

# Geospatial Planning for Spatial Justice: Securing Rural Tenure and Advancing Land Reform in South Africa

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**Key words:** Plenary

## SUMMARY

Geospatial professionals play a critical role in shaping sustainable development, yet in South Africa their contributions have historically been concentrated in formally surveyed urban areas, reinforcing spatial inequality and exclusion. This paper argues for a deliberate reorientation of geospatial planning, land governance, and valuation practices toward peri-urban and rural areas, where insecure land tenure continues to disproportionately affect historically dispossessed Black communities.

Situated within South Africa's broader transformation agenda, the paper examines how colonial and apartheid-era land dispossession produced enduring patterns of inequitable land ownership and spatial marginalisation. While legislative frameworks such as the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) and the Restitution of Land Rights Act provide mechanisms for redress, their effectiveness is constrained in areas where land remains unsurveyed, informally administered, or inadequately integrated into geospatial systems.

Using the uMgungundlovu land claim as a case study, the paper employs a temporal analysis of spatial data and historical imagery to illustrate how dispossession, lack of cadastral recognition, and uneven geospatial investment have shaped current land use, tenure insecurity, and competing land rights. The case highlights the complexity of balancing restitution, existing occupation, and new economic uses, particularly in rural and peri-coastal areas experiencing tourism-driven development.

The paper contends that geospatial planning and valuation are not merely technical functions but institutional tools that make land rights visible, support equitable land allocation, strengthen municipal capacity, and enable inclusive economic participation. It calls for fit-for-purpose land

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administration, inclusive mapping practices, and intentional rural prioritisation to ensure security of tenure, reduce vulnerability, and advance spatial justice.

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