

LAND TITLING REFORM AND THE RELOCATION OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS FOR SAFER AND MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



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INTRODUCTION

WHY DOES THIS TOPIC MATTER?

- Land provides security, identity, and economic opportunity.
- Jamaica continues to face challenges related to informal occupation and insecure tenure.
- Climate change and disaster risks make the issue more urgent.
- The Government's objective is not simply to issue titles, but to ensure people live safely, securely, and sustainably.

WHAT IS LAND TITLING REFORM?

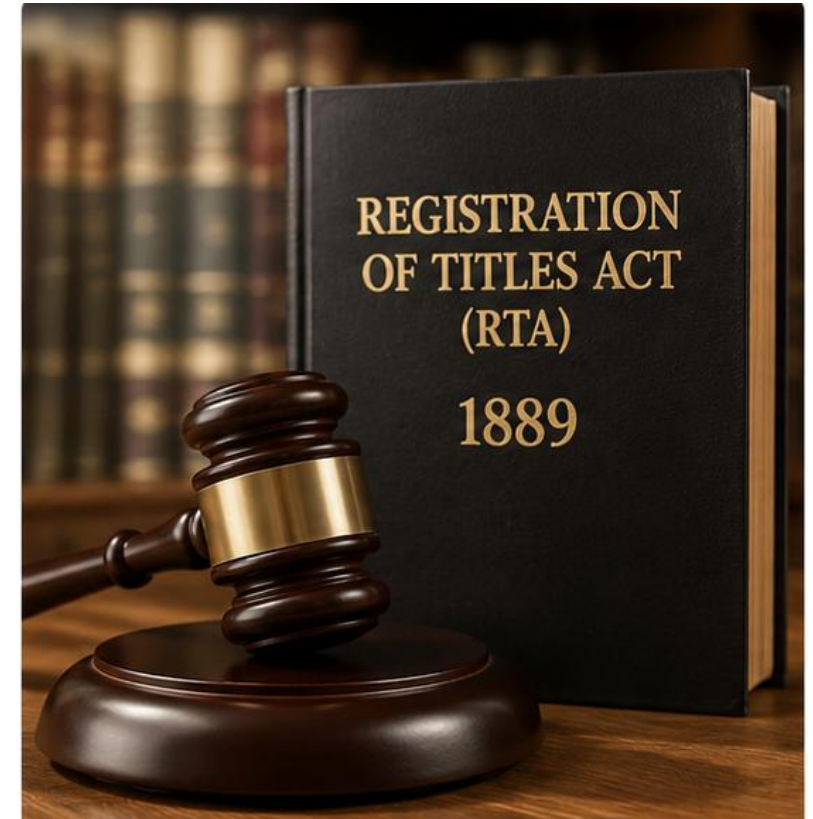
- Approximately 63% of land parcels in Jamaica are registered.
- Thousands of persons are legally living on land which they own but have no registered Certificate of Title and cannot therefore make more productive use of their land.
- Land titling reform seeks to:
 - Simplify and modernize processes for obtaining a registered title.
 - Improve access to secure tenure.
 - Increase efficiency and transparency.
 - Support economic growth and investment.

BARRIERS TO LAND REGISTRATION

- Current barriers to land registration include:
 - The prohibitive cost of titling.
 - The inability of landowners to provide acceptable proof of ownership.
 - The inability of landowners to meet the requirements of Municipal Corporations, i.e. Subdivision Approval.
 - Many Jamaicans do not see land registration as a priority.
 - Land registration is not compulsory; therefore, registration remains voluntary and sporadic.

LAND REGISTRATION LEGISLATIONS

- The principal legislations on land registration are the **Registration of Titles Act (RTA)** which was enacted in 1889 and amended in June 2020.
- The **Registration of Titles Cadastral Mapping and Tenure Clarification (Special Provisions Act)** (hereinafter referred to as the SPA) was enacted in 2005 and amended in June 2020.



SYSTEMATIC LAND REGISTRATION

SYSTEMATIC LAND REGISTRATION

- In jurisdictions wanting to pursue land tenure regularization, one of the most consistent means of realizing this objective is via the Systematic Registration of land, using an adjudication process to establish ownership rights.
- The mandate of the Adjudication Services Division (ASD) is to assist landowners who have been in open, undisturbed and undisputed possession of their land for twelve years or more, to claim ownership of such land via the Systematic Land Registration process.

SYSTEMATIC LAND REGISTRATION

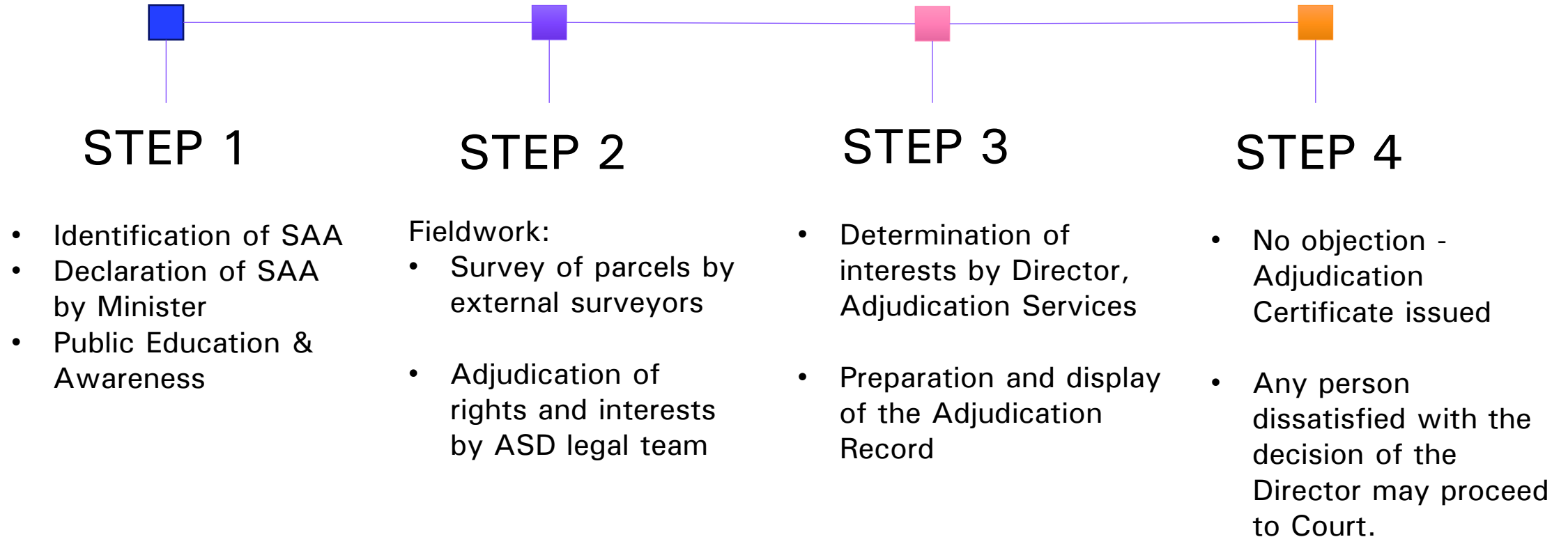
- Systematic Land Registration is defined as the methodical and orderly registration of parcels of land in a designated area.
- This designated area is known as the Systematic Adjudication Area (SAA).



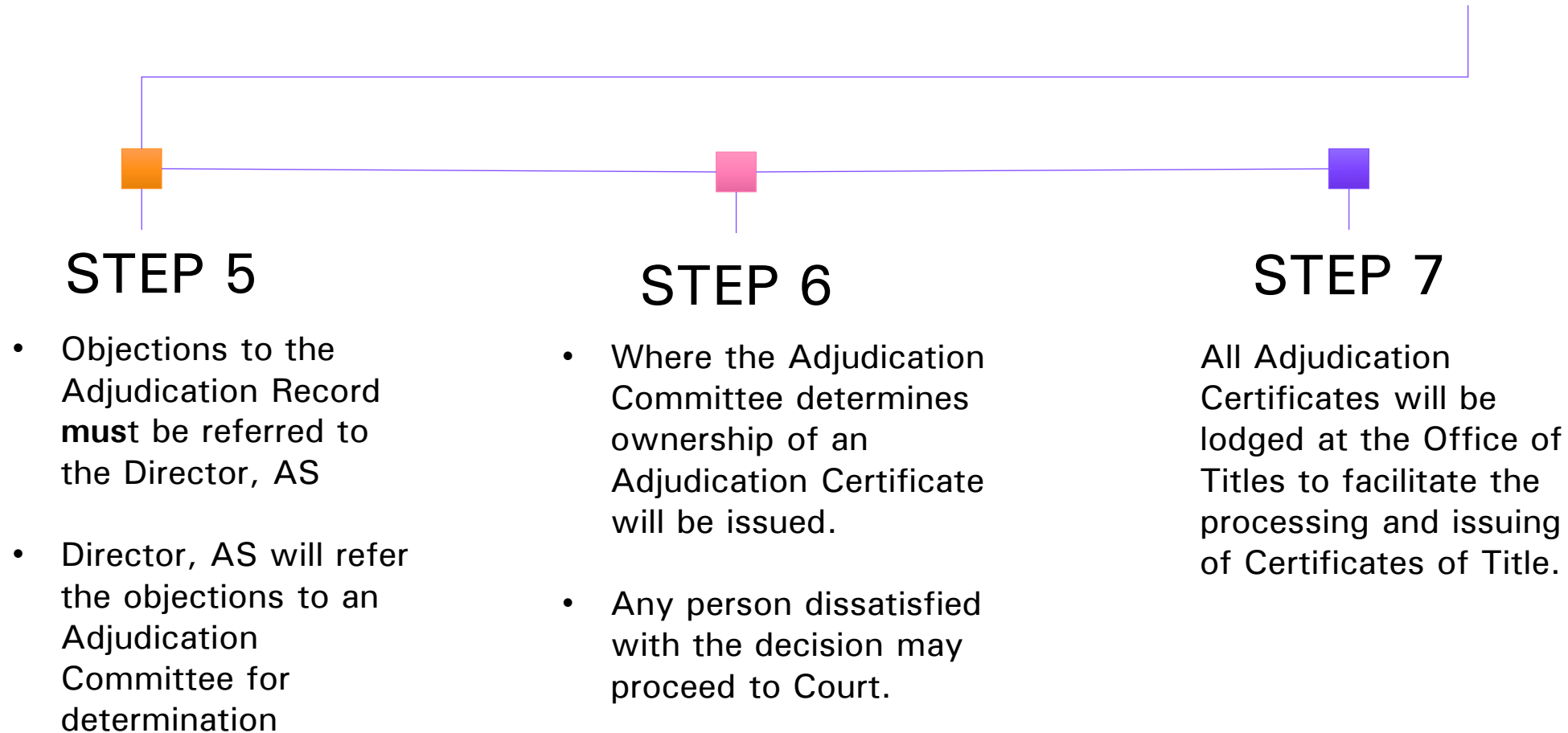
LAND ADJUDICATION

- Land Adjudication has been defined as the process through which existing rights in a particular parcel of land are finally and authoritatively ascertained
- It does not alter existing rights or create new ones;
- It merely establishes what rights exists, by whom they are exercised and what limitations, if any, they are subject to.

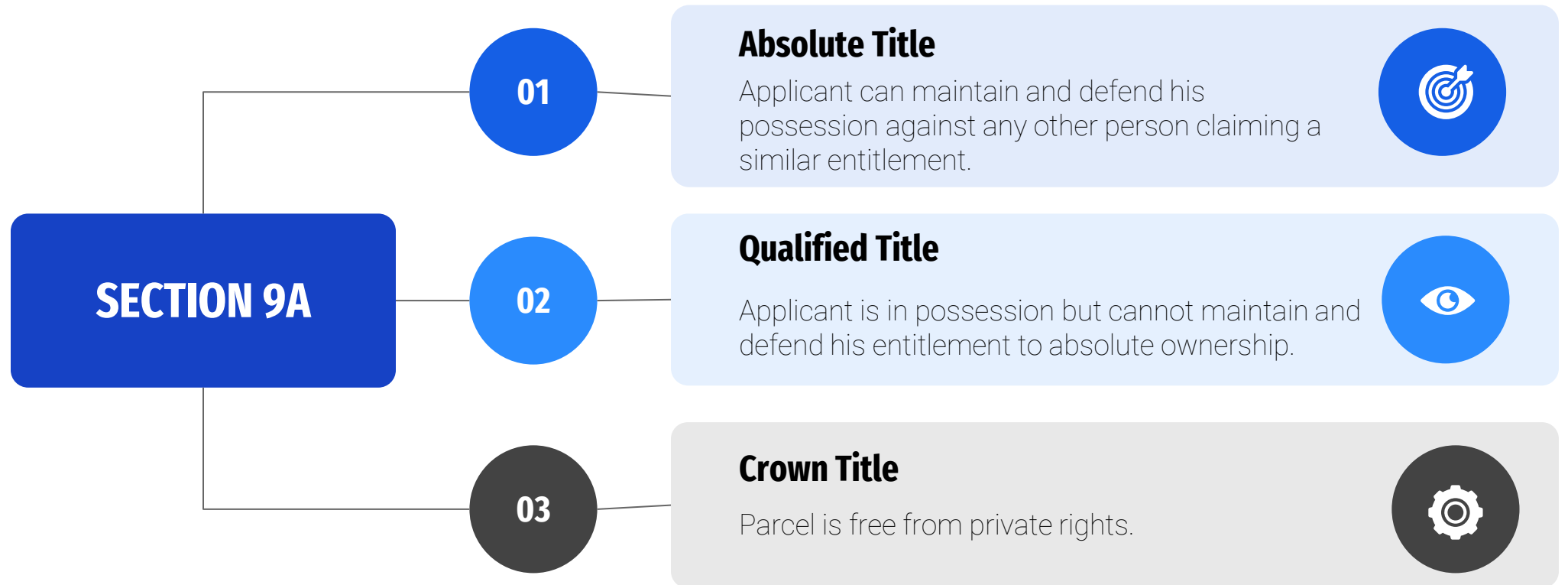
ADJUDICATION PROCESS



ADJUDICATION PROCESS (CONT.)



PRINCIPLES OF ADJUDICATION



BENEFITS OF SYSTEMATIC REGISTRATION

- ✓ Registration costs are subsidized by the Government.
- ✓ Service 'brought to landowners' doorsteps.
- ✓ Registration of an appreciable amount of land in a short period.
- ✓ Lower cost per parcel because all parcels in the SAA are dealt with at the same time.
- ✓ There is an element of certainty as the process facilitates maximum publicity and detailed investigations on the ground with direct oral evidence from owners of adjoining properties.

SLR AND LAND TITLING REFORM

SYSTEMATIC LAND REGISTRATION WILL REVOLUTIONIZE LAND REGISTRATION



IMPROVING LAND TENURE SECURITY

Legal recognition of land rights protects landowners from eviction and builds trust in the system.



REDUCING LAND DISPUTES

Clear boundary definitions and official records prevent conflicts and legal battles over land ownership.



EMPOWERING LANDOWNERS FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Access to credit using registered land as collateral enables investment in agriculture, business, and education.



E-TITLING

WHAT IS E-TITLING?

- It is a groundbreaking digital platform that will modernize the country's land administration framework
- The project is fully funded from the Government of Jamaica budget and marks a historic first for the country.
- The project is being spearheaded by a local technical team.



WHAT WILL IT DO?

- ✓ Replace traditional [paper-based] process with a secure fully digital land registry.
- ✓ Enable digital insurance and storage of land titles.
- ✓ Have real time updates to records and secure online access for property owners, legal professionals and government agencies.
- ✓ Key transactions, including but not limited to transfers, mortgages and subdivisions, will be processed more quickly and efficiently, drastically reducing delays and administrative burdens.

BENEFITS OF E-TITLING

- It is hoped that with eTitles, the thrust to formalize over 350,000 informal and unregistered parcels of land.
- Provide secure ownership to citizens and communities.
- With the acquisition of land titles, the project will transform informal settlements into thriving formally recognized communities and enable land to be leveraged as a valuable economic asset.

SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

WHAT IS SQUATTING?

- **Squatting:** illegal occupation of land and/or buildings without the explicit permission of the owner.
- **Squatter settlement:** residential area where individuals illegally occupy land and construct housing, typically without formal authorization or planning.
- Squatter settlements generally exhibit informal access to essential services, lack of proper roads, poor building structure, and **lack of legal tenure.**

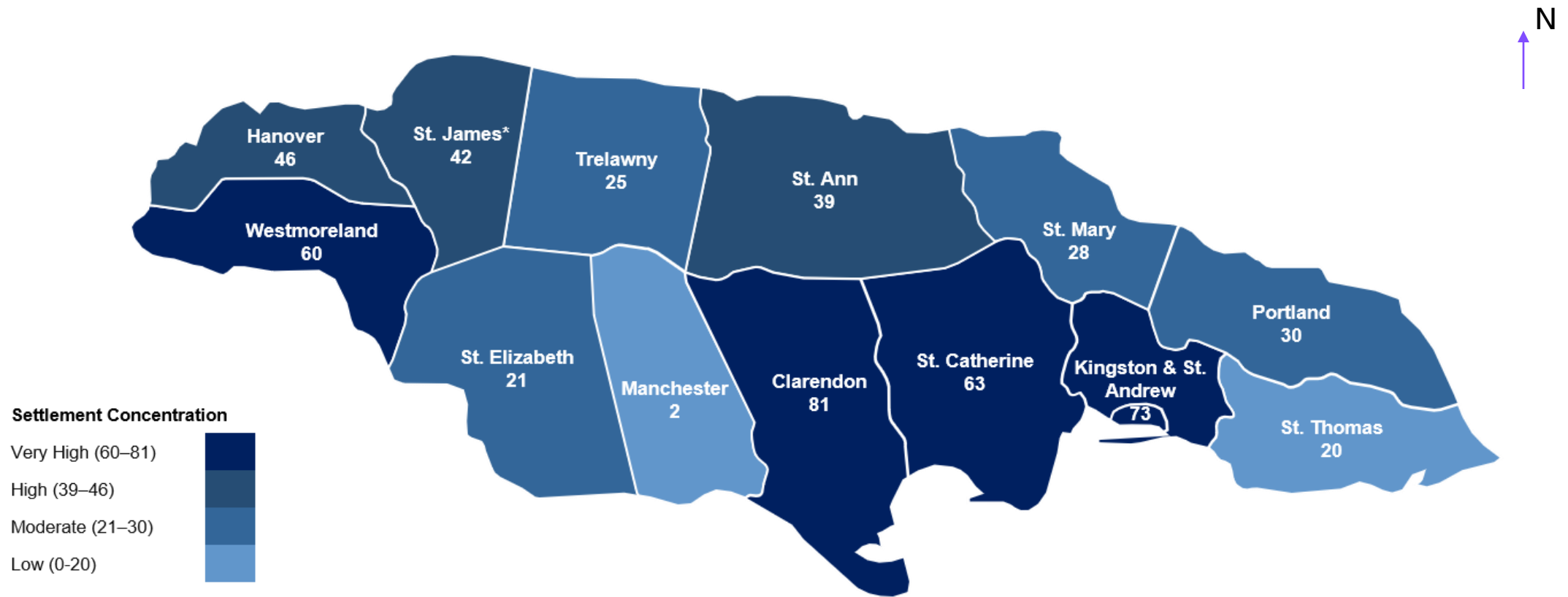


Drone imagery of a squatter settlement in Hanover (2024).

DATA ON SQUATTING IN JAMAICA

- The Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development (MEGID) is conducting the National Squatter Survey (NSS) in Jamaica.
- The NSS is completed in all parishes except St. James.
- The NSS has identified approximately:
 - 530 squatter settlements
 - 60,000 households
 - 163,700 persons living in squatter settlements

DISTRIBUTION OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS IN JAMAICA



*NSS not yet completed in St. James

Not drawn to scale

- 
- Some settlements are located in high-risk areas such as:
 - Flood-prone lands
 - Steep slopes
 - Watersheds
 - Coastal zones

Drone imagery of a squatter settlement in St. Andrew (2024).

REGULARIZATION VS. RELOCATION

Regularization

- Formalizing eligible settlements through secure tenure and integration into the legal and planning framework.
- Pursued where settlements are suitable for continued occupation

VS.

Relocation

- Moving households from unsafe or unsuitable areas to safer locations with secure tenure and access to services.
- Pursued where occupation poses significant safety, environmental, or development risks

RELOCATION AND LAND TITLING

- Relocation should not create a new cycle of informality.
- Beneficiaries should receive secure tenure arrangements in relocation sites.
- New communities should be:
 - **Planned:** guided by sound land-use and settlement planning
 - **Serviced:** with access to roads, water, sanitation, and utilities
 - **Safe:** located away from environmental and hazard risks
 - **Legally recognized:** supported by secure tenure and formal land administration

RELOCATION AND LAND TITLING

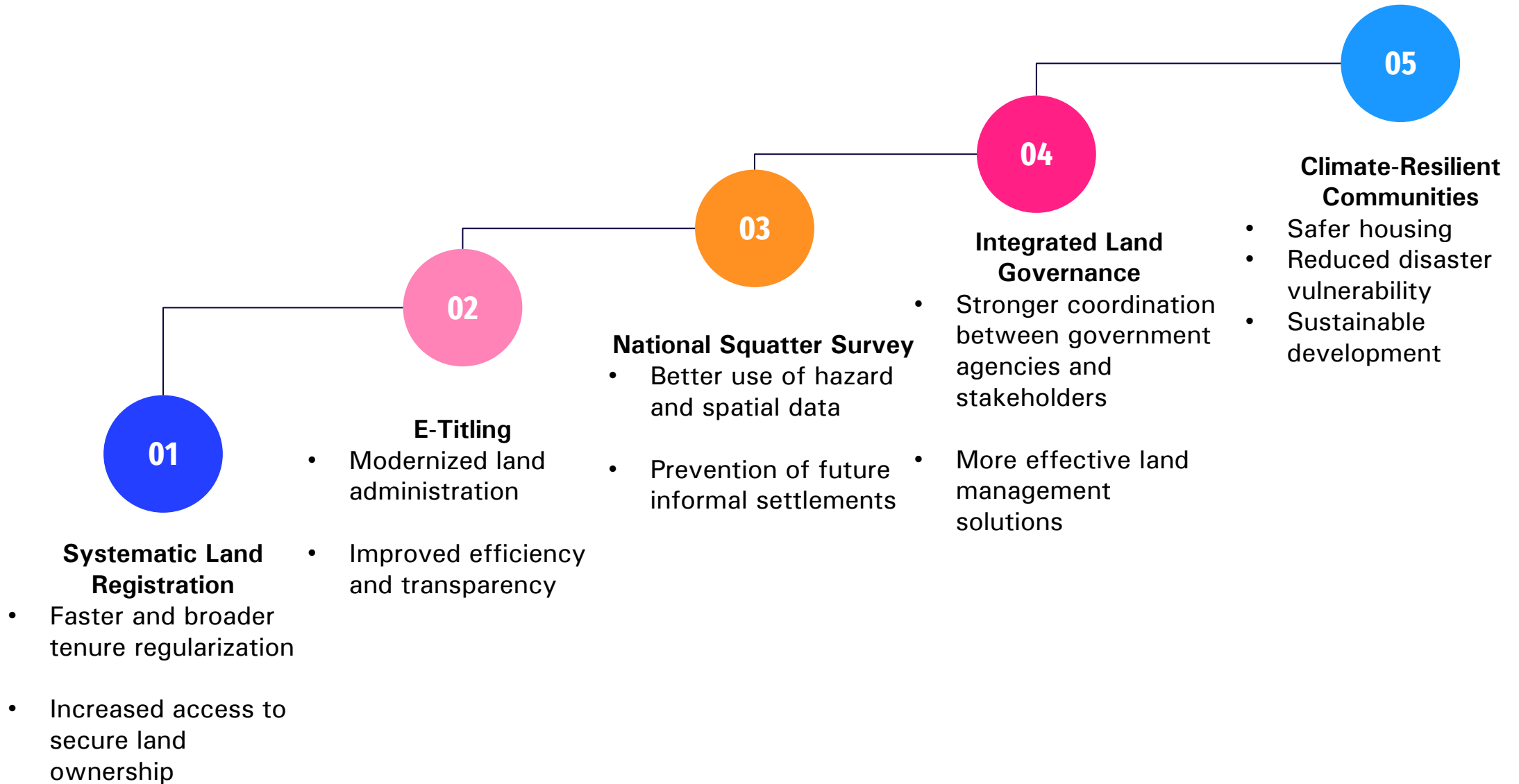
- Secure tenure encourages investment in resilient housing.
- Planned communities facilitate:
 - Provision of infrastructure and basic services.
 - Reduced exposure to flooding, landslides and other natural hazards.
 - Improved emergency access and disaster response.
 - Stronger environmental protection and stewardship
- Supporting National Priorities:
 - Climate resilience
 - Sustainable land management
 - Disaster risk reduction
 - Vision 2030 Jamaica

THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS

- No single institution can solve tenure insecurity or settlement vulnerability alone.
- Key stakeholders include:
 - Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development
 - NLA
 - Local Authorities
 - ODPEM
 - National Housing Trust
 - Communities
 - Private sector



FIVE STRATEGIC PILLARS



THANK YOU!