

COMMUNIQUE ON LAND GOVERNANCE FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

The Kingtom Communique

Adopted at the National Conference on Land Governance for Agricultural Development and Community Benefit held at the Senior Police Officer's Mess, Kingtom, Freetown on 11th – 13th July 2016

We the participants,

having discussed issues pertaining to land governance for food security, agricultural development and community benefit and considering the critical nature of land tenure in Sierra Leone and the connections between land ownership, livelihood especially for the poor and marginalized and failure to protect and promote human rights;

acknowledging the respective roles of the multiple stakeholders (state, private sector, development partners, civil society, media, traditional leaders); and being desirous of supporting nation building, protecting and promoting tenure rights, peaceful co-existence, national development and for government to be accountable; demanding that

considering relevant laws, policies and strategies promoting economic growth, peace, prosperity, food security poverty alleviation

focusing on the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), the implementation of the National Land Policy and the constitutional review

Do identify the under-mentioned issues:

1. That the vast majority of the people depend on land for livelihood, mainly through smallholder agriculture and mining.
2. That land ownership in Sierra Leone is fraught with a lot of difficulties and confusions; existing challenges ranging from inequitable land access and large-scale land acquisition to lack of geo-spatial and cadastral information system, conflicting interest of land use for public and private purposes, and corruption.
3. That evidences of injustice in the land sector are arising like violations of women's tenure rights, marginalisation of other vulnerable groups, criminalisation of land rights defenders, informal settlement of land

disputes, non-transparent processes and agreements that do not reflect the value of land for land-owning families and land users, environmental degradation and deforestation. This could be a source for violent conflicts if left unaddressed.

4. That the act of determining land lease prices by government for community and family land, and the 50% tax levied on lease fees is considered unfair and irrational.
5. Evidence of power imbalances and weak capacities to claim rights as most communities do not benefit from investments in land while at the same time losing the basis of their livelihood.
6. The Cabinet approval of the current National Land Policy (2015) is commendable but concerted action and engagement by civil society, administration and local authorities is required for the realisation of justice and equity in land tenure.
7. The effective implementation of the new land policy shall require new institutions and mechanisms for effective and meaningful participation of men and women in Sierra Leone.

To this end, we demand the following:

1. Harmonizing efforts among relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) and other stakeholders in developing and implementing land related policies with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
2. Strengthening the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, Fisheries and Forest [VGGT] in the context of national food security.
3. That large scale land lease agreements for agri-business should be made only for land area not exceeding 2000ha and lease period for 25 years and renewable for 10 years with clear conditions set regarding but not limited to land development and social standards failure for which land reverts to the owners in a time frame not exceeding 5 years.
4. That change of tenure is carried out with the free, prior and informed consent of all people with legitimate tenure rights.
5. That a National Land Commission and decentralized land committees be established that ensure representation of civil society, land owners, land users, women and youth.
6. That certain outdated land laws such as Cap. 122 are repealed by Parliament in order to engender fairness and equity in the ownership and use of land in the country.
7. That Land management and use of natural resources should be within the context of promoting poverty alleviation, food security, livelihood and engendering national economic development.
8. That special emphasis is given by the government and other relevant stakeholders on addressing issues affecting women and other vulnerable groups in land acquisition, ownership and access.

9. That the role of civil society is acknowledged as facilitating agent for meaningful and peaceful participation of communities affected by large-scale land investments.
10. That Government demonstrates strong political will in the implementation of the National Land Policy and effective natural resource governance.
11. That Government slows down or temporarily halts large-scale land acquisition to allow for the speedy development and enactment of the new land law.
12. The state to facilitate and not hamper or criminalise civil society efforts to monitor the implementation of the VGGT, but strive to maintain cordial community-investor-state relations through dialogue and non-violent engagements.
13. That awareness raising, sensitisation and monitoring of land documents/instruments be supported and promoted by the state and development partners for effective and efficient land governance.
14. That Government commits to invest more funds to support the speedy implementation of the National Land Policy as well as to facilitate the enactment of a new land law for Sierra Leone.

We the participants of this National Land Conference commit ourselves to increase collaboration and coordination in order to give a voice and power to our people-for the benefit of Sierra Leone.

We encourage everyone with this line of our National Anthem:

**LAND THAT WE LOVE,
OUR SIERRA LEONE**