

Tanzania: MPs, councillors to sign title deeds

BY FELISTER PETER

27th September 2011

Lands minister Prof Tibaijuka says plan meant to tame rising wave of disputes linked to land use

Members of Parliament and councillors will from now be directly involved in the signing of title deeds for plots allotted to investors as a way of mitigating conflicts resulting from rapidly intensifying demand for land, the government has said.

Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development minister Professor Anna Tibaijuka revealed the new plan at a four-day land stakeholders' conference in Dar es Salaam yesterday.

She explained that the plan was meant to forestall or at least minimise the incidence of land disputes particularly in Tanzania's rural areas in respect of which there have been persistent complaints about land being grabbed from local residents and then being illegally or improperly allocated to investors.

Citing cases from the last (June to August) Budget meeting of the National Assembly, the minister said she was "squeezed" on a number of occasions by MPs wanting to know why and how land belonging to residents of their respective areas was routinely given to investors.

"If the government decides to take a particular tract or piece of land and give it to an investor, then MPs and councillors would have to take part in the entire transaction – right through the signing of the title deed," she said.

She noted that currently the title deeds are signed by land officers and some other officials while MPs and councillors are not involved at all.

The professor described land as invaluable capital and an asset of crucial importance "which each and every Tanzanian would wish to own and benefit from".

She noted, though, that demand for land has been intensifying over the years in line with the need for economic transformation to expedite human development.

"The need for economic development has resulted in rural-urban migration, which has in turn led to a massive rise in the number of landless people," she added, adding that some sections of the country's Land laws would have to be reviewed to allow the government to take back chunks of land that allocated to investors and other people for development purposes but later unofficially lease to villages.

The minister quoted the law as requiring investors to pay the respective district councils a paltry 200/- per acre "but villagers hire it for as high as 20,000/- per acre", warning that such land or farms would be taken back to the government for the benefit of the villagers in question.

She said the land sector faces a wide range of challenges, among them poor land record keeping, complications in getting land for investment and development by the government in urban places, poor understanding of land policies and unplanned construction of houses in urban areas.

She cited other challenges as including intermittent land conflicts in both rural and urban areas, financial constraints impeding land development, high cost of land surveying, and serious shortage of houses for residents of urban areas.

Prof Tibaijuka urged delegates to the conference to come up with strategies to help people eradicate poverty by using land as well as recommend better ways of valuing land and paying fair compensation, as appropriate.

"You should focus on enabling more people to own houses instead of land...as demand for land is a major source of conflicts. Let's build an environment that would make people search for houses instead of plots," she said.

Maria Bilia, the Lands ministry's acting Permanent Secretary, earlier said the conference was geared at building a common understanding of the land sector among the ministry's workforce, identify challenges and chart ways to overcome those challenges.

She said such conferences are normally held every two years but unavoidable circumstances led to a five-year delay, noting that the last one was held in Mbeya in 2006 and adding that they would fight to ensure more regular conferences in the future.

Bilia explained that the event brought together land stakeholders such as land officers, land surveyors, city planners as well as land commissioners and registrars from all districts in the country.

Oxfam International last week launched a report entitled 'Land and Power: The Growing Scandal Around the New Wave of Investments in Land', advising the government to take urgent measures to help poor Tanzanians own land when competition for land intensifies.

Marc Wegerif, Oxfam International Economic Justice Campaign Coordinator for East, Central and the Horn of Africa Region, said many land deals lack transparency and adversely affect local communities, which regularly lose out to local elites and domestic and foreign investors.

Religious leaders recently called on the government to protect local communities' rights to fertile land, saying that was necessary to avert conflicts between local populations and investors normally allocated land that is potentially arable.

[SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN](#)