

UGANDA CHANGE AGENT ASSOCIATION

REPORT ON UCAA ANNUAL NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM/DIALOGUE 2012

The National Development Forum is one of the activities that UCAA conducts at National level. It is aimed at creating awareness on issues of concern or issues that affect the populace, Change Agents inclusive. Technical people are normally invited to present papers on an identified issue in order to create awareness among the Change Agents and other UCAA stakeholders.

This year, the NDF successfully took place on 25th May 2012. Attendance was over 100 people including journalists, guests, UCAA staff and change agents. The theme for debate this time was high population growth rates and land conflict. There were presentations from Ms Judy Adoko, the Executive Director for Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU), then Mr. Musa Wamala Buyungo, the coordinator for Uganda Parliamentarians forum on Food Security, land and development.

Their presentations are as seen in their copies but what we want to capture here mainly are the reactions of the participants to the presentations. Generally most reactions were just in conformity and complimenting the presentations.

They are as summarized below:

One participant argued that one of the causes of land conflict is that the owners of the land are always left out during planning processes. For example, when an investor comes, this investor will be negotiating with government but in the ignorance of the land owners. Later when negotiations are complete, government will then come to evict the owners to pave way for 'developers'. Sometimes even the resettlement packages that they are given are not substantive enough to help them resettle in other places. This automatically causes conflict on land between the owners and government.

Most participants agreed with the theme. There was an example from Western region where they observed that some people have grabbed land in Rwambaja and rendered some residents homeless. They urged government to stream line and strengthen laws and policies on land.

Other participants said the existing land policies favor people who compromise the Judiciary. They advised that idle land should be cultivated and demarcated to avoid land wrangles.

Other participants were in agreement with the second speaker. They further said that it is moral degeneration that has also resulted in land conflict. They said corruption results in a corrupt mind that does not see issues in the correct perspective. They argued that corruption makes one have a biased mind that will think of mischief all the time. Coupled with land as a contentious factor of production, the corrupt will maneuver their ways through to get even what is not theirs thus resulting in conflict with the concerned parties.

Furthermore, others were in conformity with the second presenter and re-echoed the issue of lack of a land policy. What we have now is the land act. They said that other policies are not even good and may perpetrate conflict on land.

Another participant argued that poverty is the reason we have all these conflict. The participant argued that these have been escalated by the poor government policies that we have. He suggests that government policies should be harmonized in order to check most of these problems.

There were other views that agreed that high population is the reason we have numerous land related cases. This high population had been escalated by Internal and external political struggles resulting in influx of refugees from The DRC to the western parts of Uganda.

There were also arguments that greed, arrogance, prestige and inconsideration by the rich is also escalating the problem. That these rich people are constructing industries on arable land, not considering the poor peasant farmer who desperately needs the land to be able to survive to the next day.

Cattle's grazing was also a factor to reckon with in this issue. That this has been due to lack of unity among Ugandans where they see each other differently, not as though they are all Ugandans so should share what is available by nature.

Lack of a clear policy on land and insufficient technology on how to use the available land effectively was also a contributing factor to this problem.

Participants also noted that there is a conflict between customary land management system and the land act and the customary system seems to overrule. For instance, the traditional system still maintains that a boy child or man is the owner/ heir of the family land. Women do not own land as they are also part of the property to be inherited.

Women are always discriminated with regards to land issues: that is, they are not consulted by their husbands and the clan leaders in any land dealings and at the woman's place of birth/ home once married and also where they are married, they are not considered land owners.

There is need therefore to harmonize the traditional land systems and the current policies that we have because it is the women that desperately need the land. Uganda is said to be an agricultural economy but you realize that it is the women who labor on the land most to bring up the children and yet they are the ones that the law is not protecting. "Some thing should be done and very urgently", lamented one participant from the northern region.

Finally, under development was also identified as a crucial factor. That development is in three stages: the first stage is forming, secondly we have noming (where we put names, norms etc). He says this second stage is normally characterized by conflict and this is the stage where Uganda is currently trapped. The third stage of development which Ruyendo identifies is that of performing where we are striving to get to.

CONCLUDING REMARKS BY PRESENTERS

In her concluding remarks Judy Adoko, the first presenter said that population growth is only a symptom but there are other structural causes of land conflict, given the different land forms we have. There is over reliance on the state in dealing with land issues. She admits to greed as a cause of conflict but argues that the greed is kept inside by the system of governance. She says ignorance affects us all, so there's need for awareness creation on matters to do with land.

Musa Buyungo on his side said that splitting land to different uses also causes conflict. He outlines the fact that the space we have is the source of conflict and that is why those who are greedy conflict. The increase in population should go hand in hand with space but since we can't increase land, we should then have a manageable population.

CLOSING REMARKS BY NZOGHU WILLIAM, MEMBER OF THE UGANDAN PARLIAMENT AND M.P FOR BUSONGORA NORTH (KASESE DISTRICT).

Hon Nzoghu William started by thanking UCAA for organizing such a forum where issues of national concern are discussed. In his concluding remarks, he said that the residents on land are the ones who are responsible for its security but the most important factor was to let people first understand issues to do with land. That selling land to buy airtime was not logical. He advised Change Agents to talk to their legislators so that there is a review of the policy on land.

He thanked UCAA for inviting him because it was a fruitful forum and that he had got something that he would take back to parliament.

At about 6:17pm, he declared the forum closed, the UCAA Anthem was sung and Guests and other participants were free to depart at leisure.

WAY FORWARD FOR UCAA

This forum was very fruitful to all those who attended. UCAA in its way forward will make a follow up to all the delegates who attended to find out whether they have shared the issues that were discussed in the forum with the members of the self help groups that they are working with.

UCAA will also design a questionnaire and collect views from Change Agents and members of their self Help development group in order to get a wider view of this problem. These responses will then be compiled and analyzed and this will form the basis of engagement with other stakeholders.