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THE RESPONSIVENESS OF THE LAND SECTOR TO THE COVID19 CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO FOOD SECURITY AND OPTIMUM LAND USE

Kampala, 23 April 2020

COMMUNIQUE

“Government should establish a Disaster Preparedness Plan for the Land Sector”

On 23rd April 2020, Food Rights Alliance (FRA) and land sector stakeholders held a high level online dialogue on the Responsiveness of the Land Sector to the COVID-19 crisis and its implications to Food security and optimum land use. The objective of the dialogue was to garner Civil Society’s perspective on the Government’s responsiveness plan to COVID-19 through assessment of directives on the land sector and their capacity to guarantee food security and optimum land use. These will inform policy makers and state actors across the spectrum on how to adopt viable preparedness that includes all sectors in the event of a similar crisis.

PREAMBLE

RECALLING that In March 2020 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a world pandemic. Following this announcement many countries implemented various lock down measures - from the extreme to the moderate including social distancing to minimise transmission of COVID-19. In Uganda, conversant of the fact that land rights violators could use the country lockdown as an opportunity to disfavor vulnerable communities, on 16th March 2020 the Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) announced that no land transactions should take place until the lockdown is lifted. This subsequently meant that MLHUD and all her affiliate offices such as Ministry

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Zonal Offices (MZOs) and District land offices would remain closed. This directive meant to mitigate wrongful evictions of vulnerable people through illegitimate measures under the cover of the lockdown.

WELCOMING the implementation of Minister's directive, we commend the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development for putting in place this directive with the aim of protecting Ugandans from land rights violations during this period.

However, we note with concern that despite this directive, multinationals and powerful individuals have continued to grab community land in rural and urban areas with impunity, Kiryandongo¹, Kasanda² are some of the cases in the point. This, has led to destruction of property, food crops and sometimes loss of lives in the affected communities.

CONCERNED that majority of Government's law enforcement, safety and security efforts are focused towards COVID-19 and enforcement of COVID-19 guidelines, access to land governance platforms has been disrupted leaving communities with challenges in access to remedial recourses. This is creating tension in communities as the affected cannot use their land productively unsure of their tenure security. This, if not remedied we risk facing a future with many landless people and its secondary effects of hunger, malnutrition.

RECALLING that Government at all times has a duty to protect its citizens together with their property despite of the circumstances.

WE RECOMMEND that Government urgently addresses the following issues. These recommendations have emanated from the participants of the dialogue and from actors working in the land and agricultural sector.

1. The Government through MHULD should support the land sector by developing a sector disaster preparedness plan to manage epidemics and other disasters. With this, essential MLHUD departments should remain open to respond to evictions and emergency issues such as disasters that relate to land. Further, to facilitate

¹ <https://witnessradio.org/multinationals-use-covid-19-crisis-to-violently-grab-land-of-poor-communities-with-impunity/>

² <https://nilepost.co.ug/2020/04/12/four-police-officers-arrested-for-frustrating-investigations-into-abid-alams-gruesome-acts/>

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this, the Ministerial Policy Statement for the Lands Housing and Urban Development sector FY2020/21 needs to be revised to prioritise expenditures that will boost the recovery of the sector after the pandemic.

2. The Government through the Judiciary should plan for innovative strategies on how governance platforms/ structures can continue to operate to offer remedial recourses to the affected communities during this period. These can include toll free numbers and emergency response units. This is because in spite of the lockdown, land rights violations are still being committed in communities and communities need to be supported to access justice.
3. Provide psycho-social support for the populace during this period particularly victims of gender-based violation. There has been a surge in domestic violence during this lock down and experience has shown that there is a strong correlation between land rights and domestic violence. Further, this confinement period has created panic and anxiety among the populace and if not well managed, will affect their productivity as regards land use.
4. The Government through MHULD should plan for massive sensitization using media such as radio and Television on the Ministerial directives halting all land transactions during this period. This should be rolled out across the country using the different media outlets to ensure the information gets to the public.
5. The Government through Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) should develop models to support rural food supply in terms of keeping money and input flow to rural areas. This will prevent the likelihood of rural communities protesting lockdowns of rural markets as more rural people continue to suffer silently without food and income.
6. Government through the Judiciary and MHULD should cause arrest of the perpetrators of evictions, order for cancellation of all evictions and land transactions that took place during this lockdown period. Further, efforts should be

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made to reinstate the evicted communities back on their land and provide compensation for victims of evictions during this lockdown period.

7. The Ministry of Lands should coordinate with MAAIF to establish National food reserves. The two bodies should distribute inputs to small scale farmers to curb food insecurity as it is likely that most farmers have consumed their seeds due to food shortage during the lockdown.
8. The government through MAAIF during the post COVID-19 period should focus on strengthening small and medium-scale domestic agricultural production and Public policies and efforts must support small-scale agriculture and investments in local food production as this will support the economy to recover faster post COVID-19.



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