

ILLEGAL ISSUANCE OF LAND TITLES IN CENTRAL FOREST RESERVES (CFRs)

Introduction

This paper highlights Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda's position over the Illegal issuance of land titles in Central Forest reserves (CFRs) by the Uganda Land Commission. This position is informed by the prevailing land controversies around CFRs and the Investigative study that was carried out by Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) in 2014/2015 with an aim of establishing the facts surrounding individuals owning illegal land titles in selected Forest Reserves of; Kyewaga, Gunda, and Nonve in Wakiso District. The investigative research was also motivated by a media publication titled "Behind the Scenes" (WEMNET, 2014) that showed that over 52 land titles in Forest reserves had been issued fraudulently to individuals and or investors.

Background

With the ambition as enshrined in the vision 2040 (GoU, Vision 2040, 2013) of turning Uganda into a middle income status country, there is dire need to balance the growing insatiable appetite for investments in agricultural development, industrialization, human settlement, real estate with sustainable natural management. These growing needs place enormous pressure on partners in conservation to broker development outcomes that suit both agendas. It implies rethinking current natural resources management paradigms from an economic, social, political, and environmental and accountability perspectives as well as better understand conflicts and the driving forces behind them.

Despite plethora of legal and institutional reforms like National Forestry Plan that created new institutions like National Forestry Authority, Forestry Inspection Division, District

Forestry Services and Private Forest Owners. The current forest cover loss stands at 200,000 hectares (MWE, 2015) annually

The research conducted on the 'illegal possession of land titles in Forest reserves' (ACCU, 2014) identifies corruption, greed and disregard of law and policies that govern the sector.

The issue

While the CFRs are a natural resource under the custody of National Forest Authority, enormous acres of the forests had been converted to freehold and in the hands of high level placed politicians and real estate developers in Wakiso District. The land titles whose tenure system was converted to free hold include plots in Wakiso district under Kyewaga CFR, Nonve CFR and Gunda CFR of land owned by;

- a. Mr. Ian Kyeyune (the RDC of Wakiso) who owns Block 226 Plot 46 at Buwanuka whose land title was processed on 1st April 2014 under Nonve CFR
- b. Mr. Mustapha Musisi who owns Block 226 Plot 54 at Buwanuka whose land title was processed on 22nd April 2014.
- c. Mr Ssemakula Haruna (SEMA Properties) who owns Block 226 plot 17 at Buwanuka whose land title was processed on 5th March 2014 and it falls under Nonve CFR

Our position

The Permanent secretary Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban development should cancel all the land titles in Forest Reserves While the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Water and Environment has issued a letter dated 8th August on cancellation of titles in Forest reserves, the authority to cancel doesn't entirely lie on the Chief Administrative officers.

The Permanent Secretary Ministry of Lands and Urban Development should make use of the leads provided in the media publication "Behind the scenes booklet" to commission an investigation into this matter giving priority to Bugoma CFR and Zoka CFR

The IGG should also make use of the leads provided to commission an investigation into these issues and take necessary action giving urgent attention to the 2 controversial land titles in Bugoma Central forest reserve in Hoima district and Zoka CFR in Adjumani

The parliamentary committee on Natural resources should use the leads provided in the media, "Behind the scenes booklet" and the research by ACCU to commission an investigation into the matter and take action thereafter.

All individuals involved in the illegal issuance of land titles in Central Forest reserves should face legal action.

All lead agencies in charge of all protected areas for example, NFA, NEMA, and UWA must be contacted before issuance of land titles especially for land in close proximity to Protected areas/FRs.

Respective Local Governments should demolish all structures within Central Forest Reserves without any demands for compensation by the culprits.

NFA should come out strongly and show its position considering that they have been cited as part of those promoting illegal forest land conversion. NFA's failure to use their mandate as the lead agency to deter Forest land conversion has contributed to the escalating forest cover loss in Uganda which is currently up to a tune of 200,000hectares (MWE, 2015)of forest cover annually.

NFA should place a caveat on all Forest reserves under their custody to stop any further transactions

Conclusion

Issues surrounding the Governance of the forestry sector in Uganda are currently marred by all sorts of Corruption both grand and petty. This puts the Forestry sector at stake and the possibilities of losing all our forest cover before attaining the desired vision of 2040.

Illegal possession of land titles in Central Forest Reserves, with a list of over 52 land certificates raises a red flag especially if not checked. We need to see the ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development take stern action on the matter before it spirals out of hand.

As much as ACCU sampled three CFR in Wakiso District, the findings in this paper illuminate the challenges that grossly affect the entire forest cover and are not unique to Wakiso only, but represent what is happening in other Central Forests Reserves like Namanve CFR, Kitubulu CFR, Bugoma CFR, Matiri CFR among others. This clearly shows how grave the problem is and requiring urgent attention.

Works Cited

- ACCU. (2014). Illegal possession of land titles in CFRs.
- GoU. (2013). Vision 2040.
- MWE. (2015). State of Forest cover. Kampala.
- WEMNET. (2014). Behind the scenes.



Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda

Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda

Plot 9B Vubya Road, Ntinda
 P. O. Box 34238 Kampala-Uganda
 Tel: +256-414-535659
 E-mail: info@accu.or.ug
 Web: www.accu.or.ug

Facebook:Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda-ACCU

Twitter:ACCU @ Accu_Ug

With support from:

