

# Green Scenery

42 Charles Street, P.O. Box 278, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tel/Fax: 232 22 226216. Cell: 232 76 601979. Email: [greengreenscenery@gmail.com](mailto:greengreenscenery@gmail.com) Web: [www.greenscenery.org](http://www.greenscenery.org)

The Country's Natural Resources Are Nature's Gift To Us What We Make Of Them Are Our Gift To Posterity

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## Sierra Leone reforms the land sector

*On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, the Parliament of Sierra Leone enacted the Customary Land Rights Bill 2022, and the National Land Commission Bill 2022. Green Scenery highly welcomes the new land laws, which are expected to increase transparency in the land sector, promote the security of tenure and inclusive economic growth, reduce poverty, and boost women and youth's access to land.*

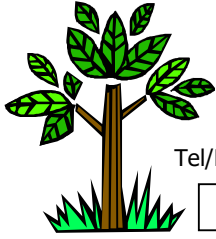
Already in 2011, noting a weak land governance system in the country, Green Scenery together with other Civil Society Organizations advocated for a reform of the customary land tenure system. The lack of regulations in Large-Scale Land Acquisitions, especially in the face of the government's strategy to attract investments in agriculture and mining into the country, was Green Scenery's cause for concern. After numerous consultations with landowners and users and interviews with experts in the land sector, a National Land Policy was developed and launched by the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Country Planning in 2015. This policy is finally translated into the Customary Land Rights Act, 2022, and the National Land Commission Act, 2022.

The land reform, which has been slow and arduous, but inclusive and participatory, transforms the land governance system through the creation of institutions ensuring women's participation at all levels. A National Land Commission will be set up to, for the first time, survey, map, and register lands for a land cadastre, as well as establish grievance redress mechanisms, which Green Scenery believes will reduce land conflicts significantly. Green Scenery applauds the bottom-up approach in the law in which village, chiefdom, and district level institutions will support the work of the commission in their respective areas.

Green Scenery notes that one of the biggest tasks of the commission will be the creation of a national cadastral system. To have this system in place will require all the possible support from development partners and national civil society organizations. In this regard, we acknowledge the World Bank's support of US\$ 41 million through the "Sierra Leone Land Administration Project" to initialise the implementation of the two land bills.

Green Scenery appreciates that the Customary Land Rights Act will vest family lands in the family as a unit. Decisions regarding those lands are required to involve adult men and women of the family, assuring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of land leases. This law will prevent companies to acquire lands for operations through dodgy means without the consent of the actual landowners, as could be done with the invocation of the colonial cap. 122 regulation, now repealed.

Green Scenery applauds the new land laws for eliminating discrimination in the acquisition of land under the customary system. All Sierra Leoneans irrespective of creed, ethnicity, gender, or status can now acquire land anywhere in Sierra Leone. This puts to rest the vexing issue of native and non-native rights to land acquisition and is a guarantee of women's rights to own, hold, use, transfer, inherit, and succeed in land. We further acknowledge that the fundamental rights and protection of customary landowners have been restored by the new land laws.



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While Green Scenery views the land reform as one of the most progressive in the whole region, we call on the Ministry of Lands to be mindful of preventing landlessness in communities by regulating the percent of the land area an investor can acquire in a village or chiefdom. We continue to frown on the conditions of the lease period, which is a hand-me-down from the colonial law.

Green Scenery wishes to thank the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Country Planning for a show of strong leadership in the entire process of getting the National Land Policy enacted into law. Minister Dr. Turad Senesie must be commended for bringing all stakeholders along in the critical moments of the process.

Meanwhile, Green Scenery condemns any form of violence to resolve grievances in the country. Ample channels are available to engage in the resolution of grievances, including dialogue. Green Scenery wishes to extend its sympathy to all the families who lost loved ones in the recent violent events. The use of constructive engagements should be preferred to prevent any loss of lives

**END**