

ISSUING TITLE DEEDS TO COAST PEOPLE DEMONSTRATES STATE GOODWILL AND SHOULD BE SUPPORTED!

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After the announcement that the State would issue 60, 000 title deeds to Coast people, there were concerns including:-

- That the national land commission has not been fully informed and involved
- That the local leaders have not been fully informed and involved
- That the lists of beneficiaries may be manipulated to include non-deserving persons
- That some of the titles to be issued may relate to disputed sites and could therefore escalate such disputes
- That issues of historical land injustices in the region may get compounded and should hence be first addressed.

Processes to issue titles are highly technical, expensive, tedious and long. Land ownership documents such as title deeds empower the citizenry both socially and economically. Local leaders should therefore see the silver lining spelt by this State declaration and harness it to ensure that State attention and goodwill is kept focused at the Coast on this matter of title deeds and related aspects in the medium and long-term. Much as there could be areas of concern (and there have been quite some in Coast in the past and particularly in the manner of identifying beneficiaries), these are concerns Coast leaders can raise internally once the State bureaucracy locates to the Coast. For instance areas that have problems could be identified and kept off the immediate exercise while lists of intended beneficiaries can be easily and quickly vetted county by county. But leaders must not let the State look away from frustration from the kind of "digging in" lately reported in the local media. The people of Coast, and by implication the leaders themselves, would stand to loose a lot.

While on the exercise, leaders may then want to seek State support to address other pertinent land issues in the various Coast Counties. But as they do so, leaders will need to bear in mind that the Coast land issue calls for hard decisions and compromises given its very nature.

As for the working gap between the Ministry of Lands and the national land commission, a little talking together will help. The two are meant to work for Kenyans and must therefore be seen to read from the same script on outputs aimed at the citizen such as title deeds. They mustn't let their differences spill out into the public. While it is true that the constitution gives mandate to the national land commission for the settlement of persons, it should be possible to talk together and agree on some minimums particularly on an exercise like this which comes before the commission builds adequate technical capacity. One hopes though that in future tasks, these two institutions will work in complementarity and be seen to speak the same language so that the public has full confidence in the processes and outputs.

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