

Key Priorities for Farida Karoney in Lands Ministry

Posted on Mar 16, Posted by [Mwathane](#) Category [Land Governance](#)

Lands one of the most strategic State Ministries

The Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning remains one of the most strategic State Ministries in Kenya. It manages a resource of fundamental importance to our settlements, agriculture, wildlife, infrastructure and the exploitation of our minerals and oil. Ministers who have had opportunity to steer it know just how true this is and therefore what a privilege it is to be entrusted to it. Those who went out of their way to bring about changes that have positively impacted on how the Ministry does business for Kenya are quick to recount stories about their moments in the Ministry. Those who while away their time at its helm without effecting meaningful changes live to regret the difficulties they themselves later encounter in doing business with the Ministry.

New Minister Farida lucky to possess critical people skills

Farida Karoney, the new Lands boss, is lucky to ascend to the Ministry from a media background. With years in the business of listening to people, collecting and processing a wide variety of news items about people, politics and development, she should by now have developed an antenna and temperament good and balanced enough to listen, determine and pursue what's important to people and development. This will be the routine menu in the Lands Ministry. People will be on her doors daily with complaints about denied, undermined or fraudulently lost land rights. About land and boundary disputes, about missing files and about laid back public officers unresponsive to their complaints! And it will at times get very lonely, particularly when the public complains about the very officers she has to rely on. But it is possible to take it all in stride and leave critical milestones.

Can build up on Kaimenyi's gains

Her predecessor, Professor Jacob Kaimenyi leaves behind some things she can continue, including the processing of ownership documents for millions of needy people and the perfecting of land control boards. The occasional sparring between her Ministry and the National Land Commission notwithstanding, title deeds and leases are essential documents for those with legitimate claims to land tenure rights. The documents provide confidence to land owners and lessees and to those keen on doing business thereon. This programme therefore needs to be continued with vigour. The Land control boards, critical to local level land transactions, need to be constantly watched. Left to do their thing, they have the capacity to frustrate and hold back business. Let her office hold routine meetings with their leadership and also ensure that their allowances are constantly paid up. There are already complaints from several of them that even after Prof Kaimenyi intervened to have their arrears paid last year, the payment of their allowances is again falling behind. These organs mustn't be given excuse for rent seeking.

The management of leases on expiry evokes bad memories to a number of Kenyans who have lost theirs through irregularities driven by collusion between insiders and some outsiders. Leases are the ownership instruments to a big proportion of our urban property portfolio. The process of their extension and renewal must therefore be demystified and perfected for predictability and efficiency. She has a framework to guide her on a way forward in this.

Digitization and Human Resource key priorities

But a key priority remains the digitization of land records and the computerization of services. So far, the Ministry is home to disparate initiatives to digitize records in each of the departments and the land commission. These initial efforts, which are good for a start, need to be converged and woven into a system that supports most of the business processes in the Ministry and the Commission. Searches, lodging and processing of survey records and land transactions, updating of existing records and applications for allocation of land are all amenable to management within a modern system. Achieving this would be a great legacy for her and the government.

The other key priority is the improvement of the human resource in the Ministry. One still

wonders whether the technical personnel in both the Ministry and the Commission are in optimal use. There are surveyors, valuers, land economists, lawyers and planners in each of the two outfits, with some earning far less than others for duties that are not necessarily more. A thorough staff audit may be necessary to determine how best to deploy the technical staff. We could save funds and minimize institutional conflicts. Moreover, integrity in service delivery remains a key concern in the headquarters and the county offices for both institutions. The Cabinet Secretary could give this matter some thought.....perhaps good induction, routine individual evaluation and even further vetting. Let the good, high integrity officers be rewarded, but let's also shed those that undermine their calling.

Tags: