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## Policy makers speak out on Africa's land blueprint

Addis Ababa, 14 November 2014 (ECA) - Experts attending the inaugural Conference on Land Policy in Africa concurred that the African Union-led *Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Based Investments in Africa* should serve as "the blueprint for improving land governance on the continent and be contextualized and operationalised in their respective countries."

The conference attracted over 300 youth, academia, government officials, traditional leaders, diplomats, women advocates, private sector, civil society and the media for four days of in-depth discussions, presentations of research findings and sharing best-practices on land acquisition, use, management and administration at the Headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Speaking during a roundtable on the lessons to take home, Bernadette Mushashu, Member of Parliament from Tanzania, who also serves with the Pan African Parliament, affirmed that the guiding principles should be domesticated by countries and be integrated in the national laws. "This is where we should start. Governments should make sense of these principles for their land deals", she said.

Alkaya Aligo Samson of the Ministry of Housing, Lands and Public Utilities of South Sudan informed the meeting that his country "took into account, seriously and rigorously," the UN voluntary guidelines and AU land frameworks in developing its Land Policy. "We were successful. The Council of Ministers has passed the draft Land Policy with minimal amendments, and it is headed to the National Legislative Assembly for review," he said.

In most African countries, land in the rural areas is either state-owned or ownership is based on customary rights, rather than a formal title. The guiding principles call for African countries to formalise their land policies in an inclusive manner, while recognizing the importance of customary and women's rights.

Naomi Kabanda from the Ugandan Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development and who heads the National Land Policy Implementation Secretariat said that while much work remains to be done in Uganda, the formulation of the African Union Guiding Principles on Land is a step towards revamping the country's institutions and policies for effective land governance.

For his part, the Permanent Secretary of the National Rural Land Commission in Niger, Alhou Abey Bazou

said that if a country incorporates in its land processes, the set of principles described in the AU Guidelines, it would make inclusive land administration easier for pastoral groups, women and poor communities. It would also enable Government to negotiate lucrative land deals with investors.

The experts expressed optimism and readiness to adopt and operationalize the *Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Based Investments in Africa*.

According to Joan Kagwanja, Chief of the Land Policy Initiative, a series of training aimed at building the capacity of leaders, parliamentarians, magistrates and other practitioners specializing in land issues will be provided across the continent with the aim of accompanying the countries in their resolve to manage large scale land based negotiations in a more meaningful way.

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