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Accra, Ghana, 19 July 2017 (ECA) – The regional workshop for Africa's Land Commissioners focusing on securing community land rights continued today with participants visiting two prominent communities to learn first-hand how local communities and land owning groups in Ghana manage their lands, secure land rights, interface with government agencies and deal with conflicts associated with land rights.

The Land Commissioners, senior government officials and other land experts visited the Gbawe and Kwabenya Community Lands where elders and paramount chiefs explained these sensitive issues and others related to community land rights.

The Gbawe community is located in the greater Accra region and was discovered in the 16th century by a hunter. Its surface area covers 9,836 hectares and has been managed by his family since that time to date. Conflicts have emerged, however, and have been settled in the country's highest courts leading to the formation of the Gbawe Family Land Secretariat to manage their land on a daily basis.

Like the Gbawes, the Kwabenya Community Land was acquired in the 17th century through hunting by their forefather and it covers a surface area of 12,619 hectares. Both communities have what are called Customary Land Secretariats, specialized offices they established with the support of the government to improve land management and administration.

Elders and paramount chiefs in the two communities explained to the participants that the land is owned and managed by the community in collaboration with the National Land Commission that issues recognition for the period of which the landed families have leased the land out for.

The lessee pays an annual land rent through of Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands (OASL) with 90 percent of the money collected being paid back to the land owners for their developmental projects.

"The land is fully under our community and this has helped us greatly in regulating and reducing the number of conflicts that usually arise from land matters," said the Gbawe Head of the Family, adding women do have a role to play in the management of land.

He said land is equitably distributed between women and men in the community. The two communities also discussed how they resolve conflicts in the allocation and use of land, the challenges they face in the management of their land, land rights for women and related issues.

Land Policy Initiative Coordinator (LPI), Joan Kagwana, whose office co-organized the regional

workshop with the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), a global coalition of organizations working to encourage forest land tenure and policy reforms, said organizers wanted to expose participants to the different land ownership and management systems in Ghana.

“The field visits are extremely important because the AU Declaration on Land touches on land governance in Africa and one of the biggest peculiarities in terms of land governance in Africa is that it is inherently customarily governed and for many that means that we also understand the complexities that are involved in terms of customary authorities engaging with governments in that process,” said Ms. Kagwanja.

“We also want to learn some of the innovations which are taking place here in Ghana in terms of documenting the rights of communities. Some countries represented here are really learning from this experience and we want to continue to provide this platform so that we can continue learning.”

Janet Edeme, Head of Rural Division in the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture at the AUC, said the learning experience from the field visits was invaluable.

Solange Bandiaky-Badji, Africa Program and Gender Justice Director at the RRI said the field trip allowed participants to learn from the experiences of the two families.

“Customary land rights issues are very contextual. When you go to a context you see that it’s all linked to culture, ethnicity and family values so it is good for different participants coming from different contexts to go and exchange experiences and see what other lessons learnt from that context can help them in their daily work as policy makers,” said Bandiaky-Badji.

The workshop was co-hosted by Ghana’s Ministry of Land and Natural Resources and Civic Response.

Participants are from Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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