

# BENGO CONSULTANCY AGENCY'S ELKE PROELL'S VISIT TO SIERRA LEONE: A MOMENT OF COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND SHARING.



Elke with cross-section of CSOs and Media Representatives

Elke Proell of the Bengo Consultancy Agency for the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) was welcomed in Sierra Leone on February 7th as part of her West African mission.

Elke's three-day visit to Sierra Leone was focused on learning about how the Land for Life decentralized multi-actor collaboration is operating in the country, as well as how communities and other stakeholders are supporting the initiative's work.

As part of a day's worth of scheduled meetings on the 8th of February, Elke met with representatives from the Network Movement for Justice and Development

(NMJD) and the Land for Life Secretariat. She was briefed on the main activities of the Land for Life Initiative Sierra Leone, which span from influencing national policy to supporting partners all around the nation. Elke was informed by Berns Komba Lebbie, the Land for Life Initiative's national coordinator that in December 2022 the initiative had developed a strategic plan with three overarching priorities. **“ one of our strategic priorities is focused on ‘Right to Food’”** Berns said **“ our focus now is to fill the food security gap in the country by pushing for the enactment of a Right to Food Law”**. Later in the day, Elke paid a courtesy call on the Deputy Minister of Lands, Housing, and Country Planning. The Deputy Minister and a few Ministry technical staff commended Elke and Bengo for their great contribution to the Land for Life Initiative Sierra Leone. The Deputy Minister explained to Elke how the participation of Land for Life and other CSOs resulted in the adoption of the Land Commission and the Customary Land Rights Acts. **"these two new laws will aid improve on the land governance status of the country"** the Deputy Minister added, **" We want to explore how we can also utilize the land to construct cheap dwellings for people in the Western Area"**. The Deputy Minister further noted that the next phase of the activities of the Ministry and the Land Commission is the implementation of Land laws across the country. Elke thanked the Deputy Minister and staff of the ministry for their support and work around land governance in the country. She acknowledged that the working relationship between the Ministry and CSO is one that has produced a lasting footprint in the land governance sector of the country.

Elke also met with representatives of Civil Society, including the media, on the 8th. Over 10 CSOs focusing on land governance and human rights were present. The CSOs discussed the historical backdrop of Sierra Leone's land governance, as well as its triumphs and difficulties. Daniel, the Head of Programmes at NAMATI, presented institutional updates, stating that NAMATI's focus has been on legal empowerment for communities. Mr. Daniel described how NAMATI assisted communities in taking investment corporations to court and winning such instances. Esther Marie Samura talked on behalf of the Media Alliance team about how the media has been helpful in gathering and reporting on land governance challenges around the country. Esther also indicated that the members of the media alliance will continue to support in the right-to-food campaign.

On the second day of Elke's visit, the team was accompanied by Jens Kraus-Masse, the German Ambassador to Sierra Leone, and Dagma Ruehrig, the Grant and Reporting Manager of Welthunger Hilfe, to Tonkolili District, where a clustered community engagement meeting was conducted. Some of the challenges that landowners are encountering were communicated to the team by community

stakeholders. Some of the landowners stated that they had leased their land to Miro Agricultural Corporation with the expectation that the company would help the communities with a good road network, water boreholes, and schools. According to the people, the company has failed to deliver on all of its promises.

The community stakeholders praised Land for Life Initiative for its assistance and education on what the land laws say about leasing and paying lease rent. The German Ambassador commended Land for Life for providing communities with knowledge about the new land laws. He also stated that they have heard a lot about land issues and land rights in the region, which is why they want to ensure that the money provided to Land for Life is appropriately utilized.

The team also paid a visit to Miro Agricultural Company to learn about the company's varied activities. Aruna Bangura, Miro's Public Relations Officer, welcomed the team to the facility. Mr. Bangura briefed the team on the



Left to Right: Berns, Land for Life; Elke, Bengo; Jens Krause-Masse, German Ambassador; Aruna, PRO Miro and Daana:WHH

company's current activities and future ambitions. According to him, the company is devoted to corporate social responsibility, and they **"build two boreholes for villages without appropriate water supply"** every year. He went on to say that the company will start making plywood, which would bring in more

money to pay lease fees and take care of the company's corporate social responsibility.

Elke met with a cross-section of Land for Life Consortium partners and a few members of the District Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the final day of her visit. Members of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform and consortium partners shared significant highlights of their work in the various districts. The number of land issues resolved by the DMSPs since the Initiative's beginning was highlighted. Among the difficulties they faced was the unwillingness of the chiefs to help others in educating communities about the new regulations.