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PRESS RELEASE

Two Major Reports on the 19 Local Councils of Sierra Leone Have Been Debated and Adopted by Parliament

The report had been laid by the Committee on Local Government and Rural Development, chaired by Hon. Abu Bakarr Koroma. These reports contained findings and recommendations of the Committee's oversight to the 19 Local Councils. Officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), Decentralization Secretariat (DECSEC) and the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) witnessed the deliberations in Parliament. Hon. Abu Bakarr Koroma moved the motion for their adoption seconded by Hon. Veronica K. Sesay.

Prior to the adoption of both reports, Hon. Abu Bakarr Koroma did not waste any time in highlighting the challenges with which the 19 Councils are faced, such as poor salaries for core staff; unlike MPs, no end of service benefits for councilors; need to review the Local Government Act, 2004; to settle boundary disputes for the collection of revenues; late transfer of allocations to councils; incomplete devolution process, among others.

Hon. Veronica K. Sesay dilated on the importance of oversight to the MDAs (ministries, departments & agencies). She also said that the councils are challenged because of poor resource mobilization, with the exception of Bo City Council (BCC); failure to monitor contractors; lack of qualified accountants; late disbursement of funding; conflict in the collection of revenues; frequent transfers of core staff to name a few. She praised BCC for doing well in revenue collection, feeder roads, hand dug wells, computers, and the utilization of donor funds.

Hon. Paramount Chief, Alie Kavura Kongomoh II said that Chiefs regretted when councils went dormant, but when they were reintroduced, Chiefs were put aside. Unlike now, chairmanship for council was rotational and the permanent person then was the secretary. The councils have failed to consult the Chiefs on the collection of own-source revenue. He also said that "all Paramount Chiefs are grateful to President Ernest Bai Koroma, because the APC restored the glory of PCs through the payment of salaries from the consolidated fund". He said the chiefdom administration is part of local government because "all the 149 chiefdoms were put together and became Sierra Leone".

Hon. Mohamed L. Mansaray spoke about poor relationship between chairmen and councilors; that councilors are not recognized in project implementation; and the need for Parliament to strengthen oversight to hold Ministers accountable for the success of

President Koroma. He furthered that most of the councils had received huge funds but have failed to perform to the expectation of the people.

Hon. James N.D Alie, who was a former councilor, also spoke about poor salaries for core staff, chairmen, and small sitting fees for councilors; poor conditions with huge funds for development is a recipe for corruption; incomplete devolved functions; role conflict between councils and MDAs; and contracts awarded at the top, only for the councils to supervise.

Hon. Aaron A. Koroma, as a former Accountant in council also spoke about insufficient allocations to council and poor mobilization of own-source revenue. He stated further that little or no money is used by councils for the development of their localities, the reason why the people are resisting the payment of taxes. He encouraged PCs to relinquish the duty of tax collection to councils, now that they are receiving salaries from the consolidated fund.

In rounding the debate, the Chairman of the Committee recommended that the allocation to the MLGRD should be increased; the need to review the LGA, 2004; and the payment of regular salaries to core staff of councils among others.