



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

FIRST SESSION-FIRST MEETING

THURSDAY, 13th JUNE, 2013

SESSION – 2012/2013



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

VOLUME: I

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First Meeting of the First Session of the Fourth Parliament
Of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House
Held on Thursday, 13th June, 2013.

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III. LAYING OF PAPERS

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THE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ACT, 1972 (ACT NO.27 OF 1972)

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT NO.7 OF 2013

IV GOVERNMENT MOTION

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

THAT THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE RATIFY THE FOLLOWING AGREEMENT WHICH WAS LAID ON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE ON THURSDAY 23RD MAY, 2013:

FINANCING AGREEMENT, RURAL FINANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME – PHASE II (RFCIP2) SIGNED IN ROME, ITALY AND FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT DATED 26TH APRIL 2013



THE CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Official Hansard Report of the Proceedings of the House

FIRST SESSION-FIRST MEETING OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC

Thursday, 13th June, 2013.

The House met at 10:00 a.m. in Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown.

I. PRAYERS

[The Clerk of Parliament, Hon. Ibrahim Sulaiman Sesay, Read the Prayers].

[The Speaker, Hon. Justice Abel Nathaniel Bankole Stronge in the Chair].

The House was called to Order

II. CORRECTION OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR TUESDAY, 4TH JUNE, 2013

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, we go through the record of Votes and Proceedings for Tuesday, 4th June, 2013. Page 1? Page 2? Page 3? Page 4? Page 5? Can somebody move that the record of Votes and Proceedings for Tuesday, 4th June, 2013 be adopted as presented?

HON. MULUKU SULAIMAN SISAY: Mr Speaker I so move>

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. EMMA KOWA: Mr Speaker I so second.

THE SPEAKER: Any counter motion?

(Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to)

Record of Votes and Proceedings for Tuesday, 4th June, 2013 was unanimously adopted as presented.

III. PAPERS LAID

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA – *MAJORITY LEADER OF THE HOUSE AND LEADER OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS*

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to lay on the Table the following papers in my capacity as Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business. But Mr Speaker before I do so, I would like to draw the attention of Mr Speaker and the House to item 'D' (I and II) on the Order Paper. It appears that there is duplication. Mr Speaker item 'D' (I) is a Proclamation for the Constitution of the Western Area Peninsular National Park. If you go to item 'D' (II), it is the same. But it

has to be the same as Proclamation. But in the case of item 'D' (II), it is Proclamation for the Constitution of the Loma Mountain National Park. So, item 'D' (II) should be 'Loma Mountain National Park and item 'D' (I) is Western Area Peninsular National Park.

THE SPEAKER: But excuse me Mr Majority Leader, how can they be duplications?

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: This is because items 'D' (I and II) on the Order Paper are saying "Proclamation for the Constitution of the Western Area Peninsular National Park." Both items are saying the same thing Sir.

THE SPEAKER: Do we have the same Order Paper Mr Majority Leader?

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: No Mr Speaker. The correction was made this morning.

THE SPEAKER: The Order Paper I have is not in consonance with what you have.

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: Exactly Mr Speaker. Therefore, mine is the corrected version.

THE SPEAKER: Therefore, both yours and mine are the same.

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: Yes Mr Speaker. But the other Members of Parliament don't have the corrected version Sir.

THE SPEAKER: Okay Mr Majority Leader, you can proceed.

HON. S. B. B. DUMBUYA: Mr Speaker, with your leave I would ask that I read out the Papers that are to be laid before I finally do so.

- i. THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (NEC) ANNUAL REPORT, 2012
- ii. BANK OF SIERRA LEONE ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2012.

(B) THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- i. LOAN AGREEMENT FOR THE REHABILITATION AND EXPANSION OF FOURAH BAY COLLEGE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE PROJECT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND THE ARAB BANK FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA, DATED 19TH MAY, 2013.
- ii. LOAN AGREEMENT FOR THE FOURAH BAY COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND THE OPEC FUND FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OFID), DATED 18TH APRIL, 2013

(C) THE MINISTER OF ENERGY

THE SAFETY IN MINING AND MILLING OF URANIUM AND OTHER ORES REGULATIONS, 2002

The PROTECTION FROM RADIATION ACT, 2001 (ACT NO.14 OF 1991)

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT NO.2 OF 2013

(D) THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FOOD SECURITY

- i. PROCLAMATION FOR THE CONSTITUTION OF THE WESTERN AREA PENINSULAR NATIONAL PARK

THE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ACT, 1972 (ACT NO.27 OF 1972)

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT NO.6 OF 2013

- ii. PROCLAMATION FOR THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LOMA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

THE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ACT, 1972 (ACT NO.27 OF 1972)

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT NO.7 OF 2013

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, with this presentation, I do lay all the Papers as read on the Table of the House (*Applause*).

IV. GOVERNMENT MOTION

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MR MOMODU KARGBO (Deputy Minister of State, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development): Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am here this morning with a motion of ratification as follows: that this Honourable House ratify the following Agreement which was laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 23rd May, 2013, Financing Agreement Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme – Phase ii (RFCIP2), signed in Rome, Italy and Freetown, Sierra Leone between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Dated 26th April, 2013.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this is an ongoing process and the motion I am asking this House to ratify this morning to a large extent indicates progress and success and that's why we landed into this. Honourable Members could recalled that I did lay the Phase 1 of this programme in this House in 2007. The original Rural Financing and Community Improvement Programme was signed on the 25th June, 2007, between the Government of Sierra Leone and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The total amount involved then was Le9, 341,500,000. The objective of the project which is now closing was to provide a wide range of financial services to the rural poor, through the creation of grass root financial institutions, principally in Kono and Kailahun. The project became effective in January, 2008 and it is supposed to end in 2014. The project made a lot of achievements like: the development of 36 financial services associations, development of 'Osusu' like organisations involving the grass root people in those two districts. If you could recall also that the process of the community banks started way back in 1989/1990. By the closure of that period, 6 of these banks

had been set up but these were new to the country, and they were working in isolated and difficult communities. Because that they started experiencing problems and the expected impact was not realised. And under this Phase 1 Project which I am talking about that started in January, 2008, all of these banks have now been restructured. They have been expanded and the latest report is that they are operating at appreciable levels.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, seven new community banks have been built in Nimiyama, in Sandor, Pendembu. Seven of them are presently in the two districts. Those banks are expanding and they are in operation. A refinancing facility was set up at the Bank of Sierra Leone to support the community banks and financial services so that they can have a full capacity to continually expand their operational facilities. A Technical Assistant Association was formed. Quite a number of people are involved. This is the model that we have been following as we have drawn inspiration from what is happening in Ghana. In Ghana, there are lot of community banks scattered all over, independently owned. APEX bank has been created as well. So, the APEX bank supervises all these rural banks, just like we have the Bank of Sierra Leone in Freetown, overseeing the operations of all other banks. It is therefore expected that this Technical Assistant Association would eventually transform into an APEX bank that would oversee the activities of all the community banks. One hundred ward offices were constructed and equipped to support rural participation at the local council level. In other words, learning from the lessons of the previous six banks which had some problems, more important structures are being created to sustain the operations of these rural banks. This is because we all know the farmers do plant their rice, harvest it but got stuck with it somewhere. And the traders will come with very vicious conditions. Sometimes they bring ten bundles of zinc before harvest time and given to the farmers. It is business, and it is done in the international community. It is called advance pricing. But only that in our own case, our farmers are not that strong to participate in such business. So, most times it is the traders that cheat them in terms of prices. In the end, (maybe at harvest time, the price would have gone up), the farmers are not able to do anything.

But in overseas countries, there are measures put in place to protect the farmers. If the price moves this way, you move the other way. These are the kind of structures that are now been put in place to protect the farmers. It is all part of the Poverty Alleviation Programme. This is because this is a Project that is experimented right across West Africa. And our Project has done considerably well. It is among the top projects; and therefore, in 2012, unexpectedly, the Project was awarded another \$12 million because of its good performance. This is what has allowed the operations to be sustained at the same level up to 2014.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, looking at the history of our projects, the problems we have in this country with regard to projects is that they are too short sighted. They come in for 5 years and go with little or nothing comes out of it. Therefore, whatever good work has started, it crumbles. So, this project is an attempt to sustain it. To our delight, the sum of \$22 million has been approved in combination as loans and grants to sustain this project. Mr Speaker as I said, it is a loan and grant. The loan is special drawing right \$7,375 million units amounting to \$11.15 million. The grant is special drawing right \$7,375,000, amounting to 11.15 million. As always the case, the Government has to demonstrate its commitment and the value of the Government's commitment has been estimated at \$4,500,000. Not all this amount is coming in cash. This is the beginning because a lot of these contributions are not priced. And part of this cost is duty waiver. We give a lot of the equipment; a lot of what comes in is custom duty and is paid to us as a country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable members, we are losing revenue because the law is that, we paid in a form of duty waiver for most of the commodities that are imported. And so we are now beginning to record our own contribution, relative to what is been contributed. The estimate of it is \$4,500,000. That is a significant percentage against the total cost of the Project. Now, the terms of the loan (the interest and other charges which include service charge per annum), is point seven-five (.75), less than 1%. The maturity period for the loan is 40 years, with a grace period of 10 years from the date it

was approved by the Board. The balance half is a grant. Again, we all have to caution that because it is a grant (we don't have to pay back), we have to be focused to achieve the desired results. This is because a country like ours needs such Grant and it is this kind of contributions that makes us achieve our result. So, we should look at the grant as important as the loan. Both are designed to achieve objectives.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the question is that, what is this money going to be used for? What is the purpose of this money? The objective of the programme is to give rural financial services. We want to find ways and means of making the rural areas lucrative. We want to find ways to make our people in up-country have access to funds so that they can buy their own irrigation equipment, they can take a loan and buy a tractor, and in the process Government is relieving itself of this burden and this is what will lead to the emergence of a private sector. And if we don't have a private sector, I cannot continue to come here all the time with loans it has its long term implication. The first component would strengthen and expand the outreach of the rural financial systems, that is, the rural financial services, the community banks and the Technical Assistance Agency. This anticipated APEX Bank is going to be very important. A lot of attention is going to be paid on developing the banks. This is because these banks are operating independently as of now.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if we listen to the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), a lot of people have come from overseas to this country. We know what is happening to the banking system around the world. There is this banking crisis all over the world. Such crisis is still hindering progress all over the world. And if you look at it, much of it had been due to lack of the interpretation of the laws. You would also learn that the competence of the people who were supervising these banks was at stake. The other analysis is that, the laws were not broad enough to address emerging issues of the banks. That is why a lot of emphasis is going to be paid to the development of the APEX Bank this time around, as more FSA's, rural banks and community banks are created.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Second Component will go, essentially to project management and coordination. Key in that area is the development of robust Monitoring and Evaluation Unit to be able to supervise the whole implementation of this bank. Mr Speaker, I want to submit that this is a very important project. It has achieved quite considerable results. Though there are hiccups, but it has done a whole lot of good work and this is why in the first instance it was awarded a bonus of 2 million in 2012. This was due to the good work the Project has achieved. And the fact that similar substantial amount of money has been laid for further expansion of the programme is an indication of the progress that has been made. And this is something that I crave the indulgence of this Honourable House to support.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, having proffered all these explanations, I move that this Honourable House ratify the following Agreement which was laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 23rd May, 2013: *"Financing Agreement, Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme – Phase II (RFCIP2), signed in Rome, Italy and Freetown, Sierra Leone between the Republic of Sierra Leone and International Fund for Agricultural Development, Dated 26th April, 2013."* I thank you.

(Question Proposed)

HON. HASSAN B. SHERIFF: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I stand before you as Chairman of the Finance Committee of this Honourable House. I know the intention of the Government is good for the people that we represent in our rural communities. I believe 70% of us are representing rural the communities. And I also believe that we are committed to improving the lives of the people of these rural communities. Therefore, with a loan like this been forwarded to us for ratification, I would be in support of it 100%. But I must say here that the Minister of Finance made reference to the 2007 Phase One Loan Agreement that we ratified in this House. My concern is that, for the most part Parliament is not involved. Parliament is not notified when these loan agreements are been received by the Ministry of

Finance. I believe we have a responsibility as Members of Parliament to not only ratify loans, but to also monitor the implementation of these loans so that they can reach out the targeted groups, especially the rural communities. I may want to invite or perhaps, ask the Minister of Finance this time around (which I am going to lead or perhaps maybe the Committee on Finance to look into or to visit these communities) where these loans or funds are been extended to? We want to see the impact of these loans on the lives of the people that we represent. I am saying this because it is sometimes surprising to us to hear some of these banks being created or opened in our communities without our knowledge. Mr Minister of Finance I want to tell you that it is our right to know everything that is going on in our respective constituencies. This is because we are representing the people of our various communities. This is a welcome idea. We would support it wholeheartedly. I would urge my colleague Members of the Finance Committee to support the ratification of this loan.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I must say that we have to be in line with the Minister of Finance's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit he was referring to. We want to monitor and follow the implementation process so that these monies are given to the poor communities. These monies are for those communities who need help from the Government. I want to believe that micro-credit that has been extended to the poor families in this country helped them in some ways. But the question here is, when all of these is put in place, do they have the markets? There should be markets for the exchange of produce, buying and selling of commodities which our community people can sell out to the markets etc. There must be market places and not just the ABC Units. These are small mushroom houses. Nothing can be found in these areas. But there must be a market where buyers and sellers can meet to improve their lives. I believe we should be looking towards that direction.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to look at financing. I am sure the impact of financing would be handled by the Committee on Agriculture. The Committee on Agriculture has a lot of responsibility in that regard. The Finance Committee is looking

at the financial aspect of this Agreement to make sure that the interest rate is reasonable. Mr Speaker, the interest and other charges is 0.75% of 40 years maturity period. This is a long period. Most of us would have died when these loan Agreements are going to be paid. The 10 year grace period is a welcome idea. The package is good Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I support this Agreement wholeheartedly. I think I would still be alive in the next 40 years. But I believe the bulk of the loan repayment would be done by our kids. But are we preparing the ground for safety landing for our kids? This is one of the questions that we need to ask ourselves. Perhaps, my colleagues from Pujehun, who are Agriculturists would give us the answer. With my friends on the Committee on Finance, I urge that we support this Grant and Loan Agreements. I thank you very much Mr Speaker.

HON. ANSU J. KAIKAI: I thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, these are the kind of ratifications that when they come here, they remind some of us of what was supposed to have been done earlier. Mr Speaker, the Paramount Chiefs would bear me witness that the Sierra Leone Cooperative Society used to give out loans and other forms of financial services and advice to farmers in this country. After sometimes, that Cooperative went moribund in the 70's and 80's. The Minister knows what I am talking about. Some efforts were made and were appreciated by the farmers of this country to reestablish the Sierra Leone cooperative. Their office was located at the Ministerial Building, George Street. The Ground Floor was given to them. Later, they got them an office at Westmorland Street, now called Siaka Steven Street. And then, they banked on the lobby floor of that building. Mr Speaker, whatever happened to those funds is another story. Frankly speaking, the Minister, who has effectively and eloquently tabled this ratification is a living witness to the fact that the farmers in this country have suffered in terms of their financial obligations to traders who have been exploiting them. Then, of course in the last ten years, the establishment of rural banks started. They have done well in all respect. Some of them are presently in Honourable

Tunis's Constituency. He has done very well. The one in Yoni and other places I am sure have equally done very well, not only for the farmers, but for other Sierra Leoneans who have benefitted as a result of the small loans that they get in pursuit of their various walks of life.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have before us a huge sum of money coming in, and of course services that are going to be provided as a result of that effort which has been made previously, especially in the last ten years by both the SLPP Government and the APC Government. I thank both President Kabba and President Koroma for their efforts in that direction.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Minister of Finance was talking about the APEX Bank which would serve as a supervisory institution of these rural banks. Rural banking is very much needed in this country. There are about 10 banks in Freetown, but only one bank in Pujehun, Kailahun etc. Few are in Bo. But when you talk about Masingbi, Gbondapi, Tormabom, Rokupr and other places where the farmers are living, those are the people who suffer the most from these traders. Those are the people who need what these loan and grants would do in this country. I hope the APEX Bank would not go the way the Cooperative Bank did. I hope the Bank of Sierra Leone would take its supervisory obligations as far as it would provide supervisory operations over these banks. This is because the Cooperative Bank failed to succeed because that was not done. That was one of the faults and of course politics played a major role in the demise of the Cooperative Bank. But there are always two sides of the story. If you do all these and fail to provide the enabling environment that would protect the farmers from these crook traders or from these Shylocks, believe you me all of your efforts would go in vain. All what we are doing here would go in vain. The purpose for which these banks were established would not be properly achieved at all. Therefore, I urge the Minister, who is an economist to start working on proposals for legislation in establishing a commodity exchange in this country. It should be a matter of must. We must do it. The exchange would benefit the farmers. It would protect the farmers of

Kailahun, Koinadugu, etc. Those are our grass root people. They have suffered the most during the war. The Banana Island farmers in Sowa Chiefdom and Kono District must benefit from these efforts, otherwise, why should he be spending his time tilling the soil? The farmers must enjoy the fruits of their labour. But the effort and the foundation for that must be laid by this Parliament and the Executive Branch of Government. I am sure the Minister of Finance would not disagree with me on that.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want this Honourable house to ratify this loan and grant Agreements that we have before us. Constitutionally, we are obliged to play our own part. There are many technical flaws, but it is not the business of Parliament at all. The Ministry of Finance has the experts. We don't have them here at all. At times when we called them, they don't come. I must admit that you have always done very well. I want you to continue doing the good work. But please Mr Minister, make sure (because previously, you have promised this House when it comes to issue like this) that you would have the Chairman of the Finance Committee and the membership involved in monitoring these monies. But that had not been done at all. That statement came from you Mr Minister. I endorse that which you said to this House. Mr Minister, this is one of the best agreements that this House has ever seen for long years. Make sure that our farmers benefit. Let it not be a situation where in the bulk of the money is left in Freetown. Please Honourable Members I urge all of us to immediately ratify this Agreement. It is good for the farmers of this country. I thank you Mr Speaker.

HON. MICHEL SHO-SAWYER: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I stand here to give my own contribution. I have no farm; but soon I would have farm in the Western Area. My Honourable colleague, Honourable Pateh Bah has a lot of lands in that area. Even Honourable Kallon has a vast land in the Peninsular. We would make use of it very soon.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I believe it was in 2011 when the Climate Change Conference took place in South Africa. The delegates of that Conference were talking about something that needs to be done to stop the polluting the world; and President

Jacob Zuma of South Africa stated that during the time the Western Nations were developing, they never discussed Climate Change. But now that they are developed nations, they are asking the African Nations to consider Climate Change. Jacob Zuma said we agreed to the principles of Climate Change, but we need to develop like the Western Nations. Also, what I have heard and learnt before I was born is that, Malaysia used to come to Sierra Leone for palm kernel. But today, Malaysia is 100 times more developed than Sierra Leone. I also learnt that farmers in Sierra Leone during the Slave Trade era were taken to the Americas and other countries. But today, if America is developed, it was developed from the labour of the Sierra Leonean farmers. It was through agriculture cotton and rice plantation that America developed. Therefore, it is not that we do not have the history to be lucrative farmers. It is not that we do not have the potentials because we see other people take our roots, palm kernel and farmers to their own continent and became so developed. It is through agriculture that these countries have become developed nations.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, in my own brief contribution, I believe any loan or any funding that we have to put into agriculture is something that we should speedily ratify like what our Chairman of Finance Committee has stated. There is already a proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place. What is needed is that, I would say Honourable Members we also need to consider what the other countries are doing. They provide subsidies for their farmers. We are not doing that. We need to find ways to subsidize our farmers, assist them in building their skills and capacity, strengthen the markets, etc. When I said strengthen the market Honourable Members, our Ministries, Departments and Agencies in this country do not buy their food from the farmers of this country. They do not even procure local goods. We need to make it a law that Government funding for MDAs should procure local goods. This is how we help our farmers. It should be mandatory that if the Ministry of Defence is going to procure rice, it should be our locally produced rice, not imported rice (*Applause across the Floor*). These are things that need to be done to strengthen our markets. If His Excellency the President is talking that in 2016 we should stop importing rice into Sierra Leone, some

of these things need to be put in place. In my own brief submission, I would recommend that this House speedily ratify this Agreement. I thank you.

HON. PC. PRINCE LAPPYA BOIMA IV: Thank you Mr Speaker for catching your eyes.

THE SPEAKER: For catching my eye?

HON. PC. PRINCE LAPPYA BOIMA III: Yes Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Proceed Honourable Member.

HON. PC. PRINCE LAPPYA BOIMA III: When the Minister of Finance was explaining, I thought I was in the classroom listening to a teacher. But I later realised that I was not in the classroom. I realised that I was in the Well of Parliament. But I did enjoy when he was explaining. As an MP Paramount Chief and a Paramount Chief representing my Chiefdom, the Kakua Chiefdom in Bo, it is our responsibility to make sure that our people do their farm work. It is our responsibilities to ensure that farmers produce enough food not only for themselves but for others as well. Therefore, I would give my support and ask my colleague Paramount Chiefs and elected Members of Parliament to speedily ratify the Agreement before us.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if I could make reference to the Speech delivered by His Excellency the President in this House on the State Opening of Parliament, he talked about youth empowerment. And I think this loan, if ratified today, it would make provisions for the empowerment of youth in this country. He also talked about education. This loan can create room for the education of our children. Mr Speaker, 90% of our people in the rural areas are farmers. If you empower the farmers for them to become sustainable, then, they would be able to pay school fees for their children. If you empower youth farmers they would be able to take care of their families. Mr Speaker you cannot be a farmer at the age of 60. You would not be effective at all. If you were going to be a tablet, your efficacy would have dropped considerably.

Therefore, you cannot be useful. But Mr Speaker it is the youths that are always considered the most lucrative farmers. So, by empowering them, you are creating jobs for the rural communities. If those banks are established, we would be like Western farmers wherein we would be able to afford our own tractors. We would be able to buy our own harvesters. But if we rely on our physique, we would not be able to provide for ourselves at all. We only rely on subsistent farming. That was the reason why my grandfather married 75 wives because he needed labour to become a good farmer. And you cannot produce if you do not have the labour force. I always say our own farm is now in our pockets. But if you can have the tractors, I think you don't need 75 wives. You only need one wife. Therefore, I am also asking colleague parliamentarians to quickly toe the line, so that we can ratify the loan agreement that is before us today.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, one thing I would always say is that, we have the ABCs in the country. But the question is how strong these ABCs to support their communities? I have one experience Mr Speaker. There are ABCs all over the country. But those in those offices cannot feed themselves. They are now asking us to loan them our rice which we produce so that they can sell for us. I said no. You have to buy. This means that they are not even protected. They don't have the finance to support themselves. If they had, they would not be asking me to loan them my rice. So, I am craving the indulgence of the Ministry of Finance to provide funds for them, so that they would be able to buy from the farmers. And if we create the banks, the loans facilities should be readily available to our local farmers and the conditions for the loan should be in proper place so that everybody can afford. These ABCs are supposed to have their own funds so that if the peasant farmers can plant their crops, somebody would be there to buy them. But if that is not happening, we would approve this loan but the impact would not be felt by our local farmers. I am also craving the indulgence of the Ministry of Finance not to leave the chiefs of this country behind in terms of monitoring the implementation of this loan. This is because it is our responsibility to help the farmers produce enough food for our people. Therefore, I am asking that we speedily ratify the loan Agreement that is before us. Thank you very much.

HON. ALIMAMY G. KARGO: Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I stand here in support to ratify this Agreement before us this morning. Farmers in Western countries are the wealthiest. But our farmers in Sierra Leone are still struggling. But I think with this Agreement, subsistent farming would be a talk of the past. The hoe and cutlass farming method must be a talk of the past. With this kind of support through IFAD, I think is applauded and is timely. We are now talking about the Agenda for Prosperity. The Agenda for Prosperity is tied up with helping our poor farmers to improve themselves and their communities. The rural poor must change to a better standard of farming. For some of us that are involved in farming, we know what it takes someone to become a successful farmer. It involves a lot of money. But with this type of funding, it would surely help the farmers to improve and change the status of the rural poor.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, it is so important that both the Finance and Agriculture Committees monitor these activities. This is because we have ratified loan Agreements in this House that have little or no impact on our people. Sometimes these monies never get to the people for which the monies are meant for. I am kindly asking the people that are managing these funds to make sure that the funds get to the right destinations. The people must get what due them. I want to stress here that the community banks they said they have established should not be established on sentiments. Sometimes the locations of these banks are poor. Farmers are far way in the interior and the bank is found somewhere away from their reach. These are the modalities that must be put in place so that the farmers would be able to reach the banks easily. They should be able to reach these banks and get the funds to support themselves. These funds should be made available to them so that they get the technical and machinery supports they need. They must make sure that when they get the equipment, they should get them with spear parts. Mr Speaker, equipment like tractors do wear-out over time. They do wear-out Mr Speaker. If you have these tractors and you don't have the spear parts to support the unexpected breakdowns, then, you will create difficulties for the farmers. Agriculture is time bound. You cannot

be waiting for the spear parts for two to three weeks. Most of these spear parts are not available in this country. When you get the tractors, you must make sure that the spear parts are available and affordable. Otherwise Mr Speaker it's a fruitless endeavour.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, with this short contribution, I want to implore this Honourable House, of which I am sure that about 80% of Members of Parliament are from rural areas. Your supporters need this kind of support. I am asking you to join me in ratifying this Agreement so that our people would be elevated from the shackles of poverty. Mr Speaker, thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I think the Minority Leader wants to contribute to this debate.

HON. DR BERNADETTE LAHAI: No Mr speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Mr Minister, would you like to respond to the several issues raised?

MR MOMODU KARGBO (*Deputy Minister of State, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development*): Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this whole issue actually falls within my area. A lot of the issues that have been raised today are not agricultural. I think I would take time to deal with some of these issues raised. This whole issue is about rural finance. We all have the history of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, Cooperative Bank, the Osusu etc. We have had that history and it did not end well at all. It is because it did not end well that new avenues were explored. This is what has led to this notion of community banks, famers association etc. I said in the explanation that structures are being put in place. We are being shadowed by what happened in the past. That shadow is hanging over us and we can't afford to fail this time around because we are talking about an issue that covers the greatest number of Sierra Leonean lives and about their greatest employment and greatest source of income. Therefore, this is not something that we can amiss. Among the key issues, this is the heart of the programme. This is the heart of the replacement of the Cooperative Bank. I don't necessarily buy the idea that we should do away with the Cooperatives.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Chairman of the Finance Committee did support the motion but it was with some trepidation. He has some disquiet about the spread of this programme. His trepidation is not known, but I think I can explain that in two contexts: first, when this programme started in 2007/2008, a lot of Members of Parliament were coming to Parliament for the first time. And those in the Ministries were also coming in for the first time. And we were all concerned about the learning process. I think that is one of the problems; second, I can interpret the Phase 1 Programme as an experiment covering only three districts: Kailahun, Kono, and Kenema Districts. New banks were established in those areas. This is the beauty of Phase 2. The beauty of Phase 2 is going country wide. Therefore, before you could realise, you may see one in your chiefdom. This is what Phase 2 is going to do. In other words, we have had some success in Phase 1; and out of that inspiration we are going to undertake a guarded expansion of the programme right across the country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, lot of statements have been made in this matter and I am so happy because it shows that a lot of people here are from the rural areas and they are concerned about the rural areas. For example, Honourable Ansu J. Kaikai made mention of a Commodity Exchange. I want to assure you that what you are suggesting is in the making in this country. Mr Speaker, starting from today, if you are coming from the rural area, you will find out that all the vehicles have started moving to the Lumas. By tomorrow, Friday 14th June, 2013, the Luma people will begin to operate. They operate on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. That is the beginning Mr Speaker. It is now left with us to see the potential of these Luma people. They should develop programmes to rationalise and transform them. That is how this Commodity Exchange will begin to emerge. This explanation also answers the question from the Chairman of the Finance Committee that there are no markets. The Luma people are beginning to build the markets. The market is a place where they do exchange goods. The traders come on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The farmers come with their produce on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to do exchange. That is the market I am talking about.

It is left with us to step in and begin to modify, transform, improve and put in rules, laws and regulations in place.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the APEX Bank is not going to follow the way of the Cooperative Bank. We pray it does not go that way because too much money would have gone down the drain. Too many efforts would have been made and that brings us to the issue of accountability. In this honourable House, there is the Public Accounts Committee that oversees all the audit reports of all these programmes. They are part of the monitoring process. In this House, there is also the Finance Committee. They have the power to even tell the Minister of State to come and answer few questions. And I am duty bound to answer these questions. In this House, there is Committee on Transparency as well. There is also the Committee on Agriculture. This programme is within their purview more than anybody else. We have to take our responsibilities. Any time I come here, I learn a lot from Honourable Members. The last time we talked about the Matotoka Road. And there was this case about an axle I did undertake.

We do subsidize agriculture. The tractors that came were sold probably at half price. The fertilizers that came for Honourable Members were sold almost at that stage. There are these extension workers that are scattered all over the country. They provide extensions services to farmers. It is left with us to look for these people, bring them and make them useful to our farmers. Honestly, Pa Bockarie in Pujehun would not have the opportunity to jump on the vehicle and drive all the way to the Ministry of Agriculture and knock on the door of the Chief Agriculturist. He would not do it. He is afraid to do that. He is timid and he does not think it should be so. It is us who should, but the extension officer is standing in his doorstep. I am using them. Therefore, you should use them to help our people in our communities, particularly now that the ABCs are beginning to grow and they are beginning to expand. And that is the centre of exchange. It is not only for trading, but for so many other activities.

Finally Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to differ from Honourable P.C. Boima. You can be a farmer at 60 and even 70. And I think that is the core of the problem.

This is what the Ministry of Agriculture is about to do. This is because we have not seen agriculture as business. As he said, we are still seeing agriculture as subsistence, and that is why at 60 you cannot hold a hoe or a cutlass. You must have tired. You cannot even walk like a normal human being. Your back is hunched for using the hoe for many years. That is why we think we cannot be a farmer at age 60. If we are able to transform farming into business, I can sit in my office with a Managerial position at the age of 60/70. I have my Operation Officer who is at his 50s. He is out in the field doing some work. I have my Field Director who is in his 40s. He is very energetic. I am a farmer, managing a farming business. That is the whole proposition of agriculture. We should move from subsistence agriculture and start looking at agriculture as a business.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I once again move this Honourable House ratify the following Agreement which was laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 23rd May, 2013: "*Financing Agreement, Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme – Phase II (RFCIP2), signed in Rome, Italy and Freetown, Sierra Leone between the Republic of Sierra Leone and International Fund for Agricultural Development, dated 26th April, 2013.*" I thank you sir.

(Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to)

Motion of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development was unanimously ratified.

ADJOURNMENTS

(The House rose at 11.20 a.m. and was adjourned until Friday, 14th June, 2013, at 10.00 a.m.)