

**C/113/2023**

**Anonymous complaint from staff of Forestry Services regarding nomination of Officers to attend seminars locally and overseas**

By way of letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023, staff members of the Forestry Services wrote to us expressing their concerns regarding the nomination of six (6) Forest Conservation and Enforcement Officers (FCEO) to attend seminars in China. It was alleged that these Officers have been favoured whilst others were never given the opportunity to attend such seminars either locally or overseas.

The Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security was requested to submit its comments on this matter and on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023, submitted a detailed report on the nomination criteria and training courses attended by Officers, amongst others. After perusal of all documents the following observations were made:

- (a) One of the eligibility criteria for nomination for a seminar in China was that the Officer should not be above 45 years old.
- (b) According to the staff list submitted, there are 8 Principal FCEOs (all above 45 years old), 22 Senior FCEOs (all above 45 years old) and 56 FCEOs (out of which 14 were above 45 years old).
- (c) Out of the 42 eligible FCEOs, some had already been sponsored to follow a Diploma in Forestry.
- (d) Several Officers in the ranks of Principal FCEO, Senior FCEO and FCEO have not followed any training course over the recent years. It was also noted that some were also not willing to follow the sponsored Diploma course.

Whilst appropriate justifications were provided by the Ministry to substantiate the nomination of the Officers for the course in China, this Office highlighted that several Officers having reached 45 years have not been given the opportunity to follow any training course over the recent years.

This Office therefore considered that all Officers should be afforded equal opportunity to follow at least one course locally or abroad in order to enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies. A recommendation was therefore made by our Office to the Ministry on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023, requesting that a Training Plan be worked out to include all the Officers in the Forestry cadre, irrespective of age, in order to eliminate any perception of discrimination or favouritism.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August 2023, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security responded positively and reported that its Training Committee has decided that all Heads of Divisions should submit their respective requests for training, taking into

consideration the training requirements of their Officers and the operational need of the sector while ensuring that all Officers are given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge, skills and competence.

This Office would therefore wish to put on record the positive response of the Ministry and considers that this measure will address the grievances of the complainants.