



HWANGE RURAL UNDER SIEGE FROM EXTRACTIVE COMPANIES

By Simiso Mlevu Posted February 24, 2021 In Front

. . . as Mines Minister Chitando heads to Hwange

Hwange Rural District has been invaded by extractive companies that have been pegging hectares of land without engaging local communities. On Monday 15 February 2021, Centre for Natural Resource Governance received information that communities within a 15 kilometres stretch from Cross Dete to Kapami area woke up to find pegs inscribed Malonga Wells/A Mupandawana in their fields. The pegged area covers Ndangababi, Makwandala and Silewu wards.

It was noted that Mupandawana's company has been pegging the area without the community's knowledge and consent. Aaron Mupandawana is the president of the Zimbabwe Youth Development Trust and has interests in mining. In 2014, he was ordered by the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) to stop operations at Ayerum Gold Mine in Goromonzi after it was discovered his mine was disposing cyanide and mercury into a river. The river fed into three nearby dams making the water harmful for communities which relied on it for domestic use.

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It is not clear what Mupandawana intends to mine in Cross Dete but the area is known to have copper, tantalite, lithium and amethyst deposits. The omission of community consultative processes in this development is worrisome. The communities are worried that, should mining operations be allowed to proceed, they will bear the burden of land degradation, air and water pollution, loss of grazing land for their livestock and, in some instances, displacement. Section 4(1) of the Environmental Management Act, read together with Section 73 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that every person has a right to live in a clean environment that is not harmful to their health.

Community consultation at the beginning of a development project is imperative, and continual engagements throughout the mineral extraction process allow communities to contribute to decision making regarding governance of their natural resources.

This development comes shortly after the Dinde Community in Hwange, located about 20 kilometres from the Cross Dete, raised alarm over a coal mining project by Beifer Investments which is also threatening their existence. The Dinde coal project, if allowed to proceed, will affect 5 villages which have about 600 homesteads. Beifer Investments claims they have a Special Grant which allows them to conduct exploration of coal deposits in the Dinde community.

The tension in Hwange has attracted the attention of the Minister of Mines and Mining Development, Mr Winston Chitando who is scheduled to visit Dinde tomorrow (Thursday 25 February, 2021). Minister Chitando's visit follows the cancellation of a meeting between the Dinde community and Hwange District Coordinator that was scheduled for the 13th of February. The meeting was aborted after the community refused to be divided into smaller groups that comply with Covid19 regulations.

CNRG POSITION

CENTRE FOR NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE calls for the Government of Zimbabwe to respect land rights of its citizens. The land question was at the centre of the anti-colonial struggle that began in 1893 and culminated in the attainment of independence in 1980, following an armed struggle. Thus the government must do everything within its power to minimize displacements of communities. Where relocation is to take place government must first engage the communities to be affected and agree on compensation. The relocation site must be built up first with all the social amenities required for a human settlement. Further, the government must address the question of livelihoods for displaced people. Merely building houses, as was the case for the thousands displaced from Marange to Arda Transau is not enough. International best practices must be followed.

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Engagement with the communities must be done in a free manner without intimidation. The people of Cross Dete have Constitutional and customary rights to participate in the decision making on development programmes that affect their community, without fear of retribution. The right of the communities to remain in their land if they choose to, must be respected. Forcing Zimbabweans off their customary land in favour of 'investors' is inhuman, unpatriotic and against the very reason why Zimbabweans took up arms against colonialists.

We implore the government and mining companies not to abuse the Covid19 lockdown by using it to suppress the rights of communities hosting mineral resources in Zimbabwe. The Government of Zimbabwe designated the mining sector as 'essential services' that remain functional during the national lockdown which started on January 5, 2021. This presented an opportunity for some mining companies to invade mineral rich communities.

We also call upon the Zimbabwean government to uphold the rights of indigenous people as they are described in the Principles of Fair, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). FPIC guidelines require that before any developmental project is undertaken the hosting communities, the investor and the government should engage the local people to give or refuse consent to the project.



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