

Sunday, Sinazongwe (January 30, 2022)



MAKE DISPLACEMENT COMPENSATIONS JUST AND EQUITABLE- CEJ

Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) has urged the New Dawn Government to review displacement compensation evaluation guidelines so that communities who face displacements receive fair, just and equitable compensations.

CEJ Executive Director Maggie Mwape is saddened to note that Chamana Community of Mweemba Chiefdom in Sinazongwe District, Southern Province, had land and housing structures evaluated between K1, 400 and K44, 500. At a CEJ Multi- Stakeholder Dialogue in Sinazongwe, Ms Mwape has described as pure distortion for a 2 hectares to be evaluated at K2, 000 and 52 hectares at K15, 000 on land they have lived for over 30 years. She says the affected communities signed consents without having a full understanding of license boundaries and where they will be located to pave way for coal mining.

But Zambian Weiye Limited Deputy General Manager Chimpanshya Simbeya explained at the CEJ Multi- Stakeholder Dialogue in Sinazongwe that a Government Evaluator generated the figures resulting his company topping up K7, 500 on each family on compassionate grounds after engagement with the District Administration. He agreed with CEJ to avail the land map to the community and install signage to show boundary to avert community conflict.

Officiating at the CEJ Multi- Stakeholder Dialogue, Sinazongwe District Commissioner Nchimunya Siakole condemned the compensation rates that host communities in mining areas are subjected to. And speaking earlier, CEJ Executive Director Maggie Mwape said there is need to see to it that the said Evaluators and the Evaluation process is scrutinized to avoid holes in the process.

Ms Mwape says after the evaluation process is done, district officials from government offices, CSOs, FBOs and community members must be availed to the evaluation report and discussions are to be made in such a sitting to ensure transparency to promote sound decisions on compensation. Meanwhile, the CEJ Executive Director stated that the Zambian people must not feel vulnerable in their own country.

"Commonly, compensation analyses are focused solely on the market value of land or immovables such as homesteads, but CEJ would like to see that any assessment should be broadened to also include valuation of the economic as well as cultural aspects of rural residents' dependence on their land to support their livelihoods. Yes, as a Country we are open to investment opportunities, however it must be our top priority to protect our people and ensure that they benefit from the natural resources," she said.

Ms Mwape observed that in Zambia, displacement of rural communities from their land, with little or no compensation, represents one of the negative impacts of mining investment.

"This includes displacement of rural communities from the land they depend on for growing food, building shelters, fetching water, grazing their animals, and for accessing land-based resources. Investment resulting in displacements of rural communities without providing due compensation or leading to actual economic improvement is contrary to "alternative land-based" models of compensation," she said.

Ms Mwape noted that when rural communities are displaced to pave the way for mining investment, the main loss is their land, which is both a basic necessity and the primary basis for a sustainable livelihood.

"The members of these communities become more vulnerable because of the new fragility of their livelihood. Their agriculture productivity drastically decreases because of the loss of quantity or fertility of their land. The future prospects for their school-going children become bleak as they relocate to new places without infrastructure or where basic services such as schools and clinics are far away, " she said.

The CEJ Executive Director observed that in most cases, rural communities are not consulted before the decision leading to their displacement is made.

"It is often the case that they discover something is going on when they see government officials surveying their land or investors moving onto their land with construction, earth moving or exploration machines. They are only informed after they inquire that their land has been allocated for land-based investment and that they will have to be relocated or offered compensation," she said.

And the CEJ team during their expedition in Sinazongwe met a few coal mining companies in the area and they highlighted some of the challenges they have been facing when it comes to dealing with the host communities. CEJ noted that Mining companies have been bombarded by beckoning voices and letters requesting them to either employ more or assist the community with financial support for numerous things.

Ms Mwape says the mining firms indicated that this lack of coordination has proven to be overwhelming for them to meet all the needs. In the same Multi- Stakeholders Dialogue, CEJ Head of Research and Studies Freeman Mubanga presented the first ever Sinazongwe Community Development Strategy (SCDS) which was developed through a consultative process with key stakeholders in Sinazongwe as a guide to facilitate Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSER) for any business investment to employ in the district.