

Saturday, Lusaka (14th October, 2023)



CHIEFS WORRIED ABOUT CARBON FINANCING TRENDS, LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Chiefs in Zambia are concerned that carbon financing initiatives and trends may have far reaching impacts including social-economic benefits on local communities, and climate change adaptation.

Speaking on behalf of twelve Chiefs, Senior Chief Nkula said carbon financing and trading initiatives, if not well understood, may affect the future development of communities, the authority of chiefs, and the Country negatively.

This came to light at the end of the '2nd Traditional Leaders Caucus' in Lusaka held under the theme, "Strengthening Traditional Leader's Role in Carbon Financing for Sustainable Development in Zambia", organised by the Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) leading to an Action Paper for Convening Partners.

The event was supported by CEJ partners such as Bread for the World, First Quantum Minerals (FQM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sweden through Musika, and the BioCarbon Partners (BCP).

Chief Nkula said there is a need to unpack the Climate Change concepts and Carbon Financing as it can contribute greatly to the development of communities if managed well.

"As Traditional Leaders, we have expressed our interest to engage in this initiative. However, there is a need to fully understand the policy mechanisms and statutory instruments behind this initiative, understand how the carbon credits are determined, unpack the technical carbon verification processes, understand the current interim guidelines on carbon trading and how the pricing system is arrived at. The carbon trade should be fairly distributed. If possible, other public entities like ZANACO, and Zambia Industrial Commercial Bank (ZICB) are allowed to compete," he said.

The Traditional Leader called for a clear benefit sharing mechanism and that the funds accrued from carbon trading are allocated to address some of the community based problems like poor road networks, water and sanitation, health care, youth, and women empowerment.

“We need community engagement, awareness, and participation. We noted with concern that there is less community engagement and participation in carbon trading among other environmental issues and decisions are made on behalf of the community. Our mandate as traditional leaders is to serve the people and participation can only be effective once adequate information including technical training is provided for chiefs and local persons to understand the processes involved in carbon trading and the available carbon markets. We appeal to Government and different stakeholders to work with Chiefs in developing and implementing regular sensitization, workshops and training programs on crucial issues such as what exactly is carbon financing, who the players involved are, and the processes involved in establishing a successful carbon project at community level.

He said there is need for a clear road map for a legislative framework and policies on carbon financing and other related problems.

“We want the promotion of nature-based solutions and involving Traditional Leaders. It is important that the causes of the environmental problems are identified and mitigated by any means possible even before we focus on providing nature-based solutions. We realize the implementation of these nature-based solutions is highly correlated with the role of chiefs in the communities and it is important that their inputs are taken into consideration,” he said.

The Traditional Leader said chiefs should work hand-in-hand with the Government, local municipal council officials and development partnerships.

Chief Nkula said financial constraints among Chiefs are also a challenge in implementing these solutions, hence appealing to Government through the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment to budget for these solutions and involve chiefs.

“We have observed that carbon trading is an initiative that the communities can benefit from but there is a need for collaboration between the government, non-state partners and the Traditional Leaders. Traditional Leaders will require collaboration with partners such as Civil Society Organisations who specialise in research and technical understanding of carbon financing to help them educate their people. We need to be provided with the facts and training using additional platforms such as the House of Chiefs in order for us to disseminate this information to the community accurately. Additionally, there is also an urgent need for Government officials to fully participate in events such as the caucuses and EPD so that they can realize the urgency of the issues being raised,” he said.

The Senior Chief said there is need for policies and updated legislative framework by reviewing the current legal framework in order to suit the citizens of Zambia after Independence.

“Some of the current laws relating to natural resources and which may affect carbon trading seem outdated but are still in use. We have observed that every leading Government ignores the important action of updating the legislative laws and framework in consultation with the Chiefs,” he said.

He said Chiefs are concerned about the lack of jurisdiction under Customary Laws and the role Traditional Leaders have in decision making especially with matters concerning the environment and natural resources.

“In most cases, the Customary Laws are sidelined by the Constitution which has a negative impact as customary laws reflect the Traditional Leaders’ laws and regulations based on their lands,” he said.

Chief Nkula said permission and authorization should be obtained from Chiefs before any carbon initiatives are implemented in their lands.

“When carbon initiatives are implemented, the land should be regarded as Customary Land and under the protection of Customary Laws. Their royal highnesses are deeply concerned with the lack of transparency attributed to the finances gained from carbon initiatives. It is not known as to how much an investor benefits and what goes to the community. Hence, it is important that a clear benefit-sharing mechanism be put in place,” he said.

The Traditional Leader called for the immediate enactment of a Climate Change Act in order to promote transparency and fairness between the carbon traders and the communities who are providing the carbon sinks.

“In that spirit, the delegates of cop 28, should also understand fully the significance of the benefit-sharing mechanisms so that fruitful negotiations should be considered and benefits are effectively distributed to the communities. Their royal highnesses also alluded that the carbon traders should be at the forefront of promoting the development of alternative and sustainable livelihoods for communities. Investments such as the creation of water dams that locals can use for irrigation purposes, renewable energy solutions, youth, and women empowerment are capable of providing sustainable livelihoods away from charcoal burning. Last but not least, the sustainable use of charcoal such as the use of green charcoal, tree planting, water harvesting and conservation farming must be supported,” he said.

Meanwhile, Environmental Protection Dialogue (EPD) 2023 Organising Committee Chairperson Freeman Mubanga said an EPD Implementation Framework has been developed to put EPD resolutions into action.

He said the Implementation Framework will be launched in November 2023 and shall act as an enabler of all the EPD resolutions and actions from the inaugural EPD in 2020 including the just ended event.

Issued By: CEJ Communications Unit

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