



THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

LITHIUM MINING IN GOROMONZI: CITIZEN'S INTERESTS SHOULD STAND BEFORE THOSE OF MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Zimbabwe has suffered from the resource curse in years gone by without recourse from the government set to protect the interests of citizens. While heavily endowed with minerals such as gold, diamonds, chrome & now lithium, locals have been unable to benefit. Exploitative Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) tend to always come out the winners while ignoring their responsibility to cultivate back into the community that hosts them. Corporate social responsibility remains a pipeline dream while to make matters worse, the same MNCs are given tax breaks by government. This has contributed to the widespread increase of inequality and poverty which is of grave concern to us and demanding immediate action from our leadership. The interests of citizens must stand before those of MNCs.

Case: Lithium mining in Goromonzi

Shengxiang Lithium Processing plant is located in Goromonzi District. The company was established a year ago and it has started operating without the approval of Environmental management agency. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes were not done at this location to determine the environmental impacts at an early stage. The company committed to meeting the Nora Community on the 19th of April at St Marks Church Ruwa and also Mrs. Cynthia Chingoriwo of the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) but the meeting was postponed to a further date by the District Development Coordinator. The Chief, Chikwaka was also engaged by Nora Community pertaining the illegal mining and he instructed the company to stop its operations until all the requirements were done citing community grievances as follows:

With the advent of a Lithium project at the source of the Norah River, in Ruwa, the Community has got together to voice the following concerns:

- There is a strong possibility of polluting as well as silting up an important river from its very source.
- Should this river be polluted with this Class D mineral, and then both the Norah Dam (providing water to Ruwa Town) and thereafter the Kunzvi Dam (in the process of construction and which is proposed to take over as the main water supply for Harare) will be poisoned.
- The Goromonzi Rural District Council map shows the development is within an agro-residential area- whose hosting of mining is illegal.
- Few of the community, if any, have been contacted prior to the launch of this project to be given the opportunity to voice their concerns. EMA Marondera confirms no EIA has been done prior to the Lithium project commencement. Thus, the project is illegal.

- Due to this, EMA have issued a Standing Order to cease operations until an EIA has been completed but this has been ignored – further disregard to the law of Zimbabwe.
- Blasting has continued (with no blasting times advised to residents) contrary to the Standing Order and blasting at night, which we believe is illegal too.
- The Lithium Company projects to employ 300 people. While we understand that not all will be in the site simultaneously, even if one half this number to be on site at any given time, that is a substantial number. As of now there are no ablution facilities, nor adequate housing. It is highly likely that ‘migrant labour’ on below-stipulated rates of pay will be in use.
- The development on this site suggests a substantial operation which will process a large amount of lithium ore. How will the waste products of crushed lithium ore be contained or disposed of? A Tailings dam can only contain so much over a short period but there is reasonable doubt they will be unable to do so over an extended period.
- Many of the locals herd cattle on the area below the Lithium project. Will the cattle be poisoned or their meat and milk be contaminated and crops too?
- These concerns lead to all stakeholders believing, again with very good reason, that the value to all surrounding properties will be substantially reduced and others forced to move.

Conclusion

Noting all the above, it is prudent that locals are demanding that this mining venture is stopped henceforth. This is to allow for the requisite processes, principal of which is the Environmental Impact assessment, to be carried out. Furthermore, the MNC already operating in the area should be sanctioned for disregarding the proper procedures of setting up such a venture, all to the detriment of citizen’s livelihoods.

The below image shows ground already cleared without an EIA

