



Center for Natural Resources Governance

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DINDE COMMUNITY IN STAND-OFF WITH CHINESE INVESTORS OVER A PROPOSED COAL MINING PROJECT.



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Introduction



Picture 1: Chinese technicians arrive in Dinde on 5th of Feb. 2021 with their drilling machinery in preparation for the exploration

DINDE community members are locked in stand-off with a Chinese investor over the latter's proposed coal exploration operations within their community, with villagers fighting to stop the operations. Villagers argue that the Chinese investors are in breach of environmental and customary laws of the country as they have not produced any documents granting them permission to work in the area nor engaged the community for a social license. The Chinese investors operating as Beifer Investments today (the 5th of February 2021) moved to Dinde to start the work. Dinde village is in Ward 13 of Hwange Rural District, Matabeleland North.

Villagers expressed their fear that, should the project continue, they will be subjected to forced relocations while others will be exposed to air and water pollution of Nyantuwe River which provides drinking water for humans and livestock. Villagers also fear loss of livelihoods and grazing land for their livestock, destruction of cultural heritage sites such as graveyards for the Nekatambe Chieftainship as well as contamination of ritual sites in that area.

Within the proposed mining area there are economic assets like a dip tank which was donated to the community by the USAID and the village cattle sale pen.

The Right to Say No

THE RIGHT TO SAY NO

According to Dinde Residents Association, from February 2019 to December 2019, a team of Chinese nationals toured the village without consulting or engaging locals. In December 2019, the same team brought some light weight machinery and set up a camp behind one Emelia Mukombwe's homestead within the village - where they intended to start drilling. Locals approached the Chinese, who failed to produce documents authorising them to explore in the area.



Picture 2. Chinese drilling machinery packed in Dinde on the 5th of Feb. 2020 in preparation for the exploration

The Chinese intended to drill 13 holes in a straight line of a 1,9 kilometre stretch without due care of what was in that path.

In a show of resistance, locals ordered them to leave and return with documents granting them permission to work in Dinde. Thereafter, the Chinese investors returned to Dinde with several officers from the Environmental Management Agency, Hwange Rural District Council, Traditional Leadership, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Zimbabwe National Army and a local miner, to coerce the villagers.

BACKGROUN DINDE COMMUNITY HISTORICAL

On the 8th of January 2020, a delegation of local community members was dispatched to Hwange Rural District office to establish the legality of the operations by the Chinese. According to Dinde Residents Association, Hwange RDC Chief Executive Officer, Mr Phindile Ncube told them that the Chinese had a Special Grant for exploration. According to the Mines and Minerals Act, in Zimbabwe, special grants are issued by the President in respect for land reserved against prospecting, like the communal land.

On the 11th of June 2020, the Chinese are said to have returned Dinde village again, this time in the company of Chief Charles Nekatambe, a Mr. Ncube and a Chilota Colliery Company (Pvt) Limited proprietor, Mr Lazarus Kwidini.

The Chief, Mr. Kwidini and Mr. Ncube are said to have acted as gate-keepers, barring interaction between the locals and the Chinese nationals. Mr Kwidini reportedly told the villagers that these Chinese were working on Chilota Colliery's concession while Chief Nekatambe reportedly intimidated villagers, threatening to get the villagers arrested.

The Chinese returned to Dinde again on the 11th of November and 15 December 2020 accompanied by the same people who included traditional leadership, state security agents and EMA officials. Threats were issued again in a bid to muzzle the community's freedom of expression and their 'Right to Say No' to destructive development projects.

DINDE COMMUNITY HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dinde is home to thousands of Nambyas and Tongas with a preponderance of the Tonga who first settled in Whange district up to Victoria Falls right upstream of the Zambezi River between 300 AD and 400 AD. The Nambyas tracked in from Masvingo in the early 19th century. According to a local traditional leader's narration, most people who settled in Dinde area were relocated from Sinamatela area in 1920 to pave way for a game reserve (Hwange National Park). The area has had five Chiefs since its establishment in 1920 and four of the chiefs who have passed on are buried near the site where the Chinese want to mine.

CNRG POSITION

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Historically, as Zimbabwe has been attracting mining investors, largely to rural areas, this has led to displacement of our people without compensation. Rural families depend on land for livelihoods and as a cultural asset. CNRG believes Zimbabweans have a right to live in their ancestral land and also reserve a right to say NO to forced evictions by mining companies. Government must respect the rights of the Dinde community as enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe.

CNRG also believes the Chinese investor has violated the country's environmental laws, specifically, section 97 which spells that an environmental impact assessment must be carried out before prospecting. The fact that the community of Dinde was not aware that they fall within a special exploration grant concession is testimony that they were never engaged, in line with SI 7 of 2007 - Environmental Management (Environmental Impact Assessment & Ecosystems Protection) Regulations, 2007.

We thus call on the Government of Zimbabwe and the Parliament of Zimbabwe to protect the rights of the people of Dinde and ensure that investors respect and uphold the Constitution of Zimbabwe. We also call on EMA to diligently execute its mandate of providing for the sustainable management natural resources and protection of the environment; the prevention of pollution and environmental degradation.