

Zimbabwe: Community Bio-Cultural Protocol (BCP)

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We have been doing participatory action research in the community of Marange and the displaced community of Arda Transsau with the aim of building a community bio-cultural protocol (BCP). This is one of the tools that we hope communities could use to engage with external stakeholders, especially investors and governments coming in to extract natural resources in their areas. The community BCP is a tool that can also be used by the communities to protect their cultural heritage, to assert their rights as a community and to determine fair and adequate compensation for their resources, especially, in case of displacement.

The BCP should be able to be produced as a document with the aspirations and the “Marange that the communities want.” We are hoping that other communities would be able to use the same tool in their countries. I think that with the amount of extraction taking place in Africa, there should be a mechanism that should facilitate benefit sharing because most of these extractions result to forced evictions of the indigenous communities. I think there is need for communities to access information so that they can be able to participate fully in the development agenda of their areas and countries. Basically, the extraction of these resources results in conflicts as a result of the unsustainable manner in which they are extracted. The process ruins the environment in which the communities earn a living through subsistence farming and often multinationals grab land from the people and displace them without any compensation or mechanism to protect their rights. This often results in extreme impoverishment of the local communities.

From the process of data collection and community engagement, we have also come up with a Mining Communities Coalition which we managed to register in January this year. It has membership drawn from the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe and we are hoping to create a platform for communities to contribute towards policy-making and participate in decision making processes in the country. We hope to work with other groups from resource rich countries including Kenya,

South Africa, Zambia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are planning to do a mapping of the groups and we have had some initial engagements with some groups in those countries. However, I am of the belief that at local level, communities should actively participate in setting development priorities of their areas.

This link has the a copy of the research project that I did with other communities who are affected by large development projects, “Back to Development - A Call for What Development Could Be.” This research project was participatory action as well, and it was based on a bit of my biography on how the famous Marange diamond find affected the well-being of our community. I contributed Chapter 6.

I am also competing my Masters in Development Studies and I hope that I may be able to further my studies because I am passionate about doing research work that is targeted at uplifting the lives of marginalized communities and protecting their rights and interests. I should be glad to share with you the BCP framework that we are using, though it is quite comprehensive. I am glad to share with you any information that I have. We have also worked with the community so that they can be able to do interest based negotiation and the training targeted traditional chiefs and religious leaders who are often targeted by the government to participate in negotiations, but mostly they are taken advantage of. I am really interested in knowing more about transitional justice project because in Zimbabwe we have passed through the colonial system that was very exploitative and oppressive to a post-independence government that left all the colonial laws in place and further abused the rights of the rural communities mostly. In our community, people were displaced using a Mines and Mineral Act 1954 which gives mining precedence over all other economic activities. The creation of military zones in our community and the subsequent human rights abuses were all based on colonial laws. Our hope is in the new constitution of 2013, but the laws still have to be aligned to the constitution.