



**MASVINGO CENTER  
FOR RESEARCH  
ADVOCACY AND  
DEVELOPMENT**

## MACRAD CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY & NON PARTISAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN THE CHILONGA-DENDAIRY PROJECT

**M**ACRAD started operating around Chilonga and Masimavele areas long before the law which ordered the immediate eviction of the Hlengwe-Xangani from their ancestral land was passed. That was long before Dendairy declared and published its interest in the land. Since then, we have been working with over 30 village heads around the subject area.

The fears of the Hlengwe-Xangani ethnic group commonly referred to as the Chilonga community are not unfounded. Without any consultation, the government ordered hundreds of families in Chilonga and Masimavele area to immediately pack their bags and disappear. These are not allegations. Through Statutory Instrument 50 of 2020, the government ordered every person residing within the identified area to *"depart permanently with all of his or her property from the said land"*. It was only after public outbursts and court applications that the government took one step back and withdrew the decree.

Fast forward to February 2022, Dendairy finally came out open to the public and declared its interests in Chilonga and Masimavele. The company published a statement highlighting that the communities concerned will be engaged. Part of the statement reads; *"After dialogue at leadership levels, the engagement process will cascade to the villages for accuracy in the interpretation of the project facts"*.

Before the publication of the statement, Dendairy's Corporate Communications Officer had a meeting with journalists at the Flamboyant Hotel in Masvingo. She explained that the project will convert the Chilonga and Masimavele into a green belt that is export-driven and will transform the region's way of doing agriculture while drastically lifting the standards of living.



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Whilst, Dendairy has highlighted that the community in question "will be" engaged, it is on record that the Minister of State Affairs and Devolution for Masvingo, Ezra Chadzamira has said consultations have already been done. Whilst addressing journalists last year, he said villagers in the area and all other stakeholders were consulted " and they understood"

He went on to accuse "the opposition and activists " for misguiding and confusing the villagers.

<https://youtu.be/tFmbU72JmDk>

On 13 March 2022, the Sunday News, a national newspaper published an article titled **"No one will be displaced in Masvingo"**. In what has been described as a press conference, the Minister told the Sunday News reporter that no one will be displaced through Dendairy's Lucerne project.

The "no one will be displaced" mantra was also repeated by the government's lawyer, the Attorney General during the constitutional court application which was filed at Harare High Court by Livison Chikutu and others. Ironically, the AG hinted that **"those who might be affected will be relocated and adequately compensated"**. Fears of displacement among the Hlengwe Xangani Community are therefore justified.

Dendairy has said its **"community engagement teams are on the ground, continuing with relationship building with locals in Chilonga and Masimavele as part of the project implementation process."**

On the other hand, the village heads that we work with maintain that there have not been any consultations with villagers. They are surprised that Dendairy is conducting meetings with journalists in hotels, some hundreds of kilometers away instead of engaging the concerned villagers.

Contrary to the Minister of State's sentiments, The majority of the village heads are yet to be engaged by the government or at least the Chiredzi District Development Coordinator. On 11 February 2022, several village heads representing thousands of villagers in the Hlengwe-Xangani community petitioned the government over how 'what appears to be consultations' are being done.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DDcCALp6t9wCcs\\_QKT8ORcfZBBb02Tep/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DDcCALp6t9wCcs_QKT8ORcfZBBb02Tep/view?usp=sharing)

The community leaders insisted that they are not against development projects being implemented by the government. They are only concerned in the manner in which the project is being implemented. They allege that the authorities are selecting individual village heads whom they are whipping to rubber-stamp the project.

The previous day, Chiredzi DDC had called for a meeting in which only four out of about 20 village heads per ward were selected to attend. Dendairy representatives were part of the meeting. The petitioners alleged that these meetings are being done in a partisan manner and without any transparency. They further alleged that ZANU PF DCC members are being invited to these meetings.

The village heads also complained that the meetings are being conducted in Chiredzi town, an area which is difficult to access from Chilonga and Masimavele. They say even if they are eventually invited, They have to cross flooded rivers to access Chiredzi town. They pay 50rands per head just to cross the river with a boat. The trip will cost them at least 300rands

A few days ago, a vet officer riding a motorcycle was swept away by flowing water at Chilonga bridge whilst trying to cross the flooded Runde river. More than 10 lives including that of a ZRP Sub Aqua Unit member have reportedly been lost at that bridge this year alone. The villager's concern that Dendairy must come to them for consultations instead of doing meetings with journalists in hotels and with a few selected village heads in Chiredzi is justified.

As a non-partisan organization that has been supporting sections of the Hlengwe-Xangani community and most particularly women,

we welcome any government initiative that is destined to upgrade the lives of the people. Dendairy has acknowledged the need for consultations and appears to be willing to engage. As hinted earlier on, it has said its members are now in the process of doing the consultations.

On the other hand, we have public officials claiming that consultations have already been done. As early as last year, Member of Parliament for Chiredzi West Constituency Farai Musikavanhu had said ***"Consultations were done and I can declare that as a resident within the community, I witnessed this happening and I attended some of the meetings as their political representative"***. Contrary to his statement, a large section of the community which voted him into parliament is saying they are yet to be consulted.

\The reason why the government initially ordered hundreds of villagers to immediately pack their belongings and leave their homes has not been explained to the villagers or anyone else. It is the government that passed the law to displace the villagers. The same government is yet to explain why and how the initial decision to immediately evict its citizens had been made. Instead, some public officials are on record blaming "the opposition and activists" for misleading the nation.

As a non-partisan community-based organization, we implore the government, and public officials to be transparent, truthful,

and accountable in so far as the implementation of the Lucerne project or "irrigation scheme is concerned".

That the president is a close ally of the Coetzee family which owns Dendairy is a fact. While this might have nothing to do with what is being described as the "Presidential Communal Commercial Industrialization and Transformation Strategy in Masvingo"

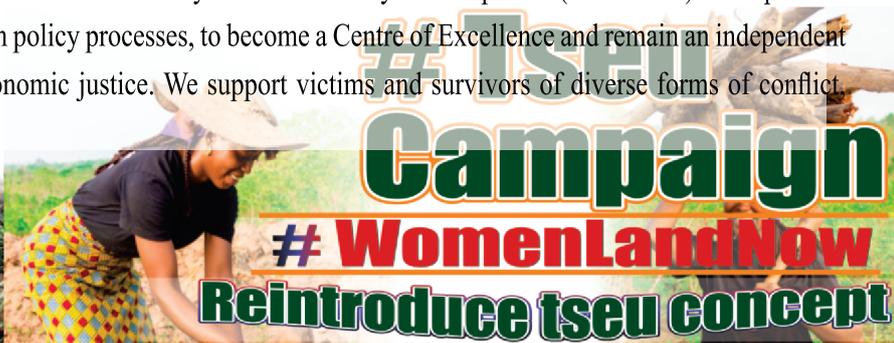
the President's alliance with the Coetzee's has been contributing to the fears that the villagers and other concerned citizens currently have. Not to be forgotten is the fact that the Hlengwe Xangani is an ethnic minority group that has been tossed up and down by both the colonial and the present government.

The Hlengwe-Xangani community claims that they are not beneficiaries of the sugarcane estates and plots in Chiredzi. Instead, they are underpaid and exploited sugarcane workers. They fear a repeat of the same fate in the hands of Dendairy.

As a result of the foregoing, the government, its officials, and Dendairy must be seen directly involving and engaging the villagers rather than having closed-door meetings with ZANU PF DDC members and a few suspiciously selected village heads as has been alleged. It is also hoped that Dendairy will fulfill its promises if the project is to be implemented.

### About MACRAD

Masvingo Centre for Research Advocacy and Development (MACRAD) Trust is an independent Zimbabwean Community Based Civil Society institution committed to the development of socio-economic rights and agrarian systems that enhance equitable land rights and sustainable land uses throughout Zimbabwe. MACRAD interacts with various organizations and communities to assist them in developing capacity for policy formulation and research. It also facilitates policy dialogue among communities, governments, academics, civil society and others on land and agrarian development, especially the land rights of marginalized social groups. Masvingo Center for Research Advocacy and Community Development (MACRAD) is driven by a desire to contribute towards improved rural livelihoods that should lead to greater capacities for the rural poor to determine their own destinies and contribute towards national development. MACRAD has worked with citizens in resettlements areas around Masvingo Province on civic and voter education to ensure their voices are heard. We support victims and survivors of diverse forms of conflict, violence, displacement and disenfranchisement. MACRAD's approach entails encouraging continuous policy debates and refinement of policy. This is achieved through generation and provision of research based information, platforms for dialogue, creating and nurturing a policy community in Zimbabwe. The ambition of Masvingo Center for Research Advocacy and Community Development (MACRAD) is to provide leadership in socio-economic justice and land-agrarian policy processes, to become a Centre of Excellence and remain an independent and credible center for knowledge on social and economic justice. We support victims and survivors of diverse forms of conflict, violence, displacement and disenfranchisement.



**#Tseu Campaign**  
**# WomenLandNow**  
**Reintroduce tseu concept**



**#munda wambuya #nsimu yakokwani #isivande**