

Desilting set to camouflage river bed mining in Odzi River: Nenhohwe-Odzi Subcatchement area.



Odzi River at Nenhohwe

Is the executive using policy gaps to advance its own interests on natural resources?

The project that was awarded to Stromspice Trading to desilt and extract minerals in Odzi River is mired in controversy. The project comes at a time when government has already in acted statutory instrument 92 of 2014 of environmental management agency banning alluvial mining in river beds. The ministry of water launched a national desilting programme in 2014 and mandated the Zimbabwe Water Authority (ZINWA) to implement the programme. The then established commercial arm of ZINWA issued special licences to private companies to desilt and recover minerals from the silt with the intention of using dividend generated from mineral sales to fund the desilting programme. However, several companies engaged in this exercise especially in Mazowe River wantonly destroyed the river system in search of alluvial gold instead of desilting. The government blamed ZINWA for illegally issuing such special licences and stopped the whole desilting programme through a cabinet directive. The ZINWA act of 1998 established ZINWA as a self financing institution to manage Zimbabwe's water resources in a sustainable manner. Thus the act empowers ZINWA to generate revenue through water levies and not mineral extraction. The mines and minerals act in its present form supersede all other acts once mineral resources have been found. Amendments for the mining act to provide stronger environmental protection for citizens in line with the new constitution have not been passed by government. However in the absence of an

amended mines and minerals act, the ministry of water through environmental management agency (EMA) is legally empowered by statutory instrument 92 of 2014 to stop any form of mining in the river bed.



Stromspice Trading preparing to set their plant on land under irrigation at Nenhohwe

The CRD received information that Stromspice Trading intends to extract minerals in Odzi River from Nenhohwe in Chimanimani west up to Bezel Bridge in Marange. The river Odzi at Nenhohwe is located in the downstream of Marange diamond fields. Local experts believe that the river contains huge deposits of both diamonds and gold. The ministry of mines officials indeed confirmed that the area 1518 of Nenhohwe was reserved for mining but were quick to point out that mining operations could no longer take place in the river because river bed mining has been prohibited. When contacted for comment company director Ivan Putter described the project as a desilting exercise but was also quick to point out since government had no money, the cabinet decided that costs for desilting were to be recovered through "any minerals that he may come across in the river." Quizzed further on whether he was aware of government directive to halt desilting operations and the ban on river bed mining, Ivan pointed out that the decision was made as a result of poor standards of operations exhibited by Chinese companies in Mazowe. He also claimed that the cabinet was facilitating all the licences needed to carry out the project. Meanwhile the company is already settling in at Nenhohwe. In his mid-term fiscal policy review presentation to parliament in August 2015 finance minister Chinamasa citing Auditor General's narrative reports bemoaned lack of accountability in management of public resources and non compliance with approved frameworks by the executive arms of government as one of the major reasons for leakages. The ministry of mines, (EMA), (ZINWA) and Chimanimani Rural District (CRDC) have all expressed ignorance over the latest developments at Nenhohwe. It remains to be seen the form of special grant the company will bring on the ground to commence operations in the mineral rich Odzi River.

Community receives project with both excitement and scepticism

The surrounding community of Nenhohwe expressed mixed feelings on the proposed project. The harsh economic environment facing Zimbabwe has not spared this community. Thus some interviewees expressed hope of working for the company following the failure by mining companies in Marange to provide employment or meaningful development to this adjacent community. One elderly villager was quoted saying “zvingangoita nekuti ava vanenge Warungu chaivo kwete maChina aya” (it may work this time because the investors look like real whites not Chinese from Marange). Already more than 50 people from the local community have been temporarily employed and were seen erecting fences and clearing the nearby Nenhohwe airstrip. According to Ivan, Stromspice has plans to build clinics, diptanks, sink boreholes, support Nenhohwe and Nyanyadzi irrigation schemes by desilting Odzi River and irrigation canals, support local schools with computers and provide funds for the education of vulnerable children, and also supply medicine to local hospitals and clinics. Locals will also benefit from selling river sand and bricklaying projects according to Ivan.



Local villager pointing to river Odzi. She believes the company is only interested in diamond extraction not desilting

With speculation high among villagers that the project intent to divert the natural flow of Odzi river in order to extract diamonds and gold deposits from the river bed, some villagers fear the worse because Odzi and Save rivers are the major sources of livelihoods. Other villagers interviewed were of the view that the ghost of Marange had resurfaced to haunt them closer to their community. Poor mining operations in Marange has caused untold suffering on this community as thousands of their cattle had been lost from drinking polluted water or from falling in disused mine dams in nearby Marange mine fields. One local woman who attended a community meeting called upon by company representative Joel Tenderere told CRD that she was not convinced with Joel's explanation

that the project was merely meant to restore river viability and aquatic life. The woman was of the view that Stromspice Trading was mostly interested in extracting diamond deposits in the river and would leave immediately after depleting the resource without rehabilitating the environment. According to her some traditional leaders have already accepted bribes from the company to establish their plant on irrigation land without the knowledge of plot holders.

Integrated natural resource management



The project intends to divert natural flow of Odzi River

Nenhohwe falls under Odzi Subcatchment area managed by sub catchment councils. According to Manzungu and CHinlinga 2002 Catchment Councils are statutory bodies created by the ministry of water as platforms for different stakeholders to consult and collectively manage water resources in a catchment area. The main stakeholder groups constituting membership of sub catchment Councils in this instance include ZINWA,EMA, Rural District Councils (RDCs),traditional leaders, communal farmers, small-scale- large-scale mines, service industry and any other local stakeholders. The Odzi sub catchment council has not been consulted on this project in order to make productive recommendations that protect the interests of all stakeholders. Catchment councils are critical as they provide platforms for communities to pursue their interests in the management of their water and environmental protection. Information gathered by CRD indicates that catchment councils are poorly funded and cannot effectively carry out their mandates at the moment. The interaction between the community and company officials in the absence of other critical stakeholders as already seen in this project of will not guarantee the community of environmental safety.

Conclusion

The government of Zimbabwe need to follow the dictates of the law in management of natural resources for the benefit of citizens. Allowing Stromspice to mine in the river bed is a violation of Zimbabwe's environmental laws. The failure by government to synchronise all laws governing natural resource management in order to close existing policy gaps is regrettable. The delay in amending the mines and minerals act in order to secure environmental and socio-economic rights of citizens is a violation of the constitution of Zimbabwe.