

PASTORALISTS SURVIVAL STILL AT STAKE ... HERE IS A SAD STORY OF THEIR RUTHLESS EVICTION FROM USANGU BASIN IN MBEYA TANZANIA

In March 2006, the government of Tanzania issued an eviction order to pastoral communities residing in Usangu/Ihefu basin that is located in Mbarali district Mbeya region in the Southern highlands of Tanzania. The eviction of pastoralists from Usangu and other parts in the country has always been executed violently without due regard and respect to human and land rights of livestock owners. The inbuilt societal stereotypes and negative perceptions over pastoralists have often been the basis of policies, laws and orders that directly affect majority pastoral communities and the wellbeing of their mode of livelihood. Some of the basic perceptions characterize them as destructive of environment, sources of animal diseases, enemies of wildlife heritage and practice an economically unviable mode of livelihood. Worse enough, there are attitudes that have been dogmatized into mainstream policies which apply without being challenged even when they stand in sharp contrast with scientific proofs. So, what happened in Usangu was basically expected because its basis is known, however wrongly framed, and even the consequences and how to manage them were predetermined. The state employed and demonstrated excessive use of force in executing the eviction order initially without even directing the pastoralists where to relocate their stocks.

Thanks are to a segment of human rights activists in the civil Society and some Members of Parliament who listened to the cries of the yelling pastoralists in the plains of Usangu. They visited Mbarali and witnessed unprecedented levels of injustices and hardships that the pastoralists were facing. They advised the government to consider allocating victims of the operation with alternative land to settle before further loss of their livestock and properties could happen. The government through the Ministry of Livestock Development admitted to have committed a mistake by not providing an alternative land for evictees. It was thus officially announced that the evicted pastoralist were to move to Lindi and Coastal Regions respectively. Lindi, Kilwa and Kisarawe districts were designated for the evictees with further promises that in the areas earmarked for pastoralists, relevant services such as dips and dams were to be constructed and facilities for the community and their livestock put in place.

Just recently in the mid of March, 2007, the Land Rights Research and Resources Institute, teamed up with other civil Society Organizations namely PINGOS forum a pastoralist forum NGO based in Arusha, Legal and Human Rights center another Human rights NGO based in Dar es Salaam and HIMWA, a Community Based Organization from Morogoro to conduct a fact finding mission in Lindi where most pastoralist found their destination. The team comprised also of journalists from Radio and Television and local newspapers. The main objective of the fact finding was to conduct a research on the whole process of eviction of pastoralists from Usangu/Ihefu with a view to establish the rationale behind the exercise and its implications against a couple of rights as provided for in the national Constitution and other legal documents.

There is actually a collection of breathtaking findings that were filmed, tape recorded and reported about the gross violation of basic rights to Tanzania citizens who exercise pastoralism as a viable mode of earning their living. At the centre of the whole story is the government, well placed with his dual role, first as cruel master to execute his own orders and second as arbiter of the aftermath. Among other things, the research team unearthed the following;

- Dehumanization and oppression of pastoralists during the whole process of eviction from Mbarali-Mbeya to Lindi region, which threatens their future livelihood as pastoralists. Some were brutally beaten others forced to sell their livestock at throw away prices normally arranged by the district authorities.
- Government officials at central and local level have in most cases acted against the procedures laid down by the government on how to handle the eviction order thus causing livestock and financial loss at the expense of innocent pastoralists
- Pastoralists complained against the Mbarali District authority for forcing them to sell their livestock at low price against the market price and to specific buyers who are allegedly regarded as personal aides to the district officials dubious transaction of government business
- Lack of necessary infrastructures for smooth evacuation of animals and the families involved caused many families to incur extra costs in transportation of their livestock. This reflected poor preparations of the eviction exercise that the government claimed to have succeeded by all standards.
- An unconstrained power of taxing pastoralists, sometimes with illegal charges at different stations on their way to Lindi was also noted. A shocking observation was made at the famous Benjamin Mkapa Bridge that is named after the third phase Government president, where pastoralists were supposed to offload their livestock. This is a point where they were charged up to Tshs. 300,000 that is almost equivalent to US\$300 for each vehicle carrying livestock to allow them a permission to move with their animals to Lindi region. This happened notwithstanding the charges they incurred through out the way before reaching the Bridge.
- Allegations of corruption in different forms were leveled against government officials both in Mbarali and Lindi districts. Leaders in different villages in Kilwa district were especially alleged for asking money from pastoralists to allocate them with relatively nice grazing and settlement areas.

The list of findings could go on and on but the highlights above are just pointers to the intentional violation of human rights and lack of good governance which the land rights activists and other supporters of rights of marginalized groups shall always stand firm to condemn. The research team has just summoned the Tanzanian Government to make the necessary interventions through a press statement while working on other alternatives to mitigate the negative implications of the eviction. The government through its prevention of corruption bureau has also been asked to act with urgency in dealing with all the officials involved in corrupt practices failure of which would mean the government is fighting the battle against corruption hypocrite. There also needs to be prompt and fair compensations for the lost properties including livestock which died en route to Landi and homes that were destroyed to force pastoralists move out of the basin. Lastly, researchers urged the society at large to join efforts in publicly condemning ill designed operations like that of eviction of Usangu pastoralists with the media taking a leading role in the move.