



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Communities in Lamu demand priority ahead of President Uhuru's visit to the Lamu port

Fishermen are yet to be compensated 3years since the order by the high court while road construction linking the port to the mainland have resulted in irregular land acquisition

Save Lamu | DECEMBER 9, 2020 – More than 40 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) under the banner Save Lamu are concerned that the President is planning a visit to inspect the ongoing construction of the new Lamu Port yet the challenges the community continues to face over the construction remain unaddressed.

Today President Uhuru is expected to land in Lamu and give the Ethiopian Prime Minister a tour of the completed births yet more than 4,000 fishermen in Lamu whose lives were disrupted by this project continue to languish in poverty – unable to earn their daily bread regularly – since the construction of the Lamu port begun three years ago. The dredging at the site meant that many of the traditional fishing sites had to be closed and became inaccessible to the fishermen.

It is quite sad that the President is happy to inspect this project when no payment has been made or any indication given that the government has any plans to do so soon. This is despite the High Court ruling that the fishermen be awarded Sh1.76 billion in compensation as the project not only undermined their source of livelihood but also violated their cultural rights.

“It's unfortunate that development that is meant to enhance our economy and our people is oppressing us. We depend 80% on the fishing economy, which has been disrupted but our leaders do not look concerned. I hope the President will address our plight as he visits.”, said the Beach Management Unit (BMU) Chair, Somo. M. Somo

It is also a huge concern that 15 hectares of the Mangrove vegetation in Lamu had to be cleared for the purpose of this project. Mangroves play an important role in ensuring we have communities that are resilient to climate change. Coastal communities like those of Lamu are very vulnerable to extreme weather and climate events and Mangrove ecosystems help these communities minimize the impacts as they act as barriers against extreme weather like Tsunamis. And yet the government and regulatory institutions remain uncooperative on the mitigation measures. Furthermore, the destruction of the coral reefs and mangrove forests, have already affected the population and location of the fish.

“It's quite sad that the institutions that are meant to protect the community and environment have also failed. A court process does not suspend the powers and functions of institutions like NEMA from enforcing compliance on a project like this, where the magnitude of social and

environmental impact can be and has been so punitive to the fishermen for lack of action.”, said Rose Birgen a lawyer with Natural Justice.

It also goes without saying that a project of this magnitude will involve construction of roads connecting it to the mainland – and that explains roads such as the port-link one – unfortunately, farmers whose land were acquired compulsorily are yet to be compensated and there’s no communication on when the compensation will take place.

Where any form of compensation has taken place, it has been rife with irregularities and claims of outsiders who bought land getting compensated even where their land was not touched. In some cases, the project proponents changed the original plan to a dual carriageway thereby taking more land than previously planned while refusing to expand the compensation to acknowledge the changes to the plan.

“What is happening is quite unfair. There are farmers who willingly gave their land for the road linking the port to be constructed only for the project to take up more land than was originally planned without compensation.” Said, Salim Said, a resident of Lamu working with Natural Justice as a Community Environmental Legal Officer.

Save Lamu is not opposed to development and indeed welcomes the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project. What we are opposed to is the implementation project that fails to prioritise community concerns or treats concerns from our fishermen and farmers as secondary when it is primary to us.

“Curfews due to COVID-19 have imposed restrictions in the movements of fishermen as they go to fish at night, affecting production of fish. This, coupled with the drastic reduction of fishes as a result of the pollution, destruction of fish habitats and noise from dredging of the port have caused the fishermen to return with barely one kilo of fish when before the port construction, they could return with up to 2-3 tonnes of fish a day.”, lamented Mohamed Athman, Chairman, Save Lamu.

ABOUT SAVE LAMU

Save Lamu is a group of over forty members consisting of local civil society organisations in Lamu including, but not limited to: environmental groups, development organisations, youth groups, women organisations, welfare groups, and more. These groups came together with the vision to create a culturally, socio-economically and politically, empowered community, striving to secure our natural resources and sustain a green environment

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