



FISH HARBOUR PROJECT AT BLACK JOHNSON:

COMMUNITY PEOPLE SHARE CONCERNS WITH HRCSL

In May 2021, some residents of the Black Johnson Community in the western area rural were in contention with the government's bid for a proposed Fish Harbour to be constructed with funding from the Chinese government. Among other things, residents said they were not formally engaged by the government on the terms of the project and also disagreed with the 252 acres of land without compensation.



Following this, a team from HRCSL led by the Chairperson; Madam Patricia Narsu Ndanema visited the community to hear concerns from the people following some scuffle and news making round on social media on the implementation of the said project. During the visit, the commission observed that there was poor knowledge of the project and those engaged can hardly distinguish between a fish harbour and a fish pond. For them, they were of the opinion that it will be a fish pond, which does not require a large portion of land.

In an engagement with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Minister Hon. Emma Kowa Jalloh stated that “the hype around the project was



due to bad publicity that had been associated with the project.” She said the government through the ministry made a series of applications for assistance from the Chinese Government, one of which is the construction of a fish harbour and mentioned that other locations were identified but the lot fell on Black Johnson because it is more suitable and will cause lesser destructions to property, the environment and livelihood as compared to places like Murray Town which was one of the proposed sites.

In March 2022, the ministry put out a notice for residents in the affected areas of the project to forward documents of their acclaimed property for review and subsequent compensation. Over 70 applications were sent, 23 were shortlisted as qualified landowners but only 19 were selected for compensation. Since the ministry commenced payment to land owners on 30th June, 2022, it has so far disbursed a compensation package to 11 residents including 5 women to the tune of NLE5, 684, 089.





Meanwhile, in January this year, the ministry in collaboration with EPA organized the draft Environmental and Social Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) and the Engineering Feasibility Studies of the proposed Fish Harbour Development Project in three different locations namely; the Black Johnson community, Waterloo and Western area urban.

The ESHIA document assesses both the negative and positive impacts of the project and the mitigation measures that should be put in place to solve whatever problems that may arise during the implementation phase.

On 17th April, the Directorate of Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations engaged the community on the current status of the project. The community people expressed dissatisfaction with the way the land was being surveyed by the Chinese team currently in-country. According to Junisa Feika, the Secretary for the local community group, the surveyors have included more portion of the land that was not part of the initial survey previously done. They also noted that there has been an influx of land grabbers into their community taking away some of the reserved land meant for communal use like cemeteries, markets, schools and health centres. “We are not happy with this whole arrangement. Some of the beneficiaries are not members of this community and nobody informed us before payments were made,” he said.





He claimed that people, who had known about the Fish Harbour project since 2017, manipulated their way through the system to have lands so that they could be beneficiaries of the said payment. He added that the community had earlier planned to use approximately 500 acres of land as a cemetery but the particular family claiming ownership of the said land have been terrorizing the community.

Deputy Director and Head of Business and Human Rights Directorate, Abdulai Yollah Bangura gave an account of the issue and the previous engagements the Commission has had with the community and other relevant government stakeholders like the EPA and the Ministry of Fisheries. “I am not here to make promises to anyone but to merely note your concerns for further engagement with the relevant authorities. I am kindly asking you all to stay calm, be peaceful and not take actions on your own,” he said.