

SEEDS OF DISCONTENT

20/03/2013

CHIEF

Our farming areas have been
destroyed.

They were helping us but now they
have stopped.

What type of company is this?

AMADO

I'm even scared now.

It's possible I could lose my job.

Seeds of Discontent

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

In the northern province of Niassa,
Mozambique, the Government promotes
the establishment of large-scale
industrial tree plantations. Six
companies are planning to grow
eucalyptus and pine trees on an
area more than three times the size
of London.

One company, Chikweti, was set up
with investments by Swedish and
Norwegian churches and the Dutch
pension fund, ABP.

Chikweti not only promised a large
financial return, but also claimed
it would deliver jobs,
environmental protection and
community development to the
region.

To produce hardwood for the
national and international market,
hundreds of workers were employed
with the sole task of cutting grass
on the plantation to enable the
pine and eucalyptus trees to grow.

WYSON

What about this area in the middle?
From this point onwards?
Hey cousin.

ALIE

- Yeah?

WYSON

How many metres did the company give you?

ALIE

- 25 metres.

WYSON

And what's the length?

ALIE

- 100 metres.

WYSON

If there was a specific office dealing with our problems...

...we could have sued the company...

...for all the problems they have caused us.

FEMALE WORKER

If you try and sure them, they'll turn against you...

...for leading others in rebellion.

WYSON

People even live as if we're in colonial times.

FEMALE WORKER

Yeah right

WYSON

That's the way this company makes us live.
The company doesn't give us contracts.

FEMALE WORKER

At least we are employed.

WYSON

Yeah, but why don't they give us contracts?

CHIKWETI SUPERVISOR

What you are saying can have the company closed tomorrow.

(MORE)

CHIKWETI SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

You shouldn't accept this stuff...
...people die because of actions
like this.

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

In 2011, the people of Licole and
Lipende uprooted and cut down over
60,000 pine trees, in protest of
Chikweti illegally occupying
productive community land. Around
12 people were arrested.

With tree plantations steadily
expanding across the region,
communities are finding it ever
harder to grow sufficient food.
There are concerns that the high
water needs of eucalyptus and pine
trees may also affect future access
to water.

The Mozambican Government and the
home states of the investors behind
Chikweti fail to protect the rights
of local people.

The people of Licole say that they
are having to travel much further
to get access to firewood from
traditional forests.

FATIMA

We will collect wood here.

Start chopping with the axe, I will
fetch wood.

It's getting harder to find wood
close to Licole because of
Chikweti.

VILLAGE ELDER

Chikweti must know that in order
for us to continue farming
successfully.

They should help the community
build a new road.

Then they could receive land to
plant trees, as long as it's not
used by the community.

The chief gave Chikweti our land.

FATIMA

All that land belongs to Chikweti.

That is the boundary over there.

Where you can see the tall grass.

It all belongs to them.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

We could improve our lives...

...if something worthwhile comes
from these trees.

HAWATU (TRANSLATOR)

Which trees?

CHIEF OF LICOLE

- The ones here.

HAWATU

Which belongs to the company?

The trees belong to you?

CHIEF OF LICOLE

They're the company's.

Chikweti Forest is an unfair and
complex company.

We have experienced constant job
losses...

...while work quotas have doubled
for the few workers left.

Their system isn't ethical.

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

Being frightened to speak out
against a large corporation is
common in rural Niassa.

(MORE)

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO (CONT'D)

In three years, the union associated with Chikweti has paid little attention to workers' rights and even less to the loss of communities' access to land.

HAWATU (TRANSLATOR)

Are you the person responsible for the workers in Lcirole?

UNION LEADER

The camera has caught me unaware. Let's not talk here.

Can't you see I have limitations?

All of the workers at Chikweti have permanent or casual contracts.

HAWATU

- They don't have contracts!

UNION LEADER

The workers at Chikweti?

HAWATU

Yes in Licole.

UNION LEADER

They don't have contracts?

Can you prove this?

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

Frustrated at the lack of secure contracts, poor pay and a union that doesn't represent them, Chikweti workers at Licole decided to bring in a new union representative to take their concerns to Chikweti's management.

AMADO

Why are you not going to sit?

Let's sit, let's sit.

WORKER

We lose wages when we are unable to work for a particular reason.

The company doesn't give us any sick pay.

AMADO

People need to work of their own
free will.

And not work in fear.

It's like being in a cage.

We need to work without fear...

...and of our own free will.

ACACIO (NEW UNION LEADER)

Everything you said is in the law.

Accidents at work are written in
the law.

This is nothing new.

When there is an accident at work,
the company must act by the law.

It is not something to bargain
with, it is the law.

AMADO

Can I say something?

- Yes

I'll tell you what happened with
contracts here in Licole.

At the beginning, for how long was
the work contract? How many months?

Three...

- Three months.

After three months, we should have
signed a year-long contract.

But we still haven't received
anything

WORKER

Do you know what has happened before?

The union and union members...

...are for the workers, so should defend their rights.

Against any violation of workers' rights.

Yet it's been over one year since they visited the workers.

ACACIO

We are still finding out if Chikweti...

...will allow us to create an independent union.

We need space to develop a union...

FRANCISCO

It's still early...

CHRISTIANA

We also need places to farm.

We don't want to go far away.

FRANCISCO

They are supposed to increase the number of workers.

In order to reduce poverty.

But what we see is further unemployment.

What kind of development is this?

CHRISTIANA

Are we moving forward or backwards?

FRANCISCO

Chikweti has invested a lot of money.

If we think of cutting down their trees...

...it will be the beginning of war.

AMADO'S COUSIN

You left here and went to work for Chikweti.

Did this make you happy?

AMADO

Hey you are making me anxious with so many questions.

It's okay to work there...

...but I feel separated from the community.

AMADO'S COUSIN

But we don't need companies to come here for employment.

AMADO

What!

Are you in favour of Chikweti?

- Nope!

AMADO'S COUSIN

Forest projects kill children as they don't plant food.

We'll die of hunger.

AMADO

You are asking too much.

AMADO'S COUSIN

Will it be enough to look after your family?

AMADO

It's not enough.

AMADO'S COUSIN

It's not enough.

AMADO

It's not enough.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

At first, we were told to gather all members of the village.

To tell them a company was coming to Licole.

We needed to decide what land to give them.

Which parcels of land and where.

And where the community farm land would be.

Where our animals would graze.

The company had selected areas...

...but we found they were going over the boundaries.

So we said no.

This is your land and no further.

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

After months of conflict, Chikweti agreed to meet with the community of Licole. Promising a new agreement for community projects.

AMADO

How are you going to begin?
Just tell them that you want to say.

ACACIO

No.

I would suggest we present the matter to the chief.

AMADO

Yes, sir.

ACACIO

When the chief finishes speaking, he will allow the workers time to talk.

At that moment, I will speak on behalf of the workers.

By presenting what the workers are demanding.

FRANCISCO

We need to lay down our hoes. No farmer should work today.

We won't work unless your supervisor from Chikweti comes here.

They must give you contracts again.

It won't make any difference.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

The company gave me a letter on Friday...

...which said we're going to have a meeting.

In fact it's like this.

As the chief I think we should speak out...

...about what happens on the plantation.

WORKER

Yeah

CHIEF OF LICOLE

Exactly

VO: CHIKE OKONKWO

The arrival of companies such as Chikweti have created divisions within communities like Licole. Some are keen to attract jobs and new funding for community projects. Others are deeply frustrated with poor working conditions and encroachment on community land. Chiefs often face challenges navigating this divide.

CHIKWETI WORKER

The agreement has...

...the signature of the director of the company...

...which is written here.

There's also the government's signature as witness.

Is that okay?
- Yes

Great. I'm now giving it to the chief to sign.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

Somebody would like to speak.

Somebody would like to speak.

ACACIO

With the permission of the chief.

I am here on behalf of the workers.

I have been asked to raise their concerns.

Will you allow me to speak, even through we've had previous conflicts?

CHIKWETI WORKER

You can proceed.
- Ok, fine.

ACACIO

It is as follows.

I would like to introduce myself.
I'm a union member.

I'm from an agricultural union.

The national trade union of
agriculture and forestry workers.

The workers have asked me to come
here and represent them.

And present the workers' concerns.

By addressing them to the
management.

When they are sick you sign them
off as absent.

Reduce their wages and don't give
any compensation.

Which is a big problem.

Then...

Another problem has to do with
contracts.

Workers' contracts.

Some workers have been with this
company for three years.

But for no clear reason, the
contracts are signed annually.

So they work not knowing when they
will receive a permanent contract.

Why?

That is the question.

I would like to say a little about
these contracts.

Imagine a worker is involved in an
accident.

Perhaps bitten by a snake and he
dies at work.

What would the company say...

(MORE)

ACACIO (CONT'D)

...when the family knows he worked for the company for three years?

Yet they say it was only for three months.

The company should pay compensation.

Even if nothing is in writing.

CHIKWETI WORKER

Thank you.

Even though I didn't come here to discuss this, we can try and solve it.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

If we keep this contract here, you will be hearing from us.

Go back to town.

These trees are planted in our village.

If something bad happens to these trees.

...it will not be us.

CHIEF OF LICOLE (CONT'D)

The company punishes us at work.

AMADO

- Disrespected us.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

They insulted us.

- Yeah

WORKER

You're right.

Yeah I agree.

They should be chased away.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

If we all sign the union's letter. We really don't need them.

AMADO

We have to sign it today.

Definitely

- We'll sign it.

CHIEF OF LICOLE

What type of company is this?

They were helping us but now they have stopped.

Our farming areas have been destroyed.

We all agreed at the beginning we'd be working for 50 years.

Didn't we?

But they have shut us out.

Some were sacked and received nothing.

Not one thing.

Things are too complex and make no sense...

...to people who go to bed without food.

It was a fight before we had a union and it's still a fight.

There's a long road ahead.

END