

OF THE KAYELEKERA URANIUM VIBE

There has been so much vibe about the kayelekera uranium mine with TVM airing a program on my views and other media houses in Malawi giving it some attention. Just the fact that the vibe can continue to be carried by a number of media houses is quite health and many people ought to take it as a healthy debate. So it becomes quite unfortunate that some people have resorted to pointing fingers at those that have been objective in this debate. In a nationally televised debate one caller pointed a finger to a guest of my views program by saying that he was a northerner and someone from Karonga running an NGO from Karonga and that is why his organization was involved in the uranium vibe.

Another major national newspaper run an article that was regionalistic and called the NGOs that are advocating for a transparent process in the kayelekera uranium project as “odious busybodies” from the north which are denying the region of its much needed development. The paper went on calling a spade a spade by questioning the technical capacity of the NGOs to debate uranium related facts.

As culture abiding Malawians we have always believed in our rich folktales and the wisdom behind our many adages and one says “pali utsi pali moto” (where there is smoke there is fire). It’s with this approach that different stakeholders ought to relax and analyze the issues being raised by any concerned citizen without anyone jumping the guns. The concerned NGOs have reviewed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that was submitted by Paladin Resources and these comments of the EIA review have been submitted to the government. The EIA has many flaws, and it will be very unfortunate and a grave mistake if our government will let the current EIA mature into a final EIA which could be used to commission a full mining license to Paladin Resources without calling to institute a thorough EIA.

The EIA review by Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation-(CHRR), Citizens For Justice-(CFJ) Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy-(CEPA), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace-(CCJP), Foundation for Community Support Services-(FOCUS), Uraha Foundation Malawi-(UFM) and Karonga Development Trust-(KADET) found out that the EIA by Paladin Resources has major flaws in very important aspects of the project. These concerned NGOs are at liberty to share the EIA flaws with the Malawians public, international bodies and our networking partners across the globe.

- EIA not reasonably accurate or comprehensive as it fails to provide qualitative assessment of intrinsic value of certain resources, economic benefit to the country and local community as it has to wait for the bankable feasibility study which is currently being conducted to be completed in order for Paladin to assess all these. Hence it’s premature!
- No commitment to fully design and fund Closure plan until 3 years before closure, as opposed to a fully designed and funded plan before construction begins, with annual updates to ensure best management practices are proposed and financial assurance is adequate. Closure plan and financial assurance is needed prior to license approval to ensure proper closure if company fails to conduct full scope of approved closure and post-closure plan. – Paladin can use an environmental Bond or some insurance as per international standards. The mine

period is 7yrs and after they have finished mining the company may pack without even making any commitments since they have made their profits

- The EIAR uses old data from the 1970s to 1990 but does not make any allowances pertaining to likely changes in the environment, socio-economic and climatic issues; this can also mean that the company did not invest much in baseline studies
- There is several data that is utilized without references, hence its reliability or credibility cannot be properly evaluated
- The company is talking about using some methodology which are not available in Malawi and even on international level without justifying why it has opted for such methodology.
- The EIAR fails or neglects to provide any uranium case studies, especially from Africa, and the environmental impacts which those case studies have experienced so as to inform decision making by the Director in the present case in accordance with section 26 (2) of the Environment Management Act.
- The EIAR states that the costs of the project will outweigh the benefits. This statement is made even before a bankable feasibility study has been conducted. There is therefore no information on which a credible costs benefit analysis can be made. How then can a decision whether to accept certain risks be made without a clear view of the real benefits to Government and the people of the area?
- In addition Paladin makes no commitment to social investment to mitigate the likely social impacts of the proposed project. According to Paladin the social impacts can not be mitigated, yet it is clear that these impacts will come by reason of Paladin investing/extracting in the area
- They also make no commitment to environmental mitigation by the local authorities after closure. They only commit to make Government and local authorities aware of hazards and effects of the project. Clearly Paladin should not be granted an EIA certificate without these commitments stipulated in the Environmental Management Plan.
- The EIA report that was released first week of October 2006 says that the results of the animal samples came back negative, but in actual sense, the results of the animal samples did not come back until- (possibly early November 2006-as reported by Aran Gough during the 15th November 2006 public consultation at Maghemo in Karonga). This means that Paladin has misinformed the Malawian people about the results of the samples. This is a punishable act as per section 63 of EMA.

- The EIA demonstrates that Project has negative benefits even without independent evaluation of cost and benefits and impacts.
- Total Cost/Benefit Analysis shows “worst case scenario” has significantly higher value of net costs than the projected net benefits from the “best case” scenario.
- The environmental Impact Assessment Report is it is loaded with a language which is too technical for local people to understand; chief kayelekera told Paladin consultants (Knight Piesold) in our presence that he has not seen nor did read the EIA, and the chief go further to say that he wanted the EIA in a local language which people can understand. Paladin has maintained that the government has advised it to publish only two languages.

The people and the NGOs who have been raising their objective views on the kayelekera uranium mine are Malawians and they have every right umbrella'd by our constitution to express themselves as Malawians and not as northerners or someone from Karonga.

It should also be understand that challenging NGOs to have scientific technical capacity to advocate for a transparent project is counter productive and an escape goat. It does not take an Environmental Chemist to comprehend that constant hazardous spills on the ground can contaminate water table and ground water. Pointing fingers at NGOs as being technically incapable of expressing their views on uranium related issues is like saying that skilled plumbers, bricklayers, watchmen or tailors cannot exercise their fundamental and constitutional rights to express their views on environmental issues in Malawi because they are not of that trade. Malawi is endowed with intelligent people in various fields and some are very familiar with the effects associated with uranium mining, and so far very few people have come forward to help the public in explaining these things.

It's of supreme importance that Malawians ought to look at such issues as of national importance and not of regional affiliation. Up and above, let people analyze the issues being raised than looking at people who are raising such issues.

The above are the collective views of CHRR, CFJ, CEPA, CCJP, UFM, KADET and FOCUS