

## **Broken Promises in Zeleka: The Silence of Western Cluster**

In Zeleka Town, Chief Momolu still waits for a document that was promised but never delivered, a copy of the social agreement his people signed with Western Cluster. That paper was supposed to represent a new chapter of accountability; a contract binding company promises to community expectations. Instead, it has become a symbol of broken trust. What was to be rendered as compensation by the mining company was in vain. Promises of School, Clinic, among others was last spoken about, during the signing of the social responsibility.

### **From Activity to Abandonment**

The Western Cluster mining concession once carried the hope of jobs, development, and economic activity. Trucks rumbled, machines roared, and people believed in a brighter future. Today, silence rules. Employees were gradually paid off and dismissed, offices shuttered, equipment abandoned, and only rats race through empty buildings. At the Blue Lake, once drained to pave the way for deeper mining, the land now lies barren, stripped of its former beauty.

The company's withdrawal has been as abrupt as it has been unexplained. No formal statement was issued to the affected communities, leaving workers and residents of towns like Zeleka in the dark. Security guards wander around idle vehicles and deserted compounds, the only visible signs of what was once a bustling industrial hub.

### **The Black Sand and the Cooperative Farms**

Yet, even as the old site lies abandoned, interest shifted to another resource: the black sand once disposed of by LAMCO, Liberia's former mining giant. Kongo Mining surveyors resurfaced, assessing its potential, and soon negotiations began anew. But here, too, controversy followed.

The majority of the black sand is located on cooperative farms covering nearly 38 acres, land cultivated by ordinary farmers who depend on it for their livelihoods. Instead of protecting the farmers' rights and ensuring transparency, the process was rushed into the familiar terrain of backroom deals. Town chiefs were brought to the table, a social agreement was drafted, debated, and signed. The representative assured the chiefs that each would receive a copy of the agreement.

That was years ago, up to this day, no copies ever arrived. Only the US\$500.00 monthly rental is paid to the town chief Momolu.

## **A Social Agreement Without Fulfillment**

Social agreements are meant to safeguard communities, ensuring that companies give back in tangible ways: schools, clinics, scholarships, roads, and job opportunities. But without documentation, the people of Zeleka and neighboring towns have no leverage, no legal standing, and no way of holding Western Cluster accountable.

Promises remain verbal, easily denied or forgotten. Communities are left vulnerable, while their lands, ancestral lands passed down for generations, are exploited in their absence. In this vacuum of accountability, frustration grows, trust withers, and the once-hopeful communities are reduced to waiting in silence.

*"We gave our land in good faith, believing their promises. But until today, we have seen nothing. We still don't know the truth of what they agreed to in our name," says Chief Momolu, his voice heavy with disappointment". Chief Momolu.*



## **The Cost of Silence**

The lack of communication has created not only anger but also deep uncertainty. Farmers whose land holds the black sand worry about displacement. Youths, once hopeful for jobs, now migrate in search of opportunities. Women, who once imagined clinics or market halls built through corporate social responsibility, now see their dreams deferred indefinitely.

At its core, the unfulfilled social agreement is not just about a missing piece of paper. It is about respect, dignity, and the recognition of communities as rightful stakeholders in decisions that affect their land and future.

The Western Cluster case in Zeleka is a mirror reflecting broader issues in Liberia's concession history, promises signed, agreements hidden, communities sidelined. Social agreements should be binding contracts, transparent and accessible to all, not secretive documents tucked away in company drawers.

### **A Government Missing in Action**

The deeper tragedy is that these failures persist under the watch of government regulators. Ministries responsible for ensuring compliance have failed to supervise or demand deliverables from Western Cluster. Communities have been abandoned not only by the company but by the very state meant to defend their rights.

### **Chief Momolu's Lesson**

For Chief Momolu, the story is deeply personal. His faith in promises made to his people has been met with silence. The missing agreement is more than paper, it is the manifestation of his community's hope, stolen by neglect.

His story is a cautionary tale of how Liberia's resource wealth continues to enrich companies while impoverishing its people. Unless government institutions step up to demand accountability and enforce agreements, the cycle of betrayal will only continue. Until the agreement is produced and its terms honored, the people of Zeleka remain in indeterminate state, guardians of land rich in resources but poor in justice.