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Why Blame the Chinese

Posted on 07 March 2010 by admin



Emily Sikazwe / Credit:
Bomoon Lee

By Sanjay Suri

The Chinese are much abused over their new extractive enterprises in Africa, but they have done little that Western countries have not for much longer, says Emily Sikazwe, executive director of Women for Change, Zambia.

“Why is it that now the North is screaming about Chinese involvement in Africa when they have been involved in the same things for a long time,” she tells Terraviva. “Not that I want China to continue doing that. But the criticism they are heaping on China is the criticism that should be encouraged of companies that have been in Africa a long time, the De Beers, the Anglo-Americans of the word. They have been extracting in Congo for a long time before the Chinese ever came to our continent.”

And yes, this is a women’s issue, particularly. It’s just that too many people don’t know.

In Africa, about one percent of the land is owned by women, compared to 25 percent in Latin America. “Women don’t have access to land, they don’t have access to productive resources, yet foreign companies have access to land, to tracts and tracts of land. They continue extracting and extracting our resources.”

Western companies have been in an extracting harmony with their governments, inevitably. And, along with agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF, have hurt, and Sikazwe insists, killed African women.

“Those structural adjustment programmes (forced in through the IMF) made for the denial of basic social services to people. And you know that when there is no proper medical care women suffer most because of their reproductive roles,” she says. Too many people simply couldn’t pay the fee for privatised medical services after state services were withdrawn.

“Most problems African countries are facing were under the prescription of IMF and the World Bank. Now why are we calling them again without calling them to account in terms of maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates. There was jubilation in the women’s movement earlier that what we had been talking about over the years over the failure of the existing development paradigm had come to pass. But the IMF and the World Bank are getting up after they had half gone into a coma.”

With them, she says, governments in Africa are responsible. “The G8 is responsible, for forcing our governments to bite the bitter pill at the expense of losing their people. Very few governments had the clout to resist. People

were demanding from the government, and government hands were tied.”

In every way you can think of, women have suffered most, she says. “Women in Africa are the farmers, the care givers. They are the poorest of the poor. They don’t have jobs, they have to be at the market all the time, domestic violence has increased, their children are not looked after because they have to be at the market, selling. We must put a human face to the destruction, and an economic value to the damage caused.”

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