

## Sugar plantation project angers villagers in Dedza

Written by Gabriel Kamlomo  
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Thousands of villagers in Dedza have expressed unhappiness at a sugar plantation project which they say will lead to displacement from the land they have cultivated for years.



The villagers in the area argue that, while the decision is being made without their consent, they are also being sidelined in on-going discussions pertaining to the establishment of the plantation.

The area under dispute is in the jurisdiction of Traditional Authority Kachindamoto. Clearing of the said area of land has already begun and sugarcane nurseries have already been prepared.

Chairman of the aggrieved villagers Isaac Phiri told The Daily Times on Saturday that the sugar plantation would consume over 250 hectares of land which is currently being utilised by thousands of villagers.

"Initially, we were told that the scheme was for maize and rice. But then we were later surprised

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to hear that the whole idea is to set up a sugar plantation. We don't want that because we have lived here all our life and we depend on this land for everything.

The affected villagers coming from Chimgwandali, Mayola, Kanzati, Migweje, Njoka, Nanjati, Chiude, Kambuku, Nanjati and Likwetché villages all located in the area of Traditional Authority Kwataine. Deputy Secretary of the group Martin Njoka said the problem has affected thousands of villagers who have tried in vain to solicit help from the District Commissioner's office but only ended up getting arrested "This whole problem began in September 2011 when we were called to meet at Group Village headman Kanzati's residence. That's where we were first told about this project.

"Until today, we are being forced to accept the scheme although we have said clearly that we don't need this. At one point, all the lower chiefs were with us but suddenly, they changed and were speaking the same tune with the T/A. We need help here or will be left destitute," said Njoka.

Jessie Kabwila, an academic and rights activist who was invited by the villagers to discuss the issue said she was concerned that those that are affected in land disputes are poor villagers whose only means of survival is the piece of land they live on.

She said the landless in Malawi are at risk of being subjected to abject poverty, disease such as HIV and Aids as they struggle to find means of survival.

Kabwila has since said she would be contacting Traditional Authority Kachindamoto and the district administration office in Dedza for a discussion on the best way forward.

In her response, Dedza District Commissioner Sphiwe Mauwa said she was aware she was aware of the move to lease out 300 hectares of land in the area but that her understanding was that this was chiefs' land.

She said the last time she had been to the area, the majority of the people accepted to have the land leased out to Matowe Sugar Plantation company and only "a handful were against the

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suggestion".

"In any case, the land has not been leased yet. As DC, I cannot sign lease forms until the chiefs in that area sign to indicate they have no problems with that. That form has not been brought here yet. We are still consulting on the issue," Mauwa said.