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Tanzania: Consortium of NGOs Takes Loliondo Matter to Kikwete

By Masembe Tambwe

AN international consortium of local communities, indigenous peoples and NGOs (ICCA) has raised its concern with the government about the proposed Loliondo Game Controlled Area division, saying the move will threaten both conservation and local livelihood interests.

According to a statement issued by the consortium, a letter has been written to President Jakaya Kikwete and the Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism expressing their deep concern about hiving 1,500 km square of disputed land from community access.

"This could only have a major negative effect on local livelihoods and social well-being. It could create a serious and lasting impediment to sustainable conservation practices in the broader Serengeti region," the letter stated.

The ICCA consortium promotes global recognition of, and support for, areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.

It is a partner organization of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

In March, this year, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism announced its plan to set aside 40 per cent of the total area of the Loliondo Game Controlled Area as a wildlife corridor, which would prohibit community residence or livelihood activities on the most important section of land for grazing and water access.

The letter is the first official statement made by a conservation- focused body requesting the government to reconsider its position.

The government has consistently defended its position, citing wildlife and ecological conservation as the driving force behind the decision.

In recent weeks there has been a lot of attention brought to the matter, particularly from the local communities which will be affected by the decision, and human rights groups who claim the decision will negatively impact the local communities which have rightful ownership of the land.

Although advocates have pointed out the Maasai's contribution to conservation in the area, the ICCA Consortium is concerned that this new land allocation could negatively harm conservation efforts in the area, countering the government's rationale for its decision.