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**Zambian families evicted from commercial farms**

By Arnold Mulenga

Dozens of rural families have been left with no shelter or source of livelihoods following mass acquisition of land by commercial farmers. The evictions are commonplace in the central Serenje district. Some commercial farmers have acquired thousands of hectares of land while ignoring legal provisions meant to protect the environment and ensure local communities are compensated if their land is taken.

The farms have forcibly evicted residents whose families have farmed the land for generations. Human Rights groups have lamented the government of President Edgar Lungu is failing to protect the rights of the rural residents. Juliana Nnoko-Mewanu, researcher on women and land at Human Rights Watch, said the families were displaced without due process or compensation. "Families have been left hungry and homeless," she said.

Commercial farms investing in Serenje district range in size from 150 hectares to more than 5 000 hectares of land. These ventures are headed up by a broad spectrum of investors, from corporations to family-run farms whose owners live on and work the land directly. Nnoko-Mewanu said government needs to ramp up enforcement of its own laws and regulations. "They need to stop forced evictions, and ensure that displaced families are able to secure a remedy for human rights abuses." Zambia's economy is heavily reliant on copper but the Southern African country is diversifying the economy through agriculture as the global price of the mineral drops.

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