

Kenyan Communities Worry About New Mineral Finds

Hi again. Welcome back to As It Is. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

Today, we are talking about women's soccer. One player in Lebanon has a surprising fan.

"I was really skilled and he was like 'give her special training session. I want her to get better and better.'"

But first, we are discussing a topic that we have visited before on this program: improving the economy across Africa. Kenya might have good news on that subject. Oil and rare earth minerals were recently discovered there. Those resources could help improve East Africa's largest economy.

But VOA's Mohammed Yusuf also found that some citizens in Kenya worry that new building projects will hurt local communities. Christopher Cruise has his report.

Mining companies in Kenya recently announced they have discovered new mineral deposits near the coast. The companies have also reported the possibility of large amounts of oil in the northern part of the country.

Mining companies say some of these finds could be worth billions of dollars. And, local communities are hoping to gain from some of those profits.

But the government has warned companies about making such announcements before they are sure about the finds.

Najib Balala is Kenya's Secretary for Mining. He spoke to reporters in Nairobi this week. He said the government will ask mining companies for details about their findings before announcing them to the public.

"Any public announcement by a mining company, we as a government need to have that notification 21 days before the announcement so we can know what is happening (and) we can go and testify (whether) those finds are genuine or people are playing with stock exchanges overseas to raise funds."

There may be another problem, too. If the discoveries are real, big mining projects might harm the communities where the resources are found.

For example, rare minerals were recently found in an area called Mirima Hills, near Kenya's coast.

The mining company Cortec reported a deposit of more than 600 million kilograms of niobium. Niobium is used to make steel and other valuable substances. The company says the deposit could be worth 50 billion dollars.

But the discovery has already started a disagreement among the mining company, the government, and the community.

Leaders of the Mijikenda ethnic groups, which live along Kenya's coast, say the Mirima Hills area is their place of worship. They say they hold religious ceremonies there.

Joseph Mwarandu is the secretary general of Kaya elders. He says they cannot permit mining to take place in their holy forests.

“We are opposed to the mining of minerals from Mirima Kaya forest or any other forest in the Mijikenda Kaya as a whole. So our stand is that we appeal to the authorities to be able to save our heritage, because when this forest goes, then we will have nothing to lay our hands on as far as the heritage is concerned.”

The area is important not only to the Kaya elders. It has also been named a World Heritage Site by the United Nations.

Secretary Balala is expected to present a bill in the next government cabinet meeting. The bill will likely suggest that the central government take 70 percent of any mining profits. The local government would get 25 percent. And communities where the mining is happening would get five percent.

But Kaya leader Mwarandu says no amount of money will make them open the forests for mineral exploration.

“Heritage is something that is valueless. You know, we cannot count heritage in terms of money.”

The Kenyan government is also hoping that mining industry reforms will help make the mining industry tell more about what they do. Currently, the industry does a lot of its business in secret.

I’m Christopher Cruise.

Women's Soccer Is on the Rise in Africa and the Middle East

Women's soccer is becoming more popular around the world. But in most places, women still have less training and financial support than male players.

A program held every summer in Berlin aims to improve opportunities for women. It is called Discover Football. It brings soccer clubs from Africa and the Middle East to Germany for a week of games and discussions.

Soccer player Aya El Ammour, from Lebanon, won a scholarship to Discover Football. She has played the game for nine years. Who is one of her biggest supporters? She says it is her father.

"He always encouraged me. He actually paid a professional coach in Lebanon. I was really skilled and he was like 'give her special training sessions. I want her to get better and better.'"

But when Aya grew older, her father had second thoughts.

"He was like 'you've had enough of football, and now you have to look forward to your education. You have to get married.'"

But Aya did not stop. Eventually her father gave in.

Today, Aya El Ammouri is one of her country's top women players.

She and her teammates attended the Discover Football program this year. It brings together about 100 women every summer. The women play soccer and talk about how to improve football and women's rights. It is also an opportunity for the next generation of leaders to meet each other.

Nadia Assaf is one of the founders of another soccer organization, called Girls Football Academy. It is Lebanon's first women's soccer school. She says before she started the school five years ago, women's soccer was not taken seriously in Lebanon.

"It's like a side thing, just to say that they have a women's quote-unquote 'team.' Actually, they never took us seriously. Women were never the priority. We never really got equipment. We never got fields, proper coaches, etc. etc."

Nadia says she and her co-founder decided to start a school just for female soccer players. That way, young women could really have the resources they deserved.

And that's As It Is. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

If you would like to reach us, send an email to learningenglish@voanews.com. Or go to our website at learningenglish.voanews.com and click on "Contact Us."