

ELGEYO MARAKWET FOREST POLICY, BILL AND REGULATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND DIALOGUE ON FOREST CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

MARAKWET EAST AND MARAKWET WEST PUBLIC SENSITIZATION WORKSHOP ON PREPARATION OF FOREST POLICY, BILL AND REGULATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND DIALOGUE ON FOREST CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT HELD ON 18TH AND 19TH JUNE 2019 AT KEELU RESORT, ITEN.

INTRODUCTION.

The county government of Elgeyo Marakwet is in the process of enacting a bill on Forest Conservation and Management. The purpose of this bill is to conserve, protect, enhance, coordinate, administer, regulate, create awareness and mitigate on environmental degradation, greenhouse emissions, charcoal burning, clearance of the Kerio Escarpment for farming activities, encroachment into existing water sources in the fragile ecosystem of Kaptagat and Cherangany water towers, siltation on water harvesting facilities and adverse weather conditions experienced during the dry seasons. In the process of enacting this bill, several consultative meetings have been held between major county stakeholders such as Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly Joint Committees on Environment, Physical planning and Administration of Justice, the Sengwer community representatives and other forest sector stakeholders and with UNDP partnership. In the work plan developed during the Elgeyo Marakwet Executive consultative meeting in Kisumu, it was agreed that a consultative meeting be convened between members of the community from Marakwet West and Marakwet East Sub-Counties, the Elgeyo Marakwet County Executives and Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly representatives on environment and administration of justice to provide information and share their views on the current forest status, seek their views, exchange information and seek their support to enact this bill. This was a two day meeting at Keelu Resort in Iten Municipality, Elgeyo Marakwet County on 18th to 19th June 2019.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

- Enable the County Environmental Committees and stakeholders to understand the National REDD+ process.
- Enhance the understanding on human rights based approach and indigenous people rights and perspective.
- Share knowledge on the legislation process in both sub-counties and the role of indigenous communities.
- Identify a road map of preparation of County Conservation and Management Bill.
- Identify and propose key actors in the County Conservation and Management Bill.
- Seek support and mandate from the sub-counties to the proposed modalities and proposed activities earmarked for the process of preparation of the County Conservation and Management Bill

The meeting was officially opened by the Chairman County Assembly representatives on environment and administration of justice, Hon John Lochaa, who explained that the county government of Elgeyo Marakwet is in the process of enacting a Bill on Forest Conservation and Management Act whose purpose is to protect existing water sources and the fragile ecosystem of Kaptagat and Cherangany water towers. The constitution of Kenya 2010, mandated the County governments to enact any legislation to address county concerns so long as it does not conflict with the constitution and National policies being implemented by national government. The chairman informed the participants that the county assembly

was ready to support any conservation bill brought before the house to control and manage county forests and natural resources, at private, county and community land. He noted that several consultative meetings have been held between major stakeholders and UNDP-FCPF focal person, in introducing various methodologies the county would explore in preparation of the county bill. The most important being to give free, prior, informed consent to the communities during public participation as envisaged by the constitution of Kenya 2010. For a more efficient approach, a consultant will be hired by the UNDP, whose role shall be to coordinate field teams, collate data, process data and present these data to the county stakeholders. The workshop was informed of the importance of dialogue to enable the County Governments and UNDP, to extend support towards facilitating the dialogue process and support the county in developing legislations on forest management in order to enable the county to implement the national Forest Conservation and Management Act 2016 and Climate Change Act 2016 that obligates counties to develop county specific policies, legislations and adaptation and mitigation on effects of climate Change. The UNDP representative further explained that the process will incorporate the participation of communities in the county including the indigenous communities in the management of the forest resources.

THE NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN-PRESENTATION BY UNDP

The UNDP facilitator informed the meeting that, the program will pilot on a few chosen counties to ensure early action, testing the outcomes against the inputs, which includes restoring degraded forests and fragile ecosystems. The proposed pilot activity for Restoring Forests on Degraded Lands would contribute to the goals of the Government of Kenya, while reducing emissions and enhancing sustainable development. These actions are also consistent with *Kenya Vision 2030*, the long-term development blueprint for the country. Vision 2030 notes the importance of forests for a “clean, secure and sustainable environment” and calls for the rehabilitation of degraded forest areas, sustainable management of dry-land forests, and user compensation for environmental services.

Much of this abatement potential could be realized through conservation and sustainable dry-land forest management interventions that encourage regeneration from ground-stored and wind-blown seeds, as well as growth of trees stunted by grazing. Kenya’s forest resources provide important environmental and ecosystem services. For example, biodiversity can benefit from sustainable forest management and conservation of forests, and regeneration of natural tree species. Forests can be used in a sustainable manner for a variety of products, including fuel wood, charcoal, medicines and others; contributing to economic development. Importantly, forest resources contribute to water availability, for consumption, sanitation, agriculture and hydro-electricity development. In addition, forest restoration can increase adaptive capacity in vulnerable areas like mountain slopes, as it is along the Elgeyo Escarpment, ASALs of the Kerio Valley, and fragile ecosystems like natural forests and wetlands. Regeneration of degraded forestlands reduces erosion and sediment discharge in rivers, and improves the health of soil. Actions to restore forests on degraded lands are consistent with the NCCAP’s vision of a low carbon climate resilient development pathway. This can only be achieved if the stakeholders understand their contributions and roles they will play before, during and after the enactment of county Forest and Management Act. He appealed to the stakeholders from Marakwet East and West to support the executive to deliver the bill on their behalf.

THE STATE OF FORESTS IN ELGEYO MARAKWET-CEC-WATER LANDS ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The county is home to two forest ecosystems and water towers namely Kaptagat and Cherangany and hosts the second largest forest cover in Kenya of 37.47%. These ecosystems are a source of many rivers that form the main water divide running along the Escarpment. East of the water divide is the Kerio catchment area which drains into Lake Turkana while West of the divide is the Lake Victoria Basin which

drains into Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria Basin includes the following rivers: Moiben, Chepkaitit and Sabor. The Kerio catchment area includes River Kerrer and Kerio River. The other major rivers in the county are Torok, Chesegon, Embobut, Embomon, Arror, Mong and Kimwarer. The rivers feeding Kerio River have a high potential for supporting irrigation activities and for generation of Hydro-electric power. Another ecological zone is the Kerio Valley. It is narrow, averaging 6.4 km in width and stretches about 150 km in a North-South direction.

The existing forests and water catchment areas have been totally encroached and destroyed by the uncontrolled forest harvesting and poor or no boundary (permanent) demarcation. This has been aggravated by illegal logging, and replacement of indigenous trees with exotic ones. With eucalyptus tree plantations mushrooming within the water catchment areas, the consequences are catastrophic. The CEC further explained that the KFS has been sidelining the participation of the communities living within the forest and the vicinity. To increase forest ownership these communities must be brought on board when decision are being made.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAYFORWARD

The consultative meeting agreed to engage all the stake holders during the enactment of the forest act, taking much considerations to both the marginalized and minority communities living within the two counties. The participants were enthusiastic that a bill will eventually be made to check all stakeholders in the county as far as forest conservation and management are concerned. The promised to support the process by fully engaging in public participation and validation of the bill at all stages. The meeting was very successful and met its objectives.









