ELGEYO MARAKWET FORESTRY POLICY BILL AND REGULATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND DIALOGUE – STAKEHOLDERS MEETING ON 25-26TH JUNE 2019 AT SIRIKWA HOTEL.

INTRODUCTIONS

Amid the process of enacting a Bill on Forest Conservation and Management Act by the county government of Elgeyo Marakwet with the aim of protecting existing water sources and the fragile forest ecosystems and water towers, consultative meetings have been held between major county stakeholders to sensitize and ensure that they have adequate prior knowledge of activities which have been planned to actualize the bill. With the assistance and funding from UNDP partnership, and support from the County Assembly joint committees on Environment, Physical planning and Administration of Justice, the County Government of Elgeyo Marakwet, a stakeholders meeting that brought together people from different working fields related to forestry Management and Conservation in ElgeyoMarakwet including; NEMA, KFS, KWTA, CSO's, CFA's, WRUA's, Professionals and the saw millers was held to gather their views. The county assembly committee in charge of environment, water, lands and climate change were also part of the team. Two representatives from all the four the sub-counties in Elgeyomarakwet county were also in attendance to represent their constituents. The Sengwer Community were given a special legroom through their request to have 5 members of their community to take part in the proceedings of the meeting. (See attached participants list)

OBJECTIVES

The meeting was to collect views from all the sector parties that participate in forest conservation within the Elgeyo Marakwet County with main emphasis on bringing out the successes and available gaps within the existing forest management laws that the county forest bill would wish to address. The stakeholders' expertise opinions were mainly encouraged to form the basis of the discussion for a participatory forest management and conservation bill in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Community representatives observations were also sought to create the picture on the real practice of forest management and conservation in their communities.

DELIBERATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The County Assembly committee chair in charge of Lands, Water, Environment and Climate Change officially opened the meeting and explained the reason why a consultative process was sought out in enacting the EMC forest bill. He explained that participation is paramount in forest conservation as the process aims at having a bill that will be participatory and owned by the communities. His words were echoed by the county team leader in charge of the consultation processes, where he encouraged the participants to meaningfully give views that would build up the enactment process. In view of this, the participants were taken through the REDD+ project in EMC and its objectives, the safeguards accompanying the REDD+ project and the FPIC tool,

Contributions:

The participants appreciated the county government for the move to significantly involving its citizens during formulation of bills and regulations. With regards, community members from Keiyo south and North sub- counties claimed that there are some Ndorobos living within the Kaptagat forest whose homes were burned down recently and so asks the county government to enact a bill that would protected all

communities regardless of their status. They also expressed concerns over benefits sharing of forest resources claiming that they are the ones planting and taking care of trees during planting yet after harvesting, they aren't given anything as a community. They also claim that landslides in the escarpments are rampant especially in keiyo south due to bush fires that are intentionally lit by farmers. Mzee Laban Kimutai prayed that this be regulated and stiff penalties be put forward on intentional bush fires. Mzee Kokoi from keiyo north requested that the Eucalyptus trees should be banned from planting and stiff measures be put forward as well.

The Marakwet community representatives present in the meeting appreciated that embobut forest ecosystem is one of the most significant resource that the community cherish for its benefits to them. Mzee chemweno echoed that there are Glades that are ancestral lands within the Embobut forest owned by both the Marakwets and the Sengwer communities. With that, he expressed that the forest has fed them and their children and so wish to have a forest bill that would take care of the forest while protecting the forest user. He then said that the community is willing to support the enactment of the bill. Mzee Chemaringo added that, the previous clan managed forest resource was the best way to protect forest resource from degradation and so would wish to have a law that protects the clannism model.

The Sengwer community members though their chairman Kiptukaa explained that the three glades- Kapkok, Kaptirbai and Korapkwen- are their ancestral homes and for a long time they have been evacuated continually since the 1960's and have decided to seek justice from international community since their they felt haven't been listened to them. He applauded the county government for their concern to listen to them and they pray as a community that the rest of the communities would join hands together in seeking justice, which was agreed by all. He claims that they want to be given a chance to live in the forest with conservation conditions.

The Representatives from the KWTA appreciate that it was the only bill that she had interacted with that first collected views from stakeholders before a bill is drafted. With regards, she asked the county representatives to ensure that the views of the community members are taken to considerations and input into the bill. She put forward that the Sengwer community lives in a gazetted forest yet county bills doesn't regulate on government gazetted forests and so looks forward to a bill that would marry the two levels of government for harmonious living of the Sengwer community. She echoed the opinion to regulate the kind of trees to be panted within the fragile ecosystems as had mentioned by one community member to curb eucalyptus trees on watersheds, wetlands and along the water steams giving an example of Nandi County that have banned planting of such species in their counties.

The KFS representative in the meeting appreciated that there have been challenges in the management of forests especially on the indigenous forests of Embobut ecosystems. He claims to be the custodians of all gazette forests and yet the Sengwer community are still inhabiting the forest glades (where they claim to be their ancestral homes). He also posed that there has been a lot of poaching on the forest resources by the communities living within and without the forest ecosystems leading to forest recourse depletion. Also, of concern was the presence of grazing animals in the forest areas – cows and sheep- that he claims to form walking paths within the forest that later act as erosion gullies in the forest. He said that the wish to have clan-managed forest law is a much welcomed move by the communities. He puts forward that he looks forward to working closely with the team enacting the bill and supports the process for as long as it does not contravene the existing laws.

The NEMA representatives applauded the process and asked the county government to ensure there is sufficient public participation on the bill to ensure that the enforcement process becomes easier due to prior knowledge of the bill. He highlighted that charcoal burning is still rampant in the county, which causes

much degradation in the lower valley and the escarpments of the county and so hoping that the county government should work towards addressing it urgently. He also expressed concern that the existing County environment committees should be part of the process since they are mandated to assist in coordinating issues environment and forests in the county government as well as marrying the two levels of government. He expressed that the process should take much time so that it doesn't lose track and expressed his full commitment to support the process, stating that he has an office space that can be used for such consultative meetings.

WAY FORWARD

It was agreed among all the participants that forest resources and water sheds/towers are not satisfactorily conserved in the county and there is need for all the stakeholders to work together to preserve the forest. They all agreed to support the enactment of the forest bill, since it's the only way to domesticate their best traditional management practices that help in forest management, for as long as the practices aren't contrary to the existing laws and bills.

Pectorals:

Sirikwa 2019