

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

SENGWER COMMUNITY LEADERS AND COUNTY LEADERSHIP MEETING HELD ON 18TH JUNE
2019 AT KEELU RESORT.

INTRODUCTION.

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. 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, UNDP Team, the Sengwer community representatives and other forest sector 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 pre-dialogue and consultative meeting was held on 18th June at Keelu Resort with the Sengwer Community leaders and His Excellency The Governor of Elgeyo Marakwet, Engineer Alex Tolgos.

Those in attendance;

1. The Governor, Alex Tolgos
2. CEC, WLE&CC Abraham Barsosio
3. CEC, TTC&E Shadrack Yatich
4. Technical Officer, WLE&CC James Keitany
5. Logistical/ Officer Sheilla Cheruiyot
6. Paul Kitum (Kiptuka), Chairman Sengwer Community
7. Yator Kitum, Sengwer community member
8. Milka Chepkorir, Sengwer community member
9. Albina Cheboi, Sengwer community member
10. Elias Kimaiyo, Sengwer community member
11. Reuben Tekerai, Sengwer community member
12. Winnie Sengwer, Sengwer community member
13. Philemon Cheptarus, Sengwer community member
14. Joel Kiptala, Sengwer community member

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

His Excellency, wanted to have an audience with the Sengwer community representatives to understand comprehensively the issue surrounding the Embobut forest and alleged human right violations, evictions and any other concerns the Sengwer community have in order to find a lasting solution. This pre-dialogue meeting was necessary to enable the Governor share the knowledge and understanding of the human rights violations of the indigenous people of Sengwer from their representatives and explore areas of collaboration in the proposed dialogue process spearheaded by his government in order to develop legislation which will address and harmonize national and county policies on forest management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, community ownership among other issues.

DELIBERATIONS OF THE MEETING

The meeting was officially opened by the Governor, after the CEC Water, Lands, Environment and Climate Change introduced the participants to the meeting and the essence of the meeting. He explained

to the participants the importance of dialogue to enable the County Government 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 and legislations on adaptation and mitigation on effects of climate Change. This process will ensure to incorporate the participation of communities in the county including the indigenous communities in the management of the forest resources. The CEC further explained the need to have internal support from all the stakeholder including the indigenous Sengwer community. He briefed the Governor on the specific mandates of roles of several partners who will be involved in the dialogue process and specific roles each partner will undertake, with the lead agency being UNDP, through the National Implementation Modality (NIM) with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

The Governor in his opening remarks thanked the Sengwer community for highlighting their community concerns wherever the opportunity arises for the purpose of addressing their concerns of being recognized as being marginalized and indigenous. He noted that the community had made several efforts to have their concerns heard, including at international forums, just to be considered as such. He reiterated that his government had employed a number of Sengwer community members as affirmative action to address marginalization of the community and was willing to do more despite shortage of funding allocated to the county. He singled out funds previously given for resettlement of Embobut forest squatters as inappropriate. The money was too little to purchase any land anywhere within this region. He noted that the Sengwer community were not forest squatters but inhabitants of the forest. Their livelihoods depended so much on honey, fruits and milk. The community also were good forest conservators because the destruction of forests was only done mostly after conflicts with other forest stakeholders. He promised to protect the interest of the Sengwer community through county legislation and policy, once adopted and supported by all the stake holders through dialogue and consultation. The county government, he noted will provide an opportunity to all stakeholders, through the concept of free, prior, information consent to all regardless of status in the society.

THE CONTRIBUTION FROM THE REPRESENTATIVES OF SENGWER COMMUNITY

The community thanked the county government for according them an opportunity to share their concerns in the upcoming stakeholders' consultations and engagements in developing a Forest Conservation and Management Act. The chairman stated that their rights had never been considered during previous engagements with other forest stakeholders. So far, they have made their stand on existing national policy which does not give them access to their ancestral land (glades) within Embobut forest. He noted that, they had travelled to international forums in search of justice and cannot rest so long as their concerns have not been addressed. He was optimistic however, because the county is now coming up with regulations and policies which will ensure that every stakeholder concerns are considered when drafting the proposed bill. The Governor gave all the participants an opportunity to express their concerns and all the members agreed that the timing of the enactment of the Forest Conservation and Management Act was a welcome gesture.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAYFORWARD

The chairman of the meeting, His Ex. The Governor had to excuse himself midway due to an urgent engagement at his office which required his presence. He however, promised to link up with the team later. However, due to unavoidable circumstances, he give all his blessings to his representatives, the CEC, WLE&CC and CEC, TTC&E. After all deliberations were considered by the appointed Chair, the CEC, WLE&CC, the members of the representatives of Sengwer community agreed anonymously to support the dialogue and consultative process to proceed and the UNDP to continue with the remaining

activities earlier on agreed upon with the County Executive meeting during the first kick off meeting on 3th to 7th June 2019, in Kisumu.



Consultative meeting with Sengwer community and The Governor Elgeyo Marakwet County at Keelu Resort on 18th June 2019.







