

Rewilding Maforki Project

FPIC Process & Stakeholders' Consultations

Decisions on whether individual projects move forward depend on the local community's acceptance or opposition. Having this in mind, Rewilding Maforki Ltd (RML) started the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process with a series of consultations and engagements within the identified project communities. This process allows local people to reach consensus and make decisions that would be of interest to the community and individuals. Community stakeholders were gathered in one location at chiefdom level to inform them about the proposed project. This included paramount chiefs, section chiefs, town chiefs, village heads, women, youth, the elderly, and the disabled as well.

The project team started its community engagement with the people of Maconteh Chiefdom on the 26th September 2021. During this event, the team had the opportunity to clearly explain to community stakeholders about the project goal and the potential benefits communities stand to gain upon their acceptance and full participation in the development of the project. Initial potential challenges the project might pose were also clearly highlighted for all to understand and decide on which decision to take for the general benefit of the communities in the chiefdom. The team used local interpreters to ensure the information was disseminated and well digested for the understanding of all present. Enough time was given to the stakeholders to make further consultations before providing feedback to the project proponent.

Since the project goal is geared towards the afforestation of degraded land that has little economic value to the community in order to counter global warming, generate high-quality carbon credits, improve biodiversity and provide community benefits, the project was whole-heartedly accepted by community members after their long deliberations and consultations. Similar engagements were held for Kesseh Chiefdom on 28th September 2021, Bekeh Loko on the 30th September 2021, Kamasondo on 5th October 2021, Dibia on the 5th March 2022, Maforki on the 10th April 2022 and Bureh on the 24th April 2022. In all of these meetings, similar concerns were raised by the community stakeholders.

- What will the community stand to gain from participating in such a project?
- Would there be any negative impacts on the community and the environment with regards the company's operations?
- A call for providing job and livelihood opportunities that would improve the rural economy.
- The implementation of development projects that would meet the needs of the community.
- In addition, the concept of carbon project is totally new in this region of Sierra Leone, accepting such a change needs regular engagements with community stakeholders.

The RML team took time to thoroughly explain and answer all questions, queries and concerns raised by community members with a view to allay their fears and address all concerns and clear any lingering doubts. This is to ensure the communities are fully informed before making a final decision. (Photos and attendances were taken at most of these engagements) Thereafter, landowners voluntarily offered to give out portions of land suitable for the proposed project for surveys and demarcation.

In a bid to address all of the concerns raised, the RML team conducted a social survey in February 2023 of 20 communities to assess community needs and to be able to make informed decisions. Thereafter, data was analyzed and a community development action plan was developed to act as a tool for the implementation of activities.

Furthermore, in January 2023, the RML operational team also engaged the community stakeholders within the project area on best fire management practices to protect existing plantations of the company. Key recommendations were agreed on by both parties including the establishment of a fire management committee that will develop and implement community fire bye-laws with fines and punishment for defaulters.

With support from community heads, RML had identified all relevant stakeholders of various communities and encouraged their participation at every decision making process. It became very evident that the youths, women, physically challenged and religious leaders are equally important stakeholders to be considered and involved in all processes of community entry and project cycle phases. In some cases, Landowner Agreements were done with landowning families and the chieftdom land oversight committee. In addition, NAMATI, a paralegal organization that exclusively represents communities and landowning families with regards their legal and customary land act rights, is in the process of community engagement towards concluding a draft land lease agreement. From the several consultative meetings held by NAMATI and the community stakeholders, RML and the land owners intend signing a 30-year land lease agreement for the implementation of carbon development project within the seven (7) chiefdoms of Kasseh, Maconteh, Bureh, Debia, Bakeh Loko, Kamasondo and Maforki in Port Loko District, Northwest of Sierra Leone.

During community engagements, the project team encouraged every community member including women, youths and other marginalized groups that have been traditionally excluded from participating in community issues to be part of every decision-making process. Meetings were held in open forums to give everyone equal opportunity to share their concerns and grievances.

RML will guide the process of creating community forums that will include representatives of every social group to discuss community development issues and implementations. To enhance open communication with the community stakeholders, the project team has employed community liaison officers that would relay concerns and requests from local community members to RML.

management. These officers will also serve as mediators to resolve community grievances through dialogue.

RML will integrate community engagement into every phase of the project cycle and promote participatory monitoring by the local communities. As part of the standard operating procedures, RML ensures that stakeholders are not only consulted with, but they are fully involved in the process of providing community checks and balances for the general benefit of all parties.

Unsurprisingly, there has been an overwhelming acceptance of the project from all stakeholders and a willingness to fully participate in all activities proposed by the project proponent. In addition, community members look forward to more job opportunities and development programs that are to come along with the project implementation proper.

All indigenous people and local communities were made to know that they can play a central role in monitoring project implementation, a clear understanding was established as to what needs to be done if for any reason, monitoring reveals problems or disagreements in project implementation.