

# Reclaiming the Land After Mining



Improving Environmental Management and Mitigating Land-Use Conflicts in Alluvial Diamond Fields in Sierra Leone

Foundation For Environmental Security & Sustainability  
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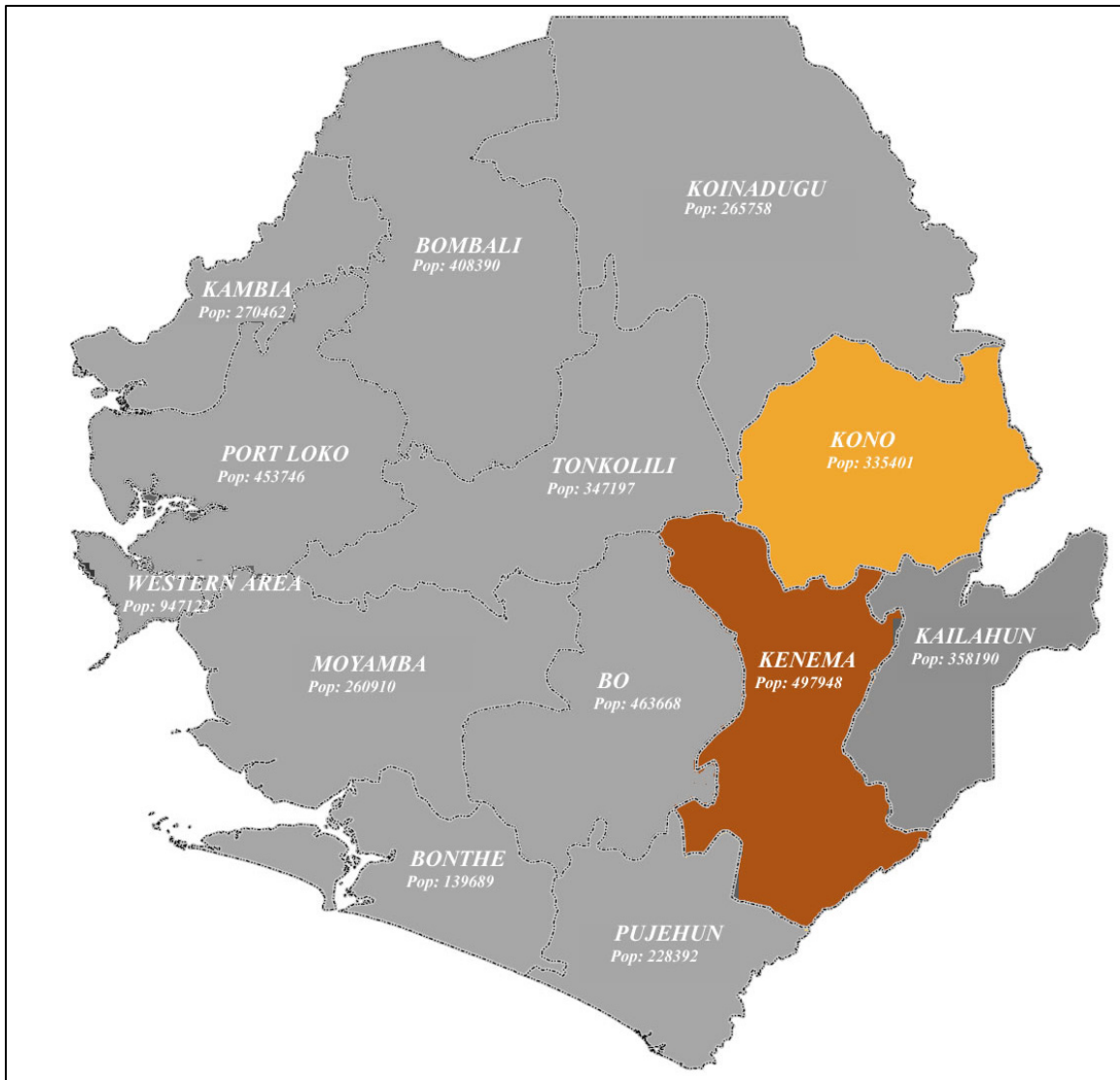
The **Foundation for Environmental Security and Sustainability (FESS)** works to improve environmental security around the world, focusing in particular on the fragile relationship between populations and the environment in developing countries where many people are directly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. FESS works with government officials, researchers, civil society organizations, and the private sector to increase awareness of how the mismanagement and abuse of natural resources can lead to social, economic, and political instabilities that can contribute to social tension and even violent conflict. To address environmental risks to stability, FESS conducts research and implements community-driven projects that promote sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

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### **Acknowledgement**

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Map 2: Kono and Kenema Districts, Sierra Leone

## **Executive Summary**

### **Improving Environmental Management and Mitigating Land-Use Conflicts in Alluvial Diamond Fields in Sierra Leone**

The Foundation for Environmental Security and Sustainability (FESS) designed and implemented the project with the support of a grant from the Tiffany & Co. Foundation's Environment Program and core funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The project put into motion a process that empowered communities to:

- Create their own mechanisms for land reclamation and implement them in ways that are appropriate to their needs and interests
- Reclaim land that is no longer yielding diamonds and has been rendered unusable for other purposes as a result of artisanal diamond mining
- Develop the agricultural potential of the land and put it to sustainable economic and social uses

Key components of the process:

- An effective partnership between local communities and FESS
- Broad-based community participation in all steps in the process
- Formal and informal commitments of support and tangible inputs from the full range of community groups
- Agreements within the community that the benefits of land reclamation would be shared by all community members

Outcomes of the project:

- Three sites that demonstrate the effectiveness of sound environmental practices after mining
- Improved environmental, health and safety, and social conditions
- Increased national and local commitments toward land reclamation
- Enhanced governance capacity of local communities
- Strengthened attitudes that promote gender equality

Implications for the future of diamond producing communities in Sierra Leone:

- Greater food and livelihood security
- Greater local capacities to sustain reclamation efforts
- More social and economic stability and less potential for conflict





## **Improving Environmental Management and Mitigating Land-Use Conflicts in Alluvial Diamond Fields in Sierra Leone**

In recent years, the diamond sector in Sierra Leone has become associated with conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. During 10 years of civil war in the country (1991–2001), tens of thousands perished, and more than two million persons were displaced. The war had its origins in a series of political failures and disputes, but control of the diamond sector became a factor that fueled and financed the war. “Conflict diamonds” and “blood diamonds” became terms that entered the popular imagination.

Sierra Leone now has been at peace for more than five years, but poverty and environmental degradation persist in the diamond-producing regions. In fact, the attention that the war brought to these areas has increased awareness that these conditions long pre-date the war.



Environmental damage from artisanal alluvial diamond mining in Koidu, Kono District

Indeed, more than 75 years of artisanal diamond mining has failed to lift those who mine the diamonds out of extreme poverty. The landscape where mining has taken place has been ravaged by innumerable abandoned pits left behind by diggers in search of a diamond they hope will provide a way out of poverty for themselves and their families. The overwhelming majority never find it.



Environmental damage from artisanal alluvial diamond mining in Tankoro, Kono District

However, the Foundation for Environmental Security and Sustainability (FESS) believes that diamond mining need not be associated with economic stagnation and environmental destruction.

In this project, funded by a grant from the Tiffany & Co. Foundation’s Environment Program and core funding from the United States Agency for International Development

(USAID), FESS has put into motion a process to empower communities to reclaim land, develop alternative land use, increase food and livelihood security, and reduce the potential for conflict. The purpose of this report is to describe the process as it was developed and implemented, the outcomes that have been achieved, and the potential of the project to contribute to a better future for people living in diamond-producing areas in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

## **Introduction**

### *Digging Out of Poverty*

The hard work of artisanal diamond mining is done by the diggers. Most diggers subsist day-to-day on a cup of rice or US\$2 a day paid to them by a mining license holder in return for hard physical labor. Some dig for diamonds as a seasonal activity alternated with farming. However, for many, digging for diamonds is their only means of livelihood.

Rarely, if ever, do diggers reap significant gains from diamond finds. Many report having worked all of their lives never to recover a valuable diamond. In Bumpah, Momodu Matturie, a bright and energetic man of 41, declared that artisanal mining was finished for him, saying, “I have worked at mining for over 20 years and I don’t have even a bicycle to show for it.”



Artisanal diamond miners in Tankoro, Kono District

Not only are individuals not benefiting, but also their communities are experiencing negative social, economic, and environmental effects from artisanal mining activity. Extensive areas are covered with abandoned pits that collect water and human waste, exposing people to enormous health and safety risks from groundwater contamination, malaria and water-borne infectious diseases, and drowning.

***Almost no diamond mining land has been reclaimed, either by the government or anyone else.***





Abandoned pits of stagnant water left after artisanal diamond mining in Tankoro, Kono District

The Koidu area in Kono District has been dug up in so many places that Pastor Kai D. Thomas, a Member of Parliament (MP) from Kono remarked, “We will wake up one day and the whole area will be flooded.” Mining communities are heavily populated with unemployed or underemployed youths. They turn to digging wherever they can, legally or illegally, and present a serious risk to social stability.

Another serious consequence of artisanal mining is the loss of productive potential from the land, while population growth increases the need for land to provide food, livelihoods, and housing. According to Dr. Sama Monde, Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, cultivable land, especially lowlands, is in short supply. Agricultural land is also scarce around the living areas, and people often walk as far as two to four miles to their farms. In the Kenema District, FESS spoke with a group of women who had found no available land that was not churned up by artisanal mining, so they turned to buying vegetables elsewhere instead of cultivating their own.



Lost potential for productive agriculture as a result of artisanal diamond mining in the Koidu area, Kono District

***“Men left the farm land. This area would be the breadbasket but for mining.”***  
***–Dr. Sama Monde, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security***

### *Diamonds Are Forever, But Not Artisanal Mining*

Diamonds, one of the hardest materials on earth, may well endure forever, but diamond mining as practiced today in Sierra Leone clearly will not last indefinitely. At present, artisanal mining, done with simple, hand-held tools, yields about 80 percent of all diamonds produced from the approximately 7,700 square miles of diamondiferous land.

Recently, four chiefdoms in Kono District were designated as having diamond deposits. Although new areas may come into production, this is likely to involve large-scale mining, as the government is encouraging major investments in the industry to generate economic growth.

In exploratory discussions in Freetown and diamond-producing districts, many people questioned how long artisanal mining can remain a viable and attractive economic activity. As artisanal diggers find fewer diamonds, they excavate deeper and wider pits, causing even greater damage to the land. As access to the increasingly deep diamond deposits becomes impossible without heavy equipment, artisanal mining as an industry becomes untenable.

In addition to miners and diggers, officials at every level of government shared with FESS their perceptions that artisanal mining is phasing out. Chief SCN Konnoh Bundoh II, chairman of the Council of Paramount Chiefs for Kono District, noted that artisanal mining is diminishing, and Komba Koedoyoma, MP for Kono District, said that alluvial mining now requires such a large capital investment that, “It is no longer a one-man affair.” Mary Musa, mayor and chairwoman of the Koidu/New Sembehun City Council in Kono District, observed that artisanal mining is coming to a close now that it takes



Deeper and wider pits are formed as productivity in artisanal diamond mining diminishes in Bumpeh and Tankoro in Kono District

mechanization to reach diamondiferous material. As the mayor said, the majority remaining in the alluvial fields are simply diggers who have no other livelihood options. District Councillor Francis A. Konuwa of Lower Bambara Chiefdom summed up the sense of growing frustration with artisanal diamond mining: “People are fed up with mining. They want to see a reversal because they are not benefiting from mining.” The question then became: How can communities recover the productive potential of the land?



***After over 75 years of artisanal mining, productivity is tapering off.***

#### *Community Participation and Ownership*

FESS recognized that, to be effective and sustainable, any efforts to reverse environmental damage and restore productive activities would have to be embedded in an inclusive process. A previous attempt to undertake land reclamation in the area, through the government-sponsored Kaisambo project, appeared to have failed because of an excessively top-down approach. FESS designed and implemented this land reclamation



Poverty remains as productivity wanes in the artisanal diamond mining community of Tankoro, Kono District

project as a participatory, community-driven process intended for the benefit of entire communities. The fundamental guiding principle was that the project would evolve as a grassroots process, with FESS offering support as a facilitating partner. Knowing the indispensability of incorporating local expertise, FESS hired highly capable Sierra Leoneans as field representative, field assistant, workshop co-facilitator, and administrative assistant. This greatly contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership that developed between the project team and members of the beneficiary communities.

At the same time, advice from a range of Sierra Leoneans made it clear that it would be critical not just to fill mining pits, but to follow up immediately with a tangible impact, such as agricultural production, to give people an incentive to refrain from re-mining the reclaimed land. This meant that the project had to be developed carefully and deliberately—but implemented quickly.

***“Once the land is productive, they [the diggers] will stay off the land. The project needs to have a quick impact.”***

***—Mohammed Jabbie, Chairman, Coalition of Kono Youths***

#### **Laying the Project Groundwork**

After receiving a grant from the Tiffany & Co. Foundation in November 2005, FESS conducted two fact-finding missions. In London in January 2006, the president of FESS, Ray Simmons, and its executive director, Darci Glass-Royal, met with high-level British government authorities, diamond industry experts, NGO representatives, and

international consultants. In March 2006, Mr. Simmons and Mrs. Glass-Royal attended the Sierra Leone Investment Forum in Freetown, meeting with numerous government officials whose cooperation would be critical for the success of the project. These two missions updated FESS's knowledge of the policy and operating environment in Sierra Leone, informing both the project's analytic framework and implementation.

In October 2006, FESS hired Daniel Gbondo as field representative, a position for which he is uniquely qualified in terms of educational background and experience. Mr. Gbondo has a BA degree in sociology and English and an MA in international peace studies. A member of a Kono family resident in Koidu in Kono District, he is fluent in the local languages and culture and is familiar with the political and social networks in the region targeted by the project. As a result of his previous work as a student leader and as a program officer of the National Democratic Institute, Mr. Gbondo has extensive experience in community mobilization and the facilitation of community meetings, which proved to be invaluable to the project.

After a period of extensive research and planning, the FESS project team consulted in November 2006 with national, district, and local government officials and community leaders representing a range of stakeholder groups in Freetown and the major diamond-producing districts of Kono and Kenema. This increased FESS's knowledge of a variety of challenges to land reclamation in Sierra Leone and helped FESS assess the level of interest in and commitment to reclaiming land, both at the national level and in Kono and Kenema Districts.



Daniel Gbondo (right) speaking with one of the project site supervisors in Tankoro, Kono District

***“Attitudes are changing slowly, but people will be ready to jump at the opportunity.”  
–Paramount Chief Paul Saquee, Tankoro Chiefdom***

FESS found awareness of the issue of land reclamation to be growing, due in part to the announcement just before FESS arrived in November 2006 of the Youth Employment Scheme (YES), a government initiative to provide employment for some of the many at-risk youths in the country. One component, coordinated through the Ministry of Mineral Resources, involves hiring youth workers to reclaim sites in five communities in Kono, Kenema, and Bo. The Minister of Mineral Resources, Alhaji M.S. Deen, and senior staff of his ministry, assured FESS of support for its project and, in a follow-up meeting after the FESS project was successfully underway in May 2007, further encouraged collaboration with the Ministry. The YES program has suffered from some shortcomings

in project design, such as the failure to provide workers with a midday meal at the work sites. Also, the YES initiative has not focused on integrating strategies for alternative livelihoods into its land reclamation program, although the government has facilitated the planting of rice and corn. According to Deputy Mayor Tamba Matturie, the Koidu/New Sembehun City Council also has land reclamation in its development plans, but so far lacks sufficient funds.

***“People were very consistent [about being interested in doing land reclamation]. They said, ‘Just buy us shovels.’”***

***–John Kanu, Policy Advisor, Integrated Diamond Management Program***

FESS’s proposal to undertake land reclamation projects in Kono and Kenema met with overwhelming receptivity from leaders at the national, district, and local levels of government. For example, Pastor Kai D. Thomas, MP for the Kono District said, “We are eager, yearning for this in our area. If you choose this area, you will be most welcome.” Many people remarked enthusiastically that the timing was right for land reclamation in the country. Chiefs and members of the Koidu/New Sembehun City Council, the Kono District Council, the Coalition of Kono Youths, and other groups, in separate discussions with FESS, all encouraged implementation of the project and welcomed the chance to collaborate.

***“It is an opportunity we can’t afford to lose.”***

***–Paramount Chief SCN Konnoh Bundoh II***

Many people acknowledged not only the wasted potential inherent in land damaged from mining, but also the need to balance reliance on the mining sector with agricultural development to help build economic stability. The Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Dr. Sama Monde, saw the project as consistent with one of the four missions of his ministry—the conservation of natural resources—as well as with his ministry’s concern for improving food security. Dr. Monde gave his full support to the project, saying, “I am one of your recruits,” and follow-up discussions during the project’s implementation were consistently positive.

### **Developing a Participatory Community Process**

A clear message from the November consultative meetings was that an effective and sustainable project would depend on developing common understandings and broad-based support within communities. It was critical to get commitments from all of the stakeholder groups and to be sure to include youths and women. In addition, the communities themselves needed to have a strong sense of ownership of the project, which FESS worked to instill through a participatory project design that called for communities and individuals to make commitments and inputs toward the project.

***“If it is our project, we assure you it will succeed. If it is the community that sits down and decides to reclaim and to allocate the land, then it will be our duty to sustain it as a community.”*** –Paramount Chief SCN Konnoh Bundoh II



The project design and implementation were guided in all respects by basic democratic principles of inclusion for all stakeholders, participation in which all parties are respected and have a right to voice their opinions, representative leadership, and decision-making through cooperation and consensus building.

FESS held consultative workshops on land reclamation and alternative land use in Koidu, Kono District on February 8–9, 2007 and in Tongo Fields, Kenema District on February 10–11, 2007. Full of vigorous discussion, the two workshops were highly successful in building the foundation of support for FESS to implement a project intended to benefit entire communities.



Workshop plenary sessions in Koidu, Kono District and Tongo Fields, Kenema District

Each of the multistakeholder workshops included approximately 45 leaders and representatives of the various stakeholder groups, including: paramount chiefs, town chiefs, and section chiefs; district and town/city councils; youth, women, elder, and farmer groups and civic associations; a chiefdom mining committee; landowning families; resident representatives from the relevant government ministries, including the Ministry of Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security; donor agencies, including USAID; and a national non-governmental organization. The workshops were led by FESS field representative, Daniel Gbondo, with assistance from another experienced facilitator, John Kanu, policy advisor for the Integrated Diamond Management Program (IDMP). The Koidu workshop was conducted in Krio and English, and the Tongo Fields workshop was conducted in Krio, with Mende and English translations where necessary for clarification.



Workshop small-group sessions in Tongo Fields, Kenema District

Through plenary and small-group discussions, participants worked together to:

- Develop a common understanding of what land reclamation might mean for communities;
- Identify the social, political, economic, cultural, and technical challenges to land reclamation;
- Identify the ways to overcome each of these challenges;
- Define a process for communities to identify land to be reclaimed and decide upon alternative uses for the land; and
- Reach agreements on commitments of support from each stakeholder group for undertaking reclamation.

Although there were fewer women than men in attendance, women were represented in each of the small-group discussions and were encouraged to take active roles as presenters of their groups' discussion points.



Workshop small-group session reports, Koidu, Kono District and Tongo Fields, Kenema District

The facilitators helped make the participation of workshop attendees fully inclusive, stopping to check and recheck to make sure that what was recorded was accurate and

complete. They worked to establish the trust and cooperation necessary for participants to negotiate agreements on challenging issues and to build the essential social and political backing to support a successful project. Each workshop culminated in a session in which leaders of the various stakeholder groups drew up and formally signed a document of commitments on behalf of their groups toward implementing a project on land reclamation and alternative use in their respective communities.



Commitments documents being signed at workshops in Koidu, Kono District and Tongo Fields, Kenema District

The workshops were highly effective mechanisms for community sensitization, participatory decision-making, and project planning. A key outcome was the strengthening of community capacities of governance and organization, which were essential for the successful implementation of the project.

### **Creating Demonstration Sites**

In the two weeks following the workshops, the field representative and field assistant held a series of meetings with individuals and groups from communities whose representatives had attended the workshops.

FESS framed the project with three criteria in mind. First, the land identified for reclamation would be declared by the community to be “mined-out,” meaning that diggers were no longer finding diamonds and the strong consensus among them was that the land was exhausted of diamonds. Second, the land would be used for agriculture so as to provide food support. Third, any economic benefits would go to the community as a whole rather than an individual or family. This last requirement was particularly relevant for Kenema District, where land is held by landowning families, whereas in Kono District it is held as a common good by chiefs who have the authority to allocate land for community purposes.

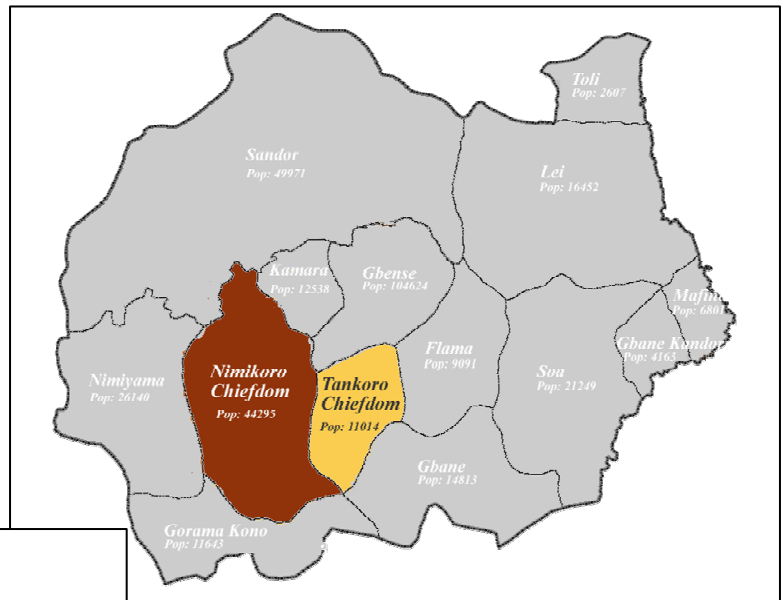
The FESS project was a catalyst in building governance capacity in the three communities. For example, in Bumpeh, there had been numerous failed attempts to form an executive committee. Seeing the FESS project as an opportunity that required significant coordination and contributions, the Town Chief and other leaders met with the FESS field representative and later among themselves for several hours. Two days later,



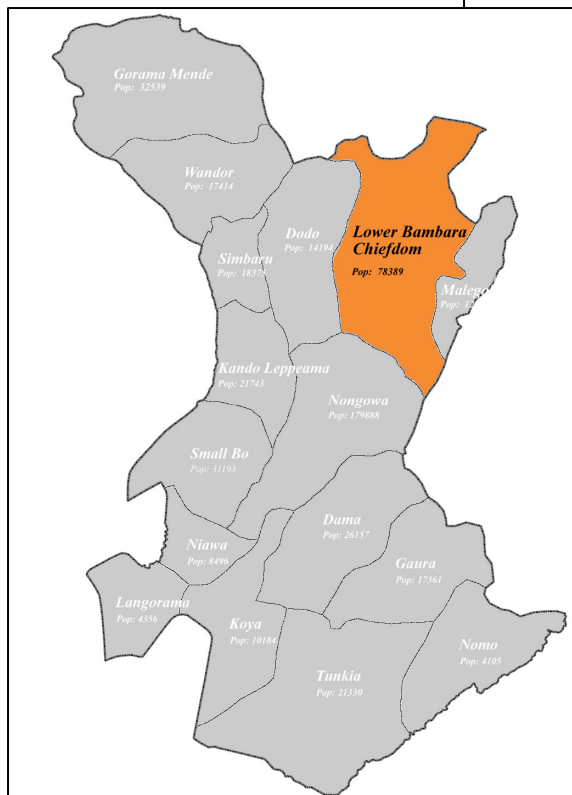
they introduced an executive committee to work with FESS on the project. The leadership of all three communities came forth and established a solid working relationship with FESS to move forward on the project.

By March 2007, FESS was actively engaged in reclamation activities at the following sites:

1. Bumpeh, Nimikoro Chiefdom, Kono District
2. Tankoro, Tankoro Chiefdom, Kono District
3. Ngiehun, Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Kenema District



Map 3: Nimikoro and Tankoro Chiefdoms, Kono District *(above)*



Map 4: Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Kenema District *(left)*

These sites were identified by the communities as “mined-out.” The Bumpah and Ngiehun sites had been abandoned for a number of years and were recognized as depleted. In Tankoro, the paramount chief made a formal visit to the site to declare it mined-out and reserved for reclamation. He gave two weeks notice to diggers who were illegally mining there after the last license had expired. An unintended consequence was that scores of diggers descended upon the site to carry off gravel and dig more intensively, nearly doubling the size of some of the pits. This made the reclamation more time consuming and costly than had been estimated, requiring the short-term rental of a water pump.



Lower Bambara Section Chief Foday Bobor II and land owners at the Ngiehun, Kenema District demonstration site

Local representatives of government ministries supported the project in multiple ways. For example, extension agents from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security trained in agriculture and forestry helped demarcate 15-acre plots in each community for reclamation. They continued to offer valuable technical assistance periodically throughout the project. The Ministry of Mineral Resources also contributed technical support. The agricultural extension agent in the Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Mr. Fofanah, helped demarcate the Ngiehun site; the mines engineer in Kono District, Jonathan Sharka, met with FESS staff, participated in the Koidu workshop, and offered technical input where needed.



PC Paul Saquee and Town Chief Samuel Ndomainah declaring the Tankoro, Kono District project site as a mined-out area to be reclaimed



To the greatest extent possible, the communities themselves made the key decisions concerning the organization of work activities and what, where, and when to plant. Each of the three communities, with oversight by the field representative and field assistant,



Demarcation of demonstration site in Bumpeh, Kono District

took charge of coordinating the labor and supervising the reclamation activities. As might be expected, these arrangements took a slightly different form in each site. In Tankoro, Paramount Chief Paul Saquee invested considerable amounts of his own time, visiting the site regularly and personally checking on the progress of the work and the proper provision of food and water for the workers. In Bumpeh, the newly formed executive committee named Momodu Matturie, an emerging young leader, as the site supervisor. The significant role played by the landowning family in Ngiehun led to one more variation. There, Section Chief Foday Bobor both served as point of contact for the landowning family, explaining the plans for the land, and oversaw the daily work of the laborers.

At each site, significant community contributions were made that were difficult to quantify but essential to the successful implementation of the project. Storage was provided for the numerous tools used by the 50-person crews each day. When the harvests arrive in the fall, storage also will be provided for the rice and other produce. Women of the community cooked lunch on site for the workers and saw to it that water was on hand. Each of the communities took on the responsibility of providing security for the work sites. Most importantly, the project was kept firmly on track by the leadership shown by key members of the community and



PC Paul Saquee, Daniel Gbondo and other chiefdom elders at the Tankoro, Kono District demonstration site

the moral support given by residents in each area. These manifestations of community spirit and determination reflected the depth of community involvement and sense of ownership over the project.

Many community leaders recognized the value of the project as a mechanism for giving youth and women employment, one of the critical needs for stability in the region. At each site, for approximately 2 months, a local group of 50 young (mostly) men and women worked for a small daily wage, and other women voluntarily cooked food and delivered water to the workers daily. Work began and ended at regular times for six days each week. In Bumpeh, the workdays were framed by morning and evening prayers, both Muslim and Christian.



Reclamation work at Bumpeh, Kono District



Reclamation work at Ngiehun, Kenema District

The impact of the land reclamation project went far beyond those benefits that were immediately evident, as was made clear to FESS in interviews with workers and community leaders. For example, the 150 workers who were engaged represented 150 families, meaning that the positive benefits were multiplied many times over. Some workers saved portions of their wages with their spouses in hopes of beginning petty trading to diversify their family incomes. The inclusive nature of the project, which gave particular attention to the participation of women in all aspects of decision making and project implementation, reinforced emerging trends in the area in support of gender equality.



Community leaders spoke of how the project helped address the problem of idle youths, some of whom had previously been involved with drugs. Prostitution is also a problem in the diamond-producing areas of Sierra Leone, and the project offered an alternative means of support for some women. Moreover, the very success of the project is increasing community awareness of the transformational potential of land reclamation. In short, the project has been like a stone dropped in a pond, with economic, social, and political ripple effects that extend far beyond the visible change at the work sites themselves.



Reclaiming land with artisanal tools in Bumpeh, Kono District

Once reclamation was under way, the early skepticism of some area residents was replaced by their requests that the project employ *more* workers on the existing sites and that the project be extended to other communities. There is almost an unlimited amount of idle land to reclaim, and the urgency of the work was poignantly underscored the very first morning that FESS's project workers began to fill holes at one of the pilot sites. Tragically, a 12-year-old girl drowned in a mining pit in another part of the community.

Workers relied almost exclusively on hand-held tools and artisanal methods to refill the old pits and reshape the landscape to support agricultural production. Many of the workers had formerly dug for diamonds using these same technologies and, in some cases, even at the same sites. Several individuals expressed amazement that they could return the pitted land to a usable state by reversing their digging methods. Having the workers use the traditional tools gave them confidence that they had within their own communities what it would take to do reclamation in the future.

***“People in Sierra Leone look up to leadership. This is the first time an organization has taken up the idea. Once it is started, others will see that all that is needed is leadership.” –Daniel Gbondo, FESS Field Representative***

In May 2007, the FESS president, executive director, and the project team made assessment visits at the three sites in Tankoro, Nimikoro, and Ngiehun, where they met with the local workers and site supervisors, community leaders, landowner family members (in Ngiehun), and chiefs. Close to 45 acres of land were nearly filled in by that time. Enthusiasm and commitment to the work was palpable in the three communities, and one person was heard to say that they wanted to reclaim land “as far as you can see the sky.”

In Ngiehun, when the workers heard that FESS’s president and executive director were coming from the United States to visit the site, they made plans for a surprise welcome. On their own initiative, they designed and arranged for the purchase of “FESS Land Reclamation” t-shirts for themselves and their FESS counterparts. To pay for this, they each voluntarily donated a day’s wages. The FESS executive staff and project team were both humbled and inspired by this expression of commitment and group solidarity, which reaffirmed beyond mere words the meaning and value of the project itself. During the May 2007 project assessment visits, workers at all three sites demonstrated a level of commitment to the project and a pride of ownership that confirmed the belief of the FESS project staff that the achievements of Tankoro, Bumpeh, and Ngiehun can be expanded and replicated elsewhere.



Workers at the demonstration site in Ngiehun, Kenema District wearing project t-shirts

One common theme articulated by both community leaders and workers alike is that they see land reclamation as a crucial link between themselves and their children. A. M. Kamanda, the chiefdom speaker for Gbense Chiefdom, said that, “We are responsible for our own country and system. We are here for life, and people will think of their children. One’s family will be recognized by the community [for giving the land to



reclamation].” A woman in the work group in Bumpeh said, “I am doing this for my 11-year-old daughter and for her children.” And Paramount Chief Paul Saquee stated his belief that, increasingly, “Our future as a people lies in education and agriculture.”

### **Immediate Project Outcomes**

In the five months since the community workshops in Kono and Kenema, project implementation at the three demonstration sites has moved very rapidly. Land was identified for reclamation by the communities. Extension agents from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security demarcated 15-acre plots (later extended to 17 acres in Bumpeh). Work crews of 50 men and women were assembled at each site. Tools were purchased and distributed to all the workers. Women of the communities assumed the responsibility for providing food and water to the workers. Work routines and requirements, rules of conduct, and supervisory structures were established. A system of weekly payments to the workers, recorded and signed for in log books, was put in place.

It is difficult to describe the striking transformation of the landscape that has been achieved at each of the three sites by work crews using only simple hand-held tools. As Ray Simmons, the president of FESS, said upon arriving at Ngiehun, “In the United States, people wouldn’t even have tried this. They would have said it was impossible.” Nevertheless, in Ngiehun and Bumpeh, large expanses of land covered by a snarl of deep pits, thick undergrowth, and immense tree roots have been cleared and reclaimed. In Tankoro, numerous, huge pits filled with water—some more than 15 meters deep and 30 meters across—have been drained, filled, and reclaimed by hand. In Tankoro, because of nearby streams and the low-lying



Filling a deep hole in Tankoro, Kono District



Re-routing a stream bed in Tankoro, Kono District



position of the land, workers have also entirely re-routed the water flow into new channels to ensure that new plantings will not be flooded.

As a result of this intense and arduous labor, the majority of the land demarcated at each site has now been reclaimed and planted. In Bumpah, where 2 extra acres of land were added to expand the planting of swamp rice, about 90 percent of the total land has been reclaimed; in Ngiehun, where upland planting has predominated, nearly 90 percent of the land has been reclaimed; and in Tankoro, which faced the most difficult terrain in terms of both the size of mining pits and water management issues, around 65 percent of the land has been reclaimed. In all of the sites, priority has been given to getting plantings in the ground before the end of the planting season.



Tankoro, Kono District demonstration site before and after reclamation

In Bumpah, the community chose to plant 400 oil palm seedlings, underplanted with dryland rice, along with some swamp rice. The oil palm seedlings normally are sold on the market at US\$7 per plant, but the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) provided them to the community at cost—only US\$1 per plant. In Ngiehun, the community opted for a mix of dryland and swamp rice, reflecting the slightly different terrain in different locations on the site. In Tankoro, given the lay of the land and nearby



Rice planting in Tankoro, Kono District

streams, mostly swamp rice was planted, with some vegetables. At each of the sites, the community's choices were informed by discussion with MAFS extension agents whose collaboration represented another significant contribution to the project.



Oil palm seedlings underplanted with upland rice at demonstration site in Bumpeh, Kono District



Rice in Ngiehun, Kenema District

The immediate outcomes of this work might seem rudimentary—filling mining pits and planting staple food crops—but these activities have helped to employ local youths and women in need of livelihood opportunities, provide food, reduce problems of drugs and crime in the affected communities, and alleviate some of the health and safety problems associated with the stagnant water found in the pits. These fundamental changes at the demonstration sites represent hope for the future for these communities and are part of what could be a larger process of change to ensure food and livelihood security and peace in the diamond-producing areas of Sierra Leone.

There are also other indicators of the success of the project and its potential impact over the longer term. The entire process has educated communities to the value of doing reclamation. The work done at the three sites proved that reclamation could be done with the same tools and techniques as were used for artisanal mining, so workers could see a close connection between artisanal mining and reclamation. Important steps have been



taken toward making the project approach a replicable process by putting in place the learning, working relationships, and decision-making mechanisms to show workers and communities at large that they can keep the process going that was started by this project. As a result, there is now increased local commitment to doing reclamation and a tangible sense that it adds value to the community's land and labor.

Beyond this, the sites also show that artisanal diamond mining can be part of a larger, integrated cycle of development. However, for this to happen, land reclamation is the essential component of the process. When land reclamation takes place and is followed by agriculture, artisanal mining begins to lose its character as the employment of last resort for all-too-numerous jobless youths. Artisanal mining will continue for some time to come, but it will not be the mainstay of the economy in Kono and Kenema over the long term. With land reclamation, the serious hazards posed by mining pits are significantly reduced, and artisanal mining can continue as part of a balanced transition for the region.

The project that the Tiffany Foundation has sponsored at three demonstration sites in Bumpeh, Ngiehun, and Tankoro are a small but powerful first step toward making that possibility a reality.

***“If a demonstration site is done well, it can be a catalyst.”***  
***–Paramount Chief SCN Konnoh Bundoh II***

### **Initial Outreach and Reactions**

In May 2007, FESS engaged in a number of conversations to discuss achievements of the project with government representatives and development specialists in Freetown. FESS met with a team evaluating the USAID-sponsored Integrated Diamond Management Program (IDMP); Richard Hogg, the head of DFID in Sierra Leone; the new head of UNDP; and representatives of two other UN agencies working on post-conflict programs. In addition, FESS was interviewed by representatives from Global Witness, who had heard about the FESS project while doing research in Kono District.

FESS held a roundtable on Friday, May 11, 2007 at the U.S. embassy to discuss the project outcomes and future of the project. Those in attendance included Christine Sheckler, the USAID Country Program Manager, USAID staff, representatives of the Sierra Leonean government, and members of non-governmental organizations working on environmental and social issues. Ms. Sheckler characterized the FESS consultative workshops as being remarkable in the inclusiveness of stakeholders, effective in encouraging community participation, and adeptly managed to allow the communities to resolve difficult issues. Ms. Sheckler expressed an interest in finding ways for USAID and FESS to collaborate in relation to this project and other related endeavors. John Kanu, policy advisor for the Integrated Diamond Management Program (IDMP) called the project a “milestone” in the country.

FESS has received many expressions of ongoing local support for the project. In a letter sent to FESS's executive director after the May 2007 assessment visit, Paramount Chief Paul Saquee of Tankoro Chiefdom wrote:

...Given the vastness of the land available for reclamation, I would like to encourage FESS to remain engaged in my chiefdom, and to even expand its activities to other parts of the district. As my people and I have demonstrated, we will continue to be supportive of the good work you are doing. For us, this project is not only about changing the environment. It is also about changing lives and building communities.

Indeed, FESS is eager to take the project farther. There is a strong rationale for building on the project's accomplishments within the pilot communities to intensify and expand reclamation and alternative land use activities there, as well as to extend the project into other diamond-producing communities in Sierra Leone and perhaps elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.





# **Reclaiming the Land After Mining FESS Demonstration Sites in Phases of Reclamation**

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Tankoro, Tankoro Chiefdom, Kono District



## Reclaiming the Land After Mining FESS Demonstration Sites in Phases of Reclamation

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Ngiehun, Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Kenema District





# **Reclaiming the Land After Mining FESS Demonstration Sites in Phases of Reclamation**

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Bumpeh, Nimikoro Chiefdom, Kono District







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FESS

*U.S. Office*

8110 Gatehouse Road, Suite 101W  
Falls Church, VA, 22042  
Tel: +1 (703) 560-8290  
Fax: +1 (703) 560-1645

*Sierra Leone Office*

2 Cockle Bay Lane  
Off Aberdeen Road  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Tel: 232.035.200297