PNG UPDATE 2019

Frieda River Mine Awareness as captured from students’ lenses

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Outline

- Awareness Aim
- Brief background
- Communication Strategy
- Findings
- Major challenges
- Potential Risks identified by students
- Conclusion
- Way Forward
Awareness Aims

• To determine what impacts that the people living in the villages (23 villages in Ambunti District) of the Upper Sepik had observed on their local environment.

• To ascertain the attitude of each village towards the planned Frieda River Mine.

• To share the concerns of Project Sepik about the impacts that the mine might have on the Sepik region.
Map of Frieda River & Sepik River

https://www.jubileeaustralia.org/literature
Communication strategy for the awareness

• The idea of awareness resonated from ESP Students Forum.
• We notified relevant stakeholders; ESP Provincial Government, District Authorities and LLGs.
• Fundraising by UPNG Avisat students – public awareness
• Wrote letters to inform the villages through the councilors, business houses and certain individuals.
1. Methods used for awareness

- Verbal presentations (meetings)
- Power-point pictures and videos
- Audios (recordings of songs)
- Charts
- On Air broadcast (NBC Wewak)

2. Data Collection (multiple)

- Questionnaire
- Group discussions, semi-structured interviews
- Meetings
- Photographs
- Videos, audios
Findings

• The communities were concerned that increased sedimentation, bank degradation and flooding along the river had impacted fish stocks, sago palms and food cultivation.

• Communities had either not been consulted about the proposed mine, or already opposed to the mine, refused to meet with those responsible for the consultation.

• Evidence of diseases that never been seen or felt before. Most cases was associated with the skin.
Findings 1

- The communities were concerned that increased sedimentation, bank degradation and flooding along the river had impacted fish stocks, sago palms and food cultivation.
Findings 2

• Communities had either not been consulted about the proposed mine, or already opposed to the mine, refused to meet with those responsible for the consultation.
Findings 3

- Evidence of diseases that never been seen or felt before. Most cases was associated with the skin.
Potential risks identified

• Environmental damage due to increase discharges into the river.

• The river system and its shape and size will vary due to increase number of vessels operating along the river.

• Increase in health issues.

• Increase in population growth rate.

• Economical issues based on unequal sharing and benefits of money.
Challenges

• Affected Communities

1. There were no mouth piece for the people due to lack of communication and updated data.

2. LLG, District, Provincial and National Government officials did not get down to the communities to listen to their concerns.

• Frieda Mine Project

✓ How to build a safe and effective tailings storage facility that can manage any acid rock drainage that can might be generated.

Three factors magnify the concerns about the tailings issue:

1. The substantial amount of tailings that will be generated.
2. The inaccessibility of the terrain and the extremely high rainfall.
3. Preponderance of seismic activity.
Challenges faced by the students

- Lack of financial strength.
- Opposed by some powerful and recognized government personnel and other individuals.
- Government officials did not help in cash or kind.
- Recognized Authorities were not able to provide assistance. Police restricted us to go up to Frieda.
- Some communities did not accept the students due to them being manipulated by the Mining company and MRA officials of monetary benefits.
Conclusion

• It is not feasible to go ahead with the proposed Frieda River mine project because the Sepik River people’s livelihoods will be affected.

• Consequently there will be sustainability issues for the future generations.

Way forward

• More dialogue between stakeholders, provincial and district governments, academics, NGOs and other interested individuals.

• More research needs to be done.

• Whatever solutions from dialogues should be based on the locals’ sustainability interests and benefits.
“The river is not ours! It belongs to the future. We are only vessels of the Sepik spirit that dwells to celebrate and protect it. We will guard it with our life” Emmanuel Peni