

Community Engagement Guide for TerraFund for AFR100 Restoration Projects



1. Introduction

This guide provides practical direction to TerraFund for AFR100 champions on how to carry out community engagement during project implementation. It is intended for use once projects have moved to the stage of implementation, building on engagement conducted during proposal development.

TerraFund funded projects are implemented in landscapes that are already used and managed by communities. Community engagement is therefore essential to ensure that restoration activities are understood, accepted, and carried out effectively.

At the start of implementation, projects need to confirm sites, organize participation, and align expectations with communities and local authorities. This stage is critical for ensuring that activities such as nursery establishment, planting, and maintenance and monitoring are implemented correctly and sustained over time.

This guide focuses on how to engage communities in practice across these stages, supporting clear communication, meaningful participation, and long-term adoption of restoration activities.

2. Key terms and working concepts

This section sets the foundation for the rest of the guide. These terms should be used consistently by project teams so that engagement is planned and reported in the same way.

Community engagement is the continuous process of working with communities, local leaders, chiefs, and relevant authorities so that restoration activities are understood, accepted, implemented correctly, and sustained over time. It runs from implementation start through monitoring and exit.

Community awareness is the stage at which people understand what the project is, where it will happen, what will change, and what will not change. Awareness is necessary, but it is not enough on its own.

Community mobilization is the organization of people, time, labour, and local structures to carry out a specific activity such as nursery setup, planting, or follow-up. Mobilization can create turnout, but turnout is not the same as adoption.

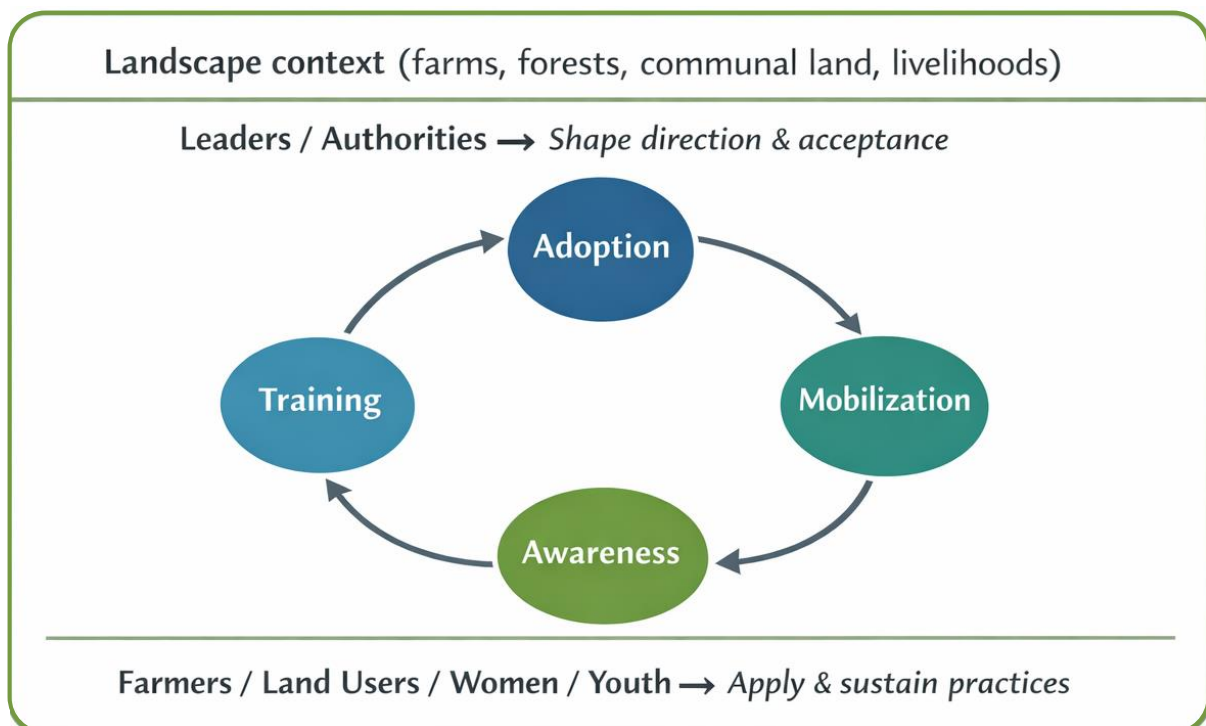
Training is practical skill-building linked to a real task. A person should only be counted as trained when a specific skill or practice has been taught and reinforced. Note, awareness about restoration sites is not counted as training if no new skill was taught or reinforced.

Adoption is when a practice is actually applied and maintained in the field. A person may attend meetings and receive training but still not adopt the practice. Adoption is visible

through behavior: correct planting, protection of regeneration, maintenance of trees, or continued use of agroforestry practices.

Consent means people understand what the project will do and agree to the changes it introduces. Where restoration affects how land, trees, or resources are used, free, prior and informed consent is a useful standard: people should receive information in advance, in a form they understand, and have a real opportunity to agree or raise concerns before implementation begins.

Gender equity means that women and men are not just present in the process, but can influence decisions, access benefits, and participate without unfair barriers.



3. Starting Implementation and Engaging Communities in Practice

Community engagement at the start of implementation should move quickly from introducing the project to working through real decisions on the ground. This is not a separate phase before activities begin—it is part of how nursery establishment, site selection, and planting are carried out.

The objective at this stage is to ensure that:

- people understand what will happen and where
- expectations are clear (especially around land use)
- key decisions are discussed with those affected
- early participation is built around real tasks

Effective engagement at this stage also requires understanding **who influences decisions and who carries out the work**. Local leaders and authorities play an important role in coordination and legitimacy, but farmers, land users, women, and youth are central to implementation. Engagement should therefore reach both those who guide decisions and those responsible for carrying out activities.

At this stage, it is also important to **understand community priorities and how they relate to the project**. This can be done through simple discussions during meetings, site walks, or smaller group engagements by asking what matters most to people in relation to land use, trees, and livelihoods. These priorities should then be linked clearly to the project—for example, how tree planting can support soil fertility, income, fodder, or long-term productivity. Where priorities do not fully align, they should be acknowledged and addressed through how activities are designed and implemented.

a. Introducing the project and building agreement

Start by aligning with local leadership and authorities before broad engagement. This typically includes chiefs, local government officials, and relevant technical officers.

Keep this step practical:

- confirm where the project will operate
- clarify expected support from local leaders
- align on how the project will be introduced to the community

Then introduce the project to the wider community. Avoid long presentations. Focus on what matters to people:

- where the work will take place
- what activities will happen (nursery, planting, maintenance)
- whether land use will change
- how people will be involved

If restoration affects how land is currently used, this should be stated clearly at this stage. Avoid delaying this message.

After the meeting, move to the field. A site walk helps people understand the project better than explanations alone. It also allows them to raise concerns early and relate the project to their own priorities and land use.

Follow this with a smaller working discussion involving:

- people directly involved in implementation
- land users

- women and youth participating in the work

Use this group to clarify details, ensure different perspectives are heard, and test understanding before moving forward. Where needed, adjust how discussions are organized (e.g. smaller groups or targeted conversations) to allow broader participation.

b. Establishing nurseries: using the nursery as an engagement entry point

Nursery establishment is often the first practical activity and should be used to ground the project in the community.

Start by agreeing clearly on:

- where the nursery is located (private, communal, or institutional land)
- who manages it daily
- who has access

Avoid assumptions here. Lack of clarity on nursery ownership or access often creates conflict later.

c. Species selection: introducing and positioning project species in the community

This step should take place during **nursery establishment and site validation**, before seedlings are distributed and planting begins.

In TerraFund projects, species are defined during project design based on ecological and restoration objectives. Engagement at this stage therefore focuses on **introducing these species in a way that is understood, accepted, and applied correctly in the field**.

A practical approach is to move away from presenting species as a list and instead **organize them based on their role**.

Start with local knowledge:

- which species grow well locally
- which species are avoided
- past experiences with tree planting

Then introduce project species through comparison:

- what each species does for the land
- what benefits it provides and when
- how it should be managed

In the nursery or on-site, group species into:

- those that provide **early and visible benefits** (e.g. fruit, fodder, fast-growing species)
- those that support **long-term restoration outcomes** (e.g. native species, soil and water improvement, biodiversity)

This helps explain why different species are included and how they work together within the landscape.

Where needed, introduce species through **how they are placed**, rather than distributing them uniformly:

- combine short-term and long-term species on farms
- prioritize restoration-focused species in degraded or communal areas

If there is hesitation around certain species:

- understand the concern (e.g. past experience, management, growth)
- clarify how the species will be used
- adjust where or how it is planted rather than removing it entirely

Avoid relying only on explanation. Use practical methods such as:

- nursery demonstrations
- field examples
- simple species guidance in the local language

Work through a **small, well-informed group** (including those involved in nursery work, planting, women, youth, and trusted community members). This helps ensure that information is understood and shared accurately across the community.

Before planting begins, confirm:

- the role of each species is understood
- planting arrangements are clear
- there is no confusion about which species go where



d. Site selection: aligning technical decisions with real land use

Site selection should be done with people who use or influence the land, not only based on technical criteria.

The approach differs depending on the context:

- On government or regulated land (e.g. natural forest, buffer zones):
Engage the responsible authority first, then discuss with nearby users. Clarify what will change in terms of access and use.
- On farms (agroforestry):
Discuss directly on the land. Walk through:
 - where trees will be placed
 - how they affect crops
 - labour and spacing
- Where land use must change (e.g. stopping cultivation):
Be direct early. Avoid soft messaging.
Let people explain how they currently use the land and what they risk losing.
Then work through possible adjustments (phasing, boundaries, alternatives).

Site selection is not complete until both technical suitability and community agreement are in place.

e. Planting: organizing participation, protecting land, and tracking trees

When this happens:

This takes place once seedlings are ready and planting areas are confirmed and there is enough rain.

Planting is where engagement becomes visible and where coordination matters most. At this stage, the focus is not only on mobilizing people, but on ensuring that planting is done correctly, on the right land, and can be tracked afterward.

Organizing planting activities and participation

Before planting begins, the team should organize the process clearly. This includes both logistics and roles on the ground.

At minimum, ensure clarity on:

- where seedlings are collected and how they are distributed
- how planting areas are assigned (by site, group, or farmer)
- who is responsible for guiding spacing and layout
- who is coordinating the activity on-site

Public activities such as planting campaigns or community events (including sports-based mobilization) can be used to raise awareness and bring people together. However, they should be structured so that:

- key messages are clear (what to plant, where, and how)
- influential people (chiefs, local leaders, respected farmers) are present and engaged
- practical instructions are given before planting starts

These activities are most effective when they combine:

- mobilization (bringing people together)
- demonstration (showing how planting is done correctly)

Ensuring correct planting in complex land settings

Planting often involves people who are not necessarily the landowners, especially when labour is hired or mobilized. This creates a risk of:

- planting in the wrong location
- damaging crops
- incorrect spacing or species placement

To avoid this, the team should:

- assign someone on-site to guide planting at all times
- ensure that landowners or users are present where possible, especially in agroforestry
- clearly mark or explain planting areas before work begins

In agroforestry systems, planting must follow the agreed design:

- trees should be placed based on spacing and arrangement suitable for crops
- avoid placing trees in a way that interferes with existing farming practices

As highlighted in TerraFund [agroforestry guidelines for TerraFund Projects](#), these systems are dynamic and must be designed to fit both ecological and livelihood needs, not treated as simple tree-planting exercises.

Linking planting to tracking and MRV (polygon collection)

Planting should be organized in a way that allows for **clear tracking after the activity**, especially for polygon collection and reporting.

In practice:

- planting areas should be **clearly defined before planting begins**
- groups or individuals planting should be linked to specific sites or plots
- avoid random or scattered planting without clear boundaries

For agroforestry:

- record which farmers received trees
- note where trees are planted (farm, boundary, plot type)
- ensure consistency with planned spacing and system design

This makes it easier to:

- collect polygons after planting
- verify planting areas
- avoid data gaps later in reporting

If planting is not structured this way, polygon collection becomes difficult and data quality is affected.

Avoiding delays and confusion during planting

Most planting delays come from lack of coordination rather than lack of participation.

To avoid this:

- Mobilize community members early
- organize people into manageable groups
- start with a short on-site demonstration before planting begins
- ensure materials (seedlings, tools) are ready in advance

If confusion appears during planting, it usually indicates that:

- instructions were not clear
- roles were not defined
- earlier engagement did not go deep enough

What to check after planting

Before closing the planting phase, confirm:

- trees are planted in the correct locations and arrangement
- no unintended damage to crops or land has occurred
- planting areas are clearly identified for follow-up
- information needed for tracking (sites, farmers, areas) is recorded

4. Training, participation, and adoption for restoration permanence

Training in restoration should not be treated as a one-time activity or a requirement to reach large numbers. Its purpose is to ensure that people **apply practices correctly, continue them over time, and adapt them as conditions change.**

For this reason, training should be designed around **who needs to do the work, what they need to do, and how often they need support**, rather than how many people can be trained at once.

a. Designing training that leads to adoption

Training should follow the work, not precede it.

- nursery training should happen at the nursery while seedlings are being raised
- planting training should happen in the field before and during planting
- maintenance training should happen during follow-up visits (weeding, pruning, replacement, protection)
- monitoring training should happen when survival checks and data collection are carried out

A person should only be considered trained when they:

- have seen the practice demonstrated
- have practiced it themselves
- have been corrected where needed

Large one-time trainings can help introduce concepts, but they rarely lead to correct application. What works better is **small-group, repeated, field-based learning**, where people can observe, practice, and ask questions over time.

b. Who to train and how to reach others

Training everyone directly is not practical and does not lead to better outcomes.

Instead, identify and train a **core group within the community**:

- people actively involved in nursery work, planting, and maintenance
- farmers hosting trees (especially in agroforestry)
- individuals who are respected and regularly consulted by others
- women and youth who are already engaged in land use and labour

This group becomes the **bridge for information dissemination**.

To ensure information reaches others:

- train this group well and repeatedly
- encourage them to demonstrate practices to others
- check understanding by asking them to explain or show the work

This is more effective than trying to train large numbers once.

c. Training materials and language

Training materials should be simple, practical, and usable in the field.

- use local language whenever possible
- focus on key actions (how to plant, spacing, maintenance steps)
- use visual aids where possible (drawings, simple guides, demonstration plots)

Avoid materials that are too detailed or technical. If people cannot use them during the work, they will not be used.

d. Ensuring participation of women, men, and youth

Participation does not happen automatically.

To ensure meaningful involvement:

- schedule training and activities at times when both women and men are available
- avoid assuming that those present represent everyone
- hold smaller follow-up discussions where needed to hear from those less likely to speak in larger groups
- ensure women and youth are included in practical roles (nursery work, monitoring, follow-up), not only in attendance

The goal is not equal numbers alone, but **active participation in decision-making and implementation.**

e. Using volunteers effectively

Volunteers can play an important role in follow-up, awareness, and monitoring, especially where budgets are limited.

To keep volunteers engaged:

- give them clear roles (e.g. follow-up on specific farms or sites)
- link their work to visible outcomes (tree survival, improved farms)
- provide basic support (training, tools, recognition)

Where appropriate, volunteers can be considered for livelihood opportunities, provided the process is transparent and fair.



f. Linking livelihoods to tree permanence

Livelihood activities should not be separate from restoration. They should **support the maintenance and value of trees over time**.

For example:

- beekeeping supports interest in flowering trees
- fodder systems support tree protection in livestock areas
- soil and water conservation improves both crops and tree survival

When selecting participants for livelihood activities:

- use clear and transparent criteria
- avoid concentrating benefits within one group or household
- ensure that those involved in restoration activities are not excluded

A simple test:

does this activity increase the likelihood that trees will be maintained?

If not, its connection to restoration should be reconsidered.

g. From training to maintenance and monitoring

Training should continue into the maintenance phase.

After planting:

- assign responsibility for follow-up (by site, group, or farmer)
- ensure those responsible are trained in maintenance practices
- conduct regular follow-up visits, especially in the first season

Monitoring should be simple and practical:

- check survival, spacing, and condition of trees
- involve trained community members or volunteers
- use observations to guide further training and adjustments

h. Handling challenges and conflict through engagement

Challenges will arise. These may include:

- poor maintenance
- incorrect planting
- resistance to certain practices
- concerns about fairness or benefits

Rather than addressing only the visible issue, identify the cause:

- was the practice understood?
- was it practical in that context?
- were expectations clear?

Then respond through:

- additional training or demonstration
- clarification of roles and expectations
- adjustments where needed

i. Planning for continuity and exit

From the beginning, training and engagement should aim to reduce dependence on the project.

Before the project phases out, ensure:

- key practices are understood and applied without supervision
- local individuals or groups can continue follow-up
- livelihood activities support continued engagement
- communities see value in maintaining trees beyond the project

The objective is that restoration continues as part of how land is managed locally, not as a project that ends.

j. What to check in practice

- people are applying practices correctly in the field
- trained individuals can demonstrate and explain the work
- women, men, and youth are actively involved, not only present
- volunteers and beneficiaries remain engaged over time
- maintenance continues without constant external push