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## Kenya: The Maasai Stand up to IUCN Displacement Attempts from their Forest

Way back in 1994, a group of NGO people –among whom the current WRM coordinator- were invited by the Maasai to visit a forest which they were struggling to save from tourism "development". As a means of providing international support to the struggle, an article was written and widely disseminated in November that year in Third World Network's magazine "Resurgence" (available at <http://nativenet.uthscsa.edu/archive/nl/9412/0140.html>). That struggle is still ongoing, but a new actor has appeared in scene -the IUCN- and what follows provides a detailed description of the situation as it now stands and on how the local people feel about it.

The Naimina Enkiyo Forest, one of the few remaining indigenous forests in Kenya, is situated in Loita, in the south of the country, about 300 kilometers southwest of the country's capital Nairobi. The forest ecosystem is considered a shrine by the estimated 40,000 Maasai of the Purko and Loita clans, since it is an important natural resource which has a long history of use by them. The Loita pastoralists consider the forest as alive, and responsive in many ways to their physical, spiritual and cultural needs. It serves as an important dry season grazing zone as well as a source for numerous rivers and is home to a wide array of fauna and flora ranging from elephants to rare bird and plant species. Particular trees are regarded as sacred. The many valuable forest-based products include products derived directly from trees (medicine, edible fruits and seeds, honey, and poles) as well as water, grass for livestock, and other plants. The Maasai see the forest as their responsibility and its sustainable use as a must.

But now, a plan by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) may entail the Maasai's displacement from the Naimina Enkiyo forest. This is not the first time that IUCN projects displace them from their traditional lands. A similar IUCN project in Ngorongoro in the 1980s forced Maasai to move out of the area to pave the way for the development of a national park.

"[The British] moved us from Nairobi and Nakuru [in the early 1900s], but we shall fight current attempts to move us from Naimina Enkiyo," declared an angry Loita elder during a June 7 demonstration which gathered one thousand Maasai to oppose what they see as a takeover of the management of the 33,000 hectare forest in Kenya's Narok district. According to reports sent to the Centre for Minority Rights Development (CEMIRIDE), violence erupted when police allegedly fired shots into the crowd of protesters and injured a number of Maasai.

By supporting the takeover, the Narok County administration would be contradicting its October 2002 statement which granted Loita and Purko Maasai the right to conserve, protect, control, preserve, and own the Naimina Enkiyo forest. However, the future of the Naimina Enkiyo forest has been debated since 1995 when the Narok County Council tried to gazette the area for tourism. Despite legal opposition from the Loita Maasai, this case has yet to be resolved.

IUCN regional representative Eldad Tukahirwa says the objective of the project is to reduce Maasai dependency on the forest by developing their livestock and "building their conscience on the value of the forest." Tukahirwa said the project proposal was based on "a year and a half of consultations with

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the community."

But those opposed to the plan argue that consultations were inadequate. While pro-IUCN stakeholders are well-represented in the proposed management body for the forest, the Loita/Purko support groups "Loita Concerned Residents" and "Forest Morans" (young Maasai men) have been left out. They allege that the Narok County Council has supported the IUCN because of the \$2.6 million earmarked for the project.

Regarding the IUCN's stated intent to provide technical support to a forest management team selected by the Loita/Purko community and IUCN, Vincent Ole Ntekerei, spokesman for the Forest Morans and Loita Concerned Citizens, asserts, "Naimina Enkiyio is one of the few ungazetted forests in Kenya, solely managed by the Maasai for centuries and therefore there is nothing new we would be learning from IUCN."

The resistance opposed by the Maasai may have rendered fruits. The permanent secretary in the Office of the President in charge of Provincial Administration, Mr Dave Mwangi, ordered the Narok DC, Mr John Egesa, to halt the project until complaints raised by the Maasai community are addressed. What would that mean remains to be seen.

Article based on information from: "Loita and Purko Maasai resist IUCN plans for the Naimina Enkiyio Forest", Michael Ole Tiampati, sent by Cultural Survival Weekly Indigenous News, June 25, 2004, E-mail: [news@cs.org](mailto:news@cs.org) ; "Kenya: Contentious Forest Plan Halted", East African Standard, June 25, 2004, Forests.org, <http://forests.org/articles/reader.asp?linkid=33023> ; "Loita project of integrated forest conservation and management (preparatory phase)", <http://www.unesco.org/most/bpik9.htm>