

## Kenya Ogiek

There are about 5,000 Ogiek people in an area of 178,000 hectares of forest and moorland on Mount Chepkitale, which is part of the Mount Elgon mountain in the north west side of Kenya, near Uganda.

It's an important area for wildlife and plants as well as for the Ogiek people. They have lived in harmony with the forest for many generations. The forest is also important as the rain that falls there goes into rivers providing water for the people who live below the mountain.

Research has shown that elephants spend over 80% of their time on Ogiek land because they feel safer near the Ogiek than they do in the nearby National Park where all Ogiek have been removed by force and poachers can, in effect, move quite freely. Kenya Wildlife Service staff have stated that "if the Ogiek are evicted, you may as well say goodbye to the elephants".

Deforestation is reduced in areas where local communities who have been living with the forest for centuries are given rights to their land.

### **Problems the community faces:**

In 2000 the Kenyan government said that the Ogiek land was a national game reserve and that no-one should live there. They have since faced evictions, violence and even the burning of their homes by the Kenya Forest Service. When the natural resources of the forest and area are reduced, it damages the Ogiek's wellbeing and way of life. They rely on the provision of these resources such as medicinal plants for the community, flowers for bees for their honey and pasture for their livestock.

The government have also been letting people set up small farms in other areas of the forest. These people are supposed to live in harmony with the forest and not destroy it but in fact they do often destroy areas of forest.

## What they want to do

The Ogiek want to get their land changed back to trustland which would mean that they can live there and control what happens. They want their traditional laws of how to behave in the forest to be used. They also want to improve the education and health services for their people.

## What's the project doing?

The project supports the Ogiek people to try to get their legal rights and helps them in trying to talk to the government bodies. The Ogiek are learning how to use GPS mapping to collect information about their area so that future use can be planned well.

Community scouts are trained who will try to stop people poaching wildlife, cutting trees to make charcoal and destroying the forest.

People are starting a centre where traditional knowledge can be passed on to children and others

## How Successful is it so far:

The Ogiek have written down their traditional laws for the first time.

The Ogiek and government bodies have talked to each other more. The community have been able to get a lawyer, to attend court cases and make informed decisions on the progress of their court cases in Kitale High court.

In this period a group of MPs visited Chepkitale. The MP who chaired the visit said; 'for the first time we have witnessed a community, a Dorobo community, the Ogiek, who have shown that it is possible to live and conserve the forest.'

A community resource centre is 90% completed and training of early childhood development teachers is carrying on. They have been documenting clan

histories and a community map has been made showing their ancestral lands.

## People

In this video Peter Kitelo, one of the community, talks about what they are trying to do. (the last 3 minutes are the most useful) -

<https://sizeofwales.org.uk/projects/defending-ogiek-communities/#video>

and they have set up their own website -

<https://www.chepkitale.com>

There's another 11 minute film here which explains a lot more -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqUjRnXp8Rw>