

Kenya

Scaling-up Mountain Ecosystem-based Adaptation: building evidence, replicating success, and informing policy



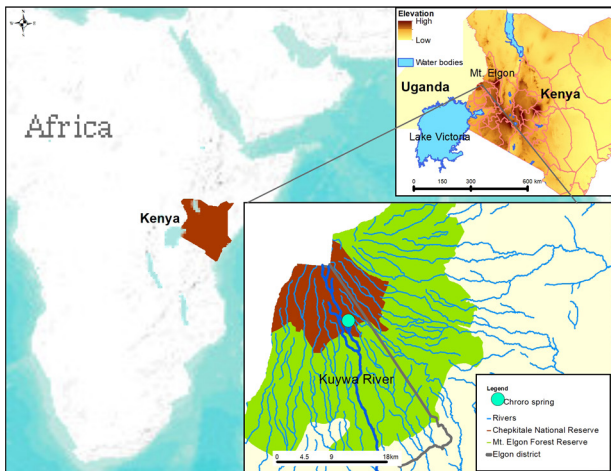
Background

Mount Elgon – the second highest mountain in Kenya – is a massive, single volcanic mountain between Uganda and Kenya, spreading over 772,300 hectares and rising to 3,070 metres. Mt. Elgon is one of five major water towers in Kenya, and its forests are a key watershed for the River Nzoia (which drains into Lake Victoria) and River Turkwel (which drains into Lake Turkana).

In 2003, the watershed forests of Mt. Elgon were declared by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve, because of their globally significant biodiversity and their importance as a water tower. The natural ecosystems of Mt. Elgon are conserved as a montane forest reserve (in the high hills, managed by the Kenya Forest Service), a national park (Mt. Elgon National Park, managed by the Kenya Wildlife

Service) and the Chepkitale Nature Reserve (managed by Bungoma County Government). The latter lies in the upper watershed of the Kuywa and Sosio rivers that feed into the Nzoia River.

Within the Chepkitale Nature Reserve live the Ogiek Indigenous Peoples. The Ogiek are mainly hunter-gatherers, depending entirely on the nearby forest and grasslands for natural resources, including water, with a few livestock only for household use. The Ogiek use very strong, traditional management and governance mechanisms to conserve their natural resources, and hence, have not damaged their surrounding environment. However, the location is remote and the community is marginalised, lacking basic amenities – such as a reliable water supply and access roads.



Climate change is affecting the reserve as the normal, clear and reliable pattern of wet and dry seasons is changing to an increased frequency and intensity of rainfall, as well as changes in the onset and cessation of the wet season. Coupled with poor land use on the slopes of Mt. Elgon, these climatic changes are resulting in floods, frequent landslides, and, in contrast, increasing temperatures and an increased incidence and intensity of droughts.

Scaling-up Mountain Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Kenya

The Scaling-up Mountain EbA project in Kenya was sited in the Chepkitala Nature Reserve and participating in it were the Ogiek Indigenous Peoples, in the Bungoma County. The project focused on improving water security to the community by identifying and protecting springs in the watershed. The IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) implemented the project in close collaboration with the Bungoma County government; the Water Resources Authority (WRA) Lake Victoria North Catchment Area; the Kenya Wildlife Service; and the NGO - Chepkitala Indigenous People Development Project (CIDP).

Local-level EbA measures

Local level measures implemented in the Chepkitala Nature Reserve followed four steps:

1. A rapid participatory assessment for climate change vulnerability in the Chepkitala Nature Reserve, Mt. Elgon

- This assessment was carried out with the Ogiek community that provided short- and long-term recommendations for implementing EbA actions in the reserve. The short-term measures included a) the protecting and stabilisation of springs which are close to the villages to improve water security and b) spatial planning to support the future

2. Participatory 3-Dimensional Modelling (P3DM) spatial mapping

- Community elders, civil society members and representatives from the 32 clans that form the Chepkitala Ogiek community have spatially mapped their ancestral territory using participatory 3D modelling, which combines local spatial and natural resource knowledge, geographic information systems (GIS) and physical modelling.
- This action follows the Whakatane Mechanism¹, which is an IUCN initiative that ‘supports the implementation of a new paradigm of conservation, that concentrates on circumstances where indigenous peoples are associated directly



¹ IUCN, 2016

with protected areas because of their land and resource rights, access and use. This mechanism supports the respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their free prior and informed consent in protected areas policy and practice, as required by IUCN resolutions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)'.

- The Ogiek indigenous people have lived in the Chepkitale area on their ancestral land long before the area was declared a nature reserve in 2000. With the gazetting of the reserve, the Ogiek were evicted from the area. They returned to the reserve and sued the government in a long court battle.
- This mapping was valuable not only for effective management of natural resources in the area, but also served as proof of how the Ogiek have, for generations, co-existed with their environment and used their natural resources sustainably.
- After two decades in litigation, in September 2022, the Ogiek won their court battle, and the reserve reverts to its original status of a Community Trust Land.
- Here, the project played the role of the peacekeeper, communicating with the local government administration and supporting the community to build trust between them.
- During the participatory vulnerability assessment, mapping and spatial planning community meetings and stakeholders consultations, about 115 people were reached with messages about EbA.

3. *Carrying out a feasibility to assess the viability of springs*

- A participatory feasibility study was conducted in the Chepkitale area to assess the viability of six springs as possible sites for green-grey construction of spring protection works.
- Leading this study was an engineer from the Water Resources Authority, who found two spring sources that were viable (Etepei Spring and Kimelli Spring), but when the project commenced work after the hiatus, these had dried up. Therefore, the project chose the perennial Chororo spring (that has water even during droughts) to provide a continued water supply to the Laboot village of about 500 people.

4. *Implementing the water structure for the Chororo spring*

- An intake point, water storage tank and two cattle and wildlife drinking troughs have been constructed under the guidance of the engineer from the Water Resources Authority and with support from the four community members. Also



constructed was the distribution line that connects these three points (intake, water storage tank and cattle). The problem addressed is the lack of water which affects the community as well as biodiversity.

- The provision of continuous water supply to the Laboot village will increase water security for about 500 community members, as well as their livestock and the wildlife of the area.

Integration of EbA into local government

The spatial planning and mapping process for Chepkitale National Reserve will provide an effective framework for achieving conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in Chepkitale National Reserve in

collaboration with the Bungoma County Government.

Scaling-up EbA and integration at the National Level

The EbA project on Mt. Elgon has pioneered the implementation of some actions of the Kenya National Wildlife Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2022-2032) that specifically mentions the use of EbA, as one of the means for achieving its objectives.

Integration of EbA into other projects

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, in collaboration with the IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), with funding from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation are supporting the implementation of BRIDGE (Building River Dialogue and Governance), a global initiative in Sio-Malaba-Malakisi (SMM) sub-basin of the Nile (downstream of the Chepkitale Nature Reserve). This project has been facilitating the implementation of the transboundary water governance, management and development of the SMM sub-basin, which includes actors from a range of ministries and authorities. Actions from the Scaling-up Mountain EbA Project provide synergies to the BRIDGE project.

Conclusions

Though the project in Kenya was hampered by externalities beyond its control, the significant benefit that has ensued is the active participation of the Ogiek community in project activities, and the considerable and remarkable impact of this participation. Modern technology – the process of 3D mapping and spatial planning – used by the Ogiek community through the project served as a tool that showed clearly the Ogiek community's strong, traditional conservation of their surroundings, in their landmark case against the Government of Kenya, to win back their ancestral lands.

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