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Impact of renewable energy projects on Indigenous communities in Kenya



By IWGIA

February 5, 2020.- The transition from the use of traditional energy sources to renewable energy solutions is rapidly becoming a necessity if humanity is to address the climate emergency we face. However, this pursuit cannot happen at the expense of human rights, including the loss of land, livelihoods and rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Kenya's ambitious plan to transition to renewable energy, while admirable, has also led to criticism for its neglect of respecting the Indigenous Peoples who live on the land that is being used for large-scale wind and geothermal projects. In one case, presented in IWGIA's latest report on renewable energy projects in Kenya, Indigenous Peoples were forced to move away from their land – land they consider holy.

Michael Ole Tiampati, National Coordinator of the Pastoralist Development Network of Kenya (PDNK), explained to IWGIA that there have been attempts by the company, politicians and private individuals to coerce and threaten Indigenous Peoples to leave and that the situation of those who have been relocated is dire.

In another case, a project generated an inflow of “outsiders” working during the construction phase in Indigenous communities, which has led to severe issues of waste-management, substance abuse, prostitution and domestic violence.

Kenya as an energy leader

Through its ambitious national development plan – Kenya Vision 2030 – Kenya sets out to be a regional leader in sustainable industrialisation, including an aim to transition to 100% renewable energy by this year, 2020. The energy sector is experiencing high demand and also a shift from former dominant state actors towards a rapidly growing private sector which is now accounting for 43% of Kenya's energy generation, including both projects examined in this report.

In general, Indigenous Peoples support the transition to green energy as this is an important element of combatting climate change, which in many cases particularly affects the areas where Indigenous Peoples live. However, Indigenous Peoples demand that their fundamental collective human rights must be respected when such large-scale projects are undertaken, as currently their lands are often seen by the state and private corporations as virgin land up for grabs to develop and exploit.

Impacts of energy projects



IWGIA's latest human rights report examines the socio-cultural impacts two particular projects – the Lake Turkana Wind Power project and Olkaria Geothermal Power plants – are having in several Indigenous communities.

Relocation has happened under both projects. For the wind project, Indigenous Peoples were moved for the purposes of constructing a road to the project area and then an attempt was made to rebuild the village with some improved amenities. However, the village expanded exponentially, after, among other factors, an influx of people looking for work flooded the area, which brought about significant problems.

The geothermal project implemented a relocation programme of four Maasai villages that failed to take essential cultural aspects into account.

In the geothermal project, health and environmental issues due to toxic gases released in the extraction of geothermal power have also been documented, and surrounding communities have experienced an increase in skin diseases, stillbirths in cattle and premature delivery.

Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous Peoples

The two renewable energy projects examined in this report have employed questionable practices in their respect for the territorial rights of Indigenous residents.

Controversies over forced relocations and neglecting the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples has, in one of the case studies, led to an ongoing court case. Such processes often place a disproportionate burden on local communities as their resources to access information and hire legal representation is often limited in comparison to the resources available to the private companies or government authorities being litigated.

The report found that neglect of following corresponding human rights regulations has been possible because involved stakeholders do not acknowledge local communities as Indigenous, against their own self-identification and their acknowledgement by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR). The failure to recognise affected people as Indigenous means that international human rights instruments protecting Indigenous Peoples and their territories are not applied.

This report, itself a follow-up to IWGIA's 2015 human rights report assessing the impact of the same projects on Indigenous communities, brings urgent attention to the fact that the Kenyan state and renewable energy corporations must take responsibility for respecting the rights, as enshrined in numerous international measures, of Indigenous Peoples when planning and executing such projects. This also implies that Indigenous Peoples must be included in project designs, from development to construction, inter-generational benefit-sharing programmes must be implemented and communities must have access to the energy generated.

For more, read the report here: [The Impact of Renewable Energy Projects on Indigenous Communities in Kenya: The cases of the Lake Turkana Wind Power project and the Olkaria Geothermal Power plants](#) [1]

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