

Kenya : Geothermal threats upon Maasai ancestor's land in the Rift valley



Manyatta-Oloorkarian Maasai Cultural Center

The Maasai Community living within the area known as Oloorkarian (Rift Valley, 100 km north Nairobi) is staying there from times immemorial :

During the colonial times the whites found us there and after Kenya attaining its independence they left us right there. The name 'Oloorkarian' is a Maasai name meaning 'red soil'

Although they have been settled as « Group-Ranches » by the Independence government like any other Maasai community, that territory was sold behind their knowledge to a farmer cie (Ngati farmers Ltd) and it is only through a long legal tussle that they recovered their ancestor's land. During the 70's and 80's they had to face some new threats by the Kenya Wildlife Service for Hell's Gate Park extension : villages set on fire, animals killed. It is important to understand that most of the National Parks were former Maasai territories, and nowadays the Maasai animals have no right to step in those parks, and if they do the Maasai have to pay a penalty or even sometimes shepherds are set in prison. To give a reply to that new danger, they register in 1994 a traditional village as « **Oloorkarian Maasai Cultural Center** », thinking that a legal recognition of a traditional village will be a boundary stone and will secure a Maasai border.

Another neighbour of the community is **Kengen**, the National company for electricity. It was discovered that this volcanic area is among the richest one in the world for geothermal resources. Today there are two power stations in activity next to the community. Those drillings are done 2 or 3 kms deep. Many new drillings are done all around the Maasai villages by some foreign companies (Chinese) and the project extension for the building of III and IV power station are already planned and can be seen on Kengen and World Bank websites. Those new power stations will be set on the community territory including the manyatta Cultural Center and many families will have to leave the place

This project is financed by the World Bank and also AFD among many other partners. Several meetings have been done with community leaders, but the Maasai have requested the help of an advocate to defend their rights..

The surface of the concerned territory is 4200 acres. For the moment the relocation proposal is a parcel of 1700 acres that Kengen will acquire from the neighbouring farmers, which seem not sufficient for the pastoralist activities and necessities. Maasai survival is also threaten by several years of droughts and their acces to main point of water for animal drinking (Naivasha lake)

is fenced by some flowers industrial productions (from England, Netherlands, India... 40% of the St Valentin rose-selling in France).

If geothermal electricity is an energy that doesn't produce CO₂ – environmentally clean – and a good promise of development for Kenya, this development can hardly be set upon the increasing poverty of the people who has been the guardian of that land since centuries. Maasai community is requesting to be relocated in equal conditions of territory both in dimension and quality of land to proceed in good conditions to their pastoralist activities. It has been scientifically given proof that the richness and diversity of the wild life in those Kenyan areas is the direct consequence of centuries of cohabitation between the Maasai domestic animals and the wild animals as a complementarity. **The nature guardians, surrounded in any corners, are nowadays surviving within parcels less than a handkerchief and dispossed of their best greener pastures.**

We should note that Kenya has not signed the Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (Geneva 2007), but the World Bank has approved a policy (OD 4.20) about indigenous people that should be set operating for the Maasai community **fair relocation.**



2007 drought in Oloorkarian