

Supporting the wisdom of age for effective community forest management

October 2008

The Lembus Forests are one of Kenya's few remaining native forests. They hold a great diversity of plant and animal species, and are essential for maintaining clean water for the Rift Valley and Western Kenya. They have been dramatically degraded, however, mainly by discretionary concessions handed down at the expense of indigenous rights and sound forest management.

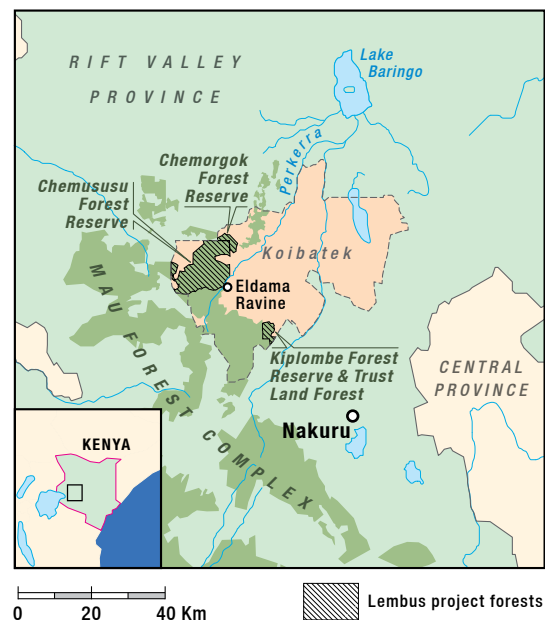
Kenya's Forest Act of 2005 called for participatory forest management to protect local livelihoods dependent on grazing, cultivation and non-timber forest products. In response, IUCN partnered with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and the County Council of Koibatek to launch the Lembus Forests Integrated Conservation and Development Project (LFICDP). This aims to strengthen community management of the Lembus Forests to ensure they meet local ecological, social and economic needs.

Strengthening forest management means listening to and supporting community members. A key local group involved in LFICDP is the Lembus Council of Elders (LCE). Centuries of sound conservation knowledge are embedded in the minds of elders aged 40–80 years.

"Long, long time ago, when we were young boys and warriors, our fathers and forefathers taught us about our culture, the land, the trees and all animals in the forest. When the white man (Mzungu) arrived, he understood how much we valued the forests and everything in it, but he didn't listen to us," says Mzee Philip Sura, a



Lembus Forests and local agriculture benefit from a common understanding
Photo © Nicholas Ngece



Map of the Lembus Forests project area. Map © IUCN

Council member lamenting the state of the Lembus Forests today. *"It is now time to directly pass all our undiluted culture and values to the young generation, because the environment is crying out for us to teach our children about the intimate relationship between the Lembus forests and their survival!"*

And so LFICDP is establishing a cultural centre for the LCE to teach the importance of participatory forest management to their communities. It is hoped that this centre will help increase local incomes as the Lembus Forests become one of Kenya's main eco-tourism sites, owing to their proximity to other popular tourist destinations such as Lake Nakuru, Mount Elgon and the Masai Mara.

"The Lembus Forests project yeam came, recognized us [and] listened to us.... We are committed to this project and are sure it will be useful to the local community."

For more information, please contact: forests@iucn.org