

# Coping Strategies Employed by Indigenous Communities After Resettlement: A Case of the Ogiek Community of Mau East, Kenya

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## Abstract

Indigenous people pursue traditional livelihood strategies and related forms of employment and occupation as part of their right to exist, have their cultures and ways of life. Natural resources are significant for the survival of any community especially the indigenous and those living in marginal areas. The Ogiek are one of Kenya's indigenous communities who traditionally depended on forests for their livelihoods. Before the initiation of land resettlement the Ogiek were involved in the local and regional trading networks, bartering honey and meat from wild animals. Honey was eaten, stored for future use, brewed into beer and traded. It is said to have been the main product for barter trade. In the 1990s' Kenyan government initiated land resettlement of Ogiek households living in of Mau East, the land was demarcated and allocated to individuals in order to enable them live in a modern way and practice new methods of agriculture and trade. The study therefore, sought to evaluate coping strategies employed by Ogiek households after resettlement Through a cross-sectional survey, primary data was collected using sets of structured and semi-structured questionnaires and focused group discussions while secondary data was obtained from documented materials.. To select respondents to be interviewed, snowball sampling was used to pick the household heads from the five locations in Mau East to give 150 respondents. The unit of analysis was household heads from the five locations in Mau East. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Subsequently, descriptive statistics was used to describe the results, and Chi-square performed to explore the relative importance of a number of variables in evaluating coping strategies employed by Ogiek households after resettlement. The results indicated that, Ogiek households practiced farming and herding, business, bee keeping, formal and informal employment, and sale of charcoal and timbers as coping strategies after resettlement. It was concluded that, land resettlement transformed the Ogiek's lifestyle of hunting and gathering to that of agriculture and entrepreneurship. It is recommended that creation of awareness of new methods of farming, technological improvements and, marketing of farm produces is needed. Further, it is anticipated that the findings of the study will add to the knowledge of policy makers on improving the socio-economic livelihoods of the Ogiek households in general.

**Keywords:** Coping Strategies, Land Resettlement, Livelihoods, Ogiek

## 1. Introduction

The context of coping strategies, both physical strategies such as the ability to achieve positive livelihoods, and emotional coping focusing on the capacity of the Ogiek households to attain a certain level of emotional stability to be able to function normally in the day-to-day lives. As the existing literature shows, many marginalized people are victims of hardship and various types of deprivation caused by economic crisis, policy changes, and conflict at all levels (Moser, 1996). In response to these, many strive to mitigate the negative repercussions. Their efforts may involve entering the formal and informal employment sectors, working for long hours, engaging children in income generating work, diversifying survival strategies, minimizing household expenditure by cutting on total spending and changing dietary habits (Moser, 1996). The Ogiek households in this study have diversified ways of living through farming and herding, business, sale of charcoal and timber and other lease out land to other communities as a source of income. Despite the difficulties encountered in the new field of sedentary life, a majority of the household heads have adopted the new lifestyle. Therefore, the study attempted to evaluate the number of coping strategies employed by the Ogiek households after resettlement.

Other strategies employed by the Ogiek households are derived from personal resources. This include high activity level, the ability to think rationally, the ability to focus, optimism and a desire to improve sources of their livelihoods through the formation of self help groups for both men and women. These groups enable them to share their skills on various issues for instance bee keeping using modern technologies, farming and herding among others. A study carried out in Harare by Rakodi (1991) on households traders revealed that there was a strong determination on the part of traders to persevere and continue in spite of all hardships they face. This was similar to the Ogiek households who faced a number of challenges in adapting the new lifestyle of farming and herding. The Ogiek households did not exhibit the sense of hopelessness that is often seen in people who are economically disadvantaged, instead social resources consisting of supportive family relationships and social groups assisted them (Smith, 1992). The findings of the present study confirm that Ogiek households drew support from one another in order to cope with the new lifestyle of farming and herding.

The Ogiek households have created mutual aid networks for instance self-help groups, men and women groups, church organizations, and Non-Governmental Organizations among others which they care for and use to sustain each other in times of stress. They undertook a number of economic activities, which enabled the Ogiek households to adapt the new lifestyle of farming and herding. These networks were strong survival strategies for the Ogiek households. The households in various works got support from family members and friends due to the fact that they were closely knit together through age-sets and lineage. This unconditional support motivated them to move on in spite of their difficulties. The findings of the current study indicated that, the Ogiek households employed various coping strategies for survival after resettlement and that most of the households have adopted various methods of farming and herding and have appreciated the resettlement exercise.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in five locations of Mau East, Njoro District namely; Teret, Nessuit, Ndoshwa, Sigotik and Kiptunga. These are the locations where the majority of the Ogiek resided after resettlement. The area was first settled by the Maasai speaking people before the arrival of British settlers to the Kenya highland. The location and topography of a district has a bearing on its socio-economic development. The main economic activities are farming of agricultural crops and processing of vegetables and milk.

The design for the study was an ex post facto (“Before/After”) research design. This was because the study dealt with an already implemented treatment. According to Kathuri and Pals (1993) an ex post facto is one in which the researcher, rather than creating the treatment, examines the effects of naturalistically occurring treatment that had occurred. In this case the phenomenon was coping strategies employed by Ogiek households after resettlement. The type of ex post facto research that was used was a qualitative study and emphasis was placed on ensuring that elicited in-depth responses about the research problem were addressed. Collection of primary data undertook interview schedule and observation. . The purpose was to generate in-depth data which is not possible to get using a questionnaire. Purposive and snowball sampling was used in the study. Purposive sampling is applied to get the location in which the units of observation have the required characteristics. Snowball sampling was used to obtain the sample size in each location. . The sample size for the current study was 150 households in Mau East. The unit of analysis in the study was household heads from the five locations in Mau East. Data obtained from the field was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative data was presented in the form of percentages, frequency distribution tables, pie charts and bar graphs. The chi-square was used to test for independence and measure of association between two variables in examining the coping strategies employed by Ogiek households after resettlement.

## 3. Results

### Coping Mechanisms employed by the Ogiek after Resettlement

Table 1 below presents the results of a number of coping strategies the Ogiek households employed after the resettlement of 1990s, for instance, farming and herding, business, formal employment, sale of charcoal and timber, and bee keeping, among others

**Table 1: Households Coping Strategies**

Strategy	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Farming & Herding	Yes	57	38.0	150
	No	93	62.0	
Bee keeping	Yes	117	78.0	150
	No	33	22.0	
Sale of charcoal	Yes	84	56.0	150
	No	66	44.0	
Formal employment	Yes	1	0.7	150
	No	149	99.7	
Business	Yes	1	0.7	150
	No	149	99.3	
Sale of timber	Yes	3	2.0	150
	No	147	98.0	

Source: Field Data (2010)

Table 1, present results of households who practiced farming and herding as a coping strategy (38%). Data collected pointed out that 78% of the household heads practiced bee keeping as a coping strategy while

22% practiced other strategies. The results of the findings showed that majority of the household heads sold charcoal as a coping mechanism (56%) and 44% had other forms of surviving. Business was a new venture and was practiced by a few household heads; this was 2% of the total distribution examined and 0.7% were employed by the government as teachers and forest guards. Sale of timber was carried out by 2% of the total respondents interviewed and the rest concentrated on farming and other activities. The findings of the present study further indicated that majority of the household heads never had any formal education; hence they could not qualify for kind of formal employment, except for a few who had attained a certain level of education.

**Table 2: Areas of Residence before Resettlement**

	Frequency	Percentage
Inside the forest	136	90.6
Squatters in peoples farm	7	4.7
With other communities	7	4.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data (2010)

Table 2, It was observed that 90.6% Of the households lived inside the forest, 4.7% were squatters in peoples' farms and 4.7% were living other communities, for instance the Kikuyus, Maasai and the Kipsigis. The findings of the present study revealed that three quarters of the household heads lived in the forest where they had a system of managing the forest through their lineage system. Land resettlement exposed this once conservative community, who had lived in the forest since time immemorial, to the outside world

**Table 3: Household heads who Adapted the New Life Style**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	65	43.3
No	85	56.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data (2010)

The findings in table 3 shows that, 43.3% of the household head adopted the new lifestyle after resettlement and 56.7% were not able to adapt immediately, but took some time to adjust to the new lifestyle of farming and herding. Household heads who adopted the new lifestyle were those who were ready to diversify there sources of livelihood after they attended various trainings on what they were going to expect after the resettlement exercise. They learned new methods of farming and have considered it a better form of land use than hunting and gathering because they are assured of sufficient food when they farm. Unlike before when they were not sure of an animal when they went hunting. This was confirmed in an interview conducted in 23th April, 2010, where Mr Sang stated that;

“The new lifestyle of farming and herding is better than hunting since we used to go hunting for days, and at times we could come back home without any meat because the wild animal we wanted to kill disappeared in the forest, hence forcing the members household to depend on wild fruits and honey, or at times they could sleep hungry. Unlike farming and herding where we are assured of milk and food through the year except for those who are lazy who are not able to till their land” (Sang, 2010).

Various households have formed groups tilling a common group farm where they planted maize and vegetables and they help each other till their own land. They also practice bee keeping using modern technologies, they kept livestock and prepare and maintain tree nurseries. Further findings revealed that the household heads that were not able to adopt the new life style were those who were proud and rigid against any change. They still held strongly to their traditions and cultures since they believed they are the only community in Kenya that follow God's constitution. In an interview with a community elder, Mr Sitienei, he noted that,

“We have lived in the forest and maintain it with our inborn knowledge of conservation the way God made it and wants it to continue to be” (Sitienei, 2010).

From these words of the community elder, one can conclude that some household heads preferred their old ways of living in groups and clans owning the land collectively while hunting and gathering, over agriculture, which they consider to be so involving. These household heads also believed that Mau Complex was their ancestral land and subdividing it into five acres parcel will change community structure and might lead to erosion of their culture and allocation of land to non Ogieks. Others thought that they would require time to learn new methods of farming considering the fact that the community had no farming culture since time immemorial, as a result they continue to live as though they were still in the forest.

**Table 4: Household head's Level of Education who Adapted New Lifestyle**

		Adapted after Resettlement		Total
		Yes	No	
Highest level of Education	Not gone to school	23	22	45
	Primary	30	39	69
	High school	10	18	28
	Diploma	3	3	6
	First Degree	0	1	1
	Postgraduate Degree	0	1	1
Total		66	84	150

Source: Field Data (2010) df=5 p<0.05 V=0.15 p=(0.643)

Table 4 shows the relationship between household heads' level of education and adoption of the new lifestyle. The findings of the current study shows that those who had attained primary education were the majority (30) were the largest group to adopt the new lifestyle, while 39 respondents with the same level of education did not adapt immediately. There were 10 household heads with secondary level education who adapted the new lifestyle and 18 who did not. Of those with a diploma, three adapted and three were not able to adapt. The Chi-square test for the two variables was less than 0.05 hence; one can conclude that the two variables are not independent. One can conclude that there is no relationship between household head's level of education and adoption of the new lifestyle. Which means one could adapt any lifestyle despite their levels of education.

**Table 5: Households' Heads who still practice Hunting and Gathering**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	49	32.7
No	101	67.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data (2010)

In table 5, it was observed that 32.7% still practice hunting and gathering while 67.3% did not. This shows that the new lifestyle was highly appreciated by the majority of the household in Mau East and the number of household heads who still practiced hunting and gathering has reduced after clearance of forest and subdivision of land. These probably were people who did not adapt the new lifestyle and who as a result continue to practice their old ways of living.

**Table 6: Household heads according to their Satisfaction with Land Allocation**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	17	11.3
No	133	88.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data (2010)

According to table 6, about 11.3% of the household heads were satisfied with the allocation of land and 88.7% were not satisfied with the way land was allocated. The findings revealed that majority were dissatisfied because those who deserved to be allocated land were not able to get any parcel of land, hence they continued to live as squatters in the land where they were supposed to have been resettled. Further findings disclosed that some household had encountered a number of challenges in the new lifestyle, for instance, in an interview with one of the area chief, Mr Rotich, he stated that;

“We can derive our economic livelihood from farming and herding but we lacked farming knowledge or training, we lack title deeds to land, finances to purchase farm inputs and markets for farm produce” (Rotich, 2010).

These challenges have hindered some households from progress hence they ended up renting land allocated to them to other people to use. The findings of the current study further revealed that 98% of the household heads were consulted before they were resettled and 34.7% were not. The result confirmed that the Government was concerned about the community, knowing that they were hunters and gatherers who knew nothing about farming. The study established that 43.3% of the household head were trained before they were resettled and 56.7% were not trained on what they were going to expect after resettlement hence they had to learn from their neighbors.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ogiek people have lived in the forest since time immemorial, being a hunter and gatherer community depending on the forest for subsistence and shelter. They were conservative and had no farming and herding culture hence they underwent some changes from their traditional life to farming and herding. They lived

together and owned land communally. Their lifestyle was entirely transformed during the resettlement of the 1990s when part of the forest was demarcated into five acre parcels and allocated to individuals. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that, it was with the establishment of the settlement scheme that the Ogiek households settled to sedentary economy more or less like the neighboring ethnic groups. They were restricted to their own plots and were expected to adopt the new lifestyle of farming, herding, business, keeping of beehives among others. They have diversified new sources of income and have employed coping strategies. The new land tenure system had effects on both social and economic livelihoods of the Ogiek household. From the findings, it is recommended that more research needs to explore cultural values and beliefs of the community since the current study found it to be a hindrance to change among the households and further analysis on policy formulations which will improve farm profitability such as marketing of farm produce, construction of road networks, improved technologies, extension services and availability credit facilities.

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