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Pre-Colonial Forest Conservation Mechanisms: Traditional Practices and Indigenous Management in Embobut Forest

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Abstract:
This research investigates the pre-colonial forest conservation mechanisms and indigenous management practices in Embobut Forest, with a specific focus on the traditional strategies employed by the Sengwer community. The study situates its inquiry within the broader scholarly context of forest conservation, which has garnered increased attention due to the significant global forest cover loss. The drivers of deforestation, including mining, infrastructure development, ranching, and agriculture, have led to substantial biodiversity reductions, with varying impacts across continents. In Kenya, the Sengwer's pre-colonial conservation practices, characterized by sacred groves and community-based regulatory systems, were disrupted by colonial policies when Embobut Forest was designated as a protected area. This top-down conservation approach marginalized the Sengwer and resulted in enduring conflicts. Subsequent post-independence policies, including the Forest Act of 2005, sought to implement community-based management but have been critiqued for their failure to address historical grievances and effectively involve local stakeholders. This study aims to assess the relevance of pre-colonial conservation practices in informing contemporary forest management strategies, highlighting the necessity of integrating traditional knowledge into modern conservation frameworks to enhance both ecological sustainability and community relations.

Key Words: Pre-Colonial Conservation; Indigenous Management; Forest Sustainability

I. Background of the Study.

Forest conservation has garnered substantial scholarly attention over the past four decades, primarily due to the pressing issue of forest cover loss and its ecological repercussions. The global shift of land use for diverse purposes has precipitated the loss of approximately 420 million hectares of forest over the past thirty years (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2020). This widespread deforestation, driven by activities such as mining, infrastructure development, ranching, and agriculture, has led to a marked decline in biodiversity (Kan et al., 2023). The rate of forest cover loss exhibits regional variations, with Latin America, Asia, and Africa experiencing the most pronounced reductions, whereas Europe, Russia, and North America have reported relatively slower rates (Kan et al., 2023). These variations underscore the complex socio-political dynamics influencing forest conservation efforts.

In Kenya, the Embobut Forest has a rich history of traditional conservation practices employed by the Sengwer community. Before colonial intervention, the Sengwer implemented indigenous management techniques, including the establishment of sacred groves and community-based regulatory mechanisms, which played a crucial role in maintaining the ecological integrity of the forest and meeting the subsistence needs of the community (Vidal, 2014). However, the British colonial administration's decision to designate Embobut Forest as a protected area in 1954 disrupted these traditional practices. The imposition of a top-down conservation approach not only marginalized the Sengwer community from decision-making processes but also led to significant conflicts and resistance (Vidal, 2014).

Following Kenya's independence, the legacy of colonial conservation policies has continued to affect forest management. Various post-independence policies, including the Shamba System and Nyayo Tea Zones, have frequently failed to align conservation objectives with the needs and rights of local communities, often exacerbating tensions (Mwangi, 2004). The enactment of the Forest Act of 2005 marked a significant shift towards community-based management, yet its implementation has faced criticism for inadequately addressing historical grievances and for insufficiently involving local communities (Kimathi, 2020). This research aims to investigate the pre-colonial forest conservation mechanisms and indigenous management practices in Embobut Forest. By examining these traditional methods, the study seeks to provide insights that could inform contemporary conservation strategies, fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to forest resource management.

1.2 Objective

To analyse and document the traditional forest conservation mechanisms employed by indigenous communities in the Embobut Forest during the pre-colonial era, focusing on their practices, beliefs, and management strategies that contributed to the preservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

1.3 Justification

The study of pre-colonial forest conservation mechanisms in Embobut Forest is essential for several reasons. Indigenous communities in this region developed sophisticated methods for managing forest resources that have often been overlooked in contemporary conservation efforts. By documenting these traditional practices, the study preserves valuable ecological knowledge and offers insights into sustainable management techniques that were effective long before modern conservation strategies emerged. This research not only highlights the cultural and historical connections between Indigenous peoples and their environment but also provides lessons that can be integrated into current conservation practices. Understanding how these historical practices contributed to biodiversity preservation can guide the development of more effective and culturally sensitive environmental management policies, ensuring the long-term sustainability of critical ecosystems like the Embobut Forest.

2.1 Discussion

It explores the strategies used by both pre-colonial and colonial administrations to manage and preserve the forest and examines the consequences these strategies had on local communities. The analysis reveals that the colonial decision to formalize the conservation of the forest caused significant disruptions to the lives of the indigenous forestdwellers. Furthermore, this approach continued into the post-independence period, creating ongoing tensions between forest authorities and local communities.

2.2 Pre-Colonial Forest Conservation in Embobut Forest Bloc up to 1895

The Marakwet people, who inhabit the Kerio Valley and the Cherangani Hills, were organized into five distinct geographical groups that formed associations based on their shared residence in these areas (Kipkorir&Welbourn, 1973). These groups include the *Endoow*, *Markweta*, and *Almoo*situated in the valley from north to south, and the *Borokot*and *Cherang'any* (also known as Sengwer or Kimaala) located in the hills. Before Kenya's designation as a British protectorate in 1895, a system of customary rights and regulations managed the utilization of forest resources, similar to other resources. Typically, a council of elders was tasked with upholding these norms across various societies. The Marakwet were no different; their council was responsible for enforcing societal norms both within clans and across territories.

The Marakwet Council of Elders is a traditional governing body among the Marakwet people, an ethnic group in Kenya. It comprises respected senior members of the community. The council plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural heritage, resolving conflicts, and making decisions on social and communal matters. Its responsibilities include overseeing rituals, managing land issues, and providing guidance on moral and ethical standards. The council's authority is rooted in indigenous customs and is recognized as an integral part of Marakwet society (Kipkorir&Welbourn, 1973). Those at the clan level oversaw issues from a clan's perspective while those at the territorial level handled more serious issues. They administered norms on the conservation of the forest through sanctions and fines aimed at

ensuring the sustainable use of communal trees and forest resources.

The false belief that no woods existed in Africa before European imperialism and colonialism has persisted. The truth is, that local communities used traditional resource management institutions to manage their forests in a non-capitalistic manner (Kinyanjui*et al.*, 2014). This means that the motivation behind forest conservation was not profiteering but rather ensuring sustainability for future generations. Negotiation and kinship were the cornerstones of forest management. Then, clan-tribal warfare was common. How Africans used wood before the imperial impetus lends credence to the idea that they had forest conservation mechanisms previously. One method by ancient systems improved conservation, according to Njora and Yilmaz (2022), was to make sure those trees and other plants were not chopped down carelessly. This was achieved by ensuring that only certain persons could undertake the task of cutting down trees. Others were assigned the role of sanctioning requests to cut down trees, thus controlling the wanton felling of forests.

Elgeyo Marakwet and the Marakwet people, in particular, had holy groves – reserved areas of woodland where the elders would perform religious rituals. Among these rituals were the dedication of burial places for the elderly, the rite of passage of circumcision, and the sacrifice of animals to appease the gods of rain, plenty, and thankfulness. Consumptive activities, such as gathering firewood or grazing, were not allowed in these areas. As severe antisocial conduct, any such behaviour was punished with fines, social exclusion, and the stigma of sacrilege. Many disasters, including droughts and plagues, were said to have been caused by illegal usage (Kotibei D, OI, 2023).

Traditional practices dictated the use of vast swaths of forest outside the severely dispersed holy groves. Those who chopped down living trees or endangered species were punished by the Marakwet's system of elders. Some parts of the woods were set aside for grazing during the dry season, and some trees were cut down for use in roofing, fencing, or building (Sirma J, OI, 2023). Traditional ecological regulations enforced by elders and a suitable taboo system allowed for the preservation of these trees. According to Cherop, Okuro, and Odhiambo (2013), traditional African ideas have played a significant role in ecological conservation, although these views have been generally disregarded by Eurocentric perspectives.

Before colonization, the rules, traditions, and religious practices of the Marakwet people were strictly enforced by the council of elders and the elders of the clan, who received divine approval from Asiis and Illat (Mamati, 2018). The responsibility of the clan elders in preventing the overexploitation of the community's natural resources was crucial. As Mbote (2012) so eloquently explains, clans determined the pattern of forest usage. As an example, cultural customs and the permission to graze livestock were decided by clans based on their closeness to the forest. There were laws in place to govern the traditional usage and appropriation of forests. Opanga (2008) also notes that clan leaders had complete control over the resources of the clan and would resort to violence to enforce these traditional rules.

The elders of Marakwet were able to preserve the forest due to customary rules and traditions, according to an oral informant (Simbolei J, OI, 2023). For example, it was forbidden for youngsters to bring a *panga* (machete) into the woods. The goal was to deter people from recklessly cutting down the forest. Therefore, the precolonial Marakwet people had elaborate systems to protect their environment. Such traditional systems of forest management have been discussed by Mwangi (1998). Mwangi notes that communities in Uganda's Kachung forest, for example, have complex rituals and customs that limit access to the forest and date back millennia.

Although the old Marakwet society's forest ordinances were well-known and fostered a feeling of clan ownership, they were not strictly enforced due to their association with a taboo that many people dreaded. Among the informal systemic taboos used in forest conservation, as revealed during a focus group discussion (FGD) at the Kapchelakacenter in Marakwet, was the prohibition of cutting down Lipkwop trees, which are considered holy. The use of the sacred tree as fuel was also forbidden in Lipkwop. Spirits would be prompted to send fire to destroy the offender's residence if they were to violate this rule. The rule ensured the proper preservation of particular trees for both present and future generations. Forests were also protected as both ritual and cultural sites. Land within the forest was held communally and each person had rights of access based on his needs. Such rights were guaranteed by a political

authority that ensured such access was enjoyed equitably.

Before the colonial era, the Marakwet lived predominantly as hunters and gatherers. However, following their contacts with the Arabs and the Maasai, some adopted small-scale agriculture (shifting cultivation) and/or livestock rearing, although hunting remained their main source of livelihood until the 1920s. The Marakwet employed collective as well as individual hunting techniques. During the *Sakas* (collective hunting) a group of people would try to circle large animals such as elephants and buffalos on the plains and spear or arrow them down. Indiscriminate hunting of wild game was prohibited through customary laws.

Among the Marakwet, gathering fruits and other non-timber-forest products is mostly done by women, while honey collection from beehives as well as from natural places, such as holes in trees, is traditionally a male activity. Most of the ancestral land of the Marakwet is demarcated as gazetted forests. This in itself prohibits community settlements or engagement in agriculture within forest land. KEFRI (2017) reports that around only 20% of the Marakwet live in Embobut and areas adjoining the Kipkunur bloc. These people have legal access to land, but their plots are, on average, only 2.5 acres per household, which is considered very small. However, a majority of the members of the Marakwet community in the areas are landless. Miruka*et al.* (2012) also note that significant parts of the ancestral lands of the Marakwet were demarcated as gazetted forests. These include Kapkanyar (70,000 acres), Kipteber (57,000 acres), Kapolet (10,800 acres), Chemurgoi (9,800 acres), Sogotio (8,800 acres), Kerer (5,340 acres), Kaisingor (2,680 acres) and Embobut (8,000 acres) (KEFRI, 2017). Before the Forest Act came into force, the government disregarded both the clan elders and the existing traditional rules and regulations of the Marakwet people. The state came up with various legislations that alienated the Marakwet people from their ancestral land. The separation hampered the Marakwet people from utilizing the forest for their rich religious beliefs and exercising their ancient ethics of natural resource conservation.

Among the Marakwet and Sengwer, in the pre-colonial period, the management and conservation of the environmental resources were tasked by clan elders from each Sengwer sub-tribe. The colonial government interfered with the Indigenous Marakwet and the Sengwer communal ownership of land and the ethnic systems responsible for controlling hunting, habitation, and utilizing resources in the forest. Members of each sub-tribe were obliged to respect the sub-tribe territories by not hunting, gathering, or collecting honey from another sub-tribe's territory without permission from the elders.

2.3 Transition from Pre-colonial to the Colonial Forest Conservation of Embobut Forest

According to Ndege(2009), the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 brought Kenya under British rule, and in 1895, Kenya became an official component of the British East Africa Protectorate. In 1902, the Eastern Province of Uganda protectorate was transferred to the East African Protectorate, and thus became part of Kenya. The colonial authority then established inter-territorial boundaries, which included white highlands, native reserves, outlying Districts, and closed Districts. According to Osamba (2000), the colonial government in Kenya implemented policies that marginalized pastoral groups by restricting them to African reserves. Such policies included the British (Western) forest conservation orders and mechanisms.

The evolution of Kenya's forest policy began in 1897 with the enactment of the Ukamba Woods and Forest Regulations. This ordinance reserved trees within five miles of the Nairobi County House and two miles of the railroad; the inner zones were to be guarded by the railway authorities while the other tracts were put under the district officer's jurisdiction (Ofcansky, 1984). Therefore, in early 1902, the colonial government appointed C. F. Elliott, a former official of the Indian Forest Service, to the newly created post of conservator of forests, in charge of the mile-wide zone on either side of the Uganda Railway. Shortly after his arrival, Elliott opened a Forest Department office in Nairobi, recruited three forest rangers, and began introducing exotic tree species – including two species of pine – for experimental plantations. These precedents the Forest Department, reforestation with exotics, and protection of the forest reserves served as the backbone of Kenya's forest policy throughout the colonial period (Ofcansky, 1984).

To support Elliott's activities, the colonial administration enacted the East Africa Forestry Regulation in 1902. The Act established the legal basis for forest reserves and for appropriate

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regulations forbidding "any cutting, grazing or trespassing without a permit." In addition, the new ordinance listed forest offenses and provided for the arrest and punishment of offenders. Following the publication of these regulations, the Forest Department proclaimed several forest reserves along the Uganda Railway. The first was located northwest of Nairobi between Limuru and Kijabe and included all land within four miles of each side of the railroad line. In 1903, Forest Ranger G. S. Baker demarcated forest reserves below the railway from Nairobi to Limuru, a distance of approximately twenty miles.

Before the First World War, the Forest Department's staff grew to one conservator, four assistant conservators, eleven foresters, one assistant forester, thirty forest guards, forty-one spearmen (assistant forest guards), one accountant, one seedsman, one head clerk, and a typist. On an administrative level, Kenya was divided into four forest divisions, with headquarters at Nairobi, Mombasa, Nyeri, and Londiani. Each was under the supervision of an assistant conservator. The forest reserves had reached a total of 1,378 square miles, equivalent to 2.6 percent of the country's fertile land area (Tarus, 1994). In Elgeyo Marakwet County, the history of forest conservation began in 1914 during the British Colonial period. The cases of the gazzettement of the protected forested areas in Kenya started in the colonial period and were indicated by Wass (1995) whose study focused on indigenous forest conservation and management. He alluded to a historical fact that by 1932, the then colonial government had gazetted a total of 43 forests and re-defined them as government forests with a land size area of 830,000 hectares.

According to Ofcansky (1984), the gazzettement of the protected areas through a land ordinance was consequential as it did not involve the forest community and thus prohibited any persons from residing in the forest or engaging in any economic or settlement activities without the Government's authority. Though considered a protected area, the Sengwer community, as forest dwellers, continued to live in the forest but moved deeper into the gazetted forest to evade detection and prosecution by the colonial administration.

Elgeyo Marakwet County is home to two forest ecosystems and water towers, namely Kaptagat and Cherangany Hills, and hosts the second largest forest cover in Kenya at 37.6%. These ecosystems are a source of many rivers that form the main water divide running along the Escarpment. East of the water divide is the Kerio catchment area, which drains into Lake Turkana while West of the divide is the Lake Victoria Basin which drains into Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria Basin includes the Moiben, Chepkaitit, and Sabor rivers. The Kerio catchment area includes the Kerrer and Kerio Rivers (County Government of Elgeyo Marakwet, 2020). The largest natural forest cover in Elgeyo Marakwet is the Chrangany forest, which consists of Kapkanyar (70,000 acres), Kipteber (57,000 acres), Kapolet (10,800 acres), Chemurgoi (9,800 acres), Sogotio (8,800 acres), Kerer (5,340 acres), Kaisingor (2,680 acres) and Embobut (8,000 acres) (KEFRI, 2017).

The forest as is currently known covers large tracts of land in three counties of Elgeyo-Marakwet, Trans-Nzoia, and parts of West Pokot counties. One informant Emmanuel Yegon, 60 years old, said, "The history of the demarcation of the forest as a conservation area started in 1914 when the then colonial government upon realizing the potential of the three counties of Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot and Elgeyo-Marakwet for large-scale farming decided to demarcate the uneven and mountainous regions as 'conservation or protected areas'. This is because they considered any venture by the white men into the forest as an insignificant event. After all, the forest was not considered as farmland because of the nature of the terrain" (Kiprono S, OI, 2023).

Another informant, Kimeli A (OI, 2023), averred thus:

"Colonial government officers found us there (Embobut forest) as forest inhabitants and we did not move and based on our social structure they (colonial government officers) introduced some registration aspects where family units were registered as bona fide*(legal owners) dwellers of the forest land where they were living in. They did not remove us from the forest and instead allowed us to continue living our lives as before."*

The informant further affirmed that a change occurred in the larger Cherang'any Forest way back in 1922 when a white man by the name of Mr. 'Cobal' set up various sawmills to extract natural timber from the forest. "Mr.Cobal set up many sawmills in the forest and continued extracting the timber until the independence period" (Kimeli A, OI, 2023).

The Sengwer are indigenous people who have a long history of human presence in the Embobut Forest. They have lived in the woods and glades of Embobut for a long time, and they were

hunter-gatherers. Before colonization, they also occupied a much greater lowland region. The Marakwet and Pokot are not the only indigenous peoples in the Embobut Forest; they also bring their livestock there to graze. The Sengwer and certain Marakwet were granted permission to graze in the Embobut and Kipkunur Forest blocs during the dry season by the Colonial Government, even though the government did not acknowledge the Sengwer's ancient land claim to the Embobut Forest. The two groups had to leave as the native grounds became suitable for grazing. As a consequence of this ebb and flow, the forest became home to semi-permanent communities. What follows is a transcript of an interview with MzeeKotibei D (OI, 2023) that pertains to the colonial era woods and their condition:

"When the first demarcation was made during the colonial period. The inhabitants of Sinen (Kikunur Bloc), extending to Embobut forest were not given any title deeds to own land but permits to inhabit the areas. About 35 individuals of the Maina age sets, their children being the following age set; Sawe and Korongo. They effectively occupied their area as an inheritance which they bequeathed to their children the Chumo age set. The supposed forest land had traditional boundaries that each clan knew their existence. Permit holders had the right to occupy the forest land. However, with the growth of population forest destruction was bound to occur. The community was proactive in conserving the forest since they mostly participated in the informal and formal administration of preserving the area."

The forest was unspoiled since cultivation was not permitted when the Sengwer and Marakwet were first granted the permissions. By 2013, the population of the Embobut and Kipkunur Forest Blocs had increased to some 19,500 individuals, descended from the Sengwer hunter-gatherers and Marakwet pastoralists (Simbolei J, OI, 2023). Their territory covered 16,000 hectares. A native ethnic group mostly residing in the western Kenyan forest regions of the Cherangany Hills, the Sengwer are also called the Cherangany or the Senguer. Their cultural, social, and economic lives have all revolved around these woods, which have played an important role throughout their history (Kipkorir, 1984). There was a dramatic increase in the population as people from the surrounding forests abandoned their farms in quest of better land for farming, grazing, and settling. The following, however, is the land division proclamation that the British colonialists had issued by 1924:

Commencing at the Northern corner of L.0.2156 (that is the point common to the Trans Nzoia, west "Suk"(Pokot) and Marakwet Districts, thence bounded by a straight line northeasterly to the point where Kacheliba-Marich-Marakwet track intersects the Chesogon river (DC/ELGM/5/1).

The Annual Report of 1923 reports that as much as the Elgeyo were allowed to live in the forest, particularly the time when the Grogan Concession was taking place, in 1923, they were evicted and their claim of the land rights in the area resented. British explorer and businessman Lord Grogan and the British East Africa Company (BEAC) inked a contentious arrangement known as Lord Grogan's concession in 1902. In what is now Uganda and Kenya, Grogan was awarded vast economic advantages and land rights by the concession (Oliver, 1976). The forest's exterior limits, which included Elgeyo Marakwet, West Suk, and Kamasia, were established in 1926 by government notification 349 of 12/10/26. Mr. Hoey and General Sir H. Gough have effectively dispossessed four farms, namely 320, 3091, 2213, and 2173. This delineation, however, failed to convince the forest-adjacent people, especially the Sengwer and Marakwet. Meeting in February 1931 with the District Commissioner and the Provincial Commissioner, they voiced their opposition to the demarcations that resulted in the forfeiture of their forest land rights.

Consequently, the British colonial authority committed several colonial abuses against the Marakwet and Sengwer populations. Their way of living is the root cause of the Marakwet and Sengwer conflict. They lived in vast, dispersed communities, subsisting mostly on hunting, beekeeping, and animal husbandry; they practiced very little farming and survived from crop to crop. Because of the spectre of colonial control, this caused shifts in industrial methods. Particularly at odds with the colonial economy was the Sengwer people's heavy reliance on subsistence hunting and gathering. In his memorandum to the Kenya Land Commission, Mr. C.H. Adams, who was the acting provincial commissioner to Rift Valley at the time, made the following remarks:

I agree then the recommendation reported in the prescription that – wherever possible the Sengwer should become members of and be absorbed into the larger tribe to which they have

the most affinity to bring them into modern economic dynamics (Annual Report, 1935).

The Sengwer and Marakwet peoples, who had become used to life in the bush, were therefore confused by the actions of the colonial authority. Makanji and Mochida (1999) observe that the colonial government's actions are still felt today because certain ethnic groups, such as the Marakwet and the Pokot, regard the Sengwer to be a member of their own clans rather than a distinct and historically significant tribe.

It may be argued that the colonial administration prioritized forest preservation above the socioeconomic pursuits of the Sengwer and the Marakwet. The colonial authority forcibly removed the indigenous Marakwet and Sengwer people from their traditional forest homeland. The government removed six forest areas – Metkei, Kapchorua, Kipkabus, Tumeiyo, Kapchemutwa, and Sogotio – in 1959 to correct the inadequate borders (Elgeyo Marakwet Annual Report, 1959). The Cherang'any forest was removed for cultivation and habitation in several places. As a result of the overcrowding in the African reserves, the limits were altered to make room for the Settlers, which in turn led to the expansion of the forest and the depletion of its natural resources (Kin'gasia, 2018). On the other hand, similar efforts were made in the Embobut and Kipkunur forest blocks, but the Marakwet were uninterested in the delineation because of their lack of knowledge. The following information was disclosed in a separate interview:

"Around 1952, a colonial administrator keen on the conservation of the area sought the cooperation of the community in getting the forest demarcation around the Cherangany Forest. At Sinen in the Kipkunur bloc, he approached a man named Kipkiiti on the suggestion of the boundaries of the forest and the settled areas. Kipkiiti being worried that it could be a way the colonial administrator wanted to gain ownership of their land, he casually instructed the white administrator to put the Beacon on some place to distinguish settlement and the forest. This act led to the whole of Sinen being locked inside the forest rather than being mapped as areas for human settlement." (Mengich B, OI, 2023).

Marakwet and Sengwer's religious and cultural practices were disrupted by the division of land into different sections of Cherangany forest. Because the colonial authorities were ignorant of the Marakwet and Sengwer people's cultural and traditional methods of forest protection, they appropriated their land and houses and turned them into government forests. The extensive correspondence between colonial rulers provides enough evidence of this. As an example, on January 7, 1943, the Assistant Conservator of Forests sent a letter to district commissioner Kitale titled "Natives in Kapolet Forest."

"I understand that some of the Cherangani and the Dorobos are once more in Kapolet Forest Reserve despite the police raid there last February and the severe penalties imposed on them. I would be glad if you could arrange for them to be shifted once and for all from Kapolet into West Suk Reserve before the end of the year." (Koross D, OI, 2023).

Without threatening the survival of any particular plant or animal species, these systems preserved natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. When the colonial authorities forcibly removed the Marakwet and Sengwer people from different sections of the Cherang'any Hills forest – a significant water tower in Kenya – they also damaged these systems. Later, the study will examine how the post-colonial administration intended to spread and refine this.

The colonial authority also made many efforts to eradicate the indigenous Marakwet and Sengwer people's customary ways of existence. Even among the Marakwet, who engaged in mixed pastoralism, the Sengwer were and are recognized as an indigenous people who subsisted primarily on hunting and gathering. To further the interests of the metropole, the colonial authorities imposed its economic policies on several Kenyan villages. For example, the introduction of crops like potatoes, cabbage, and pyrethrum as well as animals like exotic cattle and wool sheep changed the way of life for the tribes involved. All of this can be seen in the letter that the provincial commissioner received from the assistant district commissioner overseeing Elgeyo Marakwet. About the initiatives of the colonial authority, he states this with great emphasis.

The following statements made by Mr. Hoey in his testimony before the land commission provide support for the colonial government's stance on its goal for the modification of the Sengwer lifestyle:

It is given because the Cherangani when I first came into the country had no stock, but the Administration Officers did their utmost to persuade the Cherangani to adopt an entirely different mode of life become stock owners, and

cultivate a good deal more than they had done in the past (Mr. Hoey, District Agricultural Officer)

Part of the Sengwer territory in Trans Nzoia was also turned into a wildlife reserve by the colonial authority; this area is now called Saiwa Swamp National Park. The Sengwer people would come here to hunt since it was a haven for many wild animals.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the conservation of Embobut Forest has undergone significant transformations from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. Pre-colonial communities, such as the Sengwer, demonstrated sustainable forest management practices that allowed them to benefit from the forest's resources while preserving it for future generations. These traditional mechanisms were deeply embedded in the communities' cultural and social systems, ensuring a balance between utilization and conservation. However, with the advent of colonial rule, Western conservation methods were introduced, marking a dramatic shift. The colonial administration implemented restrictive ordinances that criminalized Indigenous access to the forest, leading to evictions and the disruption of traditional ways of life. Unfortunately, post-independence governments perpetuated these colonial policies, resulting in continued evictions, violence, and the destruction of property. This historical trajectory reveals the tensions between indigenous conservation methods and externally imposed systems, highlighting the need to revisit and integrate traditional practices into modern forest management strategies to achieve more sustainable and just outcomes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: List of Key Informants

Name	Place of Interview	Age
Kimaiyo Richard	Embobut	60
Daniel Koross	Endo	70
Bernard Mengich	Sambur	78
Solomon Kiprono	Embobut	70
Sally Kiprono	Sambibir	78
Johnson Sirma	Embobut	68
Isaack Kiptum	Kapyego	59
Pius Kiplagat	Kapyego	60
Yano M.O	Embobut	59
Emmanuel Yegon	Endo	60
Andrew Kimeli	Embobut	70
David Kosgei	Sambibir	50
Flora Sirma	Embobut	80