Title The Gibe III dam and its accompanying plantations pose a threat to the serenity of the Omo river valley, home to various local tribes. The sites could see significant reductions to wildlife populations due to the dam.Lake Turkana and the Omo Delta are both listed by Birdlife International as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The lake is critical to a number of species that are at risk. According to World Wildlife Fund, "Lake Turkana has more than 350 species of aquatic and terrestrial birds, and is also an important flyway for migrant birds. Central Island has a breeding population of African skimmers (Rhyncops flavirostris) that nest in banks.". Thousands of semi-nomadic tribespeople are being forcibly moved from their traditional lands in southern Ethiopia to make way for European and Indian sugar cane and biofuel plantations, according to testimonies collected by Survival International researchers. Agricultural developments along the Omo river valley have accompanied the building of the 243-metre-high Gibe III dam, expected to be Ethiopia's largest investment project and Africa's largest hydropower plant. But allegations of human rights abuses have marred both the dam's construction and the creation of a 140-mile-long reservoir intended to provide water for irrigation of industrial-scale plantations. "Clearance of people and bush has started in earnest in the Omo Valley and violence against tribal people by the military, and tribal resistance, is increasing", says a Survival researcher who has just returned to London from the region. "The tribes have been told the plan is to resettle them, and that this will happen by the end of 2012. These people are among the most self-sufficient in a country where famine and hunger are prevalent." New sugar cane and biofuel plantations are already affecting about 10,000 people from the Bodi, Mursi and Kwegu tribes. But as the government clears more land, more people will be affected. Between 20,000 and 40,000 could be affected by one cane project alone, claims Survival. "The plantations and resettlement of people [into new villages] will destroy their livelihoods and ability to fend for themselves," said a spokesman. "They will almost certainly end up languishing in the villages or 'camps', relying on donor aid [and] having lost all sense of identity and self worth, as has happened with other tribes forcibly resettled in many other countries." The Omo tribes, who are among the most diverse in the world, have until now depended on the annual, three-month long flood of the Omo river, which flows from southern Ethiopia into Lake Turkana in northern Kenya, depositing fertile silt and allowing them to plant sorghum, maize and other crops. But without land for cultivation or grazing, the tribes will be destitute and foodless, say international observers. "The government came to take the land for itself for the sugar cane plantations," said one man in a testimony given to Survival. "It never came to ask us. It came, took our land, and told us it wants to move all the people in the Omo Valley to stay in one place like a camp. It took my land. Now it beats us." A second man said: "The government says cattle and people have to move from the Omo valley to where there are no grass and no crops. We and the cattle will die together. We are not rich people, we are pastoralists." "There are many machines clearing the bush and the road. The government is coming to clear our houses and throw our sorghum in the river. Now we live in the bush because all the land has been cleared," said a third. The construction of large dams has a history of insensitive relocations of people and environmental problems. More than 400,000 people have been resettled as a direct result of dam construction in Africa. But the construction of Gibe III could eventually affect more than 1.5 million people, according to watchdog group International Rivers. Some of the greatest hydrological effects could be seen near Lake Turkana, into which the river Omo flows. When the dam is complete and the reservoir is full, possibly in 2015, the lake could shrink to one third of its present size, jeopardising the livelihoods of up to 300,000 people. The Ethiopian government in London did not respond to the allegations this week, but late last year it strongly denied accusations of human rights abuses in the valley, saying: "The government is fully committed to rural development to benefit the people and it is equally committed to the rights of all the nations, nationalities and peoples in the country, including those in the Omo river basin. The reality on the ground in the Omo Valley shows a totally different picture to that painted by Survival International. Following consultations, local people have confirmed agreement to the plantation projects, and to the proposed resettlement; the projects, designed for everybody's benefit and well-being, are progressing smoothly." A spokesman for International Rivers said: "The dwindling of resources caused by the dam would increase local conflicts between ethnic groups. Firearms are already omnipresent among the region's communities. But the dam is just one factor in a perfect storm rapidly descending on the Lower Omo Valley. The government of Ethiopia is exploring the area for oil and minerals and planning large-scale agricultural and biofuel schemes, which could further fuel conflicts over traditional land and water resources."