

Wildlife Safari Tourism and Sustainable Local Community Development in Kenya

A case study of Samburu National Reserve

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Abstract : Kenya is world famous for its wildlife attractions and magnificent landscape. Increasing number of tourists visit the country's national parks and reserves such as Maasai Mara, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru, Tsavo and Samburu among others. Parks and reserves have become the pillar of the country's tourism industry and significant amounts of revenue is generated from safari tourism activities. However, the rapid development of mass tourism and haphazard development of tourism facilities in the parks and reserves conflict with the principles of sustainable utilization of the wildlife resources. Moreover, the protection of wildlife in the parks and reserves and tourism development may conflict with people's socio-economic and cultural interests. But it is generally acknowledged that the development of sustainable tourism and local community involvement in the decision-making process and equitable distribution of tourism revenues can play a significant role in poverty alleviation and improvement of the living conditions of the local people. This research takes the case study of Samburu National Reserve to: (i) Analyse the forms of tourism activities that are taking place in Samburu National Reserve and its environs; (ii) examine the role the local people living in the adjacent areas are playing in wildlife conservation and tourism development and (iii) examine whether tourism assists in the improvement of the living conditions of the local people. This research is based on both primary and secondary information. A total of 350 local people were interviewed at various locations including residential areas, hotels, cultural centres, attraction sites and adjacent marketplaces. The interviews covered various research aspects such as the perceived negative and positive impacts of tourism, problems confronting the local communities, the role of the local communities in tourism development and wildlife conservation, and the reserve and the management, and local community relationships.

Keywords: Community tourism, Wildlife tourism, Kenyan tourism, Wildlife conservation, Samburu community, Sustainable tourism

Introduction

Kenya is a popular tourist destination in Africa, accounting for over 6% of the total international tourists' arrivals to the continent. The relative importance of tourism in the country's has risen steadily over the last forty years, and currently the industry contributes over 10 per cent to Kenyas' Gross Domestic Product. The Kenya government has, over the years, continued to spearhead the development of tourism with a main aim of encouraging even more tourists to visit the various tourists destinations in the country, particularly, the national parks and reserves.

Kenya's unique wildlife attractions form the pillar of the fledgling tourism sector, with over 60% of the international tourists visiting the parks and reserves for wildlife viewing and photographing. However, the parks and reserves are at varying levels of development, particularly as relates to visitor facilities and services and accessibility. As a consequence, there has been attendance of promoting unplanned and rapid development of mass tourism in a few wildlife parks and reserves, whereas the majority of the country's other wildlife parks are rarely visited by tourists. These forms of haphazard development of mass tourism and unplanned development of lodges and camping facilities in delicate and sensitive wildlife habitats goes contrary to the principles of sustainable tourism development and utilisation of wildlife resources.

Apart from problems arising from haphazard development of mass tourism there is also increasing conflicts between the local people and park wildlife as wild animal stray into the surrounding communities and destroy their property, cause injuries and some times fatalities. Furthermore, the local people receive little or no direct benefits from the protected areas and they are rarely consulted as far as the management of the protected area is concerned. Worse yet, the local people feel that the government most often give attention toward wildlife protection because of the realised and potential tourism benefits. Whereas as their complaints as regard to property destruction and lack of their involvement are rarely taken into consideration.

Outside and within the protected areas, wildlife receives protection through enforcement of conservation by-laws which inhibits the local people from defending themselves whenever the wildlife strays into their land and causes destruction. These state conservation programmes and tourism development activities have led to suspension of human-wildlife conflict and the local people are increasing becoming indifferent and opposed to the development of tourism in their neighbourhood.

The existing wildlife and tourism development problems indicates that there is urgent need for the development of alternative strategies that will lead to sustainable development and utilisation of wildlife resources both for tourism and provision of local socio-economic needs.

Wildlife conservation visa-vis local community needs

Over the years, wildlife conservation in Kenya and other African countries has mainly involved the creation of state protected areas where local people are completely excluded and are not allowed to utilise the wildlife resources for their sustenance. The local communities which traditionally had relied on

the park areas for their sustenance were often displaced and/or denied access to the park resource use once the area designated as a park. In fact any form of wildlife resource use by local people for sustenance was classified as poaching, a punishable offence which can lead to imprisonment and other forms of state imposed punishment. In this regard, the wildlife conservation program and tourism development projects in most instances ignored the socio-economic and cultural interests and values of local people living in areas adjacent to the protected parks and reserves. Thus, the local people were completely cut-off and were not involved nor were they consulted in the management of the wildlife protected areas.

Furthermore, the creation of parks and reserves did not only lead to the loss of access to resources, but also led to situations where the local communities adjacent to protected areas bear substantial direct and indirect costs, while they receive insignificant or no direct benefits in return. Thus, over the years the local people have continued to perceive protected areas as state resources, which cause increasing decrease of their income and restrict their access to existing resources needed for their sustenance. Particularly, the local people are offended by the fact that they are not allowed to graze their livestock in the parks nor can they contact subsistence hunting and collection of firewood and water from the protected areas. As a consequence, there is increasing intolerance and accelerating conflicts between the local people, wildlife managers and tourism developer.

It is worth noting that in the recent years, the population of the local people in the areas adjacent to the parks and reserves has been increasing tremendously. Thus, there is increasing need for land for the growing of crops and livestock rearing. It is increasingly been observed that there is increasing levels of poverty, malnutrition and general underdevelopment in the local communities surrounding the protected areas. Within this socio-economic of increasing poverty and underdevelopment, the local people perceive the protected areas as resources, which should be opened up for human settlement and local resource use. Furthermore, with increasing human population, the natural habitat in areas adjacent to the protected areas are increasingly being altered, as people clear the vegetation to make room for crop production and subsistence farming. Thus, important old and critical wildlife dispersal areas are increasingly being destroyed making the wildlife-protected areas to become unviable ecological island surrounded by completely altered or degraded habitats. As a consequence, the wildlife are increasingly being confined within the protected areas where they are increasingly being harassed by tourists who are always in hurry to see the 'big five' without regard of the ecological impacts caused by speeding vehicles and off-road driving. The natural beauty

of the parks and reserves that makes worthwhile for tourism development is completely being diminished.

Case study area and methodology

This research uses the case study of Samburu National Reserve to analyse critical socio-economic issues that are confronting the conservation of wildlife and the development of wildlife safari tourism. Specifically, the research looks at socio-cultural and economic impacts which been brought about by development of wildlife safari tourism amongst the Samburu people due to their proximity to the reserve. As a fact the land on which the reserve has been established was originally part of the dry season grazing ranches of the Samburu pastoral community. The local people were unilaterally moved out of the reserve to create room for wildlife conservation and development of wildlife safari tourism.

The reserve is situated at the extreme north of the expansive riftvalley province. The reserves covers a total land areas of over 400 Square kilometers. The reserve itself and the surrounding region is criss-crossed by many undulating streamlets which drain in to the Ewaso Nyiro river. The unique landscape and, diverse wildlife resources and the local Samburu culture make this region a paradise for tourists who are eager to combine wildlife safari tourism with the cultural visitations to the adjacent Samburu homesteads. As consequence, Samburu national reserve and the adjacent region has become a popular tourist destination in Kenya, attracting over 200,000 international tourists plus many domestic tourists annually. Particularly, the unique Samburu culture provides an added advantage for tourists willing to combine safari tourists with visitations to the adjacent Samburu cultural manyattas.

As concerns wildlife viewing and photographing in pristine natural habitats, the region has high population of the 'big five and many antelopes species including the Generuk (an endemic and rare antelope species) found only in this region. Also the region has got diverse range of floral attractions and diverse landscapes that are ideal for site seeing and other recreational activities such as photographing, hill climbing, hiking and trekking. Thus the reserve and the adjacent areas has got the potential of attracting diverse range of tourists with different interests and motivational attributes. However, as already discussed above the nature of tourism development and wildlife conservation strategies are put in doubt the potentials of these natural and cultural resources in promoting sustainable local community development. This research investigates the underlying factors that have led to the local people not to benefit substantially from these existing resources. Specifically, the objectives of this study are two-fold; (i) to analyse forms of tourism

development activities that are taking place in the reserve and its adjacent areas (ii) to examine the roles the local people living in the adjacent areas are playing in the conservation and tourism development. In line with the stated objectives, the critical question of this research is; what forms and how are these activities contributing to the improvement of the livelihood the local Samburu people?

The first stage of data collection involved a search and compilation of relevant information and data on critical issues on wildlife-based tourism development and its role as a tool for socio-economic development. The information was mainly acquired from primary and secondary sources including University libraries, government and tourism related NGOs. Particularly, the Kenya Government documents and reports including economic surveys, statistical abstracts, tourism master plans and poverty mapping indexes were used to acquire information on local, regional and national trends of tourism development and the industry's role as a tool for socio-economic development.

The second stage of data collection involved conducting field interviews and surveys in different locations within and without Samburu National Reserve. This was undertaken in three months period (May to August 2003). Structured questionnaires containing principal items on wildlife-based tourism development and perceived socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism were administered to the management of the reserve and local residents. The local residents were interviewed at various places including hotels, cultural centres, attraction sites and adjacent market places. The interview covered various research aspects such as the perceived negative and positive effects of tourism, problems confronting the local communities, the role of the local communities in the development and conservation of the reserve and the management and local communities relationship. In total 350 both the management and the local residents were interviewed. In addition, scheduled interviews and structured dialogue was conducted with selected private and public sector representatives, local community leaders and politicians.

Research Findings

Local community benefits

It should be stated that the local people living in areas adjacent to Samburu National Reserve receive minimal or no direct benefits from the reserve. For instance, the majority of the people working as managers, wardens and other service providers in the national reserves are mainly out-siders and; only less than 10% of the local Samburu people have received employment in the reserve

and adjacent tourist facilities. Furthermore, it should be stated that most of the local Samburu people who work in the reserve and the adjacent tourist facilities mainly occupy low paying, servile and seasonal job positions such as guards, porter, genitors, waiters and rangers. According to government poverty index estimates, the Samburu region has got one of the highest rural poverty indexes in the country, with more than 60% of the local population living below the poverty line (i.e earning less than US \$ 1 per day). In this regard, it has been observed that the majority of the local Samburu people live in extremely poor conditions and they lack basic necessities for their livelihood, including food, clean running water, clothing and shelter.

Due to the fact that and the reserve does not provide tangible direct benefits and the local people have been cut-off and are prevented from using the reserve resources, it can be argued that the conservation of wildlife and tourism development in Samburu region is part of the processes of socio-economic marginalisation and impoverishment of the people. In the recent past, there has been increasing mushrooming of cultural villages in areas adjacent to Samburu National Reserve and; currently, there are more than twenty cultural villages that are in close proximity to one another. In principle, these cultural villages are owned and managed by the local Samburu people who display various aspects of their culture, including art, performances and dance, traditional architecture and utensils to visiting tourists at a fee. However, when asked whether they receive adequate monetary benefits from tourists who visit the cultural villages, a significant 70% of the interviewees ascertained that they only receive minimal and token payments. Most of the local people observed that local tour- guides who take tourist to cultural villages usually pocket most of the tourists payments and only give the local people minimal payments. Tour guides usually take advantage of the desperate local economic situation and social deprivation and to bargain and give rock-bottom prices to the souvenirs, which they purchase from the local Samburu people. As one Samburu elder asserted;

" Tour guides and tourists drivers who bring tourists here from Nairobi are very arrogant and they always take advantage of the fact that there are many cultural villages where they can take tourists to. They therefore completely underpay us. They tell us to either accept the payment or they can take the tourist elsewhere. Thus we end-up accepting payments as little as Ksh. 300 per a group of six (6) tourists instead of Ksh. 1800 which is the ideal payment for such a group".

In addition, majority of the respondents (over 80%) stated that they receive minimal payments from the sell of the souvenirs and art-facts. This is

mainly due to the high number of local souvenir sellers, most of the people are willing to accept extremely low payments for the souvenirs. As one respondent stated:

"There are so many cultural villages around here and the number of tourists visiting our village has been decreasing in the recent past as tour guides opt to take tourists to other cultural villages. Thus we accept any amount of money that we are paid by the tour guide. Moreover, similar souvenirs are being sold to the tourists by many people and there has been mass production of souvenirs in the cultural villages. Thus we are willing to accept any price offer instead of standing here the whole day and receiving nothing at all and going home empty-handed".

However, it should be stated that although, most of the local Samburu people do not receive direct benefits from the reserve, the government uses some of the revenue collected as entry fee to the reserve to construct primary schools and health clinics which benefits the local people. As the majorities (90%) of the local people indicated that they are quite appreciative of these communal benefits which accrues to them. However, the local people argued not withstanding these forms of communal benefits, they should be able to receive direct monetary benefits from the reserve so that they can purchase basic items such as food, clothing and pay school fees for their children. Specifically, the local people argued that direct benefits should come in form of employment and the creation of viable business opportunities.

Local community participation and attitude

Over the years there has been minimal local community participation and involvement in state conservation of wildlife programmes and tourism development initiatives. An overwhelming 90% of the local people ascertained that, most of the decisions as regards to the management of the reserve are usually made by the Samburu County Council and the Kenya Wildlife Service. The local people are never consulted in matters related to wildlife conservation programmes and tourism development projects. Due to this existing socio-economic scenario, the local people tend to be quite indifferent and may sometimes be hostile to wildlife conservation and tourism development initiatives that are carried out by the state and external interested groups. For instance, until recent, there have been high incidents of poaching of wildlife. Also in the recent past, there has been increased destruction of the wildlife habitats in the areas adjacent to the reserve and local people clear vegetation to make room for human settlement and crop production.

The lodge and camping facilities in the reserve and the adjacent areas usually owned and managed by external and foreign investors and developers.

Also, as already stated, very few local people receive employment in the reserve and albeit low-paying and servile positions.

In the overall, most of the respondents (65%) felt that the conservation of wildlife and development of tourism has over the years negatively impacted their traditional livelihood and culture. Particularly, the elderly felt that tourism has corrupted the moral norms that govern the society. A significant 63% of the respondents stated that the development of tourism has led to increased incidents of prostitution, alcoholism and high incidents of school drop-out. Furthermore, majority of the Samburu people (65%) felt that the art performances and cultural dances that are presented to tourists are confined and are far removed from their original cultural context and meaning and only serve to satisfy the whims of tourists. Thus there is an increasing and despondence among the Samburu people, particularly, among that their traditional way of life and socio-cultural values are being destroyed by tourism and other forces of modernity and westernisation. In this context, most of the community elders feel that they are powerless and they do not have any control over what is happening to their people especially as one elderly Samburu man lamented:

"we as a people are getting completely lost, the youths no longer respect the elders, there are also increasing marital strife in the homes, the young are increasingly abandoning meaningful ways of life and have dropped out of school and have turned into begging and following tourists in the cultural villages.

Discussion

The nature of Kenya's tourism industry

Over 80% of the tourists who visit Kenya's wildlife parks and reserves travel under all-inclusive tour package travel arrangement. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the promotion and marketing of Kenya as a tourist destination (as is the case with other Third world countries) in tourist generating countries, particularly in Europe and North America, is mainly under the control and management of overseas tour operators and travel agents. In most instances, due to their command of knowledge and understanding of overseas markets, overwhelming bargaining power and capital resources, overseas tour operators tend to have overwhelming leverage over the forms of tourists and travel package they sale to Kenya and Third world tourists destinations.

Taking advantage of their bargaining power and financial leverage, with an aim of increasing their profit margins, overseas tour operators tend to

favour the marketing of all-inclusive tour package. In these forms of travel arrangements, prospective visitors pay tour operators for a complete travel package. The payment arrangements include almost all travel components, such as air ticket, food, accommodation and recreational fees. Furthermore, tour operators contract non-Kenyan air carriers to ferry visitors to the country. Even within Kenya, foreign owned hospitality and lodge facilities, internal flights and, car rentals are contracted. The local tour companies that transport the tourists to various points within the country including visitations to parks and other tourists attractions are often owned and/or are subsidiaries of overseas firms.

Within this international context, and as proponents of dependency theory contend, the development of tourism in the Third world countries such as Kenya conforms to historical and economic structures of economic dependence (Britton, 1982; Oglethorpe, 1984; Oppermann, 1992). In this regard, the establishment and development of tourism in most Third world countries is usually externally oriented and controlled, and mainly responds to external market demands. In consequence, the nature of international tourism as a 'luxury and pleasure seeking industry' usually entails rich tourists from metropolis (mainly from developed countries in the North) visiting and coming to enjoy tourist attractions in the periphery (mainly the poor and resource scarce countries in the South as Kenya).

These forms of tourism development accentuate the economic structure of dependency on external market demand, and also lead to 'alien' development (i.e the establishment of state protected wildlife sanctuaries) to which local people, such as the Samburu cannot relate and respond, both socially and economically (Oglethorpe, 1984; Williams, 1993; Dieke; 2001). In consequence, the management and long-term sustenance of wildlife safari tourism and other forms of tourism development usually responds to and mainly depends on external control and support. These forms of tourism development tend to preclude local participation in tourism project design and management and local use of tourism resources, such as the wildlife resources in the state protected parks. The following quotation summarises the nature of Kenya's wildlife Safari tourism;

"The ground operation of the country's tourism industry reflects (this) outward orientation. Typically a tour operator sends a micro-bus to the airport to collect tourists. Such visitors many be in an inclusive package tour already paid for overseas. The tour operators, for example, Abecrombie and Kent, United Tour Company, Kuoni world wide, Thomas Cook, and Hayes and Jarvis, would likely be foreign owned, or a subsidiary of foreign company. The firm takes tourists to an assigned hotel in Nairobi or Mombasa (and

other inland luxury hotels and lodges) for an overnight stay. On the following day, the tour operators take the tourists to a wildlife safari in one of the national parks. This safari lasts several days (usually not exceeding 2 weeks). At the end of the tour, the process is re-enacted in preparations for departure from the country" (Sindiga, 1996; 29)

In these forms of wildlife safari tourism initiatives, there are usually very high leakages of the tourism receipts of overseas firms and multinational co-operations; sometimes as high as 70% of the per capita tourist receipts. Furthermore, of the small tourism revenues that remains in the country insignificant receipts trickle down to local communities such as the Samburu living in areas adjacent to the wildlife parks and reserves. It has been estimated that only 2 and 5 per cent of Kenya's total tourism receipts trickle down to the local people at the grass root level, in form of low paying and servile jobs, and the selling of souvenirs, agricultural produce and entry fees to cultural Manyattas (Bachmann, 1988; Sinclair, 1990; Sindiga, 2000).

Policy implication and conclusion

It can be argued, in order for wildlife safari tourism and other forms of tourism development initiative to contribute to sustainable local community development, wildlife conservation and tourism programmes should be attuned to rural resource-use strategies and socio-cultural values. Consequently, there is need for the initiation of wildlife conservation and tourism programmes that put local communities at the centre of these initiatives that are aimed at the socio-cultural and economic empowerment of rural communities.

However, in order for local community based tourism programmes to succeed, local people need enhance capacity building initiatives accompanied by the provision of sanctioned authority to enable the people take control of their own destiny and have sanctioned authority to enable them to play a central role in the planning, design and implementation of tourism and wildlife conservation programmes.

The principal objectives of the alternative tourism development and wildlife conservation strategy should include: enhancement of equitable distribution of the wildlife safari revenues; increasing local participation in tourism decision-making; reduction of the high leakage rates and increase the multiplier effects of tourism; and minimisation of the social and environmental impacts of tourism. Furthermore, there is need to re-evaluate the role of overseas travel firms and multinational investment in the development of Kenya's tourism industry, in general and wildlife safari tourism in particular.

Over the years, the Kenya government has promoted 'open door' *laissez*

faire policy towards multinational tourism investors. However, it should be observed that the dependency on external capital investment and tourism market demand usually means that the country's tourism industry mainly responds to external socio-economic interests.

Thus, at the national level, there is need for the government and other tourism stakeholders to establish an alternative tourism development strategy. The main aim of the new strategy should be to minimise the dominant role and control of Kenya's tourism industry by foreign multinational tourism corporations and overseas tour operators. At the least, fiscal policy measures can be put in place to minimise and /or guard against the speculative capital investments, which tends to lead to over-exploitation and increasing leakage of tourism revenues.

However, in order to provide real challenge to the status quo, alternative tourism development and conservation strategies should form part of the broader international, national and local debate as to how to initiate a new global socio-economic and political order where local communities such as the Samburu community itself, rather than outside groups determine their own destiny and the right to a decent and sustainable livelihood.

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