

The Role of Ecotourism in Promoting Women Empowerment and Community Development: Some Reflections From Kenya

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Threats posed by climate change have necessitated the search for alternative income-earning opportunities that are sustainable in most rural areas of developing countries. Climate change is likely to impact more negatively on women than men. Therefore, there is a need for diversifying rural livelihoods to reduce poverty and improve social welfare. This paper examines the ways in which ecotourism empowers women participants in rural areas of Kenya by offering them alternative and sustainable livelihoods. The authors argue that the creation of income-generating activities for women through ecotourism would help alleviate poverty, improve the status of women, and promote sustainable development of the local communities. The methodology used for collecting data in this paper was primarily qualitative in nature consisting of field observations by the authors and case studies of ecotourism projects initiated and managed by women throughout the country. The study adopts a multiple case study research design by examining the impacts of several ecotourism projects in different parts of the country, some owned by women and others by members of the local communities. Secondary methods included literature search and review. Available literature concerning concept of ecotourism, principles and practices, and research findings in other parts of the world was analyzed and put in the context of the Kenyan situation. Information from secondary sources provided insights on how ecotourism ventures in other parts of the world have positively or negatively impacted women. Such literature provided lessons on how to manage ecotourism projects properly in order to empower women and promote community development in Kenya. While available literature review shows positive impacts of ecotourism on women and local communities in Kenya, not all ecotourism projects provide social empowerment to the community. Some communities do not appear to get any tangible social benefits from ecotourism projects. The study concludes by recommending that the initiation, planning, and implementation of ecotourism projects should be carefully done to benefit women and local communities.

Keywords: ecotourism, biodiversity, women empowerment, local communities

Introduction

Due to threats posed by climate change, there is an urgent need to look for alternative income-earning opportunities that are sustainable in most rural areas of developing countries. Climate change results in a declining ability of traditional subsistence lifestyles to sustain rural populations. Women are likely to be more adversely affected by climate change than men as most are engaged in the natural resources sector directly. Therefore, there is a need for diversifying rural livelihoods to reduce poverty and improve social welfare

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(Snyman, 2011). One such alternative form of sustainable livelihood is ecotourism. Available literature shows that ecotourism has the potential, if managed properly, to assist in poverty reduction and in the improvement of social welfare in rural Africa.

This paper examines the ways in which ecotourism empowers women participants in rural areas of Kenya by offering them alternative and sustainable livelihoods. This is in line with the global trend of focusing development initiatives on women at the grassroots level (Barry, 2012). The authors argue that the creation of income-generating activities for women through ecotourism would help alleviate poverty, improve the status of women, and promote sustainable development of the local communities. According to RARE Center for Tropical Conservation (2001), in the Galapagos Islands, women employed in ecotourism activities account for 50% of the total employees, and this helps women to lead a better life.

Frameworks and Definitions of Ecotourism

The international tourism industry has grown to include alternative types of tourism, one of the most popular being ecotourism. The global environmental movement of the late 1970s stimulated the growth of ecotourism, and by the 1990s, ecotourism became one of the fastest growing alternative tourism industries. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) estimates that ecotourism is growing globally at an estimated rate of 20% annually, and is expected to grow swiftly over the next two decades (Mastny, 2001). Ecotourism is becoming an attractive option for many tourists as it continues to grow. The growing interest in ecotourism is illustrated by Ziffer (1989) who stated that “Ecotourism is currently a hot topic. The fury is predictable. It is a movement that potentially involves billions of dollars, high-level politics, the survival of threatened cultures, and the preservation of rapidly disappearing wild lands”. Ziffer’s (1989) comments made about 20 years ago are still true today as the “fervor” associated with ecotourism has not abated. In developing countries, ecotourism is being considered as a potential economic savior by many rural communities which are motivated by the promise of jobs, new business opportunities, skill development, as well as the chance to secure a greater control over natural resource utilization in their areas (Ashley & Roe, 1997; Kersten, 1997).

The concept of ecotourism is contentious and has drawn considerable debate since the 1960s. Numerous attempts have been made to define ecotourism (e.g., Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Ashton, 1991; Buckley, 1994; Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1996; Weaver, 2001). Yet, from the plethora of articles contributing to the literature on ecotourism emerges little consensus. As Fennell (2001) stated, the reasons for the proliferation of definitions are unknown. Although it has been suggested that scholars need to move beyond the definition stalemate, the need to clearly define ecotourism remains a lively issue.

Ecotourism is a relatively new idea and the way in which it is conceptualized varies among groups. Scholars, organizations, and tourism companies have all sought to develop a framework and definition for ecotourism, but these frameworks and definitions do not always align. Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) has suggested that ecotourism is “environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations” (p. 3). While this definition implies that local populations should share in the benefits of ecotourism, the ways in which they have been drawn into this phenomenon have not always been in the best interests of all. The concept of empowerment can help us to draw out the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on local people (Goudie, Khan, & Kilian, 1996; Scheyvens, 2000).

Another definition of ecotourism is provided by Honey (2008, p. 33) who defined it as “travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps educate the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights”. Honey’s definition is multifaceted and encompasses various agendas. It not only addresses the environmental agenda, but also focuses on local culture and stresses that local groups should benefit from tourism.

TIES offers a much more concise definition, classifying ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (Ecotourism Society, 1991, p. 6). This definition is more compact than Honey’s, but it addresses both the environmental agenda and the agenda of the local people. Both definitions provide a foundation for understanding ecotourism.

Although the definitions of ecotourism vary, most agree that the main components of successful ecotourism are as follows:

- (1) Dependent on the natural environment;
- (2) Is ecologically sustainable;
- (3) Contributes to conservation;
- (4) Features interpretation and education;
- (5) Incorporates cultural considerations;
- (6) There is a net return/benefit to the local community (Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1998).

Table 1 shows the different criteria developed by different scholars and/or authors for categorizing ecotourism.

Table 1

Criteria Used by Scholars for Categorizing Ecotourism

Source of ecotourism criteria	Ecotourism criteria
Reichert (1994)	(1) Designed, built, and operated so that it leaves a “soft imprint”; (2) Contribute financially to the local economy and local community services; (3) Contribute financially to environmental protection; (4) Educate visitors and members of the local communities.
Honey (1999)	(1) Involves travel to natural destinations; (2) Minimizes impact; (3) Builds environmental awareness; (4) Provides direct financial benefits for conservation; (5) Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people; (6) Respects local culture; (7) Supports human rights and democratic movements.
Blamey (2001)	(1) Nature-based; (2) Environmentally and culturally educated; (3) Sustainably managed.
Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (2008)	(1) Demonstrate effective sustainable management; (2) Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts; (3) Maximize benefits to the cultural heritage; (4) Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.
TIES (2010)	(1) Minimize impact; (2) Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect; (3) Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts; (4) Provide direct financial benefits for conservation; (5) Provide financial benefits and empowerments for local people; (6) Raise sensitivity to host countries’ political and social climate.

Note. Source: Hogan (2011, p. 14).

Table 2 shows the types of alternative tourism. Ecotourism is a form of alternative tourism.

Table 2

Types of Alternative Tourism

Alternative type of tourism	Definition
Adventure tourism	Usually a form of nature-based tourism that incorporates an element of risk, higher levels of physical exertion, and the need for specialized skills; often hybridizes with ecotourism and other forms of tourism.
Cultural heritage tourism	Traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural, and natural resources.
Indigenous tourism	Tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction.
Nature-based tourism	Any form of tourism that relies primarily on the natural environment for its attractions and/or settings; incorporates ecotourism and substantial parts of adventure-based tourism.
Sustainable tourism	Tourism that meets the needs to the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; more commonly perceived as tourism that does not negatively impact the environment, economy, culture, and society of a particular destination; ecotourism can be a form of sustainable tourism.

Note. Source: Hogan (2011, p. 16).

Butler (1992) outlined eight key principles of ecotourism as follows:

- (1) It must be consistent with a positive environmental ethic, fostering preferred behavior;
- (2) It does not denigrate the resource. There is no erosion of resource integrity;
- (3) It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values;
- (4) It is biocentric rather than homocentric in philosophy, in that an ecotourist accepts nature largely on its terms, rather than significantly transforming the environment for personal convenience;
- (5) It must benefit the resource. The environment must experience a net benefit from the activity, although there are often spin-offs of social, economic, political, or scientific benefits;
- (6) It is first-hand experience with the natural environment;
- (7) There is, in ecotourism, an expectation of gratification measured in appreciation and education, not in thrill-seeking or physical achievement;
- (8) There are high cognitive (informational) and effective (emotional) dimensions to the experience, requiring a high level of preparation from both leaders and participants.

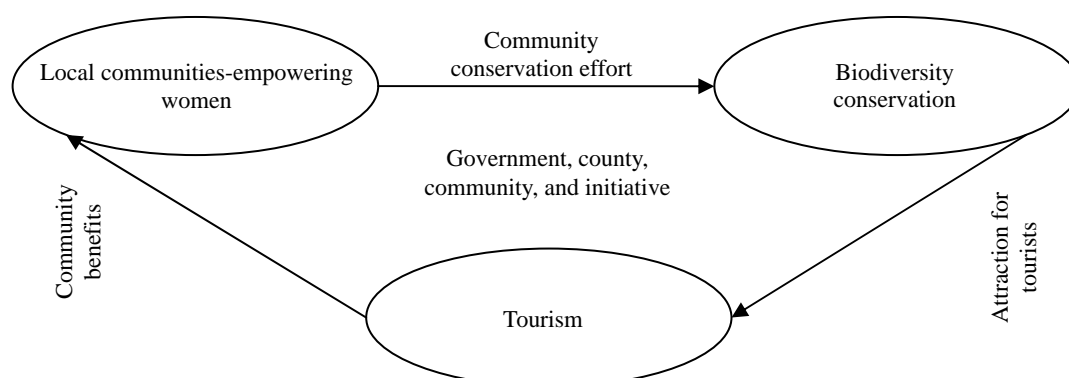


Figure 1. Ecotourism framework (adapted from Ross & Wall, 1999, p. 126).

The theoretical framework in Figure 1 above shows the connection among the three dimensions of sustainable development: ecological, socio-cultural, and socio-economic sustainability. The theoretical framework explains how local communities can benefit from biodiversity which they can use for tourism purposes. The community in turn can then focus on gender aspect for ecotourism (Ramser, 2007).

Literature Review

This paper discusses gender issues concerning ecotourism, a topic that has received little serious scholarly attention to date as the following quotation aptly illustrates:

While some critics of mass, large-scale tourism development have advocated the pursuit of small-scale, “sustainable”, “alternative”, “responsible”, or “appropriate” tourism which is locally controlled, sensitive to indigenous cultural and environmental characteristics, and directly involves and benefits the local population, gender considerations have yet to be placed centrally within such a debate. (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996, p. 97)

There is a wrong perception among ecotourism researchers that gender issues will be addressed if ecotourism is approached through a participatory planning approach in which community development is targeted. However, as Scheyvens (2007) argued, much deeper appreciation of the complex nature of communities is needed before ecotourism ventures are implemented. She further stated that direct efforts must be made to support poorer, less powerful groups, which often include women, if ecotourism is to be effective in meeting conservation and development goals. However, in past development initiatives, women’s voices have often been ignored as development consultants, researchers, and government officers seek the opinions of chiefs, local elites, and entrepreneurs, the vast majority of whom are men. Fortunately, some male commentators from the developing countries are now advocating for change as illustrated by the following quotation:

In order to translate the rhetoric of sustainable management of natural resources into reality, local people, including women, children, the elderly, and indigenous minorities, must be allowed to actively participate in the decision-making process. We have tended to vest too much power in our traditional leaders through traditional and cultural belief systems. (Mulolani, 1997, p. 12)

It is important that gender is considered by proponents of ecotourism for three major reasons:

- (1) To promote good natural resource management which protects the key resource upon which ecotourism is based;
- (2) To ensure that ecotourism development benefits from the skills and knowledge of a broad range of community members;
- (3) Gender equity is recognized as a basic human right: It is endorsed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and seen as a key principle by many development partners who fund ecotourism initiatives in developing countries around the globe. According to this rationale, women and men should both participate in decision-making forums concerning ecotourism development and management, and they should share equitably in the benefits flowing from ecotourism initiatives. A gender-sensitive approach to tourism can, therefore, be seen as in the interests of all tourism stakeholders, whether their main motivation is conservation, equity, or business success.

In most developing countries, gender inequality is a major obstacle for development. In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015, one of the most important aspects will be to try to reduce the gap between women and men in terms of capacities, access to resources, and opportunities. Tourism development is considered as one of the

ways in which gender inequalities can be reduced (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2006). Given that many tourism studies point to the crucial link among tourism, peripheral development, and women empowerment, this UN commitment has created an important political agenda to research and work on issues in this area (UNWTO, 2006).

According to the UN, gender equality implies that women and men should enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights, and obligations in all spheres of life. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives (United Nations Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA], 2008). Chigudu (1992, p. 11) held a similar view by arguing that, “Knowledge, confidence, power, skills, and access to knowledge” are important elements of empowerment. In changing the lives of women, enhancing incomes, and increasing their self-esteem, there are more and more ecotourism projects to support women empowerment. But, not much attention has been given to research about women empowerment through tourism yet.

Available tourism literature presents two perspectives on the impact of ecotourism on women. One perspective is that ecotourism has a positive impact on women, while the other perspective is that ecotourism has a negative impact on them. Wearing and Larsen (1996) showed how ecotourism can empower local communities by giving them a sense of pride and awareness of the importance of their natural resources and control over their development. Scheyvens (2000) argued that women do not benefit significantly from ecotourism projects. Other scholars with a similar view include Akama (1996), Sindiga (1995), Stonich, Sorensen, and Hundt (1995), Rudkin and Hall (1996), and Shimamotoi, Ubukata, and Seki (2004).

In many cases, women have a close connection with the physical environment of their community. For example, the Maasai women have a special knowledge of walking routes, craft production (see Figure 2), and useful plants, all of which can be related to the development of tourism products and services (van der Cammen, 1997). In such contexts, it would seem logical that these women will get involved in managing tourism projects. Ghodsee (2003) argued that assisting economic sectors, such as tourism employing large percentages of women at comparatively high wages, will help improve their relative economic well-being. However, in other cases, in terms of formal employment, local women are often ignored when lodges and other tourist sites are developed. In many contexts, women miss out on formal employment opportunities in tourism, because social norms continue to restrict the type of economic activities in which women may engage (Scheyvens, 2000).



Figure 2. Maasai women selling their craft work. Source: The researchers.

Swain (1990) observed that generally, men and women are unequally impacted by tourism. This view is expounded by Bolles (1997) who stated that women's importance in the industry is often minimized or referenced primarily in terms of sex work. He argued that tourism becomes a vehicle for exploring the differences and commonalities among women. Scheyvens (2000) described experiences from the developing world in the promotion of women's empowerment through involvement in ecotourism. Gupta and Shah (1999) presented a case where women in Himachal Pradesh, India took advantage of the tourist industry's reliance on beautiful stable mountainsides to mobilize resistance against deforestation. The ecotourism needs enabled the women to strengthen their case. This means that their involvement in joint forest management increased. In this way, they had control of how other tourism activities in the area should be ordered, not letting the male-dominated accommodation enterprises deplete forests for fuel needed for the tourists' heating needs.

Besides, there is ample empirical evidence to show that money in the hands of women benefits the livelihoods of the children in the community, such as increased expenditures on nutrition, clothing, and schooling. There is similar empirical evidence indicating that the degree of education of a woman affects expenditures on her child's health and education (Doepke & Tertilt, 2010). This is illustrated by two examples, one from a developed country (Canada) and the other from a developing country (Cote d'Ivoire). Hoddinott and Haddad (1995) found that an increase in the wife's share of income is associated with an increase in the share of expenditures on food and a decrease in the share of expenditures on alcohol and cigarettes. Phipps and Burton (1998) used data from Canada and found that the share of wives' income matters (even when both spouses work full time) for several expenditure categories, such as childcare, children's clothing and food. Phipps and Burton (1998) concluded that an increase in a woman's income is directly related to increasing childcare expenditures, while a man's is not.

Major challenges for gender equity include access and control of sectors of the economy that generate income. This observation is true for Kenya as well. Barry (2012) observed that most women in Kenya as elsewhere in the developing world are overburdened by culturally defined roles, such as water-fetching, child-rearing, and housework. She noted that these daily chores are essential for their survival, but do not generate hard cash. By creating a venue for women to generate hard cash through ecotourism projects, these gender roles can become a thing of the past and help ease the physical burden on women.

Methodology

The methodology used for collecting data in this paper was primarily qualitative in nature consisting of field observations by the authors and case studies of ecotourism projects initiated and managed by women throughout the country. The study adopts a multiple case study research design by examining the impacts of several ecotourism projects in different parts of the country, some owned by women and others by members of the local communities.

Secondary methods included literature search and review. Available literature concerning the concept of ecotourism, principles and practices, and research findings in other parts of the world was analyzed and put in the context of the Kenyan situation. Information from secondary sources provided insights on how ecotourism ventures in the other parts of the world have positively or negatively impacted women. Such literature provided lessons on how to manage ecotourism projects properly in order to empower women and promote community development in Kenya.

Empowerment and Community Development Through Ecotourism

This section discusses the extent to which women in Kenya have been empowered or disempowered by their involvement with ecotourism projects or ventures. It also examines how ecotourism projects can promote community development. In recent years, gender analyses have played an important role in deepening an understanding of the tourism industry in general (Kinnaïrd & Hall, 1994). The impacts of ecotourism and other alternative forms of tourism and their potential to enhance the lives of impoverished communities have rarely been analyzed from a gender perspective. This is what has led Kinnaïrd and Hall (1996, p. 97) to state that:

While some critics of mass, large-scale tourism development have advocated the pursuit of small-scale, “sustainable”, “alternative”, “responsible”, or “appropriate” tourism which is locally controlled, sensitive to indigenous cultural and environmental characteristics, and directly involves and benefits the local population, gender considerations have yet to be placed centrally within such a debate.

Women Empowerment

The positive and negative impacts of women involvement in ecotourism are summarized in Table 3. From the table, it is apparent that there are many positive impacts resulting from the involvement of women in ecotourism projects, such as formal and informal employment, economic independence, and decision-making.

Table 3

Positive and Negative Impacts of Women's Involvement in Ecotourism Enterprises

Positive	Negative
Formal and informal employment opportunities in areas in which women have existing skills, e.g., cultural performance, crafts.	The status and remuneration of women's jobs are often inferior to that of jobs held by men.
Employment in areas outside of gender stereotypes, e.g., tour guiding.	When women's work is associated with cooking and cleaning, they receive no or little pay.
Economic independence means that women can exercise more say in household decision-making.	Many women are expected to work a “double day”, meeting both the demands of formal employment and unpaid domestic services. Women may feel that they are neglecting their children and their religious or social obligations.
Women become involved in decision-making forums involving ecotourism.	Communal benefits may be distributed to male heads of households, ignoring the needs of female-headed households and polygamous societies.
Men accept that they need to engage in more domestic duties in order to support their income-earning wives. Opportunities for women to gain confidence from interactions with people from outside the local area.	Competition for ecotourism income among different groups in a community undermines social cohesion.
Where women are “custodians of culture”, they gain respect for the roles they play in continuing/reviving cultural practices.	Vested interests dominate park management boards, ecotourism associations, and other decision-making bodies, making it difficult for women to voice their opinions.
Increase in men's respect for their partners, leading to more egalitarian relationships.	Competition associated with ecotourism partners may exacerbate existing fissures within communities and lead to social disharmony.

Note. Source: Scheyvens (2007, pp. 191-192).

Scheyvens (1999) has identified and discussed four dimensions of empowerment, which are economic, social, psychological, and political. Given that development is multidimensional in nature, it is important to consider issues such as: whether the local community derives financial or monetary benefits from ecotourism (economic empowerment); has control over an ecotourism venture (political empowerment); if it provides opportunities for people to develop new skills, gain respect within their communities and thus improves their self-esteem (psychological empowerment); and if it enhances community cohesion (social empowerment).

Economic empowerment. Available literature reveals that local women are often ignored in formal employment, especially when lodges and other ecotourism sites are developed. Women miss out on formal employment opportunities in ecotourism, because social norms continue to restrict the type of economic activities in which women may engage. The discrimination of women in formal employment has been reported in Kenya (Mwangi, 2005). In her analysis of the social impact of ecotourism project in the Selenkei Ranch in Amboseli, Kajiado County, Mwangi (2005) found out that women were not employed at the conservancy as their role was to take care of children. Similar observations have been reported in Asia. Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995) and Lama (1998) have established that women are overlooked when it comes to tour guiding in the Himalayas and Indonesia. Many women felt that they could not exploit this relatively lucrative economic opportunity, because the women who would be involved in such activities would be labeled as “prostitutes”.

Political empowerment. A community that is politically empowered by ecotourism has a say on the development of any ecotourism project from the feasibility stage to implementation and monitoring. The various interest groups within a community such as women and youths need to have representation in the decision-making bodies. Mwangi (2005) also established that the attitude of male community members towards women is an important one because, it determines the extent to which females can participate in decision-making at the conservancy. The reason given for excluding women in decision-making was that they belonged to the same category with children. Thus, it is important not to assume that if women have benefited economically from an ecotourism venture, they will have greater voice within their communities and beyond (Scheyvens, 2000).

Psychological empowerment. Ecotourism initiatives which respect and show interest in aspects of traditional culture can be empowering for local people. Psychological disempowerment can also occur, if the ecotourism development makes local people feel that they are somehow inadequate or inferior, or if they feel that they have no control over the pace and direction of development (Scheyvens, 2000). This has been confirmed by Mwangi (2005) who stated that the community of the Selenkei Group Ranch did not have proper forums to present the community’s view in ecotourism development. The people interviewed expressed disappointment with the manner in which the project was being managed by few people. All the women respondents she interviewed expressed their desire to benefit from the ecotourism project. The community feels alienated for being locked out of decision-making process concerning the management of the ecotourism project.



Figure 3. Wasini women’s group. Source: The researchers.

Social empowerment. Social empowerment refers to a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism. Strong community groups, including youth groups and women's groups and good participation in community meetings, may all be signs of an empowered community. But not all ecotourism projects provide social empowerment to the community. Mwangi (2005) found out that the community of Selenkei Ranch in Kajiado County did not get any tangible social benefits, such as cattle dips, boreholes, or classrooms, from the ecotourism project. However, this is not the case in all areas. In Wasini in Kwale County, women are solely in control of the coral islands through ecotourism (see Figure 3 above).

Case Study of the Isecheno Women's Conservation Group

Initiation and management of ecotourism projects should be done very carefully to minimize the negative impacts such as biodiversity losses (see Table 4). In this section, case studies to illustrate the impacts of ecotourism projects on women and community development in Kenya are discussed. Some of these projects include the Isecheno Women's Conservation Group and Ewaso Cultural Group, near the Archer's Post.

Table 4

Potential Benefits and Costs of Ecotourism

Environmental impacts	
Direct benefits: Incentive to protect natural environments; Incentive to rehabilitate modified environments; Provide funds to manage and expand protected areas; Ecotourists assist with habitat maintenance and enhancement; Ecotourists serve as environmental watchdogs.	Direct costs: Impacts of permanent environmental restructuring and generating waste residuals; Impacts of tourist activities (wildlife observation, hiking, and introduction of exotic species).
Indirect benefits: Exposure to ecotourism fosters environmentalism; Areas protected for ecotourism provide environmental benefits.	Indirect costs: Effects of environmental restructuring (e.g., unplanned development in adjacent villages due to migration for ecotourism-related employment); Exposure to less benign forms of tourism; Problems associated with the economic valuation of "nature".
Economic impacts	
Direct benefits: Generate revenue and employment; Provide economic opportunities for peripheral regions.	Direct costs: Start-up expenses (acquisition of land, establishment of protected areas, superstructure, infrastructure); On-going expenses (maintenance of infrastructure, promotion, and wages).
Indirect benefits: High multiplier effect and indirect revenue and employment; Stimulation of mass tourism; Supports cultural and heritage tourism; Areas protected for ecotourism provide economic benefits.	Indirect costs: Revenue uncertainties; Revenue leakage due to imports and non-local participation; Opportunity costs; Damage to wildlife.
Socio-cultural impacts	
Direct benefits: Fosters community stability and well-being through economic benefits and local participation; Aesthetic and spiritual benefits and enjoyment for residents and tourists; Accessible to a broad spectrum of the population.	Direct costs: Cultural and social intrusion; Imposes an elite alien value system; Erosion of local control (foreign experts, in-migration of job seekers); Local inequalities and internecine disputes.
	Indirect costs: Potential for local resentment or antagonism; Tourist opposition to aspects of local culture and lifestyle (e.g., hunting).

Note. Source: Okech (2014, p. 9).

The Isecheno Women's Conservation Group is located in a small village on the Western edge of the Kakamega National Park, Kakamega County. It is made up of about 26 women. All of them signed up for the project and have a 100% participation rate. They earn about KES 500 each week. Isecheno Women's Conservation Group has become the precedent for environmental education and investment in gender equality in the region (Barry, 2012). However, many women still feel uncomfortable approaching Westerners to promote their group, and they feel as though their English is not good enough. This shows that the women in this group are not psychologically empowered (Scheyvens, 2000). The primary focus of the group was to offer training and education for alternative income-generating schemes in which the women could participate. The initiative was created to encourage women to seek alternative livelihoods from activities such as gathering firewood and making charcoal, both of which are arduous, time-consuming, and illegal. The reason for starting the women's group in Isecheno was because that many foreign tourists and local visitors were ignorant of the lifestyle of the Luhya culture and people living in and around Kakamega Rainforest.

Community Development

Ecotourism is now considered as a tool for promoting sustainable development for local communities especially in impoverished rural areas of developing countries (Watkin, Macharia, & Panopoulos, 2002; Ramser, 2007). Some of the success stories of ecotourism projects include the Il Ngwesi Group Ranch Conservancy and Eco Lodge, Shampole Group Ranch project, Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, Wasini Coral Island, and the Kipepeo project in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. Research carried out in Laikipia County (Ramser, 2007) reveals that ecotourism benefits the local economy as well as the host communities. It was found out that eco lodges provide over 100 jobs and generate nearly US\$900,000 in expenses in Laikipia County. Local communities also benefit in terms of community infrastructure, whereas education is the main improvement and there is an increase in community income. It was also found out that communities, ecotourism, and conservation are compatible with local livelihoods and the influence of tourism on the local economy is considered as socio-economically sustainable (Ramser, 2007).

Il Ngwesi Group Ranch project. The Il Ngwesi is an international award winning eco lodge, situated on the Il Ngwesi Group Ranch in Laikipia County (Ramser, 2007). It is a community-based ecotourism project. The lodge is run by the local Samburu community with support from the neighboring Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. In 1996, the Il Ngwesi Group Ranch adopted a new land use diversification strategy, one of "wildlife tourism". The main goal of this endeavor was to develop an additional source of income for the group ranch members to complement their normal pastoral livelihoods. In the same year, the community received a total of KES 10 million initial capital by various donors through African Wildlife Fund for the lodge construction. Ever since, a growing area of the community land is kept apart for conservation and, with tourism income, the community is buying land to make people live outside the growing conservancy.

The Il Ngwesi project consists of two main elements: (1) the designation of nearly half the group ranch, 8,000 hectares, as a conservation area, in which habitation is banned and livestock grazing is permitted only in times of need; and (2) the construction of an "eco-friendly" lodge using local materials to create a unique design. The lodge is managed and staffed by the local community, who act as guides to tourists both at the lodge and on nature trails.

The main activities include walking, game driving, camel riding, and cultural visits. The project has achieved widespread international recognition and won international travel awards, and is a successful pioneer

effort in community conservation. The community consists of some 400 households representing 3,000 people on 16,000 hectares.

The Il Ngwesi conservancy and lodge are run by a board of directors comprising four elected community members and three external members who report to the Group Ranch Management Committee. In addition to the lodge manager and lodge staff who are all community members, a project manager is also employed, primarily with a professional accounting function. Benefits from the Il Ngwesi lodge have been realized at several levels. Revenue currently stands at KES 3 million per year, of which approximately one third is paid to employed individuals in salaries, one third covers ecotourism operating expenses, and one third is available as benefits to the community in the form of community projects identified by the group ranch committee and approved by members. The highest priority is the provision of schools, followed by school bursaries and provision of health facilities. Funds are also used for road building and providing transport, as well as building cattle dips (Watkin et al., 2002; Ramser, 2007).

Shampole Group Ranch project. As pastoralist communities seek to diversify their livelihood strategies and as the international ecotourism market continues to grow, communities stand a greater chance of receiving benefits from wilderness and wildlife. A recent example is the Shampole Group Ranch near Lake Magadi, Kajiado County, an area of spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife where local Maasai pursuing a traditional lifestyle decided to develop their own conservation project. The group ranch established three goals of the conservation project: to realize benefits from wildlife use, to develop benefits from other natural resource uses e.g., landscape, raw materials, bird shooting, bee-keeping, and to preserve their culture and way of life (Watkin et al., 2002).

Challenges and Criticisms of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is not free from criticism, as there are many arguments against it (Honey, 1999; Lindberg, Enriquez, & Sproule, 1996; Duffy, 2002; Kiss, 2004; Charnley, 2005; Björk, 2007). There is much debate about the likelihood of realizing the promised benefits of ecotourism. According to some authors, ecotourism is theoretically sound but difficult to implement in practice. This is due to challenges such as weak capacity for development and the lack of coordination between local communities and tour operators (Björk, 2007). This has been found to be an obstacle for some ecotourism companies operating in Tanzania. In an effort to involve and benefit local communities, some companies have negotiated land concessions directly with the Maasai. Unfortunately, it is often the case that villages lack the capacity to negotiate business arrangements such as land concessions (Buckley, 2003).

Björk's (2007) claim that a community's weak capacity for development can create challenges in implementing ecotourism practices may have some levels of truth; however, some companies have sought to overcome this obstacle by creating capacity-building initiatives (Hogan, 2011). Ideally, these initiatives would create the village's capacity to negotiate land concessions, handle earned revenue responsibly, and coordinate with tour operators. Some of the tour companies, such as the Dorobo Tours and Safaris, raise funds so that capacity-building projects can be implemented in the villages where they have land leases with the Maasai. The goal of these projects is to create transparency in the handling of revenue from tourism and to strengthen the coordination between Dorobo and the villages from which they lease land for their companies' tourism purposes (Buckley, 2003). Projects such as these could allow ecotourism companies to overcome the obstacles of weak development and lack of coordination, as outlined by Björk (2007).

Kenya presents both growth and opportunity in ecotourism (Barry, 2012). The owner of eco-resorts in Kenya, Anne Loehr (as cited in Barry, 2012), said that the strong backing for ecotourism in Kenya guarantees a bright green future for the country's tourism industry. This is what she said:

I have travelled all over the world visiting eco-lodges and working with the best people in the trade, and Kenya definitely has some of the brightest minds working together to create a sustainable future for the environment and local culture. I think there's no better place to experience ecotourism anywhere in the world.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As already discussed, the goals of ecotourism development should be fostered alongside community development. Ecotourism also has the potential to increase gender equity and promote women's empowerment with income-generating activities and education. Ecotourism should function under the premises that natural resources are limited and their appreciation and protection can be fostered through education as well as empowerment. Additional income earned through ecotourism would take away the need to exploit forests and add to an already saturated market (Ziffer, 1989; Barry, 2012). Women and other community participants in ecotourism will become educated as well as economic leaders in their community, creating a model of a micro-economy to be replicated in other regions. As a result, local communities can become promoters for protection of their natural resources and take pride in the unique surroundings that attract tourists. Besides, if planning and decision-making on ecotourism ventures involve all community members and community-based organizations, then the projects have a higher chance of success and sustainability. Therefore, it can be concluded that conception, planning, and management of ecotourism projects should be done very carefully in order to minimize its negative impacts on women and the community.

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