

TOURISM AND COMMUNITY-BASED WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN KENYA

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Community-based natural resource management can be an effective approach to conserving wildlife and improving human welfare in Africa. Evaluation of the factors leading to effective wildlife conservation in protected areas as well as on communal and private lands can identify problems to be addressed by management and educational outreach, and promote efficiency and accountability.

My research on “Tourist Satisfaction and Information Needs at Kenya’s Community Tourism Enterprises,” examined the tourism experience in Laikipia, Kenya. A series of photographs and statements representing Laikipia’s wildlife, landscape features, cultural heritage, and a variety of service variables that may influence visitor satisfaction were Q-sorted by a sample of guides and managers of four nature-based tourism enterprises and visiting tourists. Using factor analyses, the data yielded 3 groups each describing a distinct visitor experience: “Ecotourist Experience,” “Comfortable Wildlife Experience,” and “Vacation Experience.”

Our results identified wildlife and cultural resources of importance to Laikipia tourists as well as relative values of service quality attributes and ecotourism benefits. Findings suggest the importance of management actions to maintain threatened, but controversial, wildlife species such as lions and elephants, and promotion of the region’s rare dryland

species to contribute to tourism satisfaction. Ecotourism benefits, currently a focus of tourism enterprise websites, appeals mainly to only one type of tourist attracted to Laikipia. Recommendations to the Laikipia Wildlife Trust were to further enhance tourism-centered information and outreach for other audiences.

Research by M.Sc. student Dickson K. Ritan evaluated biodiversity threats and tourism development in Kenya’s terrestrial parks and reserves in order to improve policies and strategic management actions. We compared management effectiveness in national parks managed by the central government through the Kenya Wildlife Service and national reserves managed by local authorities. Based on documents and surveys to 104 managers at Kenya’s terrestrial national parks and reserves, 56% of protected areas experience high threats. Biodiversity threat levels did not differ between the national parks and reserves. However, specific threats, like livestock incursion and illegal human settlement were significantly higher in reserves compared to parks. The national reserves were less visited despite similarities in many types of tourist attractions, such as the “big five,” large mammals, and birdlife.

M.Sc. student Lily Maynard, is conducting an evaluation of community-based conservancies in Maasai Group Ranches in Kenya, assessing opportunities for stakeholder collaboration. A goal of her research is to determine differences in community participation and program understanding between mature and new conservancy programs. She is assessing strengths and weaknesses of the programs perceived by directly and indirectly involved stakeholder groups in order to construct a “Potential for Collaboration Index” to highlight supports and barriers to stakeholder collaboration and conservation. The results will inform recommendations for local action by communities and NGOs to increase benefits and decrease costs to

support more effective conservancies.

Research on the governance and incentive structures for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) in Tanzania is being completed by my doctoral student, Theron Morgan-Brown. Experience with community based natural resource management in Africa suggests that in countries like Tanzania, where more than half of remaining forests are on village lands, REDD governance structures should ensure that communities receive tenure over forest carbon and a pathway to benefit from this resource. This requires that villages are nested within a national emissions accounting system and rewarded for their individual performance at reducing emissions. Theron is developing and assessing REDD benefit sharing systems at the village level that ensure wide participation and accountability.

Evaluation of conservation programs promotes an understanding of economic, cultural, and contextual factors that influence support or opposition to conservation policy. The success of conservation interventions for resources, wildlife, and livelihood depends on these analyses.

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