CHALLENGES FACING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: FOCUS ON ECOTOURISM

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Introduction

- Since the publication of Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism and Tourism and Indigenous Peoples, interest in indigenous tourism development issues has increased significantly. Recent indigenous tourism discussions have focused mainly on aspects of empowerment, authenticity and sustainability.

- Indigenous tourism is characterized as any tourism product or service that is owned or operated by native peoples. In the context of indigenous ecotourism, tourism products and services refer to activities that focus on natural and cultural attractions within indigenous territories, and are planned, developed and managed by indigenous peoples. Ecotourism is considered as a sustainable activity that is primarily focused on ‘experiencing and learning about nature . . . ethically managed to be low-impact, non consumptive, and locally-oriented.’ However, ecotourism as a concept is ambiguous, and has been interpreted to mean different things to different people.

- For the purpose of the discussion here, indigenous ecotourism is defined as an activity and enterprise focused on maintaining the natural and cultural integrity of the land and people where it is developed. There are conflicting reports about whether the development of indigenous tourism is an essential element of self-determination, or a process to assimilate indigenous societies into the mainstream culture. Those in favour of indigenous involvement in tourism argue that, through the provision of economic stability and the reinstatement of traditional cultural practices, indigenous people can achieve self-determination and self-reliance.
Development of indigenous controlled tourism is expected to bring positive social and economic changes too. In contrast, critics have argued that indigenous tourism is yet another form of cultural imperialism, and an example of Westernized attempt to assimilate indigenous peoples into mainstream societies.

Tourism has often proved to be disastrous to the indigenous communities, resulting in their displacement, conflict and violence within the community, and disruptions of social and cultural practices. Effective marketing strategies, modern communication media, access to information and technology, and the awareness of environmentally friendly tourism practices have made remote communities aware of ecotourism development as a viable economic activity.

In the Kenyan context, given that indigenous peoples have lagged behind in economic development and face many social challenges, ecotourism appears to be a viable alternative. Ecotourism development should not just be seen as an economic strategy, but also as a means to strengthen Kenya’s position in regional and national development policies.
The development of ecotourism is seen as an integral aspect of this process towards indigenous control, self-reliance and improvement of social and economic conditions. It has been heralded as an alternative, sustainable development initiative particularly in remote communities located in National Parks and Reserves in Kenya.

Many communities in Kenya have already taken necessary steps to develop ecotourism. Ecotourism has been advocated within the academic literature as an important community economic development strategy due to the potential economic and social benefits that the sector can generate, while also protecting the environment.

While it is widely recognised that indigenous Kenyans suffer considerable social and economic disadvantage compared to other Kenyans, there remains significant challenges for indigenous people in identifying suitable economic and commercial development opportunities directed at enhancing economic and human development within remote communities. Since the late 1980’s there has been a proliferation of definitions of the term ecotourism.
Through a review of the academic literature regarding definitions of ecotourism, this paper aims to present some conclusions about the suitability of ecotourism as a means of providing genuinely sustainable development opportunities for remote Kenyan indigenous communities.

For the purposes of this paper, sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’.

The study is important for two main reasons. First, the alarming scale and speed at which ecotourism is spreading into remote and peripheral areas, driven by the search for new destinations and marketing of things natural and unspoiled, have become a concern to local communities.

Secondly, problems of indigenous peoples, including those related to ecotourism development, have been recognized at several international fora.
While there is no doubt that ecotourism can play an important role in the revival of stagnant economies in many parts of Kenya, it must be ensured that ecotourism plans adequately consider the needs, aspirations and values of indigenous communities, and protection of natural resources.

This article explores the potential for building capacity to plan and develop ecotourism in tourism-dependent indigenous communities. Analysis of the communities’ perspectives of ecotourism development provides valuable insights into economic development opportunities among many indigenous and remote communities in Kenya.

In-depth examination of community visions, priorities and preferences provides a guide to implementing sustainable strategies for the Kenyan communities. From a scientific perspective, this paper provides important knowledge with regard to Kenya’s’ willingness to embrace change and adapt to changing socio-economic circumstances and, in general, contribute to the growing research literature on indigenous tourism.

The paper concludes by evaluating the suitability of ecotourism as a potential means of alleviating the considerable social and economic hardship endured by many Kenyan indigenous people living within remote communities.
Definitions of ecotourism

- There is a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the etymology of the term ecotourism. While a number of authors acknowledge the definition of Ceballos-Lascurain’s in the late 1980’s as the first, main contribution, other researchers suggest that the origin of the term can be traced back to Hetzer who wrote of ecotourism in 1965.

- Commenting on the difference of opinion surrounding the origin of the term ecotourism, it is suggested that the term ‘most likely has a convergent evolution…where many places and people independently responded to the need for more nature travel opportunities in line with society’s efforts to become more ecologically minded’.

- While some academics claim that a strong argument would be required to add to the existing plethora of ecotourism definitions, a continuance of creating variations of the term is predicted. The consequence of so many definitions is an inability to instill meaning and standards in the ecotourism industry, with some commentators labelling the term as ‘a catch-cry for developers, politicians, bureaucrats and operators’.

- A number of factors have been cited to explain the reasons why a single, agreed definition has remained elusive, and is predicted to remain so. It is suggested that ecotourism attempts to ‘describe an activity, set forth a philosophy, while at the same time espouse a model of development’, and it is this multipurpose nature of the concept that prevents the adoption of a common definition.
Advocated benefits and perceived costs of ecotourism

- Although much of the academic literature regarding ecotourism makes reference to its potential for generating economic benefits while simultaneously protecting the environment, rarely are the potential benefits and costs of ecotourism outlined clearly.

- A summary of the potential benefits and costs of ecotourism is outlined in Table 1. Given the focus of this paper on evaluating ecotourism as a means of alleviating social and economic hardship within remote Kenyan indigenous communities, the list of potential benefits, particularly economic and socio-cultural, is important. Such economic benefits are seen to be fundamental to social and human development.

- However, the lack of empirical evidence of ecotourism’s economic benefits is a matter for concern. It is noted that ‘a few economists have assessed ecotourism’s potential for generating income, but economic research into ecotourism’s impacts and its potential for creating conservation incentives is sparse’. The lack of quantitative research into the economic impacts of ecotourism is thought to be an important reason why argument persists as to the actual economic benefits available to local residents from ecotourism based activities.
Table 1: 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
- Ecotourist serve as environmental watchdogs

**INDIRECT BENEFITS**
- Exposure to ecotourism fosters environmentalism
- Areas protected for ecotourism provide environmental benefits

**DIRECT COSTS**
- Impacts of permanent environmental restructuring and generation waste residuals
- Impacts of tourist activities (wildlife observation, hiking, introduction of exotic species)

**INDIRECT COSTS**
- Effects of induces 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

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

DIRECT COSTS
- Start-up expenses (acquisition of land, establishment of protected areas, superstructure, infrastructure)
- On-going expenses (maintenance of infrastructure, promotion, wages)

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, immigration 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)
Implementing the concept of ecotourism

- Ensuring local residents obtain actual economic benefits from ecotourism activities is one of the key challenges of implementing the concept of ecotourism. Emphasis should be placed on the local community being fully aware that the natural resource that serves as the attraction of ecotourism is a major source of income, and needs to be protected.

- The type of community involvement in ecotourism influences the benefits and costs to the host community. However, rather than mere community ‘involvement’, full and effective participation of local communities in the planning and management of ecotourism projects is required. The difference between involvement and participation is that the former may simply refer to the provision of alternative employment opportunities for local residents, while the latter infers a much greater level of collaboration in the decision making processes involved in planning and managing ecotourism projects.

- Environmentally appropriate policies and planning is seen as the key to capitalising on the potential benefits of ecotourism developments. Similarly, planning and monitoring, together with an educational provision as well as a certain level of local control, is regarded as necessary to maximise the benefits while minimising the costs of ecotourism ventures.

- The means of marketing, in particular the advertising of ecotourism products, has been investigated by a number of researchers. In addition to products and activities which do meet the core criteria of ecotourism, others deliberately or inadvertently misrepresent the term.
The relevance of ecotourism activities to indigenous community development

- Contributing to the social and economic hardship endured by many indigenous people is the historically high level of unemployment among indigenous people. The main causes for this high level of unemployment are a lack of job skills, lack of education and training, and limited employment opportunities.

- In order to overcome the high levels of unemployment, indigenous people need greater access to employment opportunities and the mainstream labour market. An important avenue for alleviating the economic and social disadvantage of indigenous communities is likely to come from the development of locally owned and managed small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), operated for the purpose of making a profit for their owners.

- Research conducted in remote communities in Kenya has found that opportunities for indigenous people to establish small enterprises do exist in remote communities. However, to successfully exploit these opportunities, indigenous people are required to overcome substantial barriers.

- Indigenous people tend to lack the education and training necessary to operate, or be employed by, a small enterprise. In addition, most indigenous people who are prospective SME owner-operators have limited access to the finance necessary to establish a small enterprise. While opportunities for business activity do exist, SMEs in remote areas are required to rely on relatively small communities that have limited disposable income.
While a single definition of the term ecotourism would be beneficial for planning and funding purposes for indigenous people considering establishing an ecotourism SME, consensus on the precise meaning remains elusive. Despite the range of ecotourism definitions, three core dimensions of the term are apparent.

As discussed, these include a natural and cultural component, an educational or learning component, and a requirement for sustainability. Remote Kenyan indigenous communities possess a number of attributes that would enable them to participate in ecotourism enterprises based on such criteria. First, indigenous people own substantial land assets with considerable natural and cultural significance which would be suitable for ecotourism experiences.

Second, indigenous people possess an extensive knowledge of the land and of the cultural and spiritual significance of the natural environment. They are prepared to share such knowledge with non-indigenous people within certain knowledge domains. This would provide an important element to the educative process sought by many non-indigenous people. Thirdly, sustainability of the environment has been an integral component of the spiritual, cultural and economic knowledge system of indigenous people for many thousands of years.
As a result principally of these factors, ecotourism has been advanced as ‘a strategy to help address economic and social problems in local communities, and as an appropriate and effective tool of environmental conservation’.

Similarly, the Quebec Declaration states that ‘…ecotourism, if managed in a sustainable manner, can represent a valuable economic opportunity for local and indigenous populations and their cultures and for the conservation and sustainable use of nature for future generations’.

While there are examples of host communities which have benefited from ecotourism, there is a lack of quantitative research into the economic impacts of this form of tourism. Such empirical evidence is necessary to facilitate the development of ecotourism enterprises by indigenous people in remote Kenyan indigenous communities.

Quantitative research into the impacts of ecotourism would potentially assist indigenous people to decide whether they wish to be involved in such activities. If so, it would also assist in the creation of the necessary business planning for such enterprises.
While remote Kenyan indigenous communities possess important characteristics required for the establishment of an ecotourism enterprise, the potential costs of ecotourism need to be evaluated alongside the advocated benefits.

Tourism has a considerable potential for destructive intrusions into indigenous community life. Costs may include environmental damage, tourism trespass into indigenous communities and associated invasion of privacy.

Along with these aspects is the considerable potential for cultural clashes relating to differences in attitudes and value systems. Many indigenous people for example, find the many questions asked by non-indigenous tourists about indigenous cultural aspects as offensive and an inappropriate means of transferring knowledge about land and ceremonial matters.

Ecotourism does have a role to play in economic development and environmental conservation, but argues that this should not occur at the expense of the host communities’ values and culture. Furthermore, ‘to neglect the social dimension of development and peoples’ relationship to their environment is in opposition to the principles of sustainable development which ecotourism is supposedly supporting and implementing’.
Challenges faced by indigenous communities

- Ecotourism provides many opportunities for communities to contribute to the provision of tourism experiences for financial gain. These opportunities occur in both the formal and informal sectors although, in reality, the distinction between the two may be blurred.

- However, a number of challenges must be met if these opportunities are to be realised. These include access to capital, enhanced knowledge of opportunities and how to take advantage of them, marketing and uneven power relationships resulting from differences in scales of production.

Access to Capital

- Although large amounts of capital are not required, by definition, access to adequate capital may be a problem for many of them. Government agencies and tourism plans concentrate upon large developments and major investors and neglect the needs and opportunities of indigenous peoples. A small amount of capital may go a long way in the hands of these people and ways of providing access to capital must be found if they are to participate fully in ecotourism development.
Knowledge

- Ecotourism training is a vital component, which can underpin economic growth in ecotourism. The appropriate approach to ecotourism education should consist of a combination of professional, vocational and entrepreneurial training. It is important to recognise that there are likely to be successful local entrepreneurs who, for a small fee and perhaps in a paired relationship, can work with aspirants in their own language and cultural setting and provide examples of success which others can strive to emulate.

Marketing

- Indigenous communities may face particular problems in marketing their products to potential consumers who may be scattered in distant locations and may speak different languages and be of different cultures. As the internet becomes more widely accessible, it may provide opportunities to overcome some of these problems. Meanwhile, although it should be acknowledged that many communities may be skeptical of the merits of increased government involvement, it may be advisable for governments to assist communities through joint marketing schemes.
Scales of production

- The tourism industry is comprised of enterprises, which operate at a great diversity of scales from multi-national corporations such as airlines conglomerates and hotel chains to small, single person and family operations. In such circumstances, it is perhaps understandable if the needs and opportunities afforded by the latter have often been relatively neglected in favour of large-scale operations with greater access to power. If participation by indigenous communities is to be truly encouraged, means must be found to redress current imbalances in access to power and resources.

- In summary, if ecotourism is to contribute to development broadly conceived, including the Kenyan development plans of growth, equity and security, it will be necessary to create a supportive environment for the involvement of indigenous communities through enhanced access to capital, increased training opportunities and facilitation of marketing. This can be facilitated through effective campaigns such as the one carried out by the Minority Rights Group. Minority Rights Group International (MRG) launched a campaign in partnership with the Kenyan-based Centre for Minority Rights Development and the Kenya Pastoralist Week. The campaign’s primary target audience consists of indigenous peoples, ecotourists, as well tourism industry representatives.
MRG Campaign goals are to:

- Raise awareness among tourists, ecotourists and the tourism industry of the acute challenges faced by indigenous peoples, despite the numerous merits of ecotourism as it is currently practiced.

- Increase dialogue between indigenous peoples, ecotourists and the tourism industry in order to increase understanding of each others’ needs, interests and goals.

- Actively seek the input and recommendations of the aforementioned stakeholders, with a view to finding new ethical solutions.

- Produce a final report (to be launched at the 2008 World Social Forum) that will compile the overarching conclusions drawn from the exchanges, interviews and consultations taking place through 2007.

- The report’s proposed frameworks and recommendations will also draw from lessons learned around the world, as well as best practices that ecotourists and the related ecotourism industry can use to inform new and improved practices. Finally, the campaign also seeks to facilitate dialogue between indigenous leaders and local/national authorities in order to discuss international standards on the rights of indigenous peoples, including their right to land, natural resources and participation.
Conclusions and Implications

- While interest in the traditions and cultures of indigenous peoples is consistent with the wider ethical framework of ecotourism, the reality is that, under current prevailing models, local peoples are being overwhelmingly marginalized in the process of development.

- In most cases, communities are afforded only a token role, performing cultural dances at the borders of reserves for contributions that pale in comparison to the fees collected by tour operators. Few structures currently exist to ensure that a set percentage from tourist proceeds goes towards community funds that can enable the community to secure wells, cattle dips, veterinary supplies, medicines, school fees and other necessities for their well-being.

- Even fewer of the existing best practices ensure the full participation of the community in how these funds should be allocated and spent, or how the reserve should be managed. The right to participation is implicit in the United Nations (UN) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in Articles 8 (on freedom of association) and 15 (on cultural life), and explicit in the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Of direct relevance in this case is the manner in which the right to participation is spelt out in the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development, where Article 2(3) notes that the right to development includes ‘active, free and meaningful participation in development’.
The right to participation is also outlined in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Individuals, groups and communities have a human right to be involved in decision-making, planning and implementation processes affecting their economic, social and cultural rights, and are entitled to information that enables the decision-making process to be meaningful.

It follows that states and non-state actors, particularly development agencies, have a duty to enable people affected by a development activity to participate in ways that can transform their social, political and economic conditions. As ecotourism grows in popularity, there are a number of challenges that need to be faced.

Stakeholders must strive to ensure that global standards are established, monitored and met, to ensure that all those affected by (or involved in) ecotourism may benefit. The standards in question need to be respectful of the rights of indigenous peoples. As traditional custodians of their lands, with intimate knowledge of the eco-systems the long protected, indigenous peoples must be viewed as key contributors to the ecotourism industry.
The time has come for all stakeholders to join hands in making the shift towards ethical solutions that can allow for an ecotourism industry that thrives alongside empowered and involved indigenous communities for the benefit of all.

Despite remote Kenyan indigenous communities possessing important characteristics which align with the common dimensions of ecotourism, there are also a number of obstacles which would need to be overcome in order to establish and operate an indigenous owned and operated ecotourism venture.

While rich in ecotourism assets in terms of land ownership, many remote Kenyan indigenous people lack the finance necessary to establish an ecotourism enterprise. Indigenous people face difficulties accessing finance through normal commercial channels due to lower income and asset levels, a lack of familiarity with the procedures of financial institutions and the inability to prepare formal business and financial plans that are often required.

A lack of education and specific training required to own and effectively manage an ecotourism enterprise is another significant impediment for remote indigenous people. Skills and knowledge would be required in a number of areas including: business and strategic planning, financial management and control, marketing, technical skills to maintain the capital equipment required for the ecotourism enterprise, as well as knowledge of the tourism sector.
Cultural differences between remote indigenous people and visitors may also create tension which will need to be overcome in order to deliver a satisfactory ecotourism experience.

Ideally, ecotourists should respect the culture of the host community, but cultural unawareness by both the host and the visitor can lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

This paper has shown that ecotourism activities are likely to provide potential for economic and human development within remote Kenyan indigenous communities.

Where communities do not have the capacity to undertake all the tasks necessary to establish and operate a commercially successful ecotourism enterprise it will be necessary for indigenous people to establish partnerships with other stakeholders within a region to overcome this constraint.
Recommendations:

1. That the private sector should respect the rights of indigenous communities in the conduct of their business, including within the tourism industry.

2. That governments and the tourism industry recognize the pastoralist way of life as an ancestral mode of production that must be protected and promoted alongside ecotourism.

3. That spaces be created to afford indigenous peoples the opportunity to actively participate in decision making processes that target their land and natural resources.

4. That restitution mechanisms be developed to ensure that land and natural resource rights are restored to the communities in instances where they were unfairly acquired or expropriated.

5. That governments provide for policy recognition of communal land tenure and pursue equitable sharing of resources.
6. That deliberate and specific benefit-sharing measures be instituted to ensure that indigenous peoples benefit from resources that accrue from the tourism industry using their ancestral lands.

7. That funds be made available through tourism revenues and government grants to facilitate indigenous peoples’ human rights education, solidarity building and advocacy before national and international human rights bodies.

8. That, in instances where litigation is necessary, indigenous peoples can engage in this process free from intimidation and harassment.

9. That governments that have not yet signed and ratified international instruments for the protection of minorities and indigenous peoples do so immediately.
The question that has to be raised is: Who are the visitors to come to these Eco tourist objects? The answer is that those who are pleased to go “back to nature” establish the target group. I call them the CREATIVE people. Creative is the acronym of:

C = Care or Commit to nature, they are real environmentalists
R = Researchers
E = Educators
A = Adventurers
T = Travellers
I = Inspirer (painters, writer, photographers)
V = Volunteers
E = Employees
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING &

GOD BLESS