Ecotourism for Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion: The Case of Abindu Sacred site in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract
Ecotourism, which is currently the fastest growing form of global tourism in the world, is more prevalent today than ever before. Communities that once had very little industry and misguided management systems have now been able to flourish with the employment of local people. By involving the local people in these programs and when a direct stimulus is returned to the community, rather than having the profits sent elsewhere, programs have been proven to be much more successful. When discussing ecotourism, it is also important to realize that these programs are not always beneficial to the local communities and many ecotourism ventures are controlled by outside operators. A useful way to discern responsible community-based ecotourism is to approach it from a development perspective, which considers social, environmental and economic goals, and questions how ecotourism can meet the needs of the host community in terms of improved living standards both in the short and long term. This perspective differs somewhat from those approaching ecotourism predominantly from an environmental perspective.The achievement of sustainable tourism development through community based ecotourism initiatives, require the building of community capacities to understand the importance of the resources they own. Most communities are unaware of the potential their cultural and natural natural resources offer. This study will focus on the potential of an ecotourism site, namely, Abindu in Nyahera, in Kisumu County, where there is possibility of organizing the community to run ecotourism ventures.The general objective of the study was to ascertain livelihood enhancement opportunities brought in the wake of ecotourism development in host communities, whilst the specific objectives are to: assess the likely identify key stakeholders in the ecotourism site; assess the level of female empowerment in the development of ecotourism in the community; examine the impacts of ecotourism ventures in the community. The Study examined this community in terms of an empowerment framework as a suitable mechanism for aiding analysis of the social, economic, psychological and political impacts of ecotourism on local communities.The study used qualitative methods to collect the data, namely,participant observation, key informant Interviews, and focused group discussions.
Keywords: Ecotourism, Community based Ecotourism, Empowerment, Abindu, Kisumu.

1.0. INTRODUCTION
Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism that is consistently gaining grounds on a global scale during the past few years (UNWTO, 2001). It is one of the newest opportunities for income generation from cultural and natural resources without destroying the environment (Colvin, 1996). Its fundamental principles refer to minimizing negative impact on the environment, preserving the local cultures and actively contributing to the economic well-being of host communities as well as the stakeholders involved. Ecotourism has the potential to become a driver of sustainable tourism development and also provides opportunities for the development of the disadvantaged, marginalized and rural areas leading to poverty alleviation. It stimulates economic development and social wellbeing of people and at the same time preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage through awareness creation.

Strong arguments have been advanced in support of ecotourism playing a central role in conservation and rural development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The growth of community-based ecotourism, for instance, in this region has been the strongest in the global market in the past ten years due to the positive economic impacts on the people in the region making it an increasingly important industry in East and Southern Africa (UNWTO, 2001).

1.1. Ecotourism
The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people"(Epler Wood et al., 1991: 75). According to Ross et al., (1999), the multiple goals associated with ecotourism are reflected in this definition. Thus, the fundamental functions of ecotourism are protection of natural areas, generation of revenue, education and local participation and capacity building" (Ross et al., 1999: 4).

Participants to the World Ecotourism Summit in 2002 recognized that "ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism"

(Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002:1). Indeed, in many parts of the world, "ecotourism has provided a leadership role in introducing sustainability practices to the tourism sector" (Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002:2).

The prospect for using ecotourism as a means of community development is brighter now than ever before. For instance, ecotourism is reported to be one of the most rapidly growing segments of the tourism industry. Though the figures on ecotourism are difficult to compile, the WTO estimates that global spending on ecotourism is increasing steadily by 20% per year, approximately five times the growth rate of the tourism industry as a whole (Garraway, 2007). The increased demand for ecotourism can be attributed in part to the wave of global environmental consciousness. Important too, is the desire of the tourist to take experiential, multi-activity holidays engaged in the natural, archaeological, historical or cultural heritage of a destination.

1.2. Community Based Ecotourism

The term "community-based ecotourism" is used to describe ecotourism ventures that are characterized by high environmental consideration, increased control and involvement of the local residents, as well as significant benefits for the host community (WWF-International, 2001).This concept is clearly distinguished from other ecotourism ventures that are largely or even totally planned and managed by outside operators and generate negligible benefits to the local people (Akama, 1996 cited in Scheyvens, 1999).

Community-based ecotourism refers more specifically to tourism activities or enterprises that involve local communities; it operates in their lands, and is based on their cultural and natural assets and attractions (Nelson, 2004). Community-based ecotourism, therefore, is tourism that focuses on travel to areas with natural and cultural attractions (rather than, say, urban areas), and which contributes to environmental conservation and local livelihood enhancement.

1.3. Benefits of Community Based Ecotourism Ventures

Community-based ecotourism helps improve standard of living, for example, through increased disposable income of individuals. Besides, there is an underlying concept of development of community-based ecotourism that involves empowerment of local people. In particular, the concept of empowerment of host communities can be divided into four different categories, namely, economic, psychological, social and political. In economic terms, ecotourism generates long-term benefits that are distributed equitably within the host communities and can be used for the constant improvement of the community's infrastructure. Moreover, ecotourism can contribute to the psychological empowerment of the local people by enhancing their sense of self-esteem and by cultivating pride for their cultural and natural heritage. This happens because ecotourism reveals to the public the value of the host community in terms of natural beauty or cultural uniqueness. In addition, ecotourism may strengthen social bonds within the community by promoting cooperation among its members.Ecotourism brings about political empowerment, since it creates a forum for the expression of peoples' voices concerning issues of local development (Scheyvens, 1999).

The concept of community-based ecotourism development appears to meet the majority of the targets established in the definition of sustainable tourism, since it constitutes a tool for both social empowerment and long-term economic development of the local communities (WWF-International, 2001). This is even more crucial for small, rural and remote communities that often suffer from lack of governmental attention and assistance. Self-development through ecotourism is particularly important for these communities, since it gives people the opportunity to utilize their own internal strengths and resources in order to become more self-sufficient (Joppe,1996).Wearing and Neil (1999) stated that the more obvious reason to initiate an ecotourism project is to maximize the benefits of tourism, specifically:(a) additional revenue to the local business and other services, example, medicare, banking, car hire, cottage industries, souvenir shopping, tourism attractions; (b) increased market for local products, example, locally grown produce, artifacts, value added goods thereby sustaining traditional customs; (c)employment of local labour and expertise, example , Eco-tour guides, retail sales assistance, restaurant table waiting staff; (d) source of funding for the protection of and enhancement or maintenance of natural and symbols of cultural heritage; and (e) heightened community awareness of the value of local indigenous culture and natural environment. Benefits to the local business area and its communities are the major reason for undertaking community-based ecotourism. It is also one of the outcomes desired by all stakeholders in community-based ecotourism.

2.0. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Area

Abindu sits on a hilly ragged terrain which extends from Kajulu to Ojola and is part of extension of Nandi Escarpment that is 5 kilometers to Kisumu City in Kisumu County. It is about 1300 metres above the sea level (Fig. 1). Abindu Sacred site is situated 12 kilometres North–West of Kisumu City. Kisumu City is the third largest city in Kenya with coverage of 417 km square of which 287 km square is dry land and approximately 120

km square under water (Hayombe, 2011). It has a population of approximately ½ million people according to 1999 census.

The density population is 828 per sq km. with an average growth of 5% largely due to rural urban migration. The population is projected to be 1 million by the year 2015 with the international airport, Kisumu is expected to post higher population.

Fig. 1: Location of Abindu Site in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Abindu site can be accessed from Kisumu through Busia Road off Darajambili junction to Ulalo road that stretches 2½kms to the site (Route C86). The site can also be accessed from Kisumu through Kakamega Road off Darajambili road through Ulalo–Wachara road (Fig. 1). The site measures approximately 12km square and is surrounded by dense thicket of canopies.

2.2. Geology of the Area

The site is located 12 kilometers, North-West of Kisumu City in Kisumu County on the Eastern shores of Lake Victoria in Western Kenya. Lake Victoria was formed by Intense tectonic movements during the rift valley formation (Gregory, 1965). The Nyanzaian rock system is the oldest rock in the region, the largest being a triangular block in Kendu-Oyugis-Kabondo (Ojany&Ogendo, 1973:22). The overburden consists of reddish, silty sandy clay deposit, and a superficial organic soil underlain by laterite soil with gravel and pebble inclusions. The granodiorite basement rock in the area is a member of Muriu Granodiorite intruded into the oldest rock of Pre-Cambrian Nyanzian meta-volcanics. Abindu rock is a curanotic tor similar to Kit-Mikayi in Seme Sub-County that has more or less similar religious and cultural significance. The rock tors are spatially distributed along the lake region such as Muhonge Murwe 'the crying stone', Gangu Nyalaji and Tororo plug. They are erosional features formed due to gradual denudation processes over long span of time. Abindu hills are remnants of granitic tors that extend up to Nandi Escarpment in the Rift Valley of Kenya (Plate 1).

Plate 1: View of Kisumu City and Lake Victoria from Abindu site.

2.3. Climatic Condition

The climatic condition is modified Equatorial with marked rainfall variation of 700 - 800mm in the higher eastern region (Hayombe, 2011; Ojany&Ogendo, 1973:68). There are two marked reasons, the long rainy season (March - July) and the short rainy period (October - December). The Lakeshore lowlands rise to heights of 1163 -1219m while the inland plateaus rise to heights of 1220m to over 2272m above sea level. Temperatures range from a minimum of 14 - l8°C to a maximum of 30-34oC (Jaetzold, 1982). The Lake Victoria breeze has a strong cooling effect that reduces temperatures in the inland areas.

2.4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study used qualitative methods of data collection, namely, participant observation, individual interviews, focused group discussions and photography. Field survey of the site using field walking to ascertain the use of the site by various stakeholders was accompanied by participant observation. Purposive sampling of women and youth was done to select individual informants who were interviewed and tape recorded. The information was the transcribed and analysed using a soft-ware Nvivo into thematic areas as per the research objectives. Focussed group discussions among women and the youth were held to corroborate the information collected from individual informants and to assess their authenticity and validity. Stakeholder theory was used to interprete and analyse the data collected from Abindu site.

Photographic recording of the activities at the site as well as the nature and state of the preservation of the site was undertaken to act as back-up information to the qualitative data collected.

2.4. Empowerment Framework

An empowerment framework has been devised to provide a mechanism through which the effectiveness of ecotourism initiatives, in terms of their impacts on local communities, can be determined. The empowerment framework could also be used by communities and development agencies attempting to plan for appropriate community involvement in ecotourism ventures. The framework highlights areas to which particular attention needs to be directed if ecotourism initiatives are to avoid the traps of many past ventures which disempowered local communities. Four levels of empowerment are employed in the framework, namely, psychological, social

and political, (Friedmann, 1992) and economic empowerment.

2.5. Framework for Determining the Impacts of Ecotourism Initiatives on Local Communities (Signs of Empowerment)

Economic empowerment

Ecotourism brings lasting economic gain to a local community. Cash gained is shared between many households in the community. There are visible signs of improvements from the cash that is earned such as improved water systems, and houses made of more permanent materials.

Psychological empowerment

The self-esteem of many community members is enhanced because of outside recognition of uniqueness and value of their culture, their natural resources and their traditional knowledge. Increasing confidence of community members makes them to seek out further education and training opportunities. Access to employment and cash leads to an increase in status for traditionally low-status sectors of the community such as the youth and women.

Social empowerment

Ecotourism enhances the local community equilibrium. Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build successful ecotourism ventures. Funds raised are used for community development purposes including building of schools and improvement of roads.

Political empowerment

The community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interests of the host community groups, provides a forum through which people can raise questions relating to ecotourism ventures and have their concerns dealt with. Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism ventures seek out the opinions of community groups that include special interest groups of women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups, as well as, provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making processes.

3.0. RESULTS

3.1. Empowerment of Abindu Community

The City Council of Kisumu's Tourism and Heritage Department took interest in Abindu site in the year 2011 and ever since has not looked into the ways of supporting the host community. The community around Abindu site has since realized that they have in their possession a very important ecotourism resource that is located very close to a commercial hub in the form of Kisumu City and the expansive fresh water Lake Victoria. They have an organized Community Based Organization (CBO) through which they make management and planning decisions on how to best develop the site (Plate 2). In this regard, the County Government of Kisumu has allocated funds in the 2014 financial year to cover some of the development plans for the site.In terms of the empowerment framework, the study analysed the situation in Abindu as follows:

**Plate 2: Women and the Youth during Abindu Community Awareness Creation.**

Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment or disempowerment can also refer to the local community's access to productive resources in an area now targeted by ecotourism. For example, the establishment of protected areas mainly reduces access to hunting and agricultural lands. Abindu community hasbegun to be empowered economically

through contributions made by the members on a monthly basis, collection of some visitation fees for those who visit the site even though proper mechanisms have not been placed for gate collection fees.

Psychological empowerment

A local community which is optimistic about the future, has faith in the abilities of its residents, and is relatively self-reliant while at the same time demonstrates pride in traditions and culture.Such a community can be said to be psychologically powerful. In many small-scale, non-industrialized societies, preservation of tradition is extremely important in terms of maintaining a group's sense of self-esteem and well-being (Mansperger, 1995). Ecotourism which is sensitive to cultural norms and builds respect for local traditions can, therefore be a source of empowerment to the local people. The Abindu community presents a sense of pride in the ecotourism resource they own. The study has established that they are interested in preserving their traditions and culture, which they intend to display to visitors, including traditional food stuff (Plate 3).
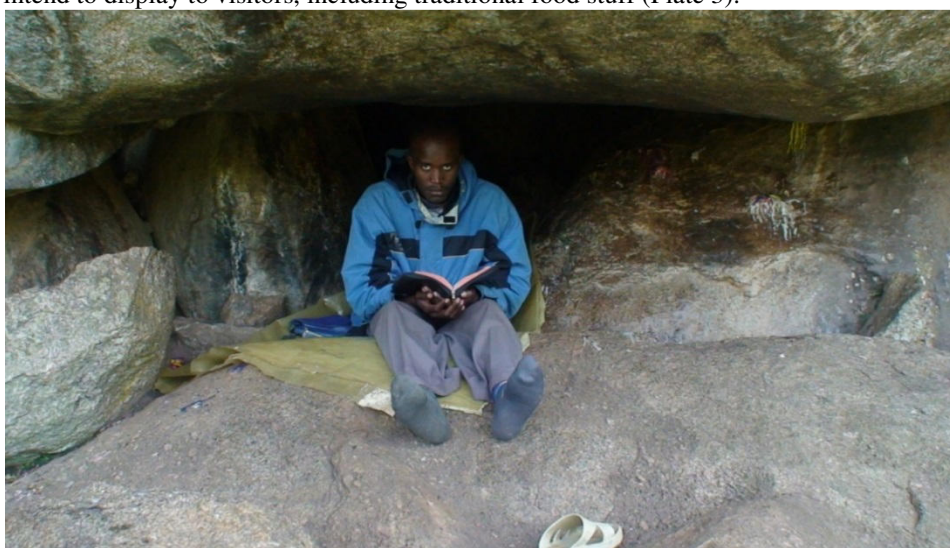
Plate 3: Private Prayer in the solitude of the site.

Social empowerment

Social empowerment refers to a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism. Strong community groups, including youth groups, church groups and womens groups, may be signs of an empowered community (Plate 4). Social empowerment is a result of ecotourism promotion when profits from the tourism activity are used to fund social development projects, such as water supply systems or health clinics, in the local area.The sense of cohesion is evident among community members around Abindusite. Since the formation of the CBO, they have been working as members of a family in all aspects of development, and they are able to lobby for development with different actors as a group.

Plate 4: A Church located at the foot of Abindu sacred site.

Political empowerment

For a community is to be politically empowered by ecotourism, their voices and their concerns should guide the development of any ecotourism project from the feasibility stage through to its implementation. Diverse interest groups within a community, including women and youth, should also berepresentedin community and broader decision-making bodies.The Abindu community that is entrusted with the management of the shrine has been empowered politically, as they are able to negotiate with other institutions on their development agenda such as the National Government, the Private sector and the political leaders. They are invited to various workshops, conferences and seminars to give their views and share experiences with other relevant stakeholders.

3.2. Female Empowerment through Ecotourism Promotion

It is therefore worth noting that ecotourism has the capacity to contribute significantly to the African women empowerment mainly by breaking through the social and policy barriers. As African female writer ChimamandaNgoziemphasizes, "… knowledge is the key to empowerment and there are many factors that make it difficult for women to become knowledgeable: class, status, family, religion and education" (BBCNews Africa, 2005). The case study presented in the next section illustrates how, after obtaining knowledge in tourism needs and interests besides setting up enterprises, the women get out of the 'societal norms' closet' to openly negotiate.

3.2.1. A Comparative Study of Community Tourism at Ol Lentille

A local tourism organization called Ol Lentille offering four holiday houses, a restaurant, pool, library and several activities. The organization is working with four local women groups as one entity. The organization works with them to build and host a craft manyatta for their guests, as well as, trained the women to be visitor guides and keep their accounts.

Programmes

Empowering women is a major focus for Ol Lentille, either directly through the tourism project or indirectly through the community work that the tourism business supports.

Types of Empowerment:

The project provides almost all aspects of empowerment among the Maasai Community.

Social/cultural

One local Maasai woman is now acting head of the spa, fully trained, and she is the first women to have a driving license. Another woman is now studying at a catering college and will return to the group when she has attained her diploma and a third one saved some money from her work and she is now undertaking her university education. The organization will eventually try to find a job for her with an NGO or in government. She will be the first local girl with a degree (now half way complete). Besides this empowerment, women are also getting more socially empowered. Ol Lentille have a large medical program which involves five women (as well as men) being trained as community health workers.

Education and training

They employ and train as many local Maasai women as they can. The women are trained by skilled men and women from outside the community leading to their promotion. They take on as many temporary trainee girls as possible to give them some skills to equip them for the job market. The organization also offer the women part time work once they are trained. OlLentilleprogrammeoffer training in book-keeping and in developing a women's investment plan to control the substantial monies from selling their bead work, maintaining the manyatta and for other projects. In conjunction with the African wildlife foundation, they have helped the women set up an egg project to supply OlLentille with all their eggs and to market them elsewhere. The construction, organization, farming and marketing are the responsibility of the women. They are also discussing the possibility of the women employing a trained Maasai woman from outside to help them manage their projects and develop new projects. The foreign visitors are purchase the women's bead work and whilst the director of OlLentille still handles the shipping (no administration or profit is taken by them), the women are learning the processes involved shipment. OlLentilleprogramme engages in identifying talent and education levels among women. They aim at giving assistance to any girl with secondary education (via training, work with us or work locally e.g. in the schools) but they are also aiming at improving secondary scores of girls now in school using the incentive of college and university courses. They also identify bright girls with no/little education in order toprovide them with education. Improving their communication skills (in Swahili and English) is a priority.

3.3. Female Participation and Empowerment in Abindu site

Since the beginning of the involvement of women in running the ecotourism site, Abindu is rapidly becoming

visible. Out of the 35 members involved the management of the sacred site, 15 are women with one of the office bearers, the treasurer of the Abindu CBO, being a woman, which shows how women are being empowered by involving the in the management and decision-making organs of the ecotourism site. During focused group discussions, the women indicated that they would need to have an eatery where they would prepare traditional cuisines to serve to prospective visitors, this will empower them by getting income from the food proceeds (Hayombe, P. O, Agong', S. G, Nystrom, M, Mossberg, L, Malbert, B, and F. Odede, 2012). The women are already engaged in making ethnographic artifacts from the local materials for sale. The county Government of Kisumu intends include the women in capacity building programmes and training to enhance their capacities to be innovative and manage their eco-venture programmes at the site and its vicinity.

4.0. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABINDU SITE

Stakeholders are organizations, individuals and institutions directly or indirectly involved in development, operation and management of community-based ecotourism projects. Stakeholder's interest in community- based ecotourism can affect the outcome of tourism development (Hayombe, P.O, Odede .F.Z.A, Agong', S.G, Mossberg. L, 2014). In fact, tourism is complex and dynamic, with linkages and independencies and therefore requires multiple stakeholders with diverse and divergent views and values. Stakeholders assume collective responsibilities for the ongoing directions and success of any ecotourism establishment (Gray, 1989). Community-based ecotourism should therefore involve collaborative effort of all the stakeholders to avoid creation of imbalances and uneven development of ecotourism sites.

The organizations include governmental agencies such as research institutions, non-governmental institutions, local people, traditional authorities and tourists.

5.0. CONCLUSION

The tourism sector is a major contributor to socio-economic development and can be used as a tool to reduce poverty in Kisumu County. The evolution of community-based ecotourism in Kenya has triggered enormous interest among people and has set a stage for ecotourism development as well. This study has generally brought to the fore the fact that community-based ecotourism can be used as a strategic tool for poverty alleviation as in the case of Abindu. The empowerment framework, designed for analysis of the impacts of ecotourism ventures on local communities and attempts to emphasize the importance of local communities having some control over, and sharing in the benefits of, ecotourism initiatives in their area. The rationale behind the framework is that ecotourism should promote both conservation and development at the local level. It is particularly pertinent when examining the extent to which indigenous people, or other disadvantaged groups, are benefitting from ecotourism.

Acknowledgement

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