

Eco-certification and Insertion of Socioeconomic and Cultural Best Practices in Ecotourism Operations in Kenya

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Abstract

The eco-rating scheme, a certification initiative for the tourism sector has existed in Kenya since the year 2003 when eco-labels were awarded to the first five tourism accommodation facilities. Since then, interest in certification by tourism facilities has been increasing with close to sixty (60) tourism facilities having received various levels of awards by mid 2012. As with many certification schemes, the eco-rating scheme uses a composite criteria comprising environmental, socioeconomic and cultural indicators in assessing whether a tourism facility qualifies for an eco-label award. In many certification schemes, the environmental criterion is better known and has received much more analysis compared to the economic, social and cultural criteria. This paper examines how destination level communities have benefitted from the eco-certification initiative in Kenya by looking at how economic, social and cultural factors are considered in ecotourism practices of a certified ecotourism facility. The study finds that there are ecotourism operators with a genuine interest in working with local communities to improve their lot. Secondly there are real and tangible benefits that local people derive from ecotourism practices that serve as a motivation for their involvement in tourism endeavours. The study also suggests that local people's participation in ecotourism enhances interest in conservation of nature and culture as well as promoting development at the destination level.

Key words: Eco-certification, socioeconomic and cultural criteria, ecotourism, responsible tourism, eco-rating scheme, Kenya.

1. Introduction

The shift in tourism practice from conventional mass tourism to alternative and sustainable forms of tourism such as ecotourism has been taking place through out the world for over two decades. Ecotourism which is a component of sustainable tourism (Dawson, 2001) has been the most popular and better known of the various emergent forms of tourism. It has generated a great deal of interest from scholars, development organisations and practitioners (Gray, 2003; Fennel, 2002). Mass tourism has been the dominant form of tourism until towards the end of the 1980s when alternative forms of tourism started emerging. For decades, mass tourism as the dominant form of tourism practice had caused many impacts of environmental, socioeconomic and cultural nature to many tourist destinations and also to host communities. Even in the wake of alternative forms of tourism, many impacts continue to be experienced in tourist destinations. A key goal of ecotourism is to mitigate the impacts of conventional tourism. One of the strategies used to reduce the impacts through ecotourism has been the use of certification as a tool to help set standards and put benchmarks to be met by tourism actors in the conduct of tourism operations.

Certification has been defined as the “process of providing documented assurance that a product, service, or an organisation complies with a given standard” (Font, 2002). Certification of tourism products, services, organisations or facilities in the sector is intended to influence tourism actors adopt practices that can help in the attainment of the social, economic and cultural objectives of tourism. The overall aim of certification is to raise the standards on how tourism in general is practiced (Font, 2003). According to the Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD), certification “sets standards and helps distinguish ecotourism and sustainable businesses from others that make empty claims” on how well they undertake responsible and sustainable practices (Bien, 2006 p.10).

Adoption of certification in tourism has been meant to ensure that sustainable and responsible tourism practices relating to destinations environments and their people are observed and that tourism facilities seeking to be certified are evaluated on the basis of observing best practices. There are generally two categories of ecolabels that are sought through the certification process: environmental quality labels which are concerned with tourism destinations, and environmental performance labels concerned with tourism providers (Buckley, 2001). The first category looks into how well destinations such as beaches achieve the benchmarked environmental quality. The best example of such as an eco-label is the Blue Flag label that focuses on beaches and coastal marinas. On the other hand, the environmental performance labels focus on how tourism products, services or even facilities meet set performance benchmarks. The best example at the international level is the Green Globe 21.

Certification schemes can also be looked at in terms of international and national certification contexts of operation or implementation. International certification schemes include those like the Green Globe 21 and the Blue flag both of which started in Europe from where their adoption spread out all over the world. Such schemes have more general standards which are not specific or sensitive to countries' tourism realities and needs (Buckley, 2002). This lack of specificity of relevance in international schemes has led to development of national certification schemes that caters for local tourism concerns (Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). Examples of national certification include the National Tourism Accreditation Scheme in Australia (Carlsen, et al, 2006) and the Eco-rating scheme in Kenya (Spenceley, 2005). Each national certification scheme is thus defined by its own criteria and standards meaning that they are unique to themselves (Hawkins and Lamoureux, 2001).

The common understanding of eco-certification in tourism is that it focuses more on environmental concerns or impacts of tourism than on other aspects. As the above two categories of eco-labels (environmental quality labels and environmental performance labels) suggest, some schemes predominantly emphasise environmental concerns in their criteria of evaluating products, services, destinations and facilities seeking to be certified. A few others such as the Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) emphasises an entirely social focus by seeking to "encourage equitable tourism growth and development in South Africa" (Spenceley, 2005). A majority of the schemes including the Kenyan eco-rating scheme though, use a composite criteria focusing on a mix of environmental, socioeconomic and even cultural indicators when evaluating products or services seeking certification. The emphasis on socioeconomic and cultural issues in many certification schemes is important since tourism practice directly impacts many destination host populations as well as the bio-physical environment.

Social, economic and even cultural indicators incorporated in many schemes examine how a business responds to local communities' issues in the conduct of their business. The inclusion of socioeconomic and cultural criteria in tourism certification is in tandem with the realisation that ecotourism principles ought to address social impacts that conventional tourism practice had failed to address. In terms of the business interpretation of inclusion of social, economic and cultural indicators in certification, the tendency is to associate eco-certification with assessment of the corporate social responsibility of tourism facilities and businesses to the host communities. In Kenya, social and community development issues have been central to the design and development of the eco-rating scheme (Ecotourism Kenya, 2008). From the very beginning, the conception of ecotourism as a sustainable development strategy underlined this social focus especially in highlighting how to bring sustainability issues into the practice of ecotourism by involving local communities (Gakahu and Goode, 1992).

Due to the common tendency of linking eco-certification efforts to environmental concerns, many success stories on how certification in ecotourism has impacted local people socioeconomically and culturally have not been addressed in scholarly studies. This paper examines how the Kenyan eco-certification efforts through the Kenyan eco-rating scheme have influenced and shaped the insertion of socioeconomic and cultural best practices in tourism operations and improved the lives of local people at the Telek area of Maasai Mara National Reserve. This is through a case study analysis of one of the very first gold eco-certified firms, the BaseCamp Explorer that operates from the areas. More specifically, the paper examines the economic empowerment efforts of the certified eco-lodge in improving local communities' livelihoods, highlights socially responsive practices that have helped local people appreciate tourism activities, and explores cultural conservation measures inspired by the adoption of the eco-certification initiative by the eco-lodge geared towards promoting sustainable tourism practice in which the local people are part and parcel.

2. Overview of Literature

2.1. The ecotourism-certification nexus

This review examines the nexus that exists between certification efforts and ecotourism practice. This is important to help show how relevant the eco-certification initiative in Kenya is, in terms of enhancing community development of people living in areas where ecotourism activities take place. Establishing the nexus is further important in showing how benefits accruing from certification help operators further strengthen their efforts of collaborating with local people in tourism endeavours. The benefits operators get from being certified and their practice of ecotourism cements the partnerships arrangements they have with local communities.

The era of mass tourism has been characterised by huge environmental, socioeconomic and cultural impacts on tourism destinations and host populations. The need to mitigate these impacts on local people and environments has over the last two decades or so seen proposals for adopting more environmentally friendly and socially responsive tourism practices. Ecotourism has been one among the many alternative forms of tourism seen to reflect this integrated approach to addressing environmental and social questions associated with mass tourism. Other alternative forms of tourism focusing on a specific issue in the industry include pro-poor tourism, community based tourism, sustainable tourism, etc (Dilys Roe, 2006). Of these alternative forms of tourism, ecotourism is unique because it seeks to integrate environmental conservation and local development issues of tourism practice in a more holistic way. Its principles include benefits to both conservation and local people (Honey, 2008). This holistic approach to addressing conservation and development is close to the perspective of disaggregating the impacts of tourism into its various components such as environmental and community-based impacts of tourism. The composite approach to addressing the myriad impacts of tourism is further reflected in many certification evaluation criteria. In an evaluation of the certification schemes operating in Africa in the middle of the last decade, Spenceley (2005) shows that many tourism certification schemes reflects the impacts that tourism have on environment and the people living in tourism destinations by incorporating the socioeconomic criteria.

Certification is also linked to the practice of ecotourism through the marketing opportunities it presents to private tourism players (Bien, 2006:10-11). The marketing possibilities of using green credentials have resulted to setting standards and benchmarks that industry players in a voluntary manner have to ensure they adhered to in their business operations. This is the reason why certification has been described as a “voluntary procedure that audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards. It awards a marketable logo to those that meet or exceed baseline standards.” (Honey & Rome, 2001).

Experts have indicated that certification opportunity sometimes leads to abuse of the idea of ecotourism where certification is only used to fulfil marketing interests without putting into practice certification’s environmental, social and economic principles. Ecotourism certification is sometimes criticised for entertaining “green washing” of the tourism industry instead of transforming that way tourism should be carried out (Honey, 2008). Green washing “refers to a business presenting itself as ‘sustainable’, ‘ecological’, ‘green’, ‘responsible’, ‘ecotourist’, etc., when it doesn’t comply with generally accepted standards, or worse, it is in contradiction with them”(Bien, 2006: 7). According to Honey, you can “know ecotourism when you see it” (Honey, 2008:28) by looking at what practices are put in place by a tourism operator. Certification therefore can play a significant role in determining how businesses practice ecotourism or sustainable tourism principles according to set standards. It is also useful “in the supply chain assisting tour operators and others identify suppliers who meet minimum standards” (Goodwin, 2005). This is especially true for certification that is “performance-based” as opposed to “process-based”. Performance based certification confirms that a business actually practice what it claims to do (Chester and Crabtree, 2002), as opposed to a mere demonstration of commitment to observing a standards as happens in the process-based certification.

A combination of benefits of certification to ecotourism investors, tourists as well as local communities illustrates the growing importance of eco-certification in the tourism sector across the world. Certification is thus hailed as having the “potential to reduce tourism’s negative environmental and social impacts, ensure that the tourism industry is responsible to its stakeholders by adhering to set certification standards” (Font, 2003:213).

2.2. The Kenyan eco-rating scheme

Like many certification schemes, the Kenyan eco-rating scheme is voluntary designed to set benchmarks and standards in responsible ecotourism practices. It is managed by Ecotourism Kenya (EK), formerly Ecotourism Society of Kenya (ESOK). Its development was a participatory affair that brought together various stakeholder including industry, government, development, civil society and academic players (Gona et al, 2000).

The rationale for its establishment was a need to develop a sustainable tourism industry in Kenya where most impacts of safari tourism prominent for the better part of post-independent Kenya were minimised. Kenya though has been regarded as the “*mzee* (elder statesman) of ecotourism in Africa” (Honey, 2008). This is mainly in reference to her earliest efforts to include local people in tourism and wildlife conservation work. Maintaining a lead in the region in sustainable ecotourism where local people play a significant role in ecotourism development has remained an important goal of ecotourism certification. Concerns for environmental conditions at the destinations have also been an important feature of ecotourism in the country (Ikiara and Okech, 2002). The community-environmental conservation agenda that has been crucial to the practice of tourism in Kenya was important in laying the foundation for sustainable ecotourism. Kenya was therefore among the first countries in Africa to adopt ecotourism as a strategy for responsible and sustainable tourism to counter the impacts of conventional safari tourism that had characterised tourism practice since independence (Honey, 2008).

The evaluation criteria of the eco-rating scheme address environmental, social, economic and cultural issues associated with the practice of tourism in the country (Ecotourism Kenya, 2008). These issues have affected development of a sustainable tourism in Kenya over the years and have been an issue of discussion and practice since the 1970s. David Western has suggested that as early as the 1970s, the country practiced ecotourism in “all but name” (Western, 2003:5). This is due to emphasis on community involvement in tourism endeavours. In the Kenyan eco-rating scheme, community issues are important in the assessment process towards award of an eco-label. The focus on communities is pertinent because local people living adjacent to protected areas contribute significantly to conservation of biodiversity on which tourism depends. According to Western, (quoted in Lovgren, 2003), a community development emphasis was a key element of ecotourism development that helped “give local people an economic incentive to save wildlife”. The socioeconomic and cultural aspects assesses how tourism businesses engage local communities at the destinations especially on welfare issues such employment of local people, community development and preservation of local people’s cultures (Spenceley, 2005).

In all, the development of a certification scheme in Kenya has emphasised the fact that stakeholders ought to adopt sustainable and good tourism practices in their operations. The eco-rating scheme has three levels of certification. These are bronze, silver and gold indicating the lowest to the highest level of certification respectively. The levels of certification indicate that the scheme uses a performance based criteria to certify tourism businesses. Receiving an eco-label is predicated on attaining the minimum threshold at the specified level a facility has applied to be certified in. The eco-rating scheme is therefore performance-based that uses a measurable process that verifies that a business has actually met the agreed standards in its operations. This means it “measure and reward performance other than relying on vague statements of commitment to ecotourism ideals which cannot be evaluated” (Gona et al, 2000). The scheme targets accommodation facilities, a focus that sees ecotourism businesses as corporate entities with certain responsibilities to the immediate communities who also play a significant role in the successes of their businesses. These community roles include diversifying eco-lodge tourism products especially through the cultural aspect. Hence, how the tourist facilities bring on board community interests becomes important to how they are evaluated when they seek certification.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a case study analysis approach. The site of the study was Telek area in the Maasai Mara National Reserve. More specifically, the focus was on the BaseCamp Explorer, one of the very first ecotourism facilities to be certified with a gold label of the eco-rating scheme. Both primary and secondary data were collected and used in the study. Collection of secondary data took the form of desk review of literature sourced from the internet, libraries and resource centres of relevant organisations such as Ecotourism Kenya (EK).

Two sets of primary data were collected. The first set was collected from the study sites through interviews from managers and workers of BaseCamp, from the surrounding community and from other key informants from organisations such as Ecotourism Kenya who manages the eco-rating scheme. The second set of data was collected from observations of ecotourism in practice so to speak during a guided study tour of the eco-lodge and its surrounding area.

Two fairly different semi-structured interview guides were used. One interview guide targeted key informants like the eco-lodge managers and local leaders while the other targeted mainly local community members who had some links or interactions of any kind with the eco-lodge. In depth interviews and observations were done with the staff of BaseCamp such as the manager, naturalist and guides. Data analysis was based on the objectives of the study where emergent issues from the interviews and observations were matched and compared for agreements and disagreements from various informants. Synthesis of data was then done according to each of the objectives set by the study as presented in the next section that follows.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Economic empowerment benefits linked to ecotourism certification

The economic criterion of the eco-rating scheme addresses issues such as job creation, local employment benefits, local supplies as well as training the community (Spenceley, 2005). The criterion aims at facilitating economic empowerment of local people. This is important because communities living in many ecotourism destinations are generally poor. In Kenya, most of these communities have not benefitted from tourism. They have only depended on handouts from tourism actors. This has arisen from the culture of “tips” that has characterised the practice of conventional tourism. It has overtime created a culture of dependency that has predisposed local people to exploitation by tourism investors, tour guides and drivers. For instance tour guides and drivers who take tourists to Maasai cultural *Manyattas* (villages) for cultural experiences often collect fees on behalf of local people but disburse little of this fee to local people who does the work of entertaining tourist. In some areas of Maasai Mara National Reserve, drivers are reported to take as much as 96% of *manyatta* entry fees as their commission, leaving the villagers with as little as 4% (Mvula, 2007:9).

A number of empowering ways have started emerging lately from many ecotourism facilities to reverse the trends. At the BaseCamp Explorer, local women groups are getting integrated into tourism business processes through deliberate steps taken by the facility to ensure that they get better and fair reward from tourism related businesses they take part in. The facility promotes local economic empowerment by mobilising women to engage in handcrafts making and marketing the products to tourists visiting lodges as well as overseas. This collaboration between BaseCamp and local women is similar in others ecotourist facilities with an emphasis on helping community members develop handcrafts while the lodge markets the handcrafts through their clients’ networks. Some lodges in the area extends help in collaboration with local people beyond craft making to other economic activities like bee keeping and furniture making.

The nature of collaboration between BaseCamp Explorer and the local women group has been set on a strong and potentially sustainable base. The eco-lodge has set up a business project known as the Maasai Arts and Cultural Project with Telek women with the aim of promoting locally made handicrafts like beads, necklaces and curio articles under the trade name “Maasai Brand”. The ultimate aim of the project is to engage local women in activities that improve their incomes and livelihood status. The project is able to generate up to 3.5 million Kenya shillings (USD 40,700) annually for the 100 women who have been enlisted in the group. This is evidence of high investment in people’s capacities by directing locally generated tourism incomes into a community-driven project.



Figure 1: BaseCamp Explorer sponsored Maasai women group at a workshop, Telek, Maasai Mara

The business idea of the Maasai Arts and Cultural project exploits the fact that the Maasai people have a rich heritage in arts and crafts and that the same items can be used to inscribe their cultural values while encouraging the spirit of enterprise through the ecotourism market. As a project initiated by the eco-lodge as a social responsibility endeavour, it uses fair trade principles to get into agreements with the Maasai women to ensure that the crafts they make benefit them. They receive 75% revenue from the sale price of each item. The remaining 25% caters for the cost of facilitating marketing and sale of the crafts locally and abroad. The project has been able to provide part-time alternative livelihoods for the women from their routine livestock herding. This has further enhanced the financial independence of the Maasai women by providing them with a regular source of income thus enabling them meet household level needs like health, children's schooling and clothing.

4.2. Social and community welfare aspects linked to certification efforts

The social criteria of the eco-rating scheme emphasises the need to engage the local community in fair wage matters, human and labour rights, equal opportunities and better working conditions, community development issues and assistance (Ecotourism Kenya, 2008; Spenceley, 2005). Community development has been an important agenda driving ecotourism in the country and so it has been very central to the eco-certification process. Ecotourism facilities are particularly keen to observe these principles as they play an important role in the evaluation process when facilities seek certification.

One of the issues prominent amongst eco-certified firms and local community interactions relate to fairness of the land acquisition processes. This is important because quite a big number of ecotourism facilities are located on land leased out from local people. For ecotourism businesses seeking to create conservancies, partnerships through lease agreements with local community members to facilitate development of ecotourism business is a common feature (Gona, 2005). Fairness in drawing lease or partnership agreements between local people and ecotourism entrepreneurs is emphasised in the certification evaluation process. In the past, queries have been raised on the lopsided manner that such agreements have been designed as they have been skewed in favour of entrepreneurs thus disadvantaging local people (Rutten, 2004; Rutten, 2002).

Adoption of affirmative action policies especially in recruitment and employment to various positions available at BaseCamp Explorer is evident. This has seen a large number of local people being employed and they constitute the largest percentage of the work force in the eco-lodge. Many eco-lodges have set high target for local people employment. At the time of fieldwork, 38 of all the 45 or 85% of all employees at BaseCamp Explorer were locally recruited and held positions right across the job cadres in the facility. The gender principle was also strongly recognised with the overall eco-lodge manager being a woman.

BaseCamp Explorer has also supported development of local social facilities. In the vicinity of Telek village, a range of community-focused projects like schools, health dispensaries, and cattle dips have been built through various ecotourism related efforts. This has been especially through partnership between the BaseCamp eco-lodge, visitors to the eco-lodge and local community. This is an important feature of the multiplier effect that certification efforts have on local people.

As result of this partnership, the eco-lodge requests tourist visiting the facility to support local development while the community provides land and labour for putting up social amenities. This has opened up more opportunities by helping people get employment as teachers at a local primary school and scholarships for children from the neighbourhood, besides provision of essential services like education and health to the local people.

Another important feature observed in the eco-lodge as well in other ecotourism facilities in the area is contribution to capacity building and skills development of locally recruited staff working in the eco-lodge. They are usually hired with basic high school training and further training become important for them to fit within the complexities of ecotourism business. This training is very important because most eco-ledges recruit locally with most of the so recruited people lacking in requisite skills to work in the lodges. Acquisition of right skills is realised through in-service training of young promising workers as well as taking them through a formal training process in local institutions such as the Koiyaki-Lemek Guiding School, a community institution developed for this purpose. On-the-job training has enabled locally recruited persons to work in eco-lodges and helped them participate effectively in the broadest aspects of ecotourism like tour guiding, serving as naturalists, ecotourism interpreters, guides, drivers, etc.

On the broader issue of community development, a clear method of facilitation and support for local development is also observed from the BaseCamp Explorer efforts. At the Telek area, local people have benefited from ecotourism proceeds where they are able to identify specific tangible benefits that have accrued from the establishment of ecotourism enterprise. Support for development of social facilities is the most popular intervention mentioned as benefits linked to ecotourism work. The Telek community is therefore able to link numerous community-based projects supported by the BaseCamp Explorer to the practice of ecotourism business as a form of direct benefits. These projects range from schools, health dispensaries, education bursary sponsorship programmes and cattle dips.

4.3. Cultural and nature conservation perspectives of eco-certification efforts

The cultural component of the social criterion is equally important. In the certification process, accommodation facilities are assessed in terms of how they recognise and respect local cultures. They are also assessed on any impacts (positive or negative) caused by their operations or activities and what they do to reduce the impacts (Ecotourism Kenya, 2008). Interesting good practices are identifiable in many eco-rated facilities. Valuing of local knowledge is captured not only in the construction of facilities where local materials and designs are used but also in the interpretative programmes targeting guests visiting to eco-lodges. Locally trained guides in most facilities engage guests in lectures that span the local cultural, environmental and socioeconomic issues of the local area. The recognition and valuing of local culture and environments is further reflected in the training programmes that local guides and naturalists undergo at the local training institutions such as the Koiyaki-Lemek guiding school near Maasai Mara where most eco-facilities sponsor their guides for training.

The significance of culture in ecotourism is seen by the way local people have continued to exploit it for tourism purposes. Culture has become part and parcel of an eco-tour in the area and is being adopted by many tour operators in the entire Maasai Mara National Reserve. This has led to coinage of new concepts that mainly come from the Maasai people themselves. A good example is the recent emergence of a concept “big six” in the Maasai Mara area that means tourism does not only entail seeing the better known “big five” animals like the lion, the elephant, the cheetah, the giraffe and the rhino in the park, but also that tourist come to appreciate the Maasai culture. The Maasai people and their cultures have thus become the sixth of the big tourist attractions in the area. Many eco-sensitive lodges are taking up these new changes as a way to market the Maasai culture and local environments for ecotourism in culturally sensitive ways with the aim of enabling tourists to visit the area and learn about the local ecosystems and people.

At BaseCamp Explorer, there is another initiative that brings the eco-lodge into good relations with local people in conservation and local development terms. This is a community tree conservation project. Through a conservation levy charged on visitors, BaseCamp Explorer has been able support a community tree programme in the neighbourhood. The initiative has been able to plant more than 50,000 trees as part of a initiative to restore vegetation along the Telek River where the camp is located. The river also provides water to the community. Most of the tree planting activities are done by the Maasai themselves as part of the campaign to interest them in conservation work.



Figure 2: An eco-lodge naturalist explains tree planting conservation efforts to visitors at the Basecamp Maasai Mara eco-lodge

Arising from these recent developments where both culture and nature have become very much intertwined for ecotourism exploitation, ecotourism interpretative and education training elements are responding to this new reality. This is where elements of new concepts such as use of local indigenous knowledge is proving to be important in integrating nature and culture as tourism products thus improving the quality of ecotourism experience in the destination. Cultural elements are thus being intertwined with appreciation of nature and landscapes through people's local knowledge to make culture become part and parcel of the ecotourism package. This has made the participation of local people in tourism quite relevant and it explains the importance of local level training programmes such as the Koiyaki-Lamek guiding school.

Conclusion

Good relations between a business and local people are important in developing true ecotourism. Through rapprochement with local people and engaging them in tourism related activities, ecotourism actors can develop sustainable businesses that support local environmental conservation as well as empowering local people socially, economically and culturally. These are key factors for development of a sustainable ecotourism industry where in Kenya has been encouraged and enhanced by eco-certification efforts.

The BaseCamp Explorer experience of working with local people shows that through local people empowerment, the culture of dependency can be reduced with local people becoming self reliant on ecotourism related activities. The true realisation of this kind of scenario may take time to spread across destinations. It is therefore important to develop a critical mass of ecotourism operators through whom sustainable tourism practices can be replicated in other destinations. For this to happen, mutual and reciprocal relations need to be developed by eco-facilities and local people. This is where the idea of certification becomes important as eco-facilities may be obliged to practice what they commit themselves to propagating and entrenching insertion of best certification standards on environmental, socioeconomic and cultural issues. In Kenya, elements of sustainable ecotourism is thus emerging, encouraged by the continued interest in certification by operators and the support the initiative has received from the various actors such Ecotourism Kenya, individuals and community groups.

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