Greetings!

Ecotourism Kenya’s Eco-rating Certification Standard Review

The Eco-rating Certification Scheme is a sustainable tourism certification program that aims to promote responsible tourism in Kenya. It was launched in 2002 by Ecotourism Kenya in cooperation with tourism stakeholders. The program’s aim is to recognize best practices in environmental conservation, responsible resource use and socio-economic investment by tourism accommodation facilities. The program has made tremendous growth since its launch and currently boosts of more than 100 Eco-rated certified facilities in Kenya. This performance and growth has been challenging but productive in the promotion of responsible tourism. To achieve the Eco-rating Certification Scheme’s objectives, it was deemed necessary to review the scheme’s criteria and establish a standard with clear performance indicators. The review of the criteria focused on four components namely: Business practice, Conservation, Community and Cultural performance.

The Eco-rating Technical Committee spearheaded the development process of the standard in consultations with various key stakeholders within the tourism industry between 2014 and 2016.

The Eco-rating standard is aligned to internationally recognized Tourism Standards, including the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) and Fair Trade Tourism Certification Standard (FTT). GSTC was primarily benchmarked owing to its contribution towards fostering sustainability in tourism by (i) fostering the increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices, (ii) promoting the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles and (iii) building demand for sustainable travel. Reference was also made to the FTT
standard because it’s a major regional certification program and it mainly focuses on fair trade practices. Additionally, comparison was done with the Botswana Eco-certification since Botswana was amongst the first countries in Africa to develop a documented standard.

Currently, the EK Eco-rating Standard is uploaded in the [International Trade Center (ITC) Standards Map](#), a platform that enables its users to identify voluntary sustainability standards, generate comparisons between standard content requirements and to assess their business’ sustainability roadmap to sustainable trade. It provides online access to ITC’s most detailed database on private or voluntary standards developed by non-governmental entities, industrial associations and companies among others with the view to promote sustainable trade. EK is also a proud member of GSTC and the standard achieved [GSTC Recognition](#) in June 2016. Additionally, in July 2016, EK and Fair Trade Tourism signed a Mutual Recognition Agreement, which will see EK’s Gold Eco-rated facilities marketed under the FTT holidays platform.

To achieve these milestones, the standard had to be reviewed and additional criteria that were previously missing included. This week’s eco-byte will focus on the additional criteria that have been included in the standard, which are already in effect with the on-going audits by the eco-rating team. Facilities undergoing the eco-rating assessment will have to adhere and show evidence to these criteria.

**Child labour, child abuse and human rights:**
There should be clear evidence of no child labor or child abuse practice and respect of basic human rights which may be indicated through;

- A clear written policy on; advice against child labour, child protection from sexual exploitation, forced labor and commitment to human rights;
- Demonstrate compliance with all national and international legislation on child labor, abuse and human rights;
- Evidence of compliance to the legal employment age;
- No evidence of child or forced labor

**Employment/staff welfare conditions:**
There should be evidence that employees are respected, are paid at least a sustainable wage, are provided with proper working and living conditions (where accommodation is provided), and local residents/disadvantaged groups are given equal opportunity for employment. Indicators here may include-

- A clear employment policy
- Compliance with legal labor regulations (the Employment Act, 2007)
- Affirmative action and capacity building of local residents
- Ensuring staff remuneration is in line or above the set legal minimum wage
- Ensuring employees have a right to paid annual, maternity or sick leave in accordance with the labor regulations
- Evidence of a staff welfare union (where applicable)
**Community access to livelihoods and resources:**
The activities conducted by the facility/business do not adversely affect local communities’ rights of access to livelihoods and essential services such as water & energy resources, healthcare, sanitation, transport, housing, food, historical, spiritual or cultural/heritage sites, etc. There should be evidence of compliance with existing legislations on access to livelihoods and essential services.

**Monitoring client/customer satisfaction:**
The facility should have a system for capturing feedback which should be documented and analyzed and the results taken into account for service improvement or corrective action. There should be evidence that the facility collects and analyzes data regularly on their customer feedback for service or product improvement.

**Fair marketing based on factual and unbiased information:**
All marketing materials referring to the tourism business are accurate and do not make any misleading claims with regards to sustainability. The indicators on this criterion include-

- Any sustainability claims made by the facility are a true reflection of genuine activities that have taken or are taking place;
- All promotional materials set realistic expectations for guests and are not deceptive or misleading;
- Ensure marketing on sustainability efforts is current

The amendments in the Eco-rating standard are reviewed regularly, to keep up with current trends and to be in alignment with other globally recognized standards. To view the complete updated eco-rating standard, please click [ECORATING CERTIFICATION STANDARD](#).