Greetings!

Sustainable tourism supporting local livelihoods

Transforming lives is at the heart of sustainable tourism! Tourism has the opportunity to provide communities with development opportunities such as: access to jobs and opening up business opportunities. For effective development to be realized, it is necessary to apply a bottom-up approach, where the associated communities participate directly in decision-making, based on their development priorities. Many of the eco-rated facilities have incorporated corporate social responsibility aspect in their business operations, as a way of ensuring the communities benefit directly from tourism. This week, we will highlight various ways in which communities are benefitting, so as to encourage you to promote community development in your locality.

Water projects in schools and communities

In some tourist attraction areas across the country such as Maasai Mara, communities and schools are experiencing inadequate water supplies, as the rivers that most people have depended on become dry due to seasonal changes in climate and increased abstraction of water to meet the water demands in tourist accommodation facilities. These areas are also not connected to municipal water supplies. Inadequate clean water can lead to water-borne diseases such as
cholera and typhoid, affecting local people. However, tourism has the ability to improve access to water resources. Ensuring universal access to a safe and affordable drinking water requires that we invest in adequate infrastructure, provide sanitation facilities and encourage hygiene at every level. Some eco-rated facilities have invested in water purification plants in schools, to ensure that students together with their teachers have adequate supply of water for drinking. The illustration below depicts a water purification plant (LifeStraw) at Enkerreri Primary School, an initiative of Sanctuary Olonana.

Provision of market for hand-made curios

Local women living around conservation areas such as national parks, reserves and conservancies have engaged in making hand-made products such as beads, earrings and leather bags among others, as way of generating income for themselves from tourist visits. Some accommodation facilities are supporting local entrepreneurship, by providing them with a ready market in their gift shops, or even by encouraging their guests to visit the cultural villages, where
women usually sell their curios directly. Through this venture, they have been able to take their children to school, and engage in other income generating activities. The illustration below depicts curios displayed at Sanctuary Olonana’s gift shop.

Support to local schools

Improved access to education has resulted into an influx of students in schools in search of knowledge! However, this has led to a strain on the existing infrastructure and inadequacy of learning materials. Some schools do not have adequate classrooms, textbooks and other necessities. Through sustainable tourism, many of the eco-rated facilities have invested in local education, as way of ensuring local communities benefit directly from conservation. This is through construction of classrooms, provision of bursaries and books, payment of teachers’ salaries, and provision of solar rechargeable lamps to be used by students among other myriad of benefits (see illustration below of students using a tablet in class at Enkerreri Primary School).
Support to community health

Equitable access to healthcare remains a challenge in many areas across Kenya. This is due to inadequate infrastructure to support the population, medicine and medical personnel. And more serious, is the remoteness of some areas, making it difficult for people to access medication, even of common diseases such as malaria. However, through tourism some of these challenges are being solved. Some of the eco-rated facilities are providing medicine, assisting in construction of health centers, providing mobile clinics, payment of salaries to the medical practitioners and employment of trained local health volunteers to deliver health services such as family planning.

As already highlighted, tourism has the potential to spur local socio-economic growth. In this sense, it should deliver both conservation and community benefits, by creating partnerships with the locals and contributing to their development, while conserving our wildlife. It’s also important that you document all your community initiatives, because this will help you track your performance with regards to implementation of planned projects, and plan for future development. Some of the development projects require huge financial investment, but your investment should not be necessarily big! You can just start small and build from that.