Greetings!

**Empowering women through sustainable tourism**

The cardinal principle of ecotourism is that benefits from tourism should be shared with the local communities while conserving the environment. Over the past few years there has been an increase in the number of local communities in Kenya seeking involvement in ecotourism ventures. This surge of interest is not a surprise! Many communities are now embracing ecotourism as a potential ‘economic saviour’. This is due to the potential to acquire jobs, expand their business opportunities, develop new skills and even more importantly the opportunity to secure greater control over natural resource utilisation in their local areas.

Women have been able to benefit directly from ecotourism through involvement in various income generating activities through the support of ecorated facilities, and in turn be empowered. This week we highlight some of these activities that are worth sharing and drawing inspiration from with regard to women development.

**Beadwork Project**

The Maasai community is well known for its traditional handmade jewelry. Beadwork has been an important part of their culture for many years. Maasai women are so passionate about beadwork, and they often set aside time every day to meet and work on beaded jewelry which includes: colorful necklaces and bracelets. In fact, it is considered a duty of every Maasai woman to learn this craft. However, finding a market for their products has been a challenge. The good
news is that through ecotourism women now have increased access to market for their products. At Angama Mara Lodge for instance, 10 women from the local village of Kawai have been provided with space and materials for beadwork within the facility. The facility only receives the production cost, while the rest of revenue generated benefits the women directly. During the Eco-rating audit of the lodge in April, we had the opportunity to meet and interact with these women. We were delighted with their work and as they shared their stories with us on how they have been able to benefit. See the picture below taken during the audit.

**Construction work**

Maasai women are always involved in construction of *manyattas*, which refers to a settlement established by a family or a clan. This is a role that is deeply engrained in their culture. This practice has been taken a notch higher, and these women are now involved in some projects in ecotourism facilities. For example at Mara Intrepids, women are involved in making screens and maintaining the walls of the manyatta that has been set up by the facility. The illustrations below are those of the manyatta and screens that are being maintained by the local women.
Whilst in the past, development initiatives including ecotourism have often seen women’s voices sidelined and usually it was the village elders and chiefs (mainly men) who were consulted, women’s voices are now being heard more. Indeed, their prominence has risen in society and we hope that you will continue to promote women empowerment in your locality in one way or another.