Greetings!

**Ecorated facilities supporting local education in Kenya through responsible tourism**

Michele Obama once said, “Empower yourselves with good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise”. This message resonates with our beliefs and aspirations. Kenya is a country full of promise, and young people are its most valuable asset. It is a country of students, scholars and future leaders eager to transform it both in social and economic terms. Access to education is at the very centre of realisation of this transformation. However, so many challenges exist that need to be addressed to meet the above objective. These include: poor infrastructure, high drop-out rate, early pregnancies and marriages and inadequate finances to pay school fees or purchase stationery among others. In the spirit of responsible tourism, some ecorated facilities have taken steps to contribute towards local education in the destinations they conduct business, with the aim of addressing some of the highlighted challenges. This week, we will highlight some of their contributions, as a way of inspiring others to support local education in one way or another.

**Investment on school infrastructure**

Adequate and good quality classrooms, laboratories and dormitories are some of the most crucial elements of better learning environments in any school. However, most schools in rural areas are experiencing strain in their infrastructure. This is characterised by: leaking roofs, poor furniture, open walls and inadequate toilets among others. The end result is the poor academic results and school drop-outs due to lack of safety and comfort.
Guided by its core ethos, Bateleur Camp, a Gold ecorated facility in Masai Mara, is contributing greatly towards development of better infrastructure in the surrounding schools. It has selected a few schools in the area to provide this support. For instance, in the financial year 2017-2018, it constructed 5 classrooms at Iltolish Mara Primary School, while in the financial year 2018-2019, it constructed a boys’ dormitory with a capacity of 100 students. Further, it purchased beds and mattresses for the school. Through these initiatives, the academic performance of students has improved and school drop-outs have reduced.

**Provision of learning materials**

It is widely acknowledged that availability of adequate learning materials such as text books and story books is one of the most effective ways to improve learning. However, in many rural schools students lack these learning materials altogether or are required to share them with others, and this has had an impact on their education. For example, without textbooks students spend many of their school hours copying content from the blackboard, which severely reduces time for engaged learning. This has largely been attributed to high cost of books. The good news is that some ecorated facilities have made tremendous efforts to reverse these trends. For instance, Sanctuary Olonana has provided Enkerreri Primary School with 50 e-readers, to provide reading material and digital enhancement. During the Ecorating reassessment audit of the facility in October 2018, we had the opportunity to visit the school and interact with students in class as they used these devices (see illustration below).
Provision of bursaries

Bursaries increase access to education for students. These are usually awarded to the “most unable and deserving” students, who could not have managed to pay their school fees due to factors such as low family income. Ecorated facilities are playing an important role towards this end, and their efforts have led to increased retention and completion of school among students. One such example is Porini Mara Camp. Through Gamewatchers Safaris, the camp supports local families living near Ol Kinyei Conservancy, who have children in various schools in the area through provision of bursaries (see illustration below of students being issued with cheques at Tumaini School).
We must always remember that education is both a basic human right and a smart investment. It is a critical tool for development, and has demonstrated to have enormous benefits in all facets of life. Some of these include: increased earnings, reduced poverty and reduced gender inequality. It is therefore imperative that we make efforts to improve access to education for all children.