Tourism driving development in local communities-the case of Kicheche Camps

While the pandemic has caused so much devastation to the tourism industry globally, its unique position as a major driver for economic development is still very crisp in our minds. According to the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC), prior to the pandemic the travel and tourism industry accounted for one in every four jobs created across the world and 10.4% of Global GDP. Indeed, these are truly remarkable statistics!

In Kenya, tourism continues to be an important engine for development in our various destinations such as Maasai Mara. Many tourism businesses are leading the way on this tract and are now role models not only domestically but also regionally and globally. One of these companies is Kicheche Camps which runs a collection of four Gold-rated intimate luxury tended camps in Kenya. These are: Kicheche Laikipia Camp, Kicheche Bush Camp, Kicheche Mara Camp and Kicheche Valley Camp. Through Kicheche Community Trust, the company has emerged as a leader in responsible tourism in areas where it does its business, by anchoring the support it provides on four pillars, namely: education, health, community empowerment and conservation. With regards to community development, the trust has implemented a wide range of initiatives as described below:

**Donation of desks and handwashing station during the pandemic**

With the pandemic setting foot in our country, the Government of Kenya was quick to spring into action, adopting science-based protocols to reduce the spread of the virus. Some of these protocols were: maintaining social distancing and washing or sanitizing hands. The choice between allowing the economy to continue running and shutting down everything including schools was a difficult one-a very complicated and unanticipated situation. With regards to schools, the question on the
table was how to maintain social distancing and high hygiene standards among students while in the classroom and outdoors given the inadequate infrastructure that existed in some schools. One of the schools facing this problem was Naboisho Primary School but the great news is that through Kicheche Community Trust they were able to receive 40 desks and a hand-washing station (see the pictures below).
Discussions to ensure increase in school enrollment has quite often revolved around provision of textbooks and bursaries with little attention paid to provision of adequate toilets. Yet, the availability of toilets can encourage children, especially girls to go to school and remain in the school system. Lack of separate toilets for girls and boys has been identified as one of the barriers to girls’ education, especially in the developing world. Access to separate toilet can be a decisive factor on whether or not a female student will continue with education especially once they reach puberty. Besides school enrollment, inadequate toilets also increase the risks of contracting diseases associated with poor hygiene. At Naboisho Primary School, there was only a single toilet and another had collapsed but thanks to Kicheche Community Trust, an additional toilet was constructed for the school in the year 2019. See the picture below of the toilet.

Medical camp for the community

The importance of organizing a medical camp in underprivileged communities cannot be overstated. Health examinations and tests at early stages of illnesses can help cure them faster and save lives. Kicheche Community Trust has placed community health at the centre of how it gives back to the community. The trust organizes annual medical camp at Mara North Conservancy for the whole community across the Mara in the month of October. It is usually a 3-day activity with a total of 7 medical practitioners comprising of repeat guests who are doctors and Oasis Healthcare
Group offering medical examination and treatment. The last medical camp was held in 2019. See the picture below of a member of local community undergoing eye check-up.

These are just the few ways in which Kicheche Camps continue to support the local community even in the midst of the pandemic. These actions truly resonate with what the late Nelson Mandela told us about conservation that “conservation is about people. If you do not have sustainable development around wildlife parks, then the people will have no interest in them and the parks will not survive”. These salient statements and what we have witnessed from Kicheche should be a source of inspiration to all of us to play our part whether in big or small ways to promote community development!