Selenkay

An example of sustainable ecotourism in co-operation with a local community

by Judy Kepher-Gona

Partnerships between the private sector and local communities are a growing phenomenon in a number of natural resource sectors worldwide including forestry, agriculture and tourism in response to changes taking place in the market, civil society and environment policy – both nationally and internationally.

In a number of developing countries, tourism partnerships between the private sector and local communities are becoming more and more common, especially as communities are increasingly gaining rights to wildlife utilization and other valuable tourism assets on their land through national policy changes on land tenure. In other cases, partnerships are developing on private land as tourism operators recognize that not only is local support essential for the long term maintenance of the tourism assets on which the industry depends, but that many communities have cultural resources which can greatly enhance and/or diversify existing tourism products.

In Kenya, the growth of tourism partnerships has been stimulated more by changes in the market place than changes in national policy and land tenure systems. The growth can also be attributed to calls for diversification of Kenya’s tourism product in the wake of falling visitor numbers in the 90’s. Other stimulating factors included a passion for conservation amongst a few citizens, change in donor policy to support conservation efforts that encouraged participatory resource management (inclusive policies) and reduction of rural poverty through sustainable utilization of natural resources. But whether donors, individuals, tourism businesses or NGO’s, it is no longer at doubt that the growth of ecotourism has had positive effects on conservation and contributed to improved livelihoods for some marginalized communities living in dry rangelands in Kenya. Selenkay is one such example.

Selenkay group ranch lies in the heart of Maasailand north of Amboseli National Park in Loitoktok division and has 1357 registered members. In 1997, Porini Ecotourism, a Kenyan organisation, agreed with the local Maasai community that they set aside 15,000 ha of their land as conservation area to act as a safe haven for wildlife and for protection of habitat. This area, Selenkay Conservation Area, has been leased to Porini Ecotourism for development of an ecotourism enterprise—Porini tented camp. In return, the community receives rent for the land and collects visitor’s fees for all guests visiting the area or staying at Porini Tented Camp. All roads in the conservation area have been constructed and are maintained using local labour in support of the local economy. In addition to the roads maintenance team, ten game scouts have been employed to carry out patrols to see that the wildlife is protected while 90% of the camp staff is from the local community.

Selenkay Conservation Area is well off the beaten track and has not been visited by tourists until now. The animals are truly wild and not yet habituated to the presence of vehicles. The number of tourist visitors is being limited to a maximum of 8 per day to retain the wild and unspoilt nature of the area and to minimise impact on the environment. Since establishment of the conservation area, the area has witnessed an increase and re-appearance of wildlife, some never seen in the last ten years like elephants. Within the Conservation Area, the following animals have been seen in the recent past: Elephants, Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Thompson’s and Grant’s gazelles, Gerenuk, Impala, Oryx, Eland, Lesser Kudu, Zebra, Wildebeest, Giraffe, Warthog etc. Bird life is prolific especially birds of prey. Selenkay Conservation Area and the development of Porini camp have progressed from a one-man dream of conservation through tourism, to a near wildlife paradise north of Amboseli.

The goal of Porini Ecotourism is to be sustainable, and thus be an efficient tool for achieving the objectives expressed in their Mission/Vision statement, which in part reads: ‘to work with local communities to protect habitat for wildlife through setting up of..."
Measuring Performance Standards About the ESOK Eco-rating Scheme

The ESOK Eco-rating Scheme, is a voluntary initiative by the Kenyan tourism industry, designed to further the goals of sustainable tourism by recognizing efforts aimed at preserving environmental and social/cultural values. Its focus is on tourism businesses interested and committed to embracing “best practice” in sustainable tourism. Such businesses will have voluntarily adopted better and systematic management practices with regard to their environmental and social performance.

Key Elements of the Criteria

Criteria define the elements used to evaluate compliance with requirements or regulations. They can be described as the building blocks of any certification scheme. In developing criteria, several factors should be taken into consideration: local environmental issues, the sector’s environmental impact and the available technical and management expertise of applicants. The objective of criteria is to signal to members that a higher level of performance is desirable.

(i) Policy & Management Systems

Policy and management systems refer to the tools; guiding procedures and concepts designed to maintain certain standards or desired performance. Good policy and management systems will include:

- Adopted business principles e.g. company environmental policy/statement, staff policy, development/growth policy etc.
- Adopted codes of ethics e.g. membership to associations promoting good business ethics, personal codes of conduct for organisation, subscription to international business codes of ethics will be an added advantage.
- Adoption of environmental management systems (e.g. Environment Impact Assessments, Social Impact Assessment, regular monitoring programmes for water, energy waste, etc.)
- Adoption of social/cultural programs relevant to sustainable development. This will include corporate social responsibility as it pertains to conservation of biodiversity and culture, community support programmes and tourism development

(ii) Communication

Communication refers to various tools and networks developed to guarantee both effective delivery and conveyance of information and feedback. An organisation should have systems to document, utilise and disseminate information to all its stakeholders. Good communication system will include:

- Developing reports/newsletters for utilisation by various stakeholders. This may include brochures, annual reports, magazines, press releases etc
- Having transparent information systems for stakeholders in terms of access and feedback e.g. suppliers manuals, complaints system, water/energy conservation strategies, etc
- Providing full and accurate product/service information to clients. This is about responsible marketing
- Promoting respect for local people’s rights and cultures through appropriate representation in, written/oral literature, images (photography), signage, decorations, art etc
- Having well developed internal communication systems

(iii) Environmental issues

Environmental issues refer to the protection, conservation, and sustainable management of natural resources by which ecosystems maintain their diversity, productivity and resilience. Good environmental practice will include:

- Purchasing material and supplies from environmentally responsible sources (recyclable & recycled materials, locally produced product etc)
- Minimizing pollution from existing operations (air & water pollution)
- Protecting biodiversity (i.e. a positive and active contribution to conservation of natural resources)
- Ensuring new development does not adversely impact on the local flora & fauna, (e.g. by undertaking E.I.A, observing moratoriums, implementing mitigating measures where appropriate etc.)
- Efficient use of resources (e.g. water, energy, land)
- Using and promoting clean (green) technology (e.g. solar energy, charcoal briquettes etc)
- Ensuring appropriate choice of location and maintaining sense of place (e.g. observing ecologically sensitive zones, keeping prescribed distances between lodges, observing prescribed distances from the shore line and other water bodies etc)
- Designing state of the art facilities i.e. use of modern but appropriate technology, like compost toilets, wetlands, natural illumination, etc.
- Designing facilities in keeping with the style of the local environment (use of local material in construction, building on local skills, etc)

(iv) Social issues (Employees)

Social issues capture the impact of the organization’s activity on society at both local and national level. It includes employees, customers, the wider community, supply chain and business partners. Good social practice in relation to employees include:

- Wage structure in line with labour laws or above labour laws
- Observation of human rights (health, housing, etc)
- Labour rights (e.g. leave, tenure of employment, workplace safety, complaints/grievance resolving systems etc)
- Equal opportunity policy (opportunity for growth not dependant on gender, race or physical abilities where necessary)
- Training (e.g. staff development opportunities/strategies)

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When entering into the close canopy of Nyakweri forest one encounters huge natural tree monuments that seem to touch the sky. Accompanied by a couple of Maasai Morans (Warriors), we enjoyed listening to their stories about their life. Their local knowledge about different plants and their traditional uses within this ecosystem is just tremendous. It really creates a different picture to learn what each tree is used for. We got to know the kind of tree used to carve the famous Maasai bows and arrows, walking sticks and “Rungus”.

When we reached the first of the incredibly grown giant Strangler Fig tree, it felt great to lean and rest on its trunk. “This tree is called Oreteti which means, “Help” in Maasai language”. “We believe that it helps women to get pregnant if they go around it several times”, Samuel ole Naikada our local guide explained. Interrupting our conversation, were sounds of birds, attracted by the fruits of this giant. This forest forms a habitat for so many different bird species, which hardly can be seen in the open plains of the Maasai Mara Game Reserve. We, for instance, came across the Grey Throated Barbet, Hartlaubs Turaco, and Narina Trogon, just to mention a few of them.

Continuing on this trial, we spotted fresh elephant and buffalo dung along the track. The guide, realising our apprehension, assured us that the animals had been there the day before and that the local security scouts were ahead and behind us to ensure security. After exploring the dense forest, we reached a sunny open plain where we followed the meandering River Operai to a picnic site. This site offers spectacular viewing, we were lucky to watch more than 10 hornbills fly above! The next stop-over was the salt lick. Here, you can sit and watch wildlife licking the salty clay, of course you have to be there at the right time!

The trail covers just three kilometres, but we spent so much time observing and listening thus spending more time in the forest. At the end of the trial, there were more activities waiting for us. We visited the boma of Bwana Meru ole Sonoro and got in touch with the authentic day-to-day life of a Maasai family. We were overwhelmed by the hospitality of the people and impressed by their nature-related/dependent culture. We did not leave before taking some practical lessons in bow and arrow shooting. This is a real challenge and it takes considerable time to be able to hit a target. However, we had our first lesson and we are looking forward to visit this “Olare trail” again and maybe by then we even will go into competition with our tough Maasai teachers! Our adventures of this day were concluded by a meeting with members of the Dupoto Forest and Wildlife Association, who are the true custodians of Nyakweri forest. This meeting revealed that despite having this unique eco-product, the community faced the challenge of how to market it.

Kiboko is the starting point for the striking River Mara walk. It is full of hippo tracts/footprints and fresh animal dung. The Trail has a beautiful scenery comprised of plant species such as *Euclea divironum*, *Diophorus abyssinica*, *Euphorgia ugdensis*, *Teclea triphylla*, *Ocimum suave*, *Lantanna lippia* and few Acacia species shrubs. These plant species are traditionally used by the Maasai for various functions such as medicinal herbs, making brooms, detergents/perfumes and as forage for the livestock. Dotting the trail are beautiful campsites,
ESOK Executive Committee

An AGM of the society took place in May 2002 at the new ESOK offices in Upper Hill. There was a fair turnout at the meeting and many important issues were discussed including offering free membership to community groups to get them to be active contributors to the society’s mission and values. During the meeting, the following were elected as executive committee members:

- Jake Grieves-Cook Chairman
- Alan Dixson Treasurer
- Ernest Mungai Secretary
- Anjali Saini Committee Member
- Grete Davey Committee Member
- Chris Marshall Committee Member
- Joseph Muongeri Committee Member

Tourist Codes of Conduct

Through a consultative process, we have managed, jointly with Friends of Conservation, to come up with a tourist code of conduct for tourists visiting terrestrial and marine parks in Kenya. Our collaborators in developing these codes have been KWS and KATO. (please see pg. 6 for the complete code). There have been calls to develop a code of practice for tour operators as well and this is being looked into.

The Green File

All members of ESOK receive the Ecoforum Magazine as a membership benefit. The Green File is a quarterly supplement of the Ecotourism Society of Kenya and Environment Liaison Center International (ELCI), and is published by the Ecoforum magazine. The simple goal of this supplement is to provide Kenya’s tourism industry with the practical information it needs to become more environmentally sound and community sensitive. It is also aimed at exposing new sensitive sites and promoting good practice. We are very grateful to sponsorship from Serena Group and Lets Go Travel, which has gone towards the production of the last issue. You too can sponsor the Green File! Call us for details.

Website

The website has improved considerably during the last few months. All our corporate members, listed on the members list, can update their information directly by logging on to www.formatic.com and entering their e-mail address and password.

We have created a Bulletin Board where members can post important notices e.g. tree planting in Mt. Kenya Forest, Lewa marathon, Kushite cultural festival in Samburu, new energy saving technology for local tourism industry etc.

We have also introduced a new feature that will help those visiting our site get answers to the most frequently asked questions about tourism and ecotourism in Kenya. The questions have been compiled from the enquiries we receive from visitors to the site.

Last but not least, we are now registered with top search engines, thereby increasing our visibility in the web. We hope that this will increase visitation to the site, giving our members and Kenyan ecotourism a chance to be seen.

Kenya ecotourism e-group

The Kenya ecotourism e-group is an interactive forum created by ESOK to encourage debate on key issues related to sustainable tourism and ecotourism. Its membership goes beyond ESOK members as anyone can subscribe and participate in the discussions. The forum has been very active and has contributed a lot of great ideas for the development of the tourist codes of conduct. Please subscribe by sending a blank e-mail to kenya-ecotourism@yahooogroups.com.

Membership

ESOKs membership has grown to 100 members as of 30th June 2002. We need many more hotels, lodges, camps, tour operators and travel agents to join the society. Membership is also open to tour operators, hotels/lodges, conservation organizations, community groups, learning/training institutions, and individuals.

By joining ESOK, organization/business demonstrate their Corporate Social Responsibility, support goals of Agenda 21 for Sustainable Travel and Tourism and above all, demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development. Individuals bring in their expertise, learn through networking and broaden their horizons professionally.

Other benefits include exposure among like minded organizations and individuals, access to publications like the Ecoforum Magazine, website listing, participation in conferences and
seminars, participation in sustainable initiatives like the ecorating scheme and the energy audit, access to information on ecotourism and much more. Join now!

Community Outreach

Kakamega Forest

We have recently visited Kakamega Forest to evaluate its potential for ecotourism. Kakamega Forest is recognized by Bird Life International as one of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) of the world. Other than that, it represents remnants of the Tropical Rain Forests in East Africa. But all these could be lost to population pressures and poverty amongst local residents leading to destruction of the forest if efforts are not made to include local people in the management and conservation of this forest.

Ecotourism offers one such opportunity. By initiating ecotourism projects, the community could realize benefits from the forest and conserve it. Our survey revealed that there is a need for accommodation development in this area to cater for an increasing number of visitors. Having established the availability of a product and the existence of a potential market, ESOK is now working with nature Kenya to develop an ecotourism plan for the Forest.

Ngangao & Mbololo Forests

We have also visited Ngangao & Mbololo Forests found in Taita Hills. These forests are the few natural forest patches remaining in the Taita hills region. They represent the cloud mountain forests that characterize the Eastern Arc Mountains. These forests houses most of the plant and animal endemic taxa found in the Taita Hills. Like other forests in Kenya, these forests are threatened.

Because all biodiversity threats are human induced, any protection measures for these forests needs to involve the local people for them to have any meaning. But involvement without benefit may not be sustainable. Ecotourism provides an opportunity for the survival of Ngangao and Mbololo Forests.

Potential activities in Ngangao and Mbololo Forests include bird watching, study tours for college students, forest walks, home-stays, camping, day excursions from the Tsavos etc. Communities living adjacent to the forests have mobilized themselves into organized groups and have been sensitized on conservation and tourism development. They are now looking for partners who can support/work with them to realize their goal of conserving the forests through enterprise development. Contact us for more information.

Launching an Eco-rating Scheme for Tourist Accommodation Facilities in Kenya

On 31st October 2002, Kenya's tourism industry will achieve yet another first. Kenya will become the first African destination to implement a voluntary certification scheme, aimed at checking and improving the performance of tourism accommodation facilities in a bid to further the goals of sustainable development. The scheme, dubbed the ESOK Eco-rating Scheme, can be described as a voluntary initiative for sustainable tourism. Eco-rating is a systematic approach for verifying an organization's performance when evaluated against an agreed suit of criteria (environmental/socio-cultural and economic). [Please see pg. 2 for more information]

Volunteers / Internship

Students wishing to volunteer their time or be placed on industrial attachment frequently contact us for assistance. As a society, we have benefited a lot from these students, but we cannot absorb them all. If you wish to offer a chance to some of these students, please contact us.

We are grateful to Jacinta and Elizabeth of Kenyatta University who have just concluded a very successful three-month stint with us. During this period they collected information on energy and waste companies providing sustainable technologies. They helped to work on a database of ecotourism ventures in the country and supported surveys on ecotourism stakeholders. We are also grateful to Dorothy, Ndirima and Otieno of Nairobi University, College of Range Management, who participated and helped in writing a report of the regional ecotourism conference held in Nairobi in March 2002.

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briefs

Ecotourism Society of Kenya Newsletter – No.5

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When visiting our country

1. **Travel with reputable operators and qualified safari guides**
   INSIST THAT YOUR TOUR OPERATOR AND ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES USE ONLY TRAINED AND CERTIFIED SAFARI GUIDES.

2. **Support eco-friendly accommodation facilities**
   TRY TO STAY AT LODGES AND SAFARI CAMPS THAT LOOK AFTER THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT LOCAL CONSERVATION PROJECTS.

3. **Respect local cultures and promote community benefits**
   SUPPORT PROJECTS AND PROPERTIES THAT BENEFIT LOCAL PEOPLE THROUGH EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS.

4. **Keep to designated roads**
   PLEASE ENCOURAGE YOUR DRIVER TO STAY ON ROADS OR DESIGNATED TRACKS WHEN VISITING OUR NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES.

5. **Minimise disturbance to animals**
   MANY WILD ANIMALS, SUCH AS CHEETAHS, BECOME DISTRESSED WHEN THEY ARE SURROUNDED BY SEVERAL VEHICLES, OR WHEN VEHICLES GET TOO CLOSE TO THEM. PLEASE KEEP NOISE TO A MINIMUM AND NEVER TRY TO ATTRACT ANIMALS' ATTENTION.

6. **Stay inside your vehicle at all times**
   DO NOT STAND ON THE ROOF OR HANG OUT OF THE WINDOW OF YOUR VEHICLE WHILE INSIDE THE PARKS, AND REFRAIN FROM GETTING OUT OF THE VEHICLE EXCEPT IN DESIGNATED AREAS.

7. **Keep to the speed limit**
   MOST PARKS AND RESERVES HAVE A SPEED LIMIT OF 40 KPH – AND ANIMALS ALWAYS HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY.

8. **Never feed any animal**
   FEEDING WILD ANIMALS CAN UPSET THEIR DIET AND LEAD TO AN UNNATURAL DEPENDENCE UPON PEOPLE.

9. **Take care not to disturb the ecological balance**
   PLEASE DO NOT PURCHASE, COLLECT OR REMOVE ANY ANIMAL PRODUCTS, ROCKS, PLANTS, SEEDS OR BIRDS’ NESTS FROM THE WILD, OR ALTER THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ANY WAY.

10. **Take all your litter with you**
    LITTER AND GARBAGE CAN BE VERY DANGEROUS TO WILD ANIMALS. PLEASE KEEP ALL LITTER WITH YOU, AND BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL WITH CIGARETTES AND MATCHES, WHICH CAN CAUSE MAJOR BUSH FIRES.

11. **Protect the marine environment**
    PLEASE TAKE CARE NOT TO TOUCH OR STAND ON CORAL REEFS, AND NEVER DISPOSE OF ANY LITTER ON THE BEACH OR IN THE SEA.

12. **Never buy or remove animals or shells from the sea**
    DO NOT CATCH FISH OR REMOVE OTHER CREATURES FROM PROTECTED AREAS, AND AVOID BUYING STARFISH, SHELLS, OR ANY PRODUCTS THAT DERIVE FROM TURTLES, WHALES OR OTHER ENDANGERED SPECIES.

13. **Avoid buying undersize crabs and lobsters**
    AVOID RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS THAT SERVE UNDERSIZE CRABS AND LOBSTERS, WHICH ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE RAPID DECLINE OF THESE SPECIES.

14. **Support traditional coastal livelihoods**
    TRY TO SUPPORT INLAND MARKET AREAS, WHERE TRADERS ARE MAKING AN EFFORT TO KEEP THEIR BUSINESS OFF THE BEACHES, DO NOT GIVE MONEY TO CHILDREN ON THE BEACH, WHICH CAN ENCOURAGE THEM TO STAY AWAY FROM SCHOOL.

15. **Respect local cultures and customs**
    ALWAYS DRESS IN A RESPECTFUL WAY WHEN VISITING TOWNS AND VILLAGES – AND NEVER BATHE TOPLESS ON THE BEACH.

The Protection of Kenya’s natural environment is a responsibility that is shared by tour operators, local people and visitors. As a visitor, you have the power to influence the behaviour of others. If you insist that these guidelines are adhered to, you will be playing an important part in helping Kenya to preserve some of the world’s greatest wilderness areas.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with Friends of Conservation, the Ecotourism Society of Kenya, the Kenya Association of Tour Operators, the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association.

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About ESOK Ecorating Scheme

- Involvement / participation of employees in sustainability programs of the facility

(v) **Social issues (community)**

Social issues capture the impact of the organization’s activity on society at both local and national level. It includes employees, customers, the wider community, supply chain and business partners. Good social practice in relation to community includes:

- Providing a fair complaints system for all stakeholders (for staff, customers, suppliers, business partners etc)
- Flexible working arrangements for employees (dress code, worship patterns, etc)
- Supporting community development projects (support and/or investment in social development like schools, hospitals, water projects, bore holes, etc.)
- Providing assistance to communities in various forms (e.g. assist in marketing of community products (artefacts, culture), involving local community in facility security programme and extending the same to community, contribute to building roads, assisting with transport in case of emergency etc)
- Developing systems for workplace (local environment, health & safety (e.g. treating waste before discharging into local rivers, safe dumping to avoid accidents, no employment for minors etc)
- Supporting of local economies through employment creation, purchase of local goods/services where practicable, promotion of local community activities like cultural rites etc)
- Providing or meeting the needs of a diverse customer base (e.g. paths for disabled people and activities for older adults etc.)

(vi) **Economic issues**

This refers not only to financial issues/information but also to wider economic development relevant to the local community infrastructure. It also includes actions to improve goods and services for satisfying human needs without degrading the supporting social and environmental systems.

- Creating jobs (e.g. number of local employees, levels of employment)
- Providing access to various benefit schemes (education schemes, cooperative loan schemes, medical schemes, training schemes etc)
- Assisting and developing local supplier capabilities (investing in outsourcing)
- Providing benefits to local communities (buying goods and services locally, selling local goods in your shop, recruiting locally, re-investing profits locally etc)
- Investing in research and development in the community (investing in indigenous technology, sharpening local skills, etc)
- Investing in career and training development to build calibre, skills and capacity of host communities.
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) goal is to help Kenya meet her national development objectives. This is done through development of capacities to design and execute programmes which integrate the protection and regeneration of the environment and the use of natural resources to reduce poverty, generate sustainable livelihoods and advance the status of vulnerable groups of the society including women.

In line with this goal, the Ecotourism Society of Kenya (ESOK) has received support from UNDP to identify community-based ecotourism initiatives to generate income and improve livelihoods of local communities through optimal management of the environment and sustainable use of natural resources. The programs focus is community initiatives in bio-diversity conservation and community participation in ecotourism development. It targets areas with high species diversity, endemism, water catchment areas, and habitats with rare and threatened species.

Through this programme, ESOK has presently identified groups in Mt. Kenya and Kakamenga Forest and a cultural group in Samburu to work with to implement ecotourism enterprises. The proposed projects include trout fishing, campsites, bandas, cultural centers, etc.

For Weru, a self-help group in Mt Kenya South, ESOK has facilitated a successful educational seminar in which all the stakeholders such as the community members, Forest department, KWS, Bill Woodley Mt. Kenya Trust and Lewa Downs Wildlife Conservancy participated. Plans are now underway to train the community group on leadership and management, acquire rights for the community to utilize the forest resources and to identify a marketing strategy. This project will ensure the protection of catchment areas which are threatened by poaching of indigenous vegetation/wildlife resources.

In Isiolo/Samburu district ESOK is working with a local CBO, the Ewaso Nyiro Women Cultural group that owns a cultural manyatta. While the efforts of the women are commendable, poor management and presentation coupled with a poor marketing interpretation makes the product unattractive to tour operators, thus minimizing its visibility. ESOK will work with this group to develop a cultural product that will act as a good example of cultural tourism development in the country. Part of the activities includes linking of the community with different partners to build their capacity.

Through this programme, many more areas with potential for ecotourism will be surveyed. They include Taita-Taveta, Nyeri/Murang’a, Makueni/Chyulu, and Kilifi, Tana, Kiwezi/Chyulu etc.

For more information, please contact ESOK on info@esok.org or Tel: 254-2-2724755, 0722 845 788

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**Selenkay**

Continued from Pg.1

conservancies and thereby generating income through ecotourism …’

**Reality**

How are the intentions of the mission/vision of Porini Ecotourism fulfilled through Selenkay?

- Management- Porini has had to use a lot of resources to ensure that the conservation area is protected and maintained. This includes paying the salaries of the game scouts.
- Marketing - Game watchers Safaris markets Porini Camp by operating two safaris from Nairobi every Monday and Thursday. Income from these safaris helps Porini meets its obligation under the partnership agreement
- Community involvement: – Involving the majority of a local community in decision making is part of Porini’s strategy. This is important to ensure benefits trickle to the most vulnerable members of the community and to retain support for conservation
- Benefit sharing – Porini assisted the community to design a benefit sharing scheme that would be beneficial to all members. Social provisions like water, health and education would be given priority in expenditure, after costs of managing the conservation area have been met.
- Provision of Water- This is crucial for the community as for the camp and wildlife. Water is one of the main sources of conflict between wildlife and local people. Porini has assisted the community to put up a bore hole to provide water for local use and for their herds
- Staff – most of the employees at Porini Camp are local Maasai people from the area. This provides direct benefits to households while building the capacity of the local people in camp management.
- Contribution – quite often Porini contributes to social development in the area. The contributions so far include building of a classroom, transport for local community when practicable, overseas exposure, etc.

For more information contact: Porini Ecotourism at: jake@porini.com
Despite its great potential for ecotourism development and conservation, the area is currently threatened by:

• Massive land subdivision. The new landowners are fencing off the land and thus blocking the migratory route for wildlife. They are also clearing natural/semi-natural vegetation for charcoal burning and using land for cultivation.
• Encroachment of the fast growing town of Kitengela.
• Erosion of the Maasai culture

In an effort to curb these problems, the community found a solution in ecotourism, hence the campsites along the river. This gave birth to ‘Maa Integrated Ecotourism enterprises’ (MIEE), a CBO that oversees ecotourism initiatives in the area. Since the year 2000 they have participated in ecotourism exhibitions, which have inspired them to continue working on ecotourism, despite the many challenges experienced. Unlike other parts of the country where ecotourism is being practiced, here the group ranch underwent subdivision in the early 80’s and each member has his own tittle deed, thus land is individually owned. The only resources used communally are pasture and water. Through ecotourism, the MIEE hopes to

• Prevent further sale of the subdivided Kitengela rangeland to outsiders who are putting up fences and cutting down trees and shrubs.
• See that ecotourism creates a buffer zone between the fast growing town of Kitengela and the intact Kitengela rangeland.

The greatest challenge facing MIEE and the community are lack of knowledge on ecotourism and its potential and inadequate resources to implement ecotourism enterprises. Their urgent needs include: acquisition of camping gear to help attract more people to the camp sites, an operating office where communication between the community staff and clients can be done and a vehicle to transport visitors from Kitengela to the camping sites.

A local tour company presently supports the marketing of these camps. They have also supported this community through printing of brochures and by facilitating them to participate in local travel exhibitions.

For more information on Olerai campings, please contact Jackson ole Kaasha on 0733 774937 or ESOK

Maasai Culture combined with indigenous forest and wildlife

the largest being the John Cook camp, named after the first person to set up a tent along Mara river. These sites are good for a person seeking a ‘one-with-nature’ night under the protection of Maasai morans. Further on the Trail we come across the John Cook swamp which is a natural pool and forms a play ground for the hippos. From this spot one has a good view of wild animals grazing along the river banks at the Maasai Mara reserve.

At last we arrived at one of the river crossing points in the great migratory route of the wildebeest; and you guessed right, there were two huge crocodiles resting on the banks of the river, favourite hunting spots, we thought. We had come to the end of the 2-km river Mara Trail and from this point we were picked by our four-wheel vehicle and went through the Maasai Mara reserve, before returning to our base.