

## Contribution of Gold-ecorated Lodges to Poverty Reduction among Local Residents in Maasai Mara and Amboseli Protected Areas, Kenya

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### Abstract

Poverty is the most pressing challenge facing humankind in the 21st century. In response, various options are being pursued to address it; key among them being ecotourism. While some scholars emphasize the potential of ecotourism in alleviating poverty, existing statistics reveal that majority of people living adjacent to wildlife protected areas continue to suffer from the absence of fundamental opportunities to lead decent lives. This study, therefore, was conducted around Basecamp Maasai Mara and Elephant Pepper Camp in Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR) as well as Campi ya Kanzi in Amboseli National Park (ANP), Kenya to investigate the contribution of gold-ecorated lodges to poverty reduction. Specifically, the study assessed eco-lodges' contribution towards local community access to financial resources, basic needs, governance, empowerment and equality as a measure of their contribution to poverty reduction. The study adopted survey design using structured questionnaires and focus group discussion in data collection. The target population included households adjacent to the three eco-lodges. Through simple random sampling, a sample size of 384 households was generated and participated in the questionnaire survey. To generate focus group, purposive sampling was used to recruit key informants who included area chiefs, managers of the eco-lodges, members of cultural manyattas and chairmen of group ranches for interviews and focus group discussions. Majority of the local community indicated that eco-lodges had greatly contributed to education and healthcare. However, majority of the respondents indicated that eco-lodges had not addressed access to financial resources like access to credit and supply of locally produced agricultural produce; inadequate and skewed financial sharing mechanisms; limited access, ownership and control of their once communal land; lack of technical and legal know-how; access to clean water and adequate shelter. Moreover, lack of partnerships with other stakeholders, inequality in sharing ecotourism benefits, discrimination against women, disunity and mistrust, and lack of government support were identified as the main constraints hindering poverty reduction efforts. The study recommends a need for an ecotourism policy that will not only establish fair and sustainable economic partnerships between private investors and local community, but also ensure community cohesion and enhanced socio-economic welfare. Kenya's National eco-labeling regulators should also put more emphasis on socio-economic benefits of such eco-lodges to the local community besides environmental conservation efforts they foster.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism enterprises; Local community; Poverty reduction; Protected areas

### Introduction

Poverty reduction is an important item on the tourism agenda [1,2]. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [3] identified poverty reduction along with climate change, as a global challenge to the tourism industry. UNWTO has been actively working on poverty reduction and climate change for some years and is committed to seeking balanced and equitable policies to encourage both responsible energy related consumption as well as anti-poverty operational patterns [4]. For instance, UNWTO launched Sustainable Tourism for Eliminating Poverty Programme, with the aim of promoting socially, economically and ecologically sustainable tourism as a gateway to development and reduction of poverty among the world's least developed countries. Recent years have also witnessed a wide range of large-scale, tourism-based development projects around the world [4].

As a result, tourism is being exalted as a powerful weapon to attack poverty [1,4]. Its use as a tool for economic development in developing countries has been a focus of research since the 1970s [2]. In the 1990s this research interest was widened with the integration of economic development in the broader rubric of sustainability, and the establishment of new forms of tourism such as ecotourism in which the economic benefits received by destination communities were a significant concern [2]. Eco-tourism, particularly, was hailed as having the capacity to generate economic, environmental and social benefits. It

was deemed as a sector that promotes inter-cultural understanding and peace among nations. For poor countries and small island states, ecotourism was identified as the leading export-often the only sustainable growth sector of their economies and a catalyst for many related sectors. Besides, it was heralded as the means of not only improving welfare and living standards but also key in overall achievement of equity and human well-being.

The new millennium has seen revisions of the development concept in tourism with increased attention being given to the equity dimension of sustainable development and which has led to renewed interest in the community as a critical element in achieving development goals [2]. Consequently, the sustainability of nature-based tourism in Africa, for example, over the long term depends on the support of local communities especially those living adjacent to wildlife protected areas [5-7].

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Unfortunately, over the years, majority of destination communities in developing countries have been excluded from the benefits of tourism. This is contrary to the principles of sustainable development. Sustainable development focuses on the well-being of individuals and communities in a people-centered and conservation-based development. Moreover, local people have the greatest repertoire of knowledge on their ecology and are able to manage their resource systems in a sustainable manner. As such, they must be involved in creative ways both in conservation and in direct tourism activities [7]. Community participation in resource management for tourism development has the potential of increasing incomes and employment, and developing skills and institutions thereby empowering local people. To be meaningful, such participation should go beyond minimal supply of goods and services, sale of handicrafts and traditional dance entertainment [6,8].

Ecotourism has the potential of reducing poverty and enhancing equitable distribution of resources. The relevance of ecotourism is linked to its role in ameliorating the problems associated with lack of development. While some scholars emphasize the potential for ecotourism in promoting the well-being of both local people and their environments [7,9] there are many people living adjacent to wildlife protected areas who continue to suffer from the absence of fundamental opportunities which can enable them lead decent and satisfying lives [6].

Continued high incidences of premature mortality, ill-health, undernourishment, hunger, illiteracy, poverty, insecurity and other forms of deprivation are evidenced in regions adjacent to wildlife protected areas although most of these regions are a haven to many of the successful ecotourism enterprises [6,7]. This view was also supported by Sindiga [10] who asserted that Africa's wildlife protected areas are characteristically inhabited by poverty-stricken communities to whom esoteric reasons for biodiversity conservation such as providing recreational, educational and research opportunities may not be meaningful. For example, although Narok County generates 90 per cent of its revenue from Maasai Mara National Reserve, only a small proportion of the earnings reach the people living adjacent to the Reserve [7,10]. These benefits are not adequate to offset the negative impacts of tourism and wildlife in their areas. Consequently, many communities in Maasailand simply have no economic incentives to conserve biodiversity [7].

Only when rural communities share in the control and management of wildlife and derive economic benefits from sustainable use and management of wildlife are conflicts and competition for resources which threaten parks minimized. This implies that without addressing issues of access to socio-economic benefits from conservation for communities living adjacent to protected areas, wildlife and other resources cannot be managed in a sustainable manner [7,8,10]. Besides, as much as ecotourism has been hailed as a key advocate for responsible travel which aims at improving the welfare of the local people, there is inadequate statistical data to support this argument [11]. This leads to the question: to what extent has gold-ecorated ecotourism enterprises supported local communities towards poverty reduction? The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate the contribution of gold-ecorated lodges to poverty reduction among local residents in Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas in Kenya. In addition, the study also investigated the constraints hindering their role in combating poverty within the two protected areas.

## Theoretical Framework

Poverty is worth greater research efforts given that it has become

one of the biggest enemies of mankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Poverty not only means inadequate income and human development, but also embraces vulnerability and a lack of voice, power and representation [12]. As such, the poor are socially, economically and politically marginalized. Poverty is multidimensional and therefore poverty alleviation is recognized as a multi-dimensional objective [12]. Consequently, understanding poverty and poverty alleviation is beyond simply tracking economic measures and requires special treatment by more comprehensive research [4]. Tracing and mapping tourists' cash-flows to the local poor could be another relevant approach in exploring the correlation between tourism and poverty alleviation [4]. However, given the multidimensionality of poverty, this study adopted the World Bank's [12] framework for development and poverty alleviation that has received prominence in recent years. According to the framework, determinants of poverty alleviation are opportunity, empowerment and security, which collectively reflect the guiding principles of contemporary development practices under the leadership of the World Bank.

To begin with, opportunity means the poor must have access to economic opportunity of which they can take advantage to change their destiny. Emphasis is being put on the income generation capacity building of the poor [13], in which economic opportunity plays a significant incubating role. Secondly, empowerment is well entrenched in poverty studies [4]. In the political sense, empowerment aims at enhancing the capacity of the poor to influence the state and social institutions and thus strengthen their participation in political processes and local decision-making. In the economic sense, it highlights removing the barriers that work against the poor and building their assets to enable them engage effectively in markets. The poor being socially, economically and politically marginalized, both forms of empowerment represent the essential processes for them to pursue and benefit from any economic opportunity [12].

Thirdly, security is concerned with reducing the vulnerability of the poor to various risks such as ill-health, economic shocks and natural disasters [4]. Since poor households have fewer assets and less diversified sources of income to manage any crisis, they could be easily thrown into despair when these adverse impacts happen to them [14]. Therefore, simply expanding opportunity and empowerment are insufficient; to consolidate the fruits of poverty alleviation, a social security system specifically for the poor also requires establishing [4]. These three components, each from a distinct angle, have manifested three requisite but supplementary ways to assist the poor. Evidently, to achieve the most desired effect in poverty alleviation, all of the three components should be concurrently strengthened [4].

The three components are key conditions for poverty alleviation and serve as the bridge linking development initiatives and the objective of poverty alleviation. Judging the appropriateness and efficacy of a certain poverty alleviation approach can be as straightforward as to examine whether it contributes to the opportunity, empowerment and security of the poor. As an immediate example, the usefulness of ecotourism development for poverty alleviation can be evaluated by employing these three criteria [4]. Doing so is expected to reveal valuable information that helps specify the functioning mechanisms of ecotourism in poverty alleviation, and thus provide theoretical support for anti-poverty ecotourism.

## Limitations of the Study

While the study adopted World Bank's [12] model for development and poverty alleviation that has received prominence in recent years,

it should be acknowledged that the model is not without controversy among development practitioners and researchers [4]. The World Bank is often criticized for taking a particular stance on neoliberalism, which advocates market reform, privatization and external policy intervention in the developing world [4,15]. Not surprisingly, its current development and poverty alleviation approach generally represents such a neoliberal stance. For example, as to the concept 'empowerment', the World Bank [12] mainly considers it in both a political and an economic sense, but there is no discussion of other ideas on empowerment such as Friedmann's [16] psychological and social empowerment [4]. Similarly, in interpreting 'opportunity', the World Bank [12] highlights the importance of economic opportunity to the poor [4]. By adopting the World Bank's model in this study, we risk blocking a more holistic view on development and poverty alleviation, and as such, there is a justified need to look beyond the World Bank's neoliberal stance. We will not venture further in this regard, but we do want to convey the point that the framework, essentially designed as a tool to stimulate thoughts and discussion, is open to debate and should be developed on a continuous, iterative basis [4].

## Study Area

This research was conducted in areas adjacent to gold-rated ecolodges (Basecamp Maasai Mara, Elephant Pepper Camp and Campi ya Kanzi) located in two protected areas: Maasai Mara National Reserve and Amboseli National Park, Kenya. These sites were the only gold-ecorated ecotourism enterprises in Kenya [17]. Basecamp Masai Mara was established in 1998. It is situated 2 km East of Talek gate along River Talek, on a private land adjacent to Maasai Mara National Reserve. The eco-lodge has won international recognition in sustainable tourism, including the 2005 First Choice Responsible Tourism Award for Best Practice in Protected Areas. The camp has 16 tents (consisting of 32 beds) with each costing between US \$ 210- US \$ 230 per night. The lodge has applied various sustainable tourism measures. These include: first, it uses a tree-top wildlife viewing post thus, reducing the need for game drives. Secondly, the camp has made extensive use of local materials for example, deadwood for construction. Third, the lodge has supported the planting of an estimated 25,000 trees since the year 2000, as part of restoring vegetation along the river near it. Fourth, the lodge uses a solar cooker at its kitchen, as a demonstration to the local community on energy-efficient technologies. Fifth, it uses solar energy, ISO-certified solar water heaters and energy saving bulbs [17].

On the other hand, Elephant Pepper Camp was equally established in 1998. It is situated within Maasai Mara North Conservancy. The camp has eight large canvas tents with each costing between US\$ 648-US\$ 785 per night. Besides, the Camp has used a number of sustainable tourism measures, in collaboration with Maasai Mara North Conservancy, such as establishing a set of guiding ethics. Second, the camp's personnel reports any injured wildlife to Kenya Wildlife Service. Third, it returns all the non-recyclable glass waste to central glass industries for recycling. Finally, the camp uses solar energy in its operations [17].

Finally, Campi ya Kanzi was established in 1998. It is situated in Amboseli ecosystem, 25 miles from Mt. Kilimanjaro, in a Maasai group ranch in Kajiado County. This camp has won sustainable tourism awards, including the Skala Ecotourism Award in 2005 and Tourism for Tomorrow Award in 2006. The camp has six luxury tented cottages and two suites, which cost between US\$ 800 -US\$ 1390 per night. Campi ya Kanzi has utilized a number of sustainable tourism measures. First, the camp funds various environmental conservation

initiatives. Second, the camp uses charcoal briquettes for all cooking. Third, it has minimized usage of the generator, with excess power being stored in batteries to be discharged later. Fourth, it harvests rainwater for usage in the camp. Fifth, it uses a three-chamber composting system to manage kitchen waste. Moreover, it uses micro-organisms in septic tanks to break down waste. Seventh, the camp has a charcoal fridge for storing vegetables [17].

## Methodology

The target population for this study was members of households adjacent to Basecamp Maasai Mara, Elephant Pepper Camp and Campi ya Kanzi. There were approximately 1,025, 1,005 and 1,210 households in Basecamp Maasai Mara, Elephant Pepper Camp and Campi ya Kanzi respectively [18]. Hence, the overall target population was 3,420 households. The sample was randomly selected using a list of households based on the 2009 government of Kenya census report. Out of a total of 3,420 households, 384 households were randomly selected for this study. Subsequently, with the use of the table of random numbers, the study selected households and interviewed head of the households. During the survey English, Kiswahili and native (*Maa*) languages were used. The *Maa* language was used particularly, with those community members who were neither conversant with English nor Kiswahili. On the other hand, purposive sampling was used to recruit key informants from the target population for the interviews and focus group discussions. The key informants targeted were those people who had the knowledge on ecotourism development in the study sites and were willing to give detailed account of whether or not ecotourism development had contributed to poverty reduction. Key informants included community leaders (area chiefs), managers of the eco-lodges, members of the cultural *manyattas*, and leaders of the group ranches (chairmen). A total of ten interviews were conducted representing five interviews in each protected areas. Focus group discussions were held in Maasai Mara and Amboseli and comprised of six and five participants respectively. This is consistent with Kitzinger's recommendation for focus group size of between four and twelve people [19]. All the focus group discussions were conducted at cultural *manyattas*. Importantly, the focus groups were heterogeneous comprising of women, men and youth. They lasted between one to one and half hours. All the interview and focus group discussions were audio- recorded and supplemented with note taking to cater for items which could not be audio-recorded.

Importantly, the research instruments (questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussion guides) addressed items on the state of poverty among members of the local community, the contribution of ecotourism to poverty reduction, constraints to ecolodges' poverty reduction strategies and community's aspirations for ecotourism development. In order to enhance the reliability of this research instruments, a pilot study was undertaken. The piloted instruments were edited and refined using results of the pilot study. The corrected instruments were then polished and used for data collection during the actual study. Additionally, questionnaires were tested using SPSS Cronbach Alpha technique for reliability. A reliability of 0.70 (70%) was attained thus qualifying the reliability of the questionnaires [20]. Besides, a combination of data collection techniques not only exhausted all the aspects under study but also provided an opportunity to assess the validity of information gathered by examining data relating to the same theme from different techniques used hence data triangulation.

## Results

The majority of the respondents (64%) were aged between 21-

40 years, 25% were aged between 41-60 years while 10% represented those aged above 60 years. Male respondents accounted for 70% of the sample and female respondents accounted for 30% of the sample. On the level of education, 26% of respondents had acquired college education, followed by 23% who had secondary education, while 22% were illiterate. Moreover, 66% of the respondents were employed while 34% were self-employed. On occupation, 51% of the respondents were involved in pastoralism whereas only 6% were involved in ecotourism and conservation (Table 1). Most of the respondents (54%) earned less than Kshs. 4000 a month; an equivalent of less than US\$2 a day, while only 9% earned between Kshs.12001-16000.

Majority of the respondents (63%) indicated that eco-lodges had greatly contributed to healthcare facilities, water supply, education, and employment opportunities (Table 2). There was significant differences between the respondents ( $\chi^2=25.28$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). On the contrary, findings revealed that eco-lodges had made insignificant contribution to equitable revenue sharing (5%) among community members and provision of financial resources (6%).

Further, majority (67%) of the respondents considered themselves as poor (Table 1) and this differed between the respondents ( $\chi^2=25.64$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). They further identified lack of partnerships with other stakeholders, inequality in sharing ecotourism benefits, discrimination against women, disunity and mistrust and lack of adequate government support as the main constraints hindering efforts in poverty reduction (Table 3).

### Relationships between responses on constraints to Eco-lodges' poverty reduction and community attributes

Gender of the respondents was an influencing factor on three

Information investigated	Responses given by the community	Frequency (%)	Chi-square goodness of fit test
Age (Years old)	21-40	247 (64)	$\chi^2=25.35$ $df=2$ $p<0.05$
	41-60	97 (25)	
	Over 60	40 (10)	
Gender	Male	268 (70)	$\chi^2=21.65$ $df=1$ , $p<0.05$
	Female	116 (30)	
Level of Education	None	83 (24.1)	$\chi^2=44.65$ $df=3$ $p<0.05$
	Primary	111 (28.9)	
	Secondary	90 (23.3)	
	College & University	100 (26.1)	
Employment Status	Employed	254 (66)	$\chi^2=23.85$ $df=2$ $p<0.05$
	Self-employed	130 (34)	
Means of livelihood	Pastoralism	196 (51)	$\chi^2=56.52$ $df=5$ $p<0.05$
	Crop husbandry	57 (15)	
	Charcoal burning	38 (10)	
	Bee keeping	31 (8)	
	Selling of firewood	38 (10)	
	Ecotourism and conservation	24 (6)	
Level of Income	Less than 4,000	207 (54)	$\chi^2=51.37$ $df=3$ $p<0.05$
	4,001-8,000	115 (30)	
	8,001-12,000	27 (7)	
	12,001-16,000	34 (9)	
State of poverty	Poor	257 (67)	$\chi^2=62.04$ , $df=1$ $p<0.05$
	Not Poor	127 (33)	

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics.

Poverty dimensions	Poverty reduction aspects	Frequency (%)	Chi-square goodness of fit test
Access to livelihoods	Access to grazing pastures	11 (3)	$\chi^2=21.04$ $df=1$ $p<0.05$
	Acquisition of livestock	19 (5)	
Access to amenities	Access to tap water/water supply	38 (10)	$\chi^2=25.16$ $df=3$ $p<0.05$
	Adequate and decent shelter	19 (5)	
	Adequate food 'supply'	9 (2)	
	Enhanced security	12 (3)	
Access to financial resources	Access to credit	4 (1)	$\chi^2=25.23$ $df=1$ $p<0.05$
	Access to income	19 (5)	
Community empowerment	Access to education	57 (15)	$\chi^2=94.02$ $df=7$ $p<0.05$
	Access to health facilities	46 (12)	
	Better transportation	8 (2)	
	Enhanced communication network	4 (1)	
	Enhanced revenue sharing	19 (5)	
	Expansion of employment opportunities	38 (10)	
	Access to market	19 (5)	
Community governance	Enhanced involvement and participation in decision-making	19 (5)	$\chi^2=53.48$ $df=4$ $p<0.05$
	Enhancement of community cohesion and pride	12 (3)	
	Improved resource ownership and control	8 (2)	
	Increased registered groups	4 (1)	
	Increased small enterprise opportunities	19 (5)	

Table 2: Contribution of gold-ecorated lodges to poverty reduction.

Constraint	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Discrimination against women	38	10
Disunity and mistrust	39	10
Inadequate access to ecotourism market	19	5
Inequality in sharing ecotourism benefits	76	20
Lack of adequate government support	38	10
Lack of entrepreneurial skills	31	8
Lack of favorable regulation	3	1
Lack of financial capital	20	5
Lack of ownership and control of ecotourism attractions	77	20
Lack of partnerships with other stakeholders	20	5
Poor leadership at the grassroots level	23	6

Table 3: Constraints to eco-lodges' poverty reduction strategies.

responses while it was not an influencing factor on the rest. Opinions on whether combating of poverty is hindered by discrimination against women was dependent of gender, with more women agreeing that combating of poverty is hindered by discrimination of women compared to men ( $\chi^2=20.22$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P=0.004$ ). Besides, opinions on whether combating of poverty is hindered by lack of entrepreneurial skills was also dependent of gender, with more men agreeing that combating of poverty is hindered by lack of entrepreneurial skills compared to women ( $\chi^2=21.16$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P=0.012$ ).

Finally, opinions on whether combating of poverty is hindered by lack of ownership and control of ecotourism attractions was equally dependent of gender, with more men agreeing that combating of poverty is hindered by lack of ownership and control of ecotourism attractions compared to women ( $\chi^2=25.53$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P=0.002$ ). Gender did not influence views on whether combating of poverty is hindered by disunity and mistrust, inadequate access to ecotourism market, inequality in sharing ecotourism benefits, lack of adequate government support, lack of favourable regulation, lack of financial capital, lack of partnerships with other stakeholders and poor leadership at grassroots level (all  $p > 0.05$ ).

## Discussion and Recommendation

At its face value, the development of eco-tourism in Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas appears to be successful and to a certain extent, the eco-tourism industry can be said to contribute to poverty reduction at the local level. In fact, local residents who were interviewed indicated that eco-lodges had brought benefits to the local community in terms of employment and business opportunities. However, a critical evaluation of the contribution of eco-lodges to poverty reduction presents a less optimistic scenario since local people are faced with insurmountable barriers to seizing economic opportunities created by eco-tourism development. The next sections of this paper discuss the issues involved.

Access to means of livelihoods, especially, livestock and pasture is fundamental to pastoralist communities' livelihoods, such as, communities living adjacent to Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas [21]. According to Okech and Urmilla [7] part of this community development is dependent on access to natural resources such as pasture. These communities link ownership of livestock to well-being, status and success within the community. They characteristically link assets to access to basic needs, increase in security; strengthening of family ties and shared community action, increase in one's control and confidence to make decisions and choices and enhancement of intra and inter-generational equity through inheritance and asset sharing [8]. However, this study revealed that establishment of eco-lodges had resulted in the community losing access to part of their land through the creation of conservancies. As a result, the community had lost out on pasture grounds for their livestock. This leads to the argument that the development of eco-lodges had hindered the local community from accessing pasture for their livestock and even reducing available land for grazing.

This is consistent with findings by Mclean and Straede [22] that the major way in which conservation has been detrimental to the poor is by excluding them from protected areas or limiting their access to resources within protected areas. If local people are deprived of access to resources because of the development of ecotourism and yet do not receive any benefits from ecotourism, it is unlikely that they will have support for conservation of the natural resources upon which ecotourism is based [7]. Many authors among them Okello [23] and Kieti [8] have criticized the exclusion of pastoralist community members from accessing means of livelihoods especially livestock, pasture and water.

Moreover, study results revealed that majority of respondents were not involved in decision making and management of the eco-lodges. This is contrary to Scheyvens' [24] argument that if a community is to be empowered by ecotourism, their voices and concerns should guide the development of any ecotourism project from the feasibility stage through to its implementation. Besides, it is contrary to Local Agenda

21 and the principles of sustainable tourism development which emphasize local community involvement and the control of tourism resources by local communities [25]. This community's view is in contrast to Fennell's argument that eco-tourism is generally assumed to encompass a high degree of involvement of the local community [26]. The responses further conflicted with the idea that the concept of eco-tourism is different from that of mass tourism in terms of local community involvement. It can be argued that the practicality of the situation in the study regions reflected otherwise as it was evident that the majority of the people felt excluded from the enterprises and local community involvement was not realized. This was evidenced when the majority of the respondents indicated that they were not pleased with the running of eco-lodges as they felt that only a few people were actually benefiting. This is consistent with Okech and Urmilla [7] argument that many communities in Maasailand simply have no economic incentives to conserve biodiversity. The findings equally revealed that most of the respondents were concerned with equity especially in the sharing of benefits accruing from eco-tourism. A typical comment from one of the respondents was: "*Ecotourism can only be important if income is shared equitably among members of the cultural manyattas*". We can, therefore, argue that gold eco-rated enterprises in Kenya put more emphasis on environmental conservation than socio-economic benefits and equitable distribution of such benefits among the host communities.

Ecotourism ventures should be considered successful if local communities have some control over them and if they share equitably in the benefits accruing from their ecotourism activities [24]. Involving those affected by tourism development is a significant mechanism to address problems in a tourism development process and to identify and attain common goals [27-29]. In addition, the involvement of key stakeholders and interested groups can enhance the capacity of indigenous communities as well as enable these communities to exert greater control over tourism development [30]. As a solution, ecotourism investors should integrate economic benefits, natural and cultural resources conservation and grassroots democracy in their operations to ensure that most of the benefits belong to the community.

Besides, these results give credence to Birt [31] assertion that without community control, more often than not, ecotourism has contributed to unfair distribution of tourism benefits. This situation has resulted in mistrust among community members, as there is no transparency and accountability. In response, the key to successful conservation, in these communities, is making sure that they share the benefits fairly and do not shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs. In determining the success and sustainability of an ecotourism venture, the distribution of economic benefits from ecotourism is just as important as the actual amount of benefits a community may receive [24]. In this regard, equitable distribution of ecotourism benefits is of great concern, since the local communities have a right to share in any economic benefits generated from the wildlife resources in their areas [6].

Stakeholder collaboration in tourism planning is a fundamental step towards empowerment of indigenous communities in community based ecotourism development as the effects of collaborative efforts nurture empowerment [32]. In this regard, eco-tourism investors should aim at strengthening a community's sense of cohesion and integrity in order to promote governance [21]. Besides, diverse interest groups within a community, such as women and youths should have representation on community and broader decision-making bodies [24]. On the contrary, the study identified discrimination against

women in the development of the eco-lodges. These results give credence to Akama and Kieti [5] argument that lack of democratic space and corruption makes it almost impossible for marginalized people to play any meaningful role in tourism development.

Discrimination against women has remained an enormous challenge facing most women in Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas. In a true equity decision-making, women would be encouraged to articulate their desires for eco-tourism development, to plan and take the necessary actions, which was not the case with the Maasai Mara and Amboseli people [21]. In this regard, community involvement in eco-tourism development is often difficult to implement in developing countries [8]. These findings advocate for the need to empower local communities especially women to participate in decision making about, and control over, ecotourism development in their areas.

The study revealed that local community ownership was non-existent within the study regions. This is contrary to the recommendation by Wishitemi [6] that a sizeable percentage of the community that contributes land and services in-kind must have some level of involvement and benefits. Lack of involvement of local communities in ecotourism and wildlife conservation as well as not stimulating in them economic interest in resource conservation may be the reason for their indifference and continued perpetuation of poaching and bush meat trade, or concerns for the plight of wildlife migration corridors and dispersal areas [6]. Besides, the results revealed that local community ownership was hindered by lack of economic opportunities, confidence, capital and empowerment amongst the local community. Still, majority of the respondents asserted that the community lacked the technical know-how to successfully operate any eco-tourism enterprise. This is consistent with Cater [33] argument that the degree of truly local participation is often limited in ownership and control of the natural attraction. As a remedy, economic partnerships between investors and local communities should be initiated. Sound partnerships will play an imperative role in filling financial and technical gaps facing communities [6].

The study also established that the eco-lodges surveyed possessed exclusive rights to manage all eco-tourism activities within the conservancies they are located in. These rights were consolidated in the legal agreements they signed with the neighboring communities. In view of these responses it is clear that the local community's participation was further hindered by lack of institutional power structures and economic systems. To overcome this, the local community must have access to legally recognized and enforceable rights to land, which will give them both an economic incentive and a legal basis for stewardship [7]. In this regard, we argue that local communities need technical and legal assistance whenever they are negotiating partnership contracts with ecotourism investors. More importantly, partnership agreements should be flexible and avoid exclusive clauses in order to buffer communities against risks and vulnerabilities associated with rigid articles in the agreements [6].

To sum up, ecotourism development in Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas has not adequately addressed empowerment, opportunity and social security of host communities. The study particularly did not establish existence of any social security programme for the host community. This leaves the host community vulnerable to various risks such as ill-health, economic shocks and natural disasters. In this regard, gold ecorated lodges will only make a meaningful impact on poverty reduction, if they seek to strengthen empowerment, economic opportunity and social security in their poverty reduction agenda as advanced by World Bank [12] and Zhao and Ritchie [4].

## Highlights of Future Research

The study recommends that there is an urgent need to explore an appropriate framework for joint venture partnership agreements between private investors and destination communities that will not only address the diverse interests of private investors and host communities but also poverty amongst destination communities. Besides, given that this study focused mainly on economic opportunity, security and empowerment (from political and economic perspectives) as the main determinants of poverty alleviation, there is need to evaluate the contribution of gold-ecorated lodges to not only psychological and social empowerment but also other dimensions of opportunity key to the well-being of destination communities.

## Conclusion

1. Equity and human well-being should be an eco-tourism development goal. By focusing on poverty reduction agenda, ecotourism enterprises will lead to truly sustainable growth in areas adjacent to wildlife protected areas. There is an urgent need to overhaul ecotourism practice to guarantee is just, participatory and geared to authentic human advancement. Eco-lodges have the potential to positively contribute to poverty reduction among communities living adjacent to wildlife protected areas. On the contrary, the study findings revealed that grassroots involvement of local communities in eco-lodges was minimal. Although, the local communities had benefitted from social programmes financed by ecotourism revenues such as water, education, and healthcare; such benefits had remained largely ineffective, as majority of the local community were unable to gain access to basic needs such as food, decent shelter and clothing. Thus gold-rated eco-lodges in Maasai Mara and Amboseli protected areas had not significantly contributed to poverty reduction among the local community. In this regard, it can be argued that such eco-lodges were mainly driven by conservation and optimization of both growth and profitability objectives rather than socio-economic development of their adjacent communities.

As a consequence, they had not been able to make any meaningful impact on the livelihoods of the local community. Moreover, inadequate democratic and popular participation had limited local community's control of revenues and effective involvement in planning and implementation of ecotourism enterprises. Besides, the study findings revealed that poverty reduction was hindered by lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of ownership and control of ecotourism attractions, discrimination against women, poor leadership at grassroots level and lack of adequate government support. These findings are contrary to the idea that the concept of eco-tourism is different from mass tourism. Generally, eco-tourism is assumed to involve a high degree of involvement of the local community and results of this study suggest otherwise. The practicality of the situation in the study sites reflect otherwise as it was evident that the majority of the people felt excluded from the eco-lodges and local community's involvement was not realized. As a result, the majority of the community felt alienated in the decision making process, as their leaders failed to represent community's views but instead pursued their own personal interests. This situation had resulted in mistrust between the community and their leaders, as there was no transparency and accountability. Consequently, community cohesion and cooperative spirit was gradually diminishing as mistrust and disunity tended to replace the traditional emphasis on group welfare.

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