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Wildlife Tourism: Can We Increase the Small People's Share?

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Some animals lay eggs. Others give milk. Some provide wool, ivory, skins or meat. And then we have “creatures” like Wildlife Tourism. We expect this poor “creature” to produce many such things all at the same time: Fill the exchequer's coffers, grease District administrations, build dispensaries and wells in remote villages, safeguard biodiversity, conserve wildlife and protect wild areas, reduce poverty at household level – and this all nature friendly, in true eco-style and, of course, without disrupting local culture.

Such complex undertakings often fail; or some objectives are reached at the expense of others; or some players get the “lion's share” while others end up with the “peanuts”.

Nevertheless, for good economic and environmental reasons, tourism is a major backbone of Eastern and Southern Africa. It can contribute to the above-mentioned objectives, but it must not necessarily. This depends on the framework set by the state and on the actions of the different players. And it depends on us how much we manage to influence the processes in a community- and poverty-oriented way!

German development cooperation through GTZ has been involved in wildlife conservation and - thereby indirectly – in tourism in Tanzania for fifteen years. Our tourism here is mainly wildlife based. Let me share with you a few of the experiences we have made during this period.

For us wildlife conservation and tourism has always had a community perspective. It was geared towards poverty alleviation. It is an empirical fact that wildlife cannot be protected in the long run against the will of those who share the land with the animals, many of them dangerous, destructive to man and competitors on the land. They live together in conflict and not in harmony. These peasants cannot be turned into conservators by telling them about the beautiful brown eyes of the impala or how important it is to save the rhino as an heritage of mankind. These people can be convinced only, if they will be better off **with** wildlife than **without**.

This means: If the communities do not get a greater share of the tourism revenues and benefits, the very basis of this tourism will disappear in the not too far future. Some isolated zoo-like enclosures might remain. No Government has the means to protect this natural resource, if the people do not agree.

One word of warning as far as the economic potential of wildlife and tourism: We must not overestimate it. Most of the protected areas in Africa do not even earn enough money from tourism to cover their financial needs. It costs 50 to 500 US\$ to manage one sqkm of Park, but at most places this is not generated. Tourism sometimes does not even cover its own costs. Public budgets – a great part of which come from poor taxpayers' money – are used in such cases to subsidize tourism in protected areas.

Some conclusions:

- Protected areas must be managed in a business-like manner. There are examples that this is possible and that it is possible without sacrificing the environmental objectives.
- The present trend to create huge trust funds in order to subsidize protected areas leads into the wrong direction. Big money keeps inefficiency alive. It rewards the bad performers.
- We have to look at all options to earn money in a sustainable way. Photographic tourism is one option. Hunting is another one. Take the Selous for example: Hunting earns over 90 %, photographic tourism less than 10 %. Without hunting the Selous would be dead. Well-controlled and managed hunting is in very situations a way to earn much more money with less ecological impact.

Another point: Tanzania has more than 25% of its country protected as Parks and Game Reserves. New ones are being created. Do we want to put half of the country under strict protection? Who can afford this? I was part of the creation of one, namely the new Saadani National Park. I had a different idea: Make it a privately run multiple-use Reserve in a system of checks and balances set by the state. This would not imply giving away the national heritage, the sovereignty of the country, as some feared. The opposite is true. It just means to find private players who do the job for the Government. And as reward they earn a profit. Saadani will be run for many years at a loss. TANAPA is lucky. God gave them a mountain, and the German and British colonial Governments did a deal and agreed that the mountain was on the Tanzanian side of the border. Together with another three profitable Parks this mountain subsidizes nine loss-making National Parks.

Or even a better idea than just privatizing: Community run Parks as an alternative. In most cases the communities will not be able to manage and run the tourism themselves, but they can do this in joint ventures with the private sector. There is a nostalgic and pseudo-democratic feeling that at some time all protected areas were settled by people and that this land actually should be given back them. In some countries this is being done, and mostly it leads to normal agricultural use and a loss of bio-diversity. In Tanzania there are no plans like that. It is therefore all the more important to assist the communities in making full use of the wildlife resources on their own land outside the protected areas. Fortunately Tanzania still has many such “open areas”. Half of the

country's wildlife lives there. Due to expanding settlements and agriculture as well as widespread commercial poaching for bush-meat the game is, however, disappearing on this land. People had no interest in conserving it in the past, as they suffered only the costs of these animals and did not enjoy the benefits. The new Wildlife Policy of Tanzania foresees that communities have the right to declare Wildlife Management Areas, which will allow them to utilize the game on their land, be it for subsistence, tourism or safari hunting. They can decide in which way they want to use game and it can be expected that they will go for the most profitable type of utilization. This all takes place within a set of legal regulations in order to maintain sustainability.

Unfortunately the implementation of this policy is slow, as the Government apparatus moves forward with snail speed. This leads to a situation where many suitable areas get lost. A typical example is the land grabbing around national parks, which takes place with increasing speed. Private investors purchase agricultural land on the border of national parks for a few thousand Shillings and later build hotels. Mostly this is not legal, but in most cases reality creates its own legality, and they get away with it. When later the community tries to create a Wildlife Management Area near the Park in order to lease suitable sites to tourism investors it is too late. The land is already in private hands, and the community will not benefit apart from a few jobs for cleaning maids and watchmen. This happens presently everywhere in Tanzania, and it must be feared that the share of poor communities from tourism will remain small, as it has been in the past. Perhaps it is not too late to halt this trend.

References:

Gastorn Kennedy, The Legal Environment for Tourist Investments on Village Land outside Wildlife Management Areas

Wildlife Division (Ed.), Procedures for Communities to enter into Joint Ventures in Wildlife Management Areas

Rolf D. Baldus et al., Experiences with Community Based Wildlife Conservation in Tanzania

all three publications can be found on:

www.wildlife-programme.gtz.de/wildlife/publications.html

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