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Towards promotion of local tourism: A case study of the Kenya Wildlife Service outreach program

Abstract

In an effort to promote local tourism, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) launched a cost-sharing outreach program in Nakuru Municipality involving a free bus to take residents for wildlife viewing tours in Lake Nakuru National Park (LNNP) during weekends and national holidays upon payment of park entrance fees. I joined in the tours between September and December 2006 and using a questionnaire personally interviewed 256 of the residents to evaluate the program's impact on their relations with KWS and the management of LNNP, how it stimulated the need for recreational wildlife viewing among them, and identify the program's weaknesses and the residents' views for its improvement. Results reveal high potential for sustainable local tourism among residents of Nakuru Municipality. Popular opinion was that the program had improved residents' relations with KWS and with the management of Lake Nakuru National Park, had made them appreciate recreational and aesthetic values of wildlife and generated demand for wildlife viewing as a pastime. Respondents were unanimous that one bus was not enough for the program and a majority felt the game drives were too short although they were set for a repeat visit to the park. Most respondents visited the park with companions comprising friends and family members. The program was rated a success and improvements are proposed for better satisfaction of residents. Where feasible the Lake Nakuru National Park example should be extended to other wildlife protected areas to boost local tourism and improve relations between wildlife managers and local communities in Kenya.

Keywords:

communities; local tourism; national park; protected area; wildlife; Kenya

Introduction

Wildlife is Kenya's foremost natural resource and defines the base of Kenya's tourism industry. A state agency, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is responsible for wildlife management in the country. A major criticism against Kenya's tourism industry has been that its facilities and services are geared towards meeting the interests of foreigners at the expense of locals. Ordinary Kenyans including communities neighboring its wildlife protected areas have, with time, developed the feeling that recreational wildlife viewing is for foreigners and a few rich Kenyans, but not for the common man.

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Major deterrents against wildlife viewing for ordinary Kenyans include the requirement for motorized transport to enter the country's wildlife protected areas and the exorbitant entrance charges.

As part of its corporate social responsibility aimed at improving its public relations, KWS embarked on local tourism promotion as one of its goals. About 10 years ago, it launched a pilot cost-sharing outreach program in conjunction with Lake Nakuru National Park in which it provided a free tour bus to take residents of Nakuru Municipality for wildlife viewing tours in the park during weekends and national holidays on condition they pay park entrance fees on their own. Nakuru Municipality, with a population of 500,000 people shares a common boundary with Lake Nakuru National Park on its Eastern side and the park entrance is 2.5 km from the town centre. The park, established in 1961, measures 187.9 square kilometers.

Since its launch, no known study has examined the program's impact on local tourism promotion among residents of Nakuru Municipality and on their relations with KWS and the management of Lake Nakuru National Park. The purpose of this study was to address this knowledge gap.

Methods

The researcher joined local residents during their wildlife viewing tours in Lake Nakuru National Park between September and December 2006. Data was collected through participant observation and individual interviews with the help of a structured questionnaire.

Randomly selected respondents aboard the bus on the return leg of the wildlife viewing tour gave "YES", "NO" or "NOT SURE" in response to whether:

- (i) The program had improved their relations with Kenya Wildlife Service and the management of Lake Nakuru National Park.
- (ii) The program had improved their view regarding recreational wildlife viewing and generated demand for it among Nakuru Municipality residents.
- (iii) One bus was enough for the outreach program.

Supplementary open-ended questions sought respondents' answers to:

- (i) Sources of information regarding the program and desirability of repeat visits to the National park.
- (ii) Relations with their companions, if any.
- (iii) Elements of the program that contributed to their dissatisfaction and suggestions for its improvement.

Results

In total 256 respondents (110 males, 146 females) were interviewed. Table 1 summarizes results from the closed ended part of the questionnaire. The general reaction to the outreach program was very positive. Agreement was high that the program had improved their relations with the management of Lake Nakuru National Park (1.14) and with KWS (1.23) and that it had generated demand for recreational wildlife viewing among residents of Nakuru Municipality (1.08). Respondents further affirmed that the outreach program had made them appreciate the recreational and aesthetic values of

wildlife (1.30) but were emphatic that one tour bus was not enough for residents of Nakuru Municipality (2.97).

Table 1

IMPACTS OF THE OUTREACH PROGRAM

Item	YES (%)	NOT SURE (%)	NO (%)	OPINION SCORE
1. Improvement of relations with the management of Lake Nakuru National Park.	87.89	9.77	2.34	1.14
2. Improvement of relations with KWS.	81.26	14.06	4.68	1.23
3. Generation of demand for recreational wildlife viewing among residents of Nakuru Municipality.	92.18	7.03	0.79	1.08
4. Increased appreciation of the recreational and aesthetic value of wildlife.	75.00	19.53	5.47	1.30
5. One bus is enough for the program.	0.79	2.34	96.87	2.97

Scale: Yes = 1, No t Sure =2, NO =3

Table 2 shows responses to the open-ended part of the questionnaire. A majority of respondents (86%) expressed desire to participate in the program again. Elements of the program that caused dissatisfaction included inadequate wildlife viewing time (63%) and respondents' failure to identify individual wildlife species (18%). Popular suggestions for improvement of the program included more wildlife viewing time (55%) and more informative talks during the game drives (35%). Most respondents (75%) were accompanied; by family (63%) and friends (37%). Information sources regarding the program included colleagues at work (26%), neighbors (25%), friends (20%), family (19%) and common knowledge (10%).

Table 2

RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

(a) Participation in the program

Desire to participate in the program again.

Yes:	86%
No:	2%
Not Sure:	12%

Elements of the program that contributed to dissatisfaction with the park visit*.

Inadequate wildlife viewing time:	63%
Failure to identify some wildlife species:	18%
High speed of the tour bus:	10%
Poor weather:	9%

Suggestions for improvement of the program*.

Increase wildlife viewing time:	55%
Give more informative talks on wildlife species:	35%
Include picnic packages with wildlife viewing drives:	8%
Allow for advance booking:	6%

Table 2 **Continued**

(b) Travel party and information sources

Traveling with companion(s): Yes: 75% No: 25%

Relation with companion(s):

- Sibling: 10%
- Spouse: 23%
- Colleague/friend: 15%
- Neighbor: 7%
- Lover: 15%
- Parents/Children: 30%

Sources of information regarding the program*.

- Family member: 19%
- Friends: 20%
- Colleague at work: 26%
- Neighbor: 25%
- Common knowledge: 10%

* Only first answers were taken

Discussion

Study findings reveal high potential for sustainable local/community tourism around Lake Nakuru National Park. Acknowledgement that the outreach program has generated demand for recreational wildlife viewing among residents of Nakuru Municipality, coupled with popular desire among respondents for a repeat wildlife viewing tour attest to this.

A number of researchers in Kenya (Waithaka, 1995; Aboud, 1989; Western, 1989) have documented poor relations between wildlife managers and communities neighboring protected areas who also hold negative attitudes towards wildlife. Results from this study, however, show that opportunity exists for such wildlife managers and local communities to establish viable partnerships which not only improve their relations but also make communities become more positive and appreciative of social values of wildlife. This is important for reversing the historical negative attitudes held by local communities towards wildlife.

High desire for repeat visits to the park reveals availability of leisure time for wildlife viewing among residents of Nakuru Municipality and is possibly the reason they emphasized that one tour bus was not enough for the program. Availability of leisure time among respondents in this study agrees with Machlis, Force and Burch (1997) that agricultural, pastoral and less industrialized societies generally have much non-work time available for leisure activities. The Kenyan society is one such society.

The study further reveals that most visitors to the national park have companions who comprise friends and family members. Undertaking wildlife viewing in such company serves to cement family and social bonds for a more cohesive community within Nakuru Municipality. Wildlife in Lake Nakuru National Park is thus serving a societal role of strengthening social harmony and mutual understanding among friends and family within the Municipality.

In a way, study findings provide evidence that the cost-sharing policy advocated by the Kenya government has direct application in the tourism sector. The study advises that

the country's tourism industry pay more attention to the potential for local/community tourism among Kenyans and desist from overdependence on foreign tourism. The KWS in conjunction with the management of Lake Nakuru National Park should regularly revise the program with a view to improving the tour package offered to residents of Nakuru Municipality to ensure it is client oriented for purposes of sustainability.

Conclusion and recommendation

The outreach program to promote local tourism and improve relations between wildlife managers and the local community within Nakuru Municipality is a success and should be maintained. It is recommended that where feasible, this example be adopted by other wildlife protected areas in Kenya and elsewhere as one way to boost local/community tourism and improve relations between wildlife managers and communities on fringes of wildlife protected areas.

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