



Impact of Tourism on the Environment in Kenya

Tourism is a leading economic activity in Kenya, being the third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture. Since 1990, particularly since the second half of the 1990s, Kenya's tourism industry has faced enormous challenges, including decline in per capita spending, average length of stay, hotel occupancy rates, hotel room rates and service quality. Some of the factors that have contributed to this decline in tourism growth include environmental degradation and deterioration in the quality of tourism products due to mass tourism.

Tourism has a tremendous negative and also positive impact on the environment, especially because of its interaction with wildlife, which is highly sensitive to human disturbance. The negative environmental effects of tourism include soil erosion; air, noise and water pollution; littering; decreased diversity of flora and fauna; and visual degradation. The magnitude of the impact of tourism on the physical environment depends on the intensity of tourism development and use, flexibility of the ecosystem, long-term versus short-term tourism planning, and the extent of modification of the tourism site.



Kenya has promoted inclusive package tours for most of the period since independence, which has led to the emergence of high volume tourism. The adverse impact of mass tourism has been aggravated by over-concentration of tourism activities in some areas of the country, notably the beaches of the North Coast and Diani in the South Coast, and some national parks and game reserves like Maasai Mara, Amboseli, Nairobi and Nakuru. The six most popular parks alone, for example, accommodate about 70 percent of all park visitors while the top fifteen accommodate about 96 percent of all visitors.

The impact of tourism on the environment is largest where visitation is concentrated. In

Amboseli National Park, for example, visitor crowding and mismanagement of the park have led to disruption of the growth of species such as cheetahs. The very presence of tourists affects the feeding and mating behaviour of animals. Other problems in the game reserves include: scavenging of wildlife in garbage dumps, which has been found to change the natural feeding habits and diets of animals such as baboons, birds and other animals; landscape degradation, which has resulted from extensive construction of facilities to support tourism; introduction of viruses and bacteria in remote areas by tourists; and over-use, which has caused stress on natural resources such as water, land and marine ecology.

On the positive side, the 1992 UN conference on the environment and development (the Earth summit) recognized that tourism places socio-economic value to wilderness, that is natural resources in their original state. Tourism has improved environmental awareness among the people living near game reserves. An elephant in Kenya, for example, is estimated to be worth USD 14,375 in tourism income for each year of its life, a major justification for protecting elephants.

Global efforts to mitigate adverse environmental effects of tourism have been taken by United Nations agencies and tourism organisations such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), but lack of strong institutions and treaties, and pursuance of unregulated tourism trade have constrained progress. Sections of the Kenya tourism industry have adopted some of the mitigation efforts made at the global level. Some hotels in Kenya, for example, are using modern technology to minimize resource use and treat wastes, to recycle wastewater and other wastes, and to rehabilitate degraded tourist attractions by planting trees. In addition, some are training their staff on conservation issues, among other activities. The majority of tourism participants, however, ignore the regulations introduced to protect the environment and use eco-friendly jargon merely for commercial benefits. Partnership initiatives among the Government, the tourism industry, and local communities, such as some Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) programmes and the Beach Management Programme are achieving tremendous success in environmental conservation.

Mitigation efforts in environmental conservation in Kenya have been constrained by weak institutions and lack of institutional coordination; corruption and mismanagement; inadequate political and administrative capacity; a mining mentality in some of the institutions charged with

the responsibility of conserving tourism areas; inadequate incentives to stimulate interest of local people in conservation; poor tourism performance since the mid 1990s; poor marketing and inadequacy of marketing resources; physical insecurity and rampant poaching; and the high cost of changing these practices.

To extend the initiatives that the tourism industry is taking to mitigate its adverse environmental impact, the Government of Kenya should:

- ◆ Provide incentives to encourage industry initiatives aimed at protecting the environment, including stiff penalties for activities that destroy the environment—coupled with effective and predictable enforcement, periodic information on best practice with respect to environmental protection, and awards for the most outstanding environmental protection initiatives;
- ◆ Improve implementation of policies and laws such as the new Environmental Management and Coordination Act (EMCA), eradicate corruption, and aim to disperse tourism activity around the country;
- ◆ Strictly enforce environmental regulations, particularly with respect to fragile and indispensable natural resources, whose irreversibility of damage necessitates such costly command-and-control measures;
- ◆ Target luxury or high spending tourists, and use pricing to disperse tourists to non-traditional attractions;
- ◆ Introduce clear and secure ownership and access rights to wildlife and other natural resources that support tourism; and
- ◆ Integrate environmental and tourism policies and planning into national and local government planning to ensure that all development, tourism included, observes laid down environmental requirements.

About the Umbrella Project

The goal of the Umbrella Project for Improving the Enabling Environment for Business in Kenya is to improve the policy, legal, and regulatory environment for business. The Project has three components. The **Simplifying the Regulatory Environment for Business (SREB)** component involves research on constraints to operation of business by the private sector in Kenya. The **Private Sector Advocacy** component assists the private sector in advocating for reforms that create a favourable environment for business and investment. The **Capacity Building** component aims to build capacity in line ministries and regulatory agencies to respond to reform proposals made by the private sector and other stakeholders. KIPPRA implements the first and third components while the Kenya Private Sector Alliance implements the advocacy component. The Project is funded by the British Department for International Development (DfID).