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Role of Local Stakeholders' Networks on Sustainable Tourism Development in Selected Group Ranches in Amboseli Ecosystem, Kajiado County, Kenya

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Abstract

Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) has emerged due to the exponential growth of tourism, which has significantly impacted natural and socio-cultural resources. The need for sustainability, as highlighted in literature like the Brundtland Report, is critical. This study focused on the role of stakeholders' networks in promoting sustainable tourism in the Amboseli Ecosystem, Kajiado County. A notable gap exists in information sharing and stakeholder networking, with existing frameworks primarily centered on conservation rather than STD. Stakeholders, including accommodation providers, local destination organizations, local communities, conservation organizations, the government, and travel organizers, play a crucial role in ensuring the longevity of sustainability initiatives. Networking offers solutions to industry challenges by fostering unified decision-making and addressing local resource and expertise deficiencies. The study employed an exploratory research design, targeting 420 participants from different groups in the Amboseli ecosystem, including community members, lodge managers, Kenya Wildlife Service officials, and NGO representatives. Data were collected using questionnaires and structured interviews, analyzed through Pearson and Regression Analysis. Results showed that stakeholder networks significantly and positively influence sustainable tourism development ($r=0.246$, $p=0.000$). Recommendations include fostering stakeholder networks, capacity building for leaders, enacting legislation to involve local communities, forming societies for local tourism entrepreneurs to network, and collaborating with local universities and research institutions on sustainable tourism issues.

Keywords: *Local Stakeholders, Networks, Sustainable Tourism, Selected Group Ranches, Amboseli Ecosystem*

1.0 Introduction

The tourism industry connects various stakeholders, including the government, tourism development organizations, and those providing essential infrastructure. These stakeholders participate in the conceptualization and sustenance of tourism activities and initiatives, either directly or indirectly. Given the complexity of the industry, it is crucial for stakeholders to network in order to provide a cohesive product, offer exemplary service to tourists, and ultimately maximize benefits for the destinations where tourism initiatives are based. Due to the small size of tourism enterprises and their dispersed locations, collaborations among stakeholders tend to be stronger compared to other sectors. In Africa, the contribution of Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) initiatives to overall tourism has been recognized in countries like Burkina Faso. Acknowledging the significant role that networks and Community-Based Tourism (CBT) play in empowering local communities, the Ministry of Tourism of Burkina Faso, in partnership with ADTB, the Government of France's Department of Belforte, and the ARTOUDE Association, constructed a CBT complex in Bazoule, 30 km from Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, between 2009 and 2010 (UNWTO, 2021). The project aimed to enhance revenue generation from tourism initiatives in Bazoule, creating job opportunities for local youth. The initiative has successfully diversified Burkina Faso's tourism product portfolio, attracted more visitors to Bazoule, and provided employment for the local communities. In Kenya, STD is evident in the conservancy model of conservation, which has gained prominence in recent years. There has been a surge in conservancies across Kenya, especially around Amboseli National Park, Maasai Mara Game Reserve, Laikipia, and Northern Kenya, where wildlife is abundant. This research aims to raise awareness among local communities and build capacity for effective collaboration, management, and operation of CBT enterprises, while promoting networking among stakeholders to ensure the success of these initiatives. It is widely accepted that global integration has compelled tourism businesses to adopt strategies to remain competitive in the face of intense competition. Competitiveness can only be achieved through fostering innovation, cooperation, and networking with other stakeholders.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Tourism is one of the country's major forex earners, accounting for 6.9% of Africa's GDP and 24.7 million jobs, or 6.5% of total employment per sector. In Kenya, tourism accounts for 8.8% of GDP (WTTC, 2021). STDs have emerged as a result of tourism's exponential growth over the years, which has had a significant impact on natural and socio-cultural resources (Greenwood 2006). The importance of sustainability has been emphasized in a variety of sustainability literature, most notably the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 2003). We cannot deny that tourism can overconsume resources, whether natural, man-made, or cultural, and negative consequences are unavoidable if thresholds are exceeded. The Amboseli Ecosystem Trust, an umbrella organization tasked with driving collective action and innovative collaborations for the well-being of the ecosystem's people, wildlife, and habitats, has implemented STD interventions in the AE (AET, 2022). However, efforts to foster networks among stakeholders in AE and ensure active participation of local communities in STD initiatives have not been documented, resulting in a contextual gap. According to Tourism Concern (2022), the following indicators serve as guidelines for the private sector's Sustainable Tourism Planning: resource sustainability, waste reduction, diversity, tourism integration into planning, local economy support and involvement, stakeholder and public consultation, staff training, and responsible tourism marketing. In the Amboseli Ecosystem, there is a gap in information sharing and how stakeholders' network, and the only documented networking and information sharing frameworks have focused on

conservation rather than STDs. Further, despite the critical role that leadership plays in driving the sustainable tourism agenda, this has not been addressed in the Amboseli Ecosystem, and there is no documented agenda on leadership towards STD in the AE.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to assess the effect of stakeholder networks on Sustainable Tourism Development in Amboseli ecosystem.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Sustainable Development

The debate around development that meets the needs of the current population while considering future generations has been ongoing for a long time. Significant milestones in this discussion include the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) issuance of the document "Our Common Future" in 1987 and the revitalization of this conversation during the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Muhanna, 2006). Sustainable development is not a new concept; Muhanna (2006) emphasizes that it revolves around people who are entirely dependent on their environment. He argues that poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation result from past development practices that failed to embrace these principles. Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) focuses on meeting current tourists' demands while safeguarding and advancing future opportunities (UNWTO, 2021).

Tourism planners must purposefully and sustainably develop tourism through compromises between societal, environmental, social, and economic aims (Stereimikiene et al., 2020). Literature suggests that sustainable tourism development should ensure high satisfaction levels for tourists, significant experiences, awareness of sustainability issues, and the promotion of best practices. The growing importance of nature-based tourism in environmental conservation and job creation has gained traction, creating approximately 22 million jobs globally and contributing over USD 120 billion to the global GDP (Kaitlyn, 2022). Research shows that tourism actively contributes to natural and socio-economic preservation while adding value to nature and culture. In Kenya, this is exemplified by the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy model, which has put the community at the core of conservation, benefiting local communities through improved healthcare, employment opportunities, and education (Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, 2020).

A community is a social grouping that shares commonalities such as religion, norms, values, or identity, often situated in a specific geographical area like a village, town, or neighborhood (Wikipedia, 2021). It is defined by acts of sharing, reciprocity, and interaction, although members may differ in intent, beliefs, resources, preferences, and needs (Beeton, 2015). Recent research has focused on community ownership and management of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Zielenski et al. (2020) argue that a community's cohesiveness can both benefit and hinder tourism development, especially in rural, ethnic, and traditional communities in third-world countries where businesses are often communally owned and managed. However, community integrity in STD is impacted by various inhibitors. Zielenski et al.'s (2020) research identified the presence of external actors with conflicting interests as a significant barrier, often creating competition and resentment among communities and diluting community benefits (Lenao, 2015; Wunder, 2016). A bottom-up approach to tourism is more successful when local competition and resentment are managed.

2.1.2 Stakeholders' Networks

Socio-economic disparities, a global issue, have significantly influenced discussions on this topic, particularly between rural and urban areas (Manaf, Purbasari, Aprilia, & Astuti, 2018). Addressing this gap requires local communities to take the lead in development activities. The scarcity of resources is a common problem for tourism organizations, prompting local businesses to seek external resources through their networks. Networks are a crucial support system for businesses, offering endless opportunities for growth (Midlands State University, 2017; Sustain-T, 2019). Collaboration, as defined by Gray (2017), involves key stakeholders partnering to make decisions for the future of the industry. It is a means to involve relevant parties in solving problems that affect community-based tourism.

Jamal et al. (2015) also argue that collaboration involves independent and diverse stakeholders coming together to make unified decisions and solve problems in a given area. Mobilizing local communities is essential for poverty alleviation, but these communities often lack the expertise to manage programs and depend on external support. Manaf et al. (2018) suggest that tourism development and stakeholders' diverse roles coexist harmoniously, extending beyond the local realm. This implies that tourism organizations, cannot operate alone; collaboration is a collective effort that brings together diverse stakeholders with unique skills, talents, and resources for the common purpose of fostering Sustainable Tourism Development. Stakeholders, including accommodation providers, local destination organizations, attractions, transport providers, local communities, conservation organizations, the government, and travel organizers, must collaborate to place the local populace at the core of tourism initiatives (Mayaka, Croy, & Cox, 2018). Social network structures and relationships significantly impact tourism development (Mensah & Afenyo-Agbe, 2021), highlighting that CBT should not be viewed solely as a local effort but also as a global community initiative (Manaf, Purbasari, Aprilia, & Astuti, 2018).

A study by Manaf et al. (2018) in Nglanggeran Tourism Village, Indonesia, underscores the critical role of collaboration among tourism stakeholders. Stakeholders were grouped into four categories: locals, public/government, business enterprises, and NGOs. The local community could not achieve its tourism objectives alone, making collaboration with other stakeholders essential. This collaboration led to the rapid growth of Nglanggeran Tourism Village, with the local municipality benefiting from increased local revenues. Notably, 30% of the proceeds from this venture were used to improve local social amenities (Manaf, Purbasari, Aprilia, & Astuti, 2018). Dangi et al. (2020) further support the need for collaboration in CBT, suggesting a more synergistic approach to tourism development and management, reinforcing the importance of collaborations and networks in sustainable development.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The study's independent variable was networks within the Amboseli Ecosystem, with indicators such as collaborations, community mobilization, external expertise, and meetings. The conceptual framework highlights the importance of the community as the central focus of any sustainable tourism initiative. Collaboration through multi-stakeholder partnerships is considered an effective approach to supporting sustainable tourism development and advancing the industry towards sustainability.

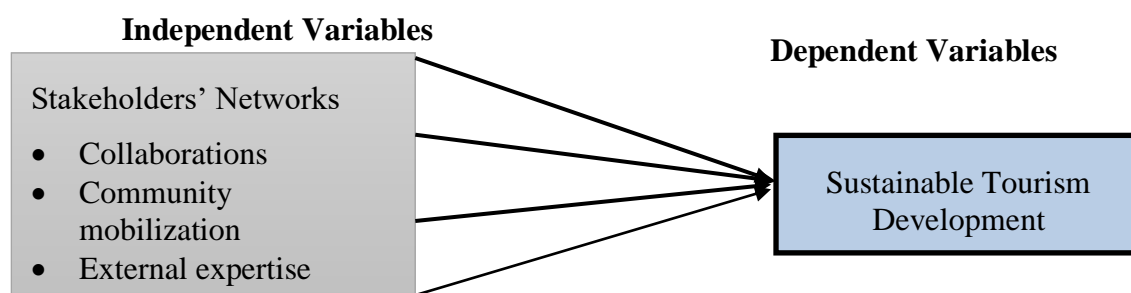


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, targeting a population within the Amboseli Ecosystem, including community members, lodge managers, Kenya Wildlife Service officials, and NGO representatives. The sample size was 420 participants, determined using a combination of Simple Random Sampling (SRS) and stratified sampling methods. Data was collected through questionnaires and structured interviews, with questionnaires organized on a 5-point Likert scale. SPSS software was used for data analysis, applying descriptive statistics, Pearson, and Regression Analysis techniques. Ethical considerations included obtaining necessary approvals and adhering to research ethics.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Questionnaires and interview schedules were administered to a total of 420 respondents, including 399 community members and 21 KWS officials, NGO representatives, and lodge/eco-lodge managers. Of the 399 questionnaires distributed to community members, 305 (76.44%) were returned fully completed. Interviews were conducted with 10 lodge managers, 2 Kenya Wildlife Service officials, and 3 NGO representatives, yielding a 66.67% response rate. Demographic analysis showed that the majority of respondents were male (60.82%) and aged between 31-40 years (49.53%). In terms of education, most respondents had attained secondary school education (49.84%), followed by college education (35.74%), with only a small percentage having university or postgraduate education. This demographic distribution aligns with the general population data from the Kenya Population and Housing Census Report (KNBS, 2019).

4.1 Stakeholder Networks and STD

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholders' Networks

Variable	Indicator	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Deviation
Stakeholder Networks	Collaborations	0(0%)	0(0%)	11 (5.9%)	272 (85.2%)	28 (8.8%)	4.0	0.39
	Community mobilization	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	13 (4%)	291 (91.3%)	14 (4.4%)	3.9	0.42
	External Expertise	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	280 (89.8%)	30 (9.6%)	4.14	0.28
	Meetings	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	220 (69.1%)	96 (30.2%)	4.29	0.36
Average							4.08	0.36

A larger number of respondents (94%) agreed that collaborations were an important consideration in STD in the AE. This refers to collaborations as an important factor in advancing the STD agenda, the presence of a consultative framework among stakeholders, the presence of a clearly defined system for information disclosure, and the presence of a grievance mechanism. 95.7% of respondents also supported community mobilization. The AE mentions equitable community participation in STD matters, the presence of linkages and coordination among stakeholders in the advancement of the STD agenda, the ability to leverage and manage local and external resources, and the participation of CBOs in STD networks and coalitions. 99.4% of respondents agreed that external expertise in STDs is important in the AE. The need to leverage external expertise, knowledge sharing, ease of access to STD information, ease of access to external expertise, and application of knowledge gained from external expertise were all examined. Meetings were agreed upon by 99.3% of respondents as an important component of stakeholders' networks. The importance of meetings is emphasized, with stakeholders holding regular barazas to discuss the STD agenda, structured and minuted meetings for future reference, feedback on issues raised during meetings, and equitable representation of community members during meetings.

Indicators averaged 4.08, indicating that respondents agreed with the majority of the statements. The standard deviation for most statements was 0.36, indicating that they were reasonable. Stakeholder networks are important for STD in the AE, and they can be strengthened by promoting collaborations, community mobilization, external expertise, and stakeholder meetings. According to the WTTC (2021), collaboration facilitates the development of strategies that promote sustainable and ethical practices in the Travel & Tourism industry, in tandem with the UN's SDGs. Similarly, collaborations among AE stakeholders go a long way toward creating and fostering sustainable practices that help to promote the destination.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

This was conducted using Pearson Correlation to ascertain the relationship between stakeholders' networks and STD. Table 2 summarizes the results of correlation analysis:

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Stakeholders' Networks and STD

		STH_NET	STD
STH_NET	Pearson Correlation	1	.392**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	319	319
STD	Pearson Correlation	.392**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	319	319

Data analyzed for community members and ecosystem officials illustrated a positive and significant association between Networks and STD ($r=0.392$, $p=0.000$). Carlsen et al (2019) contend in their thinking that for innovation to thrive in tourism, the existence of networks is critical. Tourism businesses are majorly small businesses clustered over diverse localities, and this informs the dire importance of collaborations (Sustain-T, 2019).

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Analysis of Variance for Stakeholders' Networks and STD

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.692	1	2.692	57.529	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.832	317	.049		
	Total	17.524	318			

Table 3 shows the analysis of variance for community members, lodge managers, and KWS/NGOs/Group Ranch officials. The findings revealed that Stakeholder Networks were a good predictor of Sustainable Tourism Development for both Community Members and Ecosystem Officials. This was highlighted by an F-Statistic of 57.529 and a reported p-value of .000, which is less than the standard probability of 0.05 significance level.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficients-Stakeholders' Networks and STD

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.592	.201		12.870	.000		
STH_NET	.374	.049	.392	7.585	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: STD

Results on regression of coefficients for both sets of respondents combined indicated that stakeholders' networks and STD are positively and significantly related ($r=0.374$; $p=0.000$), where $p<0.05$. Stakeholders' networks are an important aspect in a destinations' value-addition and also enable tourism stakeholders to work effectively (Presenza & Cipollina, 2010).

4.4 Hypothesis Testing Between Stakeholders' Networks and STD

The study's hypothesis was that there was no significant link between Stakeholder Networks and STDs in the AE. Table 4.7 shows that the hypothesis was tested using bivariate regression, and the p-value was used to determine this. We rejected H1 if the p-value was $p<0.05$, and accepted it if the p-value was $p>0.05$. The null hypothesis stated that stakeholder networks do not have a significant impact on STD in AE. Table 4.7 shows that the combined respondent sets had a p-value of 0.000. Further, the T-statistic was 7.585. The critical t-statistic equals 1.96. We reject the hypothesis ($p<0.05$, $t\text{-statistic}>1.96$) and propose an alternative hypothesis: stakeholders' networks influence sustainable tourism development in the Amboseli Ecosystem. This is summarized in table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis

Objective	Hypothesis	Rule	p-value	Comment
Influence of Stakeholder Networks on STD in AE	H ₀₁ : There is no significant relationship between stakeholder networks and STD in AE	Reject H ₀₁ if p value<0.05	P=0.000	Stakeholders networks influence sustainable tourism development in AE.

Despite limited literature on the impact of stakeholders' networks on Sustainable Tourism Development (STD), their importance is undeniable. There is a pressing need to reconfigure local stakeholders and collaborations to encourage innovation and develop new sustainable initiatives, leading to more valuable and sustainable destinations (Costa, Calisto, Nunes, & Dias, 2023). Presenza and Cipolina (2010) also stress the significance of enhancing stakeholder relationships, especially in policymaking and destination marketing. Data collection for this research was efficiently conducted through questionnaires and structured interviews, with strong cooperation from community members and ecosystem officials. SPSS software was used for data analysis, with both descriptive and inferential statistics applied to understand the influence of stakeholder networks on STD in the Amboseli Ecosystem. The results showed a significant relationship between stakeholders' networks and STD ($p=0.000$; $r=0.374$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

4.5 Determinants of STD in AE

The Researcher sought to identify the different predictors for STD in Amboseli Ecosystem. For this purpose, three regression procedures are normally used, which lead to the same result. These are: backward elimination, forward selection and stepwise regression. For this study, backward elimination was used, reason being that it is simple to use and interpret.

4.5.1 Backward Elimination

The Researcher placed all indicators for individual variables in the model for consideration. All these were sequentially eliminated until the remaining variables were shown to contribute significantly to predicting STD in AE. The indicator that was eliminated at each stage had the least significance, indicating that it had the largest p-value. The model was adapted as the final one where the indicators had a significant contribution, $p<0.05$. Eventual results are presented in table 6:

Table 6: Ingredient Determinants of STD for Stakeholders' Networks in AE

Indicators	B	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	2.835		14.271	.000
Collaborations	.130	.213	3.690	.000
Community Mobilization	.189	.335	5.372	.000
Meetings	.142	.220	3.202	.002

The Researcher made a note of key predictors of STD in AE and these were compiled into a model that took note of the key variables and their indicators across all objectives of the study. A smaller sig. (p-value) and a larger t-value of a predictor, have a great contribution to a predictor's input to a model. For stakeholders' networks, community mobilization and collaborations were identified as the indicators with the most significant predictor to STD ($p=.000$, $t=5.372$ and $p=.000$, $t=3.690$ respectively), while meetings had the least significant predictor to STD in AE ($p=.000$, $t=3.202$). This information was important in coming up with the final study model for STD in AE. Essentially, the model outlines both the indicators that noted to predict STD and those that were found not to predict that much, but with a p-value of <0.05).

5.0 Conclusion

The conclusion identifies key determinants that influence Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) in the Amboseli Ecosystem, emphasizing the significant relationship between stakeholders' efforts and STD outcomes. Specifically, collaborations among stakeholders and initiatives to mobilize local residents were highlighted as critical factors. The findings reveal that stakeholders' networks are positively and significantly associated with STD, despite the local community being the custodians of the ecosystem's resources, they often lack the expertise and knowledge required for effective management. Given the challenge of limited resources faced by tourism organizations in the region, it is essential for local entrepreneurs to leverage external resources through their networks. These networks foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, uniting people with a common mission and creating a sense of belonging. The effectiveness of stakeholders' networks is crucial for the success of sustainable tourism in the Amboseli Ecosystem. Collaborations, community mobilization, meetings, and external expertise are vital avenues for exchanging information and consolidating resources, which are essential for sustainable tourism development. By joining forces and pooling knowledge and resources, stakeholders can make a lasting impact on the sustainability of the region. Furthermore, collaborations play a pivotal role in accelerating the growth of successful sustainable tourism initiatives, placing the local community at the core of these efforts. Given that the Amboseli Ecosystem is located in one of Kenya's most remote semi-arid areas, where major economic activities are limited, tourism is a critical sector for supporting local livelihoods. Therefore, advancing stakeholders' networks to foster sustainable tourism activities must be prioritized to ensure the region's sustainability and economic viability.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended to foster networks among stakeholders in the Amboseli Ecosystem through collaborations with universities, research institutions, and NGOs focused on conservation and sustainable tourism. This will enhance skills, information, and knowledge sharing on community involvement in sustainable tourism initiatives. Regular, structured meetings with follow-ups are advised to ensure accountability and alignment of tourism objectives with local residents' aspirations. The government, in collaboration with local communities, should explore and promote new sustainable tourism initiatives, such as homestays and cultural activities, to maintain the ecosystem's competitiveness while protecting the environment and promoting local culture. Additionally, local leaders and entrepreneurs should encourage the formation of societies for tourism entrepreneurs, particularly artifact vendors, to collectively air their opinions and improve networking.

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