A Maasai family in Tanzania. Photo by John Musgrove

Tourism's Impact on Communities

Integrating Biocultural Protocols in Tourism and Biodiversity Policies

An advocacy strategy for the Maasai Indigenous Community in East Africa

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OCTOBER 2024

Introduction

Tourism, often promoted as a catalyst for economic development and environmental conservation, can have deeply adverse impacts on Indigenous communities and their surrounding ecosystems. In East Africa, the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania have experienced firsthand the negative consequences of tourism development on their ancestral lands, culture, and livelihoods. As tourism has expanded in these regions, the Maasai have been systematically displaced from their traditional territories, their cultural heritage commodified, and their role as stewards of biodiversity largely disregarded.

This research paper explores the complex relationship between tourism, biodiversity, and Indigenous rights, using the Maasai community as a case study to highlight broader issues faced by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) globally. It examines how the influx of mass tourism—often under the guise of ecotourism and conservation—has led to the erosion of the Maasai's land rights, traditional knowledge, and cultural identity, creating a scenario in which the community bears the costs of conservation but receives few of the benefits.

The analysis then turns to the role of Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs) as a potential solution to these challenges. BCPs are community-driven tools that document a community's governance systems, values, and customary laws in a format that is comprehensible to external actors, including governments, NGOs, and the private sector. These protocols help bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and formal legal structures, ensuring that Indigenous communities have a voice in decision-making processes and a platform to defend their rights over their lands, resources, and cultural heritage.

In the context of the Maasai, BCPs can play a pivotal role in addressing the negative impacts associated with tourism development. The paper argues that tourism and biodiversity policies should be evaluated through the lens of BCPs ensuring that such policies respect the cultural integrity and traditional ways of life, while fostering sustainable management of biodiversity.

The research presents a brief analysis of the impacts of tourism on the Maasai Indigenous People of East Africa, with the following key findings:

1. Loss of Land and Livelihoods: The establishment and expansion of protected areas such as the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania have often involved the forced displacement of Maasai communities, severing their access to grazing lands and natural resources essential for their pastoralist livelihoods.

2. Cultural Erosion and Economic Marginalization: The commercialization of Maasai culture through tourism has led to the commodification of their traditions and knowledge, without meaningful participation or benefit-sharing for the community. This economic marginalization is compounded by policies that prioritize profit-driven tourism over the welfare and development of local people.

3. Environmental Impacts: The emphasis on tourism has also altered traditional land-use patterns, disrupted wildlife migration corridors, and increased human-wildlife conflicts, undermining both ecological integrity and the Maasai's long-standing role as custodians of the region's biodiversity.

The paper concludes by advocating for the integration of Biocultural Community Protocols within international frameworks, particularly under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and related tourism and biodiversity policies. It argues for the recognition of BCPs as essential instruments for ensuring the full and equal participation of IPLCs in conservation and the planning, designing, and implementing of tourism initiatives. This would involve making BCPs a mandatory requirement ensuring that the rights and priorities of communities like the Maasai are upheld.

Given recent developments within the CBD, particularly Decision 12/12 and Article 8(j), which addresses the traditional knowledge and sustainable use of biodiversity by Indigenous Peoples, this paper suggests that the CBD's working group on Article 8(j) is the appropriate forum for advancing the recognition and integration of BCPs. It also identifies upcoming CBD sessions, such as COP16 and the negotiations around the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), as strategic opportunities for advocating for BCPs to be embedded within global biodiversity and tourism governance.

Incorporation of Biocultural Community Protocols BCPs into the (KMGBF) is essential for ensuring IPLCs are not merely consulted but are central actors in shaping biodiversity and tourism-related policies. While it is possible to point out the negative impacts of tourism on IPLCs, we challenge the assumption that tourism can be genuinely beneficial or sustainable for these communities. Instead, we advocate for BCPs as a tool to empower IPLCs, granting them greater authority in determining the policies that affect their lands, resources, and cultural heritage, while upholding their rights and autonomy.

The Maasai Mara National Reserve, Narok District, southwestern Kenya, along the border with Tanzania.

What are Biocultural Community Protocols?

Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) have long governed themselves through a set of practices, principles, and norms known as customary laws and rights. These are traditional rules that guide interactions within and between communities, regulate relationships with outsiders, and establish responsible stewardship over the territories and natural resources they depend on. Such customs have safeguarded their homelands and sustained their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge for generations.

Customary laws are community-recognized norms and regulations, often transmitted orally, which dictate various aspects of life, such as the use of natural resources and the ethical sharing of traditional knowledge. Unlike modern legal systems, these laws are enforced by community institutions and emphasize sustainable resource management and the collective good.

Customary rights, on the other hand, are acquired through tradition and are typically held by all members of a community. Unlike conventional property rights that stress individual ownership, these rights emphasize collective stewardship and the responsibility to maintain and protect lands for future generations.

These customary laws and rights, also known as protocols, reflect a symbiotic relationship with the land and a responsibility for preserving these lands for future generations.

Origins and Purpose of Biocultural Community Protocols

Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs), also known as community protocols, originated as a response to the need to articulate and formalize these customary laws and rights in a way that is comprehensible to external entities such as governments, businesses, and NGOs. They communicate the importance of their lands and resources for a community's livelihoods and way of life, their roles, particularly that of women, as stewards of land and resources, and their customary rights and how these are recognised in international and national law.

Given the historical marginalization and displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral lands, denial of land rights, and adverse impacts from large-scale development, BCPs serve as a participatory tool to defend their biocultural heritage against these pressures and threats through communicating these communities' values, governance systems, and their inherent rights over traditional knowledge, land, and resources.

The concept of biocultural community protocols emerged from global efforts to protect Indigenous rights under international frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), particularly its provisions under Article 8(j) of the CBD and on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS). These protocols are shaped by a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness between people,

their culture, and the natural world. They seek to promote equitable partnerships and ensure that the exploitation of traditional knowledge or genetic resources respects community values and benefits all parties.

Applications of Biocultural Community Protocols

Biocultural community protocols have a range of applications that support IPLCs in asserting their rights and interests:

Asserting Customary Rights: BCPs can help IPLCs defend their rights to land, resources, and traditional knowledge, framing these claims within both international and national legal frameworks.

Negotiating Access to Resources: They provide a basis for communities to negotiate equitable and gender-just agreements regarding the use of their resources and knowledge, ensuring that benefits are shared fairly among all members.

Facilitating Dialogue and Partnerships: By clearly articulating a community's values, needs, and priorities, BCPs help promote constructive dialogues and equitable partnerships with external stakeholders, ensuring that development projects or research initiatives align with community aspirations.

Enhancing Internal Governance: BCPs can strengthen internal social dynamics and governance, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and fostering inclusive decision-making, especially the equitable participation of women.

Implementing Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) Arrangements: Under the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol, BCPs provide a framework for communities to engage with ABS agreements, ensuring that any use of their biological and genetic resources is mutually agreed upon and benefits the community.

The commercialization of cultural identities and practices for tourism consumption can undermine the pride and dignity of communities, turning cultural heritage into mere products for sale. This shift not only distorts the cultural narrative but also creates tension and conflict between local communities and tourism businesses.

Why Biocultural Protocols Matter

The use of biocultural community protocols helps to bridge the gap between Indigenous customs and formal legal systems, ensuring that IPLCs' rights and knowledge systems are respected and safeguarded in dealings with external actors. By documenting their laws, values, and expectations, communities can better defend against external pressures such as land grabs, exploitative resource use, and loss of cultural heritage. These protocols are not just legal documents but living agreements that reflect the unique biocultural heritage of each community and its vision for sustainable self-determination.

Tourism and its Impacts on Biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples

Tourism and Biodiversity

Tourism, as defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to locations outside their usual environment for personal or business purposes. This diverse industry encompasses various sectors, including accommodation, transport, attractions, and travel services. It has been argued that when carefully managed, tourism has the potential to contribute positively to local economies and the conservation of ecosystems. However, it more often than not poses significant threats to biodiversity and ecosystem health.

The concept of "sustainable tourism" is defined by the UNWTO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as tourism that "takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and local communities." Achieving this balance is crucial for the well-being of both people and ecosystems, especially in the Anthropocene era, where human activities heavily influence environmental outcomes. It requires the involvement of diverse actors, such as governments, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and conservation organizations, to effectively manage natural resources.

Tourism is considered one of the major threats to ecosystems and a frequent driver of species decline due to its direct and indirect impacts on vegetation, soil, and wildlife. Activities associated with tourism, such as habitat destruction, pollution, and the introduction of invasive species, contribute significantly to global biodiversity loss—second only to habitat destruction. Paradoxically, tourism often depends on the very biodiversity it threatens, with destinations like tropical forests, coastal areas, and national parks attracting visitors due to their natural beauty and ecological richness.

For tourism to contribute positively to biodiversity conservation, it must be based on inclusive, participatory, and gender-just planning and management that prioritize long-term environmental sustainability over short-term commercial gains. Unfortunately, commercial tourism development pressures often conflict with these goals.

The 2003 report, *Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism's Global Footprint*, jointly published by UNEP and Conservation International, examined the overlap between tourism development and biodiversity hotspots. The report highlighted both opportunities and risks, emphasizing that biodiversity is essential for the long-term viability of the tourism industry. However, it also noted a widespread lack of awareness about the links—both positive and negative—between tourism and biodiversity conservation.

A subsequent UNWTO report explored how tourism could contribute to biodiversity protection through responsible land use planning and development controls to minimize harmful impacts. The report called for the development of sustainable tourism products that link tourism activities with conservation management, ensuring that tourism becomes a resource for protecting biodiversity rather than a threat.

However, the UNWTO also identified a common challenge: many destinations lack local expertise to create tourism models that simultaneously benefit local communities and conserve biodiversity. This gap often leads to tourism development that undermines both community welfare and environmental health.

Highlighting this dilemma, Hall (2010) argued that tourism contributes significantly to the five main drivers of biodiversity loss: habitat change, overexploitation, pollution, invasive species, and climate change. He emphasized that while tourism can, in theory, support conservation, success stories are rare and often limited to isolated cases involving individual species or small habitats. Thus, the broader potential of tourism to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity conservation remains largely unrealized.

Overall, while tourism can be a double-edged sword for biodiversity, achieving a positive balance requires strong governance, local capacity-building, and policies that prioritize ecological integrity over profit. Only then can tourism serve as a true ally in the fight to protect the world's biodiversity.

Tourism and Indigenous Peoples

Research on Indigenous cultures, initially led by anthropologists and sociologists, has long explored themes such as identity, empowerment, and authenticity, particularly within the context of tourism. Early studies highlighted the impact of tourism on Indigenous communities, including issues like cultural commodification and acculturation. These foundational works paved the way for subsequent research on Indigenous tourism and its broader implications.

As the field evolved, scholars began to focus on mitigating the negative impacts of tourism and promoting authentic cultural experiences for visitors. Sustainable tourism models emerged, emphasizing economic benefits for Indigenous communities, the conservation of cultural landscapes, and environmental stewardship. Research by Carr et al. (2016) explored these themes, analyzing the interplay between economic prosperity, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. These studies emphasized that achieving sustainable livelihoods for Indigenous peoples requires a balance between economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

Indigenous women gathering during a community meeting in Kimintet, Lolgorian Trans-Mara. Photo by Edna Kaptoyo/GFC

Further research has examined the complex interdependencies between Indigenous economic development, cultural values, and connections to traditional lands and resources. For example, *Koot's (2016)* study of the Indigenous South Kalahari Bushmen illustrated how colonial legacies and neoliberal capitalism continue to shape tourism in post-apartheid settings. The study found that the Bushmen's cultural image is often commodified for tourism, creating a stark divide between wealthy luxury lodges and impoverished local communities. Despite their cultural significance being used for branding and marketing, the Bushmen rarely benefit from tourism revenues, remaining relegated to low-wage labour roles. This perpetuates a "primitive" narrative of the Bushmen for marketing tourism and reinforces economic marginalization, even within ostensibly cooperative tourism ventures.

Tourism can also concentrate power in the hands of multinational companies, reducing local control and decision-making. These companies typically negotiate at the national level, sidelining local communities. Moreover, within tourism operations, higher-paying and skilled jobs often go to expatriates or non-local workers, while Indigenous people are confined to lower-paying positions. This dynamic exacerbates inequality and prevents Indigenous communities from fully benefiting from tourism in their own territories.

Overall, while tourism offers potential economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples, it often reinforces existing power imbalances and cultural exploitation. Any sustainable model that involves community land and Indigenous territories must prioritize equitable partnerships and community-led development to ensure that Indigenous peoples are not merely participants but key beneficiaries and decision-makers in such initiatives.

The fate of the Maasai community illustrates how protected areas and so-called ecotourism can deny Indigenous Peoples access to traditional knowledge, lands, and forests—the essential assets that underpin their livelihoods, health, and identities. This economic, political, and cultural marginalization creates social separation that can erode Indigenous societies.

Commodification of Culture, Land, and Community Values

Tourism development often leads to the commodification of culture, displacement from ancestral lands, and altered lifestyles for local residents. These impacts are particularly evident when tourism expands into Indigenous territories and local communities, disrupting traditional values and social structures.

Tourism's influence can be broadly categorized into three types of impacts: socio-cultural, environmental, and economic. One of the most significant socio-cultural impacts is the commodification of cultural practices. This occurs when cultural expressions, rituals, or traditions are transformed into products for tourist consumption, undermining their original meaning and value. For example, traditional art forms and dances may be reduced to commercialized imitations aimed solely at generating income from visitors.

Commodification extends beyond cultural practices and into the realms of land and labor. Land, once viewed as a communal resource tied to social and ecological well-being, is often transformed into a tradable commodity under tourism development. This shift can exacerbate existing inequalities, as land privatization and formalization of property rights frequently lead to the exclusion of marginalized groups and elite capture of resources. Additionally, such restructuring of property rights can trigger land grabbing, pushing local communities out of their traditional territories.

Tourism also reshapes gender roles within communities, particularly affecting women. As traditional caretakers, women often see their roles reproduced in the tourism labor market, where they are overrepresented in low-paid jobs such as housekeeping, cleaning, and other service-related roles (Jackman, 2022). The Global Report on Women in Tourism (2019) highlighted this issue in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, where women face domestic violence and restrictions on their economic participation due to cultural expectations and male control over their earnings. Similar trends have been observed globally, in contexts as diverse as China, Costa Rica, and Belize, where employment in tourism increases women's workload without reducing their domestic responsibilities, thus reinforcing traditional gender inequalities.

The commercialization of cultural identities and practices for tourism consumption can undermine the pride and dignity of communities, turning cultural heritage into mere products for sale. This shift not only distorts the cultural narrative but also creates tension and conflict between local communities and tourism businesses. For instance, conflicts may arise when tourist behaviour or attire clashes with local cultural values or when local people are excluded from decision-making and fair employment opportunities.

Tourism Development in Maasai Mara: Impacts and Consequences

The Maasai community in Kenya and Tanzania has experienced profound changes over the years due to tourism and conservation efforts. Initially, the Maasai territories were taken over to create protected areas (PAs) under colonial policies of fortress conservation, which later became commodified to attract mass and elite tourism. This process has resulted in the financialization of nature, wildlife, and the customary rights of Indigenous communities, disrupting their culture, traditional practices, and belief systems.

While the Maasai community's perspectives on wildlife and tourism have been largely overlooked, their ancestral lands were forcibly taken over and converted into ecotourism destinations. In theory, ecotourism aims to mediate conflicts between local communities and wildlife conservation, but in reality, it has been driven by profit motives in areas like the Maasai Mara and Amboseli National Parks. This profit-driven approach undermines local economic opportunities and perpetuates inequalities, reinforcing the observation that many Kenyans employed in the tourism industry are left to "eat the crumbs" of tourism's profits.

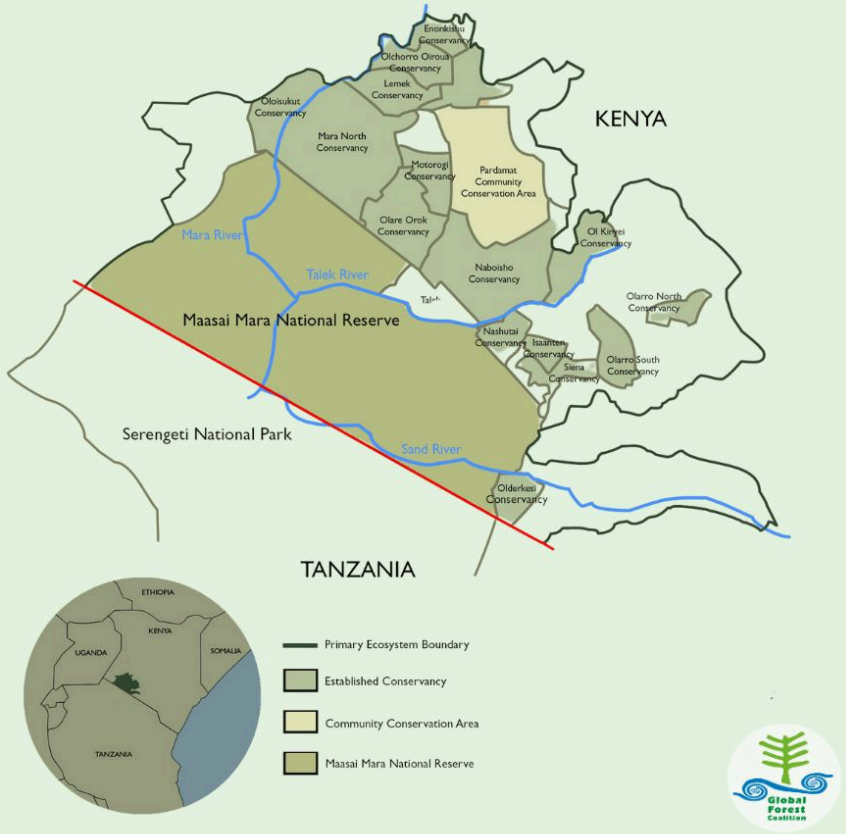
The fate of the Maasai community illustrates how protected areas and so-called ecotourism can deny Indigenous Peoples access to traditional knowledge, lands, and forests—the essential assets that underpin their livelihoods, health, and identities. This economic, political, and cultural marginalization creates social separation that can erode Indigenous societies.

The Maasai's deep connection to their land, wildlife, and heritage is integral to their identity. The loss of livelihoods and cultural displacement weaken their social fabric, making it difficult for them to defend their rights and fulfill their community responsibilities. As a result, their cultural heritage risks being overshadowed by a tourism narrative that prioritizes external consumption over local integrity.

Maasai Mara National Reserve and its Impact

The Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR) is a key conservation area in Kenya, widely recognized as the "Jewel in the Crown" of Kenya's protected areas and celebrated as the Eighth Wonder of the World. The area in consideration, holds immense cultural significance for the Maasai, whose traditional practices have long supported wildlife conservation across the Greater Mara Ecosystem. Every year, millions of wildebeest, gazelles, and zebras migrate through the Reserve from Tanzania's Serengeti, contributing to its ecological and cultural value. The Maasai Mara National Reserve and the adjacent land which form part of the larger Serengeti–Mara ecosystem, are home to pastoral communities and are important wildlife areas.

Maasai Mara National Reserve



The Maasai Mara National Reserve is located in Narok District, southwestern Kenya, along the border with Tanzania and adjacent to Serengeti National Park. It forms the northern section of the larger Serengeti-Mara ecosystem, which covers 40,350 square kilometers (Muthee, 1984), with the Mara National Reserve occupying 1,673 square kilometers. The reserve is surrounded by group ranches and divided by the Mara River. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1989, the primary goal of establishing the park was to protect its rich wildlife (Bhandari, 1999).

However, the establishment of protected areas like the MMNR has marginalized the Maasai and other pastoral communities. Most national parks and reserves in Kenya were carved out of Maasai territory immediately after World War II, displacing the Indigenous inhabitants and restricting their access to grazing lands. Today, Kenya's protected areas occupy 8% of the country's land, totalling 7,194,000 hectares and comprising over 65 national parks, reserves, and private sanctuaries.

In Tanzania, the Maasai have fought for 28 years to regain control of 5,000 hectares of land expropriated by Sukenya Farm. Additionally, they continue to lose land and livelihoods around the Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. For example, a 400,000-hectare hunting license was granted to outsiders in the Loliondo area, with little benefit to the Maasai.

Although tourism is promoted as a tool for economic development, especially in the MMNR, it has made minimal contributions to the empowerment and socio-economic development of the local people. Büscher (2011) notes that in Africa, local actors struggle to negotiate with profit-driven conservation interests, as natural resources are framed as "inverted commons"—a global heritage for which only local communities bear the cost.

Consequences of Tourism for the Maasai

Tourism has displaced the Maasai from their ancestral lands and restricted their traditional activities. For instance, in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, tourists camp on the crater floor and visit the Olduvai Gorge, areas once central to Maasai life but now off-limits to them. Measures to manage tourism's impact, such as banning new accommodations, have focused on conservation while neglecting Maasai land and grazing rights, thus reinforcing the community's marginalization.

A review of existing literature on the Maasai community and the impact of national parks and reserves on their territory reveals several critical findings. The link between the environment—such as the Maasai Mara National Reserve and Amboseli National Park—their ecosystems, and poverty reduction has been unclear for most host communities, given that they experience high levels of poverty, ranging between 50% and 60%. Mowforth and Munt (2003) highlight that local communities are frequently excluded from planning, decision-making, and the operational stages of tourism development. This exclusion has led to unequal benefits for locals and has resulted in them being pushed off their ancestral land.

The Maasai attribute their marginalization to multiple factors: wildlife encroachment, which destroys crops and kills livestock; displacement from their ancestral land for protected areas; environmental degradation; inequitable distribution of ecotourism benefits; exclusion from decision-making; a lack of entrepreneurial skills; poor accountability in the management of ecotourism enterprises; and discrimination against women and the dominance of elites in managing these ventures. In their assessment of the Maasai's perspectives on tourism, Nampushi and Nankaya (2020) conclude that tourism has significantly contributed to the commercialization of Maasai culture by foreigners, particularly through the construction of Manyattas, cultural villages with huts plastered in cow-dung for tourists to visit and buy hand-crafted souvenirs.

Tourism has also been seen to suffocate Maasai culture and traditional ways of life. This transformation has led to over-dependence on tourism income, especially among young men who, instead of assisting their families with traditional livestock herding, now engage in activities like gambling, crime, drugs, and alcohol to support this shift in lifestyle. Tourism has increased the school drop-out rate, leaving young Maasai unfit for traditional roles or for employment in the tourism sector, as they lack both formal education and experience. Some villagers view the benefits from tourism as minimal compared to the profits generated from their local resources, while conservation NGOs are seen as foreign-owned entities more invested in maintaining high salaries and expensive vehicles than addressing local needs, such as building water wells.

Employment opportunities for locals in the tourism industry are typically limited to menial roles, such as cutting grass, washing dishes, working as security guards, or serving as rangers who help identify and arrest Maasai herders caught trespassing in conservation areas. Some Maasai have been forced to reduce their livestock herds to prevent conflict over essential resources like water and to avoid fines or jail time. This has forced many to graze their cattle at night to evade detection

by park rangers. While leasing their land for conservation tourism may provide some income, the revenue generated is insufficient to replace the lost grazing land, which is critical during periods of drought.

The businesses operating within local Maasai communities are often owned by outsiders, denying residents full participation in tourism investments. Foreign investors are known to extract large profits, which they repatriate rather than reinvest in the local economy. Similarly, Wishitemi et al. (2015) argue that wildlife conserved in protected areas generates limited income or employment for local communities while simultaneously imposing significant costs, such as land-use restrictions and damage to crops and livestock caused by wildlife. As livelihood opportunities diminish and population pressures increase, competition over natural resources has intensified, leading to conflicts, environmental degradation, and heightened poverty levels.

The Maasai community predominantly survives through subsistence pastoralism, crop farming, charcoal burning, and selling firewood, which are unsustainable practices that contribute to environmental degradation. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from ecotourism discussions has been identified as a factor contributing to high poverty levels in the Maasai Mara and Amboseli regions.

Weldemichel and Lien (2019) further argue that the history of land division, the establishment of wildlife conservancies, and the ongoing discourse surrounding the 'end of pastoralism' have driven the Maasai to fence their lands. They suggest that fencing is both a form of resistance against dispossession in the name of conservation and evidence of the acceptance of a narrative that pastoralism is no longer viable. This narrative has been pushed by a range of state and non-state actors since Kenya's independence, leading to significant changes in land use and ownership patterns among the Maasai people.

Donkeys ferrying fuel wood from Nyekweri forest to nearby urban centres. Photo by IIN

Tourism's impacts on the Maasai are multifaceted

Economic Exclusion: Local Maasai often lack access to tourism profits, which are concentrated among outsiders. Foreign-owned businesses dominate local investments, generating large sums that are rarely reinvested in the community.

Minimal Employment Opportunities: The Maasai are typically employed in low-paying jobs, such as security guards, cleaners, and rangers. They are often tasked with policing fellow Maasai for trespassing or grazing in conservation areas, creating social friction.

Cultural Erosion: Tourism has commercialized Maasai culture, turning their traditional villages (Manyattas) into attractions for tourists, where Maasai men perform for money instead of engaging in traditional responsibilities. This shift has increased youth unemployment and dependency on tourism income, pushing some into crime, drugs, and alcohol.

Environmental Restrictions: Tourism development has reduced grazing areas, leading to severe resource conflicts. During droughts, leasing land for tourism is a precarious solution as it does not compensate for lost grazing lands. As a result, some Maasai graze their livestock in protected areas at night to avoid fines or imprisonment.

Broader Impacts and Community Voices

Studies reveal that ecotourism and wildlife conservation generate minimal benefits for the host communities, despite the significant costs they bear, such as crop destruction and livestock loss due to wildlife. With limited livelihood opportunities and increasing population pressure, competition for resources has intensified, contributing to conflicts, environmental degradation, and poverty.

The exclusion of women from ecotourism discussions has further entrenched poverty in the Maasai Mara and Amboseli regions. This exclusion, combined with the privatization and commercialization of Maasai land, has driven communities to fence their properties as a form of resistance to dispossession.

The history of tourism development in Maasai Mara underscores how conservation and ecotourism can serve as tools of dispossession, depriving Indigenous communities of their rights, land, and cultural identities. The Maasai experience reveals the complex dynamics between global conservation goals and local realities, where economic gains are pursued at the expense of community well-being and sustainability. Addressing these issues requires a more inclusive and equitable approach that genuinely incorporates Maasai voices, rights, and needs into tourism planning and conservation strategies.

Integrating Biocultural Community Protocols: An Advocacy Strategy

Tourism in Kenya is often viewed as a key driver for achieving the Vision 2030 Economic Development Plan. However, without the active cooperation and engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), tourism development projects may generate anger and mistrust, negatively influencing perceptions of tourism's social, environmental, and economic benefits. To mitigate these concerns, it is essential for Kenya's economic development policy to recognize and integrate Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs) as a means of ensuring IPLCs' strong involvement throughout management and decision-making processes.

BCPs can serve as a valuable tool to address conflicts that may arise in relation to tourism and biodiversity and to build consensus among policymakers. IPLCs should be identified as key actors in any policy-making or collaborative approach and consensus-building.

Kenya has ratified several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), all of which emphasize the promotion of human well-being through equitable benefit-sharing from conservation initiatives. The three core objectives of the CBD are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. The CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development, adopted in 2004 with contributions from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), align with and support the implementation of various international sustainability frameworks. These include the 2002 Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, the 2002 UNEP Principles for Sustainable Tourism Implementation, the 1999 Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, the 1997 Manila Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism, and the 1997 Berlin Declaration on Biodiversity and Tourism. The Guidelines also incorporate the CBD's ecosystem approach and the Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines, which outline best practices for conducting cultural, environmental, and social impact assessments regarding projects impacting sacred sites and IPLC territories.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the CBD further elaborated on these guidelines through the publication of Tourism Supporting Biodiversity (2015), a manual aimed at planners, developers, managers, and policymakers engaged in tourism development within biodiversity-sensitive areas. The manual's primary purpose is to mainstream biodiversity considerations into sustainable tourism initiatives and support public authorities and other agencies in minimizing tourism's negative impacts.

To ensure the effective participation of IPLCs in tourism and biodiversity conservation, it is necessary to advocate for the integration of BCPs within existing CBD, UNEP, and UNWTO guidelines. This integration should be made mandatory in all tourism development and biodiversity conservation programs to respect and protect IPLCs' rights and promote equitable participation in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes.

The adoption of Decision 12/12 at the 12th Conference of Parties (COP12) to the CBD in 2014, which pertains to Article 8(j), provides a strong foundation for this advocacy. Article 8(j) addresses the preservation of Traditional Knowledge, Innovations, and Practices of indigenous and local communities, particularly in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The CBD's working group on Article 8(j) emphasizes the intrinsic link between maintaining traditional knowledge, continued stewardship of traditional lands and waters, and the right of IPLCs to free, prior, and informed consent.

Future negotiations within the Article 8(j) working group represent a crucial opportunity to advocate for the formal recognition and integration of BCPs. Such efforts could significantly influence the CBD's broader work on tourism development and biodiversity conservation. To advance this agenda, upcoming sessions of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), and the Conference of Parties should be strategically targeted for focused advocacy.

In this context, the forthcoming COP16 and the ongoing negotiations surrounding the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) present a prime opportunity to campaign for the recognition and integration of BCPs. The KMGBF outlines several targets, including Target 21 (effective and equitable governance, integrated and participatory management of biodiversity), Target 22 (access to justice and information), and Target 23 (gender equality and a gender-responsive approach for biodiversity action). These targets emphasize the need for full, equitable, and informed participation of IPLCs in biodiversity-related decision-making while respecting their cultural rights and traditional knowledge systems. Achieving these targets could serve as a foundation for advocating the mandatory inclusion of BCPs in the context of Target 3, which focuses on the expansion of Protected Areas.

Incorporating BCPs into the KMGBF framework ensures that IPLCs play a central role in shaping policies related to biodiversity and tourism, rather than being passive stakeholders. While we can highlight the negative impacts tourism has on IPLCs, we cannot claim that tourism can be inherently beneficial or truly sustainable for these communities. Instead, we advocate for the use of BCPs to empower IPLCs to take a leading role in determining policies that affect their lands, resources, and cultural heritage, respecting their rights and autonomy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With contributions from the Indigenous Information Network

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Design & Layout
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