

Tourism, Vision 2030 and pro-pastoralist livelihoods in north-eastern Kenya

- Ecotourism in Northern Kenya Policy Brief - Enhanced Livelihoods in the Mandera Triangle (ELMT)

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Tourism accounts for approximately 10% of the country's GDP, 9% of total formal employment and is one of the leading foreign exchange earners for the country (US\$800 million in 2006). Interestingly, the tourism sector has been one of the fastest-growing industries in Kenya, although since the 2007 elections tourist numbers have significantly dropped and only slowly are these trends reversing – an added impact of the current global financial crisis.

The tourism products which Kenya offers are varied, from coastal tourism to premium parks, whilst the demand for niche products such as community and eco-based tourism is increasing. Vision 2030 highlights numerous challenges and opportunities to exploiting the growth opportunity in the tourism sector, and pertinent to north-eastern Kenya, highlight the expansion of product choices and destinations, improved infrastructure and security, and better coordination and collaboration amongst the private and public sector players.

One of the flagship projects and key tourism initiatives highlighted in Vision 2030, to be undertaken in collaboration with local and international investors and delivered by 2012, is the construction of a resort city in Isiolo – one of three identified in Kenya. The establishment of Isiolo as a resort city was highlighted as an opportunity to optimise the rich tourism potential presented by Mt Kenya, Meru National Park, the Aberdares and Samburu National Park.

Feedback from various community, private and public sector stakeholders indicate that the establishment of Isiolo as a resort city would be premature. With limited infrastructure in and around the town, expansion of road development only beginning and significant insecurity issues in the town and region as a whole, the proposed development of Isiolo as a resort city may not be a wise economic investment in the short-term. These are significant stumbling blocks to developing north-eastern Kenya as a key tourism destination at this moment in time.

The perceived and/or reality of insecurity in north-eastern Kenya is significant, impacting greatly on the potential of sustainable tourism products to support livelihood development in the region. The proximity to Somalia, regular influx of refugees, ongoing cattle rustling and tension of border conflicts are concerns to any potential investor, let alone international (or domestic) tourist.

However, and this must be seen in the perspective of long-term goals, potential for niche tourism products in the region has the greatest potential. If the establishment of the proposed Lamu port gets underway, and the subsequent development of a good road network through north-eastern Kenya to Isiolo and onward to Moyale (southern Ethiopia - and in future to South Sudan) follows, then the possibility of capturing the tourism dollar throughout this region is greatly enhanced.

In support, the interest in developing parks and tourism opportunities in the lower Tana River has been highlighted in Vision 2030, and something which is being supported on the ground by local and international support across a range of sectors. The area offers the potential of great niche product markets, connectivity to the coast and untouched wildlife opportunities.

Encouraging support, infrastructure, increased security and tourism opportunities in this part of the region in the short- to medium-term would be recommended and importantly help to conserve the areas valuable natural resources (water, wildlife, vegetation) whilst providing a nature tourism product and opportunity for enhancing livelihoods for those living in the area. As a first leg in connecting the coast to the north, this area offers a natural opportunity.

As the infrastructure develops and security concerns are alleviated, the linkage from the coast through to Garissa, Meru Conservation Area, Isiolo (and Laikipia) and further afield will evolve and investment opportunities will flow from private and public sector.

In this regard and in perspective of pastoral livelihoods and Vision 2030, the development of niche tourism products i.e. ecotourism and cultural tourism, in north-eastern Kenya align most closely with pro-pastoral livelihoods. Vision 2030 focuses on enabling and supporting increased tourism products and employment opportunities. However, attracting the lion's share of the market would conflict with the small scale niche tourism product which would support the diversification of a pro-pastoral ecotourism industry in north-eastern Kenya.

As highlighted, concern arises over the constraints which face the development of a pro-pastoral ecotourism industry in north-eastern Kenya, and specifically issues of security, infrastructure, accessibility, and marketing, linkages with other tourism areas and products and capacity of community. These constraints require considerable thought and attention if as a whole the development of a pro-pastoral ecotourism industry in north-eastern Kenya is to occur. However, in light of these constraints which will naturally limit tourist numbers, opportunities and as such economic benefits, communities would need to identify what their major interest (benefit) would be by establishing an ecotourism or similar enterprise. The social value of establishing such a venture, the possibility of more secure land tenure and the preservation of a culture or way of life may be far greater than any economic benefit can ever offer.

Although Vision 2030 targets key areas and opportunities, some of which may compliment the pastoral livelihoods of those in north-eastern Kenya, nothing specific was identified to support communities in this region develop opportunities outside of the major towns or National Parks.

The majority of private stakeholders highlighted that the potential for tourism opportunities in north-eastern Kenya are limited in the short-term, with little interest in investing in opening up the area for potential gains. From an economic perspective, large scale investment in north-eastern Kenya may be risky at the current time with the numerous constraints highlighted. Return on investment for a private sector investor is largely geared towards short- to medium-term gains which in the current climate in north-eastern Kenya would not be forthcoming. Therefore, public sector must assess the possibility of working collaboratively with the development community, if appropriate, to find ways to assess and support tourism opportunities that may have the possibility of becoming sustainable.

Understandably elements of the public and development sector are keen to assist communities diversify their livelihoods so as total dependence on their pastoral livelihoods is alleviated. Today's changing economy requires families to have access to money for payment of

education, food and other resources, whilst persistent droughts, increasing human population growth and insecurity result in cumulative impacts on individuals and subsistence communities.

All is not lost. A targeted tourism market and product assessment of north-eastern Kenya supported by the public and private sector should be undertaken – possibly using a combination of fresh external and knowledgeable internal experts. A number of potential stakeholders highlighted that the current tourism products are limited; environments under pressure from high numbers of tourism and limiting Kenya's possibility of attracting repeat visitors back after the key attractions have been visited. The need to search for and develop new opportunities is critical, and this includes north-eastern Kenya.

Opportunities may include linking with private sector although unlikely that the private sector investor would invest large capital in the development of an enterprise considering the uncertainty. Small-scale private sector partners, similar to partnerships undertaken at Ol Gaboli Community Lodge and Ngare Ndare Forest Trust in Laikipia/Isiolo should be assessed.

Additionally, an appropriate assessment of a joint private-public venture or community-private-public venture opportunity in the ecologically rich Malka Mari National Park in far north-eastern Kenya should be undertaken. Although currently a limited opportunity, this valuable park has been touted as part of the world biodiversity hotspots and therefore a target of any future ecotourism expansion plans in Kenya.

The likelihood of attracting an equivalent private sector partner which Kijabe Group Ranches have been able to do is highly unlikely considering the current tourism market potential in north-eastern Kenya. Investment of large sums of money supported by international donors and private investors are more likely to concentrate efforts in 'known' areas with locations and infrastructure that support access and security of an enterprise, whilst providing important benefits back to the community in the various manners.

A solely community driven initiative is more likely to succeed in north-eastern Kenya, especially if the priorities are for diversifying their livelihoods and maintaining a pro-pastoral enterprise rather than purely revenue making. The Garbatulla community, north of the Meru Conservation Area, is one example of a community coming together collectively to assess what the needs are of the people, how they match with their current livelihoods and importantly how any benefits can help them to secure their culture and the land on which they reside, whilst also possibly bringing in some money to support collective community development e.g. education, infrastructure, etc. Another example is the Garissa community who initiated a community Bour-Algi Giraffe Sanctuary which both help to conserve these poorly understood animals but also brings the community together to manage the land and its resources more appropriately. The potential social development benefits for the community in both of these initiatives are still to be realised although they are driven from within.

Finally, ecotourism in north-eastern Kenya is confounded by the lack of clear links with existing or draft policies, many of which contradict each other or provide counter efforts to assisting those in marginalized areas. For example, the draft Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) policy highlights the support of government for pastoralism as a livelihood system.

This is complimented by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Economic Recovery Strategy, but are they similarly complimented in other policies which are currently undergoing reform e.g. National Disaster Management Policy, National Drought Contingency Fund, Wildlife Bill and National Water Policy to name a few. All of the above have the potential to support the development of pastoralist livelihoods in north-eastern Kenya if mutually complimentary and work effectively in practice.

Vision 2030 efforts should attempt to address greater linkage of Kenyan policies to support marginalized pastoral communities, and in a way which is clear, coherent and supporting. Additionally, and not only in support of pastoral communities of north-eastern Kenya, but a need to address the lack of current legislation supporting community (and private) conservancies to manage for and benefit from natural resources. This apparent 'gap' in the legislation has and will continue to limit the growth and development of Kenyans, whilst comparative legislation in southern Africa has considerably improved the socio-economic lives of their communities across the region.