

GSVS CAPSTONE RESEARCH PROJECT

SPRING 2020

**Sustainable Community-Based Ecotourism: Skill Development,
Socio-Cultural, Environmental, and Economic Dynamics in Costa Rica and
Kenya**

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Abstract

Ecotourism is an ever growing market, accounting for \$77 billion of the annual global tourism industry¹. Ecotourism is described by the International Ecotourism Society as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”². Though this may seem like a wholly beneficial concept, there are cascading social, environmental, and economic effects on local communities in areas primed for ecotourism. When designing and implementing a new ecotourism venture, it is essential that local agencies and customs are included to promote long-term sustainable tourism. Important factors in community-based ecotourism (CBET) that will be discussed in this paper are skill development, socio-cultural, environmental, and economic dynamics. These criteria will then be applied to case studies in Costa Rica and Kenya to identify threats against local communities and examine and propose solutions moving forward that are beneficial environmentally, socially, and economically for community ecotourism.

Introduction

Ecotourism is one of the largest growing sectors of the travel industry, with an annual growth rate of 10-15%³. It is important in sustainable ecotourism development not just to think of the environment, but the people and cultures that depend on it's health. As ecotourism is increasing so too is concern for environmental and community wellbeing in ecotourism areas.

¹ Scheyvens, Regina. “Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities.” *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1999, pp. 245–249., doi:10.1016/s0261-5177(98)00069-7, 245

² “What Is Ecotourism.” The International Ecotourism Society. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>.

³ Scheyvens, Regina. “Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities.” *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1999, pp. 245–249., doi:10.1016/s0261-5177(98)00069-7, 245.

Possible threats include dislocation, economic marginalization, and commodification of culture. CBET is a model that helps to address these concerns as local community members are integrated into the planning and development of ecotourism projects so social ties are strengthened, benefits are more equally distributed, and entrepreneurial skills are increased for long term socio-economic success.

This paper will examine past and current precedents of local engagement in ecotourism, or community-based ecotourism (CBET) to identify successful initiatives where the threats of large-scale, foreign ecotourism operations have been addressed to improve a community's skill, economic, and community development. Through exploration and application of case studies in Costa Rica and Kenya as well as ecotourism more broadly, the results will propose successful strategies and organizational infrastructure to help strengthen and maintain local involvement in ecotourism. Ecotourism, if done poorly can hurt communities and environments; however, if done right it can improve the economic, social, and environmental dynamics. Community-based ecotourism is a way forward to benefit local communities as well as the environment for long-term sustainability.

What is Ecotourism?

Tourism is a unique industry as it is both an economic and experience sector. Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector within the tourism industry; it now captures \$77 billion of the \$5751 billion⁴ of the global tourism market, with a growth rate of 10-15% per year⁵. For the purposes of

⁴ Scheyvens, Regina. "Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities." *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1999, pp. 245–249., doi:10.1016/s0261-5177(98)00069-7, 245.

⁵ Scheyvens, Regina. "Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities." *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1999, pp. 245–249., doi:10.1016/s0261-5177(98)00069-7, 245.

this paper, we will use The International Ecotourism Society's definition of ecotourism--

“[Ecotourism consists of] responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”⁶. Ideally, ecotourism ventures are focused on the protection and conservation of natural areas to be enjoyed by tourists in order to promote an ethic of environmental awareness and respect.

The rise in ecotourism falls under Harold Goodwin's theory of “the experience economy”⁷. People want to feel as if they are a part of the places they are visiting, they want to interact with local settings and cultures. However, within this ecotourism bubble, “the destinations and experiences sold to tourists are abstracted from their contexts”⁸. This threat of isolation and commodification shows the potential harmful effects of ecotourism on local communities if they do not strive to meet all aspects of the definition set forth by The International Ecotourism Society. Community-based ecotourism is one way to promote the agency, wellbeing, and potential of local communities for long term sustainable ecotourism that is socially, environmentally, and economically beneficial.

Community Based Ecotourism

Community-based ecotourism (CBET), the focus of this paper, differs from traditional ecotourism in that its pillars consist not just of an environmental focus, but a goal of social

⁶ “What Is Ecotourism.” The International Ecotourism Society. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>.

⁷ Goodwin, Harold. 2015. “Tourism, Good Intentions, and the Road to Hell: Ecotourism and Volunteering.” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 22 (1): 37–50, 39.

⁸ Carrier, James G., and Donald V.I. Macleod. “Bursting The Bubble: The Socio-Cultural Context Of Ecotourism.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 2 (2005): 315–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00238.x>, 315.

connectivity and community development. In its simplest form, CBET can imbue a community with a sense of purpose, strengthening social ties and community institutions⁹. This form of ecotourism proposes linking conservation with the improvement of local livelihoods, “preserving biodiversity whilst simultaneously reducing rural poverty”¹⁰. The ideal characteristics of CBET consist of an operation that is “(a) nature based, (b) ecologically sustainable, (c) where education and interpretation is a major component and (d) where local people are benefited”¹¹.

In traditional ecotourism, the main directive is the promotion of environmental attractions--CBET works to promote not only the environment, but local communities just as fervently. Though our definition of ecotourism includes mention of the well-being of locals, most of the traditional ecotourism ventures described throughout this paper do not actively work towards their advancement. Another distinguishing characteristic of CBET is the added focus on education and interpretation of local communities and cultures, rather than just the natural attractions.

When analysing CBET, it is important to utilize triple bottom line thinking. This is the shift away from simply assessing success of an industry or business solely through the total economic gain; rather, triple bottom line thinking also considers the social and environmental effects. This framework is especially useful in explaining and examining the sustainability of

⁹ Liu, Jingyan, et al. “The Role of Social Capital in Encouraging Residents pro-Environmental Behaviors in Community-Based Ecotourism.” *Tourism Management*, vol. 41, 2014, pp. 190–201., doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2013.08.016, 192.

¹⁰ Kiss, Agnes. “Is Community-Based Ecotourism a Good Use of Biodiversity Conservation Funds?” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2004, pp. 232–237., doi:10.1016/j.tree.2004.03.010, 2.

¹¹ Vishwanatha S, Chandrashekara B. *An analysis of socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in Kodagu District. American Journal of Research Communication*, 2014, 2(7): 135-147} www.usajournals.com, ISSN: 2325-4076, 136.

ecotourism ventures. In the broadest sense, sustainable CBET should be socio-culturally positive, with a strong potential for positive impact through localized economic profit and mutual respect for local cultures and environments.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable CBET consist of “managing overcrowded destinations, engaging and creating opportunities for local communities in the travel industry, embracing diversity, and putting the environment at the heart of travel”¹². The hallmark of CBET is the ability of local communities to play a role in the development, implementation, and management of ecotourism ventures in their community. This agency over their own resources and community dynamics allows for them to prosper socially, economically, and environmentally while also promoting skill development and integrating them into the global tourism economy. All of these factors allow for the long-term socio economic success of the community venture in a manner that is self sustaining. If local communities are marginalized by outside groups' missions for economic profit, their agency will be diminished and there could be an increase in the threat of violence, poverty, and health problems, which we will discuss in greater detail later. Without the preservation and promotion of social cohesion and trust, community ecotourism can not be maintained long-term in a prosocial manner.

¹² “Making a Positive Impact on Travel.” *Amadeus*, 60px 451px Amadeus, 25 Nov. 2019, amadeus.com/en/insights/white-paper/making-a-positive-impact-on-travel.

For CBET to be truly sustainable, it is critical that communities are motivated, prepared, and promoted to play a large part in local ecotourism ventures. If local communities benefit socially and economically from ecotourism, this will then inspire a greater ethic of conservation. This incentivization of environmental protection helps increase the long-term health of the natural attraction, contributing to the sustainability of the operation.

Factors of Sustainable CBET

There are several important factors to consider when determining the sustainability of community ecotourism: skill development, socio-cultural, environmental, and economic dynamics.

Skill Development

Skill development is a unique factor of CBET in comparison to traditional ecotourism which works to improve local education and entrepreneurial skills to further the goal of local community advancement. A defining goal of CBET is not only the preservation and promotion of environmental protection but also the progress, education, and agency building of local communities. Typically, remote communities do not have the business or financial experience to operate large tourism operations. Successful CBET is not just a matter of having the attraction, but having the capacity and ability to maintain and sustain increased tourism on a local scale.

The inclusion of local communities into the supply chain is an integral part of the creation of agency for long-term economic and environmental sustainability. According to the International Labor Organization, “Skill development is of key importance in stimulating a

sustainable development process. Its major contribution lies in facilitating the transition from an informal to formal economy. In the context of globalization it is also essential to address the opportunities and challenges to meet new demands of changing economies and new technologies”¹³.

A necessary precondition for successful CBET is a skilled workforce to support long term sustainable ecotourism through “socio-economic development, job creation and business opportunities”¹⁴. Proper education on the ecotourism industry and the processes and expenditures that come with it are essential for long-term financial and community planning. A ‘virtuous circle’¹⁵ can be created for communities through education initiatives. This breeds adaptability and innovation within a community which then translates to better practices and management systems to create new ventures for socioeconomic success. An example of one such CBET skill development program is the “Aangan” project in Goa. This project is operated by the local community with financial backing and technical support for the program provided by the Mineral Foundation of Goa¹⁶. Such initiatives work to support the local community’s advancement long-term while also allowing them access to new technologies and skills. Skill development through CBET is critical to capacity building; it works to prevent the commodification and exploitation of local cultures and economies that can come with traditional ecotourism through local involvement and management of activities.

¹³ Fadte, Rohini. “The Relevance of Skill Development to Tourism.” *Tactful Management Research Journal*, n.d., 89–91. <http://oldtm.lbp.world/SeminarPdf/357.pdf>, 89.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Fadte, Rohini. “The Relevance of Skill Development to Tourism.” *Tactful Management Research Journal*, n.d., 89–91. <http://oldtm.lbp.world/SeminarPdf/357.pdf>, 91

¹⁶ Ibid, 90

Socio-cultural Dynamics

The socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism operations can be thought of as “the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in the value systems, individual’s behavior, traditional ceremonies and community organization”¹⁷. As discussed earlier, most prime spots for ecotourism growth are relatively remote and can be less developed than surrounding areas. Due to this, these communities are often more vulnerable to significant changes being made through foreign contact and can be fragile to shifting cultural values and dynamics that can skew their behaviors and actions.

Lifestyles and cultural practices can be disturbed by constant tourism, and traditional practices may be accommodated to the entertainment of the tourists. Local communities face three main threats from outside, large-scale ecotourism: diminished social cohesion, a fractured sense of community, and decreased mutual trust. Through CBET, these threats can become more manageable than with outside foreign tourism operators. When locals have no control over the industry, their cultural beliefs and practices are overwhelmed by the authority of the large-scale tourism operators whose only bottom line is profit. Through CBET, local communities can determine what factors and how much of their culture to share. Since there will typically be less intensive visitation than when compared to large-scale foreign operators, the effects of outside culture will be less overwhelming and can even be beneficial, adding to local culture rather than taking away from it. Increased cultural exposure of tourists can help spread knowledge and

¹⁷ Vishwanatha S, Chandrashekara B. *An analysis of socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in Kodagu District. American Journal of Research Communication*, 2014, 2(7): 135-147} www.usajournals.com, ISSN: 2325-4076, 136.

respect towards the local cultures which can work to protect them against infringement and economic marginalization by larger operations.

Environmental Dynamics

Ecotourism can either raise an ethic of conservation or can potentially increase the extraction of resources to create an industry that cannot be sustainably supported by the land. The newly imbued economic value into the environment as a scenic destination can have a bottom up effect onto local policies to establish large protected areas to promote conservation. On the flip side, increasing demands for ecotourism spaces can create strain and foster increased damage to ecosystems through higher densities of visitors and the waste associated with them.

The need for strong socio-cultural cohesion discussed earlier plays a big role in the creation of a sustainable conservation ethic; “relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchange, common rules, norms and sanctions, and connectedness in communities are all necessary for shaping individual action to achieve positive biodiversity outcomes”¹⁸. Through the effort of collective action and strong communal cooperation, conservation becomes a more realistic and socially directed possibility. The relationship between CBET and environmental protection can be thought of as a marker of success. If the industry is working well and making the community profits while also enhancing their community infrastructure and social integrity, a conservation ethic will become prominent--all of these factors exist in a cyclical relationship to create a sustainable CBET industry.

¹⁸ Ibid, 191.

Economic Dynamics

Interwoven with the above dynamics is the economic effects of ecotourism on local communities; “economic benefits are the drivers of the cognitive and structural social capital in the less developed rural areas”¹⁹. A major argument for the case of CBET is that it gives local communities more direct economic benefit and the ability to control the distribution and investment of capital.

A common theme in traditional ecotourism is the dependency that is fostered of local communities on nearby “mass tourism centers”²⁰. This relationship exists as geographic proximity to large-scale tourism hubs can provide a foreign market and a volume of tourists a local initiative could not attain or support infrastructurally. This can create a dependency of local communities on powerful external players in their area. These dominant companies will reap most of the economic benefits while local communities will bear the social and environmental costs. This signifies inequality in both the costs and benefits reaped from outside tourism operations. Both of these make the case for locally controlled ecotourism ventures. Often, when a CBET initiative is just getting started, there is a need for outside resources and knowledge to promote community skill building and agency;

Joint ventures between community groups and private tourism operators, which are increasingly popular, might have the greatest potential for generating significant revenues for communities, and might also be more likely to succeed than wholly community-run

¹⁹ Liu, Jingyan, et al. “The Role of Social Capital in Encouraging Residents pro-Environmental Behaviors in Community-Based Ecotourism.” *Tourism Management*, vol. 41, 2014, pp. 190–201., doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2013.08.016, 192.

²⁰ Brenner, Ludger, and David Vargas. “Community-Based Ecotourism and Environmental Protection in Mexico: A Synergetic Strategy or Trendy Slogan.” In *Tourism: Developments, Issues and Challenges*, 1st ed., 255–84. NOVA Science Publishers, 2013, 258.

enterprises, particularly in the early stages. However, communities will often need outside assistance to organize themselves, obtain and assert their legal rights and understand their obligations in such partnerships²¹.

There are many factors that impact the potential for economic success of CBET such as “attractiveness of the tourism asset, the type of tourism operation, the nature and degree of community involvement, and whether earnings become private income or are channeled into community projects or other benefit-spreading mechanisms”²². To this last point, CBET has the benefit of allowing for the creation and improvement of infrastructure that may have been lacking from more rural communities before. Ecotourism revenue should be funneled to community based initiatives for sustainable infrastructure, safe drinking water, and improved communication facilities.

Case Studies

All of the dynamics and factors talked about in the section above can now help us better understand and analyse the ecotourism efforts in two locations-- Costa Rica and Kenya.

Case Study I: Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a big player in the ecotourism world; In 2008, two million tourists visited the country—an eightfold increase since 1987—making tourism one of the most important

²¹ Kiss, Agnes. “Is Community-Based Ecotourism a Good Use of Biodiversity Conservation Funds?” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2004, pp. 232–237. doi:10.1016/j.tree.2004.03.010, 234.

²² Ibid

sectors of the national economy²³. The reason for this incredible growth is the fact that Costa Rica has the largest amount of protected land in the world. The ecotourism boom came from new expansion of government protected areas in the 1980s. Protected areas now account for ¼ of all Costa Rican land²⁴. This incredible environmental dedication is due to the early creation of national parks by the government in partnership with several large conservation groups. The country's conservation groups were so successful in their goal of pushing for protected land in part due to external contacts and funding from American universities and environmental NGOs. This huge amount of preserved land soon became attractive to outside players. This case study helps illustrate the fact that if measures are not put into place to foster and promote local involvement, communities can be harmed by ecotourism.

In the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, a particularly remote and underdeveloped area, foreign investors seized the opportunity to grab up land:

Foreign investors possessed specific cultural knowledge of postindustrial societies, had a greater range of international experience, and participated in fluid, transnational social networks that enabled them to recognize the ecotourism potential on the peninsula much sooner than Costa Ricans still embedded in more localized and limited social and cultural networks²⁵.

Rather than help educate and empower local communities, these foreign entities capitalized on their inexperience and lack of developmental knowledge, perpetuating their

²³ Blackman, A., Naranjo, M.A., Robalino, J., Alpizar, F., & Rivera, J. (2014). Does tourism eco-certification pay? Costa Rica's blue flag program. *World Development*, 58, 41-52.

²⁴ Horton, Lynn R. "Buying Up Nature." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 3 (2009): 93-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x09334299>, 95.

²⁵ Ibid

economic and social disadvantage. By 2000, prices of ocean front property in Osa were upwards of \$25,000 per hectare, a price which served to exclude local communities from participating in the market²⁶. As discussed earlier, skill development is key to sustainable CBET. The top-down processes fostering local exclusion in Costa Rican ecotourism are unsustainable as they do not provide training and education for locals to participate in the industry. The case for skill development is further made through the example of the creation of Tortuguero National Park. Even though foreign ecotourism has grown in the area, local agency is further diminished as they lack the language, managerial skills, and capital investment to compete with foreign operators to garner more than a small number of tourists.

One environmental initiative in Costa Rica which has been fighting to break this trend of foreign domination to promote local inclusion in ecotourism is the Blue Flag Program (BFP). The BFP merits and recognizes Costa Rican tourism operators who demonstrate advancements in environmental performance. These eco-certification programs have cascading effects which can create economic benefit for certified operators, as they are marked for tourists as respectable and responsible models²⁷. BFPs are community-based. Boards are made up of “representatives of a business association, the tourism board, the municipal government, the local utility, the Ministry of Health, and non-governmental organizations”²⁸.

It is important to establish clear and consistent standards for ecotourism industries to promote responsible operations and behaviors. In Costa Rica, the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) was created to monitor “a variety of social and environmental impacts including

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Blackman, A., Naranjo, M.A., Robalino, J., Alpizar, F., & Rivera, J. (2014). Does tourism eco-certification pay? Costa Rica’s blue flag program. *World Development*, 41-52, 41.

²⁸ Ibid, 43.

emissions, conservation and protection of fauna and flora, and cultural and economic impacts”²⁹.

The former two points are especially critical for CBET programs. Some facets of this program include idea-pooling which involves community stakeholders, and training programs, which serve to empower local community initiatives and control. These benefits have had the positive effects of “a stronger pro-environmental impact on local residents, cultural interaction with visitors was also found to be a greater encouragement of community participation in conservation practices, than economic benefits”³⁰. These bottom-up initiatives provide resources such as education and skill development that promote local involvement in hopes of creating a sustainable tourism industry that benefits local communities.

Case Study II: Kenya

In Kenya, tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner for the country. It is also the most popular tourism destination within Africa. This success in tourism, particularly ecotourism, has not come without a cost to local Kenyan communities. Many governments have attempted conservation with the establishment of wildlife protected areas (WPAs)³¹. These function by identifying an area to protect based on its resource supplies. However, the implementation of these WPAs requires the displacement of host settlers due to the outlawing of

²⁹ Almeyda, Angelica M., Eben N. Broadbent, Miriam S. Wyman, and William H. Durham. “Ecotourism Impacts in the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica.” *International Journal of Tourism Research* 12, no. 6 (2010): 803–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.797>, 805.

³⁰ Ahdekiv, Viljam. “Community-based ecotourism in the modern world.” Bachelors Thesis, Aalto University, 2016.

³¹ Wishitemi, Bob E.I., Stephen O. Momanyi, Bernard Gichana Ombati, and Moses Makonjio Okello. “The Link between Poverty, Environment and Ecotourism Development in Areas Adjacent to Maasai Mara and Amboseli Protected Areas, Kenya.” *Tourism Management Perspectives* 16 (2015): 306–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2015.07.003>, 307.

human settlement within the area. These host people are then settled outside of their ancestral lands. This has negative lasting impacts on socio cultural practices and environmental resource management and interaction.

To offer more tangible evidence of the effects of this displacement is the fact that 14 to 24 million environmental refugees have been created within Africa due to the creation of protected areas and parks³². In 2004, the government of Ethiopia removed 500 people from their settlements within Nechisar National Park³³. They were settled outside of the park without access to the land, and were provided with no further training or education in order to integrate into a completely foreign, external economy. Again, this highlights the need for skill development and training in order for local communities to prosper in any way.

Perhaps one of the most studied local communities in relation to ecotourism are the Maasai pastoralists in Kenya. Both the Maasai Mara Game Reserve and the Amboseli Game Reserve were created on traditional Maasai grazing land. Within Kenya, most of the WPAs have taken land primarily from the Maasai. They are a common target as they are pastoralists and coexist peacefully with local wildlife, utilizing the health of the environment for their herds. This well-kept land is then seen as a valuable asset and a business opportunity for foreign operators. Many Maasai have been forced out of their land which they have cultivated and protected for generations, just for outside tourism operations to come in and exploit it. The protected lands that were taken from the Maasai make up a staggering 8% of Kenya's landmass³⁴.

³² Ibid, 306.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

This forced removal and exclusion has cascading effects through all facets of Masaai culture and society. Homelessness, unemployment, and economic marginalization pose a huge threat to the integrity and long-term existence of the Masaai. Those outside of the park who participate in the ecotourism industry occupy low paying positions. According to one survey by Wishitemi et al the communities bordering the Maasai Mara and Amboseli Protected Areas were asked which cascading effect of the park's creations affected them most. 29% of those surveyed recorded that invasion from the unchecked wildlife from the parks, caused large financial losses due to damaged crops and animals. 20% responded that the displacement from their ancestral lands furthered their economic turmoil, as well as cultural and psychological health. Other responses touched on the characteristics earlier described that are necessary for ecotourism to benefit local communities; "environmental degradation (10%), inequality in sharing ecotourism benefits (10%), alienation from decision-making processes (9%), lack of entrepreneurial skills (8%), lack of accountability in the management of eco-tourism enterprises (6%), discrimination of women (4%) and elitism in the management of ecotourism enterprises (4%)" ³⁵.

Recently, there has been a movement within the Kenyan ecotourism community towards more small-scale development to try and combat such problems. Within the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, the National Environmental Management Authority of the Kenyan government halted 36 new applications for tourism facilities within the park area until a comprehensive management plan is created. One CBET venture in Kenya is Basecamp Maasai Mara which is located on the outside border of the reserve: "The Maasai Mara development is limited to 15

³⁵ Wishitemi, Bob E.I., Stephen O. Momanyi, Bernard Gichana Ombati, and Moses Makonjio Okello. "The Link between Poverty, Environment and Ecotourism Development in Areas Adjacent to Maasai Mara and Amboseli Protected Areas, Kenya." *Tourism Management Perspectives* 16 (2015): 306–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2015.07.003>, 311.

tents with thatched roofs, employs about 30 local Maasai as guides and staff, uses solar power for all lighting and heating, and promotes cultural interaction that engages the visitor intellectually and emotionally”³⁶. This basecamp idea is supported by the global basecamp explorer destinations, a small group of CBET initiatives which are backed by Swedish and Norwegian management.

This holistic model of CBET is described by Executive Chairman Lars Lindkvist as establishing a conservation area and associated operations together with the community who occupies the space. In part, the organization has been so successful in sustainable CBET because it establishes clear goals-- there goal is to promote “education, health, energy, water, and biodiversity conservation”³⁷ within the local communities. By establishing these guiding principles, their work is more focused and specific plans can be put into place to address each goal.

Discussion

In the above case studies, CBET ventures are working to protect local communities and the environment. In Table I, the sustainability of CBET initiatives for Costa Rica, the Blue Flag Program and the Certification for Sustainable Tourism, and the Kenyan Basecamp Masaii Mara are rated based on the four criteria outlined within the paper: skill development, socio-cultural dynamics, environmental dynamics, and economic dynamics.

³⁶ Honey, Martha. “Community Conservation and Early Ecotourism: Experiments in Kenya.” *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 51, no. 1 (2009): 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.3200/envt.51.1.46-57>, 51.

³⁷ Ibid.

The Costa Rican examples of the Blue Flag Program and the Certification for Sustainable Tourism both seek to protect the environment and the socioeconomic health of local communities. They provide training, idea pooling, and community membership boards, all of which improve socio-cultural dynamics and foster economic equality through promoting the agency and business skills of the community at large. The creation of standards for and recognition of environmental excellence works to create a long term ethic of conservation and environmental protection. Though both programs work to address issues in development participation, skill building, and environmental standards, little has been done to further promote the economic opportunities available to local communities. The standards set by these two boards can often be difficult to achieve for small-scale community initiatives, and applying for membership can be prohibitively expensive. Possible, these programs would be more inclusive and beneficial to local communities if they provided economic assistance and financial breaks to small-scale ecotourism enterprises to further their development and integration into the local economy.

In Kenya, the example of the CBET initiative Basecamp Masai Mara promotes environmental protection and socioeconomic benefits in a sustainable manner. Locals are hired to run the camp and are outfitted with the appropriate training. A large focus of this small-scale camp is the engagement with and promotion of local cultures. Basecamp Maasai Mara works to further promote the socioeconomic and political agency of the local community through trying to address the systems that can create disparity and marginalization in the larger scale ecotourism world. One challenge the Basecamp Masai Mara is tackling is creating new “ functional

democratic institutions³⁸ to replace the current exploitative institutions that control the parks and resources. They are integrating local communities' needs and voices to create a sustainable industry moving forward for economic and social prosperity. The site also utilizes renewable energy for heating and lighting needs. To increase the promotion of skill and economic development, further training and education opportunities could be offered to locals through the backing of the Swedish and Norwegian management. This would benefit the entire operation as amenities and tourism offerings could be expanded. This would also benefit economic dynamics, giving locals increased opportunities and entrepreneurial skills to better manage and generate capital.

Table 1: The Sustainability of the CBET ventures from Costa Rica and Kenya are scored based on the four criteria outlined in the paper: skill development, socio-cultural dynamics, environmental dynamics, and economic dynamics.

	Case Study 1: Costa Rica	Case Study II: Kenya
Skill Development	☆☆☆☆ (out of 5)	☆☆
Socio-Cultural Dynamics	☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆
Environmental Dynamics	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Economic Dynamics	☆☆	☆☆☆

Moving Forward

Ecotourism is not just about the environment as many tourists believe. There can be no conservation ethic and long term environmental sustainability if the basic needs of local communities are overlooked. As for future ecotourism growth, it is essential local communities are involved. One movement that is gaining traction for CBET are Integrated Conservation and

³⁸ Ibid.

Development Projects (ICDPs). These projects are focused equally on environmental protection and socio-economic development to create a “symbiotic system where development and conservation fuel one another”³⁹. ICDPs create a geographic, administrative, and functional network. Geographically, they are traditionally focused on areas within or bordering national parks or protected areas. Administratively, they connect NGOs or foreign donors with local managers and local communities.

ICDPs encourage conservation through promoting self interest in biology through decreasing disincentives, increasing public awareness, and encouraging community action. They promote local enterprises when there is a high potential for tourism to create a market for natural attractions. In actions where capital cannot replace resource use, ICDPs push for alternative local sources of goods. This could include creating specific tree plantations for wood use rather than deforesting protected areas, still allowing for economic activities communities rely on while protecting the environment. Finally, they enact a “quid pro quo” system of benefits to reward or compensate local communities for preserved resources. This could be a system of measurement such as trees replanted or water quality markers which could then be incentivized by community infrastructure grants for schools or clinics.

Conclusion

As the ecotourism sector is growing, so too are concerns over long-term environmental and community wellbeing. Community-based ecotourism works towards a more sustainable future for local communities through the promotion of socioeconomic agency and resources.

³⁹ Alpert, Peter. "Integrated Conservation and Development Projects." *BioScience* 46, no. 11 (1996): 845-55. Accessed March 2, 2020. doi:10.2307/1312970, 845.

Stakeholder collaboration with community members in designing, planning, and executing strategies is key to create CBET that can be self-sustaining and prosperous. There is no chance for a successful ecotourism initiative if there is not mutual respect between developers, policy makers, operators, and local tourism boards and employees. Through promotion of community involvement such as idea pooling, board membership, and training programs, locals are given the opportunity to gain agency and managerial skills which they can continue to grow to create long-term sustainable CBET industries.

All of this goes to show that it is not enough to merely mark a suitable environment and call it ecotourism. Social cohesion and political and economic agency are essential for local communities to protect themselves against the threats and trials that come from large scale tourism ventures. It is important to recognize the benefits that ecotourism can provide with local communities. CBET can spread and show cultural traditions to a new audience, fostering a sense of respect for their lifestyle and inspiring an ethic of mutual respect. A huge opportunity that ecotourism can create for communities are educational opportunities, employment opportunities, economic benefits for the local community/people and friendship with the visitors to the area.

When locals can discuss and plan operations, community building initiatives, and profit distribution, they are more inclined to practice sustainable land practices to keep the industry going. If ecotourism continues its rapid trajectory and local communities are forgotten in favor of large scale, foreign operators, traditional ways of life will be lost, communities will be impoverished, and a land ethic of conservation will disappear. CBET represents a way forward for sustainable ecotourism that benefits not only the environment but the people and communities who rely on it.

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