

# Living with wildlife

Farmers and pastoralists living alongside wildlife close to the national parks of Kenya have few advantages. It can also be inconvenient and dangerous. Crops are routinely trampled or eaten and livestock is killed by lions or weakened by exposure to tsetse flies. Tourism revenues are usually promised to compensate for this but how realistic is this option particularly for the poorer communities?

## FORTRESS CONSERVATION

For the past 40 years the main approach to wildlife conservation in Kenya as elsewhere has been the creation of national parks and other protected areas to conserve the declining numbers of wildlife species. Unfortunately this approach has not worked as well as was anticipated and the numbers of species that attract tourists such as elephants, giraffes and lions, have continued to decline both within and outside these designated areas.



One principal cause for this was traced to the deliberate exclusion of small farmers and pastoralists from these grassland ecosystems. Many local people did not agree with this approach and so not only did they withdraw their support for the conservation initiative some went further and saw wildlife as legitimate quarry for poaching and a threat to be eliminated. In 1998 a Maasai tribesman was gored to death by an elephant and so fellow Maasai speared a Cape buffalo in plain view of tourists. They then went on to spear a number of elephants.

## COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

The failure of 'fortress conservation' as it became known, gave rise to an alternative approach known as community wildlife conservation. Rather than separating wildlife conservation and sustainable community development, it brings them together and uses participation as the new driving force to give local communities a greater opportunity to voice their preferences, needs and concerns about conservation initiatives. This idea gained momentum when research showed that climatic variability and drought were in fact the main constraints on rangeland productivity and not stocking rates and grazing pressures, which were originally thought to be damaging rangeland and wildlife resources.

### *Crops are routinely trampled or eaten and livestock is killed by lions*

The emphasis on 'community' has spawned a broad spectrum of community wildlife conservation approaches and programmes. In general, they all subscribe to the basic idea that conservation goals will only be achieved if local people receive alternative benefits to compensate for their reduced access to natural resources. In other words, 'conservation as sustainable exploitation'

Tourism is an option

One option is tourism and this has been very much the focus of attention among conservation and development professionals and donors. The potential revenues from hunting and viewing wildlife are high and in 1994 tourism accounted for more than 40 per

cent of Kenya's GDP. Redistributing this back to local communities, either directly to individuals through employment or via community livelihood initiatives could create a motor for sustainable development and local people might see the value in conserving wildlife. But such strategies have their limitations. One is the fickle nature of tourism. Kenya suffered a 60 per cent fall in tourism revenues in 1997 and 1998 because of the country's elections and the unfavourable press reports. Added to this are concerns about unequal distribution of revenues, employment being low-skilled, limited participation and control remaining with outsiders, and so achieving the desired outcome may be more complicated than was first thought.

*Conservation goals will only be achieved if local people receive alternative benefits for their reduced access to natural resources*

Surprisingly, very few people have questioned just what community conservation means in practice or whether projects can succeed in meeting their complex and potentially conflicting objectives of wildlife conservation and local development. To date studies have provided optimistic descriptions of local level 'success' but more in-depth analyses are now emerging that indicate otherwise. It appears that many projects are neither sufficiently effective at promoting conservation, nor at encouraging



development. Local impoverishment seemingly continues apace in many pastoral areas.

A STUDY OF TWO COMMUNITIES

A study undertaken by ITDG of two communities in southeast Kenya where the potential for tourism is low, examined the impact of wildlife conservation policies on livelihoods and natural resource management. One was located close to Amboseli National Park and the second was near Tsavo National Park.



The study found that, in both cases, wildlife conservation has neither strengthened the

livelihoods of the local pastoralists and farmers, nor significantly conserved wildlife.

Disappointingly, in spite of the potential benefits, the reality was that people's food security and income were eroded especially in times of stress.

As a result of these experiences local people had a negative view of the effects of wildlife on their livelihoods. Emerging wildlife conservation projects may change this attitude as people begin to recognise that wildlife can have an economic value but in the meantime illegal hunting continues. It was also evident that many people lack the negotiation and leadership skills to present their case properly. Local institutional capacity, which could represent their interests to government and private sector organisations, was also limited.

From a conservation perspective, employees of the Kenya Wildlife Service have quite a different view of the 'problem' of living with wildlife and have found it difficult to successfully combine policies for wildlife conservation with local development. These constraints are all likely to erode any relationship they may have with local people.

Helping people to move forward

To investigate the potential for ecotourism in the two communities, consultations and workshops were hosted by ITDG East Africa at both national and local levels to bring together local people with organisations working in the tourism industry. An 8-day exposure tour was also organised for community members so that they could see at first hand how other communities had tackled similar problems.

As a result of the consultations and tour, people felt better able as a community to address issues that affect their lives and to choose from different natural resources management and ecotourism options.

Productive meetings were held with the Kenya Wildlife Service and at the Tsavo West National Park the assistant game warden was assigned to work with the local community. This is a significant step forward in the light of their very different views and the mistrust that existed between them.

Although some people were still sceptical about ecotourism initiatives, this participative process was seen as beneficial. A majority of the people in the communities now acknowledge that, if carefully planned, ecotourism can provide a way of reducing the current conflicts between people and wildlife. One community identified technologies such as fodder production, salt lick blocks and bee keeping for honey sales that could support ecotourism development and increase community livelihoods.

#### THE WIDER ISSUE

The study has clearly indicated that if wildlife conservation projects are to succeed then it will be important to concentrate on areas where the potential for cash income generation from



wildlife is high and where interventions are properly tailored to the real needs on the ground. It will be essential that local people participate fully in community wildlife conservation interventions. Building adequate institutional capacity and networking among relevant institutions are important steps in achieving this. At government level the need is for stronger inter-sectoral policy coordination for wildlife conservation with tourism and pastoral and farming development. The year 2002 is designated 'World Ecotourism Year' and it is planned to use this opportunity to communicate and promote the study's findings more widely.

**R7150 A synthesis of two case studies of common property resource management where tourism, wildlife and pastoralism interact in Kenya**

**PD099 Towards ecotourism development in Southern Kenya**

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