



FIRST PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE

"Sustainable Tourism Management in African National Parks and Protected Areas: Challenges and Opportunities"

Draft Conclusions

**Richard Tapper, Environment Business & Development Group
Conference Moderator / Rapporteur**

The first Pan-African conference on "Sustainable Tourism Management in African National Parks and Protected Areas: Challenges and Opportunities" took place in Arusha, Tanzania, 15-18 October 2012 and was organised jointly by the Government of Tanzania and the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). The conference considered the following key issues:

- Context and outlook for tourism in protected areas in Africa
- Developing and marketing tourism products in protected areas
- Ensuring community benefits and participation
- Integrating tourism with conservation management
- Providing the right framework of governance, planning and legislation

The conclusions of the conference were as follows:

CONTEXT AND OUTLOOK FOR TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS IN AFRICA

- Tourism is a major economic sector globally. International travel is forecast to rise at a relatively constant rate reaching an estimated 1.8 billion international arrivals by 2030, including 134 million international arrivals in African destinations.
- Protected areas are at the core of the tourism sector in many African countries and are key assets for African tourism, creating a distinctive offer that differentiates Africa from destinations elsewhere in the world.
- Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are vital for tourism – and community support is essential both for successful conservation and sustainable tourism.
- What happens outside the boundaries of protected areas can have major impacts on conservation and tourism, and that it is therefore important not just to focus on designated protected areas, but on the role these areas play in the wider region, and on the influence that external activities and land management have on protected areas.
- Tourism in protected areas needs to make a contribution to the wider regions if they are to be valued and protected for the future.
- Governments and the private sector are responsible for ensuring that tourism respects nature, communities, cultures and environmental limits.

- Many communities are, in practice, marginalised from tourism development and operations in and around protected areas: this is not sustainable and needs to change. For tourism to contribute to biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and poverty alleviation, it has to be sustainable.
- Tourism needs to create opportunities for local communities, as well as for tourism businesses and national economies. A country that cannot be enjoyed by its people, cannot be enjoyed by visitors.

DEVELOPING AND MARKETING TOURISM PRODUCTS IN PROTECTED AREAS

- Africa is the home of the safari, and many of Africa's tourism products are built around wildlife watching. Experiencing African cultures has also been introduced as an increasingly important element.
- African destinations are relatively high cost: they need to develop tourism products that justify higher costs and to communicate the value of these products through their marketing.
- There is scope to open up new markets as part of a push to show that parks many more opportunities for tourism experiences beyond the 'big five'.
- There is a need to rejuvenate and diversify tourism products to adapt them to changing market demands, and to offer different opportunities within different protected areas.
- Appropriate marketing is necessary to ensure a reliable flow of tourists, to enable tourism to generate revenues for conservation and for local communities.
- One significant challenge is that in most countries just one or a few protected areas receive the bulk of visitors, increasing pressures on the most popular sites, while other areas may miss out on potential opportunities. Tourism development and marketing need to be undertaken in ways that can spread visitation more evenly.
- In some countries, tourism businesses have set up reserves on their own properties to create a wildlife resource that attracts tourists.
- Synergies need to be built between protected areas and tourism businesses, for example those in the accommodation sector. Creating these synergies requires an integrated approach to tourism development and marketing that involves the private sector and conservation managers, as well as national or regional tourist boards.
- Public-private partnerships can be used to provide the right mix of skills and expertise and to give long-term security for both conservation and tourism development.

ENSURING COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND PARTICIPATION

- Tourism needs to have a positive role in local livelihoods if it is to be sustainable and to be an effective tool for poverty alleviation.
- If communities do not receive an equitable share of benefits, they have no incentive to support conservation. This leads to degradation of the natural assets on which tourism to African destinations depends.

- Communities are most often treated as beneficiaries who may receive benefits from tourism that is planned and operated by others. In these arrangements, communities may be consulted on but have little influence over decisions on tourism activities and development.
- An alternative approach – community ownership – has proved successful, under which communities are given legal title and land rights to the areas which they have traditionally used and on which their livelihoods depend. This places them at the centre of decision-making, and they can then decide on the balance between different land use options – including tourism – that they wish to pursue.
- Models which integrate tourism, conservation and community ownership, have a track record that demonstrates their effectiveness, and have the potential to be applied throughout the continent.
- Community based resource management can be combined with tourism development. Support organisations can work with communities and either broker leases or joint ventures with private sector tourism investors and operators, or assist communities to access funding and develop tourism businesses directly.

INTEGRATING TOURISM WITH CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

- Protected areas are important assets for African tourism, but are also quite fragile and require careful management.
- A precautionary approach to tourism activities and development is particularly important in and around protected areas, to prevent damage to wildlife, and to protect the quality of tourism products.
- Measures to manage visitors and minimise their impacts are vital in protected areas.
- Too much tourism can be damaging – this is why clear limits on numbers of tourists and tourism development are essential in order to balance tourism with community livelihood needs and with conservation. There is a need for constant monitoring and adaptation of tourism and conservation, combined with a strong commitment to long-term environmental protection and maintenance of the vital ecosystem services, to ensure they remain in balance.
- If protected areas are to thrive in the long-term, they need to contribute to achievement of development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and their successors, and poverty reduction.
- There are challenges for conservation management from growing populations, agricultural expansion, the effects of prolonged droughts, and declines in natural resources of importance for local livelihoods.
- Human-wildlife conflicts – where protected wildlife causes damage to crops, livestock and people – are a major issue associated with protected areas in all parts of Africa. Different measures have been tried to manage human-wildlife conflicts, including physical measures such as elephant-proof fencing, and financial compensation for damage caused by wildlife. These measures have had limited success, and the issue remains that communities suffer damage from wildlife that is protected in order to attract tourists, while often receiving little or no benefits from tourism in terms of community and local economic development.

- Guidance and support is available to assist those dealing with management of tourism and biodiversity in protected areas to balance tourism with conservation, and includes the Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, and materials from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the World Heritage Centre at UNESCO, and UNWTO.

PROVIDING THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK OF GOVERNANCE, PLANNING AND LEGISLATION

- Governments need to recognise the importance of tourism, to set out clear and implement clear policies for tourism, including effective planning frameworks, support for SMEs operating in or supplying the tourism sector and for communities to ensure that they benefit from tourism.
- Too rapid a pace of development of tourism creates problems that include adverse social, cultural and environmental impacts, and damage the features of protected areas (as well as of other destinations) that attract tourists; it also risks over-development of tourism to an extent where it is no longer sustainable.
- The Rio+20 conference in June 2012 formally recognised that all types of tourism need to be sustainable.
- Providing the right framework for sustainable tourism is the responsibility of governments, and needs to be backed by effective implementation and enforcement. Key elements required for implementation of this framework for sustainable tourism include:
 - an effective legislative framework;
 - planning measures;
 - setting carrying capacity limits on the scale and extent of tourism development and tourist numbers;
 - use of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and other assessment tools;
 - visitor management;
 - supporting the rights of local communities, including ensuring they have an effective role in decision-making on from tourism that affects them and equitable share of the income it generates, as well as enabling them to create their own tourism businesses; and
 - a system of concessioning that ensures that concessions in protected areas are awarded to tourism investors, developers and managers with sufficient experience and track-record of delivering value for protected areas and associated communities.
- Coordination between the various ministries involved in tourism, conservation and development can be promoted through agreement of national plans for tourism management and regulation that also take into account national plans for economic development, resource use, community development and conservation.
- Regionally, many of the issues of tourism and conservation cut across national boundaries, and governments have collaborated to establish regional agreements and transboundary conservation areas and tourism circuits.