

INVESTMENT IN INDIGENOUS TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN KENYA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

Kenya has continually pursued foreign investment as a tourism development strategy, resulting in a high level of ownership of tourism resources by non-indigenous Kenyans. Consequently, involvement of local communities in tourism development and the benefits accruing have remained minimal. This is due to a lack of focus on investment in indigenous tourism enterprises. Currently there is a drive to get indigenous people involved in tourism development by such organisations as the World Bank and United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), laying emphasis on small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs). Kenya's draft national tourism policy also supports this endeavour. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the challenges facing indigenous tourism entrepreneurship and to identify opportunities for policy considerations in Kenya. The paper is developed through in-depth semi-structured interviews with indigenous Kenyan tourism entrepreneurs, community members, community leaders, managers of community-based tourism initiatives, government officials, members of academia and representatives of support organisations. The paper reveals that indigenous tourism entrepreneurs face significant challenges in terms of literacy and numeracy skills, tourism skills and knowledge, product development and marketing, tourism awareness, empowerment and access to capital. Moreover, indigenous Kenyans view the tourism industry as in terms of ownership of resources and clientele as a 'mzungu' white (people) affair, and hence do not regard themselves as potential owners of such resources. Nonetheless, indigenous tourism enterprises can contribute significantly to local livelihoods and also provide opportunities for tourism product diversification in Kenya. The paper concludes that the Kenyan Government needs to review its tourism policy to create a conducive environment for the development of indigenous tourism enterprises.