

October 2018

POLICY BRIEF

AWAKING THE UNDERUTILISED POTENTIAL OF TOURISM AT THE MOUNT ELGON PROTECTED AREAS, TRANS NZOIA AND BUNGOMA COUNTIES



Tourism role in Kenya

Protected areas and tourism

Protected areas in Africa are increasingly vulnerable to human-related pressures. Ecosystems found in protect-ed areas, such as natural forests, mountains and wet-lands are susceptible to conversion into agricultural land and settlements despite being critical for ecological pur-poses. Managing protected areas for tourism has proven in certain contexts to be helpful in enabling local popu-lations to increase their conservation value of forests, wildlife and biodiversity in general.

The challenge for protected areas is to ensure the means to increase the revenue stream from tourism persists. Increased revenue would have a significant impact on employment opportunities and other economic benefits while supporting efforts for conservation and preserva-tion. Additionally, contributions from tourism in parks and protected areas can be channelled to provide envi-ronmental education which has a positive effect on conservation and ownership by adjacent communities.

Mount Elgon

Mount Elgon is located on the Kenya-Uganda border and is the oldest and largest solitary volcanic mountain in East Africa (Fig 1). It is the eighth highest mountain in Africa and has the largest base area of any freestanding volcano in the world. The mountain runs approximately in a North East - South Western di-rection and is found in the Western region of Kenya. At 4321m, it is the country's second highest mountain. The landscape is endowed with

exceptionally high diver-sity of animals and plants of renowned global importance. The area was declared a World Heritage site by United Nations Education, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) in 2003 .

Efforts both now and in the future need to ensure it's special designation is protected, conserved and monitored. Strategic policy changes and implementation is the main way to approach would ensure commitment an and continuity in conservation.



Figure 1: Mount Elgon Peak, Kenya Wildlife Service, 2014

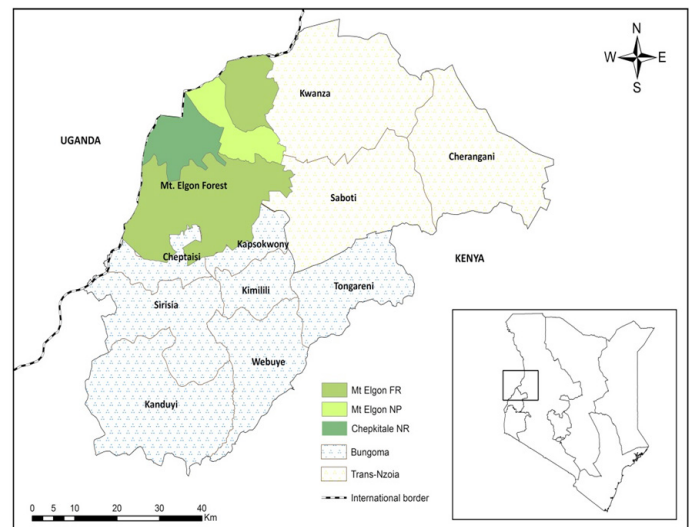


Figure 2: Mt Elgon protected areas of Kenya, Trans-Nzoia and Bungoma counties

Developing Tourism in the Mount Elgon region

Mt Elgon Protected Areas

The Mt Elgon ecosystem has been demarcated into protected areas and national parks (Figure 3) on both sides of the border, creating an extensive trans-boundary conservation area.

Mt Elgon National Park is under the statutory management and administration of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the park headquarters is situated at Chorlim. The national park has an area 16,916 hectares. The MENP is governed with a classical 'fortress approach' in which local communities are excluded from any consumptive access or even entering the park .

Trans Nzoia and Bungoma Counties local economy

Main economic activities in Trans-Nzoia and Bungoma counties are agriculture, forestry and small-scale entrepreneurship.

Agriculture is the leading economic activity as this region is considered the bread basket of Kenya due to its large scale maize farms.

Trans-Nzoia and Bungoma counties (Fig 2) are considered to be among the most food secure in Kenya.

However, this does not translate to food access for the majority of the population.

The peoples of Mt Elgon carry out cross-border trade in agricultural products, forest produce and livestock.



Figure 3: Mt Elgon protected areas , Kenya and Uganda

Mt Elgon Forest Reserve was established for the extractive use of the forest resources from both the indigenous forests and the established softwood plantations and is managed by the Kenya Forest Service.

The Chepkitale National Reserve establishment allows con-sumptive use such as grazing, bee-keeping and collection of non-timber forest products such as herbal plants.

Challenges

The challenges facing tourism growth in the Mt Elgon protected areas are;

- Poor governance, local as well as national.
- Threats to and insecurity relating to land tenure, rights and land security.
- Conflicting interests and lack of cooperation between stakeholders.
- Environmental pressures resulting from over-population and/or climate change.
- Multiple other uses for the land e.g. forestry, agriculture, industrialisation etc.
- Inadequate tourism marketing strategies, including niche marketing.
- Restrictive national and international policies and regulations.
- Social or political upheaval and conflict that can affect tourists visiting.
- Inefficient or inappropriate benefit distribution plans.

Mount Elgon Protected Areas (MPAs) as a tourism destination

Mount Elgon Protected Areas tourism destination components

Tourism products (wildlife and culture)

Tourist facilities and amenities

Markets (visitors and travellers)

Infrastructure (roads, airports)

For tourism to take place in any destination it requires the following four components illustrated on Figure 4;

- Products**
- Amenities**
- Markets**
- Infrastructure**

MPAs consists of a wealth of attractions landscape scenery, cultural products, festivals, activities such as nature trailing and cross-border mountain trekking.

However, the region is lacking in adequate infrastructural development and is lagging behind in sufficient market driven tourist facilities and amenities.

Inevitably, these factors affect the market and contribute to driving the consumer to other destinations.

Mount Elgon National Park Tourism Numbers

- Figure 5 illustrates the visitor numbers and revenue in the Mt Elgon National Park (MENP) over a ten-year period from 2003-2013.
- Visitor numbers to MENP on average are 5000 per month.
- Estimated to US\$ 36 400 in sales revenue per year.
- This total figure is relatively low compared to other similar parks e.g. Mt Kenya.
- Mt Elgon Forest Reserve and Chepkitala National Reserve, although associated and promoted for tourism together with MENP, currently receive negligible numbers of tourists.
- These protected areas remain relatively unexplored owing to minimal efforts by the destination marketing agency

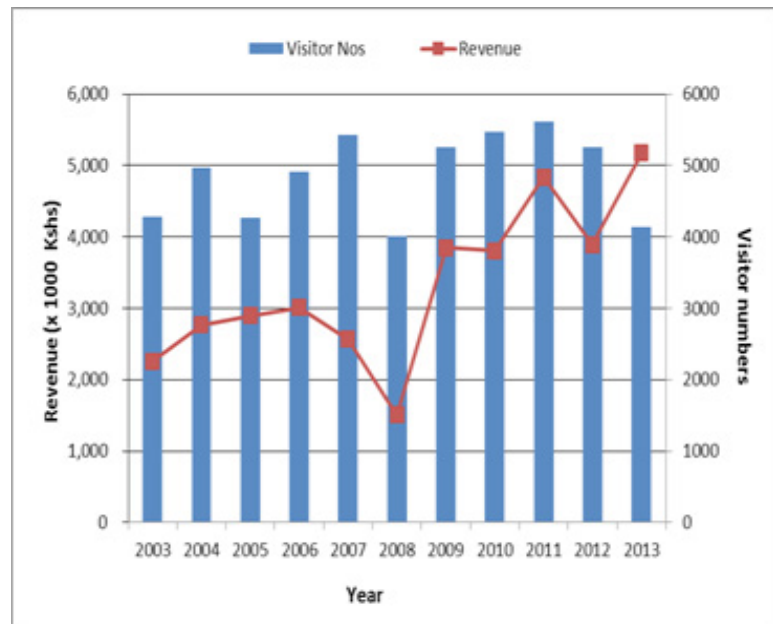


Figure 5: MENP Visitor Entry data, Kenya Wildlife Service (2014)

Key Policy Messages

Policy changes driven by both the local and national governments that would positively impact the Mount Elgon region should reflect the following:

Policy issues

- Threats to harmony and insecurity relating to land tenure, rights and land security.
- Inadequate tourism marketing strategies, including niche marketing that attracts consumers and tourists to region over and above other parts of the country.
- Lack of awareness and ambivalence of tourism by community stakeholders including knowledge about investment and marketing opportunities
- Lack of awareness and ambivalence of tourism by community stakeholders including knowledge about investment and marketing opportunities
- Conflicting interests and lack of cooperation between key stakeholders in the region.
- Multiple other uses for the land e.g. forestry, agriculture, industrialisation etc.

Short term implications

The outcome of local and national governments developing policy would result in the following:

- Meet tourism and conservation goals to preserve biodiversity of the protected area which will minimise poaching of wildlife and illegal logging of the forest reserves.

Recommendations

- Increase tourism opportunities in the Mount Elgon tourism destinations to enable stakeholders to receive the full social and economic benefits.
- Increased tourism marketing of the region with the aim of driving and increasing tourist traffic from local, national and even global spheres.
- Introduction of tourism activities within the underutilised protected areas such as Mt Elgon Forest Reserve and Chepkitala National Reserve reserves given their significant attributes and high potential.
- Introduction of tourism activities within the underutilised protected areas such as Mt Elgon Forest Reserve and Chepkitala National Reserve reserves given their significant attributes and high potential.
- Harmonise the cross-sectoral and interface element of tourism due to its direct linkage in a number of policy areas such as transport, environment and land-use planning.
- Encourage the integration of community livelihoods such as agriculture and forestry to create alternative tourism such as agro-tourism and forest based tourism.

Long term impacts

If concerted and well thought out effort is made to awaken the underutilised potential of tourism at the Mount Elgon protected areas, it will inevitably contribute the cooperation of stakeholders, improved conservation of protected areas and increased economic opportunities. This will inevitably translate to achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable

- Negotiation and encouragement of community involvement in tourism to motivate their collaboration with key tourism stakeholders in business development initiatives.
- Create a tourism resource inventory of the region to understand market access and opportunities that would improve tourism in the region.
- Pursue initiatives that integrate mainstream livelihoods such as agriculture with tourism to develop agrotourism, cottage tourism and cultural tourism in order to enable equitable resource use and access for all stakeholders.

Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mount Elgon region. The UN post-2015 SDGs, stipulate the need for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will guide humanity to live in harmony with the planet's fragile ecosystems therefore tourism development has the potential to contribute directly or indirectly to all of the SDG goals particularly, Goals 8, 12 and 15 (fig 6).

Looking Ahead

The crucial key steps the local and national governments in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Private Sector, Local Community, Research institutions and Non-Governmental Organisations need to enact favourable policy adjustments are:

- Institutional and governance analysis for the purposes of reconciling protected area management practices.
- Increase opportunities for public private partnerships (PPP) in sustainable livelihood enhancement activities.
- Promote sustainable marketing practices for tourism in protected areas by incorporating technology such as geographical information systems (GIS) into planning and publicity for tourism.
- Develop tourism blueprint for the Mount Elgon Region that integrates the key cross-sectoral policy found in the Trans Nzoia and Bungoma County Integrated Development Plans(CIDPs).



Figure 6: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 8, 12 and 15

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