

PAPER TITLE: ASSESSMENT REPORT ON COMMUNITY BASED
ECOTOURISM IN KARATU DISTRICT,
ARUSHA, TANZANIA.

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1.0 Overview of MESO's Eco-cultural tourism initiatives

The Multi-Environmental Society (**MESO**) is a community based non-governmental organization, which operates in Tanzania. MESO's central objective is to promote awareness, utilization and conservation of both natural and cultural resources. Its **vision** is improving the quality of individual and community life and that of the environment in which we live. MESO's case among others is "**Eco-cultural trips in Karatu and the Rift valley area of North Tanzania**". Basically, eco-tourism **concept** and **definitions** are given by different authors as follow; Western (1993:8) in Lindbergh and Hawkins states 'Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improve the welfare of local people' While Oumamuga (1996.1) defines ecotourism as ' a form of tourism which is nature based in which there is special preparation of the tourist product so that the the visitor is exposed to certain unique experiences which allow him/her to appreciate the special qualities of natural occurrences, entities and phenomena of a country or region'. In principle, the eco-cultural trips are environmentally friendly, socially responsible and an alternative or/and addition to traditional park safaris. Ahham (2000:13) describes ecotourism principles as 'Visiting natural sites, learning about the local culture and giving opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. Surplus income goes to improve the economic power of local residents and conserve the environment and re-establish nature.

The importance of community-based conservation and eco-tourism is relatively revealed in the context of the socio-economic and ecological transformation that Karatu and the Rift Valley area are experiencing. Traditionally, the Rift valley basins and highlands are predominantly used for agriculture and pastoralism. But, the present population can no longer be sufficiently supported by the old style practices. Thus, changes are must.

2.0 Program linkage to eco-cultural and sustainable tourism

The ever increasing environmental deterioration, poverty, security threats and health vulnerability in developing countries like Tanzania, is a constraint which if not addressed

properly, will continue to hamper the efforts of the individual persons, households, the government, civil society organizations and donors to bring about the desired development in the country and region. MESO operates by focusing on environmental conservation and socio-economic developments as the two main components. Mbaruka (2000:6) suggests 'village communities will have little incentive for participation unless they benefit directly and have sufficient authority to be effective'

3.0 Eco- cultural tourism assessment objective.

The objective of the community sites study was to determine and review the trend, progress, and challenges (negative and positive impact) in ecotourism for the selected villages of Karatu district, in Arusha region, Tanzania.

4.0 Method used.

The methodology for information generation and gathering is based on the principles of Participatory Action Research / learning.

5.0 Field finding results by MESO and SNV on October 20th-22nd, 2003.

5.1 Highlights of the stakeholders interviews

District Commissioner of Karatu Abdallah Kihato is interviewed, here are his comments; he can be seen as an expert in the field of tourism, politics and administration. He was directing, suggesting and criticizing the way tourism and ecotourism is done in his district. He admitted that there are lots of attractions and potentials in the area, which are not yet used or exploited, whereby the exploitation itself is a very critical thing. He further stressed the need to distinguish between ownership and management. In the end he advised that whatever an NGO is doing should be for the people, so that they can benefit. Although he said, is ready to support NGO initiatives and efforts he did not clarify about his role or how he can give that support.

In the village of Qang'dent (Lake Eyasi site) where Julius Merus is a chairman, there is a village initiative for public sight development. They have a public campsite, which needs to

be improved. About 15 tourists per week arrive at the campsite during the high season. The village chairman himself is the tour guide for the visitors. Also, it is positive that the village is doing business, there are several shortcomings to mention. The way tourism is done in that village in some aspects is bureaucratic. The village council decides about the fee, which is a fix rate. The price to stay at the campsite is very low, so there is no possibility of generating surplus and to invest again for development. Another problem, the village chair is the lead tour guide for the tourists, but if there are problems within the village he has to solve, the tourism business has to wait. At the same time, there is a claim that he is among the very few persons who have shown motivation and commitment in community tourism.

Christian Scheming owner of a private campsite at Lake Eyasi; Christian Schmelling is from German origin, but grew up in Karatu and studied agriculture in Germany. He is doing ecotourism in number of aspects in a pure sense. He connects different phenomena with each other: the environmental conservation, the sustainable development of the sight and a possibility for local people to benefit, e.g. through work, support for public services. Christian is also connected to the village through his work in different committees. The question arises: Why should the surrounding community benefit from that private business, where as the similar land adjacent to his land is continuously degraded?. Is Christian/business ready for the community to learn and copy from his business practice or simply compete with them? These are some questions and challenges in the area.

Kambi ya Simba interview with the Village Chairman and villagers; The cooperation between MESO and the people in Kambi ya Simba is very strong, but they are attitudinally expecting more support from the head office in Arusha or from outside. It is very important that more initiative comes from inside the community to go on with the ecotourism project and to be independent. Also misunderstandings which is based on the lack of communication between different actors have to be solved. In the neighboring village of Upper Kitete, which is strongly connected to Kambi ya Simba, the concept of ecotourism is

not yet fully developed. The private sector has now started to activate the village. Therefore, there was the weakness of the local NGO influence.

5.2 Observations and comments as the basis for the way forward or application.

Strengths; The most important strength is the environment of the area. It is almost unexplored and the way the single village decides to go can still be influenced. There is a lot of potential to develop different sights, even without investing a lot of money. Development primarily out of the community and not driven from outside. There are institutions that are active in the field of environment and tourism in the area e.g. MESO (NGO), TANAPA (Tanzania parks), NCAA (Ngorongoro authority), village authorities and community groups.

Wood (1997:11) adds 'many of the respondents noted that ecotourism has helped to conserve natural environments and created increased conservation awareness'.

Weaknesses: The lack of management skills and education in the tourism sector in the local communities. Not enough initiative and efforts from the community to get the project started and going.

Opportunities; Learning from the ongoing trials in ecotourism success and failures in the area. Learning from mistakes and success from other Ecotourism projects elsewhere. Working together with experts and individuals to optimize the project

This is in line with Wearing and Neil (1999:106) as they state 'marketing is based on the four P's of product, place, price and promotion with the emphasis on attracting maintaining and expanding a customer base'.

Threats; If it takes too long to get the project going, others, like big tour operators from Europe (Excluding investors in favour of community based tourism), can explore the sights and start the business, without involving the local communities or following the principles of Ecotourism. MESO and the other stakeholders have to take care, that they do not do all the

exploring and the work and then to be used by other companies without attaining the principal goal of empowering the local residents to control and benefit from the resources.

6.0 Conclusion

The Ecotourism programme initiated by MESO and other actors is altogether a well-balanced programme between environmental issues, social involvement of the local community and the economical benefit of the community. Community based ecotourism, Sproule (1997:3) argues 'it involves conservation, business enterprise and community development'. Still there are many problems to be solved until the programme can fully take off, like the lack of communication between the stakeholders, the training of guides and the improvement of the accessibility of the sights. Another big issue is the issue of ownership. There are two different types of ownership, a private owner, who is having his own business and public owner, like the district or the community. Again the issue of management: Who has got a comparative advantage in doing what? Matter of relationships between ownership and management.

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