



SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM
Making tourism count to communities, ecosystems and businesses

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Eco-tourism as a strategy for biodiversity conservation in Rwanda

Biological diversity or biodiversity is a term used to describe the variety of life on Earth. It includes plants, animals and other organisms. On the other hand ecotourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism market, influenced primarily by public demand for undegraded environments. It is a form of alternative tourism which aims to achieve economic gain through biodiversity preservation. Not only that, ecotourism represents a small segment of nature-tourism that involves travel to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas. When planned properly, ecotourism can integrate conservation of biodiversity with socio-economic development of local communities. It implies that eco-tourism can minimize or even avoid most negative effects, if properly handled, managed and controlled. There is a broad consensus amongst researchers that eco-tourism can be used as a tool of biodiversity conservation but should be fully compatible with conservation goals. The aim of the study is to determine how eco-tourism can be used as a strategy for biodiversity conservation. It is not clear if ecotourism can have significant negative impacts when poorly planned and managed including severe environmental degradation. For the case of Rwanda the problem may be attributed to factors like high population pressure which has led to over-exploitation of biodiversity, expansion of intensive agriculture, deforestation, habitat loss and wetland degradation. The case study will be Volcanoes National Park and the research methodology will involve descriptive research design as well as use of qualitative and quantitative methods together with primary and secondary data. Data collection will be by use of questionnaires, interview guide and observation. Analysis of data will be done by use of statistical and explanatory methods.