



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

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The potential and challenges of promoting ecotourism in Kenya's wetlands

In the last few decades, ecotourism has become well developed in many parts of the world. This is because it is increasingly viewed as a strategy for promoting sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. But, uncritical adoption of ecotourism as a development strategy may pose problems to pristine ecosystems such as wetlands. The aim of the paper is to assess the extent to which wetlands in the country can be exploited sustainably for ecotourism development. The challenges faced in promoting ecotourism in the delicate and sensitive ecosystems are also examined. The paper adopts an exploratory research design to assess the ecotourism potential in the wetlands. The methodology used comprised thorough literature search and review on potential of and development of ecotourism in other parts of the world. In-depth interviews with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) officials and questionnaire survey on local communities and tourists were used. The four Ramsar sites in the country were used as case studies and information obtained from them was used to generalize about their potential for wetlands tourism. Several study visits were made to the selected Ramsar sites and observations made were recorded. The paper established that proper management of ecotourism in wetlands can bring many ecological and, socio-economic benefits to the local communities bordering the wetlands. Therefore, it is recommended that the county governments should put in place mechanism to ensure benefits from ecotourism trickle down to the local community.