

ECO-TOURISM AS A COMMUNITY STRATEGY TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS ON THE ISLANDS AND BEACHES IN USIGU DIVISION, SIAYA COUNTY, KENYA

In Kenya ecotourism is seen as having the potential of driving the economy for locally directed developments based on utilization of the ecosystem and cultural resources. The study explores how ecotourism products can be utilized to fight HIV/AIDS among Usigu community in order to reduce the prevalence of the disease and empower the community economically through use of ecotourism resources available. The need to explore ecotourism resources to fight HIV/AIDS is addressed by the study. This study was anchored on Branding Theory and Ecological Health Belief Model and conducted through a descriptive research design. Specifically it sought to examine ecotourism products that can support the fight against HIV/AIDS prevalence on the islands and beaches of Usigu Division, determine economic benefits of cultural heritage, establish nature based eco-tourism resources and artifacts and how to integrate policies for national and County Governments to fight the scourge. Research population of 25,000 people consisted of beach assembly members, traders, CBO's, NGO's, tourists, churches, students and teachers among other stakeholders. The sample size was 397 respondents. Multistage sampling, cluster sampling and Purposive sampling techniques were used and Data collection was from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered using focused group discussion guides and questionnaires. Data was analyzed using Inferential and descriptive statistics, presented in frequency and percentage tables. The study findings on the first research objective revealed that eco-tourism could be a new way to fight HIV/AIDS, due to its sustainability and community participation. It is supported demonstrating that Cultural heritage supports eco-tourism. The findings on the second research objective showed economic benefits derived from eco-tourism can provide an alternative source of livelihood. The findings on the third objective depicted that, the natural attractions can promote eco-tourism and reduce poverty, and that there are plenty of nature based opportunities for ecotourism activities. The study recommends identification, branding and marketing of Usigu ecotourism products and destinations. In conclusion there is need for harmonization of policies to support the fight against the pandemic form both the county and National Government through the affected communities and stakeholders' participation in designing and implementing innovative techniques, in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS prevention strategy targeting the fisher folk.