

## **An Assessment of the Role of Non-State Actors in Development of Community-Based Ecotourism in Kenya's Western Tourist Circuit**

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### **Abstract**

*This study was mounted to provide better understanding of the role non-state actors (NSAs) are currently playing in the context of community-based ecotourism in the western tourist circuit of Kenya. The motivation to carry out this research stemmed from the fact that there is dearth of information on this important area of scientific inquiry. While the existence of NSAs engaged in various aspects of ecotourism development in the western circuit is not contested, this constituency of stakeholders has not been sufficiently studied and their role systematically documented. The cross sectional study carried out in 2015 involved 114 NSAs drawn from 9 of the 12 counties that form the circuit. The study mainly benefited from primary data obtained with the aid of questionnaires and in-depth discussions with key informants and processed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study established that NSAs that are registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Community-Based Organizations, Community Forest Associations (CFAs), Cooperatives, Business Management Organizations (BMOs) are engaged in diverse roles including but not limited to product development and diversification, advocacy, tour guiding and nature interpretation, research, construction of support infrastructure facilities, provision of a range of accommodation facilities including home stays and guest houses and enhancing accessibility to sites. The study further established that NSAs receive different types of support from other organizations including government ministries/departments, public universities, umbrella organizations and the international community. This paper argues that NSAs play a critical role in ecotourism development but require increased and sustained support from other development partners in public and private sector*

**Key works:** Ecotourism, Non-state Actors, Western Tourism Circuit of Kenya

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study is housed within the broad framework of sustainable development. It focuses on the role and performance of non-state actors (NSAs) in development of community-based ecotourism in Kenya's western tourist circuit. Ecotourism, a segment of tourism has continued to gain currency among scholars, researchers, policy makers and practitioners because of the increasing awareness of its contribution to sustainable development goal achievement. Ecotourism has become an increasingly important topic of debate in the discourse of international development (Buchsbaum, 2004)

The study aims to contribute to increased understanding of the role and performance of non-state actors (NSAs) on community-based ecotourism in the western tourist circuit of Kenya. The single most important question to be answered by this paper is "what role are non-state actors in Kenya's western tourist circuit playing in the context of ecotourism development and how can they do it better"?. Kenya's western circuit is described as the country's best kept secret because not much is known about it and it is perhaps the least patronized by domestic and international tourists. The existing corpus of literature on the western circuit does not much its importance and hence the need to provide new insights about the destination through scholarly articles. This paper argues that Kenya's western tourist circuit is simultaneously rich (ecologically and culturally) but economically relatively poor region.

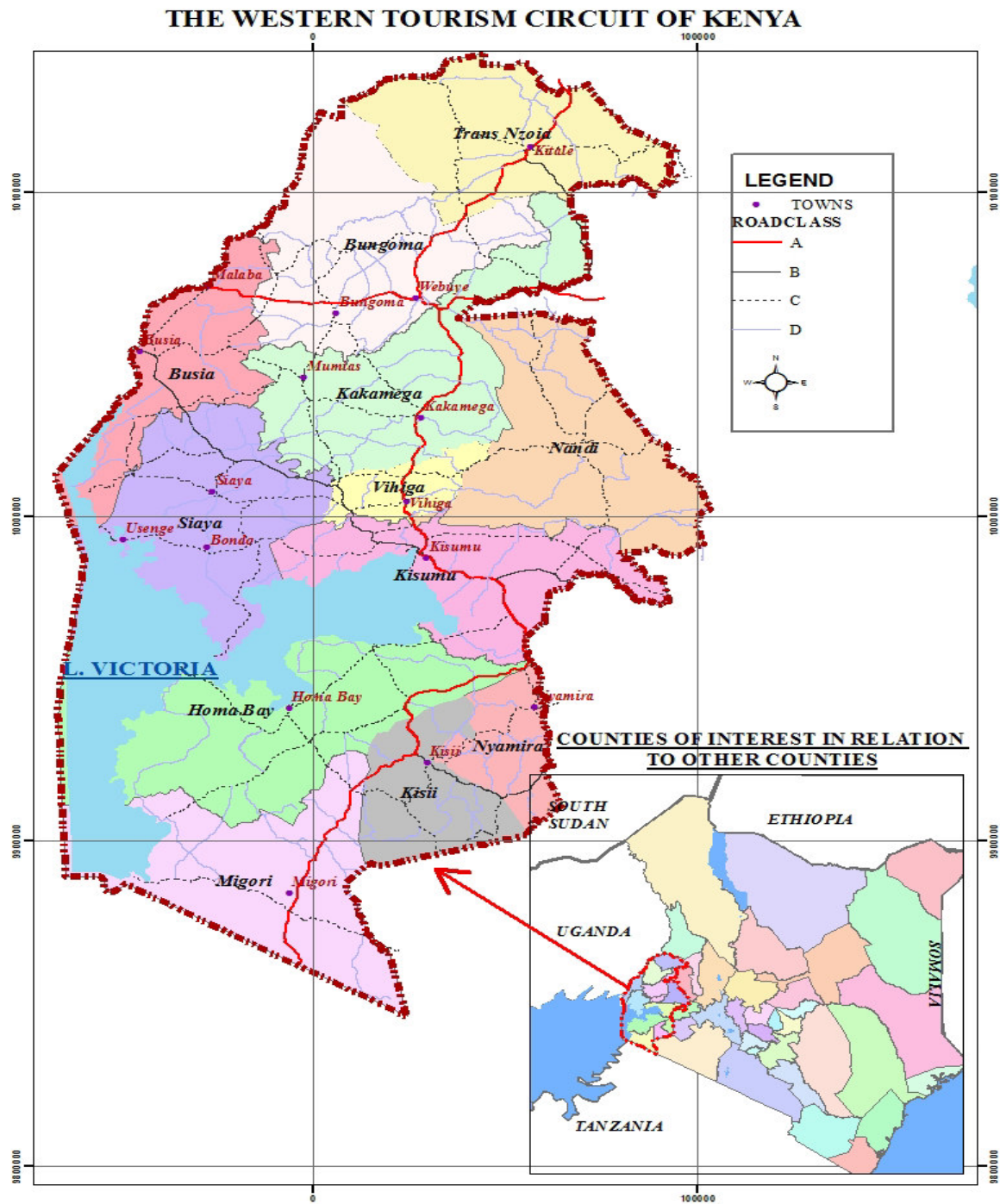
The study is premised on the assumption that systematic and planned interventions by state and non-state actors in community-based ecotourism can contribute not only to enhanced conservation of pristine sites and local people's culture but also improve their means of livelihood.

### **1.2 Objectives**

- 1) Identify and characterize non-state actors involved in development of community-based ecotourism in Kenya's western tourist circuit
- 2) identify and profile diverse roles played by non-state actors in their desire to strengthen community-based ecotourism in the western tourist circuit of Kenya
- 3) make plausible suggestions for non-state actors-led promotion of community-based ecotourism

### **1.3 The Western Tourism Circuit of Kenya**

Kenya is divided into eight (8 No.) tourist circuits for purposes of planning and development of Kenya's tourism industry. These include: Western, North Rift, South Rift, Central, Nairobi, North Eastern, Coast and Mt. Kenya. This section provides a detailed background of the study area- the Western Tourist Circuit of Kenya (WTCK), with a focus on the core attractions (natural and cultural) that form the basis for ecotourism development and other support infrastructure and services. The western tourist circuit consists of twelve sub-circuits (equivalent of counties) including: Trans-Nzoia, Bungoma, Kakamega, Vihiga, Busia, Nandi, Kisumu, Siaya, Homa Bay, Migori, Kisii and Nyamira. The circuit occupies about 26,301Km<sup>2</sup> (4.04 %) of Kenya's total land mass (582, 650Km<sup>2</sup>) as detailed in table 1. According the Population and Housing Census of 2009, the circuit was home to 10,948,715 people against the county's total population of 39.82 Million (27.51 %) (GoK, 2009).



**Figure 1: Location of the western tourist circuit**  
Source: Modified after Counties Map of Kenya, 2010

### 1.3.1 The Western Tourist Circuit- A Fact Sheet of Counties/Sub-Circuits

**Table 1: Fact Sheets of Counties within Kenya's Western Tourist Circuit (Source: Compiled by the Author based on Report of the Commission for Revenue Allocation 2011)**

S/No	County	County Headquarters	Area Km <sup>2</sup>	Population (2009)	Population density person/Km <sup>2</sup>	Poverty levels (Based on KIHBS) (%)
1	Kisumu	Kisumu City	2,086	968,909	465	47.8
2	Siaya	Siaya Town	2,530	842,304	333	35
3	Homa Bay	Homa Bay Town	2,586	958,791	371	44.1
4	Migori	Migori Town	1,969	563,033	286	46.7
5	Kisii	Kisii Town	2,542	1,511,422	596	60.7
6	Nyamira	Nyamira Town	899	598,252	665	48.1
7	Vihiga	Mbale Town	531	554,622	1,045	41.8
8	Kakamega	Kakamega Town	3,051	1,660,651	544	53
9	Bungoma	Bungoma Town	3,593	1,630, 934	454	52.9
10	Trans-Nzoia	Kitale Town	2,496	818,757	328	50
11	Nandi	Kapsabet Town	2,884	752,965	261	47.4
12	Busia	Busia Town	1,134	488,075	430	66.7
			Total = 26,301	Total = 10,948,715		Mean = 46%

Source: Compiled by the author based on Commission for Revenue Allocation Report of 2011

## 1.4 Review of Literature

This section presents brief literature related to the research issue

### 1.4.1 Tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as 'the activities of persons travelling to, and staying in places outside their *usual environment* for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited'. The usual environment of an individual is defined as the geographic area (though not necessarily contiguous one) within which an individual conducts his/her regular life routines. According to UNWTO, three factors are taken into consideration while considering an area to be *usual environment*. These include: minimum distance travelled to consider a person a visitor; minimum duration of absence from usual residence (frequency); and minimum change between localities or administrative territories.

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries with ecotourism being one of the fastest growing sectors (Ayotte, 2009). The World Tourism Organization in 1996 predicted that international tourism could grow by 4% through 2010. Since the Second World War, the growth of international tourism has been phenomenal. Annual tourist arrivals worldwide increased from 25 million in 1950 to 450 million in 1990 (Bhatnagar, 2010). Between 1969 and 1979 the World Bank encouraged developing countries to invest in tourism as a strategy for attracting foreign investment and governments of developing countries began to see tourism as a means to redistribute resources from North to South" (Bhatnagar, 2010). Tourism is, arguably, a unique product because it can only be consumed in *loco* and it plays a critical role as a strategy for local development (Ferreira and Estavao, 2009).

Sharpley (2002) and Jackson, *et al* (2005) argue that tourism is an economic engine with particular focus at regional level but its national impact is also significant. Statistics produced by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicate that tourism generates about 11 percent of global GDP, employs about 200 million people, and transports nearly 700 million international travelers per year—a figure that is expected to double by 2020. In 2013, travel and tourism's total contribution to the global economy rose to 9.5% of global GDP (US \$ 7 trillion) not only out spacing the wider economy but also growing faster than other significant sectors such as financial, business services, transport and manufacturing (WTTC, 2014). In total, the tourism industry provides 1 in every 11 jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2014).

### 1.4.2 Ecotourism

Critics of mass tourism argue that it is not consistent with the goals of sustainable development because of its negative environmental, social and cultural implications. Conventional tourism especially in developing countries, is more vulnerable to the industry's adverse effects from environmental risks like compromised ecosystems to socio-cultural conflicts arising from failure to respect, communicate and include local communities in the planning and benefit sharing. This led in 1990s to the emergence of what is referred to as *sustainable tourism* of which, ecotourism is part. Ecotourism reshapes the landscape by prioritizing the inextricable link between the welfare of local people and preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Bagul (1990) argues that ecotourism is hailed as a potential sustainable development tool and can be one of the most powerful tools for protecting the environment.

Honey (1999:4) observed that “*Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: away to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development, in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness, and a social conscience in travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist and, some claim, build world peace*”

The declaration of the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) reflected the importance of ecotourism in the global tourism industry. Ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of tourism because of people's growing interest to spend leisure time in nature and increasing awareness of environmentalism (Bagul, 2009). Himberg (2006) observed that a significant shift has happened in tourism industry during recent decades and interest in ecotourism has grown exponentially. Viewed in the past as an “alternative” or “fringe” form of tourism, today ecotourism is widely accepted as and plays an integral role in generating a green economy.

Weaver and Lawton (2011) consider ecotourism as an area of research that has come of age due to escalating number of peer refereed journal articles; text books; its recognition by United Nations and other international agencies; and its degree of speciation (division into sub-segments that deserve targeted research; focused marketing; planning and management).

The tourism sector is a service industry that has attracted numerous non-state actors at global, regional, national, sub-national, and local levels. Non-state actors are form a critical constituency of stakeholders in the tourism industry in general and community-based ecotourism in particular. The strong presence of NSAs at various scales of the tourism industry is not in doubt. Carr and Higham (2001) identified some of the ecotourism-themed corporate actors including: World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), World Tourism Organization (WTO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), among others.

The study is based on the premise that *the future of ecotourism depends on the role and performance of non-state actors, acting individually and collectively alongside state actors to enhance biodiversity conservation and empower local communities*. The supply-side of ecotourism is the focus of this study and this include



interventions by NSAs that are likely to enrich experience of domestic and international ecotourists and therefore make the western circuit of Kenya a destination of choice.

#### **1.4.2 Non-State Actors and Ecotourism Development**

Growing interest in ecotourism led to corresponding growth in the number of organizations seeking to take part in its development with their roles typically including research, education, technical assistance, promotion and networking (Sustainable Travel International, 2007). There is no universally accepted definition of the concept “non-state actors”. The way the concept is applied is context-specific and therefore varies from one context to another. This study adopts working definition of non-state actors. The Partnership Agreement between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Rim (ACP) countries signed in Cotonou, Benin in June 2000 defined non-state actors as:

*the private sector, the social and economic partners including trade union organizations, and the civil society in all its diversity. NSAs can include a wide range of actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, employers’ organizations, private businesses, consumer organizations, academic and research organizations, church and religious associations and communities, independent foundations, organizations representing indigenous peoples, organizations representing national and/or ethnic minorities, organizations representing economic and social interests, organizations fighting corruption, and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organizations and organizations fighting discrimination, local organizations involved in decentralized regional cooperation and integration, cultural research and scientific organizations, the media and others (Kironde, 2007)*

Blamey (2001) observes that the membership of non-state actors depends on the definition of the concept and therefore varies from place to place and according to the context in which it’s used. Blamey (2001) equates delineation of the boundary for non-state actors’ membership to “drawing a line on sand”

This study’s operational definition for non-state actors is “an heterogeneous set of non-sovereign entities (“for-profit” and “not-for-profit”; formal or informal) including the private sector and the civil society in all its diversity”. These include: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Community-Based Associations (CBAs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), Business Management Organizations (BMOs), Trusts, women groups, Youth groups, Community Forest Associations (CFAs), and Resource User Associations (RUAs), Beach Management Units; among others.

##### **1.4.2.1 Role of Non-State Actors: A Case of NGOs**

The role of non-state actors in development has continued to receive increasing space as an area of scientific inquiry. NGOs are perhaps the most common example of non-state actors since they operate at global, regional (e.g Africa, East Africa), national, sub-national and local levels. The United Nations Agenda 21 recognizes the role of NGOs as partners in implementation of sustainable development (UN 1992). NGOs play a vital role in shaping and implementing participatory democracy. “NGOs possess well established and diverse experience and expertise and capacity in fields which will be of particular importance to implementation and review of sound and socially responsible development as envisaged in Agenda 21” (UN 1992. P. 282). The United Nations (1992) strongly recommends that NGOs should foster cooperation and communication to reinforce their effectiveness as actors in implementation of sustainable development. Many NGOs have been participating in ecotourism development especially where tourism is linked with local communities and the environment (Ghasemi and Hamzah, 2011). NGOs have emerged in the last decade as some of the major actors and implementers of sustainable tourism/ecotourism (Higgins, 1999). Existing body of literature categorizes the role of NGOs in community-based ecotourism into six categories

as follows: facilitators; partnership with ecotourism stakeholders; trainers and source of technical information expertise; partnership with Protected Area Administrators; managing their own private protected areas or managing governmental protected area; and ecotourism service provider (Ghasemi and Hamzah, 2011).

Kironde (2007) argues that a broad range of non-state actors has become increasingly interested in becoming development partners. Kironde (2007) observed that non-state actors play multiple roles in development. These include: identifying projects that are relevant to their areas/needs; participatory budgeting; mobilization and usage of resources; implementation and supervision of development projects; advocacy and reforms; and creation of public awareness, among others. The USA's National Intelligence Council (2007) argues that the impact of non-state actors is context-dependent: the roles they play, and the influence they exert, depend on political; economic; and social context.

### 1.5 Methodology

This study adopted survey design and benefited from both primary and secondary data. The non-state actors involved in community-based ecotourism in Kenya's western tourist circuit were the target of this study. Probability sampling technique was applied while sampling the non-state actors involved in community-based ecotourism. The study area (Kenya's Western Tourist Circuit) is home to 12 sub-circuits/counties namely: Nyamira, Kisii, Homa Bay, Migori, Kakamega, Busia, Trans-Nzoia, Siaya, Bungoma, Nandi, Vihiga and Kisumu. Nine (9 No.) of the sub-circuits (75%) of the sub-circuits/counties were randomly sampled through simple random sampling technique. These include: Homa Bay, Migori, Kakamega, Trans-Nzoia, Siaya, Bungoma, Nandi, Vihiga and Kisumu. A list of non-state actors actively involved in enhancement of community-based ecotourism (target population) in each sub-circuit/county was compiled with the help of officials from Nature Kenya, Department of Tourism and the Kenya Forest Service (KFS). These NSAs operate from various parts of respective counties and carry out diverse activities that enhance ecotourism. The table below contains a summary of NSAs involved in the survey.

#### Sample size by county/sub-circuit

Sub-Circuit	Number of registered NSAs actively involved in ecotourism-related activities (Target population) by County/Sub-Circuit	Number sampled	%	Actual number of NSAs involved in the study by County/Sub-circuit	%	One official (preferably Secretary or Chairman) from each organization sampled purposively
Kisumu	28	28	100	19	68	19
Siaya	30	30	100	26	87	26
Homa Bay	20	20	100	11	55	11
Vihiga	4	4	100	4	100	4
Kakamega	20	20	100	10	50	10
Bungoma	20	20	100	15	75	15
Nandi	25	25	100	10	40	10
Trans-Nzoia	25	25	100	10	40	10
Migori	15	15	100	8	53	8
	183	183	100	114	62	114

### **1.5.1 Data Needs and Sources**

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data and relied on primary and secondary sources. The data collected was dictated by the study objectives and corresponding research questions. Thematic areas for data collection included: NSAs' background information; core functions of NSAs; niche products; the 5As (Attractions, Accommodation, Amenities, Accessibility, and Activities) and 4Cs (Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce) of ecotourism. Other aspects investigated include marketing; forms of collaborative partnerships with other development partners; major achievements so far; benefits accruing to community from ecotourism-centred activities; gender factors (membership and leadership level), challenges; performance (based on self appraisal method); benchmarking with other regions outside Kenya's western circuit, training; future plans; support (if any) from National/County Government and other agencies.

Primary data were collected from representatives of non-state actors (Secretaries/Chair Persons/Treasurers) who were believed to have sufficient information about every day operations of their organizations. Secondary data were obtained from existing records and previous related studies. Instruments used to collect data include: semi-structured questionnaires, in-depth discussions with key informants and observation method. Both video and still cameras were used to capture and store information

### **1.5.2 Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20) was used to organize and analyze primary data. The results were presented in the form of percentages, frequency tables and bar charts.

## **1.6 Results and Discussions**

This section presents the research findings and discussion in line with the study objectives stated in section 1.2 above.

### **1.6.1 Key Characteristics of Ecotourism-themed Non-State Actors**

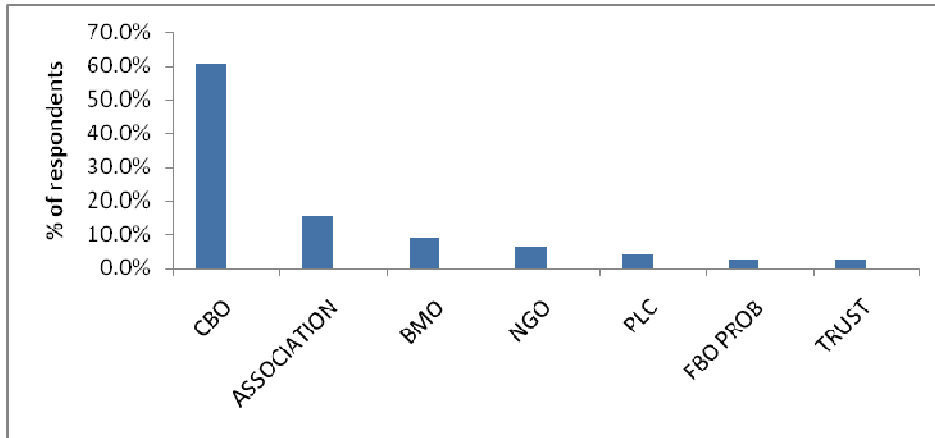
This subsection provides a detailed account of non-state actors including: registration status, membership, core functions, leadership, gender composition among members and leadership positions, sources of financial resources, election of office bearers, challenges encountered, reasons for their existence, spatial scope of their operations, capacity building through training, benchmarking with other best practices locally and internationally, educational status of secretaries or chair persons, among others.

### **1.6.2 Registration status, Constitution, Elections and Frequency of Meetings**

Majority (54% ) of the NSAs are registered as community-based organizations (CBOs) while others are registered as associations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private limited companies, Business Management Organizations (BMOs), Trusts, and Faith-based organizations.

The study revealed that most (88%) of the non-state actors have a formal constitution that guide their operations including election of office bearers. They practice democracy as office bearers are elected into office as per the constitution. 77% of the non-state actors conduct elections for office bearers after 2 to 3 years in accordance with their constitution. It is worth taking note of the fact some non-state actors do not conduct elections as such. These include those registered as private limited companies, the rain-makers of Ebusiekwe, the Tiriki Cultural Association. For instance, among the Tiriki Cultural Association and "Rain-makers" of Ebusiekwe, the chairman's office falls vacant upon death. They have their own unique way of nominating the successor who is usually groomed over a long time in readiness for the task ahead.





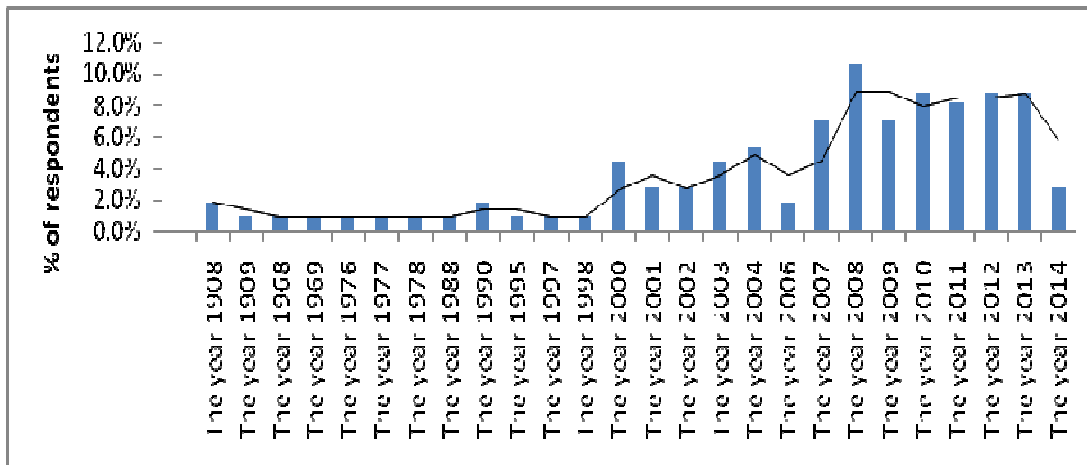
**Figure 2: Registration status of NSAs**

Source: Field studies

The survey further revealed that the frequency of meetings to discuss matters concerning their activities vary from one non-state actor to another. Majority (47%) of non-state actors hold monthly meetings while 22% hold meetings after 2 to 3 months and 31% hold meetings after every 1 to 2 weeks.

**1.6.3 Population of Ecotourism-themed NSAs Over Time**

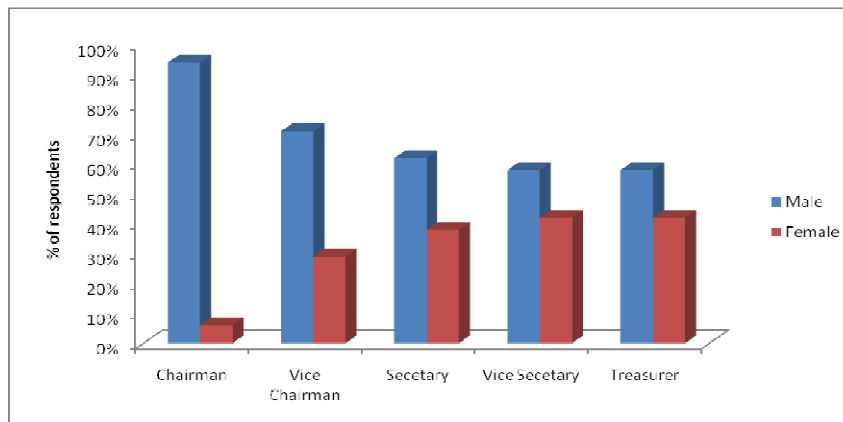
Figure 11 below presents a trend of establishment and registration of NSAs involved in ecotourism development. Some of the NSAs engaged in ecotourism have been in existence for a long time. However, most of the them were registered between the year 2000 and 2014. This may be explained by the fact that more and more people have continued to embrace the concept of sustainable development and within which ecotourism is housed. The government of Kenya has continued to provide enabling environment for the private sector to play a leading role in development in all sectors of the economy including the tourism sector. For instance, the Forest Act of 2005 opened a window of opportunities for communities living near protected forests to form Community Forest Associations (CFAs) for purposes of managing forest resources in partnership with Kenya Forest Service (KFS). CFAs are actively engaged in development of community-based ecotourism in many counties within the western circuit including Vihiga, Kakamega, Homa Bay Nandi, Trans-Nzoia and Bungoma. The Beach Management Units have also continued to embrace ecotourism as a result of awareness creation.



**Figure 3: Registration pattern for NSAs**

### 1.6.4 Membership and Gender Composition

The survey revealed a wide range of membership among non-state actors involved in ecotourism-related activities. Membership ranges from 1 to 4500. Friends of Thim-Lich Ohinga in Migori County had the highest membership of 4500 local people. Both male and female gender is actively involved in promotion of ecotourism in Kenya's western tourist circuit. Gender analysis of members of non-state actors revealed that 56% and 44% are of male and female gender respectively. Further analysis of gender composition among current office bearers revealed male dominance as shown below.



**Figure 4: Current office bearers by gender**

Source: Author

### 1.6.5 Age and Educational Achievements among Chair Persons and Secretaries

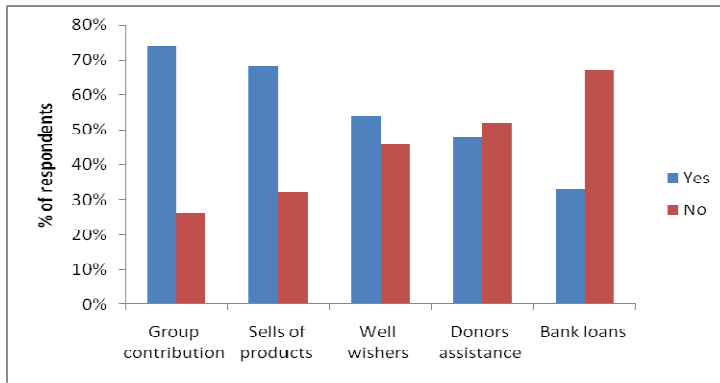
39 % of the respondents (mostly chairpersons and secretaries) are youthful people (18-35 years) while 35 % fall within age bracket 36-47 years and only 10.6 % and 2.7% fall within 54-65 and above 65 years respectively. 71 % of the respondents (mostly chairpersons and secretaries) have attained at least secondary school education. This shows that non-state actors prefer electing youthful and educated members of their organizations to hold key positions that are more demanding in terms of time and energy.

### 1.6.6 Knowledge of the Concept of Ecotourism and Training of members

78% of NSAs confirmed their members do not clearly understand the concept of ecotourism. Ecotourism is a new and fairly difficult concept to understand. While people generally may have an idea as to what tourism is, its ecotourism segment is not well understood even among the educated class. It is a relatively new and evolving concept and therefore not widely known. Most members of NSAs have low level of formal education and therefore do not understand various forms of sustainable tourism. 63% of the NSAs confirmed that their members have had training on ecotourism-related activities within the last three years. Kakamega Environmental Education Program has been offering a series of environmental education to various organizations in Kakamega County in partnership with Nature Kenya.

### 1.6.7 Financing Mechanisms and Banking Services

Development of ecotourism involves a series of operations that require financial resources, among others. The survey revealed that non-state actors raise funds for their operations through various mechanisms as presented in the figure below.



**Figure 5: Main sources of financial resources for non-state actors**

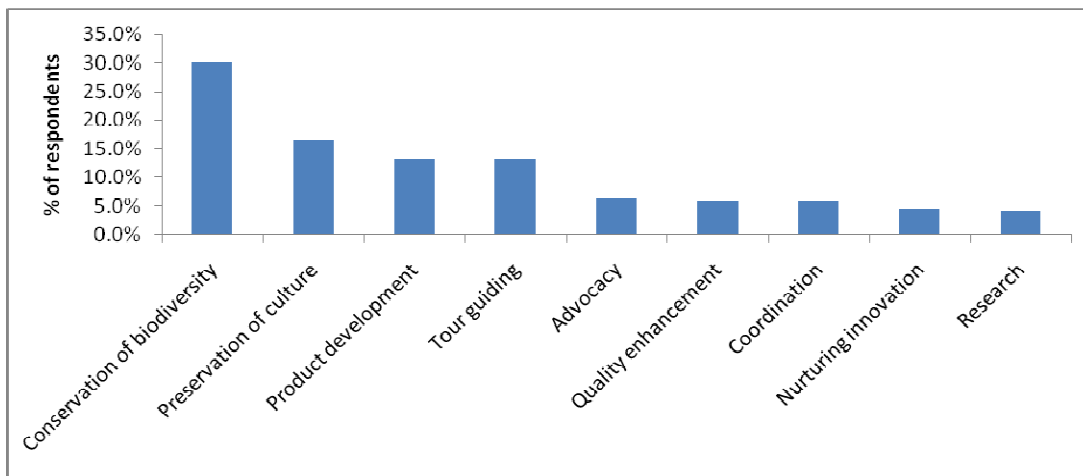
Source: Author

**1.7 Non-State Actors and Development of Ecotourism**

This sub-sections provides a detailed account of diverse ways in which NSAs contribute towards the development of ecotourism in the region

**1.7.1 Core functions of Non-State Actors**

The results revealed that most of the NSAs are involved in activities that enrich experience of tourists such as conservation of environment and natural resources, promotion of culture, product development and diversification and tour guiding, among others. A small proportion of NSAs are involved in research in partnership with academic and research institutions. This may be explained by the fact that research is not only expensive but a core function of academic and research institutions.



**Figure 6 Core functions of non-state actors**

Source: Author

**1.7.1.1 Conservation of Biodiversity**

Biodiversity is a critical component of ecotourism development since ecotourists are not only interested in enjoying the services that nature provides but are keen to actively engage in conservation of the same. Areas rich in biodiversity within Kenya’s western circuit include wetlands, forest ecosystems, and freshwater bodies among others. Kip’s Eco-Resort is one of the many private organizations that are involved in conservation of biodiversity (see plate below). Others include Kitale Nature Conservancy and Chepkitala Nature Conservancy, OSIENALA (Friends of L. Victoria), Eco-Finder, Delta Crescent Wildlife Sanctuary; among others.



Plate 1: A tortoise as a tourist attraction at Kip's Eco-Resort (Nandi County) & Delta Crescent Wildlife Sanctuary (Trans-Nzoia County)

Source: Field studies, 2015

**1.7.1.2 Preservation of Culture**

Terpstran (1987) defined culture as the integrated sum total of learned behavioral traits that are manifest and shared by members of society. Culture is one of the key pillars of ecotourism. Figure 7 above presents some of the cultural practices found in Kenya's western tourist circuit. A case in point is the Tiriki Cultural Association that mainly focuses on preservation of original Tiriki culture alongside conservation of community forest shrines in Vihiga County. Photos 5 and 6 presents some of the cultural practices among the communities of western Kenya. In-depth discussions with the key informant based in Kakamega County revealed that bullfighting is one of the most celebrated niche products synonymous with Kenya's western tourist circuit. much more compared to scheduled events. Owners of the bulls and cockerels always do their best in preparation for the special occasions by feeding them well and ensuring they are in good health. The winning bull/cockerel is rewarded heavily and this motivates the owners to prepare adequately

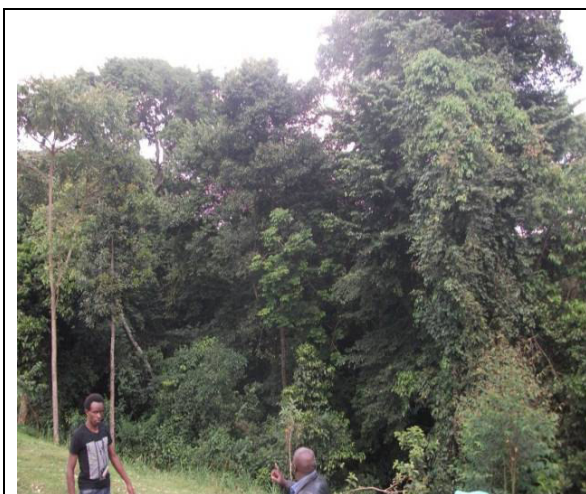


Plate 2: One of the 58 Tiriki Community Cultural Shrines (Source: Field studies, 2014)



Plate 3: Bullfighting as a cultural-cum sporting event (Source: Field studies, 2014)



### 1.7.1.3 Tour guiding and nature interpretation

Tour-guiding and interpretation is a critical function in tourism industry that is mainly provided by local tour companies.



Plate 4: Tour guiding and nature interpretation in Kakamega Forest

Source: Field studies, 2015

Nature Kenya has continued to play a key role in building capacity among local community-based organizations to provide superior tour guiding and nature interpretation services. Nature Kenya also ensures that various tour guides provide standardized services by offering standardized training.

### 1.7.1.4 Product Development, Diversification and Quality Enhancement

The main objective of product development and diversification is to enrich experience of tourists so that they can return to the destination at a future date. A case in point is Kitale Nature Conservancy which provides a variety of tourist attraction. Some of the products available at the farm include: genetically mutated animals that are not only tourist attractions but are also used for training of students from various universities and colleges especially those pursuing veterinary medicine, animal production, genetics, among others. The dairy cow on the left has deformed udder while the animal on the right has weak and undeveloped rear part and moves about with the help of front legs. Other farm animals with rare deformities include poultry, donkeys, and horses, among others. The deformities are caused by gene mutations, lack of essential minerals etc



Plate 5: A collection of farm animals with various deformities at KNC for education/research

Source: Field studies, 2015



The Kakamega Environmental Education Program (KEEP) is also actively involved in diversification of tourist attractions around Kakamega Forest as shown in plate below



Plate 6: Tourist products by Kakamega Environmental Education Program (KEEP)

Source: Field studies, 2015

Quality of tourist products is a critical aspect of ecotourism development and a destination can only remain competitive if the quality of its services is high always. NSAs should therefore endeavour to upscale product quality to international standards. Umbrella organizations have a major role to ensure that all organizations working under them produce nothing but the best.

#### 1.7.1.5 Advocacy and Coordination

The Oxford Dictionary defines advocacy as the act of arguing in favour of or supporting something. Various sectors of the economy compete for limited financial resources and in a game of competition, weaker ones will always lose out. Advocacy is a core function of NGOs and other umbrella organizations that articulate and defend the rights of less disadvantaged. In the case of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, NSAs play a critical role while advocating for more financial resources to be allocated to the sector for protection of otherwise threatened tourist attraction sites, formulation of policy documents, training, improvement of tourist attraction sites, among others. A case in point is the Western Circuit Tourist Association which has been and continues advocating for higher allocation of funds to tourism sector by county governments within the circuit. Umbrella organizations such as FeCTO, WCTA, KAFETA are also involved in coordination work since their member organizations are spread over a large geographical area.

#### 1.7.1.6 Research and Nurturing of Innovation

Research is a critical aspect of ecotourism development as it generates new knowledge that informs decisions and actions. Results revealed however that only a small proportion of NSAs are involved in research on ecotourism. This may be explained by the fact that research is highly technical undertaking that requires a lot of expertise, financial researches and well established infrastructure facilities such as laboratories. Most of the NSAs do not have the required human resources to carry out research and their budgets are limited. The few NSAs involved in research in the region include: Nature Kenya, OSIENALA(Friends of L. Victoria), Ecofinder, Western Circuit Tourist Association, KEEP, Sunset Birders, among others. At Dunga Beach for instance, Ecofinder is involved in research projects such as recycling of plastics and making of lanterns that are used for fishing at night.

Innovation is required in ecotourism sector for purposes of developing new products. Innovation can enable an organization to produce unique tourist products and enter uncontested markets where competition is non-existent or minimal.

## **1.8 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **1.8.1 Conclusions**

This paper concludes that:

Ecotourism as an emerging segment of sustainable tourism is slowly but surely growing in the western tourist circuit of Kenya

Although the region is rich in terms of natural attractions and cultural attractions it is still greatly under developed in terms of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular. This is possibly due to limited awareness among local and international visitors about what the circuit can offer.

Non-state Actors that are registered as Community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, Faith-based organizations, Business Management Organizations, Community Forest Associations, Cooperatives, private limited companies are playing several and diverse roles with a view to enhancing ecotourism in the region

The diverse roles they play include but are not limited to: product development and diversification, planning and management of tourist sites, advocacy, conservation of pristine sites, preservation of local people's culture, enhancing accessibility to tourist sites, training and provision of environmental education lessons, engaging in income generating activities to empower their members, marketing of products and destination, among others.

The circuit is however, at infancy stage as far as ecotourism development is concerned and there is therefore urgent need for various stakeholders to combine efforts to promote the course of ecotourism

There is great potential for ecotourism development and NSAs are determined to work in partnership with other development partners to make the circuit a destination of choice among domestic and international visitors

### **1.8.2 Recommendations**

There is urgent need to create awareness about Kenya's western tourist circuit in order to stimulate ecotourism development in the region.

Under Kenya's new system of governance where county governments are playing a leading role in development of tourism industry, there are numerous opportunities for NSAs to work with the county governments and other development partners to promote sustainable tourism and ecotourism

An integrated and strategic development plan covering the entire western circuit should be made with the aid of various stakeholders and such plan should clearly define roles for various players including NSAs

Emphasis should be placed on key aspects of tourism development including: attractions, accommodation facilities, accessibility to sites, amenities, awareness creation and safety and security.

NSAs should be accorded increasing space to manage the community-based tourist attractions as they empower themselves socially and economically

The NSAs involved in ecotourism should endeavour to learn more about ecotourism and sustainable tourism since these are specialized areas that are not well understood by many

Both County Governments and the donor community to partner with NSAs in ecotourism development especially product development, quality assurance/enhancement, training, and benchmarking with best practices from other areas

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