

Partnership challenges of Community Wildlife Sanctuaries in Laikipia County, Kenya

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Abstract

Community Wildlife Sanctuaries (CWSs) is a Community Based Conservation (CBC) approach promoted in Kenya since the 1990s for wildlife conservation and as an alternative livelihood option in pastoral areas. A study was carried out in Koiya, Tiemamut and Kijabe group ranches in Laikipia North District, Kenya, with an objective of determining the reasons for the establishment of CWSs, the role of partners and the perception of the communities towards the partnerships. It was expected that the CWSs established in the late 1990s and early 2000s like these studied should have benefited from the experiences of those established earlier and also from the then ongoing intense criticism of CBC approaches globally on the argument that they were not producing the desired results. Single subject interviews, focus group discussions and key informant formal and informal interviews were used. The study established that CWSs were established to help conserve wildlife and improve the livelihoods of the communities through non-consumptive wildlife utilization. Two of the group ranches, Kijabe and Koiya had tourism facilities all managed by entrepreneurs while Tiemamut was in an easement program. However, it was found that communities in Kijabe and Koiya were not contented with their partners and that they did not trust the partners. Further, despite previous research findings enumerating the weaknesses in CWSs established earlier, the same problems associated with CWS were identified in this study. The partnerships were not transparent and returns to communities were low and therefore the likelihood of the CWS meeting the challenge of alleviating poverty was unlikely. The CWSs studied were being run under an environment of mistrust which might threaten the sustainability of the partnerships and the projects in general. The study recommended that agreements or partnerships with communities be done only after assessment of costs and profits have been done irrespective of who provides the initial capital. The inferred mistrust towards the entrepreneurs by the community in both Kijabe and Koiya is worrying as partnerships are supposed to be based on trust. The need for the relationships to be mended cannot be overemphasized and was recommended if the projects are to be sustainable.