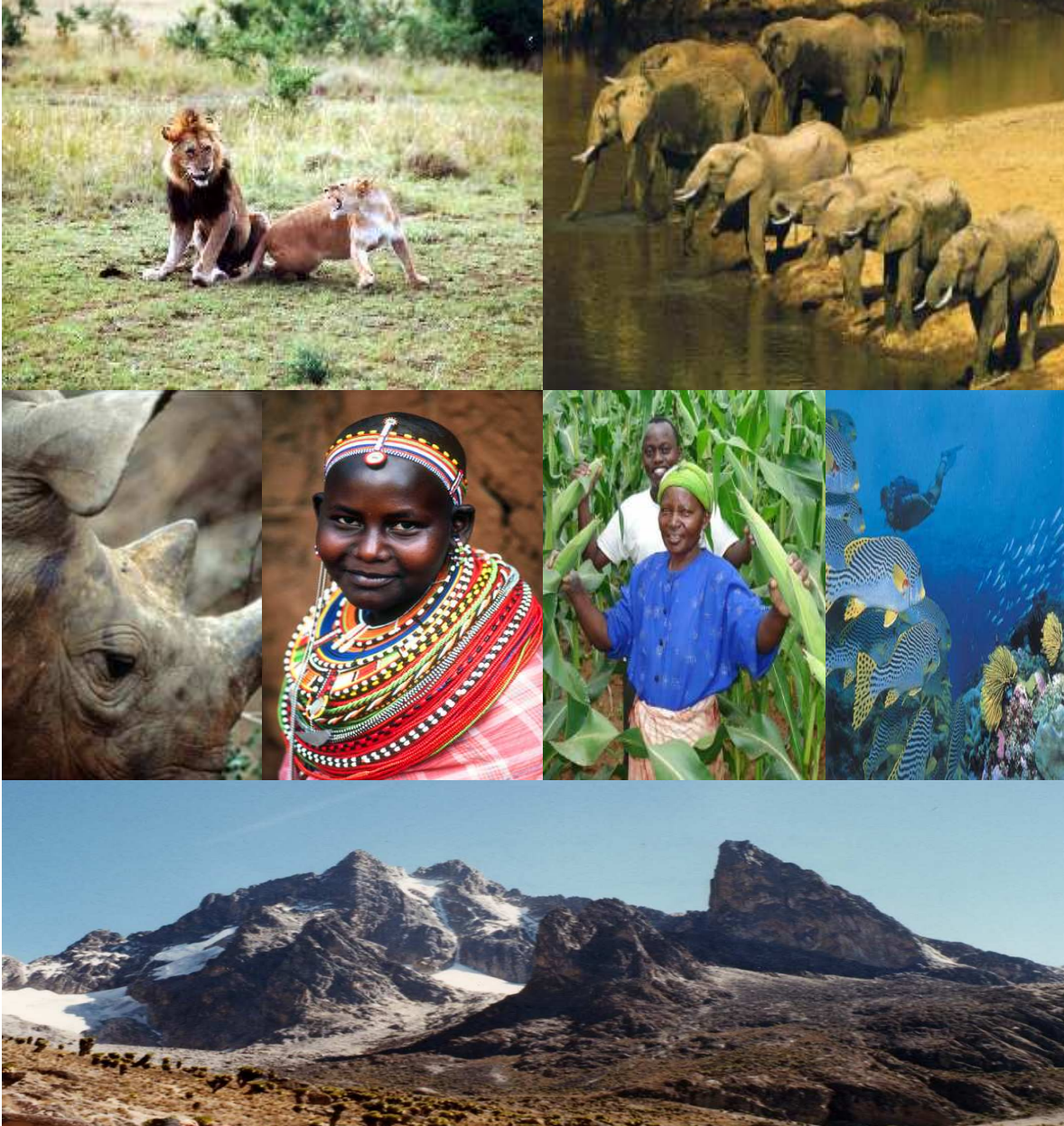


The Effects of Tourism in Kenya



GCSE Humanities Coursework

Introduction

Kenya lies on the east coast of Africa. It is bordered by five countries and the Indian Ocean. It is 1 degree north of the equator and has a land mass of 582,650 square metres. Over 32 million people live in Kenya and the main language is Swahili (Fig 1).

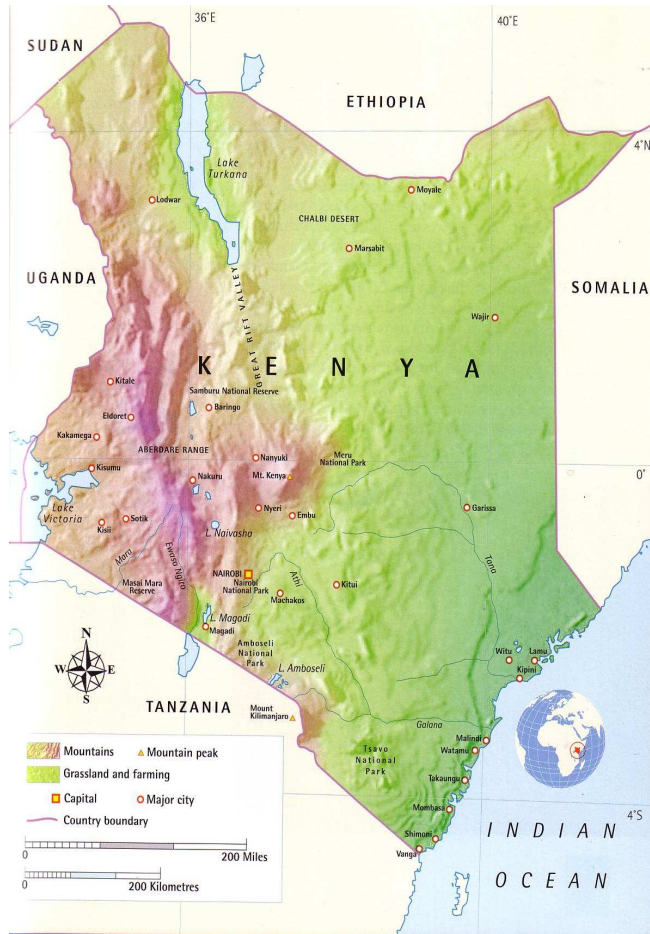


Figure 1 – Map of Kenya, to scale



Figure 2 – Mountainous area



Figure 3 – Kenyan Coral Reef

Kenya has many varied attractions. One of the biggest attractions is the opportunity to see the amazing range of wildlife on the grassland areas called Savannah. It is home to such animals as elephants, lions, cheetahs, zebras, giraffes, hippos and crocodiles. This has attracted big game hunters, zoologists, and lovers of wildlife who want to see the ‘big five – elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and rhino’ on safari.

Another tourist attraction is the mountainous areas which include 5,199m tall Mt. Kenya, which has glaciers at the top (Fig 2). This attracts experienced climbers, geologists, scientists, trekkers, walkers and even white water rafting enthusiasts who travel to Kenya when the glaciers melt to enjoy the fast rushing water. A series of lakes in the Great Rift Valley including Lake Victoria and Lake Turkana are inhabited by flamingoes, hippos and rhinos, and bring lovers of wildlife to its shores.

The coastline is another main area of attraction. The coast borders the Indian Ocean and has brought holiday makers to its white sandy beaches and warm, clear waters, where

coral reefs team with life (Fig 3). Just behind the coast there are both coastal forests and inland forests. These boast not only a rare and varied species of plants and trees but a wide range of reptiles and wildlife which attracts botanists.

Kenya does not only attract lovers of wildlife and people who love the 'coastal holiday' breaks. Kenya also has a rich, varied and eventful history. Cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa have a range of different cultures, traditions and architecture for tourists to explore and experience.

It is this varied landscape and variety of wildlife, history, cultures, customs and traditions which has encouraged tourism in Kenya. In the last century overseas visitors came to Kenya for big game hunting and after Independence from Britain in 1963, the government realised the enormous potential of the 'tourist industry', encouraging local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in tourism in Kenya, making it the most popular tourist destination in Africa.

In this article, I aim to determine whether the influence of tourism on Kenya has been beneficial in the country's development, and to see if there is any way of sustainable tourism that will avoid damage to the environment, economy and the cultures, so that Kenya's natural resources can be preserved.

Maasai Mara

Kenya has 43 national parks. The Maasai Mara lies in the Great Rift Valley and borders Tanzania. It is named the Maasai Mara after the Maasai tribe, who inhabit the area (Fig 4), and the Mara River which runs through the middle. The terrain is mostly grassland, and Acacia trees can be seen in the south-east region. The western border tends to have the biggest concentration of wildlife as there is swampy ground which means that the animals and wildlife always have access to water. This also means that disruption from tourists is minimised as the swampy ground is inaccessible. The Maasai Mara is not the biggest game reserve in Kenya, the area is 1510km², but it is the most famous, as there are about 1.3 million wildebeest and about 250,000 zebra and many tourists go to see the annual spectacle of the migration of thousands of wildebeests. Tourists also come for the black rhino, a species threatened with extinction from poaching. Wikipedia states that in 2000, there was a recorded population of only 37.



Figure 4 – Maasai Warrior

The key use of the Maasai Mara is for tourists who come to seek the “safari experience”. This has brought many advantages for Kenya. As well as building hotels, money had to be spent in the development of other areas such as agriculture, transport and communications. This included the improvement of hospitals and public utilities such as electricity supplies and telephone systems. This was to cater for the numbers of tourists. These improvements, as well as benefiting the tourists, have also benefited the locals. Tourism has provided direct and indirect employment for thousands of people. It has also given a great awareness for the conservation of the landscape, vegetation and wildlife, and the preservation of the traditional way of life of such people as the Maasai. In recent years things have changed for the Maasai. They now have a share in the money made from entrance fees and hotel bills. The funds go to two local councils who divide the money among the Maasai clans that own the land on the reserves.

The following quote, taken from Kenya By Heather Blades, by a spokesman for the Maasai shows that tourism can have a positive impact and be advantageous if managed correctly:

“Tourism will bring employment to the area, and if the hotels and tour operators only employed local people, this would have a big impact on the community’s decision to allow tourism.”

However, tourism has also brought disadvantages for Kenya, including the Maasai Mara. Environmental disadvantages include the fact that increasing numbers of tourists can actually result in the destruction of the environment and loss of habitats in order to build the communication network. Areas frequently visited by safari trucks are damaging the fragile vegetation and so causing soil erosion and pollution problems such as litter. Having too many animals in an area can destroy the natural environment. Keeping big animals such as elephants away from people's farmland is another problem.-

The economic disadvantages are that the country doesn't gain the full benefits of income from overseas visitors – only 15% of money spent on a holiday reaches the host country. Some of the local people, such as farmers or fishermen may lose their livelihoods in areas where tourist facilities are developed. People who used to live and keep their herds in the National Parks have been forced out, losing their land and their traditional way of life. Numbers of visitors to the game reserve go up and down, which doesn't create a stable income for the workers in the tourist industry.

Social disadvantages are that local traditions are disappearing faster in favour of copying the visitors. The tourists look down on the local people and treat them badly.

Although tourism in the Maasai Mara is seen in all travel brochures to bring benefits for the Kenyan people and its wildlife, this is not always the case. The images in the brochures show idyllic scenes of open plains, with little traffic and tourists looking at animals relaxing in their natural habitats (Fig 5), when in reality it is completely different (Fig 6), shows large numbers of safari vehicles flocking to the area where one of the "Big Five", a lion, has been sighted. This causes damage to the environment, animal's habitats, and stress to the animals.



Figure 5 – Travel Brochure Safari



Figure 6 – Safari: the Reality

The Daily Telegraph in December 2007 stated that

“Research has shown that cheetahs in national parks have started to hunt at midday, where there are no tourists present, as they are harassed so frequently by safari vehicles.”

Wikipedia also states that

“Cheetahs are also to be found, although their numbers are threatened, chiefly due to tourist disruption of their day-time hunting.”

Together, these two quotes indicate how tourism can have a negative impact on the wildlife in Kenya.

Mombasa

The coastal town of Mombasa is the second largest city in Kenya, with a population of half a million people. It is located in the South East part of Kenya, lying on the edge of Indian Ocean, and the total size is 100² miles. It has the best natural harbours on the whole coast, having two ports, one old and one new. Centuries ago, traders from Arabia anchored in Mombasa and set up businesses and built 'Arab Towns', which included mosques where they could worship Islam. This influx of Arab merchants has shaped how Mombasa is today with over 50 mosques and a large Muslim community. Muslim women are often seen wearing the black, loose fitting bui bui dress, along with a black head covering (hijaab), and they also sometimes wear a veil (nikab) (Fig 7). Because many people on the coast are Muslims, the festivals and ceremonies of Islam are very important occasions.



Figure 7 – Traditional Muslim female attire

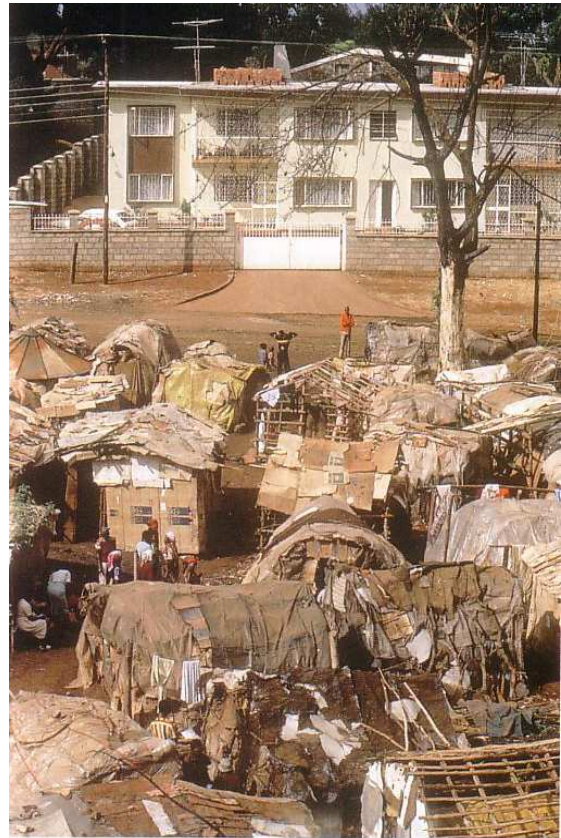


Figure 8 – Shanty town

Today Mombasa is a city of contrasts, with exotic luxurious buildings and a sprawl of informal settlements or 'shanty towns' at the edge of the city (Fig 8). Mombasa plays an important part in the country's economy, not only from imports and exports, but also as a tourist destination, as it has the best white sandy beaches and coral reefs that Kenya has to offer.

I am now going to discuss how the above factors have had both a positive and negative impact on this area. With the popularity of Mombasa as a tourist destination, there have been advantages for Mombasa and its population. New facilities have had to be brought in to cater for the needs of the tourists. The tourist resorts need airports, new roads to

resorts, buses, hotels with 'western facilities', and services such as water (Mombasa now has a reliable water supply), sewerage and electricity. All these needs have created jobs for Kenyans, so people have migrated from rural areas, to gain work.

However, this increase in population has added to the shanty towns as most of the jobs created are unskilled and poorly paid. Seventy to eighty percent of the population of Mombasa live in the shanty town area. These shanty towns often have no safe drinking water, so disease spreads quickly in an area where health care provision is limited. More than half of Kenya's urban population now live in poverty.

Sir R. Sanders stated "Tourism has come to be seen in Mombasa as being of no benefit to the local population. Despite the massive growth in tourism, only a limited number of locals have a stake in it". The National Geographic

This quote reinforces how little tourism can benefit the local people.

There has also been conflict between western visitors and the local Muslim community, as tourists do not always understand or follow the local traditions or respect the cultural differences.

"The traditional Muslims also feel under threat from the thousands of tourists who flock to Kenya's Indian Ocean beaches. They are often young, on holiday and insensitive to Muslim attitudes. The sight of scantily clad or drunken Westerners on the streets has contributed to Islamic conflict". The Observer, Sunday 1st December 2002

Past and recent conflict has also had a negative impact on the area, and the falling number of tourists has not helped this. Tourist numbers peaked in 1990 but since then the numbers have fallen, with severe economic consequences for the country and its people.

For example, in 2002, The Paradise Hotel was bombed, by a Somalian group linked to Al-Qaeda. This had a dramatic effect on tourism.

"The Australian Government confirmed that there was a possible terrorist threat in Mombasa. It said threats against Westerners in Mombasa are high. The foreign office in Britain issued a 'generic warning' to travellers to Kenya"

The Independent, 30th November 2002

Kenya's recent problems in 2008, which have been sparked off by a presidential election, the result of which has been disputed, have resulted in 1000 people being killed and forced more than 250,000 from their homes.

"There should be more than 30,000 visitors at the height of the season. But the hotels lie empty. Over the last month, 20,000 people working in tourism have lost their jobs. This will also have an impact on this area and its people."

These two quotes highlight how conflicts can have an enormous effect on tourist's decisions to travel to Kenya, which in turn affects the lives of the people who live there.

Sustainable Tourism

Due to the negative impact that tourism can have, other ways to develop tourism without causing damage to the country have to be evolved for tourism to be sustained within Kenya. The Kenyan Government is keen to develop alternative venues for tourism and in doing this it hopes to reduce the detrimental impact of visitors at the most visited spots. They also wish to promote other forms of attractions. One of the proposed ideas is health spas; Kenya has lots of geothermal springs, an example being Lake Bagoria.

Another idea is to extend the existing 36 golf courses as this is a popular pastime for some tourists. Further ideas include cruises on Lake Victoria and the building of conference centres to attract a regular trade of business travellers. Increasing the number of tourist venues would bring job investment opportunities to a wider range of people and regions in Kenya. However, these ideas might also have a negative impact and cause environmental damage if not done properly.

So tourism must be seen as a sustainable industry but take into account ecological and environmental factors. This is called Ecotourism. Ecotourism invests in and supports the protection of the environment, respects local cultures and involves local communities to ensure equity for all share holders rather than the few. Conservationists will be called upon to give professional advice.

“Most of all it is our culture that we must protect. It must be made clear how the negative impacts of tourism will be overcome by the positive ones. If we can be sure we will be better off by changing then we will welcome tourism.”

Book – Kenya by Heather Blades

This quote shows us that tourism could be affecting the local cultures. The local people will only welcome change if the tourism is beneficial.

For the future, tourism will have to be more low impact tourism which directly benefits local communities and provides opportunities for these communities to have control over local tourism.

One example of sustainable tourism is the ‘Kaya Kinondo Ecotourism Project’. This is set in a 30-hectare forest south of Mombasa. The local community have formed this project which offers controlled access to the sacred forest (Kayas). Only limited numbers of visitors are allowed and these visitors have guided tours where the community share information on the local culture. The tourists also get the chance to visit the village and interact with ‘traditional’ locals such as the Medicine Woman (Fig 9).



Figure 9 – The Medicine Woman at the Kaya Kinondo Ecotourism Project

In conclusion, it would seem that tourism has given a major boost to the Kenyan economy and has brought many advantages. There is no doubt that tourism has provided both direct and indirect employment for over a 100,000 people. It has developed its road, rail and air communications systems, as well as improving services such as telephones, hospitals and public utilities. This has not only helped cater for the tourists, but also the needs for the local people.

Tourism in Less Economically Developed Countries, LEDC's, can also bring environmental and social problems. Most of these advantages and disadvantages can apply to tourist locations anywhere in the world. However, the disadvantages may be more severe for LEDC's. For example, management and stewardship of the environment are more difficult in countries like Kenya because they lack the human expertise and money to be as effective as More Economically Developed Countries, MEDC's. Also, much of the technology and many of the materials which are essential for setting up the facilities and services needed for large scale tourism in LEDC's have to be brought in from MEDC's.

Therefore tourism must be seen as sustainable, it must benefit the locals. If badly managed, tourism will not improve the quality of life of people living in LEDC's, such as Kenya. Most of the money will only benefit wealthy foreign people and companies.

The life expectancy in Kenya is only 49 years, and the mortality rate of infant births is 79 deaths in every 1000 live births. The Gross National Income is only 20.9 billion, in comparison to Britain's 1151 billion. Only 46% of the population in rural areas have approved drinking water, and access to a clean water supply is still a problem for many Kenyans.

LEDC's like Kenya need to produce as much money as possible from tourism to counteract these problems. Tourism is Kenya's largest source of income. A large percent of the country depend on it, for a source of income, and to support their families.