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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MAASAI RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON TOURISM IN THE MAASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE, KENYA

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to survey the residents' attitudes on the impact of tourism on Maasai Mara National Reserve and to identify critical issues and tourism development concerns of the Maasai residents associated with the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Methodology: Data for this study was collected from June-October 2015. The participants were residents, 18 and older, from three group ranches. Data were collected using single-stage cluster sampling to identify three group ranches, *Koyiaki*, *Olkinyei*, and *Siana*, in the Maasai Mara region. A semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire was used for face-to-face and photo-elicitation interviews of 24 respondents. Data were subsequently analysed using the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) technique.

Main Findings: The study identified six overarching themes; conservation, cultural change, community development, employment, livestock, and small business. This study found that residents perceived tourism with mixed feelings, both negative and positive. More specifically, residents living closer to the tourism destination experienced direct and tangible benefits as compared to those who live far away.

Applications of this study: The results of this study are important for tourism planners, practitioners, and conservation managers in developing holistic strategies that promote sustainable tourism development in the Mara region of Kenya.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The success of the tourism industry depends on the involvement of the local people. Lack of cooperation of the local communities in tourism development projects could lead to anger and mistrust, influencing perceptions of tourism and its three basic areas of benefits and costs: social, environmental, and economic. This study, for the first time, attempted to describe the resident's attitudes towards tourism development in the Mara, results which can be used to improve the participation of local residents to ensure sustainable tourism development in destinations.