

WAKING UP THE SLEEPING GIANT – WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR MID-RIFT TO BECOME THE NEXT PREMIER TOURISM DESTINATION IN KENYA?

CHALLENGE

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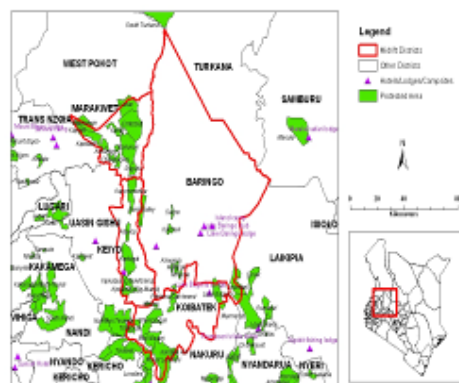
The Kenyan government tourism strategy plan 'Vision 2030' identifies tourism as one of the economic drivers in the country. The Mid-Rift region has potential to become a premier destination, with its scenic features, rich culture and fantastic sporting activities. However, like many tourism destinations, Mid-Rift region also faces many challenges¹ that hamper the exploitation of its potential and make it a 'sleeping giant'.

In exploiting the Mid-Rift's tourism potential, SNV and the WWF worked together with the local and regional leadership on a multi-stakeholder conference that brought different actors together to deliberate on the major constraints to tourism in the Mid-Rift and to design a carefully negotiated road map for the development of the destination. The actors included: private sector parties, Members of Parliament, Government departments, representative of the local community, athletes, and universities.

This paper describes the process of mapping and understanding the constraints, developing consensus around requisite actions, and implementation. The activities undertaken included situation analysis, investment mapping, and the establishment of stakeholder platforms. The paper also highlights the key successes and the lessons learnt from this multi-actor process.

This paper illustrates the need for shared understanding, joint planning and action by tourism stakeholders seeking to address bottlenecks in an emerging destination and create an enabling environment for tourism to thrive. It also demonstrates the need to link micro issues to national policy.

About Mid-Rift Region



Mid-Rift region boasts three key tourist destinations; Lake Bogoria, Lake Baringo, and the Kerio Valley, with its unique physical features and landforms. It also has many rare species of wild game and birds, a rich cultural heritage and fantastic sporting activities. Yet the destination's tourism potential has remained untapped for various reasons: long-standing resource conflicts between communities (Pokot, Tugen and Marakwet) along the Kerio valley,

low marketing of the destination, few and poorly managed accommodation facilities and lack of coordinated management of the destination by local leaders and communities.

According to a baseline study commissioned by SNV North Rift Portfolio in 2008, 137,724 tourist arrivals were recorded in 2007, with an average expenditure of

¹ Some of the key challenges are weak relationships between the tourism players, lack of destination plans, negative publicity, and poor infrastructure.

\$185 per day and 3 days length of stay.. In the same period population was estimated at 830,000 people with a poverty index of 43%. The region has 642 in 2008 compared to 599 beds in 2007 with the average bed-night occupancy rate standing at 24.8 % in 2007, lower than the national average of 47.2% in the same year. Additional 198 beds were available in Budget hotels. Direct employment from tourism in the region was 552. However, the above situation



changed with the post-election violence that rocked the country in January/February 2008, and reduced revenues at the key destinations by 98%. Road infrastructure is relatively developed, with most tourist attractions accessible. Most tourism sites in the region are managed by county councils with little participation by

other stakeholders². Earnings from these destinations remain quite low, even though, nationally, tourism is on the rise. Even with recorded growth in earnings from tourism in Kenya reaching \$ 65.4 billion³ in 2007, only \$ 307,692 was earned through gate fees by the local authorities managing L. Bogoria and Baringo in the same fiscal year, representing only 0.036% of national earnings.

CLIENTS

The Mid-Rift Tourism Forum– SNV partnership

To strengthen collaboration among tourism players to address the above challenges, SNV⁴, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Mid-Rift Tourism Forum signed a two year, tripartite memorandum of understanding. The partnership aimed at increasing tourist numbers in the region, thereby increasing the income of 1,000 Mid-Rift households living on less than \$2/day.

Specifically, the partnership aimed at applying the following strategies to promote tourism activities into the region:

- Strengthening collaboration amongst tourism actors in the region, especially building linkages with private sector
- Supporting the development of a tourism recovery plan in the region
- Developing strategic and operational plans for the visitor information centre
- Supporting investment opportunity mapping and development of destination profiles

Mid-Rift Tourism and Wildlife Forum (MRT&WF)

MRT&WF is a Multi-Stakeholder initiative of four local authorities; Keiyo, Koibatek, Baringo and Marakwet. It started in the 1990s, when these local councils needed to engage in dialogue so as to resolve conflicts over shared resources. These included a sand cess dispute in the Kerio Valley, cross-border conflicts between Pokot in East Baringo and Samburu, and natural resource conflicts. Consultations began in 2001/02, and the informal dialogue was formalized through registration under the Local Authorities Act, CAP 265 in 2005.

The same year, the forum secured funding from the Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) for institutional capacity development over a period of one year. Through this support, the Forum commissioned a reconnaissance survey of the Mid-Rift region and facilitated an educational visit to Laikipia Wildlife Forum. However,

² Tourism stakeholders include hoteliers, Small Medium Tourism enterprises, cultural organizations, athletes, and Members of Parliament.

³ Kenya Tourism Board Annual report

⁴ SNV Kenya is committed to supporting the development and promotion of sustainable pro-poor tourism through; lobbying for pro-poor tourism oriented policies, capacity building of community-based tourism initiatives, brokering sustainable relationships between private investors, donors and communities, and facilitating women's empowerment through tourism.

the Forum remained inactive for most of 2006 and 2007, until the SNV-WWF partnership was launched. This partnership has thrown the Forum a lifeline and has jump-started dialogue with stakeholders, generating renewed interest and enthusiasm among them. A final disbursement of funding by the TTF made it possible to finalize certain stalled activities, such as the reconnaissance survey, and the development of a website and of marketing materials. The stakeholders met recently to develop a joint strategic plan for the Mid-Rift destination. It is anticipated that the forum will certainly be an important destination management organization⁵ (DMO) that will steer tourism development around Lake Baringo, Lake Bogoria and the Kerio Valley.

It is important to note that in Kenya Local Authorities play a critical role in the development of tourism. They are responsible for collecting revenues and also greatly influence the enabling environment issues e.g. they could provide tax holidays to potential investors. Therefore having a platform that already had four Local Authorities coming together was quite strategic for scale. This was a good entry point in developing the destination.

SNV engagement with this forum was a continuation of other development activities supported through the Inter-Council Forum, an umbrella body of County Councils. Earlier activities included the development of an inventory of tourist attractions in the North Rift, and of a proposal for funding submitted to TTF. This funding was approved, although in phases.

Situation analysis; effects of post-election violence

Due to the post-election violence that rocked the country early in 2008, the tourism industry nearly collapsed. As mentioned above, because the Mid-Rift region was at the epicentre of the violence, visitor arrivals had dropped by about 98%. Key players at both local and national levels sought to restore the country's image and develop a roadmap for tourism recovery. Together with Mid-Rift, SNV carried out a quick scan to assess the extent of the damage and solicit ideas from the stakeholders. The scan brought out the high impact of the post election violence on employment and income. There were massive Layoffs and redundancies and most establishments had temporarily closed down. The level of insecurity especially around banditry, highway robberies and visitor hassling had also gone up.

Stakeholder analysis and the Multi-Stakeholder Platform

The above-mentioned scan entailed visiting the local and national tourism stakeholders to deepen understanding on constraints and identify possible solutions. Each player underscored the need for the key players to come together to build a consensus on the Mid-Rift Tourism recovery plan. Among the stakeholders were: private sector players such as hoteliers and tour operators; government departments such as the Ministry of tourism, the Kenya Tourism Board and other relevant government parastatals; community organizations, including small to medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs), tour guides and cultural groups; Moi University, with its extensive research on tourism development; and Members of Parliament. There were four key themes during the consultations:

- Tourism recovery plans;
- Investments and financing;
- Creating an enabling environment for tourism to thrive;
- Products development and marketing.

⁵ A tourism destination is a physical space in which tourists spend at least one overnight. It offers tourism products such as support services, attractions, and tourism resources within one day's return journey.



Community participation was viewed as a cross-cutting issue, and it was agreed that the first priorities were restoring the image of the destination and charting a way forward for tourism development. SNV, with its competence in connecting people, supported Mid-Rift in organizing a multi-

stakeholder conference on the four issues identified by the stakeholders. At this point, the local Members of Parliament were already on board, and assisted in shaping the course of tourism development.

Support to the Task forces

Four task forces were constituted and commissioned during the stakeholders' conference, to steer the activities related to the four key issues. The task forces were later supported to come together to concretize plans, develop concept notes and start implementation. The task forces have been able to achieve their goals and have shared their achievements with the board. Smaller stakeholder platforms have emerged around the issues.

Investment Mapping and Development of an Investment plan

In the initial stages, SNV and Mid-Rift Tourism Forum had planned to begin with an investment mapping and baseline study for the region. This activity was kept on hold until the commissioned reconnaissance survey had been carried out. A baseline study conducted by SNV (Mid-Rift Baseline study 2008) showed that the region, which only has about 13 accommodation facilities, received about 137,724 tourists in 2007. Shortage of accommodation caused many visitors to look elsewhere. The reconnaissance survey described the tourist sites, both existing and potential, the road network, protected areas etc. This information was shared with the stakeholders at a validation workshop, also supported by the SNV-WWF-Mid-Rift partnership. The process of developing investment profiles is ongoing and an investor conference is planned for the future. The Minister for Tourism has expressed interest in supporting this and directed the Kenya Tourism Development Corporation to promote investment in the region.

Building relationships and knowledge sharing



The Mid-Rift Tourism Forum is now well connected to the tourism actors, both upwards at the macro level and downwards at the micro-level. The Members of Parliament from the region are steering the agenda at the national level, which has contributed to linking the micro and macro levels. Moi University is collaborating with the Forum and supporting them through knowledge development and

sharing.

Support to SMEs

Through the SNV partnership with the UNWTO, the Forum has benefitted along with other regional platforms from market access for SMTEs. Five groups have

been identified, i.e. curio dealers, cultural dancers/villages, tour guides, bird guides and trail guides, and five proposals were submitted to the project implementing committee for funding consideration. Three proposals have been funded. These groups have developed marketing materials including brochures and fliers and others have acquired tents and expanded their accommodation facilities. Through a similar partnership with Moi University, a capacity assessment for SMTEs has been done and followed up with training of 23 SME groups and a mentoring process for selected groups. The outreach of the groups is estimated at approximately 870 households.

OUTCOME

Outputs

- a. Development of a road map on tourism recovery and promotion of Mid-Rift region and a three year strategic plan;
- b. Expansion of the membership of the Forum to include private sector players, investors, institutions of higher education, hoteliers, athletes, curio operators and the community. SNV/WWF will play a facilitating role;
- c. Establishment and operationalization of four thematic taskforces i.e. Strengthening MRT&WF, stimulating investment and financing, product development and marketing, and creating an enabling environment.
- d. Mapping of tourism sites through GIS Mapping
- e. Development of Mid-Rift Website and other marketing collaterals e.g. brochures, fliers and maps
- f. Launch of a tourism information centre recently seen as a gateway to the destination. This event was graced by the Hon Minister for Tourism who also committed his ministry in opening up the region.



Strengthening Mid-Rift Forum: to be responsible for looking into the legal and institutional structure of the forum, developing a forum strategy plan and setting up a forum office. Membership is from county councils, Moi University, the community, SNV and private operators.

Stimulating investments and financing: to survey and map available and potential tourism attraction sites and resources, develop investment plan, organize investment conferences and operationalize the tourism information centre. Membership composed of private sector, community, WWF, and SNV.

Product Development and marketing: to identify and develop products, brand the destination and carry out aggressive marketing. Membership composed of hoteliers, conservationists, Moi University, private sector, community and SNV.

Enabling environment: to come up with action points for improving the enabling environment for tourism in mid-rift. Specifically, engage Members of Parliament (MPs) for

Table 1: Thematic Task forces and their role

Outcomes

This paper highlights the change process experienced by the Mid-Rift Tourism Forum as a result of the SNV-WWF-Mid-Rift partnership. Some of the outcomes touch on the internal as well as the external environment

- i. **A more representative and active MRT&WF:** With support of SNV/WWF, the forum has been able to resume its operations once again, and funding from the TTF has been resumed. The relationship between stakeholders has been enhanced, with each stakeholder playing a role within the subcommittees/Forum.
- ii. **Better governance/management of the destination**
The formation of MRT&TF has strengthened the relations and partnership within and between stakeholder organizations in the destination:

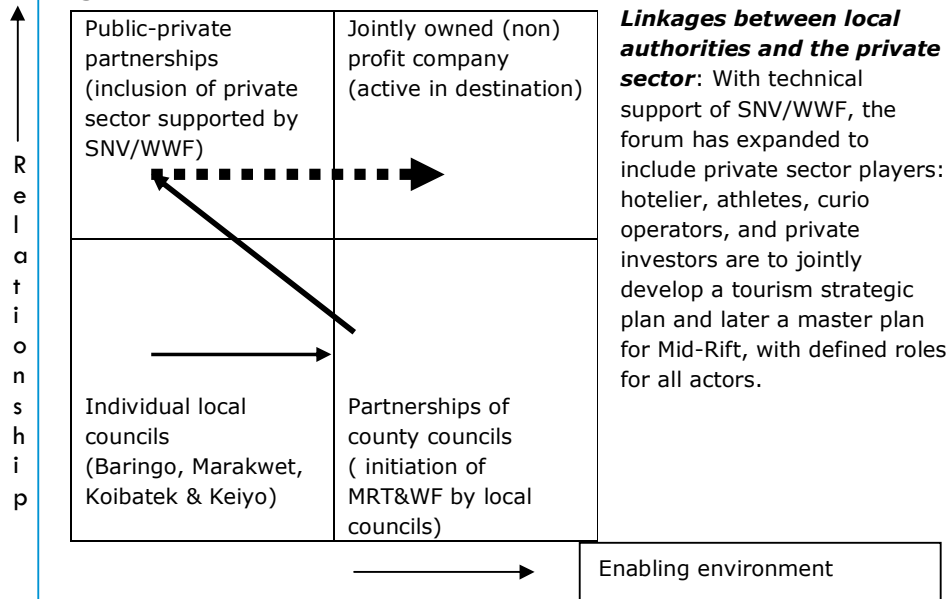


Between local county councils: previously, councils in Mid-Rift operated like 'small kingdoms', keeping their operations secret from other councils. Now, they come together to address common issues such as tourism promotion, insecurity, conservation, revenue collection, and management

practices.

Between local authorities and communities: the mid-1990s witnessed one of the worst resource conflicts between local authorities and communities. Baringo county council, for example, clashed with the Endorais community regarding the management and use of proceeds from L. Bogoria. Now, partnerships with local communities have emerged, such as the Illchamus Cultural Centre.

Fig1. Governance of destination



From fig. 1 above, we can see that MRT&WF has succeeded in bringing local councils together to address obstacles facing the destination. The creation of an enabling environment within the destination can be addressed both at the Local level and at the National level, with the local Members of Parliament supporting the Forum through the MPs' Forum. With support from SNV/WWF, the forum is now a public-private sector partnership. Its management is now aware of the needs and thinking of the private sector, but still largely depends on the facilitating role of SNV/WWF. The forum is still evolving in its competence to initiate and steer activities in the destination. Concrete plans for this have been outline by the task forces in their thematic activity plans.

- iii. **Shift from a political to a development alliance.** Initially, the forum was formed by local councils to address their common political challenges, such as management of councils. Now, the forum is providing an opportunity for local councils to team up with the private sector, local communities and development agencies to increase their revenue and provide an enabling environment for the sector.

iv. Engagement of the regional leadership; The Local MPs' Forum is now changing from a platform for promoting political agendas to one that addresses issues hindering the development of the region, with a clear action plan on tourism promotion. The participation of MPs in the stakeholder meeting helped with setting priorities, and their engagement has helped to scale up issues from the local to the national level and bridge the micro-macro divide.

v. Stimulating investment. The forum has stimulated investments in the sector. With support from the European Union, Koibatek County Council has invested Kshs five million in the construction of a tourism information centre at Mogotio. Other local councils are allocating resources to develop their tourism attractions too. The private sector is making valuable contributions to the tourism strategic plan being developed by the forum to enhance investment opportunities in the region. Local area Members of Parliaments are collaborating with SNV to draft a concept note for submission to the Kenya Tourism Board, while exploring options for sector financing as well.

vi. Tourism as an enterprise. The mapping of the local tourism resources, coupled with conservation and marketing efforts initiated by the forum has brought out the spirit of enterprise in the destination. Local councils are already investing in strategic infrastructure to enhance their revenue base. Communities are setting up cultural villages and curio shops along the circuit. There is an increase of tourism based SMEs from about 8 to 23 within the region.

vii. Attitudinal change. The four local councils under MRT&WF have undergone a complete metamorphosis since they first interacted with SNV in the early 1990s. Councils have embraced the spirit of sharing, and now engage in joint ventures and public-private sector partnerships. The County Council of Marakwet became the first local authority in Kenya to develop a strategic plan. This was then taken to another level by Baringo county council, by introducing participatory strategic planning. The forum, furthermore, became the first in the history of local authorities in Kenya in which councils came together to address their common problems, goals and plans.

viii. A three year strategic plan has been developed (2009 -2011) that will provide guidance on tourism development in the region

viii. Map, brochures and fliers have been developed in consultation with the private sector players in the region. This has promoted Mid-Rift has a favourable destination particularly for the domestic market. Information generated from the reconnaissance survey was uploaded to Google to market the region through the



search engine. Linkages with Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) have been established by SNV to promote the destination. KTB has shown interest in creating links with the destination website and in reprinting marketing materials.

IMPACT

i. Enhanced benefits to local communities: Sales for curio operators (women groups, youth groups, e.t.c.) are on the increase, from an average of \$6 per day/operator. (Source: Equator Curio Operators) in August 2007 to \$12.5 now. This could be attributed to the training that has been done to SMEs through the partnership with Moi University. The value of land near the tourism information centre in Mogotio has increased by more than 1000%, from an estimated \$ 1,000 per acre before construction of the centre up to \$ 12,500. Rental costs for renovated business premises in the town are rising too, in anticipation of its becoming a tourism hub. Certainly, expectations from this partnership are high among local small enterprises and communities.

ii, Policy shift in local governance: through the initiatives of the forum, the Ministry of Local Government has now introduced reforms in all local authorities to encourage them to draw up strategy plans and to increase their revenue base. The way in which the SNV/WWF initiative has stimulated both public and private partners is also expected to have an impact on policy.

Ongoing Activities

- Supporting resource mobilization to finance implementation of the master plan
- Supporting an investment conference planned for 2010, to open up the region to potential investors
- Finalising destination plans facilitated by Moi University
- Operationalising the visitor information centre

Critical Success Moments

While the forum has had its fair share of challenges, it has had its happier moments too. Forum Manager, Mr. Letangule recalls that the Lake Bogoria Spa Stakeholder meeting was a defining moment in the life of the forum: *'The ideas, and focussed action plans from the forum have given us a direction.'*

The forum means a lot to the councils too. Mr. Kimosop of Koibatek County Council remembers that the defining moment was when councils came together for first time to discuss shared issues as a forum. Councils are no longer 'small kingdoms', but an enabling forum for partnerships.

According to Mr Argut, a representative of the private sector, SNV's role can be compared to the oil that runs the engine. Without the oil, he says, the engine will not run.

SNV has learnt many lessons too:

- Private sector involvement is key for any vibrant tourism destination
- Tourism development can be very challenging but the involvement of all players makes it easier, as solutions are home grown.
- Tourism development is not only limited to economic aspects. Dealing with issues such as the security threat could actually open up opportunities for other industries to thrive.
- There exists a huge knowledge gap within and between communities, local leadership and institutions on existing opportunities for tourism. This has to be bridged for communities to effectively exploit the opportunities that tourism has to offer.
- Returns from Investments in tourism development are long-term. There are no quick fixes.

References

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2. North Rift Tourism Baseline;2008
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