ABSTRACT

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SURVIVAL OF MAASAI MARA ECOSYSTEM

Prof. R.S. Odingo, Prof. E.M.Irandu and Dr. Christopher Oludhe

The Maasai Mara ecosystem which arguably is Africa's most famous wildlife habitat faces serious threats which may jeopardize its very survival. Some of the threats include climate change, human settlements and land use changes. Climate change is of particular relevance to tourism. This is because tourism destinations, enterprises and tourists are all sensitive to variability and change in climate and weather parameters. Climate also has an important influence on environmental conditions that can deter tourists such as wildfires, diseases, pests and extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. Because climate represents both a vital resource to be exploited and important risk to be managed in tourism, it is expected that the integrated effects of climate change with shifts in both climatic means and extremes, will have profound impacts on tourism businesses and destinations. The expansion of human settlements in the Mara area largely due to rapid population growth coupled with land use changes, pose a grave threat to the sprawling ecosystem. Those facing the greatest threat are conservancies adjacent to the Maasai Mara National Reserve. These conservancies do not only provide an important buffer zone to encroaching farmlands and human settlements but are also seen as best practices in community wildlife conservation. However, the Mara ecosystem despite being a vast area incorporating the protected area, its considerable large mammal species requires access to large, unprotected dispersal ranges inhabited and increasingly transformed by agro-pastoral communities. As a result, human-wildlife conflicts are experienced both within and outside the protected areas of the ecosystem. These conflicts pose a major threat to the ecosystem viability. This paper examines the relationship between tourism and biodiversity and tourism and livelihoods in the Maasai Mara ecosystem in the Narok County, Kenya. The impacts of climate change on these relationships are critically examined. The possible mitigation measures to ameliorate climate change impacts in the study area will also be discussed.

Key Words:, Biodiversity conservation, Climate change, Ecosystem, Livelihoods, Narok County.