

Training in Tourism and Hospitality: a key component in sustainable tourism

By Mary Mwendwa

The existence of only several tourism related training colleges and institutions in Kenya is a clear indicator of the need of personnel in the industry. However, despite the huge demand of personnel, some trainers and employers have taken advantage of this situation, and are offering low quality training standards in the name of saving money.

David Wanyama, a trainer at Wildlife Clubs of Kenya College says, “As trainers in the tourism and hospitality sector, we focus on giving the best in the market out there, apart from the course work, we instill morals and knowledge among the students to prepare them for the job market which comes with its own challenges, especially the poaching menace which Kenya is currently struggling with.”

He also points out the need to have a curriculum that is relevant to Kenya’s scenarios, some colleges use foreign curriculums which are not relevant to Kenya’s tourism sector. David further notes how some employers in the tourism sector don’t get qualified personnel. They opt to pick people and train them on the job.” We recently toured Maasai Mara National Reserve with my students and

we witnessed a lot of off-track roads, which seemed to be have been used by the people who went for the viewing of wild beast migration.”

David blames this on the tour guides who are supposed to know the dangers of off-track driving to the wildlife. “They tamper with the habitats and also the breeding sites. If a tour guide is not well trained, he may not understand some of these practices done by tourists who damage the entire ecosystem of wildlife in the parks,” he says.

Wildlife Clubs of Kenya College offers a certificate course in Tour Guiding and Administrations. It is a one year course meant to designed to equip tour guiding students with knowledge on the principles and ethics in tour guiding aimed at promoting sustainable tourism. Among other courses they offer include: Tourism and Wildlife Management and Hotel and Restaurant Management.

According to David Wanyama, Kenyan universities that offer certificate and diploma courses in Tourism are not of great benefit to students they need to be more intensive in nature. “We as training colleges are looking into ways in which this can be amended so that universities are only left to offer degrees and masters,” he says.

David further recommends anyone who has an interest in tourism and hospitality industry to go for training as it entails educational trips, talks, and libraries which have a lot of information about the sector. “Knowledge and skills gained during the training are key towards the development of the tourism sector for future sustainability,” he emphasised.

On policy, the Kenya Conservation and Wildlife Act 2013, gives guidelines and mandates of conservation organisations like the Kenya Wildlife Service. Poaching and penalties for the offenders, community participation and conservancies and how people should deal with issues to do with land ownership when giving out their land for conservation purposes. Training institutions have a big role to play on poaching activities .They instill morals and knowledge on poaching to their students. For example, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya College, too have talks and call in experts on anti –poaching, to come and educate them on the dangers of poaching towards the sustainability of the tourism sector.

The Scoping Study on the Prosecution of Wildlife Related Crimes in Kenyan Courts 2008 -2013 by Wildlife Direct, points out the scale at which poachers were charged under the Wildlife Act Cap 376 of Kenyan laws. The study found out that the national police service handled all the cases and it was not clear how closely

they collaborated with the Kenya Wildlife Service on setting the charges. This obviously sets a gap in the fight against poaching and it can only be dealt with by empowering more of those who are joining the sector through training.

Tour guides and other people who interact with wildlife need a lot of knowledge and skill on how to combat this menace. One of the key recommendations which is in integrity with well-trained personnel is, Kenya Wildlife Service needs to transform its relationship with communities and private sector in line with provisions in the constitution of Kenya, and empower citizens to participate in the fight against wildlife crime by encouraging them to act as independent court monitors and through the creation of a wildlife reporting hotline. The role of ordinary Kenyans is crucial and under-utilised in the fight against poaching and trafficking.

At the Koiyaki Guiding School in Maasai Mara National Reserve, students get to experience the real taste of tour guiding within the park, they are better equipped to undertake their roles as tour guides . At a time when group ranches in the Mara region are being privatised and tenure is shifting from group to individual ownership, there is now intense pressure to break down this internationally important region into small pockets of land for alternative uses, including

agriculture and settlement. Already the spread of human settlement into prime wildlife habitats has reduced the animal population and distribution of predators in the area. Bush fires, poaching for meat, illegal tree cutting and small-scale farming are all on the rise. The Koiyaki Guiding School has been formed by the community in an attempt to halt this decline and to educate their own Maasai youth about the importance of the Mara ecosystem, and how, by taking a holistic approach to conservation, the region can be managed for the mutual benefit of the community and its wildlife. The school's annual intake of 24 students must complete a year long course which includes every aspect of guiding from ecology, to camp management and first aid. Every year approximately 85% of students receive bursaries from key hotels and camp operators in the Mara who have recognised the huge need for employing local Maasai (traditionally 80% of guides come from elsewhere in Kenya) and the positive contribution it can make to safeguard the future of the Mara and its tourism industry.

Similarly, Margaret Otieno, Director of Wildlife Clubs of Kenya College says, "Our training focus is to produce such personnel with the research component constantly enriching the courses and informing our overall training policy and direction. Thus, our work involves training action as a continuous process for us to remain a credible actor in the tourist industry."

Kenya Utalii College (KUC) boasts of giving the best training in the country in tourism and hospitality. It has set training standards in the tourism sector which promote sustainability in the sector. Established over 40 years ago, the College has trained over 50,000 graduates from around the world, a majority of who have served in the local and international hospitality and tourism industries. The College is an affiliate member of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). According to the Principal, Dr. Kenneth Ombogi, “Some of our courses have acquired accreditation by the Tourism Education Quality (TEDQUAL) certification body. Further, KUC is an authorized International Air Travel Agency (IATA) training Center. The institution is the Secretariat for Africa's only Association of Hospitality and Tourism Schools (AHTSA) which has a membership of more than 27 hospitality schools drawn from over 15 countries. It is also an East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) accredited Center of Excellence in Hospitality and Tourism training. KUC is renowned for providing world class training for the Hospitality and Tourism industry both locally and internationally. One of the strategies we have put in place is collaboration with other reputable training institutions, both local and international, to help us deliver our mandate: Training for the Hospitality and Tourism industry.”

The institutions include some of the world's best hospitality and tourism training institutions such as the Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, Makerere University, Uganda and Dr. Livingstone International University of Tourism Excellence & Business Management (LIUTEBM), Zambia. Locally, the College has partnered with one of the leading public universities, University of Nairobi, a collaboration that has culminated in the College offering two degree programs: Bachelor of Arts in Hospitality Management and Bachelor of Arts in Travel and Tourism Management. The two programs have boosted the provision of quality training in the Hospitality and Tourism industry. They have attracted scores of new entrants with interest for professional training in the hospitality and tourism industry. In order to meet the ever growing demand, the College is preparing itself to start offering e-learning in the near future.

Increased linkages between the College and the hospitality and tourism industry stakeholders has seen most KUC graduates get internships and jobs in leading establishments within the industry. The institution is closely linked to the industry through the Tourism industry/Kenya Utalii College Liaison Committee. Some of the institution's alumni have secured jobs internationally, regionally and locally- a move that re-affirms Kenya Utalii College's position as a market leader in Hospitality and Tourism training in Africa.

Adaptation for existing training courses: Non-governmental, non-educational organisations are an increasing resource of best practice and knowledge for sustainable tourism management. Numerous training and capacity building programs already exist among NGOs, and intergovernmental, bilateral or international organisations. These should be integrated together with the personnel in the industry for best results.

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