



OL DONYO WUAS, KENYA COMMUNITY BENEFIT AWARD FINALIST 2009

CASE STUDY

Ol Donyo Wuas (ODW) is a 22-bed eco-lodge next to Chyulu National Park, set on 275,000 acres of Maasai communal land in southern Kenya. It welcomes over 1,500 guests a year and has 60 full-time employees. Its non-profit affiliated organisation, the Maasailand Preservation Trust, employs an additional 80 local game scouts.

Ol Donyo Wuas was established on the belief that local communities that live alongside wildlife areas and national parks need to become stakeholders in tourism so that the economic benefits that are generated from tourism are shared directly with rural households in a meaningful, sustained and regular manner.



Specifically, it operates according to the mandate that each rural community member who lives in a wildlife area or alongside a national park should:

- Be part of a financial structure ensuring regular payouts at household level when wildlife populations are nurtured and thrive
- Benefit financially from the wildlife tourism industry by each community household owning equity or earning a percentage of a lodge or hotel profits
- Benefit from effective rural community outreach programmes that ensure rural communities are uplifted in meaningful and sustainable ways, enjoying skills transfer as well as obtaining employment.

To achieve these goals in its own operations, in 1992 ODW established the Maasailand Preservation Trust, whose role is to forward benefits from its tourism operation to the Maasai communities in the area where the lodge is located. The Trust comprises elected members from the community along with representatives of ODW.

A fee of US\$80 per person per night is automatically added to each guest's stay – money which is given directly to the Trust. Guests are encouraged to make additional donations to the Trust, and the fees paid by ODW to the community to lease the land are also channelled through the Trust. In 2008, over US\$525,000 was provided by ODW directly to the Maasai communities, the equivalent of US\$178 per guest per night.

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To secure neighbouring land with conservation status, ODW entered into a partnership with Great Plains Conservation – a conservation and tourism company. Through this partnership, an additional 70,000 acres of land provide protection for wildlife, while 4,500 Maasai households neighbouring ODW have become shareholders in the total operation, receiving two dividend payments each year. A new conservancy lease fee will also provide another US\$225,000 to the local communities. The method of distributing this fee ensures that Maasai land owners benefit directly from tourism, while money can also be directed to community projects.

Through the Trust, the commitment to the community has been impressive. The Trust has provided over 100 scholarships to local students to attend all levels of school and university. Currently, more than 55 students are in receipt of scholarships totalling US\$39,000, and two graduates are now employed by the Trust. The Trust currently pays the salaries for 15 teachers and has built numerous classrooms, dormitories, playgrounds and teachers' accommodation in schools in the region. Desks, chairs, books, teaching materials, maintenance, solar panels, uniforms and toilets are the direct result of ODW's innovative community-based tourism. The Trust also funds a women's co-operative, which offers cultural lessons for tourists. Sales to visit the co-operative, plus sales of jewellery by the women generated over US\$7,300 in 2008. In addition, the Trust has funded the establishment and operation of a community health clinic, which now employs over 100 people and also offers a mobile clinic for those who are unable to travel to the main clinic.

Another large-scale project established by ODW is the Predator Compensation Fund, administered through the Trust, which provides compensation to the Maasai if a predator attacks one of their cattle. As well as providing compensation, this project makes considerable efforts to educate the Maasai about the value of wildlife to tourism. To date more than US\$45,000 has been paid out through this compensation scheme. As a result, the number of lions killed has fallen dramatically, to only four since 2004 and none since 2005. This innovative scheme has been adopted in neighbouring areas with similarly impressive results in protecting predators, demonstrating ODW's position as a model for best practice on conservation and community benefit.

Instead of copy-righting, which creates ownership, ODW believes in the 'copy left' model, which makes its framework freely available to any other business or community that wishes to replicate, adopt and possibly even improve upon the model to the benefit of additional local communities. The sharing of resources, ideas and knowledge is fundamental to ODW in its efforts to support the future of Africa's communities and wildlife. Encouraging others to replicate and implement the best practices they have learned over two decades of work, ODW believes, will result in additional 'enriched' communities throughout Africa who tangibly share in the economic successes of tourism and, as a result, improve their livelihoods and create better protected and managed wildlife areas.

