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# Governing conservation tourism partnerships in Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This article adopts the Policy Arrangements Approach to study how the stability of conservation tourism partnerships is governed. Our study compares two private-community partnerships in Kenya to explore how incongruences resulting from internal dynamics and external challenges are faced. Drawing on the notion of metagovernance, the article examines the roles of the actors involved in ensuring internal and external congruence. It is concluded that conservation tourism PCPs are adaptive entities that need to be actively governed, to ensure long term outcomes that are effective and democratic, and that both state and non-state actors can take on this role.

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### Introduction

Since the early 1990s, partnerships of various forms and scales between diverse societal actors have been deployed for advancing sustainable tourism (e.g., Haase, Lamers, & Amelung, 2009; Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Selin, 1999). The surge of tourism partnerships reflects wider societal trends (e.g., Glasbergen, Bierman, & Mol, 2007; Visseren-Hamakers, Leroy, & Glasbergen, 2012) and is a manifestation of the widely recognized shift from government to governance, where

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authority is transferred from the state towards networked governance arrangements between state, market or civil society actors (e.g., Kooiman, 2003; Rhodes, 1996).

To enable the development of conservation tourism (Buckley, 2010) outside state-protected areas in Eastern and Southern Africa, partnerships have been established between local communities and private entrepreneurs (e.g., Ashley & Jones, 2001; Carter, Adams, & Hutton, 2008; Lamers, Nthiga, van der Duim, & van Wijk, 2013). Private-community partnerships (PCPs) are one of many initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of earlier, centralized, conservation efforts, in which state-protected conservation areas were created from which local communities were displaced (e.g., Peluso, 1993). These decentralized efforts are also believed to address the need for natural resource use and management that is based on participation and collective action of user communities and collaboration between state and non-state actors (e.g., Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Conley & Moote, 2003; Nelson & Agrawal, 2008; Ostrom, 2005).

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in Africa, however, has had mixed results (e.g., Leach, Mearns, & Scoones, 1999; Mbaiwa & Kolawole, 2013; Sebele, 2010). Challenges faced by community-based tourism, particularly, include communities' lack of business skills and access to transnational tourism markets (e.g., Spenceley & Snyman, 2012), the long-term dependency on external donor funding (e.g., Kiss, 2004), and the unequal distribution of benefits and power among community members (e.g., Manyara & Jones, 2007). Partnerships with private entrepreneurs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were introduced in community-based tourism since the late 1990s to address these issues, but present a suite of problems of their own. These problems include imbalanced relations between individual private investors and heterogeneous communities, unfair partnership deals, local political struggles emerging after implementation, and misalignment with the wider institutional environment (e.g., Ashley & Jones, 2001; Meguro & Inoue, 2011; Southgate, 2006).

Extant studies have mainly focused on the effectiveness of these partnerships and the desirability of the neoliberal discourse they often represent (e.g., Brockington, Duffy, & Igwe, 2008; Spenceley, 2003), while the longer-term consequences for governance remain understudied. Research in this area is timely and relevant, as multi-actor partnership arrangements continue to flourish and the recent literature suggests that in many of these partnerships political struggles and governance challenges seem to increase rather than decline, particularly in East Africa (Ahebwa, van der Duim, & Sandbrook, 2012; Lamers et al., 2013).

PCPs in conservation tourism run the risk of being affected both by internal dynamics, such as the imbalanced relationships between partners, and external challenges, such as the lack of state orchestration between fragmented, overlapping and competing partnerships or other initiatives (see also Glasbergen, 2011). This raises the question how coherent PCPs in conservation tourism are, both internally and externally, who governs this coherence, and how. Addressing this question is relevant in order to gain insights into the mechanisms undergirding the efficacy of PCPs in solving societal challenges without falling short on democratic credentials, such as representation, accountability, transparency and participation (e.g., Meadowcroft, 2007).

In this article, we address this question by providing a comparative analysis of two tourism-conservation enterprises implemented by the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in Laikipia County, Kenya. AWF is an international NGO focused on nature conservation across Africa. Since the late 1990s, AWF has developed and promoted conservation enterprises, defined as “a commercial activity that generates economic benefits in a way that supports the attainment of a conservation objective” (Elliot & Sumba, 2011, p. 4).

Conservation enterprises aim to protect biodiversity and alleviate the poverty of people living with wildlife through various sectors, such as agriculture, livestock production, forestry and fisheries, but mostly through tourism (see also van Wijk, van der Duim, Lamers, & Sumba, 2014). By developing tourism-conservation enterprises, such as lodges, tented camps and cultural villages in biodiversity-rich areas, AWF aims to incentivize communal landowners to set aside land for nature conservation. Livestock is excluded from these areas to make room for wildlife and tourism enterprises. Through different funding mechanisms (e.g., donor grants, social venture capital), ownership of the immovable assets remains with the community, while management of the enterprise is put in the hands of a private entrepreneur. Revenues of the enterprise are shared with the local community through a variety

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