

HANDOUT 3-2

EXERCISE 3-1: SAMBURU ECOLOGES – KENYA

Ecotourism Lodges. AWF provided assistance to the local Namunyak community to become an equity shareholder in a permanent tented camp that had been built on land originally leased from them. The community has gone on to purchase the camp from the original owner who continues to manage the facility. At another community nearby, AWF has provided capital for a group to develop their own 'star beds' luxury camp along the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro. Both of these communities have set aside large areas of their land for conservation and tourism.

Imagine sleeping out on the African plains in a warm, luxurious bed. Above you billions of stars illuminate the African night sky. Below you flows a rapid river, attracting Africa's abundant wildlife. A light East African breeze touches your cheek, rustling the leaves of the phoenix palms above you. The sounds of the African night surround you. Trumpeting elephants, the musical braying of zebra, the sound of water flowing through the carved out banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River.

A dream? Yes, but one experienced by over 600 fortunate tourists visiting Kenya every year thanks to a unique partnership brokered by AWF called **Koija Starbeds**. Opened for business in March 2002, Koija Starbeds is one of the most unusual lodging experiences in Africa, and is one of AWF's most successful conservation enterprises on the continent. It is serving as a model for ecotourism development in the future.

The Laikipia region, a major part of AWF's [Samburu Heartland](#), is composed primarily of private ranches and livestock-producing communities. Laikipia has no formal protected areas, so community-based conservation is key to the survival of wildlife here. The Samburu Heartland is home to the second largest population of elephants in Kenya (over 3,000). It is the last stronghold of the highly threatened Grevy's zebra and the area hosts the largest number of black rhinoceros in the country. It is also home to unique "northern specialty" species like gerenuk, beisa oryx, and Somali ostrich. In recent years, Laikipia has even seen the return of the African wild dog, one of the continent's most endangered predators.



Koija Starbeds is a true partnership between the community, the private sector operator, and AWF. It has been successful because each partner concentrates on what it does best. The Koija community (population 1,500 people) owns the camp through the Koija Community Trust. It provided the land for the camp and set aside a 500-acre community conservation area as part of a deal for the camp. This area is now off-limits to grazing.

The community's ownership of the venture, and wages from the community members who work at the camp, provide a strong incentive to conserve the land and its wildlife.

The African landscape is littered with ecotourism enterprises that did not work out or failed to deliver appropriate benefits for wildlife and local people. One important lesson AWF has learned is that such ventures need to be successful businesses. The Koiya community did not have the capacity to run a safari camp, so AWF engaged a responsible, experienced private sector operator to run it. AWF approached the adjacent Loisaba Wilderness, a private 61,000 acre ranch with several successful lodges and camps, and brokered a management agreement. Under Loisaba's management, the camp is professionally run and staffed. Loisaba train locals on the various aspects of safari camp management, so that managerial capacity is built over time.

Koiya Starbeds has produced solid benefits for wildlife and the community alike. The land within Koiya's conservation area has recovered remarkably well from previous overgrazing. According to Giles Davies, AWF Enterprise Director, the Koiya conservancy land "is clearly healthier than nearby land open to grazing. It supports noticeably higher numbers of wildlife, including Grevy's zebra, gerenuk, and impala." It has also created clear socio-economic benefits for the community. Whereas the community had previously depended largely on livestock grazing prior to the project, now the community earns more than \$20,000 in profit each year -- a sum that goes a long way in Laikipia. It has enabled the community to fund critical healthcare, education and water projects. The Koiya Bursary Fund, funded with project proceeds, has allowed over 30 students to go on to secondary and vocational school, and for the first time in Koiya community, a student is attending university from funds generated by Starbeds. As Starbeds showcases their culture, it is helping the Laikipiak Maasai sustain their traditions. Finally, the project has helped open communal resource use decisions to greater public comment and is teaching community members how to manage a business sustainably. Vice-chairman Edward Nogle sums up the community's impression of the Koiya project by stating "Starbeds has done wonders for the Koiya community. It has unified group ranch members, and it has also brought about beneficial changes to our life style. Today at Koiya, a man is willing to allow his wife to go and sell her bead work while he stays at



home to take care of the children. This has never happened before in the history of Koiya. Above all, members of the community are now able to send their children to secondary school and college because they are assured of school fees that come from revenues generated by the Starbeds"

Ultimately, the project is a success because it is a fantastic place to stay and provides its guests with unforgettable experiences. It is secluded and intimate. It includes only three Starbed platforms, two doubles and one twin, which can sleep between 6 and 8 people. The rooms themselves are half-covered platforms that are cantilevered over a game-rich section of the Ewaso Nyiro River. They are set at mid-tree level, giving them a "tree house" feel, and each is sighted to ensure complete privacy. They are sturdily constructed of thatch, coastal reed matting, timber and sculptured acacia

branches that were collected from elephant damage. A comfortable bed fashioned on the axel and wheels of old Land Rovers is rolled out onto the platform in the evening, so guests can sleep underneath the stars - under mosquito netting of course. The platforms are, indeed, "the biggest bedrooms in the world."

"It was unbelievable. I didn't sleep a wink -- a heaven full of the brightest stars I have ever seen and an elephant eating the grass under my deck!" one guest noted in the Koija guestbook.

Koija Starbeds is a small, but obviously successful piece of the overall conservation puzzle in Laikipia. It is a model for future efforts in the region and else-where in Africa. Given its solid business foundation and community support, AWF expects the enterprise to continue benefiting wildlife and people and delivering exceptional experiences to its guests for some time to come.

For more information on the Starbeds project, contact Ben Mwongela at bmwongela@awfke.org.