



Empowering Kenyan Maasai Women Through Cultural Bomas Tourism

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on the empowerment of Maasai women through tourism. Using cultural bomas tourism as a case study, the article explores the different ways this form of tourism is contributing to the empowerment of Maasai women in the Amboseli region; a rural setting where tourism is a thriving industry. This article draws on data from a larger ethnographic study whose focus was Maasai involvement in tourism development. The data used in this article was gathered through primary sources such as participant observation; group and key informant interviews; as well as secondary sources. The results revealed that cultural bomas tourism was making positive contributions in empowering Maasai women in five realms namely: social, economic, psychological, political, and educational. The study concludes that, while to some extent tourism was empowering Maasai women, the benefits they accrued were not big enough to transform their livelihoods and improve their standards of living. However, it is suggested that if well managed, Maasai women's involvement in tourism can, in the long-run, lead to their empowerment.

Key Words: Amboseli, Cultural bomas, Development, Empowerment, Maasai, Tourism, Women.

1.0 Introduction

Globally, women and girls make up slightly more than fifty percent of the total population (Boserup, 1970; Wallerstein, 2006; Ondicho, 2021). Despite their numerical strength, women are generally under-represented in all realms of life,

and many times are poorer than their male counterparts. Gender inequality was identified by Boserup (1970) in her path breaking seminal volume *Women's Role in Economic Development* and in the *Beijing Platform of Action* in 1995 as a key obstacle to women's advancement and development. Studies have shown that this is specifically the case for rural indigenous women who have lower access to productive resources and services, fewer livelihood choices, lower levels of education, and lower social status than urban women and men (Scheyvens, 2000; Irandu & Shah, 2014; Moswete & Lacey, 2015). While women play a vital role in economic development, unlike men, their contribution is undervalued in a deeply patriarchal society (Moswete & Lacey, 2015). However, recently gender equality has emerged as a top priority on the international development agenda. Subsequently, gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls was designated as Millennium Development Goal number three (MDG 3) Ampumuza et al, (2008) and currently as the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) (UNWTO, 2020). Empowering women has been acknowledged as a vital element in building stronger economies, poverty reduction, and for the success of the sustainable development goals. As a result, many countries around the globe have established policies, programmes, and ministries to address the problems facing women and empower them to participate fully in society.

Tourism has been widely acknowledged across the globe as a powerful potential tool for empowering women in multiple ways through income generating opportunities and provision of jobs in both small- and large-scale tourism related enterprises (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; UNWTO, 2020). This is especially possible because worldwide, women constitute a large majority of employees and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. Tourism can unlock women's potential by fully engaging them, which will result into poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and women empowerment because of its labour-intensive nature, wide geographical spread, and easily accessible opportunities for marginalized groups such as women (Makombe, 2007; World Bank, 2009; UNWTO, 2021). Furthermore, tourism has been shown to be an effective catalyst for gender equality and the empowerment of women because it offers destination communities' unrestricted opportunities to sell goods and services, to diversify and supplement their sources of income, employment opportunities for local people especially women, and enhance local economic growth (UNWTO, 2021).

In recent years, many initiatives that seek to reduce the existing gender power imbalances and empower women through tourism have emerged globally. The UNWTO in its *2020 Global Report on Women in Tourism* advances the claim

that, in addition to tackling poverty and gender disparities, tourism can provide women with an easy access to opportunities for active participation in leadership, entrepreneurship, and in the workforce (UNWTO, 2020; McCall & Mearns, 2021). Compared to other economic activities, tourism, especially community-based tourism (CBT) is arguably one of the easiest and quite lucrative sectors for women without education to join. Community-based cultural tourism has been shown to be an ideal tool for empowering indigenous women in rural remote areas because it utilises locally available resources, offers flexible hours of work; allows women to combine work with domestic chores, and does not require formal education which normally would make it hard for women to be employed in the formal sector (Ondicho, 2017). This illustrates the potential value and significance of tourism towards empowering women to manage their lives.

The tourism industry is the second largest sector of the economy of Kenya. Since her independence in 1963 Kenya has relied on mass tourism revolving mostly around wildlife safaris to boost its foreign exchange reserves and create employment opportunities while reducing the adverse effects on the social and natural environment (Irandu & Shah, 2014; Ondicho, 2018). Unluckily, there is limited domestic capital to finance the development of the country's tourism infrastructure. As a result, foreign investors own and control much of the industry. Furthermore, wildlife tourism is concentrated on a few locations, predominantly in the Maasai Mara, Tsavo, and Amboseli regions in the country's south. While the game parks and reserves in these regions generate substantial amounts of benefits, local communities have not gained much from wildlife tourism (Stanonik, 2005; Ondicho, 2018). Much of the tourism revenues from these regions are shipped to the National Treasury for appropriate distribution. Unfortunately, wildlife tourism has had some negative effects; it has triggered substantial social disruption through dislocation of indigenous communities to create room for the conservation of wildlife, thus loss of access to critical livelihood resources and land. To add insult to injury, the communities are often side-lined from involvement in tourism development (Ondicho, 2010).

The government of Kenya has over the past decades implemented a policy of supporting and encouraging CBT around wildlife protected areas as means of sharing the benefits and environmental footprints of tourism more broadly. The Maasai represent one of the communities that have embraced a novel approach to harness their culture for the tourist dollars. They have started to invest in cultural bomas, also known as manyatta tourism, and assumed an entrepreneurial role (Ondicho, 2010; Ritsma & Ongaro, 2020). A cultural boma is a purpose-built

‘model village’ intended to attract tourists. Such villages offer tourists the opportunity to meet the Maasai on their own terms and to learn more about their exotic culture, purchase their handicrafts, take special photograph of the Maasai in their ritual dress, and experience other aspects of their exotic culture. Cultural bomas are an indigenously home-grown tourism initiative through which the Maasai seek to harness their culture for the tourist dollars, thus putting control in local hands which gets the tourists to spend their money directly into the hands of poor people. Mitchel and Ashley (2010) have argued that community based cultural tourism can play a critical role in stimulating economic development, complementing, and diversifying local sources of livelihood, improving the welfare and well-being of host communities, and in alleviating poverty.

Community based tourism ventures present Maasai women with a rare opportunity to actively participate in tourism, take ownership and exert closer local control over the industry. Studies suggest that CBT not only tackles poverty through income generation, but it also empowers the poor and marginalized groups, including women. The CBT is a relatively easy form of tourism to enter compared to a variety of other economic sectors. However, little research has been conducted to explore how Maasai women’s involvement in cultural bomas tourism has empowered them. Thus, there is a paucity of empirical literature on the empowerment of women through tourism in Kenya as a case study in a developing country. This study, therefore, sought to establish the ways in which cultural bomas tourism, as one variant of community-based tourism, is fostering the empowerment of Maasai women so that they can contribute meaningfully to sustainable development in the Amboseli region of Kenya.

1.1 Women’s Empowerment and Cultural Tourism

Empowerment according to the World Bank refers to *“the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”* (World Bank, 2011: 1). In the same vein, Kabeer (2001) has defined the concept empowerment as *“the expansion of people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”*. These definitions imply that empowerment is a multidimensional and deeply contextual concept. It is a process and not just a state or an outcome (Moswete & Lacey, 2015). While there is little consensus on the exact definition, empowerment is understood as a multidimensional and deeply contextual concept which is widely understood to include equal access to productive resources and opportunities, same rights, and obligations for both

genders, self-determination, freedom, or the power to make independent decisions about one's life (Bishop & Bowman, 2014; Moswete and Lacey, 2015).

Empowerment of host communities has long been recognised as a precondition for sustainable tourism development (Joo et al., 2020). Research has shown that tourism makes very useful contributions to the empowerment of people and communities in different locations and cultural contexts (Maruyama & Woosnam, 2020; Scheyvens, 2000). Scholars Joo et al. (2020) and Maruyama & Woosnam (2020) have argued that empowerment is important in marginal areas and to marginalized groups, including women. However, different scholars have proposed different models to guide the academic analysis of women's empowerment (Joo et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2005; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 2000). This article will utilise the four domains of empowerment proposed by Scheyvens (1999, 2000) namely the economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions to analyse tourism-induced women empowerment (Kabeer, 2005; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 2000). Given that women, compared to men, often have lower access to education in a variety of contexts, coupled with the widely recognized positive impacts of education on the above four aspects of empowerment, educational empowerment is added to the proposed women's empowerment framework (Kabeer, 2005; Moswete & Lacey, 2015).

Economic empowerment has been defined by Timothy (2002: 152) as the "*long-term financial benefits spread throughout a destination community*". (Joo et al. (2020) Kabeer (2005) and Scheyvens (2000) further state that tourism can promote economic empowerment through opening new markets for locally produced goods and when tourists spend directly into the hands of poor people, thus leading to improvements of women's power to own and exert control over productive resources, such as capital, land, employment, earnings, entrepreneurial opportunities, and economic competence in and outside the domestic spheres. Political empowerment mainly involves giving women a voice in the planning, organisation, and management of tourism enterprises; the inclusion of women in leadership positions; political representation and participation in the decision-making processes in the family, community, and wider society (Joo et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2005; Scheyvens, 1999). Social empowerment encompasses a complex array of factors, including improved family and social status, social networks and relations, safety in family and society, equality, freedom over marriage, social inclusion, and improvements in social institutions (Joo et al., 2020; Scheyvens, 2000). Psychological

empowerment emphasizes the ‘power within’, includes self-confidence, critical consciousness, respect of self and from others, fulfillment, leadership, and creativity (Joo et al., 2020; Scheyvens, 1999). A lack of psychological empowerment would hinder the realization of the other empowerment dimensions.

Education has been suggested as an additional dimension of empowerment due to its important linkages to the other dimensions (Kabeer, 2005; Moswete & Lacey, 2015). For example, improved access to education can significantly improve women’s cognitive abilities which, in turn, enhances the capacity to reflect and act upon changing conditions; gain access to information; and develop new ideas (Kabeer, 2005). Educational empowerment usually includes women’s initiation into education; enhanced recognition on the part of the self, family, community, and the wider society, of the importance of education to women; improved educational opportunities, including formal education and skill training and capacity improvement (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 1999).

The dimensions of empowerment that have been identified are not independent but interact and, at times, overlap (Scheyvens, 2000). For example, psychological empowerment might be enhanced by improved education, economic competence, enhanced social status and political enfranchisement (Boserup, 1970; Scheyvens, 2000). Moswete & Lacey (2015) have shown that social empowerment can be realised with or without political or economic empowerment. Furthermore, the empowerment dimensions exhibit different forms at different scales from the self, family, and community to the wider society (Kabeer, 2005). For example, educational empowerment can be seen as a higher educational pursuit for individuals, enhanced education opportunities for women in the family, community and wider society and recognition of its importance and efforts to improve access to education for women (Kabeer, 2005; Sha & Ma, 2012). Social empowerment may involve enhancement of women’s status in the family, social status improvement in the community and greater recognition in the wider society.

1.2 The Amboseli Region

The Amboseli region is in the southern part of Kenya. The region is characterised as a semi-arid to arid zone with low and unreliable rainfall which makes water a key limitation to development (Reid et al., 1999). The area is, however, blessed with a rich diversity of flora and fauna, which also supports a flourishing tourism industry. Many of the inhabitants of the Amboseli region are the indigenous

Maasai pastoralists whose livelihoods are dependent on subsistence livestock herding. Many local communities in this region depend on the natural environment directly or indirectly for their survival (Ondicho, 2010). As a result, there is significant pressure on the environment leading to high levels of poverty, especially among women (Ondicho, 2018). Though international tourism generates significant amounts of revenue, a large majority of the Maasai people who coexist with wildlife and bear most of the costs of conservation which include human - wildlife conflicts, food insecurity, and natural resource depletion, have not benefited much from the tourism industry and are often sidelined from tourism development (Mwale, 2000).

The Maasai people living within the vicinity of the Amboseli National Park have formed groups which have invested in cultural bomas tourism and assumed an entrepreneurial role. While the Maasai were previously excluded from tourism, with the onset of cultural bomas tourism, an increasing number of local people, particularly women, are joining tourism not only to complement and expand the sources of their livelihoods but also to alleviate poverty and enhance economic advancement. Maasai women, therefore, present a superb case study for analysing the contribution of cultural bomas tourism to women's empowerment.

1.3 Methodology

This research endeavour employed many techniques in data collection and analysis. First, direct personal observations during interactions with men and women in the cultural bomas and key people in tourism, including those in the public private sector in the Amboseli region. The author has also lived and conducted consultancy and ethnographic research in the Amboseli region. Previous research by this author has focused on community power and political relations arising from Maasai involvement in tourism development. Consultancies by the author in this region took place in 2015, 2017, and 2019 during which intense observations were made yielding a veritable amount of data.

Secondly, primary data was collected from six Focus Group Discussions comprising 8 to 10 Maasai women directly involved in cultural bomas tourism. During the interviews the researcher tried to create a relaxed, casual, and comfortable environment for all the participants. This enabled all the interviewees to freely participate in the discussions of such issues as their personal attitudes and perceptions towards tourism and its impacts on the daily life of Maasai women, main constraints, and prospects, Maasai's women's involvement in tourism and changes to their lives, and their motivations for undertaking

entrepreneurial activities in tourism. In addition, the discussions also sought to get details on the role of women in cultural village tourism, the benefits that accrued to them, how these benefits were shared among the different stakeholders, and how tourism contributed to their empowerment. The interviewing stopped when no new information was being generated, suggesting that saturation was reached. The FGDs were facilitated by the author while a note taker took notes. However, each of the FGD sessions which lasted for about an hour were tape recorded as well.

Supplementary data was collected from individual interviews with 8 key informants who included 22 women leaders, 2 development workers, 2 administrators (chiefs), and 2 staffers from the Kenya Wildlife Service. These people were included in this study because of their expert knowledge of tourism in Amboseli. All the key informant interviews were conversational discussions on the principal issues under examination. These conversations promoted a deeper understanding of the issues discussed in the group interviews. The data obtained from the interviews provided very useful backup data on women's empowerment through the cultural bomas tourism. Supplementary evidence was also taken from relevant published and unpublished documents. The available literature was also used to confirm and disconfirm the core findings.

The resultant data were largely qualitative, necessitating the use of thematic and content analysis techniques. Data obtained from individual and group interviews were transcribed and translated into the English language. The written transcripts were reviewed and coded, and emerging themes were broken down into categories and sub-categories which were interpreted iteratively. Emerging and recurring themes were identified and grouped together. Interview transcripts were then analysed using content and thematic techniques. Major themes were identified and triangulated following the five dimensions of empowerment highlighted in the literature review above and used in the findings to describe how cultural bomas tourism was empowering women.

2.0 Results and Discussion

The article sought to investigate the contribution of cultural bomas tourism to the empowerment of Maasai women in the Amboseli region of Kenya. To do this, the article has used the five domains of empowerment, namely, political, economic, social, educational, and psychological as proposed by Scheyvens (2000) to analyse the ways cultural bomas empower Maasai women.

2.1 Economic Empowerment

One of the most important ways cultural bomas tourism is empowering Maasai women is through earning them income. For most women in this study tourism was their main source of income (Ritsma & Ongaro, 2002). All the women in this study agreed that their personal incomes from tourism had increased considerably, enabling them to spend more on food and other necessities, leading to improved living conditions at the individual and household levels. Much of the income Maasai women earned was from selling handcrafts and beadworks (curios) directly to tourists. These curios were manufactured by Maasai female entrepreneurs using locally available materials. However, it was difficult to obtain data on individual incomes because no records are kept by the female entrepreneurs. Through personal observations it was estimated that each female entrepreneur on average sold between US\$ 100-200 worth of curios a week. The amount of income earned by each woman varies depending on whether it is low or high season. This income from tourism was a much welcome economic opportunity for unsalaried Maasai women without education and skills to secure formal employment. Cultural bomas tourism was basically empowering Maasai women through boosting production and creating a ready market for handicrafts manufactured by Maasai women and enabling them to sell slightly larger quantities at better prices.

Scholars Manyara (2006) and Mbaiwa (2015) suggest that tourism can generate additional income for poor [women] families and households which can contribute to economic diversification. Data from group interviews revealed that, without this extra-income, many Maasai women would not participate in cultural bomas tourism. Most participants stated that they perceived cultural bomas tourism as a viable means of earning income to diversify and supplement their livelihoods (Charnley, 2005; Mbaiwa, 2015). It can be argued that while the income from tourism was not huge, it was providing women and their families with a golden opportunity to increase their incomes, part of which they used to support community development projects and to provide social services that are available to all community members. Cultural bomas tourism can, therefore, be described as a strategy that can promote women's empowerment.

The other way tourism was economically empowering Maasai women was through self-employment. It was observed that nearly all of the tourism entrepreneurs in the cultural bomas are women. The study established that these women are drawn into the cultural bomas tourism because it offered flexible hours of work and schedules that are easy to combine with domestic duties.

Tourism has empowered Maasai women to become self-employed and supplement family income from the comfort of their homes. Most Maasai women in tourism entrepreneurship are without formal education and, therefore, cannot find employment in the formal tourism sectors. The flexibility of the source of income (the activity done at home, in their own time and with low inputs) made cultural bomas tourism particularly attractive to Maasai women. Many interviewees commented that tourism enabled them to earn extra income which they used according to their own priorities thus their enhancing economic independence.

I am glad that I have an income and do not need to ask for money from my husband. Now I can purchase anything that I would like without begging for money from my husband. With my income I can pay fees for our children, buy food for the family, and help my siblings and parents. I like it here because I work in the same place where I live so if someone is sick in the family, I can care for them during the day when I take a break from serving our guests unlike someone who works in the fields far from their homes. I am also able to attend other family and community social gatherings.

The study established that while the income Maasai women earn from tourism is not huge, this was perceived by all the study participants as a good thing because the income has enabled them to take up additional roles both in the public and private realms. This has, in turn, enhanced Maasai women's status within the family and community levels. Furthermore, the participants stated that they invested the income earned from tourism in buying livestock, without consulting their husbands as custom dictates, thereby reducing their vulnerabilities, and increasing their capacities. Existing studies have shown that participation in community-based tourism gradually increases women's financial autonomy, which is a form of women's empowerment (Ondicho, 2010; Scheyvens, 2007). In this respect cultural bomas tourism becomes something that Maasai women can ill afford to ignore or live without because of the socio-economic benefits it engenders.

2.2 Social Empowerment

Traditionally Maasai women are considered inferior to men. However, their involvement in cultural bomas tourism has enhanced the Maasai women's

socioeconomic standing within the family and community. For the individual, recognition of their own value and their contribution to the family and community were frequently cited by interviewees. Even though the status of Maasai women in the family is still low, their involvement in tourism greatly enhanced their economic competence and self-recognition which were a manifestation of advancements in social standing and freedom at the family level. Most of the women in this study stated that they were happier because tourism has not only brought them into contact with foreign tourists but has also enhanced their English language and communication skills.

Generally, I get to intermingle with tourists from different parts of the world and through them, I benefit from cultural interactions and exchanges. When some are not in a hurry, they share stories from their countries with me. There is a cultural interaction with visitors.

The participants of this study indicated that participation in cultural bomas tourism was viewed positively as being appropriate and in tandem with Maasai traditions at the community level. Cultural bomas tourism has given Maasai women an opportunity to expand their social networks without leaving home. Specifically, they had formed women groups, including merry-go-round, welfare and income generating groups within the cultural bomas to support each other, improve their family status, and social standing in the community. These women groups have not only promoted a sense of cohesion and integrity but they have also strengthened their self-worth through meetings, discussions, and doing beadwork. Maasai women have subsequently gained a certain level of social respect which has, in turn, elicited positive comments from the rest of the community because they recognize their contribution to bring benefits to the whole community through tourism activities.

Cultural bomas tourism grants Maasai women high flexibility in location and time which makes it easier for them to achieve an acceptable balance between business and domestic work. This is much appreciated by participants:

My family is very supportive to my entrepreneurship in tourism, as it is flexible. If there is domestic work to do, I can easily do it after tourists have left. Working in tourism fits my schedule very well. I enjoy coming doing beadworks and chatting with fellow women.

This kind of job I do has helped me find friends. I mean, I have white people who used to purchase from me as friends.....when they were here, I taught them how to cook traditional bread and other dishes. I taught them about Maasai women and life. They are my friends now.

Interviewees talked about the happiness of intermingling with tourists from different backgrounds and sharing their cultural heritage and community lifestyles with them. The chance to look at and talk to tourists in a remote area like Amboseli was valuable for many Maasai women. Performing ritual song and dance and enlightening tourists about their culture not only confirms the Maasai's unique cultural identity but also presents Maasai women with an opportunity to share their visions with visitors about their future aspirations in tourism. Many interviewees stated that the exchange of ideas and experiences with tourists was a welcome aspect of tourism. Even though women still must maintain their traditional role in the family, the recognition of their ability to contribute to family and society is increasing.

2.3 Psychological Empowerment

The study established that Maasai women have gained self-confidence that they can achieve their dreams through entrepreneurship in cultural bomas tourism. Most women stated that they have built their confidence to handle their handcraft businesses alone, earn income, and make independent decisions on their expenditures. At the individual level, all interviewees agreed that participation in the cultural bomas tourism has enhanced their self-confidence and encouraged positive self-evaluation and recognition of personal ability and value. In addition, respect from family members and tourists or other visitors are pointed out and appreciated by interviewees:

There are different types of visitors and reporters coming to our working space in the cultural bomas to see us doing beadworks. They take many pictures and speak highly of our beads. It is good recognition for us. We feel very happy and proud to know that.

With life fully confined to the cultural bomas fellow women working together provide chances to chat, exchange and share ideas and feelings, enhancing their psychological and emotional state. Two Key Informants stated that most Maasai women working in tourism often demonstrated strong sense of self-confidence and self-recognition emanating from their feelings of achievements gained from starting and operating a business and bringing many Maasai women together. Creativity, self-consciousness, and self-motivation are important psychological attributes gained through the process of operating a handicraft business.

Of course, cultural bomas has opened the door for us to sell our beads! It is a meaningful career. Not only have I benefited from the women around me, but they have also benefited from me!.....If not for tourism, we would never have had a chance to leave scattered homes. Running a business is much more complicated than the making beads. It is not only about a good quality product, but about management, organisation, sales and marketing and many other things. We are still learning.

2.4 Political Empowerment

The political empowerment of Maasai women was also mentioned during the individual and group interviews. Interviewees revealed that most women in the cultural bomas tourism do not pursue political power or desire to get involved in political decisions. Their attention revolves around their family and close social networks. Therefore, at the individual level, most women in the cultural bomas do not exhibit higher political empowerment. Nevertheless, through participation in meetings, they have gained some level of political empowerment as they have increased their visibility and prominently featured in leadership positions within the cultural bomas. Participation in meetings and other decision-making bodies has provided opportunities for Maasai women to make their voices heard and their concerns addressed. Although there is some small improvement in political empowerment, it is not substantial when compared to the other four aspects. However, even this is improving slowly at the community and society levels.

2.5 Education

While education is normally considered as a very important component of social, economic, and psychological empowerment, in this study it is an independent indicator of women empowerment and as a result, it is evaluated separately here.

Although the cultural bomas tourism had not influenced any of the women in this study to pursue formal education, most of the interviewees indicated that they used part of the income from tourism to pay fees and purchase school materials for their children and, sometimes, siblings. Additionally, they indicated that they had attended training seminars and workshops offered by different organisations within the community. Such training sessions have greatly enhanced the Maasai women's capacity to manage their businesses and to undertake joint actions in tourism development. In this respect, it can be argued that Maasai women have gained prominence in their community through the acquisition of new business management skills which have not only allowed them to define mutual objectives and aspirations but also to communicate more confidently with their clients. As one woman remarked:

In the past, we used to feel scared to communicate with tourists, but we attended trainings held in the community, we were encouraged and advised on how to conduct business with tourists. Now we are starting to confidently converse with tourists in English.

Generally, Maasai women have gained extensive knowledge working with other stakeholders on a range of tourism development issues. This has not only strengthened Maasai women's relations with their neighbours but also has enhanced their organisational capacity to pro-actively work with outsiders.

3.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that cultural bomas tourism has great potential to empower women through entrepreneurship, income, and job creation. While the benefits that accrued to Maasai women were meagre, and not evenly distributed among all community members, they were playing role in empowering women in five key spheres of empowerment namely: economic, social, political, psychological, and educational. The study revealed that cultural bomas tourism has freed Maasai women from their previous burdens of dependency on men generally, and specifically husbands. Involvement in cultural bomas tourism has offered Maasai women a rare opportunity to earn direct income which they spent as they wished. This article confirms the findings of previous studies which suggest that cultural tourism has great potential to promote gender equality and women empowerment if women have unlimited opportunities to actively participate in entrepreneurship, ownership, and control of this development process (Ondicho, 2010, Irandu and Shah, 2014).

As is the case in other developing countries, Maasai women had chosen to engage in cultural bomas tourism as a lucrative mechanism for earning income to supplement and diversify their livelihoods as well as attain self-sufficiency at the household level. The finding that the number of women involved in cultural bomas tourism was slightly higher than that of men indicates gradual empowerment. As a result, Maasai women were increasingly becoming more visible in virtually all spheres of community life, including leadership, political, and management positions. In much of the existing literature, tourism is said to be a service oriented, labour intensive, and multidimensional sector with linkages to many other sectors of the economy thus, providing larger opportunity for employment. Hence, it has a wider scope of empowering Maasai women not only through entrepreneurship and benefit sharing but also through granting women a chance to voice their concerns and achieve their aspirations in life

The cultural bomas tourism represents an ideal case study of an indigenously homegrown initiative with enormous potential for promoting gender equality and empowering women employed in their own small-scale handicraft businesses. Certainly, cultural bomas tourism afforded Maasai women a wide range of empowering experiences, including greater opportunities to make independent decisions and choices, engage in cross-cultural interactions and communications with foreign tourists, develop friendships, and to enhance business and language skills. While most Maasai women have traditionally been sidelined from tourism development and benefits, the cultural bomas provide new

and welcome pathways to redress previous inequalities thus leading to the empowerment of women because of the relative ease for many poor and uneducated women to join (World Bank, 2009). Thus, it can be concluded that homegrown tourism initiatives have enormous potential to generate income for women, improve their status, contribute to poverty reduction, and achieve sustainable development goals.

Through their involvement in tourism Maasai women have experienced psychological empowerment. This was expressed in terms of increased entrepreneurial drive and belief that working in the cultural bomas tourism could empower them to improve their own living conditions and those of their families. Women in this study had gained the self-confidence not only to make individual and group decisions but also to determine their future destiny (see Hovorka, 2012). By and large, working alongside their husbands and their husbands granting them the freedom to start their businesses and earn their own income made Maasai women feel supported and encouraged in their quest for empowerment. They regarded their husbands as potential partners in their empowerment which was a good thing.

In conclusion, cultural-bomas tourism is one of the important sources for empowering Maasai women. In Amboseli the cultural bomas tourism is increasingly contributing to women's empowerment albeit on a small scale and at a slow pace. However, there are some teething problems that need to be addressed before the Maasai women's empowerment could be fully realized. Maasai women need capacity building, greater educational opportunities, and financial support to enable them to engage in beneficial entrepreneurial activities, thereby experience greater levels of freedom, autonomy, and agency. Training and capacity building should include entrepreneurship, management, motivation/confidence (empowerment), and leadership skills. The government should put in place laws to regulate the operation of the cultural bomas tourism. The government should also initiate alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism that have greater potential to deliver more benefits to the marginalized groups than does wildlife safari tourism.

For Maasai women to be empowered through cultural bomas tourism, it is imperative for them to be actively and meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, and review of the tourism policies in Kenya and beyond (Landorf, 2009; Scheyvens, 2000). Both men and women should be granted equal opportunities in the cultural bomas tourism. The study recommends further empirical research amongst other communities in the country to validate the

findings of the current study and create new strategies for the further empowerment of Maasai women.

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