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**A SOCIO ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM IN LAMBWE VALLEY AREA (LVA)- HOMA-BAY DISTRICT, KENYA.**

DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis reports the results of a study conducted to assess the economic potential of ecotourism development and the demand for nature conservation and recreation among the local people in Lambwe Valley Area (LVA), Kenya with special attention to Ruma National Park. The study objectives were to assess the economic potential of ecotourism in LVA; to investigate the socio economic constraints to nature conservation among the local people; to determine whether there is a relationship between local people's interest towards ecotourism development and the socioeconomic factors: age, literacy level, sex, benefits and willingness to pay to conserve LVA; and to seek possible approaches to overcoming obstacles to LVA's development as an ecotourism venue.

A multi stage sampling technique with a constant sampling fraction of 30% was used. A total of 405 household heads were interviewed using questionnaires which formed a basis for the collection of primary and secondary data. Socio economic factors and physical attributes affecting ecotourism development were also assessed. An econometric multi-equation model describing people's interest towards ecotourism development was fitted to determine whether there were direct factors influencing people's readiness to support ecotourism development in LVA. Observations on physical attributes that can attract ecotourists, tools like Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) and the Chi Square analysis were also used to estimate the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) and significance of parameters assessed.

Data on physical, cultural and aesthetic features showed that LVA has high economic potential as an ecotourist resort. The observations on attractive physical attributes of

LVA rated 82.6% on the study's assessment scale set by the researcher. The BCA (at 12% discount rate) yielded a benefit-cost ratio of 1.156 and a Net Present Value of over Ksh 3 million between 1985-1994. Model OLS and Chi square analyses showed that interests in ecotourism development in LVA were significantly dependent on the socio- economic factors (age, literacy level, sex, benefits and conservation costs) investigated. The estimated LVA's annual recreation benefits stood at about Ksh 2.9 million whereas the marginal willingness to pay for a change in amenity services of the site was over Ksh 3,000 per year.

The major constraints to ecotourism development in the area were crop damages by game, water shortage, disease prevalence and threat to life. However 73% of the households were seen to benefit from the park and the forests. Measures taken by the surrounding communities against game intrusion include fencing and guarding. Based on the data it was concluded that LVA is economically viable as an ecotourism site. Recommendations included: fencing of the park; inclusion of women in some activities; initiation of controlled and rational exploitation of forest products from the forest and the park; and formation of pressure groups against degradation of land.

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