

Linking Travelers' Philanthropy to Ecosystem  
Conservation, Community Partnerships, and Local Empowerment:  
Experiences  
of Dorobo Safaris and the Dorobo Fund for Tanzania

What I am going to do today in the short time we have is distill 20 years of experience into a few lessons or insights into the interplay between philanthropy, tourism, community welfare and conservation.

The world and Tanzania were very different places in the early 1980's when Dorobo Safaris began operations. With respect to tourism, Tanzania was sleeping. The border with Kenya had been closed disallowing Kenyan operators and tourists flying into Nairobi from visiting Tanzania. The oil crisis of the 70's and the burden to Tanzania of a costly war with Uganda's Iddi Amin, coupled with misguided macro economic policies meant that infrastructure had deteriorated, even basic goods were not readily available (I bet you didn't know that toilet paper was a luxury item) and tourism was tough to pull off. This is the period the Kenyan's appropriately coined the saying "in Kenya it may be dog eat dog but in Tanzania it's dog eat nothing".

On the positive side, the National Parks and wildlife resources in adjoining areas were in good shape. And, they were very uncongested. For example, one could just drive into the Ngorongoro Crater and camp without prior booking.

From the beginning, Dorobo operated in both protected and community areas. The draw of community areas, which had high resource value at the time, was that one was free to walk and visitors were privileged to learn from people with deep connections and knowledge of the land and natural resources. In these early years, our entry point to community areas was relationships with individuals – influential elders or village chairpersons – individuals we had either worked with in previous jobs or had serendipitously come to know through the years. Consequently, other than a few community token benefits in forms such as contributions to classrooms, water projects or maize grinding mills, the benefits were also largely to individuals and on an ad hoc unstructured basis. The community contributions were based on requests by the community for help and dependent on our ability and willingness to respond.

**This phase I would categorize as falling into what has been the general model of philanthropy or conventional charity – which we can think of as a ‘first tier’ level of engagement. While there is giving back to the land and communities it is primarily on the terms of the business or donor rather than the community - Philanthropy which is potentially more patronizing than empowering.**

By the mid to late 1980’s it was clear to us that we needed to move towards a more sustainable model in terms of tourism, conservation and community welfare. In the face of encroachment of wildlife and livestock habitat by farming interests, a burgeoning charcoal industry, mining and unsustainable wildlife harvest, it was clear that the trends ran counter to both longer term tourism viability and conservation goals. The basic tenets and environment of pastoral and hunter gatherer economies were also being undermined with huge economic and social repercussions to the majority of people in these communities. An antidote to these trends wasn’t clear.

Then two positive developments happened simultaneously in 1991. With the help of ADDO the Catholic Development Organization, many of the villages we were involved with got title deeds to customary lands, giving villages clear rights over defined areas. At the same time, the first draft of the new wildlife policy came out. The draft policy was extremely exciting for it embodied true devolution of control over wildlife to communities and therefore a framework that would allow the seemingly intractable trends to be reversed. As an aside, it’s now 16 years later, the issues & solutions are much more complicated and we still are uncertain what new policy and act we’ll be dealt.

As background to this one needs to understand that the National Parks in N Tanzania are dependent on community lands for ecosystem integrity. A good example of this is Tarangire National Park with 2,600 sq km of land under protected status. This is centred on the Tarangire river which provides year round water and is the dry season refuge for the large mammals in the entire ecosystem. Yet, the migratory cycle of Tarangire’s main large mammal species encompasses almost 30,000 sq km or more than 10 X the area set aside. What this means is that for more than half of the year, the bulk of Tarangire’s large mammals are found outside the Park on

community lands in pursuit of the mineral and nutritional requirements for calving & lactation which are lacking in the Park.

This highlights the importance of real devolution to communities over wildlife in order to create the incentives necessary to safeguard this resource. The importance is not only of value to the National economy because of the integrity of National Parks but also for the potential role of wildlife as a locally based and controlled means of development. There are corn fields and cattle all over the world but wildebeest and lion are much rarer and therefore potentially much more valuable.

We wrote a short proposal to the Director of Wildlife explaining the concept, it's rationale for tourism, local livelihoods and conservation and requested WD permission & support to go to villages and negotiate tourism agreements. Given the new progressive policy, our proposal was initially endorsed but then undermined in subsequent years (and until now) by entrenched interests which ensured that control remained with Central Govt.

The next step was to approach the villages. Initially we selected areas in two villages on the eastern boundaries of Tarangire and Serengeti National Parks, respectively. These areas were chosen due to existing community relationships, scenic and wildlife value, proximity to the Parks allowing easy incorporation in a circuit and because they were both livestock grazing reserve areas and only part of the pastoral cycle in difficult seasons or years. Additionally, both areas are important pieces of the Parks ecosystem in terms of migratory corridors and spill over of wildlife.

In short what we proposed to the villages was the following:

- 1) exclusive tourism rights for a specific area of land; this did not mean that other companies could not use the area, rather that all tourism activities either were operated through Dorobo or under agreements that respected the guidelines and benefit agreement between the village and Dorobo;
- 2) land use restrictions for the area that allowed seasonal grazing but no permanent residence, no cultivation, no charcoal extraction and no unlicensed hunting. In effect this was a formalization of an integration between existing indigenous land

- use and use for tourism. The areas concerned were traditionally used for seasonal grazing and reserve grazing during drought years or in the case of hunter gatherers for their traditional economic pursuits. The community as a whole was not losing anything, only gaining. Note however, that individuals in one village, some of them community members, did lose access to farms in the area. Because of the tourism contract, pending requests for a total of 12,000 acres of farmland were refused;
- 3) a guaranteed annual fee plus bed night fees for camping in the area paid into a village account.

These few conditions short and simple by in large make up the tourism agreements we have maintained now with several villages for close to 20 years. Some of the lessons which stand out from this experience follow:

- 1) As a bottom line, an operator/tourist enterprise must begin by recognizing that the village is a legal entity which has rights over land and resources. Only under such a premise can a true partnership be built rather than a relationship which is patronizing. Ideally, all traveler's philanthropy projects should be built on an egalitarian mutual relationship and not used as a substitute for it.
- 2) Transparency and trust are the key to stability. For their own long term benefit, operators must make an effort to ensure that the partnership is not hijacked by a few influential individuals or even the village government. The village assembly (analogous to a town hall mtg in the US) as the final legal authority for decision making must be involved.
- 3) Contracts and agreements should be simple, clearly understandable and incorporate security for both sides recognizing that different models and contexts will require different agreements e.g. capital investment of a hotel vs. mobile camping.
- 4) Contracts should when possible include land use conditions which ensure longer term sustainability of the partnership. Land use conditions should have conservation value and where possible build on and support indigenous resource use patterns.
- 5) Benefits in addition to individual training and employment opportunities should be in the form of monetary payments into

village accounts. While this may result in embezzlement by a few in some cases, in the longer term it will lead to village capacity for financial management, to hold leaders accountable and to implement their own development priorities. Again, this underscores the importance of involvement by more than a few leaders.

**These structured concession agreements between tourism operators and communities are what I call the second tier of involvement. While philanthropy can play a role in these by adding value, by nature they are more in line with the concept of fair trade and can even obviate the need for philanthropy of the first tier –conventional charity – since communities under negotiated agreements are getting a fair deal and can take charge of their own development priorities. For example in Loliondo on the east border of the Serengeti, over \$300,000 of community fees were generated in 2007 by a handful of operators divided among 7 village accounts. While philanthropy can provide the catalyst, it is impossible for philanthropic contributions to substitute for the benefits of fair and equitable mutual business relationships in which the community controls the revenues generated by their land, resources, skills and work.**

**A further initiative which has developed within the last few years but which is built on the experiences and relationships developed through the years of concession agreements, is the concept of conservation land easements. Dorobo spearheaded negotiations on behalf of a group of operators (mobile and lodge) with Terrat village to pay an annual fee for protection of critical calving habitat for Tarangire wildlife most notably wildebeest and zebra. While this area is not directly used for tourism by any of the concerned parties, conservation of the Simanjiro plains is recognized as crucial to the integrity of Tarangire National Park and therefore sustainable tourism enterprises in Tarangire.**

**Because of the indirect link with day to day operations, it is unlikely that operators will be willing to support ancillary activities and costs such as village game scouts and monitoring. Here is where classic philanthropy – the first tier – can contribute to and build on a viable model.**

While the concession – fair trade – model was a success, it became clear that the pressures facing indigenous communities were increasing and mere pieces of the puzzle, as in parcels of land set aside for tourism and grazing or tourism and hunting and gathering, were inadequate to equip communities to respond to these pressures.

The 1980's were a time of profound change in Tanzania. The socialist policies of founding President Julius Nyerere were abandoned by the middle of the decade, and economic reforms adopted which promoted privatizing lands and resources and increasing foreign investment into the country. Local communities were able to improve their rights to land by securing title deeds, but in many places this only meant that village leaders sold land off to individuals. In other places, the promotion of foreign investment meant that the government attempted to take large areas of community land and allocate them to outside investors. National parks and game reserves continued to expand onto lands formerly used by pastoralists and other rural communities, with the reviving tourism industry providing a renewed rationale for taking over these lands. Meanwhile, population growth meant that pressure on land was increasing, with people immigrating into formerly lightly-populated areas and more land being converted to agriculture, even in semi-arid savannahs traditionally used for livestock grazing.

By the mid-1990's, we in Dorobo had become convinced that a new community-based organization was needed to help local communities address these resource management and governance issues. We had watched over a decade of largely ineffectual activity and millions of dollars spent by international conservation organizations seemingly unable to address the core issues which would allow communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources, the key in our minds, to local livelihood enhancement and conservation.

It was time to try a different tack. Several of the former KIPOC (the original Maasai activist ngo) staff from Loliondo were recruited. These committed individuals had roots in the communities and experience facilitating local development processes. In order to channel philanthropic funds, the Dorobo Fund, a 501 C3, was registered in the US and a locally implementing Trust, the Ujamaa Community Resource Trust was born in Tanzania.

The mission of the Ujamaa Community Resource Trust (UCRT) is to improve the livelihoods of local and indigenous communities in northern Tanzania through sustainable natural resource management. The UCRT works with 8 different ethnic groups in 35 villages spread across 9 districts of northern Tanzania.

UCRT's work is built around empowering communities with legal rights over lands and resources and building the skills, knowledge, and management capacity at the village and household level so that these communities can take advantage of the livelihood opportunities provided by the resources around them. In this way, UCRT seeks to transform the marginalized into enabled groups of people who can work to take control of their developmental future in today's changing world. The UCRT is about catalyzing positive change in people's lives, environment, and communities.

UCRT's approach works to integrate issues of political empowerment, rural development, and environmental conservation. By developing economic opportunities for local communities to manage and benefit from natural resources, people's lives are improved and at the same time the incentives are strengthened for sustainable conservation of northern Tanzania's ecosystems by the communities who depend on their resources. This approach thereby addresses the fundamental interconnections between cultural diversity, rural economies, and biological diversity.

The Dorobo Fund and UCRT are not nor were ever meant to be an appendage of or to further the business interests of Dorobo Safaris the tourist business. In the few villages in which there is overlap, Dorobo Safaris only benefits if it conducts tourism in a fair and transparent way. UCRT is staffed by over 20 Tanzanians from the villages it works in.

Success at the grassroots level has attracted support so that the Dorobo Fund which was in earlier years the only donor is now one of several with support coming from as disparate organizations as the Wildlife Conservation Society, N.Y. on one hand (conservation) and Oxfam Ireland (social activism) on the other extreme. This is a reflection on the success of UCRT to integrate socio-cultural,

economic and ecological spheres into a holistic strategy of empowerment by local communities.

This then is what I will call the third tier of philanthropy. Philanthropy it is but in contrast to most conventional charity embodies the twin goals of social justice and environmental sustainability. This is 'hard' philanthropy and the kind that requires a long view, patience, learning and adaptability. Ultimately, the sustainability of tourism and related businesses in Tanzania come down to the challenging issues of local capacity and empowerment. If Philanthropy is willing and able to confront the challenges we face, then it must strive for this third tier.

All of us here likely have a positive definition and feeling about the concept of Philanthropy – in short giving to need. What I hope to have spurred is thought and debate that reflects on conventional charity and results perhaps in action that leads to alternative models of Philanthropy.

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**'Daudi Peterson grew up in Tanzania and carried out pioneering studies of wildlife distributions in the pastoralist landscape of the Maasai Steppe during the 1970s, before founding Dorobo Safaris with his brothers Mike and Thad in the 1980s. They established the Dorobo Fund for Tanzania, which helped found the Ujamaa-Community Resource Trust in the late 1990s as a way of addressing rural conservation challenges, local livelihoods, and community empowerment in an integrated and grassroots manner.'**