The Expansion of Ecotourism and its Implications for Tanzania's Maasai

Kathryn Hogan

Presenter: Kathryn Hogan
International Relations & Diplomacy

Advisors: Prof. Edward Malecki, Geography & Prof. David Kraybill, Agricultural Economics

The Maasai are a group of semi-nomadic pastoralists that have traditionally lived in the Serengeti Plains. Historically, the Maasai have faced a plethora of land tenure issues. The government and environmentalists have created challenges for the Maasai in the past, and today, the tourism industry is creating issues as well. Tourism companies often advertise as ecotourism companies, implying that they embody the principles of ecotourism and execute these principles in their business models. However, this is not always the case. The impact of tourism on the Maasai has attracted the attention of non-governmental organizations, international organizations, journalists and bloggers from all over the world. The purpose of this study is to examine how ecotourism manifests itself in Tanzania and the implications it will have for the Maasai. There is a myriad of definitions for ecotourism. Various organizations and scholars have put forth definitions for ecotourism, and this study will analyze them in order to determine an applicable framework for ecotourism. This framework will then be used to evaluate the tourism companies that operate in Tanzania and affect the Maasai. These evaluations will allow us to discern between companies that truly practice ecotourism from those that do not. My methodology integrates various sources. My research is a synthesis of printed sources, online sources, historical documents, reports from non-governmental organizations, accounts of various journalists and bloggers, and reflections from my personal experience in Tanzania. Current research shows that spurious ecotourism companies do exist in Tanzania, and as a result, the Maasai are negatively affected. Current research also shows that genuine ecotourism companies operate in Tanzania and can empower the Maasai. This study suggests that ecotourism can positively impact local groups such as the Maasai; however, companies must truly emulate ecotourism principles in order to make these positive impacts.