

## **Using Tows Matrix as a Strategic Decision-Making Tool in Managing KWS Product Portfolio**

*1. Mugo Mary 2. Kamau Florence 3. Mukabi Mary 4. Kemunto Christine*

- 1. Multimedia University of Kenya*
- 2. Multimedia University of Kenya*
- 3. Multimedia University of Kenya*
- 4. Multimedia University of Kenya*

### **Abstract**

*In today's changing business environment, product portfolio management is a vital issue. Majority of companies are developing, applying and attaining better results from managing their product portfolio effectively, as the success of any organization is dependent on how well it manages its products and services especially in an unpredictable business environment. The aim of this study was to understand the concept of SWOT analysis as a decision making tool that can be used to manage the product portfolio of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) with the aim of maximizing returns and staying competitive in a dynamic business environment. The study was conducted in the eight KWS conservation areas. Primary data was collected through semi structured questionnaires and in depth interviews. Collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Research findings revealed that each conservancy had its own strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities; some unique and others similar. The most common strengths were the unique products offered by each conservancy giving the ultimate panoramic view for any tourist, rich history, partnership with other organizations, and well-known internationally. However, lack of aggressive marketing and product diversification, poaching, logging, human encroachment, lack of community participation, competition from other destinations offering similar products, insecurity, economic recession, poor marketing research and infrastructure in some conservancies have been limiting factors. Road infrastructure improvement, park beautification, diversification of products and services, new product development, improvement in facilities as well as local and international tourism marketing are opportunities that KWS can exploit to remain competitive.*

***Keywords: SWOT Analysis, Product Portfolio, Product Portfolio Management, Competitive Strategies, Kenya Wildlife Service, TOWS Matrix***

## **Introduction**

Kenya is a country with diverse and unique destinations, favorable climate, and a variety of cultures among many other features, which bring scores of international visitors from all over the world. The tourism sector is the second largest of Kenya's economy and accounts for 12% of GDP (Ministry of Tourism, 2008). The Ministry of Tourism in Kenya is responsible for developing the tourism sector through devising tourism policies and managing the implementation of strategies. Kenya's Vision 2030 is anchored on the economic, political and social pillars which aim to transform the country into a middle-income, newly industrialized country that provides to its citizens a high quality life.

Tourism is the leading player among six other sectors within the economic pillar that has contributed to wealth creation and employment, and has also played a major role in its contribution to the recovery of the country's economy (Ministry of Tourism, 2008). The total foreign exchange earnings generated by the tourism industry accounts for 21%. Approximately 75% of total tourist earnings come from wildlife tourism (Kenya Wildlife Service, 2014). Wildlife in Kenya is managed by the Kenya Wildlife Service and accounts for 90% of safari tourism. Safari tourism and wildlife viewing are significant contributors to foreign exchange and income (Akama *et al.* 2011). For this reason, Kenya Wildlife Service forms the backbone of the tourism industry in Kenya (Kenya Wildlife Service, 2014).

In collaboration with other stakeholders, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) role is to sustainably manage and conserve Kenya's wildlife and its habitats. About 8% of the country's total landmass is managed by KWS (KWS, 2014).

This land includes 22 National Parks, 28 National Reserves and 5 National Sanctuaries. At the Coast, KWS manages 4 Marine National Parks and 6 Marine National Reserves. Outside protected areas, KWS manages 125 field stations (KWS, 2014). Away from just managing wildlife habitats; the stations and parks also feature hotels, workshop areas, bandas, research centres, shops and restaurants, airstrips among others. KWS is involved in tourism marketing of its products and utilizes recovery strategies such as Premier Parks Initiative which involves branding of the well known parks with the purpose of offering high quality experience at premium rates; and under-utilized parks initiative which involves expansion and rehabilitation facilities and infrastructure in its parks including bed capacity through investing in parks that are less frequented by tourists. Other development strategies include domestic tourism promotion, road infrastructure development, customer services, and niche products development such as cultural tourism, Eco tourism, and bird tourism (KWS, 2014).

KWS Parks, Reserves and Stations operate at two levels: KWS Headquarters in Langata, Nairobi and at the field level. KWS headquarters role is to facilitate, advice and coordinate field activities. Functions at the Headquarters are classified into divisions. management of reserves, parks, and stations fall under the Wildlife & Community Service division. The other division is Field Operations whose role is to ensure that all the protected areas within the country are effectively managed. There are eight conservation areas mainly Western, Mountain, Tsavo, Southern, Coast, Central Rift, Northern, and Eastern; each headed by an Assistant Director from the Kenya Wildlife Service. In each area, the parks and reserves are headed by wardens who report to the assistant directors.

KWS also offers economically priced self-catering accommodation where one can enjoy the scenery within the parks and reserves they manage (KWS, 2014). Table 1 highlights the Conservation Areas and Self-catering Accommodation Managed by the Kenya Wildlife Service.

**Table 1: Conservation Areas and Self-catering Accommodation Managed by KWS**

<b>Conservation Area</b>	<b>Headquarters</b>	<b>National Parks &amp; Reserves</b>	<b>Self-Catering Accommodation</b>
Central Rift	Lake Nakuru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lake Nakuru National Park</li> <li>• Hells Gate National Park</li> <li>• Mt. Longonot National Park</li> </ul>	Naishi Guest House
Coast	Mombasa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mombasa Marine National park</li> <li>• Shimba Hills National Reserve</li> <li>• Kisite Mpunguti Marine Park</li> <li>• Malindi Marine National Park</li> <li>• Watamu Marine National Reserve</li> <li>• Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve</li> </ul>	Shimoni Bandas at Kisite
Eastern	Meru National Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meru National Park</li> </ul>	Murera and Kinna Bandas
Mountain	Aberdares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aberdare National Park</li> <li>• Mt. Kenya National Park</li> <li>• Mwea National Reserve</li> </ul>	The Fishing Lodge Guest House & Tusk Camp Banda. Batian Guest House & Sirimon Bandas.
Northern	Marsabit National Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marsabit National Park and Reserve</li> <li>• Sibiloi National Park</li> </ul>	Allia Bay Guesthouse at Sibiloi
Southern	Nairobi National Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amboseli National Park</li> <li>• Nairobi National Park</li> <li>• Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park</li> </ul>	Nyati Banda, Kibo Guest House, Kilimanjaro Guest House, Simba & Chui Banda Nairobi Tented camps Sabuk Guest House

Tsavo	Tsavo East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chyulu Hills National Park</li> <li>• Tsavo East National Park</li> <li>• Tsavo West National Park</li> </ul>	Kamboyo Guest House and Lake Jipe Bandas
Western	Kitale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruma National Park</li> <li>• Kakamega Forest National Reserve</li> <li>• Mt. Elgon National Park</li> <li>• Saiwa Swamp National Park</li> <li>• Kisumu Impala Sanctuary</li> </ul>	Oribi Guest House at Ruma Isikuti houses Kapkuro Bandas & Koitoboss Guest Tree Top House at Saiwa Swamp

**Source:** KWS National Parks, (2014)

In 2005, the Kenya Wildlife Service introduced the park branding initiative, launching new and distinct symbols with the aim of diversifying its product offering (Kenya Wildlife Service, 2014; Odiara, 2012).

**Table 2: Branded Parks in Kenya**

<b>Parks</b>	<b>Branded as</b>	<b>Date</b>
Lake Nakuru National Park	Bird Watchers' Paradise	August 10, 2005
Amboseli National Park	Kilimanjaro Royal Court	September 23, 2005
Tsavo West National Park	Land of Lava, Springs & Man-Eaters	November 8, 2005
Tsavo East National Park	Theatre of the Wild	December 9, 2005
Aberdares National Park	Majestic Peaks, Moorlands, Falls	March 3, 2006
Kisite Mpunguti Marine Park	Home of the Dolphin and Coconut Crab	April 27, 2006
Ruma National Park	Dramatic Valley of the Roan Antelope, Oribi and so much more	September 22, 2006
Malindi Marine Park	Oldest Marine Park, Magic Islands, Zebra Fish and so much more	October 27, 2006
Watamu Marine Park	Haven for Green Turtle, Unique Coral Garden, Mida Creek and so much more	October 27, 2006
Nairobi National Park	The World's Only Wildlife Capital	December 16, 2006
Nairobi Safari Walk & Nairobi Animal Orphanage	Refuges of the Wild	December 16, 2006
Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park	Ultimate Panoramic Experience	June 21, 2007

Mt. Elgon National Park	Untamed Wilderness, Secluded Splendor	March 15, 2007
Kakamega Forest National Reserve	Canopy of Natural Beauty	September 27, 2007
Meru National Park	Complete Wilderness	July 19, 2007
Hells Gate National Park	A Walk on the Wild Side	September 25, 2009
Mt Longonot National Park	Sheer Adventure	September 25, 2009
Ndere Island National Park	The Island of Serenity and Beauty	March 3, 2010
Kisumu Impala Sanctuary	A Lakeshore Walk With the Impalas	March 4, 2010
Shimba hills National Reserve	Paradise of the Sable Antelope	April 18, 2011

**Source:** KWS, (2014)

Studies done by the KNBS (2016), performance of Kenya's tourism sector is seen to be reducing. The earnings went down from Kshs 97.89 billion in 2011 to Kshs 84.6 billion in 2015 representing a decline of 16%. The number of visitors to national parks and game reserves declined to 228,470 in 2016 from 266,410 visitors in 2011 representing a drop of 14.3%.

Table 3 presents the number of visitors to national parks and reserves in Kenya from the year 2011 to 2016.

**Table 3: Number of Visitors to National Parks and Game Reserves, 2011 – 2016 ('000)**

<b>Park/Reserve</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>%change 2011&amp;16</b>
Nairobi	135.1	151.1	154.7	131.8	133.1	153.1	13
Nairobi Safari Walk	176.3	147.2	136	133	139.2	149.3	-15
Nairobi Mini Orphanage	403	474.6	407.4	361.3	328.2	390.4	-3
Amboseli	176.2	141.4	141.2	117.1	87	114.6	-35
Tsavo (West)	98.9	70.9	68.8	51	32.9	50.2	-49
Tsavo (East)	268	176.7	153.2	103.2	75.2	84.8	-68
Aberdare	45.8	44.3	50.1	43.8	34.7	41.3	-10
Lake Nakuru	245	253.5	262.5	226	188.9	214.7	-12
Maasai Mara	138.2	102	103.8	166	146.9	146.3	6
Haller's Park	149.8	125.5	121.5	116.2	115.4	121.1	-19
Malindi Marine	49.5	40.8	41.9	28.9	28.8	31.5	-36
Lake Bogoria	108.3	114.6	91.5	80.5	71.4	90.8	-16
Meru	20.2	17.8	14.7	19.2	17.4	19.8	-14
Shimba Hills	29.4	26.1	23.2	17.6	17.2	21.2	-28

Mt. Kenya	33.3	27.5	24.6	20.2	18.5	19.1	-43
Samburu	14.2	15	13.5	15.4	8.5	10.8	-24
Kisite/Mpunguti	59.5	48.4	44.7	29.7	25	34.4	-42
Mombasa Marine	38.3	34.6	36.8	27.4	26.2	29.5	-23
Watamu Marine	37.3	36.3	35.1	31.3	24.3	33.9	-9
Hell's Gate	133.1	95.4	89	114.1	121.8	154.4	16
Impala Sanctuary (Kisumu)	201.6	247	222.3	227.6	212.2	256.5	27
Mt. Longonot	43.2	44.1	43.6	50.7	51.4	64.5	49
Other	60.1	57.5	57.5	52.6	49.6	52.6	-12
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,664.1</b>	<b>2,492.2</b>	<b>2,337.7</b>	<b>2,164.6</b>	<b>1,953.8</b>	<b>2,284.7</b>	

**Source:** KNBS| Economic Survey (2017)

<sup>1</sup>Others include Arabuko Sokoke, Ol-Donyo Sabuk, Marsabit, Saiwa Swamp, Sibiloi, Bamburi, Chyulu, Ruma National Park, Mwea National Reserve, Central Island National Park, Kiunga, Mt. Elgon, Nasolot, Ndere and Kakamega.

This shows that that the most visited parks in Kenya are Nairobi National Park, Nairobi Safari Park, Nairobi Mini Orphanage, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru, Maasai Mara, Haller's Park, Hells Gate, and Impala Sanctuary (Kisumu). The least visited parks are Aberdare, Malindi Marine, Meru National Park, Shimba Hills, Mt. Kenya, Samburu, Mombasa Marine, and Watamu Marine. The coastal marine and parks are seen to have been hit the most by the decline in tourist arrivals since 2011 for instance, visitors in Mombasa Marine declined by 23%, Watamu Marine, 9%, Shimba Hills, 28%, Haller Park, 19%, Kisite/Mpunguti, 42%. Mt Longonot, Maasai Mara, Impala Sanctuary (Kisumu) and Nairobi National Park are among the few parks and sanctuaries that registered an increase in the number of visitors at 49%, 6%, 27% and 13% respectively between the year 2011 and 2016.

Nevertheless, between the year 2015 and 2016, all the national parks and game reserves registered increases in number of visitors except in the Maasai Mara game reserve. Despite the slight increase, the least visited parks still remain the same.

### **Swot Analysis**

Organizations do not operate in isolation but relatively exist, co-exist, cooperate, and compete in an interrelated complex environment. It is necessary for organizations to have a better understanding of the environment in which they conduct their activities as it impacts on strategy formulation, planning and decision making (Wang, 2007, Oreski, 2012). Therefore, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis is a significant tool that allows managers to develop competitive strategies aligned with the existing conditions in their business environments (Wang, 2007). Through this analysis, organizations are able to match the strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) existing within a business firm (internal environment) with the opportunities (O) and threats (T) present in the external environment. Therefore, a firm is able to utilize its strengths to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the environment. The strength of a business firm refers to the ability by which a firm can gain a distinctive advantage over its competitors. The weakness of an organization refers to constraints facing a business firm. Opportunity is a favourable condition in the external environment that an organization can take advantage of whereas a threat is an unfavourable condition in the external environment that can create a risk to a business firm (Jain *et al.*, 2010).

The major role of SWOT is to assist an organization to develop a complete understanding of all the factors that may negatively or positively affect decision making and strategic planning. In fact when done correctly, it can steer a company towards implementing good strategic decisions with regard to its products and services (Goodrich, 2013). Failure to take into account a key strength, weakness, opportunity or threat can result to poor business decisions (Laidre, 2014). Undertaking an overall evaluation of a tourist destination strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats enables the company to identify opportunities and make good decisions that will improve the tourist destination. In order for a tourist destination to succeed, it must use its abilities, favourable opportunities, and resources from the environment to generate the maximum value (Light Minds, 2005).

In today's demanding global economy, companies are faced with increased competition, ever changing markets and technologies, globalization, cash flow issues, and demand for customized and value rich products from consumers. In an effort to deliver value while maintaining efficient production, companies need to think in a more customer-oriented way. A single product rarely contributes to the success and competitiveness of the company in the long term therefore, it is more profitable to design product families instead of creating one product at a time so as to in order to satisfy large different target markets (Ohvanainen & Hietikko, 2012). Just as the success of a business in the long-term relies on its long-term strategies; the success of a product largely depends on the ability of a company to beat the competitors in the market by capturing customers' imagination with stylish and functional content that performs as required and delivered at a price that the market is prepared to pay for (Gecevska *et al.*, 2010; Siemens, 2011).

Too much emphasis however, has been placed on mere line extensions. Moreover, too many products within a company if not well developed and managed can result to scarce resources not being adequately focused on the most important activities because products that aren't performing well tend to absorb resources that could be productively used elsewhere. The product mix offered and its management widely influences an organization's marketing performance (Cravens, 1997; Dwyer and Tanner, 1999). Therefore, in order to achieve better results companies need to rethink how they can manage their business portfolio in the face of all the rapid changes in the environment by not only delivering the right product into the market but also by developing an effective portfolio approach (Cooper *et al.*, 2001).

### **Tows Matrix**

Despite the use of SWOT analysis as an important tool in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, its analysis is static and hardly enables the unique development of alternative strategies (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010).

It has been noted that after a SWOT analysis is undertaken, managers often fail to come up with strategic choices that are demanded by the outcome of the analysis therefore, the TOWS (Threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths) matrix is a useful tool that enables managers to not only match the external threats and opportunities with the weaknesses and the strengths internal to the company but also aids in developing four major types of strategies namely WT Strategies, WO Strategies, ST Strategies, and SO Strategies, and tactics necessary for strategic planning (Hiriyappa, 2013; Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). The WT strategies (mini-mini) aim at minimizing the weaknesses and threats facing the firm, WO strategies (mini-maxi) focus on improving a firm's internal weaknesses by capitalizing on its opportunities, ST strategies (maxi-mini) utilize the internal strengths of a firm to reduce or avoid the impact of threats in the external environment and finally, SO (maxi-maxi) strategies which enable a firm to use its strengths to maximize on its opportunities (the most suggested successful strategy to use) (Koontz and Weihrich, 2010; Weinhrich, 1982). Kenya Wildlife Service can utilize SWOT and TOWS analysis to better understand and manage its products effectively in an effort to identify and make investment decisions so as to optimize fully the potential of tourism product mix and gain competitive advantage.

## **Methodology and Results**

### **Sample and Data Collection**

The survey applied descriptive studies and was conducted using Senior wardens, Customer service officer, Assistant directors and Tourism officers in the eight conservation areas namely Central Rift conservation area, Coast conservation area, Eastern conservation area, Mountain conservation area, Northern conservation area, Southern conservation area, Tsavo conservation area, and Western conservation area. In-depth interview method and semi structured questionnaires were used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Kenya Wildlife Service which was the case of this study. Data obtained from the eight conservation areas was analyzed using SPSS version 17.0.

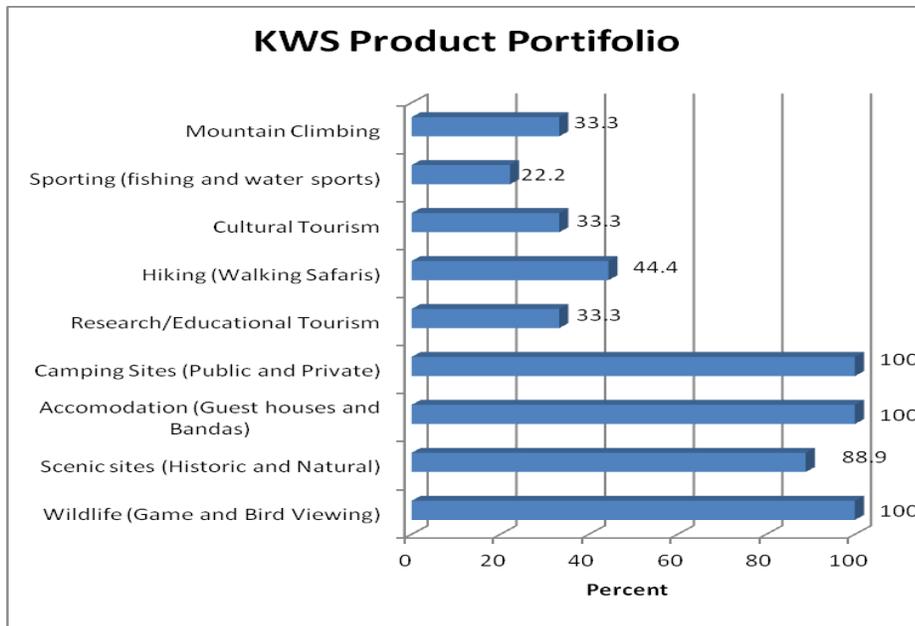
### **Findings**

The Demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 3. Two thirds (66.7%) of the respondents Males and one third (33.3%) were females. About 44.4% of the respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years, followed by 33.3% aged between 35 and 44 years. 22.2% were aged 45 years and above. One third (33.3%) of the respondents had worked with KWS for 5 to 10 years and 10 to 15 years respectively. The respondents who had worked for less than five years, 15 to 20 years and above 20 years were 11.1% respectively. One third (33.3%) of the respondents held the position of senior warden and assistant director respectively. Positions held by other respondents were tourism officer (22.2%) and customer care officer (11.1%).

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	6	66.7
	Female	3	33.3
<b>Age group</b>	25 to 34	4	44.4
	35 to 44	3	33.3
	45 to 54	1	11.1
	55 or older	1	11.1
<b>Years of Service</b>	Less than five years	1	11.1
	5 to 10 years	3	33.3
	10 to 15 years	3	33.3
	15 to 20 years	1	11.1
	20 and above	1	11.1
<b>Position of the Respondent</b>	Senior Warden	3	33.3
	Customer service officer	1	11.1
	Assistant Director	3	33.3
	Tourism Officer	2	22.2

All KWS conservation areas had wildlife viewing, camping sites (Public and Private), and accommodation (guest houses and bandas) in their product portfolio as shown in Figure1. Almost all conservation areas (88.9%) had scenic sites either historic or natural as part of the product mix. However, selected conservation areas had mountain climbing (33.3%), sporting activities (22.2%), cultural tourism (33.3%), hiking (44.4%) and research/educational activities (33.3%) in their product portfolio. The later may be an indication of the uniqueness of the various KWS destination areas.



**Figure 1: KWS Product Portfolio**

### **SWOT Analysis of KWS**

The Southern conservation area has its headquarters in Nairobi National Park. Amboseli National Park, Nairobi National Park, and Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park are parks within the Southern Conservation area. The current product portfolio gives tourists an ultimate panoramic experience and consists of wildlife viewing. The strength of the current product portfolio consists of a rich history, unique product (variety of wildlife), and an ultimate panoramic experience. In the southern conservation area specifically the Amboseli ecosystem has unique natural features, branded product, famous in international markets and good customer service. However, inadequate product promotion, limited product range, and limited utilization by locals due to high entry costs have been weaknesses facing the Amboseli ecosystem.

Other weaknesses in the southern conservation area are the non-differentiated products, inadequate marketing, poor infrastructure and inadequate research. The major threats facing this conservation area are environment degradation, human settlement, competition from mushrooming tourism activities, and climate change. The road infrastructure and development in both Mombasa road and Thika superhighway is an opportunity that KWS can leverage on by undertaking marketing and trade fairs in counties such as Kiambu and Machakos as this will promote and increase domestic tourism. Marketing to international tourists and development of joint forums and partnerships with hoteliers and tour companies are other opportunities that they can venture into.

The Central Rift conservation area with its headquarters in Lake Nakuru manages the Lake Nakuru National Park, Hells Gate National Park, and Mt. Longonot National Park. The current product portfolio consists of wildlife viewing, scenic sites, accommodation, research/educational sites. Its strength relies on its product uniqueness, partnership with hotels and tour companies, and local and international target markets. However, national politics (political instability), poaching, logging and natural calamities like drought, negatively affect this conservancy. The Central Rift conservancy has the opportunity to take advantage of is the capacity available for hosting local, national and international events and to package its product better.

The Northern conservation area has its headquarters in Marsabit National Reserve and manages Marsabit National Park and Reserve and Sibiloi National Park. The current product portfolio consists of research tourism, cultural tourism, recreation sites and accommodation.

Its strength lies on its competitive pricing and the diversity in its products and parks. Poor road infrastructure, inadequate facilities, political volatility and tribal wars, and lack of community participation have been major limitations to the growth of tourism in this area. Moreover, human settlement, habitat degradation, poaching, underfunding and financial constraints, and high donor dependency are threats facing the Northern conservation area. Adequate land and resources for expansion, increased marketing and research services, and access to a big market are all opportunities this conservation can take advantage of.

Mountain conservation area has its headquarters in Aberdares and is home to Aberdare National Park, Mt. Kenya National Park, and Mwea National Reserve. The current product portfolio is composed of game viewing, accommodation, ultimate panoramic experience, sport fishing, and research activities. Its strength relies on its unique diverse products, partnership with other organizations, support from KWS on funds and research, community engagement on tourism, government, and community support. However, high dependency on international tourists, inadequate technology, inadequate financial resources, poor risk management, and poor roads infrastructure are major weaknesses facing this conservancy. Moreover, poaching, habitat degradation, human wildlife conflict (human settlement), economic depression/recession, limitation of wildlife act (lean sentences on the Act), natural calamities such as wild fire, crime and insecurity are threats facing this ecosystem.

However, there are opportunities for further tourism development through financial support from development partners, road and infrastructure development, increased tourism facilities, diversification of products, increased marketing, training, and research services.

Coast conservation area's current product portfolio consists of accommodation (bandas and cottages), recreation sites, cultural sites, and ultimate panoramic experience. The strength of this current product portfolio lies in its uniqueness, diversity of products, unspoilt habitat, one stop experience (self-contained marine parks), and the rich historical background/heritage. However, the weakness facing this conservation area is competition from other coastal destinations such as Zanzibar and Mozambique, which make these coastal products less unique to Kenya alone and products difficult to modify. Cultural degradation, environmental degradation, poaching and human-wildlife conflicts are major threats to this ecosystem. There are opportunities for increasing domestic tourism, improvement in facilities and room, for products and services diversification.

Western conservation area's current product portfolio consists of game viewing, mountain climbing, camp sites and accommodation. The products are unique, natural and diverse. This conservation area has fully established research offices, well trained personnel and is well located making it favorable for trans-border tourism. However, negative local perception, lack of community participation, and bad terrain that makes it hard for tourists to view wildlife; are weaknesses faced by this conservation area.

Moreover, poaching and logging, encroachment, natural calamities such as wildfire, crime and insecurity are major threats in this region. Increase in marketing training and research as well as government and NGO collaboration are opportunities that this conservancy can exploit on.

Eastern conservation area which manages the Meru National park consists of game viewing, accommodation, ultimate panoramic experience as its current product portfolio. The strength of this conservation area is the fact that its prices are fairly competitive and the products are unique and diverse (the Big 5 are all found here). The challenges it faces is the distance to the park from the capital city, competition from other tourism destinations, low visitor turn-out, poor marketing and research, and high dependency on international tourists. Moreover economic depression/recession and lack of domestic tourism promotion by the Kenya Tourism Board are threats that have a negative impact to this ecosystem. However, increase marketing is likely to improve the visitor turn-out.

Tsavo conservation area manages Chyulu Hills National park, Tsavo East and Tsavo West national park. Its current product portfolio consists of game viewing and landscape. Despite the products uniqueness, there lacks diversification of products and services within this conservation area. Moreover, poaching, environmental and habitat degradation, economic depression/recession, poor management, crime and insecurity are major threats to the growth of this ecosystem. There are however, opportunities for beautification of the park, and road infrastructure improvement.

## **Discussion**

Using the TOWS matrix, this study prescribed strategies that KWS can utilize to remain competitive. The road infrastructure and development presents an opportunity for KWS Southern conservation area directors, to market and promote their products to counties while focusing on the strategic advantages of the conservancy. This could be through social media marketing, exhibitions, newspaper, travel guides and publications, television, brochures, internet/website, posters, radio, travel and leisure magazines, yellow pages, and CD-ROM direct mail to universities, colleges and schools. KWS should maximize partnerships and cooperative marketing with counties to ensure product visibility. Moreover, better infrastructure in park areas should be developed for easier accessibility by tourists. The Marketing communication tools used must be matched to the needs of individual markets and where possible customized strategies for each diverse target market should be developed. Consumer research in relation to price sensitivity, disposable income, product needs and length of stay should be undertaken so as to understand the target markets. Questionnaires, promotions, and other strategies can be utilized to gather information about potential clients.

KWS should not only introduce new unique products and activities but should also find ways to differentiate, position, and add value to their products and services in a distinctive way to their target markets. They should consider what value added products can be included without sacrificing profits so that sales can improve. The park entry fees particularly in Amboseli national park should be reduced, so as to encourage locals to visit the park.

Additionally, KWS should increase the southern conservation area attractiveness and improve the value that visitors derive from their experiences. The challenges facing KWS should be tackled by introducing tourism activities that do not harm the environment, but protect the natural areas ecosystem so that tourists can understand, enjoy and appreciate them in ways that will conserve them for the coming generations. Moreover, because climatic changes do affect tourism, short-term promotions and marketing activities might opt to highlight climatic conditions that are more favourable. Additionally, due to competition from mushrooming tourism activities, KWS should introduce new unique and diverse products that cannot be easily copied.

In the Central Rift conservancy area, KWS should strategically use the opportunities they have for hosting local, national and international events to market their tourism products. Moreover, they should find ways to diversify the tourism product by adding more activities and products. They should also encourage investors to invest in hotels within the parks that do not have them. The health and wellness tourism in this area should be emphasized particularly by increasing awareness among the locals on the Olkaria geothermal spa and its benefits. KWS should increase the attractiveness of the parks within this conservancy and improve the quality of visitor experiences. KWS could find ways to curb poaching and logging by partnering with hotels, government and locals in the area to help protect wildlife.

In the Northern conservation area, KWS should work together with tour and travel firms, and hotels marketers to include KWS products in their travel packages so as to create awareness of Marsabit and Sibiloi National parks. With adequate land for expansion, KWS should provide development opportunities for investors to invest in this region and increase its product's attractiveness to both local and international tourists. Marketing research should be undertaken to identify and segment target markets; and marketing communications done to create awareness. Activities that can be undertaken in the region should be identified and offered to suit the different market segments.

Due to underfunding and financial constraints within this conservancy, KWS should organize events or other marketing activities that enable them to get funds to upgrade facilities, including roads at national parks, visitor centres, national historic sites and campgrounds; and also work with the county government for support. They should also work with the government to provide better accessibility to the conservation area because another major challenge has been poor infrastructure. Lack of community participation can be tackled by educating the locals on the benefits of tourism in the area and how they can participate and benefit from it. One major hindrance to the growth of this region is insecurity which is a major concern for many tourists therefore; KWS should work with both national and county governments to ensure that tourist destinations are secure. This will increase both local and international tourists' arrivals.

In the Mountain conservation area, KWS has both government and community support, therefore they should utilize this support by pushing for road and infrastructure development. They should also partner with hotels that can invest in this region so as to increase tourism facilities. Products offered in this area should be diversified and tourism products that target the domestic market should be developed so as to avoid high dependency on international tourists. KWS can diversify their tourism products by introducing lower priced products or activities to complement the main product. Since this conservation area has partnerships with other organizations and get support from KWS on funds and research; then marketing research should be undertaken to identify and fulfill customer needs, wants and demand. The infrastructure and technology should be upgraded and marketing promotions undertaken to increase visitation to the area. KWS should look for ways to manage risks, poaching, habitat degradation, human - wildlife conflict, natural calamities, crime and insecurity so as to protect the ecosystem. The limitation of the wildlife act is a challenge to this ecosystem because of the lean sentences of the act and therefore, government should enact stringent laws that ensure protection of wildlife.

In the Coast conservation area, KWS should market and promote the tourism products to both domestic and international tourists by highlighting the unique selling points of the products and region. They should look for ways to diversify their product offerings and ensure that the habitat and ecosystem within this area is not destroyed. Competition from other coastal destinations has been a major challenge to this ecosystem because the products are not unique to Kenya alone and are difficult to modify.

Therefore, KWS should venture into blue oceans by looking at the unique ways in which they can deliver their services, and come up with activities that involve tourists. KWS should also look for ways to reduce human - wildlife conflict, environmental and cultural degradation.

In the Western Conservancy area, KWS should aggressively market the tourist attractions showcasing the area's diversity and its unique natural attractions. Due to its favourable location near the trans-border, KWS should take the opportunity to market to other regions to increase market share. They should also create opportunities for local investors to invest in the area. Their fully established offices provide opportunities for increased marketing and research that will positively improve this conservation area. The weaknesses faced by this conservation area such as negative local perception and lack of community participation can be overcome by involving the local community, educating them, and offering schools and community groups free visits to the parks to show the benefits of preserving these habitats. KWS should collaborate with government to work on the road infrastructure so as to enable the tourists to view game in the parks as the bad terrain hinders proper game viewing. KWS should closely monitor activities within the park that can be harmful to the wildlife such as poaching and logging, and strictly regulate all developments that threaten the Western conservancy.

In the Eastern Conservation area, Kenya Tourism Board should undertake aggressive marketing showcasing the uniqueness and diversity of this conservation area, so as to create awareness and improve the visitor turn-out. Different pricing strategies and tactics should be used to increase visitor turn out.

The low visitor turn out could also be as a result of the distance to this conservation area therefore, KWS should collaborate with hotels, travel and tours companies to include this conservation area as part of their itinerary for visitors, visiting tourist hotels in the Eastern part of Kenya so as to increase visitor turn out. KWS should introduce new products and expand the range of services such as night game drives and adventure parks. This conservation area is highly dependent on international tourists and therefore, marketing strategies directed towards domestic tourists should be undertaken. Research and marketing needed to understand the different tourist markets so that so that they understand their needs and wants.

In the Tsavo Conservation area KWS should build partnerships with other tourism and hospitality stakeholders in the industry, they should also undertake consumer research to understand the different target markets, as well as work with government to improve the road infrastructure in the area. Marketing promotions should be carried out to create awareness of the unique products within the Tsavo conservancy area. KWS should improve on the quality of attractions, develop evening attractions and local accommodations, evening seminars or special entertainment and expand their range of services and provide more value added activities to do at the destination. Due to poaching and environmental/habitat degradation, KWS should closely monitor human activity and strictly regulate all developments that threaten the Tsavo conservancy and work with government to curb crime and insecurity in this area. Moreover, proper management within this conservation area is needed.

### **Limitation and Future Studies**

The population of this study focuses only on the eight conservation areas that KWS manages. This may limit implication of the research findings to other areas not managed by KWS such as Maasai Mara, Samburu National Reserve, and to other countries, where there is a significant difference in the environment. Therefore, future research can be carried out in parks and reserves that KWS does not manage. Additionally, comparative studies can be done across countries that have parks and reserves, particularly in neighboring countries such as Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa.

### **Conclusion**

For KWS to remain competitive, they need to manage the product portfolio of each conservancy which requires understanding each conservancy's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This will enable KWS develop sustainable strategies for each conservancy because each has its own strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

## References

- Akama, J., Maingi, S. & Camargo, B. (2011). Wildlife Conservation, Safari Tourism and the Role of Tourism Certification in Kenya: A Postcolonial Critique. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 36(3): 281-291.
- Cravens, David W. (1997). *Strategic Marketing*, (5th Edition). Chicago, Irwin
- Cooper, R., Edgett, S., & Kleinschmidt, E. (2001). Portfolio Management for New Product Development: Results of an Industry Practices Study. *Industrial Research Institute*, 31 (4).
- Dwyer, F. & Tanner, J. (1999). *Business Marketing: Connecting Strategy, Relationships, and Learning*, Boston, Irwin McGraw-Hill.
- Gecevska, V., Chiabert, P., Anisic, Z., Lombardi, F., & Cus, F. (2010). Product Lifecycle Management through Innovative and Competitive Business Environment. *Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 3(2): 323-336
- Goodrich, R. (2013, October 09). *SWOT Analysis: Examples, Templates and Definition*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4245-swot-analysis.html>.
- Hiriyappa, B. (2013). *Corporate Strategy: Managing the Business*. Indiana: AuthorHouse.
- Jain, R. K., Triandis, H. C. & Weick, C. W. (2010). *Managing Research, Development, and Innovation: Managing the Unmanageable (3rd ed.)*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley
- Koonz, H. & Weihrich, H. (2010). *Essentials of Management (8<sup>th</sup> ed)*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited.

- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Economic Survey*. Nairobi, Kenya.
- Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). (2014). *Overview - Parks and Reserves*  
Retrieved from <http://www.kws.org/>.
- Ministry of Tourism. (2008). *Strategic Plan 2008 - 2012 - Kenya*.
- Laidre, A. (2014). *Strategic Planning: What is a SWOT Analysis?*. Retrieved from [http://www.iplanner.net/business-financial/online/how-to-articles.aspx?article\\_id=swot-analysis](http://www.iplanner.net/business-financial/online/how-to-articles.aspx?article_id=swot-analysis).
- Light Minds Ltd. (2005). *Understanding Customer Need During New Product Development*.  
Retrieved from [www.lightminds.co.uk](http://www.lightminds.co.uk).
- Odiara, B. (2012). *Polishing the Kenyan Jewel: Park Branding and Promotion*. Paper Presented at the Ecotourism conference 2012: AMREF Training Centre.
- Ohvanainen, J. & Hietikko, E. (2012). Building Competitive Advantage Through Platform-Based Product Family Thinking: Case Power packs. *Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 5(1):180-197.
- Oreski, D. (2012). Strategy Development by Using SWOT - AHP. *TEM Journal*, 1 (4), 283-291.
- Siemens Product Lifecycle Management Software Inc. (2009). *Strategic Product Planning – Building the Right Products*. Retrieved from [www.siemens.com/plm](http://www.siemens.com/plm)
- Wang, K. (2007). A Process View of SWOT Analysis. *Proceedings of the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the ISSS*, August 5-10. Tokyo.
- Wehrich, H. (1982). The TOWS Matrix--A Tool for Situational Analysis. *Long Range Planning*, 15 (2), 52-64.