

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS: A KEY TO GREEN RECOVERY

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted economic activity and led to recession and widespread job loss in countries across the world, pushing at least 88 million into extreme poverty. As countries allocate scarce resources towards economic recovery programs, many are turning to the benefits of green recovery options, investing in their environmental assets while stimulating jobs and growth. Such efforts are good for the environment *and* the economy. The International Monetary Fund reported a return of almost seven dollars within 5 years for every dollar spent on conservation, for example. The World Bank's recent publication, **Banking on Protected Areas: Promoting Sustainable Protected Area Tourism to Benefit Local Communities**, recommends that governments promote sustainable tourism in protected areas as a part of their economic recovery strategies to help achieve triple bottom line benefits: recover from the economic fallout of the pandemic, address longstanding development challenges, and conserve biodiversity.

Why protected area tourism? Promoting sustainable tourism in protected areas ticks all boxes of a strong recovery strategy.

✓ **HIGH INCOME MULTIPLIERS:** The study finds that income multipliers across five diverse protected areas are significant and consistent, between 1.5-1.9, suggesting that a healthy protected area tourism sector provides similar income gains to local households across a variety of contexts, despite variations in per tourist spending and numbers of visitors. In all but one case, multiplier shares per resident are higher for poor residents than for non-poor, demonstrating the potential for an inclusive tourism sector.

✓ **HIGH RETURNS ON PUBLIC INVESTMENT:** Including protected areas in green recovery strategies capitalizes on high returns: economic return per \$1 invested in parks in Zambia, Brazil, and Nepal was at least six-times the investment, with Zambia's South Luangwa National Park generating over 28 times the amount spent by the government.

✓ **SIGNIFICANT JOB GROWTH:** Protected area tourism creates significant job opportunities, both directly through tourism activities (jobs such as hotel employees and tour operators), and indirectly by stimulating local economies. As a result of the increased demand for goods and services catalyzed by tourism, jobs grow in sectors such as retail, services, and even agriculture, livestock, and fishing. *Banking in Protected Areas* finds that hiring an additional park guard costs only a fraction of the thousands of dollars in local income the position generates.

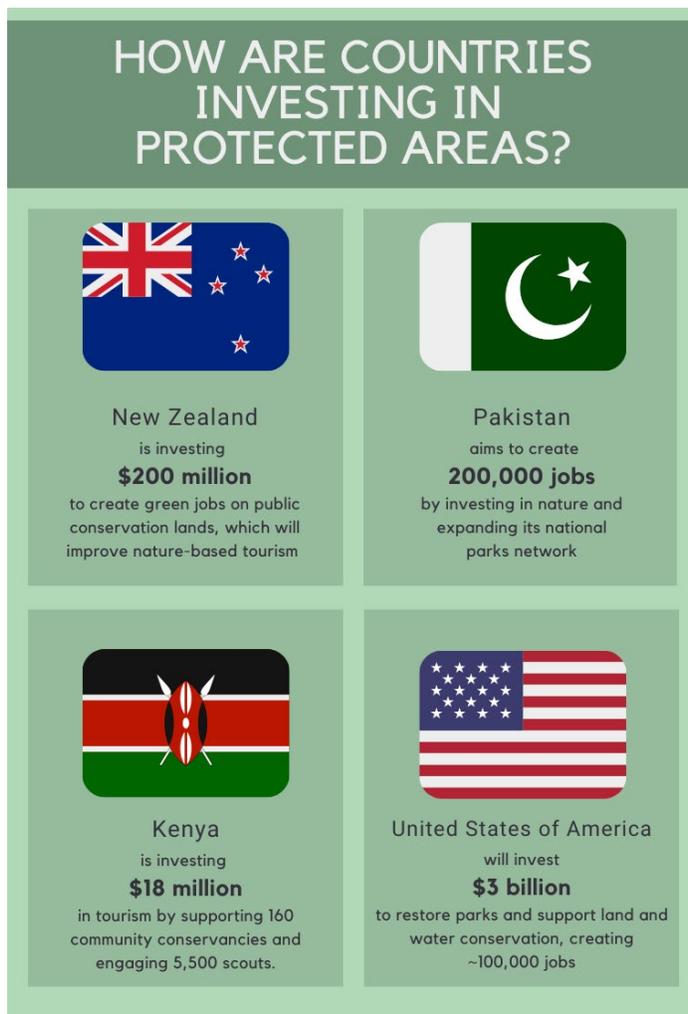
Moreover, the tourism industry has been hit hard by the pandemic, suffering a loss of almost US\$4.5 trillion and 62 million jobs worldwide. The study shows that these losses are not only felt by those that work in the tourism industry, but the wider community. Promoting sustainable tourism in protected areas will help this hard-hit sector. Additionally, loss of tourism has also meant loss of revenue



for protected area management. Reduced security around protected areas due to budget shortfalls has coincided with reports of increased poaching and illegal logging. Unless countries invest in protected areas, they risk losing irreplaceable wildlife and biodiversity, the very basis of the tourism industry.

How can governments promote green recovery through protected area tourism?

Invest in protected areas through public works programs to secure and enhance this natural asset. The success of such a strategy has long been proven—the United States of America’s Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps employed about 5% of the male workforce at the time to create long-lasting infrastructure, ecological restoration, and tourism development. Today, the US is revamping the initiative as the Civilian Climate Corps, addressing climate change through investment and jobs in conservation and land and water restoration.



Assist protected area tourism enterprises so that they continue to operate. Small and medium-sized enterprises make up about 80% of tourism-related businesses, and even one month without tourism results in significant income losses. Subsidized loans and skills training, tax relief, and grants can help these businesses weather the storm of economic downturn, while travel incentives to encourage tourist visits can help these firms gain back business.

Address policy and institutional reform now to help the sector grow back better and allow for a more inclusive tourism sector. Adopting policies to fairly distribute the benefits of tourism helps reach development goals and incentivizes communities to support conservation. Including poor and disadvantaged groups can be achieved through direct and indirect employment, revenue sharing, sustainable natural resource use, and shared decision making, and capacity building. In Argentina and Pakistan, this strategy includes adding conservation-focused jobs for those that are vulnerable or unemployed, providing livelihoods for those in or at risk of poverty.

When public sector funds are channeled into protected areas, they secure natural assets’ integrity, allowing private sector financing to follow as tourism picks up. This sets up a system where tourism can help fund protected

areas, but to do so, the natural assets that attract tourists must still be well preserved.

While protected area tourism can boost green recovery solutions, it is not a panacea and it does not work everywhere. Individual case study sites do not represent the protected area networks of countries, which can contain both tourist hotspots and areas in which tourism is not viable. When shaping protected area tourism strategies, governments should consider the *type* of nature-based tourism they want to grow to target investments toward areas that are accessible and interesting to a substantial number of tourists, and where local economic linkages ensure that tourist spending stays local, circulating in the economy.