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Integrating Tourism with Rural Development Strategies in Western Kenya

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Tourism being one of the most intriguing sustainable development themes has become popular economic development tool in many countries today. Tourism related activities are widely regarded as key-tools for rural development, especially in developing countries. Villages are today some of the places, attracting the attention of tourism planners more than ever before. Those villages with specific natural or social-cultural appeal have strong potential for attracting tourists from close or far off areas and this can have significant role in rural development if well planned and integrated. This research sought to find out ways through which tourism can be integrated with rural development strategies in Western Kenya and what the resultant benefits of the integration could be in the long run to the local communities studied. Qualitative method was used to collect and analyze data for the study. In particular, three focus group discussions consisting of 27 key stakeholders (9 individuals in hospitality and tourism enterprises in the region, 9 individuals from community based organizations (CBOs), and 9 participants from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) concerned with rural development in Western Kenya) were conducted. The study identified several integration approaches that can be adopted in rural development through tourism.

Keywords: integrating, tourism, rural development, strategies, Western Kenya

Introduction

Tourism is constantly thought to have both positive and negative impacts on a destination, whether it is the local people, the environment, the government or the available resources. Most researchers have examined social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts of tourism in a destination (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007; Hall & Brown, 2000; Newman & Smith, 2000). Rural communities in developing countries are faced with hostile economic, social and environmental conditions in attempts to eke a living. Good planning and development of tourism product in the rural areas could be an avenue through which the livelihoods of the rural community can be improved. Hall and Brown (2000) for instance believes that through tourism, majority of the rural areas can regulate themselves both economically and socially in the dynamic global setting. This contention has triggered increasing focus on tourism by both tourism product developers, planners and the rural communities as an alternative means of achieving sustainable economic growth and development.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD] (1994), many rural areas in developing countries face the challenge of population and service decline. Poverty eradication still remains to be a key and persistent challenge for rural development in the developing countries.

Kenya just like any other developing country is confronted with the challenge of improving the lives of her rural folks. The situation has exacerbated especially in the western region of the country where the economic situation has not stabilize. Despite the existence of certain projects and programs geared towards rural development, little success has been noted.

Poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and poor infrastructure still remain to be some of the challenges facing the people residing in the rural areas. Basic services such as health care, drinking water and roads remain deficient in these areas making it difficult to achieve the millennium development goals. Tourism on the other hand has had profound success in relation to other economic sectors in the country. Compared to the performance of the tourism industry in the country, a gap still exist between growth of tourism and rural development initiatives in Kenya. While there exist this disparity, the tourism industry in Kenya is performing tremendously well contributing significantly towards the country's economic development.

However, the impact of tourism growth is minimally felt in rural Kenya especially the western region. Extant literature regards tourism as an alternative channel for improving the living standards of local community residing in rural areas (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007; Cabrini, 2002; Hall & Brown, 2000; OECD, 1994). This is attributed to the steady increase of touristic activities in the rural areas of most touristic countries (Haghsetan, Mahmoudi & Maleki, 2011). However, consideration

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of tourism as an instrument of development in rural areas has been ignored for several years by governments of most developing countries. According to Cabrini (2002) tourism activities, promotion and development in developing countries tend to be concentrated only in prestigious areas especially along the coastal line and in major cities. It is only recently that some governments in developing countries including Kenya have started appreciating the role tourism can play in the development of rural areas. This paper therefore focuses on developing rural areas through various forms of tourism that can be integrated into rural development strategies in western Kenya.

Literature Review

Tourism has been viewed largely as a consumer activity with most of the studies focusing principally on visitor needs, motivation and satisfaction; and little on rural development. Although tourism is perceived as a channel to rural development, the focus has always been on urban and coastal regions thereby overlooking potential rural areas. The integrated sustainable rural development strategy [ISRDS] (2000) acknowledges rural development as multi-dimensional broader phenomena that focuses on social programs and transfers in the rural areas.

According to ISRDS (2000) rural development initiatives should place emphasis on changing environments to enable the rural people earn more, invest in themselves and their communities and contribute toward maintenance of key infrastructure. Previous research indicates that tourism activities focusing on beaches, large holiday home developments, big hotels among other major touristic products are difficult to integrate into the concept of rural development (Reeder & Brown, 2005; Cabrini, 2002).

In regard to this notion, rural tourism is thought to be one of the sustainable development channel through which rural areas can achieve economic, environmental and sociocultural growth (Haghsetan, Mahmoudi & Maleki, 2011; Reeder & Brown, 2005). Rural areas of most touristic countries have become the centre of attraction for tourism planners and holiday makers (Haghsetan, Mahmoudi & Maleki, 2011; Kneafsey, 2001). It is believed that only those rural regions with specific cultural, natural or social charm can attract tourists and this in turn can have significant impact on rural development strategies (Mostowfi, 2000). It is evident from the literature that many countries have incorporated tourism activities with the aim of achieving even development in both urban and rural regions. However, this calls for a balancing act between rural environment, rural population and natural products (Briedenhann & Wickens,

2004; Hall & Page, 2002), the stakeholders in the industry and policy formulators and planners. The Kenya Rural Development Strategy (KRDS) whose theme is "sustainable livelihood for all" argue that rural development strategies and programs should emphasize on steady growth, while preserving natural resources for present and future generations (Government of Kenya [GoK], 2002).

Rural development calls for appropriate objectives and strategies which focus on the rural communities and sustainable utilization of the existing resources. KRDS have identified four main objectives for rural development strategies and programs in Kenya. The objectives identified focused on increasing agricultural productivity; expanding farm and non-farm income earnings; reducing disease and ignorance; and achieving sustainable natural resource management. This implies that rural tourism which focuses on local culture, environment and gastronomy of the rural community should be the basis for formulating strategies in the rural development initiatives. Kim, Chen and Lang (2006) view tourism a viable tool that can be utilized in achieving sustainable rural development provided both the tourists and the rural population are considered. Tourism is emphasized in this context because it has positive economic, sociocultural and environmental implications to the rural folks (Reeder & Brown, 2005).

Given that tourism which focuses on beaches, large hotels and the broader tourism market poses some challenge when integrated in the rural development concept (Reeder and Brown, 2005; Cabrini, 2002) focus tends to shift towards rural tourism (Kim, Chen & Lang, 2006; Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007; Sharpley, Dalglish, Power, & Telfer, 2008).

A clear definition of the term rural tourism has not been developed yet. This is attributed to several reasons as identified by OECD (1994). First, definition of rural areas where rural tourism itself takes place varies from one nation to the other making it impossible to certainly use particular forms of tourism in developing all the rural areas. Secondly, there are other forms of tourism which also takes place in the rural areas. This makes it difficult to quantify specific contribution of rural tourism in rural areas.

Lastly, rural areas are perceived to be undergoing the process of change which makes it difficult to focus entirely on specific forms of rural tourism for rural development. However, Sharpley et al (2008) defines rural tourism as a state of mind, and technically, according to activities, destinations and other measurable, tangible characteristics.

According to OECD (1994) rural tourism comes into existence when the rural culture is the key component of the product on offer. This form of tourism varies from one country to another with

various channels of rural tourism having been suggested. These include interest in farms, nature, adventure, health, education, arts, and heritage; and experiencing living history such as rural customs, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage (Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003).

Haghsetan, Mahmoudi and Maleki (2011) argue that developing rural areas through tourism calls for developing rural tourism first. This is attributed to the fact that rural tourism possesses strong social and economic potential for growth of the rural areas. Viljoen and Tlabela (2007), points out that rural tourism is as a way of involving the rural population in ventures that call for local ownership and management of tourism facilities in a given destination. In order to increase participation by the rural communities in rural development initiatives, Holland, Burian and Dixey (2003) stress the importance of considering appropriate forms of rural tourism.

Research Methodology

Focus group discussion (FGD) was used to obtain in-depth information describing integration of tourism with rural development. Focus group discussion produces data and insights by engaging the participants to interact in a group setting which in turn stimulates memories, ideas and experiences in participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The sample frame for the focus group was developed by identifying key groups through analysis of the industry stakeholders. Participants were derived from hospitality and tourism enterprises in the region, community based organizations (CBOs), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) concerned with rural development in Western Kenya. Great care was exercised in selecting focus group participants, designing the interview guide, and training moderators for the focus groups. A total of twenty seven participants were obtained for focus group discussion (FGD). The criteria for selecting the NGOs and CBOs was that each must have been involved in rural development initiatives in the region for at least five years.

The questions were based on rural development concerns for the region and the various forms of rural tourism that can be integrated with rural development strategies. Different sets of questions and focus group protocols were developed for the focus group participants. During the training session for moderators and assistant moderators, participants composed lists of focus group questions and probes for local business persons associated with tourism, CBOs and NGOs representatives. The principal investigators and an extension specialist then reviewed and revised the questions and probes. The questions and probes were then pre-tested and further revised. Focus

group participants were asked to discuss, in detail, the various forms of tourism suitable for stimulating rural development and entrepreneurship in Western Kenya; their ideas of rural development through tourism; tourism development strategies and how to integrate them with rural development; and the resultant benefit from the process of integration.

Focus group moderators and assistant moderators included the principal investigators, and regional hospitality and tourism specialists. Additionally, the principal investigators with the help of extension specialists developed a set of focus group procedures that helped guarantee reliability and consistency across the focus groups. Three separate focus groups were conducted, one with NGOs representatives, another with CBOs representatives, and the other with local business persons (LBP) in the hospitality and tourism industry. The LBP group consisted of 3 hotel managers, 3 tourism development and marketing officers, 2 tour operators in the region and 1 local entrepreneur in the tourism industry. The CBO group included 3 youth development initiative representatives, 3 women development initiative representative and 3 farmers involved with tourism representatives in the region. The NGO group included 3 members concerned with poverty reduction, 1 member from the education field, 3 members concerned with food security and 2 members concerned with health service delivery in the region. The average number of each focus group participants was 9. The length of the discussion in the focus groups ranged from 1 hour and 15 minutes to approximately 2 hours. All the focus group discussions were tape recorded and the assistant moderators took notes during every focus group session which were used in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Rural development concerns in Western Kenya

Poverty was adversely mentioned by the participants as the major challenge which still inhibits rural development in the western Kenya. The participants stated that poverty is still rampant because of unemployment in the region making the local people unable to provide better living standards for themselves. Food insecurity was also identified as a concern that should be addressed to solve many problems resulting from food shortage such as malnutrition and other health related issues. Rural areas have also been side lined politically propagating some of the challenges already facing the rural communities. However, participants felt that some of these problems if not all can be incapacitated through integration of appropriate tourism channels in the rural development plans. Through tourism development, participants believed

that other rural development concerns such as inadequate infrastructure and illiteracy could as well be history if well planned and coordinated.

Rural tourism channels for developing rural areas

Several rural tourism channels identified by the participants are summarized into four main channels: community based tourism (CBT), nature based tourism (NBT), cultural and heritage tourism (CHT) and agricultural based tourism (ABT).

Community based tourism

Community based tourism (CBT) is tourism in which local residents (often rural, poor and economically marginalized) invite tourists to visit their communities with the provision of overnight accommodation. In Kenya, the community based tourism concept is just taking root and there is a need to harness this product and direct it towards the market in a more cohesive and systematic manner throughout the entire rural regions in western Kenya.

Focus group participants felt that in order to develop and promote community based tourism, the community involved should position itself in a manner that is appealing to the tourist. This implies that the rural community has the responsibility of striving to make their communities attractive to tourists. Other participants felt that the local government should be involved in the process of making a particular community attractive. This is because lack of government support would lead to efforts being made by the local community to be attractive to yield nothing in the end, given that this is the same community which is still trying to improve its living standards.

Many participants felt considerable positive local outcomes and benefits could flow from community involvement in and ownership of tourism projects in the area. A member of the CBO group particularly mentioned that "...through community based tourism; rural residents could earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs, service and produce providers and employees". The participant went on to say that "...part of the revenue generated could be set aside for projects which provide benefits to the community as a whole". The participants identified community projects such as building schools, providing safe drinking water and constructing clinic facility for the rural community as some of the projects that can benefit from the revenue generated. One focus group participant said "Community members can be employed and trained in the tourism projects and benefit from wages, community development funds and involvement in spin off enterprise". Community based tourism would also enable tourist to discover local habitats and wildlife, and

celebrates and respects traditional cultures, rituals and wisdom. According to participants from the NGO group, the rural community will be aware of the commercial and social value placed on their natural and cultural heritage through community based tourism, and this will foster community based conservation of these resources. Similarly, the participants felt that the central government must be willing to support community involvement in the various tourism projects in order for the local communities to maximize benefits from tourism activities.

Participation of the local community in rural tourism development is considered critical for the success of such programs and also because the local people are always considered to be the custodian of tourism activities in any given destination. Focus group participants thought that in order to encourage participation of every community member in CBT, special education and training programs should be created to involve older people in the delivery of services. Involving the older members of the society in tourism service delivery would reduce their over-dependency on support from people living in the urban areas as this could be means by which they earn their livelihoods.

Nature based tourism

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, approximately 7% of international tourism sales are spent on nature tourism. Nature based tourism is defined as visitation to natural or near natural areas (Richards & Hall, 2000; Holden, 2000). The nature based tourism concept includes ecotourism and adventure tourism. Ecotourism focus on education and interpretation of the natural and cultural environment while adventure tourism concentrates more on exploring the various attractions for adventure.

In Kenya, the environment and tourism have always been inextricably linked, and this is a truly symbiotic relationship. According to the Kenya Ministry of Tourism, wildlife has always served as one of the major tourist draw cards, and the resultant revenue has played a major role in the great priority placed on wildlife preservation in Kenya. Ecotourism is considered an instrument for natural protection while at the same time it assures sustainable economic benefits for local people (Hall & Brown, 2000). Strasdas (2002) cited the main objective of ecotourism as to create high quality tourism, while protecting the environment and stimulating sustainable local development. The focus group participants outlined several activities related to adventure and nature based tourism that both the tourists and the local communities can benefit from. While tourists would enjoy the natural sceneries in the region, the participants felt

that local people can provide the necessary services to the tourists.

Focus group participants from the LBP enumerated various services that the rural community can provide in regard to nature based tourism. These include tour guiding services, serving as translators and story tellers, provision of food and beverage services and provision of accommodation services to the tourists. The income resulting from these activities could create the possibility to improve the necessary infrastructure to develop rural areas in western Kenya. Revenue generated from the tourist activities in the area could also be directed towards environment protection and local developments. Nature based tourism is believed to assure promotion and marketing of tourism products from protected areas; to increase public awareness on the importance of nature protection and conservation; and to contribute to sustainable rural development (Hodur, Leistriz & Wolfe, 2005).

Cultural and heritage tourism

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's (NTHP) defines cultural heritage tourism as travelling to experience places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present in a particular destination. Unlike the other forms of rural tourism, the focus is more on cultural, historic and natural resources. Focus group participants identified touristic activities associated with cultural and heritage tourism as experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts and special lifestyles, values, traditions, and events. Participants from the CBO group specifically noted the various cultural resources that could be of interest to tourists in western Kenya. These included festivals and events (whether sport or food related e.g. bull fighting in the small village of Si Galla Galla, near Kakamega), music and traditional dance, village and rural life, indigenous foods, visiting/tasting local products, village buildings and visiting historic and religious monuments such as Kit Mikayi (located off Bondo Road in Kisumu), art galleries at the various museums.

Newman and Smith (2000) argue that cultural resources generate economic vitality by leveraging human capital and culture to spawn economic strength through cultural attractions. This implies that the cultural resources identified by the participants could be pragmatic in improving the economic conditions of many rural communities. It is therefore important for rural development programs and strategies to focus more on those cultural resources believed to strengthen a community's wellbeing. Both the NGO and LBP focus group participants thought that rural

community would be in a better position both economically and socially if they directed their efforts in developing cultural and heritage tourism products. To achieve this, rural community members need to understand the local conditions, opportunities and nature of the cultural products on offer; and strategically plan how such resources will be utilized in the long run. They (NGO and CBO focus groups) stressed the importance of empowering local individuals and organizations to take leadership in the strategic planning effort in order to develop culture based tourism that benefits the local community.

It is believed that by focusing on the cultural and heritage products, many rural aspects such as service delivery, education and training, marketing, planning, management and assessment/evaluation and public policy actions could be supported. Focus group participants from the hospitality and tourism business felt that in order to develop and enhance cultural and heritage tourism, it is important for those involved in tourism planning and development to clearly distinguish rural tourism products on offer. They suggested full participation of tourism stakeholders to ensure that tourism products on offer are unique from others found elsewhere in the country.

The focus group participants suggested two ways to achieve this. First, they thought that it was important to enhance and renovate existing historic buildings, monuments, museums, archaeological and historical sites. They also thought it would be important to develop special events and festivals related to culture including food, dance, music or economic activities of the region to boost the existing ones. This would ensure that the rural community remains attractive at all time. However, the process of making the community attractive requires the input of all the stakeholders as already mentioned earlier. Other than focusing on the product variety, product quality was also mentioned by the participants. The focus group participants felt that provision of quality authentic tourism products was crucial for enhancing tourists experience and sustainability of the various programs or businesses all year round. Focus group participants from the hospitality and tourism industry (LBP) commented that, "...quality of the tourism products on offer should be emphasized in order to remain viable". Enhancing authenticity and quality of the product is thought would ensure that the region establishes itself as a unique touristic destination.

Agricultural based tourism

Agricultural tourism also known as agri-tourism or agro tourism is a combination of agriculture and tourism, use of agricultural landscapes and rural space to attract tourists (Liu, 2006). Its major

components include agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fisheries which provide a wide range of activities for tourists and the rural community to venture into (Liu, 2006; Ohe, 2006). This form of tourism is said to act not only as a link between the local people and the tourism industry, but also support the broader tourism industry as a whole (Ohe, 2006). This is attributed to the fact that tourists have to eat while away from home and the raw materials for their food are drawn from agricultural produce in the area visited and sometimes imported.

In Kenya as a whole and the western Kenya in particular, this form of tourism is still on its early stages of development. Despite being one of the least developed forms of rural tourism in western Kenya, the focus group participants believed that agricultural based tourism could serve as mitigation to some of the challenges facing the local people in rural areas. "If well developed, agricultural based tourism products would not only be utilized by tourists but also the local people," said a participant from the CBO group. In this context, rural communities benefits as the supplier of the agricultural based tourism product. This leads to multiplier effect which impacts on the entire rural communities.

Respondents in particular thought that the government should improve farming conditions and encourage people to employ sustainable methods of agriculture. This way, the participants believed this form of tourism would lead to a lot of benefits being enjoyed by the local people. For instance, members from the LBP group felt that local farmers should concentrate their efforts in indigenous food farming. Through this, the group participants believe that the community could supply various hotels and restaurants with indigenous or organic food products while at the same time alleviating food insecurity in the area. Focus group members highlighted an example of fish farming which they believed could serve as tourist attraction while at the same time generating income and providing food for the local community.

Mode of tourism and rural development integration

According to ISRDS (2000), integration has been a goal of rural development programs for many decades which have failed to achieve the desired synergy. The failure has often been attributed to lack of proper mechanism for the integration. Integration of rural development has been perceived to be a daunting task as it cuts across traditional sectors and involves all levels of

government. An effective mechanism however should specify what happens at the various levels, who does what, how will the integration be accomplished and the final outcome (ISRDS, 2000). Ndlovu and Rogerson (2004) highly recommend government support in tourism development and involvement in community support initiatives for a region's development.

All the focus group participants felt that the rural community had a role to play in rural development through rural tourism. However, the role of the government in linking tourism with rural development was thought by the participants to be a critical approach.

One of the participants particularly noted that "There is need for the central government to diversify rural tourism product by supporting new and existing ventures, projects and initiatives". This they believe would facilitate sustainable tourism development and improve living conditions in the rural areas. The focus group participants proposed several means by which the central government could be supportive. One respondent noted, "It is important that water services appropriate for hotels and restaurants are developed and that proper infrastructure is in place to ensure smooth operation of business, enhanced product quality and experience for the tourists."

Government participation, the focus groups noted, could be through provision of soft loans to the local community involved in touristic businesses such as carvings and artifacts. The community could then sell these products as souvenirs to tourists. This would ensure employment for the local people as well as encourage a culture of self-dependency, local cultural identity preservation and innovation.

Focus group participants also felt that tourism support facilities including education and training centres should be made available and accessible for the rural community. Through education and training of local population, respondents believed that tourism service quality will be maintained and customer service delivery will be up to standard. This in turn will ensure sustainability of spin-off businesses involved. Given that these businesses and programs are what support the community, the local people would benefit from the multiplier effect.

The focus group participants saw it necessary to involve local population in the planning, organization and coordination of tourist activities not only as beneficiary of the proceeds that would be realized, but also as an active factor of the rural development initiatives. The above discussion can be summarized by Figure 1.

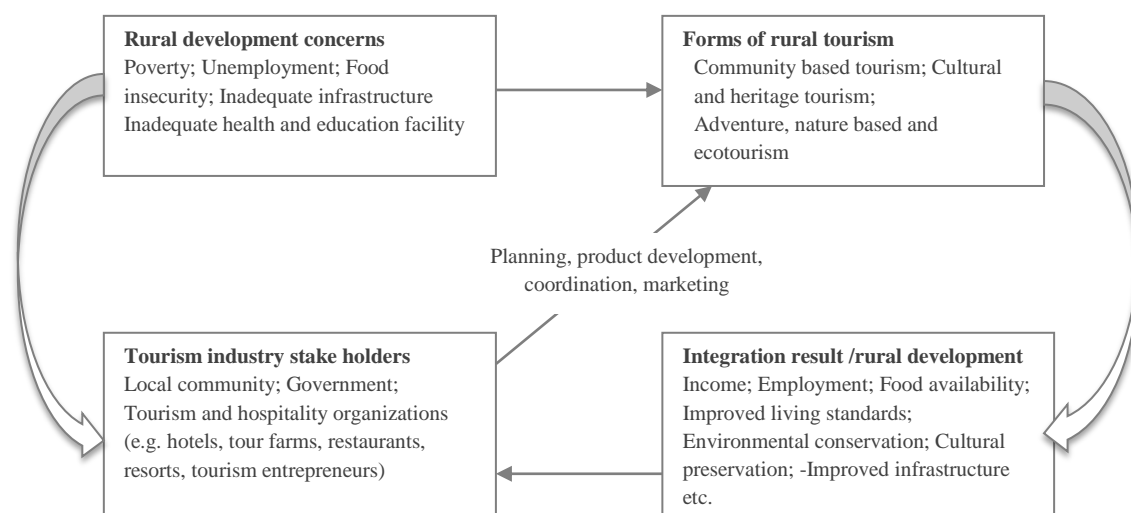


Figure 1. Channels of tourism integration with rural development

Conclusion

From the above results and discussion, it is clear that rural areas are an integral part of the modern tourism experience. In fact, rural tourism is considered as a tool for revitalizing rural communities. Rural development through tourism is only possible if rural tourism is first developed to a level that can sustain economic and social activities in the rural areas. The results indicate that there are four main channels of rural tourism which can be integrated with rural development strategies.

Through these forms of rural tourism, rural development concerns such as poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, illiteracy and health related issues could be mitigated. However, all the stakeholders including the rural community, the government (central and local government) and other players needs to be involved in the entire process of rural development through tourism. It is therefore important for the public policy makers to review the various forms of tourism to be sure that they are pragmatic to allow rural areas develop in a sustainable manner. If well integrated, the concept of tourism in rural development would lead to benefits accruing to local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development and preservation of the environment and heritage among other benefits.

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