

INTEGRATING TOURISM WITH RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN WESTERN KENYA

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Abstract *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. 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. 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. Focus group discussion (FGD) was used to obtain in-depth information describing integration of tourism with rural development. The FGDs 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. A total of twenty seven participants were obtained for FGDs. Poverty was adversely mentioned by the participants as the major challenge which still inhibits rural development in the western Kenya. Finally this research suggests measures for the tourism policy planners in Western Kenya.*

Keywords *Integrating, Tourism, Rural Development, Strategies, Western Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized for its tangible and less tangible outcomes. According to Hall and Brown (2002), tourism is one of the central means through which rural areas can adjust themselves economically, socially and politically to the new global environment. This contention has triggered increasing focus on tourism by primary producers and rural communities as an alternative means of achieving sustainable economic growth and development. Rural areas in this context refers to geographical areas in which primary production takes place and where populations are found in varying densities (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007).

Rural development is considered indispensable for the overall progress of any third world country because very high percentages of people in these countries reside in rural areas (Barrera & Muñoz, 2003). Kenya like other developing countries is facing the challenge of improving the lives of

her rural folks especially in its western region. Despite the existence of certain projects and programs meant for rural development, little success has been recorded. Poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and poor infrastructure are still some of the challenges facing people in the rural areas. Basic services such as primary education, health care, drinking water and roads remain deficient, making it difficult to achieve the millennium development goals. Tourism is regarded as the best option for improving the living standards of the people particularly those living in rural areas (Barrera & Muñoz, 2003). This is because of the fact that the number of tourists in countryside is steadily increasing.

However, consideration of tourism as an instrument of development in rural areas has been ignored for several years by governments of most developing countries. Tourism has been concentrated in prestigious areas of these countries (Cabrini, 2002) until very recently that some governments in developing countries including Kenya have started appreciating the role tourism can play in the development of

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rural areas. This paper therefore focuses on developing rural areas through various forms of tourism that can be integrated into broader rural development strategies in western Kenya.

TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The countryside is increasingly being viewed as a commodity (Kneafsey, 2001) that can be marketed by the tourism industry and consumed by the tourist. Many countries have incorporated tourism activities in order to achieve even development in both urban and rural regions (Hall & Page, 2002; Briedenhann & Wickens 2004). The most important factors to consider in this balancing act are: rural environment, rural population and natural products. All these factors are known to contribute to the particularities of recreation, gastronomy, culture and ecology that rural tourism generally offers (Tane & Thierheimer, 2009).

Rural development strategy and programs in most developing countries reinforce the need for consistent growth, while conserving natural resources for present and future generations (Ashley, 2000; Cabrini, 2002). Tane and Thierheimer (2009) identified four main objectives for rural development strategies and programs: to increase agricultural productivity; to expand farm and non-farm income earnings and food security; to reduce disease and ignorance; and to achieve sustainable natural resource management. Tourism is regarded as a viable tool in achieving all these objectives provided that both the targeted final consumers of tourism and the local community are considered (Kim, Chen, & Lang, 2006). Tourism is emphasized in this case not only as a foreign exchange earner but also as a source of employment (Reeder & Brown, 2005) and a means by which rural communities can achieve their livelihoods if well planned and incorporated.

Sharpley and Sharpley (2006) defines rural tourism as a state of mind, and technically, according to activities, destinations and other measurable, tangible characteristics. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE) (1994), 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 (Bramwell and Lane in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003) and experiencing living history such as rural customs, folklore, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage (Pedford in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003). Haghsetan, Mahmoudi and Maleki (2011) believe that in order to develop rural areas through tourism, it is important to first develop rural tourism because rural tourism is a strategy for improving economic and social life of poor villagers. This is attributed to the fact that rural tourism possess strong social and economic potential, it does not only involve local actors in sustainable

resource use, but also generates new income sources and improves life conditions (Barrera & Muñoz, 2003; Aranda, Combariza & Parrado, 2009).

According to Viljoen and Tlabela (2007), rural tourism is as a way of involving ventures that feature local ownership and management of tourism facilities within a given touristic destination. This can be achieved by developing tourism in rural areas in order to increase participation of the poor in the development of tourism and bring wider benefit to rural areas (Holland, Burian & Dexy, 2003). Holland, Burian and Dexy (2003) further argue that, since the success of tourism development depend on commercial, economic and logistical issues (such as the quality of the product, accessibility and infrastructure of the destination, availability of skills and interest of investors), rural areas may well be at a disadvantage. This is attributed to what Kay (2008) refer to as "Urban Bias" (UB). Therefore, successful development of rural areas through tourism requires the involved parties to overcome this notion and develop tourism products that fulfil both the needs of the tourists and the local people (Rogerson & Visser, 2004).

METHOD

Focus group discussion was used to obtain in-depth information describing integration of tourism with rural development. Dean (1994) contends that a focus group is an informal, small-group discussion designed to obtain in-depth qualitative information and is an excellent method to study processes. Participants were derived from hospitality and tourism organizations in the region, community based organizations (CBOs), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) concerned with rural development in Western Kenya. More specifically, the focus groups explored rural development concerns, the various forms of tourism that can be integrated with rural development strategies and the mode of tourism integration with rural development.

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 integration process as a whole. Great care was taken in selecting focus group participants, writing the questions, and training moderators and assistant moderators for the focus groups. Thirty participants were obtained for focus group discussion (FGD). Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and local business persons associated with tourism were identified from each of the ten counties in the region. Each of the NGOs and CBOs selected was involved in rural development in the region for at least

five years. Three focus groups were conducted, one with NGOs representatives, another with CBOs representatives, and the other with local business persons associated with tourism.

The focus groups with local business persons associated with tourism consisted of 3 hotel managers, 3 tourism development and marketing officers, 2 tour operators in the region and 1 entrepreneur and businessperson involved with tourism in the community. The focus group with CBO included 3 youth development initiative representatives, 3 women development initiative representative and 3 farmers involved with tourism representatives in the region. The NGO focus group included 3 members concerned with poverty reduction, 1 member concerned with education, 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. 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 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. All the focus group discussions were tape recorded. The assistant moderators took notes during every focus group session. Debriefings were conducted and field notes were taken as soon as possible after each focus group discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Focus group discussion results clearly indicated the importance of tourism in rural development. Rural development concerns that can be addressed through tourism as identified by the focus group participants were poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, inadequate infrastructure and inadequate health and education facilities. The focus group results suggest the following six rural tourism channels as a way of integrating tourism with rural development strategies: community based tourism; agri-tourism; culture and heritage tourism; nature based and adventure tourism; and ecotourism.

Community Based Tourism (CBT)

According to the Kenya Ministry of Tourism, community based tourism is a growing sector, globally and currently accounts for 5% of the global tourism market. This is due to the increasing number of tourists who want to interact with the local communities and to stay in places that positively impact on both the environment and the local population (Viljoen & Naicker, 2000). Focus group participants felt that in order to develop and promote community based tourism, the community involved should be appealing to tourist. It is therefore the responsibility of the local community to strive to make their communities attractive to tourists. However, other participants felt that the local government also had a role to play in making a particular community attractive through such initiatives as beautification campaigns and zoning. Lack of cooperation from local government was seen by participants as a way of creating problems such as unattractive environments making community efforts to be useless in the long run.

Many participants felt considerable positive local outcomes and benefits may flow from community involvement in and ownership of tourism projects in the area. Participants suggested land leases as one of the strategy towards tourism project ownership. The participants believed that communities can improve their lifestyles through increased revenue obtained from wages, land leases and development funds channelled towards tourism project development. One focus group participant observed that: "Community members can be employed and trained in the tourism projects and benefit from wages, community development funds and involvement in spin off enterprise." Another participant felt that by participating in such tourism projects, the local community can build schools, provide safe drinking water and construct clinic facility for its people.

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. Ndlovu and Rogerson (2004), highly recommends government involvement in community support initiatives. One of the participants said that "There is need for the central government to diversify the tourism product by supporting new and existing ventures, projects and initiatives, and to facilitate sustainable tourism development and enhanced product quality in the rural areas." Another participant proposed means of central government support to involve identifying, supporting and funding community tourism projects in the rural areas. One respondent noted, "It is important that water and sewer services appropriate for hotels and restaurants are developed and that proper infrastructure is in place to ensure smooth operation of business and to enhance product quality

and experience generated for the tourists.” Focus group participants felt that tourism support facilities including education and training centres should be made accessible for the local 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 such tourism businesses involved and since these businesses and programs are what support the community, the local people will benefit in the end.

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. If the older people are involved in the process, this will reduce their over-dependency on support from people living in the urban areas as this could be means by which they earn their livelihoods.

Through CBT, the participants believed that the local communities may earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs e.g. hand crafts, restaurant owners, hotel and resort owners, service and produce providers e.g. suppliers of farm produce to the various hotels within the community, and employees in the various tourism facilities established within the community. “Sometimes, part of the tourist income could be set aside for projects which provide benefits to the community as a whole and in this instance, everyone in the community is set to benefit from CBT projects,” said one of the participants. 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 Kenya.

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 can be defined as visitation to natural or near natural areas (Richards & Hall, 2000; Holden, 2000). These include ecotourism and adventure tourism. Ecotourism is a niche component of nature based tourism, with a focus on education and interpretation of the natural and cultural environment. Ecotourism is an instrument for natural protection and at the same time assures sustainable economic benefits for local people (Hall & Brown, 2000). The concept of ecotourism explains mutual relations established between tourists, environment and culture which not only bring important benefits to the local economy but also insure the conditions for a long-term development and maximum recreational satisfactions for tourists (Hodur, Leistriz, & Wolfe 2005). According to Strasdas (2002), the main objective of ecotourism is to create

high quality tourism, while protecting the environment and stimulating the durable local development, that can be achieved by activating financing resources, realizing the environmental education, and involving local communities.

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 including landscape, vegetation and other natural features in the region, the local people can provide the necessary services to the tourists in the form of tour guides, translators, story tellers, food and beverage services and even accommodation provision to the tourists. The focus group participants felt that the income resulting from these activities creates the possibility to develop the necessary infrastructure to develop rural areas in Western Kenya. Income obtained from the tourist activities in the area can also be directed towards both environment protection and local developments. When it comes to this form of tourism, participants from CBO focus group said it was necessary to involve local population when organizing tourist activities not only as beneficiary of obtained profits, but also as an active factor of the tourist developments in rural areas.

In this case, these forms of rural tourism are understood as environmental, sociological and economic category (Hodur, Leistriz & Wolfe, 2005). As economic category it crucially contributes to sustainable rural development while at the same time it is a motor of development. As sociological category contribute to higher awareness of public about importance of nature protection, while at the same time visitors have the impression of protection and maintaining social activities of the local communities. As economic category these forms of tourism assure promotion and marketing of products from protected areas like nature, cultural heritage, clean water, fresh air, local authentic products (also from ecological farming)

Cultural and Heritage Tourism

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s (NTHP) defines cultural heritage tourism as travelling to experience the places, artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes 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. Specifically, various activities that could be of interest to tourists identified by the focus group participants include festivals and events, music and traditional dance, village and rural life (e.g. farms, local market activities), gastronomy,

visiting/tasting local products, general sightseeing, village buildings and “atmosphere,” and visiting historic and religious monuments.

Cultural resources are believed to generate economic vitality by leveraging human capital and culture to generate economic strength through cultural attractions (Newman & Smith, 2000). Many focus group participants recognized that programs based on cultural resources may restore, revitalize or strengthen a community or neighbourhood by serving as a centrepiece for development and cultural renewal. One focus group participant observed that “the available cultural resources may contribute to an area’s ‘innovativeness’ by making communities in the area more attractive to highly desirable cultural knowledge-based activities and permitting new forms of knowledge intensive production to flourish.” Both the NGO and CBO focus group participants thought that rural community would be well served to begin its efforts in developing cultural and heritage tourism with some of the key elements of strategic planning in order to fully understand local conditions and opportunities and to set a strategic direction. 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. The participants believed that focusing on the cultural and heritage products will support services, public works, education and training, marketing, planning, management and assessment/evaluation and public policy actions.

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: enhancing and renovating historic buildings, monuments, museums, archaeological and historical sites; and developing special events and festivals related to culture including food, dance, music or economic activities of the region. Developing minority cultural heritage facilities and programs according to some of the respondents would also ensure that the minority groups often overlooked by the government in developmental activities are part and parcel of tourism development in a given rural region. This in turn they believed would make such people feel appreciated and would be willing to take part in rural development initiatives through tourism. In order to achieve this successfully and throughout all seasons, the focus group participants from the hospitality and tourism industry commented that quality of the tourism products on offer should be emphasized. Quality of local products on offer would ensure that the

region establishes itself as a unique touristic destination.

Focus group participants stressed the importance of the government involvement in development of small and medium sized touristic businesses that focus on locally themed items. Government participation, the focus groups noted, could be through provision of soft loans to the local community involved in such businesses. The community can then sell these products as souvenirs to tourists. Other than ensuring employment for the local people, this will encourage a culture of self-dependency and local cultural identity preservation. Focus group participants from the hospitality and tourism industry felt that continued support of businesses such as local restaurants, hotels, souvenirs shops by the government is very critical in ensuring sustainability and viability of such businesses in the rural areas. Participants felt that educating and training local population in cultural areas such as conservatory, youth and college-level music, arts and crafts programs etc. will also ensure cultural preservation, community support, community involvement and income generation on part of the local people. Individual organizations should be assisted in developing grant applications for outside support marketing, branding and in promoting rural regions’ cultural/heritage sites and events as well as related tourism services and non-cultural activities.

The participants believed that the local community can be involved in the development of a tourism master plan such as airport, hotel complex, roads, sports and leisure facilities and cultural activities to encourage medium-stay by tourists. The community could also get involved in the establishment of tourism guidelines for coordinating and cooperating with other stakeholders in creating strategic partnerships (governments, non-profit organization, and private firms). This in turn will provide support for small organizations with small budgets in achieving some economies of scale and broadening the programs considered to be part of the cultural and heritage tourism activities. Respondents also felt that local communities should also be involved in negotiating packaging arrangements (itineraries, support services, regional focus) with a variety of arrangements (cultural products of the same type, cultural products of different types such as festivals, cultural and non-cultural products, hotels, resorts, retail areas, sports and outdoor recreation, amusement attractions).

Agricultural 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). It entails agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fisheries as a wide range of agricultural resource-based development of tourism products that provide special service for tourists (Liu, 2006; Ohe, 2006).

This form of tourism acts not only as a link between the local people and the tourism industry but also support the broader tourism industry as a whole. This is because tourists have to eat while away from home and the raw materials for their food are drawn from agricultural produce in the area visited. Despite its underdevelopment in Western Kenya, the focus group participants believed that this form of tourism could serve as mitigation to some of the challenges facing the local people in rural areas. Respondents in particular thought that the government should improve farming conditions and encourage people to employ sustainable methods of agriculture that attract tourists. 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 felt that by people concentrating their efforts in indigenous food farming, 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. The above discussion can be summarized in figure 1.0 below

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear that rural areas are an integral part of the modern tourism experience. In fact, tourism is considered as one tools for revitalization of rural communities and as part of a bigger picture to bring in money and visitors to communities. By understanding that tourism also plays a role in providing exposure to an area that may attract new residents or investment (if they are seen as attractive), then the industry may be seen as an important player of rural development. The above discussion shows that rural tourism is seen as a very important, probably even the most important, factor for economic development in rural areas and it is also seen as a solution for lost working places

Rural development through tourism calls for coordination of all the stakeholders in the tourism industry with the main focus on the well being of the local community. Appropriate policies need to be established to support ventures in rural tourism related activities. 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. The basic concept of tourism in rural areas is thus envisaged in the 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.

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