

PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF KISUMU REGION, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The Kenyan tourism industry has over the years relied on beach and safari tourists to the Kenyan coast and selected Parks and reserves. This has put a lot of pressure on these regions leading to negative environmental and social impacts. To overcome the negative impacts, there have been efforts to develop and market alternative destinations such as Western Kenya under which Kisumu region lies. This paper aims at exploring the viability of the Western region, specifically Kisumu for tourism by analyzing its strengths and challenges in relation to attractions, amenities/facilities and accessibility. A mixed methods approach, where both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques was used. Results indicate that Kisumu has strengths in attractions and challenged amenities/facilities and accessibility. For sustainable tourism development, through product diversification to Kisumu, the government and other stakeholders need to develop amenities/facilities (especially accommodation) and improve the accessibility within the region.

Key Words: Kisumu region, Tourism product diversification, Sustainable development.

1.0 Introduction

The Kenyan tourism industry has over the years relied on beach and safari tourists to the Kenyan coast and selected Parks and Reserves respectively. This has put a lot of pressure on these regions leading to negative environmental and social impacts. To overcome the negative impacts, there have been efforts to develop and market alternative destinations such as Western Kenya under which Kisumu region lies. For tourism to be viable in a region, there are basic requirements that have to be met. According to Inskip (1991) the attractions and features of a destination provide the basis for developing tourism. Pearce (1989) further notes that the tourism potential of an area is determined by aspects such as climate, physical conditions, attractions, access, existing facilities, land tenure and land use. Additional factors affecting the attractiveness of a destination include the availability of regional incentives, political stability of the area, public health and safety, destination travel costs among other factors.

The presence of the above mentioned basic attributes for tourism development in a destination doesn't guarantee its success. In the world today, a destination has to develop tourism in a sustainable manner. The concept of sustainable tourism development has its roots from the sustainable development discourse which emerged in the 1980s in the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987) and gained prominence after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. In layman's terms sustainable development refers to the development that takes care of the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable tourism development is widely and variously defined and encompasses the 'triple bottom line' of economic health, social and environmental wellbeing (Sharpley 2009). Sustainable tourism development is operationalized as policies, plans and activities in a destination context aimed at ensuring that tourism develops without harming the economic, environmental and social wellbeing (Sharpley 2009).

As the third highest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Kenya's tourism has been promoted by the government as a strategy for sustainable development. This is because its a source of economic growth and poverty alleviation and has also been identified as a cornerstone of Kenya's *Vision 2030*, which is the country's development plan to transform it to a middle income country by the year 2030 (World Bank 2010). Despite this important role, the industry has been characterized by lack of sound tourism policy, unsystematic tourism planning, unclear roles and responsibilities, lack of tourism awareness, insecurity and bad publicity and a narrow range of tourism products (Akama 1997; 1999; Manyara and Jones 2007). One of the solutions to these challenges has been to diversify tourism to other regions of the country most prominently the Western circuit, where Kisumu is located. The solutions to the challenges of Kenya's tourism industry have been referred by the World Bank as 'polishing the jewel'.

Diversification of the tourism industry to these new destinations requires that development is done in a way which is sustainable to avoid the social, environmental and economic challenges experienced in the existing destinations such as the Kenyan coast and the overexploited parks and reserves. This article therefore contributes to the debates on this new strategy of Tourism Product Diversification in Kenya. The article analyses the strengths and challenges of Kisumu region as a tourism destination and recommends the way forward to ensure that the development is done in a sustainable manner. The article starts by summarizing the concept of sustainable

development, discusses the nature of the Kenyan tourism industry, the tourism product diversification as a sustainable development strategy and the constituent elements of tourism in a destination. The article further discusses the study methodology and the results of the Kisumu region as a tourism destination in terms of its strengths and challenges. The article then concludes and offers recommendations for sustainable tourism development in the Kisumu region.

1.1 Concept of Sustainable Tourism Development

The roots of sustainable tourism development lie in the concerns over the environmental consequences of rapid and unplanned mass tourism development (Sharpley 2009). Sustainable tourism is a prerequisite for sustainable development. The concept has however been critiqued as being vague, ambiguous, sectoral, too conceptual and confused with environmental issues (Sharpley 2009). Despite all these criticisms, Briassoulis (2002) argues that the discourse of sustainable tourism development revolves around a central issue of how to manage the natural, built and socio-cultural resources of host communities in order to meet the fundamental criteria of promoting their economic wellbeing, preserving their natural and socio-cultural capital, achieving intra and inter generational equity in the distribution of costs and benefits, securing their self sufficiency and satisfying the needs of the tourists. Among the principles that guide sustainable tourism include:- Minimizing environmental impacts, Achieving conservation outcomes, Reflecting community values, Providing mutual benefits to visitors and hosts and Building local capacity among others (Sharpley 2009).

The concept of sustainable tourism development has received massive international attention. For example, The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 2001. In addition, a plan of implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg identified further measures to promote sustainable tourism development, with a view to increasing “the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages” (WTO, 2002). Despite the attention and the ‘good intentions’ of sustainable development, there is need for systematic action and the availability of adequate resources at both national and international levels. This article contributes to this discussion by contributing information to one of Kenya’s national plan of achieve for the achievement of sustainable tourism development.

1.2 The state of development in Kenya

According to Ikiara *et al.* (2006) the Kenyan government has since 1963 been struggling with development challenges. The development challenges have been addressed through Development Plans, Sessional Papers and Recovery Strategy Papers such as the Recovery and Sustainable Development to the year 2010 contained in the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1994 and most recent the Vision 2030. Despite all the efforts more than 60% of the Kenyan population live below the poverty line (Ikiara *et al.* 2006). The main economic sectors in Kenya include agriculture, forestry, transport & communication, manufacturing, wholesale & retail trade and tourism.

1.3 The nature and role of the tourism Industry in Kenya

Kenya is regarded by many as the “Jewel of East Africa” (World Bank 2010). Tourism in Kenya is a major foreign exchange earner contributing to over 10% to GDP (Ikiara *et al.* 2006; Reid 2003). In 2005 tourism for example contributed to Kshs. 49 billion (US\$ 700 million) and directly employing 176,000 people, which is about 10 % of jobs in the formal sector (CBS 2006). The industry is built around abundance of wildlife, world-class beaches and traditional cultures such as the Maasai (Ikiara *et al.* 2006; Reid 2003). However, many of Kenya’s parks and reserves have become gigantic zoos as a result of overuse by tourists, severe environmental problems and human-wildlife conflicts (Reid 2003) with majority of the tourism activity concentrated within the Maasai Mara, the Amboseli National Park and the sea coast, mainly Mombasa.

As a result of the prevailing model, tourism faces numerous challenges such as unsystematic tourism planning, lack of tourism awareness, insecurity, and bad publicity, stiff competition from other countries, poor road infrastructure and narrow range of tourism products (Akama 1997; 1999; Ikiara *et al.* 2006; Manyara and Jones 2007). One of the plans to deal with the challenges has been to promote the other undiscovered wonders of Kenya in order to ensure sustainability of tourism and empower local communities economically. One of the earmarked regions is the Western Tourism Circuit, which Kisumu region is part. This article thus establishes the potentials of Kisumu region as a tourist destination through an analysis of the strengths and challenges.

There are diverse reasons for advocating diversification of tourism to areas such as Kisumu as a strategy for sustainable development. First, is because tourism can act as a catalyst for investment in other sectors thus leading to economic diversification to these areas. Second is that tourism stimulates economic diversification across sectors and therefore economic growth. Third tourism offers strong potential for environmental and cultural linkages by providing an economic incentive to preserve natural and cultural sites, undertake environmental cleanup efforts, and improve local environmental management all which can lead to environmental and social wellbeing which are key pillars for sustainable development. Tourism expenditures can turn over 7 to 11 times in an economy. In addition, pro-poor tourism studies have shown tourism linkages clearly benefiting the poor (World Bank 2010).

1.3 Product diversification as a tool for Sustainable Tourism Development in Kenya

Product diversification in terms of tourism activities and destinations/ physical regions has been identified as one of the strategies that will lead to sustainable development in Kenya. It is aimed at distributing tourism activities and benefits to other areas. For example, it is estimated that 66% of tourism expenditure takes place in the Coast Province, 14% within Nairobi, and 8% in the Rift Valley province (Ikiara *et al.* 2006). This pattern of high concentration indicates that income and employment benefits are unevenly distributed throughout the country and with tourism development to other areas, this scenario will be overturned. This scenario has been acknowledged by the government for example in the Tourism Strategic Plan (2008-2012) which acknowledges that potential exists for spreading tourism to areas such as L. Victoria and other regions away from most visited and crowded areas (GOK 2008). Despite this acceptance there exists limited information regarding the potentials of these regions for tourism development.

This is especially in terms of the 5 As of a tourism destination which include:- Attractions, Access, Amenities , accommodation and Awareness (World Bank 2010). This article fills this gap by analyzing the strengths and challenges of the Kisumu region as a potential and existing tourism destination.

1.4 Constituent elements of tourism

The tourism industry according to Inskeep (1991) and Pearce (1998) comprises of attractions, accommodation & catering, sightseeing and entertainment among others. Tourism is therefore a complex activity comprising travel to and around a destination (Briassoulis 2002). In summary, a destination can be considered the ‘umbrella’ under which the diverse sub-sectors of tourism industry work in partnership to provide facilities and services for leisure and business travelers. According to Holloway (2002), a destination can be a particular resort or town, a region within a country, the whole of a country or even a larger area of the globe. All destinations share certain characteristics and their success in attracting tourists will depend upon the quality of three essential benefits that they offer the tourists, these are, attractions, amenities (or facilities) and accessibility (Holloway 2002).

The above argument is supported by Cooper and Hall (2008) who are of the opinion that if a destination seeks to attract tourists, the following four categories of resources should be available in the destination. The first category is resources in the form of physical and cultural attractions to induce people to visit. The second category is resources in the form of facilities and services including human resources that enable them to stay at the destination. The third category is resources in the form of infrastructure and services that make the destination accessible as well as the various attractions, facilities and services within the destination accessible. Infrastructure includes transportation, roads, electricity, water, sanitation and communications set up in a destination and determines the investment climate affecting either directly the establishment or operations of business and/or indirectly through increased operation costs compared to regions with better infrastructure (Ikiara *et al.* 2006; World Bank 2010). The fourth category is information provision so that the consumer actually knows about the destination and its resources.

1.5 Justification and objectives

As noted earlier in the discussion, Kenya is a prime exponent of beach/safari combination holidays. It is unfortunate, however, that despite Kenya’s vast tourism products only a few have been marketed and exploited for tourism (WTO, 1994). The result has been an increase in mass tourism particularly during the peak season, leading to the degradation of the same resources that tourism thrives on. This scenario has made it necessary to seek for new untouched products with high value to complement the traditional beach/safari options. The calls and subsequent efforts for diversification of Kenya’s tourism product provides for and justifies for the assessment and evaluation of various potentials for sustainable tourism development in Kenya. This article therefore assessed the strengths and challenges of Kisumu City and its surrounding areas as a sustainable tourist destination in Western Circuit of Kenya. Kisumu region is selected due to the increased attention from government and its vast natural attractions. The article specifically aims at assessing the status of the attractions, accommodation facilities, transport and infrastructure facilities as well as the challenges in the region with regard to tourism.

2.0 Methodology

This article summarizes results of a study that was conducted between December 2009 and February 2011. The study employed a mixed methodology approach where both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used. The study entailed a survey of a purposively selected sample of 30 managers from 15 purposively selected tourism-related establishments (hotels, guest houses, fast food outlets, restaurants museums, boat operators and wildlife sanctuaries), 2 Ministry of Tourism, Kisumu office officials and 50 visitors randomly selected from the selected tourism facilities. Primary and secondary sources of information were used. Primary sources of data included questionnaires, interviews schedules and observations schedules while secondary sources of data included published literature on sustainable tourism development, government documents on tourism and Kisumu region.

Questionnaires were issued to collect information from guests or visitors to the selected tourist facilities in the Kisumu region. The questionnaires sought to establish information regarding the visitors opinion of the quality of attractions, accommodation, means of transport used to the destination and the activities they engage in while at the destination. Interviews were conducted with managers of the tourist facilities and the Ministry of Tourism Kisumu Office officials. Information sought through interviews included the challenges or constraints faced by tourist service providers in the region. The observation schedule was used to observe the general level of infrastructure development in the area as well as the weaknesses of the region in terms of attractions, accommodation and infrastructure. Qualitative data were analyzed using Microsoft excel and presented as descriptive statistics (percentages) while content analysis was performed on qualitative data and reported in form of narrative.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Attractions in Kisumu Area

Natural attractions: Lake Victoria (the largest fresh water lake in Africa with related attractions and activities), Impala wildlife sanctuary (a 1km² wildlife sanctuary with Impala, Hippos, birds, baboons and leopards), Ndere Islands National Park, Kit Mikayi granitic tors (large upright stone with myths and legends among the local Luo community and believed to bestow good fortune to visitors), Ahero rice fields, Kajulu Hills, Rusinga island (base for exploring L. Victoria with plenty of birdlife) and Ruma National Park (120 km² of savanna and hills, last refuse for the roan Antelope and home to Rothschild giraffe and Oribi antelope) among other natural attractions. *Cultural and historical attractions:* Lwanda Magere (a site where the strong legendary Luo community warrior was killed during wars with a neighbouring community and is used for rituals and prayers), Kisumu Museum (established in 1980 and consists of among others a UNESCO sponsored traditional Luo community homestead), Jomo Kenyatta Sports Ground, Kotetni cultural centre. *Man-made attractions:* Boat riding facilities (Lake challenged by the presence of water hyacinth and poor state of boat riding facilities and equipment), Fishing facilities (Lake challenged by the presence of water hyacinth and poor state of boat riding facilities and equipment), Buildings and other monuments.

Rating of Kisumu as a destination by tourists: Visitors were asked to rate Kisumu area as a destination in terms of the attractions. Results indicate that 22% rated it very good, 51% rated it good, and 22% rated it moderate while only 5% rated it poor. Regarding the reasons for their

visit to Kisumu, 32% came for business and conference, 26% for recreational and leisure purposes, 18% for wildlife viewing, 17% visit for adventure while only 4% visit for culture purposes. The satisfaction with the attractions by the visitors is an indicator of the key potential element of tourism development in Kisumu region. It is however important as advised by Lickerish (1991) that major and subsidiary tourism attractions be identified, ranked against other regions and their competitiveness identified to get some indication of the market segment which might be interested to it.

Activities engaged in by tourists: Managers response on the activities visitors to their establishments participate in indicate that 51% participate in conference and workshops, 28% participate in wildlife seeing while 11% participate in site seeing and sports. The visitors' responses to the same question indicate that 37% participate in conferences, 24% boat riding, 16% game viewing, 13% swimming while 13% sport fishing.

3.2 Accommodation and Hospitality facilities

In terms of accommodation facilities, there are no 5-star, 4-star or 3-star hotels in Kisumu area. There are two one-star hotels with a bed capacity of 160 and one two-star hotel with a bed capacity of 140 beds (Ikiara *et al.* 2006) other accommodation facilities include non-rated small hotels and guest houses. Among the prominent hotels in the Kisumu region include Imperial hotel, Kisumu hotel, Sunset hotel, Kisumu Beach resort, Nyanza Club and Kisumu Bay Hotel amongst others. Other outlets for lower spenders include guest houses and hostels.

Visitors rating on the quality of the accommodation and other hospitality services indicate that 17 % rate them as very good, 54 % as good, 24 % as moderate and 5 % as poor. Other services used by the guests during their stay included banking facilities, health facilities and retail outlets. The results of visitor rating of the facilities revealed that they are good, but relative to other established destinations, this area is evidently of lower class. This can be concluded as a characteristic of exploration stage of tourism destination life cycle (Butler 1980). This scenario may be attributed to investors not willing to risk investing in the area due to uncertainty in the sustainability of the destination's tourism. Local investment should therefore be encouraged.

The accommodation sector according to Ray (1998) provides leisure and business tourists with somewhere to stay and sustenance while traveling to or staying in the destinations. It encompasses hotels, self-catering accommodation, restaurants, fast-food outlets, contract catering and a wide range of other enterprises like guesthouses, kebab bars harbor side restaurants e.t.c. accommodation and catering in purely economic terms, is the most significant of all the sectors of international tourism since it is the biggest employer and account for the largest proportion of tourist expenditure.

3.3 Transport and infrastructural facilities

Electricity: Available even to the inhabitants of the surrounding rural areas, though management indicated frequent rationing. *Communication facilities:* Telephone services, fax services, E-mail. These were found to be available and reliable in areas near the city but not in the remote areas where the wildlife Parks are located.

Water and Sewerage system –Provided by the Kisumu Water and Sewerage Company (KIWASCO). Water supply was sometimes unreliable due to rationing and Sewage systems not well maintained and missing in some areas.

Transportation: The visitors were asked about the means of transport they used to reach Kisumu City and the results were as follows; 28% of the visitors arrived by air, 62% by road and 10% by water, that is through L. Victoria. Results from observation of the nature of transportation infrastructure in terms of roads, railway and airport are summarized below:-

Roads: The area has good road network making it easily accessible. Public Service Vehicles, taxis and *boda-bodas* (*Motorcycle and bicycle taxis*) are available in town but not to the rural areas.

Railway: There is railway network which help in both passenger and goods transport from Kisumu to Butere, Nakuru and Nairobi. This is not very reliable due to poor management of RVR.

Airport: The Kisumu airport has been expanded to meet international standards. This has facilitated international flights as well as domestic flights.

Transport to islands was however a challenge due to poor nature of the water vessels and the remoteness of these areas rich in wildlife. Guests were also asked to rate their opinion of the security of the region. 12 % rated the security as very good, 45 % as good, 34 % as moderate and 8 % as poor.

3.4 Challenges to tourism development in Kisumu Area

To achieve this objective, tourist facility managers and Ministry of Tourism Kisumu office officials were asked in the questionnaire and interview respectively to give an insight into some of the challenges faced in the development of tourism in the area. Respondents were also required to give their view on the various destination mix elements found in the region relative to other developed tourism areas. Challenges identified included: - Inadequate marketing of the region, Poor infrastructure, Lack of trained staff, Poor waste disposal, Insecurity, Inadequate equipment especially for boat operators, Competition from other regions, Seasonality of business and Inadequate finances.

These challenges are interdependent and can be attributed to lack of stakeholder commitment and their solutions lie in stakeholder commitments. The government for example can provide both direct and indirect incentives for tourism development including assistance in the effective marketing of the region. Lack of an established tourist circuit and a clear marketing programme could also be attributed to lack of collaboration among the key stakeholders, that is, the government and the private sector. There are no specialized tour operators in the area perhaps because of the risk of venturing into an un-established tourism destination/circuit. This might have contributed to poor marketing as marketing is now left to KTB and the accommodation service providers. The study established that though KTB has been vocal about developing the Western Tourism Circuit, little efforts are practically seen to market this region both domestically and internationally.

The above challenges have also been acknowledged in diverse literature (Ikiara et al. 2006; World Bank 2010). For example Ikiara *et al.* (2006) argue that government budget allocation to the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) for destination marketing is very low relative to those of competitor destinations such as Egypt, Mauritius and South Africa. During the 2006/2007 financial year, for instance, KTB was allocated only Kshs. 750 million when stakeholders feel that Kshs. 2 billion is required. Due to resource inadequacy, KTB often holds trade fairs in Europe and contracts a

foreign organization based in Europe to market the destination. Besides inadequacy of resources, Ikiara and colleagues further note that KTB's marketing efforts appears to have been concentrated on coastal beaches and game parks/reserves, leaving out other regions including some with classified hotels.

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

In summary, Kisumu area has a huge potential for tourism development despite the weaknesses in terms of poor infrastructure, inadequate bed capacity/accommodation, poor waste disposal and numerous challenges such as insecurity, competition from other regions, seasonality and inadequate finances among others. For sustainable tourism development to take place in the area, there is need to ensure that the weaknesses and challenges are addressed by all stakeholders especially the government. This development should take place in a way that the present needs of the tourists and host communities are met while maintaining the cultural integrity, ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. For further research, the study recommends an investigation on the information provision/dissemination to potential and current visitors about the region.

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