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Domestic Tourism Strategies and its Implications on Economic Growth: Case Study of Rwandan National Parks

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Domestic tourism is a critical part of tourism development in Rwanda. However, most of the government's efforts have been concentrated on the development of international tourism. This focus has resulted in considerable growth in the country's most significant contributor to the national economy. While the impact of domestic tourism has been addressed in the latest developed Rwanda's National Tourism Strategy, the initiatives set forward have had minimal effects. This paper aimed to address the issue of an increased focus on domestic tourism contribution in developing the economy of Rwanda besides international tourism. The rationale for this paper supports a strong motivation for a more dedicated approach by Rwanda's tourism stakeholders (public and private) to develop the country's domestic tourism market alongside the international market with reference to the national parks of Rwanda. The population under this study was composed of three different groups of respondents at three national parks in Rwanda. These were local residents living adjacent to the three national parks under study; the park authorities and government officials (policymakers) in tourism and conservation-related matters, and tourism and conservation experts. The researcher developed a structured questionnaire that was administered to the selected respondents. The administration of the questionnaire was done by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. The researcher used descriptive analysis to analyse the data. The data collected using the open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis. The study established that domestic tourism is yet to be developed in Rwanda. The study also reported that domestic tourism has the potential of leading to significant economic development by supplementing revenue generated by foreign tourists.

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INTRODUCTION

As a continuously growing industry worldwide, tourism has often demonstrated its role as a vital tool in the advancement of economies through direct domestic and foreign exchange earnings and through the employment and investment opportunities it can generate (Nkurayija, 2011). The role of domestic tourism and its importance for the creation of sustainable tourism industry has been widely acknowledged, but limited researches on the subject exist and few tourism policies tend to neglect its full potentials.

Rwanda as an African country claiming to rebuild itself economically, socially and politically has chosen tourism as one of its main economic drivers for poverty reduction and economic development (Kabera, 2010). However, its implementation has so far directed most of its efforts on the development of international tourism, leaving behind the development of domestic tourism potential. Travel by local tourists is often overlooked by members of the tourism industry and is often considered as a luxury activity in the Rwandan context. The few available tourism policies tend to neglect the potentiality domestic tourism has on society. The country's current tourism initiatives attract specific international tourists (Musana & Mutuyeyezu, 2011). The Rwanda tourism sector has realised National Park's potential to attract many more

tourists than it has been able to in the past, and though lack of accommodation and poor roads leading to the parks have "plagued" tourism opportunities thus far, the park was selected as a priority by Rwanda's tourism industry for development in 2005 (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011).

Marketing plans provided for this market have resulted in considerable growth in the country's first significant contributor to the foreign earner income for the national economy since 2007. While such growth is considerable and welcome in the latest material used to develop Rwanda's National Tourism Strategy, the moment has come to investigate the potentials of domestic tourism and its effects on the Rwandan economy, especially at this time of international financial downturn. While the impact of domestic tourists has been addressed in Rwanda's National Tourism Strategy, the initiatives set forward have had minimal effects (Mazimhaka, 2007).

This research focuses on the contribution of domestic tourism to Rwanda's economic development; especially at this time of the international financial downturn. This paper argues that the development of a more focused domestic tourism alongside international tourism offers opportunities for a more diverse and economically sustainable domestic tourism industry that can mitigate the adverse impact of the global financial

crisis (Masozera, Alavalapati, Jacobson & Shrestha, 2006).

Rwanda is a landlocked country situated in central Africa, literally in the heart of Africa. It is known as 'the land of a thousand hills'. The population of Rwanda is approximately 12 million people (NISR, 2012) of whom 88% are engaged in the agricultural sector and rely mainly on subsistence farming. It has five volcanoes, twenty-three lakes and numerous rivers, some forming the source of the River Nile. Rwanda is bordered by Uganda to the North, Tanzania to the East, Burundi to the South and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the West. The country has a variety of green landscapes of hills, dominated to the north by volcanoes and bordered by Lake Kivu to the west. The great animals of the wild are protected from poachers and roam free in the national parks. The Volcanoes National Park is world-famous for mountain gorillas, teeming with wildlife both large and small, while Lake Kivu to the west offers beautiful beaches, jutting peninsulas and an archipelago of islands (Kabera, 2017).

The land of thousands of hills offers tourists a home to one-third of the world remaining Mountain Gorillas, one-third of Africa's birds 'species, several species of primates, volcanoes, game reserve, resorts and islands on the expansive lake Kivu, graceful dancers, artistic crafts and friendly people. According to Grospietsch (2004), "Rwanda is a thriving, safe country with one of the lowest crime rates in Africa. All major attractions are located within a 1-5-hour drive from the capital, Kigali. In a short vacation, a tourist can reach volcanoes, rainforests, savannah, lakes and the beautiful city of Kigali". The land is a very precious natural resource, the need for which often overrides other development initiatives (World Wildlife Fund, 2002).

The catastrophic 1990-1994 war and genocide decimated a fragile economic base and badly affected the livelihood of the population. The image of the country was damaged, which in turn impacted

on both private and external investments. After 1994, the country was faced with the task of reforming its economy. This reform effort has subsequently brought about a surge of growth during the last twenty years, particularly in the tourism sector which has currently taken the lead as a foreign earner income since 2008, Poverty nonetheless remains there and the government's main economic challenge is to stimulate new sources of poverty-reduction. More significantly, the persistent lack of economic diversification keeps the country vulnerable due to market fluctuations. While the development of the primary agricultural sector, as well as that of manufacturing and other service industries, is badly needed, it is assumed that tourism industry could have greater potential impacts given Rwanda's current stability/travel infrastructure and several potential tourist sites and other attractions. Rwanda's history, its distinct culture and varied natural attractions come together to form a unique experience for any type of tourist. Over the twenty years, in particular, the country has transformed itself into an interesting destination with rich experiences for any visitor. Rwanda's tourism has mainly been based on its natural endowments which coincided with nature conservation and preservation efforts (Grospietsch, 2004).

With Rwanda joining the East African Community, it is now possible for more visitors from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to enter the country with their national identity cards, and foreigners using one single visa for the three countries. For all Africans, they can visit Rwanda without visa restrictions. All of these improvements that have been realized over the last 20 years contributed in making Rwanda more visible at the international level as a top tourist destination. Rwanda was recently appointed as the first country in East, Central and North Africa to become a member of the International Council of Tourism Partners (ICTP), enhancing its reputation as one of the favourite tourist destinations in the world. The ICTP is a global alliance of responsible destination cooperation and marketing in tourism

that promotes best practices and being on its list is considered as a sign of excellence. Rwanda has been conducting itself as a responsible member of the global tourism industry and is a very special destination with a great future (Munanura, Backman, Hallo & Powell, 2016).

The Tourism Industry has been a recent occurrence, based on the need for the country to create a name for itself in the international tourism market but also to open space for a more diverse group of visitors into the country. Recent innovations in the tourism industry such as the canopy at Nyungwe National Park have helped to ratchet up revenue from foreign tourists, effectively reversing the decline experienced in 2009. In addition, the introduction of bird viewing, improvement on air transport with new airlines and expansion of Rwandair to new destinations such as Dubai, Congo, Ghana and Nigeria have also helped bring in more tourists. The country also saw big investments in hotels and restaurants during the first half of 2011 worth US\$ 69.3 million. “New products launched in Nyungwe in 2010, as well as the world-class accommodation known as Nyungwe Forest Lodge, has seen figures in the park double.

Despite this country’s tourism industry development, the concern remains that Rwanda’s tourism remains gorilla-centred and current growth is therefore needed to be sustainable in order to attract more foreign visitors and investment. The level of profitability is increased where tourism-related businesses are lucrative. Studies have shown that if there is more improvement in tourism as a dynamic sector; tourism businesses would be more lucrative than ever in the globalised era. Several economic benefits of tourism have already been mentioned and remain potentially the most significant benefits offered by the industry (Nkurayija, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic Impacts

Different positive economic impacts are observed in the available literature. Among the most important ones include the creation of jobs, earning foreign exchange, running small businesses and improved living standards. Economic benefits that communities expect to get from an increase in tourism activity are the major motivations used to promote tourism development. Most of the studies on impact assessment. Nkurayija (2011); Machogu et al. (2014) and Munyiri (2015) include questions related to economic impacts that tourism has had on community residents, including studies indicating that residents expect tourism to increase their standard of living (Kim, 2002), that it improves the economy (Alejo, 2014), and that tourism helps the host community and country to earn foreign exchange (Kim, 2002). Most importantly, tourism generates employment (Alejo, 2014), and increases revenue for local businesses (Kim, 2002) as well as shopping facilities.

Social Impacts

The tourism industry can also make an impact on nations, if well managed, not only economically but also socially. In Africa, tourism is not only seen as a means to strengthen existing economies but also as a means to rebuild them. This rebuilding process means that the community must make a significant contribution to the progress and its involvement in the tourism industry is one way of accomplishing this. The people of Rwanda must take ownership of their tourism industry. The participation of all Rwandans in tourism through travel as well as employment and participation in education goes far beyond economic gains.

Tourism increases traffic congestion and crowdedness in public areas and brings social problems. Tourism also contributes to social ills such as begging, gambling, drug trafficking, and prostitution, as well as the uprooting of traditional

society, and causes deterioration of the traditional culture and customs of host countries (Alejo, 2014). Adding to Alejo's argument, Ahmed (2015) stressed that tourism could change the way people live, think and work. It can change the social values of the people involved. When tourism achieves its most noble social goals, it helps to develop the sense of a global community. People share their cultures, their festivals, and their special experiences (Ahmed, 2015). Through this, they learn through each other's' opinions and lifestyles in a respectful way. Ahmed moved on to discussing that when tourism fails to achieve such ideals it can leave in its wake social disorder, crime, degradation, a loss of community values, and a sense of either inferiority or superiority both of which can be dangerous (Ahmed, 2015). Tourism may contribute to excessive consumption of alcohol, increased traffic congestion, and overcrowding because of tourist numbers (Alejo, 2014). However, tourism enhances more opportunities to upgrade, such as recreation facilities, roads and amusement parks, but brings crowdedness in theatres, movies, concerts, and sports events (Alejo, 2014). Alejo's argument is consistent with Ahmed who tackled the issue of the social capacity of a tourism destination (Makoondall-Chadee, Bokhoree & Sumputh, 2017).

Cultural Impacts

Var and Kim (1990) argued that though tourism contributes to the renaissance of traditional arts and craft (Kim, 2002) tourism has frequently been criticised for the disruption of traditional social and cultural structures and behavioural patterns. In Ahmed (2015), it has been proved that the societal choice of strategies to cope with changes depending on the characteristics of the host community, the number and the type of tourists, and the level of change affected by tourism Ahmed (2015) cited (Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996). Although people of different backgrounds in the same destination may have different preferences, some sections of locals may have more benefits because

they view tourism more favourably Ahmed (2015) cited Cater, 1987). For instance, age differences among the local population are highly correlated to the differences toward tourists, young people may adopt values about sex, dress, and morality quite different (Ahmed, 2015). Based on the late investigated proof, the researcher is bold in his assertion that destination areas have embraced tourism for its economic benefits and have witnessed increased levels of crime and prostitution, and displacement due to increase in land costs and loss of the cultural heritage of local people (Ahmed, 2015). The author continued believing that Tourism has been charged not only with the debasement of socio-cultural factors but also with the degradation of the environment.

Environmental Impacts

Some people believe that tourism helps create greater awareness and appreciation for the need to preserve the environment to capture its natural beauty for tourism purposes and increase investments in the environmental infrastructure of the host country (Kim, 2002). Tourism is also thought to be a "clean" industry, without the pollution problems associated with other types of economic development. Residents have expressed agreement with statements that suggest that tourism improves the appearance of their town or surroundings Kim (2002), citing Perdue *et al.*, 1987). In the study conducted by Ritchie (1988) about three decades ago, he found that 91% of respondents agreed that tourism affected the quality and upkeep of attractions, and 93% believed that tourism affected the quality of national and provincial parks positively. Environmental pollution, degradation of vegetation, destruction of natural resources and depletion of wildlife are some of the negative environmental impacts of tourism Kim (2002). Gursoy & Rutherford (2004) reported that Virgin Islanders believed that water and beaches were being spoiled by tourism practice. In Pizam (1978)'s study, Cape Cod residents felt that

tourism brought litter, noise, and negatively affected air and water quality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

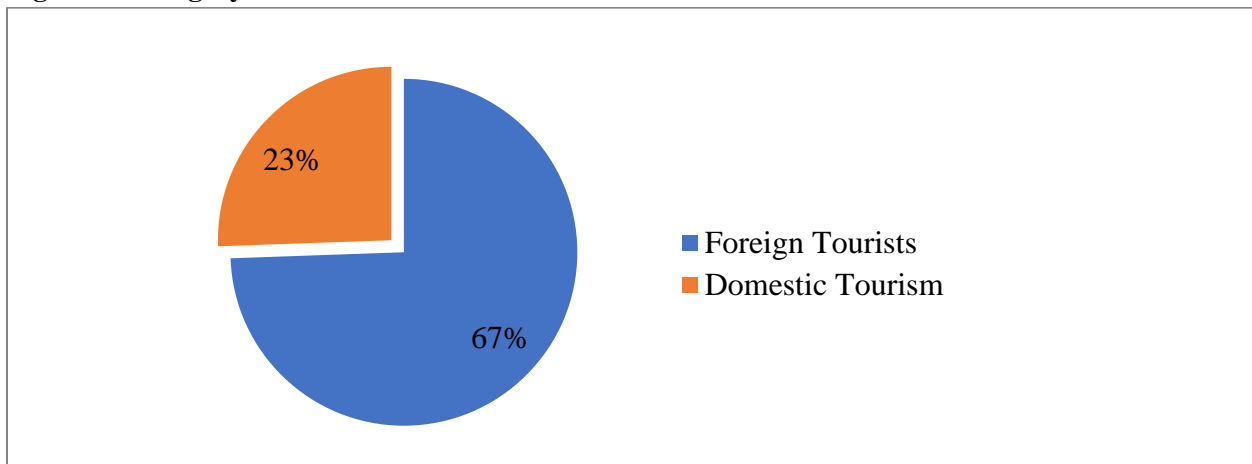
The population under this study was composed of three different groups of respondents at three national parks in Rwanda. These were residents living adjacent to the three national parks under study, the park authorities and government officials (policymakers) in tourism and conservation-related matters, and tourism and conservation experts. According to Sekaran (2000), a population of 100,00 units will require a sample of at least a sample size of 384 units. Since the total population under this responded category was less than one million, the sample of 384 households was

sufficient. Multi-stage sampling techniques were used to arrive at the actual participating households. The researcher developed a structured questionnaire that was administered to the selected respondents. The administration of the questionnaire was done by the main researcher and three research assistants. The researcher used descriptive analysis to analyse the data. The data collected using the open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings presented in *Figure 1* show that 67% of the total tourists that visited National parks in Rwanda were foreign tourists, while only 23% were domestic tourists. This indicates that the Rwanda tourism sector is dependent on foreign tourists.

Figure 1: Category of Tourists in the National Parks



The study asked the respondent whether employment opportunities for local residents in this area have increased because of tourism, 41.6% and 42.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. These results implied that local communities did not experience an increase in employment due to tourism and closeness to national parks.

On whether infrastructure facilities like roads, public transport, and electricity have improved because of tourism in this area, 41.6% and 38.9% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively (*Table 1*). Similarly, 44.1% and 41.4% strongly

disagreed and disagreed that opportunities for local businesses (farmers, cattle herders, and handicraft) have increased because of tourism. The respondent further disagreed as shown by the mean of 1.94 that tourism had increased the monthly revenues of residents in this area (*Table 1*). The study further sought to establish from the respondent whether the level of crime and social problems (prostitution, gambling, drugs, etc.) in this area has also increased because of tourism; (This is a negative impact), the respondent also disagreed and strongly disagreed and finally on whether the entertainment and recreational opportunities have developed in this area because of tourism in this area. The findings of

the study show that 43.0% and 42.2% of the agreed and strongly agreed (*Table 1*).

The study findings implied that the local communities that live around the national parks had not seen the impacts of the national parks in terms of employment opportunities, income generation, infrastructure development and creation of the business opportunities. This calls for the incorporation of the local communities in conservation frameworks of the national parks in Rwanda.

The study findings concur with Mason (2003) who found that more or less impacts have been found and these have been evoked to support the late statements in this study. He pointed out that the impacts of tourism can be positive or beneficial, but also negative or detrimental. Whether impacts are perceived as positive or negative depends on the value position and judgement of the observer of the impacts (Mason, 2003). For example, in the economic sector, he put forward his argument saying that only economic impacts are considered and the example relates to the building of a hotel in an area with currently little tourism activity. It is possible for one observer to express a view that the

building of the hotel will create more jobs, both in the building and running of the hotel and the observer would consider this to be a positive impact (Mason, 2003). Equally, another observer may claim although jobs will be created, they will only be part-time, semi-skilled, poorly paid and lacking a career structure, as well as taking people away from traditional forms of employment (Mason, 2003).

The study findings further concur with those of Choi and Murray (2010) who supported the sun's (2002) study. But, in many of these studies, the seasonality character of the tourism industry has brought some disappointments, as there is then a disruption in employment structures. One may ask the meaning of the seasonality character of the tourism industry. In short, seasonality in the context of this study is associated with social, economic and environmental impacts as a major issue for the tourism industry. Lee et al. (2008) argued that seasonality is generally defined depending on the context from which it is studied, that is, hospitality, tourism, or leisure and conservation in this study. It is an obvious experience in Rwandan tourism to observe such seasonality character.

Table 1: Impact of Domestic Tourism to Economic Development (%)

	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std Dev
Domestic Tourism increases employment opportunities for local residents	41.6	42.4	8.1	2.7	5.1	1.87	1.03
Domestic Tourism lead to increase in Infrastructure facilities like roads, public transport and electricity	41.6	38.9	11.6	3.8	4.1	1.90	1.02
There is increase opportunities for local businesses (farmers, cattle herders, and handicraft) have increased because of Domestic tourism	44.1	41.4	7.8	2.7	4.1	1.81	0.98
Domestic Tourism has increased the monthly revenues of residents in this area	37.8	45.7	6.8	4.1	5.7	1.94	1.06
The level of crime and social problems (e.g. prostitution, gambling, drugs, etc.) in this area has also increased because of tourism. (This is a negative impact	46.5	38.9	6.8	4.1	3.8	1.80	1.00
Entertainment and recreational opportunities have developed in this area because of Domestic tourism.	4.3	5.1	5.4	43.0	42.2	1.86	1.03

SD= strongly disagree; D = disagree; N =neutral; A = agree; SA =strongly agree; m = mean;

Qualitative Data Presentation

All the respondents agree that Rwanda has made substantial progress in stabilising its economy which has been one of the fastest-growing in Africa, but they also admit that the persistent lack of economic diversification beyond the production of tea, coffee and mining, keeps the country vulnerable to market fluctuations. In addition, they add that the country's domestic tourism industry could have greater potential given Rwanda's current stability, travel infrastructure, and several potential tourist sites and other attractions.

The perception of domestic tourists towards tourism contribution in the growing economy of Rwanda is also very positive as being an option for economic diversification and development. Domestic tourists to NPs were very satisfied with the attractions founding in NPs; furthermore, they like to visit in groups and with their friends, and they don't like to spend the night out, after visiting they return home.

The most popular source of information about Rwanda's attraction sites is through friends or relatives, followed by the television or radio, the internet being the least popular source. The respondents affirm that key factors for considering while promoting the domestic tourism were to develop action guidelines, plans for national, regional and local tourism development, sensitise the public and private sector to diversify the investment in domestic tourism, to improve financial services in order to facilitate new investments in tourism facilities, related projects and other tourists support services across the country, encourage Rwandans to invest in the domestic tourism sector, providing capital for tourism investment in Rwanda and update information and tourism statistics on domestic tourism.

CONCLUSION

Rwanda tourism has developed international tourism strategies which resulted in increased

numbers of foreign visitors to the country and impacted on economic development. If this was coupled with strategies aimed at developing viable domestic tourism, as it continues to rebuild itself economically, socially and politically, the whole tourism industry could have gained a lot in that process and momentum. Tourism is widely considered to be one of the sectors that may help the country achieve its economic targets through revenue gains and job creation. Using experience from many countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, Domestic Tourism could have a greater contribution to widening the national economy through the sale of local goods and services, site-visits and stays at the country's lodges and hotels. Socially and politically, domestic tourism could strengthen the reconciliation process among Rwandans through experience sharing of the beauty and uniqueness of their country. It could reinforce the spirit of 'one culture, one language, and one country', and hence gain a sense of patriotism, unity and love of the country

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations were made; Stakeholders in tourism should focus their marketing strategies primarily towards geographical diversification along with appropriate information at all levels through various media including the internet as they get encouraged to invest in affordable tourism facilities nearby and national parks. The national tourism policy should provide a more dedicated approach to domestic tourism, with standard and diversified facilities, and institutional elements alongside increasing and reviving tourist attractions sites. It is also essential to computerise and update precise information and tourism-related statistics on Rwanda. There should be plans and strategies from local

authorities/enterprises/institutions/organisations, both public and private, to encourage and sensitise the population in general, students and employees to

carry out leisure travel as the disposable income for Rwandans continue to grow.

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