

# Developing Community Tourism as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation and Socio-Economic Development. a Case Study Of The Bukusu Community In Kenya.

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## Abstract

Poverty alleviation and socio-economic development are crucial elements of the millennium development goals and the recently launched vision 2030 by the Kenyan government, community tourism can play a significant role towards their realization and improvement of the socio-economic welfare of the communities living in areas with immense tourism potential. The objectives of this study were therefore to find out how community tourism is helping to alleviate poverty, whether there were challenges facing development of community tourism and how local community support and participate in tourism. The information was obtained from 190 respondents, structured questionnaires were administered to 150 local residents and 20 tourists, 10 managers and 10 opinion leaders were interviewed. The main finding of this study shows that small and medium tourism enterprises create jobs and through this poor families get a source of earning. Insecurity also emerged to be another serious problem, the study revealed that the Bukusu Community supports the idea of community tourism and many are willing to take up responsibilities like local guides and interpreters. In conclusion it was established that the Bukusu region has a diversity of nature based and culture based attractions which if well developed can be used to alleviate poverty and improve socio-economic conditions of the Bukusu people. The proposed recommendation is that in order to promote sustainable tourism development, there is an urgent need for the establishment of institutional and managerial decision strategies (use of local resources, marketing and use of tourism information centers) development.

**Key words:** Bukusu community, Community tourism, Poverty alleviation, Socio-economic development.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study.

Kenya is an important international tourism destination accounting for 6% of overseas visitors to Africa, Sindiga, (1999) states that until 1992, Kenya was the main tourist destination in the Sub-Saharan region with 782,000 arrivals. The tourism industry provided, according to Sindiga, (1999) 17,000 direct employment and 34,000 indirect jobs in 1994, which accounts for 11% direct employment of the modern wage employment sector in the country. However, tourism activities are mostly concentrated at specific regions of the country for example coastal region of Kenya, and the national games reserves; indicating lack of diversification and extension up to the community level. Developing tourism up to community level will facilitate economic empowerment of the locals and alleviate poverty that is a thorny issue particularly in the developing countries. Most communities in fact see tourism as a foreigners' activity and therefore do not fully participate in it, from numerous studies, it has been realized that tourism has a great economic and social force towards community development. Bhatia, (1991) argues that the World Tourism Organization had estimated 415 million total world arrivals in the year 1990, these tourists had to spend 230000 million US Dollars on accommodation, catering, local transport and other goods and services. According to the Western Economies Forecasting Associates, WEFA, travel and tourism employs more that 101 million people around the globe, that is one out of every 16 workers, all these points to the fact that tourism today is a great economic force, its status as a major economic activity has been well established by almost all the nations of the world (Sindiga, 1999).

Today, the benefits of tourism are not to be judged in terms of economic benefits alone, tourism has a wider implication encompassing not only economic benefits but also social and cultural benefits as well. True benefits of tourism can only be appreciated on a basis that includes all the above aspects. In Kenya the Bukusu community has vast potential tourism resources, the area has spectacular physical features and a beautiful landscape composed of farmland dotted by traditional houses; the Bukusu people also still maintain their unique traditional culture such as initiation, folk costume, music and customs. These resources if properly developed can alleviate poverty and economic hardships which are evident in the area,

An attraction like Libale Lia Namakanda (LLN) is a unique cultural identity for the Bukusu Community and they are the ones eligible to draw optimum gains from it, but the reverse is true, indeed the area surrounding Libale Lia Namakanda qualifies to be made a protected land where organized community tourism could be practiced, tourism that will allow for equitable allocation and use of the region's natural resources. By directly benefiting from such a form of tourism, it is believed that the Bukusu community will not only empower themselves economically but also reciprocate by policing the tourism resources abounding in their area.

Service industry particularly community tourism will offer an alternative way for the locals to meet their economic needs and even expand their income base. It is strongly believed that through community tourism, the cultural practices that are on the verge of extinction will be rejuvenated, but only if the benefits are real and tangible (Mckean, 1976). Additionally, the environment from which this tourism resources anchor will be given due attention through proper planning and management. This research identified tourism attractions, activities and facilities available for exploitation by the Bukusu community; it also examined the social-cultural and economic benefits that the community may derive and how community tourism can alleviate poverty, the study also looked at the challenges faced by the community in engaging in tourism, the responsibilities of the various stakeholders and how the local community participation can be enhanced, as Reid, (2003) observes, communities only support developments in which they are directly involved and feel part of the mainstream. In spite of these tourism resources, no group has ever been in charge of implementing organized tourism, what has been happening over the past years and what this study aimed at addressing is the totally unorganized form of tourism.

### *1.2 Purpose of the study*

The purpose of the study was to find out how community tourism is helping to alleviate poverty among the Bukusu community in Kenya, challenges facing community development and the contribution of community tourism support and participation.

### *1.3. Research Questions*

1. How does community tourism help in poverty alleviation?
2. What are the challenges facing development of community tourism?
3. How does local community tourism support and participate in community tourism?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### *3.1. Existing and potential attractions of the Bukusu community.*

Tourism development concerns a large, enough count of attractions and services to meet the needs and desires of various travelers (markets). Attraction are the most powerful components of the supply side of tourism (Lavey, 1990), they make up the emerging power unit of the tourism system. The market demand provides the "push" of traveler movement, while attractions provide a major pull (Gunn, 1994), tourist attractions of the Bukusu Community are both natural and cultural. The most outstanding natural attractions include the landscape sceneries and forests, the natural attractions can provide excellent opportunities for nature based recreational activities such as sight seeing, photography, mountaineering and tracking.

Libale Lia Namakanda (LLN) is a rock found in Bungoma District, Kanduyi Division and Mwikhupo sub-location. This is a tourism gold mine for the community, the rock draws its name from a Bukusu term meaning "Rock of Namakanda", the study demonstrates that LLN, gloried in a forest of trees is a home for several mammals, a place

for worship and a place for cultural performances, the rock is a vein of life, the communities around depend on it for water because River Fuchani and Namasera well draw their sources from it, there is what is believed to be a lake on top and a dam, the dam served community water projects in the 1960's. Liabile Lia Namkanda holds a diverse background, talent and knowledge of local people since the pre-colonial period, despite this, nobody has taken a keen examination of its potential being tapped as a tourist attraction.

There are more than four caves in the rock, Liabile Lia Namkanda offers an exceptional observation point of Bungoma town, a panoramic view of life in the villages including the stunning and breathtaking river Nzoia spread out, in addition there is a wider variety of wildlife ranging from mammals such as the green vervet monkeys, reptiles for instance green mamba snakes, aquatic birds, Amphibians, terrestrial birds among others; in fact the Bukusu community adjacent to Libale ascribes their farms fertility to LLN. For the Bukusu, the rock provides a place for overnight cleansing of new initiates, the initiates are expected to bath in the river before returning home, some Churches use the rock to offer sacrifices to God and the worshipers believe that the sacrifices are received by God only if offered from here. Other natural attractions that support numerous tourist activities include Sang'alo Hill, Sikele Sia Mumia (another rock), Kimugui hills, Mwikhupo falls, Vitenyo Makini herbal clinic forest, Nzoia Sugar Company, river valleys such as Kuywa.(Simon Wanjala Local tourist guide).

Cultural attractions entail diversity in ways of life, rites, languages, socio-economic activities and general material cultures. Cultural attractions provide opportunities such as rural tourism or village tourism and agro-tourism; the Bukusu community acknowledges that culture enables them to understand their history and evolution, various Bukusu cultural resources that were identified for use in community tourism development include: Architecture, this covers the Bukusu traditional houses, the round grass thatched houses and general rural setting of the Bukusu community.

Music and dance, these include the musical folk and the contemporary music, they are therefore among the most popular activities, they are occasional and for specific events such as songs for initiation (circumcision), war, love, praise (politicians), greetings and work, more importantly, singing acts as a mechanism of social control, dancing always accompanies singing, it evokes fancied and erratic characteristics associated with spirit mediums, stylistic devices used when dancing include movement of the shoulders, great rigor and node of the head controlled by vigorous neck movements.. Tourists can be attracted by the way Bukusu traditional music and dance are staged; the songs are educative and full of message, they could also serve as a source of entertainment to the community. A good example of a cultural dance that was identified was "Kamabeka" dance that is staged when the people of the community are in celebration.

Language, literature and study tours are other forms of culture with a potential of attracting many tourists. Language is an indispensable tool for cultural transmission, it is learnt culturally and culture is largely learnt through language. The Bukusu people speak "Lubukusu" and it is a Bantu language that has similarities with other Bantu languages. The old people who are rich and resourceful with the history of the "Omubukusu" could tell stories and nice narratives which are educative and Informative to the listening audience. The Bukusu traditional initiation ceremony for men was realized to be one of the most attractive activities among the Bukusu community, therefore traditional circumcision ceremonies if well developed and promoted for community tourism can attract of great number of tourists both locally and internationally,( Sindiga, I. 1999).

The Bukusu male circumcision is thought to have been adapted from contact with the Kalenjin at Mount Elgon, others argue however that the presence of practice in order with the other Luhya tribes indicates an earlier adoption, before the Bukusu settled at Mt. Elgon in ceremonies that were spaced about two years apart, young boys of a particular age (usually 15 years) of age on getting the go-ahead from their parents, invite relatives and friends to their initiation, the initiation is a public event witnessed by all and going through the operation without showing any sign of pain is thought to be an indicator of bravery. Once circumcised, an initiate becomes a member of an age group, there are twelve age groups lasting for 8 years, once the last age group has been reached, the first is re-started and so on. For example the "Bachuma" age group lasted from 1980 to 1986, and ever Bukusu circumcised within this period (that is 1980, 1982, 1984 and 1986) belongs to that age group. In 1988 the "Basawa" age group began and lasted until 1994. Among the Bukusu, the form of ceremony varies according to clan, in particular the festivity and

ceremonies accompany the final stage of initiation, when the now-healed initiates came out of seclusion to rejoin their families as “men” is specific to clans and has been handed down largely.(Sindiga,I,1999)

Gastronomy entailing fresh and curdled milk, carried and stored in gourds was identified among the Bukusu community, there are other foods that are also unique with a great potential of attracting visitors who prefer to go for ethnic tourism and rural tourism, examples are Sweet potatoes, Millet, Ugali, Wimbi and other vegetables like Visaka, Rinogi, Chinderema, Chimboka and Managu. Cultural attractions provide opportunities for activities such as rural tourism, village tourism and agro-tourism, these attractions however are yet to be changed and managed for visitor enjoyment. Even though a destination may have an abundance of resources that attract, they cannot function as true attractions until they are ready to receive visitors (Gunn, 1994).

Cultural tourism is for instance less developed in this region partly because the region lacks a museum and a cultural center to facilitate cultural exhibitions e.g. songs, dance, handcrafts; the residents propose a Kanduyi Cultural Centre. After having developed the destinations tourism product, its promotion should follow; promotion ought to be directed to the largest markets. The strategic location of the Bukusu region has a positive bearing on development of community tourism; the region also provides a breaking point for tourists traveling to and from Uganda by road.

The Bukusu tradition stipulates that circumcised boys stay out of sight from women; LLN has continued to serve this purpose for the communities in the area. Circumcision among the Bukusu community has two stages, there is the circumcision itself and the graduation stage, during the graduation stage, the initiates are required to spend a night in the wilderness with their age groups, the preparations for this coveted stage involve the initiates leaving their fathers' homes in the company of their age group, carrying with them the items they have been using since circumcision, to go through this stage, the initiates normally go to identified exotic places like the Likina Lia Namakanda in the morning, the elders send somebody to call the initiates back home so as to be officially ushered into the home as young adults, given that many initiates chose this exotic place, many visitors come to the village to witness the grand cultural event,(Murphy L,1998).

### **3.0 Research Methodology.**

#### *2.1. Population and sample*

The study was carried out in Bungoma County in Kenya, through a survey design over a period of six months, the research targeted the local residents, tourists and community's opinion leaders, 190 local people interviewed were selected through random sampling method and data collected from community's opinion leaders was through focus group discussions. The response from the local community were collected using a questionnaire and a structured interview. Focus group discussions were designed to illicit responses from opinion leaders and stakeholders. Data was analyzed by Statistical Program for Social Sciences, (SPSS) and presented in form of narrations

#### *2.2. Validity and reliability*

The validated instrument sample questionnaires were piloted in one of the community study area and necessary corrections were done using 15 respondents. The correlation coefficients were calculated for the instrument done was 0.68.

### **4.0 Results of the study**

#### *4.1 How community tourism is helping to alleviate poverty.*

Tourism enterprises create jobs, through employment the poor families get a source of earning which means that the employees are able to sustain themselves and their dependants, policies that encourage the employment of local people should open up opportunities for the poor, the advantage of addressing poverty through existing tourism is that it enables the poor to benefit from the entrepreneurial skills, issues like having proper contracts and fair pay conditions, providing part time work, seasonality and the need to provide more year round opportunities, choice of location of new developments, making it accessible to poor communities who could supply labor should needs to be addressed. Business operators with income generating activities realize booming activity with ready market for agricultural products like cabbage and bananas, some sold directly by the villagers or small scale farmers, sale of

non-agricultural products has also increased. Hawkers, stage vendors, wholesalers, artisans get more income, supply of goods and services by the community occur at any point of the tourism supply chain including goods and services provided to hotels such as food, handcraft, building services at construction stage among others.

Direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the community thus the informal economy and includes stalls selling food and handcrafts, pottery, transport and informal accommodation e.g. camping, this sector is hugely important in the area and is one of the most direct ways of getting visitors spending into the hands of the community. Establishment of tourism enterprises by the community, this ranges from micro, small to medium sized enterprises or community based enterprises, compared to working in the formal economy, it enables the community to develop long term projects hence reap benefits for a longer period. Tax or levy on tourism income profits is directed to poverty reduction programs; this has the advantage of enabling the resources to be channeled to the neediest people and community members without requiring their direct involvement in tourism activity.

Voluntary giving by tourism enterprises and tourists is another way in which community tourism is helping to alleviate poverty in the area, this includes payments into general charities and programmes such as HIV/AIDS programmes by tourists and tour operators or more specific support for projects in areas visited.

Investment in infrastructure stimulated by tourism has enabled the community residents to get good drinking water, electricity, road network, it is easy to transport locally produced goods to the market, infrastructural development should essentially cover energy supply; sanitation, clean water and telecommunication, careful planning should involve the local community from the onset because this developments are sources of employment in many ways.

#### 4.2 Challenges encountered in developing community tourism

There are numerous setbacks in attempts to develop community tourism, this include poor transport and communication network, for example when roads leading to specific attraction areas are in bad condition or others completely inaccessible, it means that the existing products may not be accessed or will be sold expensively. Some roads are muddy; the rainy season renders them impassable. The communication network is poor, some of the interior places have neither telephone nor internet facilities, information efficiency relies heavily on the modern technologies and therefore an area which lacks such facilities will be out of touch with customers, the operators can not market their products, consequently a community can sit on vast resources unexploited.

Insecurity also emerged to be another serious problem, insecurity sends an image about an area, the recent insecurity cases in Mt. Elgon as a result of the government forces battling the Sabaoti Land Defense Forces (SLDF) created a picture that the entire Western region was insecure, although the government forces triumphed, there is need to reinforce security in the area because once the visitors get information that a destination is not safe, they always avoid the area or change their destinations altogether. The state of infrastructure also poses another serious challenge in developing community tourism in the area, there is need to improve the state of infrastructure, sewerage system, water supply and electricity supply to correct the current shortages, the Kitale and Bungoma airstrips for instance should be modernized with better run ways to attract domestic airlines and enable them to introduce flights into the region.

#### 4.3 Local community support and participation in tourism development

Reid, (2003) notes emphatically that for any meaningful progress to be realized in tourism development, there must be meaningful understanding between the local communities and the tourism developers, therefore local community support and participation is a *conditio sine qua non*, the study revealed that the Bukusu Community supports the idea of community tourism and many are willing to take up responsibilities like local guides and interpreters, however, the community must be seen to derive direct benefits from this developments, they should be educated on the importance of this tourism development on their economic well being, conclusively, the local community has a right to the tourism resources of an area and therefore have to be involved, after all, it is the community that will pick up the pieces when the tourist has gone (Sharpley, 1994, Murphy, 1998), sustainability is only achieved if there is clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of the ordinary people, they need to be consulted in planning and encouraged to open up tourism enterprises and take up employment in tourism establishments.

#### 4. Roles of the stakeholders in developing community tourism among the Bukusu community.

From the responses, many respondents cited minimal government support as a major impediment to community tourism in the region, community tourism development is a process of wide dimensions involving many organizations in private and public sector, at the regional planning scale, the private sector, the government and the local communities ought to participate in the process, this is because planning is complex necessitating delicate balancing between tourist satisfaction and welfare (socio-cultural, economic and environmental) of the destination. Tourism development in Bukusu region should be aimed at minimizing the problems hampering effective community tourism development and the negative impacts of tourism in the area while maximizing tourist satisfaction and local community benefits.

#### 5.0 Conclusion and recommendation.

The study found out that the Bukusu region has a diversity of nature based and culture based attractions which if well developed can be used to alleviate poverty and improve socio-economic conditions of the Bukusu people. Tourism development has the potential to enhance culture and the economic base of the local community; indeed, it is a primary goal in modern tourism development for indigenous communities (Harrison, 1992 and Gunn, 1994). The main attractions of the region include rural landscape, cultural resources and captivating scenarios. With careful planning, the Bukusu region can become an environmentally sensitive, low volume and high cost tourism destination, currently the region's stage under the lifecycle of destination development considering Butler's, (1980) model is at involvement where there is an increasing local and government initiatives to provide tourism facilities and establishments, it can be said to be moving from the "non-existent" stage of tourism destination development to the "embryonic" stage, the region is envisaged to grow into a well established destination.

Tourism needs greater recognition by the government and development institutions for its capacity to generate economic, environmental and social benefits; it is a sector that can promote the welfare of the poor as well as intercultural understanding and peace among nations, it is a catalyst for many related sectors and can play a key role in the overall achievement of the millennium development goals, (WTO, 1999).

To help the Bukusu community in Kenya to unlock the full tourism potential and develop community tourism as a way of alleviating the widespread poverty in the area, there is need for the government to create a Regional Tourism Board for the region, this board will work hand in hand with the Ministry of Tourism, the Kenya Tourism Board in initiating and coordinating tourism development projects and create community tourism awareness and carry out capacity building among the community. And finally there is need to conduct a feasibility study of tourism development in the region to determine whether future community tourism development in the region is economically viable, marketable, socially and environmentally sustainable and politically supportable.

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