

RURAL TOURISM OFFER AND LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE GAMBIA

Ikechukwu O. Ezeuduji

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Wolfgang Rid

Technische Universitaet Muenchen

Locals have been objects rather than drivers of rural tourism development in The Gambia and therefore have no direct benefits from tourism. This study used in-depth and focus group interviews to identify and analyse the internal and external driving forces that influence rural tourism development in The Gambia. Rural tourism development in The Gambia will require a clear value position, operational excellence and strong customer relations to gain a market leadership that offers the nation a competitive advantage. The results can be used to help rural tourism stakeholders with locals at the core, to collaborate and manage this development proactively and retain revenue generated from tourism within rural communities. One suggestion made from the results of this study is to encourage locals to stage events that will lead to establish unique rural tourism experience which could in turn lead to securing a brand identity in the rural tourism marketplace.

Keywords: *tourists, rural tourism, rural development, community participation, The Gambia*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism contribution to the Gross Domestic Product in The Gambia, one of the smallest nations in West Africa, is projected to increase from an estimated 13% in 2004 to around 18% by 2020. Employment generated by tourism is projected to increase from an estimated 16,000 jobs in 2004 to around 35,000 jobs in 2020 (Emerging Market Group, 2005). This level of economic impact makes tourism economically significant to the nation.



Tourism in The Gambia has a high reliance on package tours, whereby tourists pay for flights, transfers, accommodation and catering in their home countries before departing, denying locals the opportunities of fair benefits from tourism. Most hotels in which tourists lodge are situated close to the Gambian beaches and the urban areas. Tourism in this nation, therefore, is largely urban although Gambians are making efforts to spread the development of tourism to rural areas.

Cultural heritage and natural areas of different communities are being considered as key selling value propositions to the tourists beside the 'sun-beach' tourism for which the nation has built up a reputation in the tourism sector so far (Emerging Market Group, 2005). Some excursions to rural areas are being organised by different ground tour operators to offer local experience to tourists, however, tourism in rural areas remain largely unorganised.

'Rural tourism' constituting visits by tourists to rural Gambia to experience the culture and natural environment of the local population is considered one of the strategies within the management portfolio of sustainable rural development. Sustainable rural development, in general, encourages locals to embark on initiatives that will lead to their own socio-economic development as well as protecting their environment. Locals in The Gambia in partnership with some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have started organising themselves to offer rural tourism products and services to generate more income for the local community. But a careful consideration of the link between this development's internal environment (factors which local rural tourism stakeholders can control and/or influence) and external environment (factors which local rural tourism stakeholders cannot control and/or influence) is needed to make the management of this development more balanced and strategically orientated, especially at its initial stage.

Recent studies on rural tourism in Africa have enquired into community-based tourism initiatives: the implications of tourism development on local communities and factors critical for successful community-based tourism (such as Akama & Kieti, 2007; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Kibicho, 2008). In these studies, however, not enough attention was given to the analysis of the internal and external environment of rural tourism development. Furthermore, balanced strategic and proactive management outlook to improve rural tourism services and community participation was not provided. This study in contrast will undertake such analysis. Focus group and in-depth interviews are conducted to analyse the internal and external factors affecting rural tourism development in the Gambia, e.g. products and

services offered by rural communities, the structure of decision-making and stakeholders in the Gambian tourism industry. This information is used to present a model of rural tourism development for the Gambia and to make strategic suggestions on how to improve the present Gambian tourism industry with regard to local community participation and improved rural tourism activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW – RURAL TOURISM AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Given the growing competition within the global tourism industry (Leslie & Wilson, 2006), tourist destinations without a unique market position may not become viable. Many rural areas worldwide view tourism growth as a potential solution to the declining extractive industries and the subsequent loss of economic opportunities and population decline (Petzelka et al., 2005); establishing rural tourism as an alternative means of economic development is therefore being sought after. Excursions to rural Gambia are seen as a strong mechanism for linking the tourism sector to the poor (Bah & Goodwin, 2003).

Rural tourism businesses are small and mostly operating on a local and regional basis outside the mainstream tourism (McKercher & Robbins, 1998). Not every rural area can benefit equally from the increasing demand in rural tourism. Those that will benefit will have natural or cultural attributes, and a critical mass of attractions and infrastructure to be able to effectively harness the rural tourism market (Roberts & Hall, 2001). The scale of tourism promoted in rural areas is diverse, however integrating local products or cultural attributes into tourism through rustic seasoned event tourism has helped to shape the emerging form of rural tourism (Liu, 2006).

‘Cultural tourism’ constituting tourists visiting rural areas to experience local culture has the potential to benefit host communities and to provide motivation for them to care for and maintain their cultural heritage. Local communities’ involvement and cooperation with tour operators, property owners, and policy makers are however said to be crucial for the success of cultural tourism activities (Sdrali & Chazapi, 2007).

Tourism in rural areas does not always bring expected benefits to local people. Motivation to participate in tourism or other factors that allow for locals’ active involvement could become critical to successfully integrate a local community into rural tourism activities. Some researchers suggested that local communities that need economic

development would readily embrace tourism (Smith & Krannich, 1998; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1994; King et al., 1992). Lepp (2008) however found that a rural community can react with distress towards new tourism development. Community-based tourism may foster a new form of colonialism and dependency when resource control is firmly in the hands of foreign investors and/or rural tourism activities are heavily reliant on funding or donor agencies (Manyara & Jones, 2007). A lack of proficiency on the part of the local community in personal business relations, business planning, management and operational skills may affect tourism business development adversely (McKercher & Robbins, 1998). Local communities in Africa nevertheless may want to be drivers rather than objects of their own rural tourism development to be able to have some degree of control over the rural tourism sector.

According to Kibicho (2008: 211), there are some crucial factors that are important to develop a successful community-based tourism in developing nations, i.e. the involvement of stakeholders, having clear aims and objectives, making clear which benefit is individual or mutual, appointing a legitimate convenor, and the commitment to implement every decision arrived at. The study presented here follows Kibicho's view, as it aims to explore the structure of rural tourism offer in The Gambia, i.e. products and services offered by rural communities. Moreover, the structure of political decision making by important stakeholders in the Gambian tourism sector as well as important internal and external factors for successful rural tourism implementation will be analysed in order to help maximise local people's benefits from regional tourism turnover.

Akama and Kieti (2007: 746 – 747) stated that some of the ways in which tourism can contribute to sustainable rural development in developing nations include: (1) creation of opportunities for self- and local employment; (2) encouraging collaboration amongst public and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and local communities; (3) enhancing socio-cultural effects of tourism; (4) enabling local access to infrastructure and services which are provided for tourists; (5) supporting local communities' participation; and (6) fostering institutional capacity-building to enable locals' active participation. This paper follows Akama and Kieti's opinion, however as the first, third and fourth points are desired outcomes, this study will rather build on the enablers to achieve the desired outcomes (see Akama and Kieti's second, fifth and sixth points). We focus on a careful analysis of the internal and external environments of local communities involved in rural tourism

development. In this paper, 'internal environment' is defined as all factors that influence rural tourism development which local rural tourism stakeholders can control and/or influence. 'External environment' is defined as all factors that influence rural tourism development which local rural tourism stakeholders cannot control and/or influence.

The analysis of the internal and external environment of rural tourism in the Gambia was split into several steps: (1) local participation and local needs as regards rural tourism development; (2) aims and objectives of rural tourism development; (3) stakeholder analysis of present and future rural tourism development; (4) identifying unique attractions / attributes for further rural tourism development in The Gambia; (5) a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of rural tourism in The Gambia; (6) rural tourism development's internal and external environments; and (7) management implications for rural tourism offer.

METHODOLOGY

Building on a literature review of rural community-based tourism in developing nations, missing research information on how local communities may become more economically involved in rural tourism were identified. The research concept was to investigate the internal and external environment factors that might influence success or failure of rural tourism initiatives in the Gambia. No applicative empirical information to adequately answer the research questions were available from secondary data or other sources, hence new empirical data had to be collected to reach the objectives of the study. Furthermore, as this study is the first to explore the area of rural tourism offer and community participation in The Gambia, qualitative methods of social sciences' research were used. We considered qualitative research methods to be superior in terms of explanatory power compared to quantitative research methods as in this study we focused more on explanation than measurement of phenomena or quantitative generalisations.

Primary data collection on the Gambian case was conducted between July and September 2006. Relationships among key rural tourism stakeholders, their roles and perceptions to rural tourism development, and general rural tourism development questions were enquired (see table 1). The in-depth and focus group interview methods were used because of their ability to effectively enquire stakeholder relationships and opinions. Salant & Dillman (1994) pointed to the strategic strength of the interview method in research studies, where no mail or other listing of the target

group members is available but where the target group can be reached easily in their abode, which applied to our study design. Four groups of stakeholders were selected for interviews based on these stakeholders' key roles in rural tourism in the Gambia after consultation with the country's tourism research office (see Table 1 for selected interview groups, specific methods used, and checklist of topics).

Table 1 Key stakeholders involved in rural tourism development process as sources of data

Stakeholders and their role in rural tourism	Data collection method	Checklist of topics
<p>Group 1 Government officials responsible for tourism development: (a) Department of State for Tourism and Culture (responsible for tourism policy formulation); and (b) Gambia Tourism Authority (responsible for tourism policy implementation)</p>	Focus group interviews	<p>Tourism development in The Gambia. Potentials for tourism in rural areas. Compatibility of rural tourism with the overall tourism policy. Role of local communities in tourism in The Gambia. Chances of success or failure of rural tourism initiative.</p>
<p>Group 2 Ground Tour Operators (bringing in tourists)</p>	In-depth interviews	<p>Nature conservation strategies. Tourism marketing. External factors affecting rural tourism. Relationships between stakeholders.</p>
<p>Group 3 ECCO officials, a non-governmental organisation (working with locals in rural tourism projects)</p>	Focus group	<p>Potentials for tourism in rural areas. Role of rural communities in the tourism industry</p>

Group 4 Local people (offering rural tourism products and services)	interviews	(with aims and objectives). Gender roles with particular reference to rural tourism. Chances of success or failure of rural tourism initiative. Nature conservation awareness and strategies. Tourism marketing. Problems faced so far and likely problems in the future.
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholder groups 1 and 2 respectively, i.e. five key Government officials responsible for tourism development, and five ground tour operators' representatives. The interviews with groups 1 and 2 were used to enquire into recent issues in tourism development in The Gambia, the stakeholders and their interests, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that rural areas and locals have or face in tourism development. The strategic strength of face-to-face interviews in getting more accurate responses as compared to phone or e-mail inquiries has been suggested by Salant and Dillman (1994), and was used to conduct the interviews in this study. The Government officials were interviewed in a group, and the ground tour operators were interviewed separately. This is because the Government officials pursue similar objectives and are not economically competing for market shares unlike the tour operators, who may have different commercial and other interests that they would not like to talk about with other tour operators present in an interview situation. Notes were taken during the interviews and transcripts written immediately thereafter to document the interviews for analysis.

Groups 3 and 4 of rural tourism stakeholders were interviewed using the focus group interview method. Community leaders from two local communities (Berefet and Njawara) in The Gambia that were recently starting rural tourism initiatives were selected for focus group discussions; seven female leaders and seven male leaders were separately group-interviewed in each of the two communities, leading to four separate focus group discussions. Community leaders here comprise of both village heads (recognised formally to have leadership roles, with

authority bestowed on them due to their age), and youth groups' heads (elected democratically by youth groups). Five members of a non-governmental organisation working with the locals in rural tourism issues were also involved in separate focus group discussions. Focus groups 3 and 4 interviews enquired into potentials that rural Gambia have as regards rural tourism, local perceptions on rural tourism development, gender issues, aims and objectives of tourism and how they have organised themselves to provide tourism services in their local communities. Recent problems that stakeholders might have faced so far in tourism management and probable future issues were also of interest to this study. Interview discussions also included the local environmental suitability for tourism development and associated tourism services as well as the pros and cons of this new development to their environment, social structures and cultures. The focus groups were guided by a checklist of topics and involved interactions between subjects as well as interactions between the moderator and the subjects. In the in-depth interviews, a checklist of topics was used which guided the interaction between the interviewer and the subjects (Veal, 1997; Karmakar, 2011). Notes were taken during the interviews and transcripts made immediately afterwards.

For data analysis' purpose, a content analysis of the in-depth interviews' and focus groups' transcripts was carried out which involved a coding and classification of recurring opinions (see Williams & Dair, 2007) on a checklist of topics. Incidences of opinions were classified as very commonly recorded, commonly recorded, and infrequently recorded; and subsequently served as framework for the following results and discussions' section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Local participation, aims and objectives of rural tourism development

In the two case study communities, interviewed local community leaders expressed active level of participation in rural tourism activities, though their roles differ with regard to gender. Women perceive that their role needs more improvement, to be managers and not to be managed, to lead and not to be led, and expressed their willingness to be involved with men in any rural tourism initiative (*commonly recorded*). This is in line with the findings of the Emerging Market Group (2005) which showed that women have suffered specific discrimination within the tourism

sector in The Gambia. Also, Tripp (2004) noted that a process of change over entrenched inequalities in the exclusion of women from public decision-making in Africa will require simultaneous struggles over the norms governing gender roles and behaviour and over public decision-making authority. In The Gambia, both women and men are known to work together in rural development projects. This trend has to be continued for the case of rural tourism development without changing the social network structure. Most interviewees, therefore, emphasized that purely men or women self-organised rural developmental networks may not be very successful if encouraged (*commonly recorded*).

It is observed from focus groups that more institutional capacity building among locals for both men and women, in personal relationships, business planning, management and operational skills is needed to sustain the new rural tourism development (*very commonly recorded*). These results support the findings of McKercher & Robbins (1998), and Adama & Kieti (2007), which reported that basic proficiency in these skills is necessary for tourism development. Capacity building should not be gender biased, but be focused at creating a mixture of both male and female tourism managers at the community level on the long-term.

Locals stated society focused objectives of their local rural tourism development to include: (1) alleviation of poverty in all participating local communities; (2) increasing the protection of the natural environment; (3) improving human resource development; (4) promoting equal opportunity employment, regardless of gender; and (5) increasing the active participation of all stakeholders and building strong partnership among them (*all objectives very commonly or commonly recorded*).

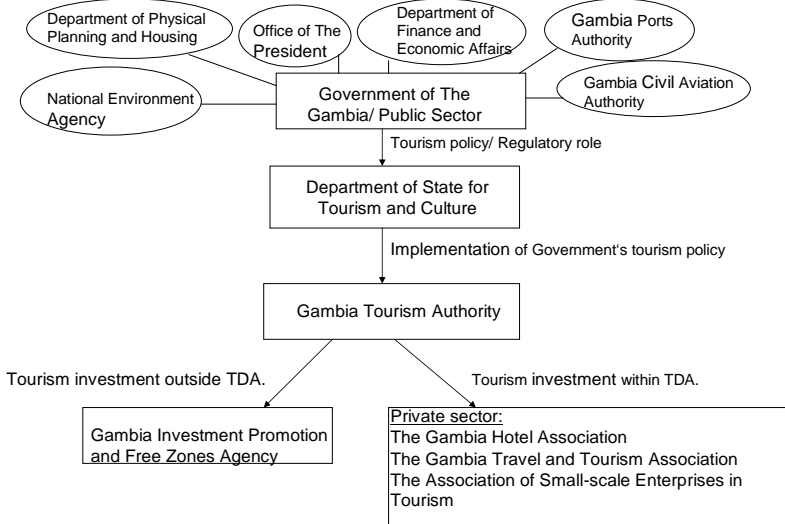
In contrast to Lepp (2008), who reported that a rural community can react with distress towards new tourism development, we found that tourism development was associated with positive perceptions. This result would therefore support the findings of other recent studies (Smith & Krannich, 1998; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1994; King et al., 1992), where authors pointed out that locals who wish for economic development would readily embrace tourism.

Stakeholder analysis of rural tourism development

This section starts with an overview of the hierarchical structure and levels of power of the present tourism institutions in The Gambia (fig.1). Based on in-depth and focus group interviews, the hierarchical model of the political tourism institutions are complemented with additional information on stakeholder activities and linked to a model of cooperation

of all important stakeholders in the Gambian rural tourism industry, including local communities (fig.2).

Figure 1 The hierarchical structure of tourism institutions in The Gambia*

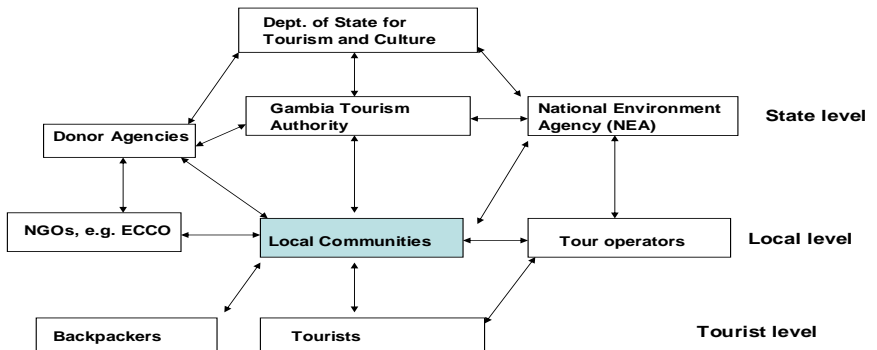


* *TDA in this figure stands for Tourism Development Areas.*

From what is displayed in figure 1, tourism related policy and implementation institutions in The Gambia are strictly hierarchically organised, the structure is ‘tall’ and has strong elements of bureaucracy in it. In order to improve rural tourism development, highly efficient and flexible policies are to be implemented, e.g. for flexible national funding schemes in favour of rural tourism businesses.

Owing to the fact that successful community participation in the rural tourism business is dependent on institutionalising rural tourism and local community participation, this research tried to find a model that reflects the need for flexible and efficient policies. In this model, the community becomes a central part of the institutions involved in rural tourism industry. The model presented here can be called the “cooperation model” (see figure 2) and displays all stakeholders involved in rural tourism in the Gambia, partitioned in three levels of interest: the ‘state (governmental) level’, the ‘local level’ and the ‘tourist level’.

Figure 2 Cooperation model involving rural tourism stakeholders in The Gambia*



* *'Backpackers'* in figure 2 are those visitors who individually come and decide to tour rural Gambia, while *'tourists'* are those visitors who come to The Gambia through tour operators.

The Department of State for Tourism and Culture passes the policies to govern and support rural tourism development. Also, on the 'state (governmental) level' the Gambia Tourism Authority is responsible for the implementation of rural tourism policy, e.g. by marketing the nation internationally and by supporting tourism related human resource development projects in rural communities. The environmental impact of rural tourism projects is assessed by the National Environment Agency (NEA). Community development projects, e.g. rural tourism projects, are primarily financed by donor agencies, which closely cooperate with numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The NGOs try to support rural tourism projects by providing services such as research projects, communication, training and organisational support.

According to the results of the interviews carried out with local community leaders, NGOs will play a bridging role between locals on the one hand and tour operators, donor agencies and the NEA on the other hand. The tour operators in turn are expected to continuously bring tourists to rural areas and decide on itineraries. Tour operators are also seen as experts to advise communities on professional ways of organising local events in order to impart experience on tourists. In the "cooperation model", the 'local communities' as an institution is placed in the centre, as the locals themselves are expected to become the main organisers of local events to offer tourist experience within their rural space. According

to the interviews, the reliance on backpackers is evaluated as not sustainable for a local community-based rural tourism development in The Gambia. Backpackers are quite few in numbers and make disorganised visits, which mean fewer turnovers for local tourism businesses. In contrast, tourists who come through tour operators are many and make organised visits through the tour operators (*commonly recorded*).

Also, community leaders expressed concern for the need for rural tourism businesses to be locally owned by the communities but be supported by the tour operators, the Government and the NGOs (*very commonly recorded*).

The tour operators interviewed expressed the need to support rural tourism development, but decried the poor infrastructural development in rural Gambia (*very commonly recorded*). According to the tour operators, the poor road infrastructure in the Gambia is one of the weaknesses of new rural tourism development. These results form a complement to the findings of Bah and Goodwin (2003) which stated that tour operators might be willing to support locally owned businesses, as there is an increasing concern of tour operators to develop new business opportunities and to care for the welfare of the local Gambian population.

The Government officials interviewed emphasised their support for rural tourism development, especially in the western part of the nation. If done in a sustainable and responsible way, rural tourism can contribute significantly to the quality of life in The Gambia, i.e. through income generation, employment provision, increased foreign exchange and social awareness (*commonly recorded*). This reflects Tosun's (2005) research results that appropriate political decision making at central level, enacting relevant legal frameworks, empowering local communities and cooperation of dominant elite groups are critical to the emergence of the participatory tourism development approach in developing countries.

The Government officials further pointed out (*very commonly recorded*) that the nation's tourism industry is heavily dependent on tour operators bringing in tourists and suggested that exploring other forms of tourism in The Gambia can reduce this dependence (see also Manyara & Jones, 2007).

From the findings with regard to the "cooperation model", we conclude that a combination of efforts from the public sector and donor agencies would be necessary to push-start high quality tourism infrastructural development in the western Gambia. Also, at this early stage of rural tourism development, a better interpretation of all aspects of the Gambian natural, cultural and historical heritages is needed to make

new infrastructural investments part of a sustainable tourism development. This will be in line with Roberts & Hall's (2001) proposal of creating a balance between acknowledging and embedding bottom-up values and the need for bringing to bear top-down resources. Public strategic actions need to be framed with care and sensitivity, to embrace and represent host communities', tour operators' and environmental interests.

The 'internal environment' of rural tourism

In this paper, 'internal environment' is defined as all factors that influence rural tourism development which local rural tourism stakeholders can control and/or influence. Earlier, we have discussed the levels of power as well as the structure of cooperation of institutions involved in rural tourism in the Gambia (fig. 2: "cooperation model").

To complement the "cooperation model", interview data were used to generate a systems map (fig. 3) showing rural tourism's 'internal environment' and 'near environment' activities (*cf.* Stapleton, 2007). Within the inner circle displayed in fig. 3 are the institution's 'internal environment' activities, which the local communities have complete control over. Outside the inner circle, the institutional 'near environment' activities are displayed, which are tourism activities that local communities can influence but have no control of, because the activities are performed by rural tourism stakeholders other than the local communities.

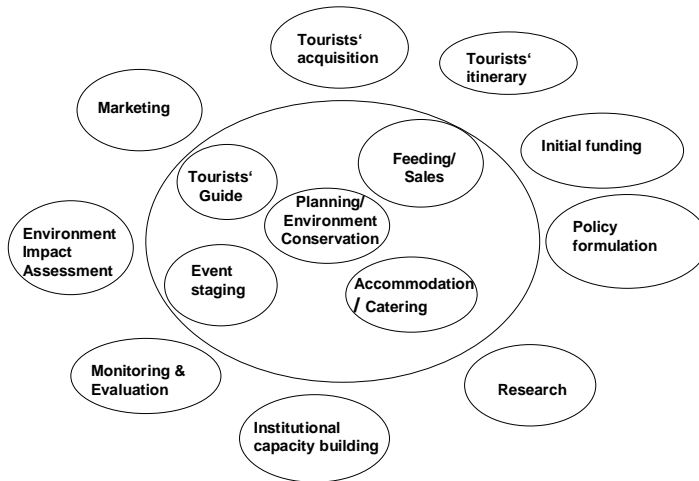
This study infers that for example, the staging of tourism events and the associated tourist services are within the power of rural local communities, however initial funding, tourists' acquisition, capacity building, etc. have to be implemented by other rural tourism stakeholders. Cooperation amongst all rural tourism stakeholders is therefore crucial for new rural tourism development.

Tourism attractions and the 'external environment': a SWOT analysis

Based on in-depth interviews and focus groups, we tried to identify attributes of tourism attractions that can be packaged and sold to the tourists, which have the potential to offer The Gambia a unique selling anchor with which it can strategically market itself and differentiate itself from other competitors. Having a unique selling proposition (USP) is discussed as having a great potential to benefit local communities

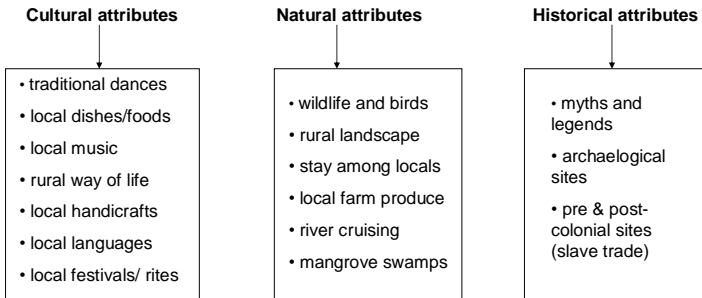
involved in rural tourism (see also Bah & Goodwin, 2003). A distinct brand identity can help The Gambia establish a clear and competitive position (*cf.* Cai, 2002; Liu, 2006). The focus group interviews with government officials and local community leaders as well as the in-depth interviews with tour operators led to numerous evaluations and assessments of The Gambia's supply of tourism services. We found the SWOT method best suited to organise and structure the data received from the interviewees (*opinions, very commonly and commonly recorded*).

Figure 3 Systems map, Gambian rural tourism



Central assets of rural tourism offers in The Gambia, following the responses of the interviewees, can be subdivided into three main classes of attributes namely; cultural, natural and historical attributes (fig. 4).

Figure 4 Rural tourism attractions in The Gambia



The Gambia is endowed with natural and cultural heritage accompanied with friendly and hospitable people (*very commonly recorded*). These assets are both high- and low-profile symbols with which the nation can position itself in the rural tourism marketplace. The main assets of The Gambia's rural areas (fig. 4) were introduced as 'strengths' to the SWOT analysis table (tab. 2).

The 'external environment' of the Gambian rural tourism sector consists of the social, technological, economic, environmental and political factors (acronym, STEEP) which the local communities and other stakeholders involved in rural tourism have neither control nor influence over, but can only respond to. To further develop a SWOT analysis, the qualitative data was analysed according to the STEEP concept, (see STEEP factors according to Stapleton, 2007: 85). A sophisticated monitoring system is needed to be able to quickly respond to external environment's changes and hence proactively manage rural tourism. To develop such a monitoring system for the Gambia's (rural) tourism sector, STEEP factors that are crucial to rural tourism development have to be identified. From this study's data, some important issues with regard to STEEP factor's monitoring could be identified and were recorded as part of the SWOT analysis (tab. 2).

Analysing the interviews' data, we first focused on social factors which rural tourism stakeholders in The Gambia may have to respond to: commonly and very commonly recorded statements included social aspects such as the perception of increasing political instability in Africa (as a continent), the perception of increasing health hazards (e.g. malaria, HIV/AIDS) for a trip to Africa, as well as culture shocks caused by a 'clash of cultures' when Gambians and tourists meet (see the 'threats'

section in the SWOT analysis; tab. 2). Gambians can respond to these threats, by reinforcing a national image of a peaceful and stable political climate, marketing the nation under a cultural umbrella alongside the well known 'sun-beach' tourism using its rich diverse cultural heritage and authentic archaeological sites (see the 'strengths' section in the SWOT analysis; tab. 2). Tourists may become well informed that with adequate prevention and prophylactic measures the perceived health hazards can be reduced to the barest minimum.

Among the technological factors most commonly mentioned by the interviewees were the effects of information and communications technology (ICT): on the one hand, the increased use of ICT, e.g. in booking tourism services, is expected to lower the spatial and temporal barriers and hence improve the market share of distant destinations such as The Gambia; on the other hand, the increased use of ICT is expected to further intensify the competition on the tourism market. The Gambia can respond to this through intensified internet marketing of rural tourism products and services pointing to the Gambia's unique rural tourism qualities and hence better target desired tourists' clusters. The friendliness and hospitality of the locals are other strengths which the nation as a rural tourism destination can use to respond to increased use of ICT and competition on the tourism market.

With regard to the economic factors of the STEEP concept, the factors most commonly mentioned by the interviewees pointed to the present global financial crisis in the western nations from where the nation receive most tourists. Also, the interviewees stressed market inefficiencies, the perception of economic cycles moving from boom to bust, and the increasing competition in the global tourism industry. Some of the strengths of the Gambian tourism industry, such as the aggressive pricing of the destination, can help to balance the above mentioned economic threats. Continual monitoring of arrivals through Tourists' Information Systems and medium-term policies such as adequate investment planning is needed to foster a stable tourism development. Monitoring and evaluation of rural tourism products and services could also help to improve tourism offers and to achieve efficiency in operation and consistency in delivery. We conclude that combining these strategies is a prerequisite to achieve the above-mentioned unique selling proposition and to develop a Gambian tourism brand of high international standard. From the interviews' data, numerous other strengths and opportunities of the Gambian tourism external environment which were identified and perceived capable to combat economical challenges are: the low crime rate and safe cultural environment for tourists, a sunny and hot

climate suitable for an all-year-round-tourism, new niche market of individual travel developing globally, relatively short flight distances from Europe, perception of having 'rural idyll' experience, the River Gambia (navigable for 200km from the capital city into the villages), more than 500 bird species in a relatively small catchment's area and the potential to create more linkages between the tourism and the agricultural sector.

Environmental factors that can be associated with the 'external environment' of the Gambian rural tourism industry were also identified from the interview data. Most commonly, interviewees mentioned the perception that many so-called 'ecotourists' actually do not travel in an environmentally friendly manner. According to Roberts and Hall (2001), regions marketing themselves as tourist destinations should promote a prior understanding of the ecological limits or range of change through tourism acceptable to the region, and also should monitor how the region's environmental quality is placed at risk by intended tourism development processes. Following Robert and Hall's opinion, we recommend that The Gambia use their environmental impact assessment procedures (formulated by the National Environment Agency) to enable communities wishing to be involved in rural tourism uphold the desired environmental standards. From the interviews, it can be concluded that not all rural communities are environmentally insensitive to rural tourism development. Those that are fragile should be discouraged from further rural tourism development by cooperative information and negotiation. Adequate information and communication channels can help tour operators, tourists and locals to become increasingly sensitive to rural environment's vulnerability, so as not to turn the recreational idyll into a recreational mess. Tourists should be informed adequately by tour operators about the communities they wish to visit, as well as about environmentally sensitive areas in the region of visit. Negative environmental effects from overcrowding can also be avoided through progressive monitoring, evaluation and limit setting with regard to maximum number of visitors. Locals themselves are responsible for protecting their own environment. Progressive institutional capacity building can lead to increased environmental awareness on the part of the locals. With regard to quantitative data however, there exist no reports on the scope of negative environmental impact from tourism in The Gambia by the time this study was conducted.

Political factors are not perceived as significant external factors to the Gambian rural tourism development by the interviewees in this study. The Government of The Gambia through the Department of State for Tourism

and Culture are stakeholders in the Gambian rural tourism business. Policies are already in place to support rural tourism development, and any future regulation is not being considered as an important external factor. Foreign policies however, put in place by tourists' nations of origin, may affect the demand of tourism in The Gambia.

With reference to the 'strengths' and 'opportunities' side of the SWOT analysis (table 2), it can be argued, that rural tourism initiatives in the Gambia can benefit from typical African rural idyll experience settings, which consist of typical Gambian rural products and services. Müller et al. (2004) discussed the term "experience setting through events" as spatially and timely specific situations with a consciously animated atmosphere, to provide audience with such experiences. The attributes of The Gambian tourism attractions identified above (cultural, natural and historical attributes) are well suited to stage events that can impart experiences on tourists. To stage events in turn has the potential to improve the competitive position of The Gambia within the international tourism industry. Clear aims and commitment as well as adequate political decision making nevertheless, will be necessary to achieve improved turnover from rural tourism in the Gambia. Also, further investments are necessary to improve the tourism infrastructure and to improve marketing efforts in order to enable rural communities to attract tourists by themselves instead of having to rely solely on the marketing power of foreign tour operators.

Table 2 SWOT analysis of the Gambian rural tourism

Strengths (positive factors, internal)	Weaknesses (negative factors, internal)
<p>Traditional active community participation in development projects.</p> <p>Peaceful and stable political climate in The Gambia.</p> <p>Low crime rate and safe cultural environment for tourists.</p> <p>Existence of eco-tourism strategy to compliment rural tourism.</p> <p>Diverse tribes and cultures with rich cultural heritage.</p> <p>Authentic archaeological sites. Pre and post-colonial historical sites (slave trade).</p> <p>Friendliness of rural population with English as official language.</p> <p>Affordability of destination.</p>	<p>No clear functional framework for rural tourism.</p> <p>Lack of adequate skilled manpower in rural areas.</p> <p>Low level of entrepreneurial culture and customer service orientation. “African time” – a problem of reliability.</p> <p>Inadequate marketing potential.</p> <p>Limited investment in high quality tourism products and services.</p> <p>Partly undeveloped infrastructure (power and roads).</p> <p>Sub-standard quantity and quality of landing sites (jetties) along River Gambia.</p> <p>Unimproved interpretation of all aspects of Gambian natural, cultural and historical heritage.</p> <p>Gender stereotyping on employment.</p>

Opportunities (positive factors, external)	Threats (negative factors, external)
<p>Sunny climate suitable for all year round tourism.</p> <p>New niche market focusing on individual travel.</p> <p>No ‘jet lag’ problems due to relatively short flight duration from Europe.</p> <p>African continent perceived as having the “rural idyll” atmosphere.</p> <p>River Gambia (navigable for 200km) offers opportunities for transport, river cruising, water sports, fishing, and is marked by tropical forest, bamboo and mangrove swamps.</p> <p>Not sensitive to highly dangerous natural disasters.</p> <p>More than 500 species of birds, mostly found along River Gambia.</p> <p>More linkages between tourism and agriculture needed.</p> <p>No major negative socio-cultural and environmental impact observed from tourism so far.</p>	<p>Perception of increasing political instability in the region of West Africa.</p> <p>Perception of increasing health hazards (e.g., malaria and HIV/AIDS) for a trip to West Africa.</p> <p>‘Culture shock’ to both Gambians and tourists.</p> <p>Increasing market competition in global tourism, especially with the emergence of new information and communication technology.</p> <p>Global market inefficiency, financial crisis.</p> <p>‘Eco-tourists’ are actually not behaving environmentally friendly.</p>

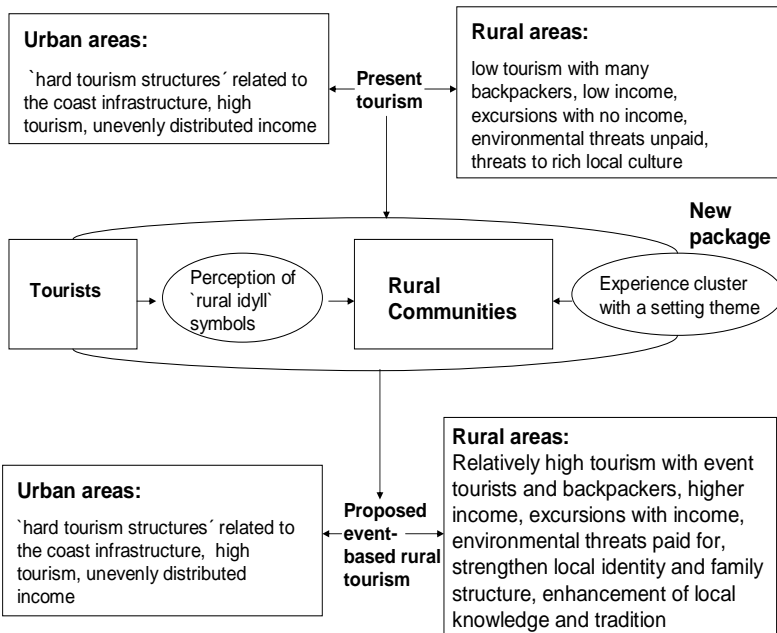
Management implications for rural tourism development

This study conceptualised the emerging rural tourism in The Gambia (see fig. 5). A new “cooperation model” was introduced (fig. 2), which suggests the acceptance of the present form of tourism in The Gambia as a starting point but seeks a linking package that will help make tourism more sustainable.

According to the results presented above, event-based rural tourism is perceived as having the potential to become the USP in The Gambia’s tourism industry. The Gambia’s rural experience could be imparted on tourists as staged local events presenting highlights of actual traditional events with cultural performances. Rural communities are perceived to

best benefit from rural tourism, when running a diversification strategy with regard to the structure of tourism offerings. The Gambian communities are to concentrate on different offers in different villages according to what a particular village is specialised in. Tourists can travel from one village to another, participating in different staged events and enjoy a whole rural Gambian experience at the end (*very commonly recorded*).

Figure 5 Proposed rural tourism model, involving local communities



The locals are required to provide products and services needed for this form of rural tourism, however the issue of “African time” (*commonly recorded*), that is not keeping to the time known in so many African villages, needs to be addressed through education and information on Western tourists’ expectations. Inaccuracy in time-keeping otherwise may lead to anger, disappointment and stress on the tourists and hence limit successful rural tourism development.

The rural tourism model concept (fig. 5) is provided to illustrate how the present form of tourism in the Gambia (package tourism) can be transformed into a more locally controlled tourism industry with improved environmental awareness and protection. Using this model of 'new' Gambian tourism business structure, the tour operators will continue to tailor excursions and offer transportation for tourists to the villages. The Gambian locals can offer catering, camp accommodation and guides as well as performances highlighting rural Gambian experiences. Backpackers will still be encouraged to access rural Gambia, however this model rather targets organised event rural tourists who will come through tour operators. Most importantly, the turnover generated from experience tourism offers will remain with the local communities, e.g. through NGOs assistance to coordinate and secure the money transfers between tour operators and the locals (*commonly recorded*).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of in-depth and focus group interviews with stakeholders involved in the rural tourism development in The Gambia had local communities at the core. From the results we conclude that rural tourism may not become a panacea for package tours in the nation. Rural tourism, however, has the potential to lead to a fairer distribution of tourism benefits among the stakeholders and particularly to a higher share of tourism revenues for the local rural communities. At the local level, improved capacity building, institutionalising and collaboration among different rural communities are recommendations drawn from the interview data in this study to foster the Gambian rural tourism development. At the political or state level, clear legal framework formulation and effective policies' implementation especially with regard to public investment and infrastructure provision are necessary to make rural tourism an integrated and functional part of the Gambian tourism industry.

In this study, the results from the interviews with regard to the assessment of The Gambia's future tourism development were bundled and presented in a SWOT analysis summary. According to the SWOT analysis, there is a high potential to offer unique rural tourism attractions to complement the package 'sun-beach' tourism schemes in the Gambia, which until the time of writing this paper, is the major source of tourism revenue in the Gambia. By offering unique experience setting tourism schemes through events organised in rural areas, rural tourism in The

Gambia could have a unique selling proposition within the international tourism industry.

Rural tourism schemes, however, are heavily dependent on healthy environmental conditions, as the 'rural idyll' perception is a main motivation for tourists to visit rural Africa. The numbers of tourists and tourism activities in rural Gambia therefore, have to be carefully planned in size as to not exceed the carrying capacities of rural communities. This will help to establish a sustainable and healthy social environment in the host communities.

Rural tourism in The Gambia requires local ownership, if the rural communities are to benefit from rural tourism. Numerous external economic interests nevertheless play a role to continuously run rural tourism activities, hence important stakeholders such as the ground tour operators (private sector) and the non-governmental organisations have to be actively involved in this development. Also, appropriate policies have to be in place to guarantee a fair distribution of rural tourism revenue among the main stakeholders. Donor agencies are needed at the initial stage of this development but locals can subsequently take over long-term business responsibilities by achieving a clear value position, operational excellence and strong customer relations using some of the suggestions provided by this study to increase viability and independence. Improved rural tourism activities rooted in the local communities may enable the nation to gain a significant competitive advantage among other African and international rural tourism destinations. The marketing concept proposed by Bosworth (1995) of identifying customer needs and finding ways of satisfying them could guide the monitoring and evaluation processes of this development.

REFERENCES

- Akama, J.S. & Kieti, D. (2007). Tourism and socio-economic development in developing countries: A case study of Mombasa Resort in Kenya. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 15, No.6, pp.735-748.
- Bah, A. & Goodwin, H. (2003). Improving access for the informal sector to tourism. *The Gambia pro-poor tourism Working Paper 15*, Overseas Development Institute. London.
- Bosworth, M.T. (1995). *Solution selling: creating buyers in difficult selling markets*. IRWIN Professional Publishing. Illinois.
- Cai, L. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, No.3, pp.720-742.

- Emerging Markets Group (2005). *The Gambia Tourism Development Master Plan: The challenges for 2005 to 2010 and the 2020 vision*. Banjul.
- Haralambopoulos, N. & Pizam, A. (1994). Perceived impacts of tourism: The case of Samos. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23, pp.503-526.
- Karmakar, M. (2011). Ecotourism and its impact on the regional economy - a study of North Bengal (India). *Tourismos*, Vol. 6, No.1, pp.251-270.
- Kibicho, W. (2008). Community-based tourism: A factor-cluster segmentation approach. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 16, No.2, pp.211-231.
- King, B., Pizam, A. & Milman, A. (1992). Social impacts of tourism: Host perceptions. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 20, pp.650-665.
- Lepp, A. (2008). Attitudes towards initial tourism development in a community with no prior tourism experience: The case of Bigodi, Uganda. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 16, No.1, pp.5-22.
- Leslie, D. & Wilson, J. (2006). The backpacker and Scotland: A market analysis. *Tourismos*, Vol. 1, No.2, pp.11-28.
- Lindberg, K. & Johnson, R. L. (1997). Modelling resident attitudes towards tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 24, pp.402-424.
- Liu, A. (2006). Tourism in rural areas: Keddah, Malaysia. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 27, No. 5, pp.878-889.
- Manyara, G. & Jones, E. (2007). Community-based tourism enterprises development in Kenya: An exploration of their potential as avenues of poverty reduction. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 15, No.6, pp.628-644.
- McKercher, B. & Robbins, B. (1998). Business development issues affecting nature-based tourism operators in Australia. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 6, No.2, pp.173-188.
- Mueller, H., Jans, K. & Scheurer, R. (2004). *Tourismus-Destination als Erlebniswelt. Ein Leitfaden zur Angebotsinszenierung*. Bern, Forschungsinstitut Freizeit und Tourismus der Universität Bern.
- Petrzelka, P., Krannich, R.S., Brehm, J. & Trentelman, C.K. (2005). Rural tourism and gendered nuances. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 32, No.4, pp.1121-1137.
- Roberts, L. & Hall, D. (2001). *Rural tourism and recreation: Principles to practice*. Oxon, CABI Publishing.
- Salant, P. & Dillman, D.A. (1994). *How to conduct your own survey*. Washington DC, Island Press.
- Sdrali, D. & Chazapi, K. (2007). Cultural tourism in a Greek insular community: The residents' perspective. *Tourismos*, Vol. 2, No.2, pp.61-75.
- Smith, M.D. & Krannich, R.A. (1998). Tourism dependence and residents' attitudes. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 25, pp.783-802.
- Stapleton, T. (2007). B713 Course book *The Context of management: The external environment*. The Open University Business School, Walton Hall.
- Tosun, C. (2005). Stages in the emergence of a participatory tourism development approach in the Developing World. *Geoforum*, Vol. 36, pp.333-352.

- Tripp, A.M. (2004). Women's movements, customary law, and land rights in Africa: The case of Uganda, in *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7, Issue 4, pp.1-19.
- Veal, A.J. (1997). *Research methods for leisure and tourism: A practical guide*. Second ed. Essex, Pearson Education Limited.
- Williams, K. & Dair, C. (2007). What is stopping sustainable building in England? Barriers experienced by stakeholders delivering sustainable developments. *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 15, pp.135-147.

SUBMITTED: JUL 2010

REVISION SUBMITTED: NOV 2010

ACCEPTED: DEC 2010

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Ikechukwu O. Ezeuduji (iezeuduji@uj.ac.za) is a Lecturer at University of Johannesburg, Department of Tourism Management, Bunting Road, Auckland Park, 2092 Johannesburg, South Africa.

Wolfgang Rid (Rid@lrz.tu-muenchen.de) is a Senior Researcher at the Technische Universität München, Faculty of Architecture, Arcisstrasse 21, 80333 Munich, Germany.