

Impediments to Regional Tourism Development in Kenya's North Rift Region

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Abstract

Regional tourism is seen as a way of diversifying tourism in order to revitalize the economy at the marginalized lands. However, development of regional tourism has numerous challenges. This study identified challenges confronting tourism development in the North Rift region of Kenya by reviewing related literature, carrying out interviews with officials from six hotels and four tour companies. Two Kenya Tourist Board officials were also interviewed, and field observations utilized. Key challenges confronting tourism development in the region related to development of tourism products, accessibility, marketing, coordination among stakeholders and insecurity. These problems must be addressed jointly by the central government, local governments, hotels, tour operators and the host community if meaningful tourism is to be realized.

Key words: *Regional tourism; Challenges; Tourism development; Marketing.*

1. Introduction

Tourist arrivals in Africa have remained low compared to other continents like Europe and USA. For instance, Europe remains the most popular destination, followed by Asia & the Pacific then America, while Africa commands the lowest market share (UNWTO, 2007). This means that the region is not reaping the full benefit of the global tourism. However, few countries in the continent like South Africa,

Kenya, Morocco and Egypt view tourism as an important sector in the economical development. For instance, tourism in Kenya is the fastest growing industry and is currently the second highest foreign exchange earner after tea (GOK, 2004). Its receipts grew from US\$ 699 million in 2005 to US\$ 803 million in 2006 (UNWTO, 2007). Unfortunately, tourism in the country is spatial and only few regions receive substantial number of tourists because Kenya is predominantly a nature-based tourism destination with wildlife concentrated in southern part of the country and beaches along the Indian Ocean, and therefore have become the few centers or honey pots that exist in Kenya. The rest of the country including the North Rift region is less visited by tourists. Statistics indicates that the coast receives 60% of all the tourists in the country while the Western Kenya Zone (that include North Rift region) receives a paltry 2% (GOK, 2004).

The North Rift region is located in the Northern part of Rift Valley province in Kenya, and is made up of eight districts: Turkana, Nandi, West Pokot, Marakwet, Keiyo, Tranzoia, Baringo and Uasin Gishu. The North Rift region is part of the Western Kenya Tourist Circuit that was launched in 2002 as a tourist destination. The region is endowed with rich cultural attractions, wonderful landforms, high altitude climate suitable for sports, forests and wildlife. In spite of these attractions and its launching, visitation to the region has not improved significantly (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007). Thus, the aim of this study was to identify the challenges confronting tourism development in the North Rift region as a tourist destination in Kenya.

2. Conceptual Framework

The North Rift region is a peripheral or distant area within Kenya. Such areas have inhibiting characteristics like unexploited tourism potential and lack of accessibility that bring about inequalities. These disparities both at the global and national level have long been the focus of academic interest, spawning a strong tradition of theoretical work under the banner of development and regional studies (Botteril *et al.*, 2000). As a result, synonymous terminologies have evolved over time. These terms, whose characteristics are mostly of economic and social nature distinguish between successful and less successful, rich and poor, developed and developing, north and south, and so on (Botteril *et al.*, 2000). In the context of tourism, *core* or *centres* have been used to describe the advanced area while *periphery* designates a less advanced area (Scott, 2000).

Hohl and Tisdell (1995) refers peripheral region as marginal lands with little other economic alternatives. They are those areas located at the remote edges of regions. Some people may want to refer developing countries like Kenya as peripheries. Nonetheless, such 'peripheries' have better visited areas, and can be regarded as *centres*, central place, and/or access point. On the other hand, *peripheries*, also known as other sites within a region (Moscardo *et al.*, 2004) or less visited tourist circuits in a country certainly exist. From Merriam-Webster dictionary that one of two or more words in the same language that are the precise equivalent of each other or which have very nearly the same signification and liable to be confounded together is a synonym. For practical purposes of this study, a 'peripheral region' and 'region within a destination' are synonymous. Regions within a destination are conceptualized as the region within a country remotely located away from the tourism concentration centre. The region under reference is selectively characterized by its rural and remote setting, presence of high scenic values, feeling of alienation due to lack of participation in decision making, and has poor infrastructure (Bottlerill *et al.*, 2002).

Although tourism development in regions within a destination or peripheral regions can be successful, the general problems of tourism development such as those relating to income, preference of travelers and vulnerability to policy changes are aggravated here because of their limited resources base and greater economic inflexibility (Hohl and Tisdell, 1995). Remote areas relies on traditional activities like agriculture, therefore local manpower is dedicated to it with little left for new activities such as tourism. In that case, the local communities are not involved in the tourism business, which often result in massive economic leakages.

Key factors in the success of destinations are connected to accessibility (Pridenux, 2000), tourism attractions and amenity standards (Gunn, 2004), marketing and positive image (John and Mattson, 2005; Buhalis, 2000), a supportive government (Weaver and Lawson, 2002) and safety (Poirier, 1997). Moreover, shortage of tourism resources, inadequate infrastructure, obstructionist governments and ineffective promotions (Henderson, 2006), are major impediments in tourism development.

3. Literature Review

Previous studies on destination development including (Hohl and Tisdell, 1995; Buhalis, 1999; Tosun and Timothy, 2001; Sharpley, 2002; Bottlerill, *et al.*, 2002; Akama, 2002) reported on problems confronting its planning, development and management. Others dealt with factors or reasons to failures of tourism development in peripheral or marginalized regions (Keller, 1987; UNWTO, 2002).

Buhalis (1999) outlined consequences of tourism development in remote, peripheral and insular destinations. He pointed out that destination have been forced to develop tourism that have evolved to mass tourism since planners either failed to limit development or to implement plans against politicians and foreign developers. Some authors (Akama, 2002; Tosun and Timothy, 1998) referred to this kind of planning as haphazard and common in developing world. The current defects in planning approaches in developing countries are an extension of prevailing shortcomings of public administration systems, political cultures, over-politicized states and lack of development approaches to national development (Tosun and Timothy, 2001). The result has been uncontrolled numbers and development, hence mass tourism. The negative impacts of mass tourism that include degradation of tourism resources plague these destinations. Consequently they are ensnared by the inevitable vicious circle which destroys the very essence of tourism.

Hohl and Tisdell (1995) focused on the enormous economic leakages from the peripheral region as a result of external control. This is particularly true at the initial stages of the destination's developments when most of the tourist facilities are owned by foreigners. This means that little monetary benefits trickle down to the host community. External control has been attributed to local incapability to manage businesses in the tourism industry. Research findings by Keller (1987) and Hohl and Tisdell (1995) identified lack of unskilled workforce as the major obstacle to the build-up of locally controlled businesses in Canada's Northwest Territories and in Cape York, respectively.

Problems relating to product development have also been found to hold back tourism development in remote destinations. The regions are usually undisturbed, therefore unexploited. But in order to be in any type of business, it is essential to identify what to offer to the market. Thus, attractions must be developed and offered to the market (Vukonic, 1996; Gunn, 1994). However, remote destinations are often

undecided to develop theirs. Many unexploited attractions, tourist facilities falling below international standards and poor shopping facilities were some of the factors that contributed to the slow growth of tourism in Abu Dhabi (Sharpley, 2002).

To develop tourism in regions within a destination, planners should first understand that tourists must travel to experience it, hence the importance of accessibility in the tourism system. Gnoth (1999) indicates that tourism has been developed in the New Zealand's vast areas of bushland, geysers, active volcanoes and beautiful lakes through construction of a road system accessing these attractions. However, poor accessibility to attractions is a barrier to tourism development at the destination. Bottlerill *et al.*, (2002) indicated that remoteness of peripheral region coupled with poor road infrastructure increases transportation cost, placing business located within the periphery at a comparative disadvantage in today's highly competitive environment.

Marketing remote destinations can also be a difficult and expensive affair. Flow of information within and from the remote area to the central place is weak. As a result, tourists place greater reliance on impressions which are long established and possibly stereotypical. The problem of perception, in terms of either lack of recognition or negative association, represents a challenge in accessing the market, and therefore requires significant investment in promotion (Sharpley, 2002). Unfortunately, these regions usually have low economic vitality, therefore may not have the capacity to finance effective promotions.

These studies concentrated on problems in tourism development in regions regarded as peripheries. The aim of this paper is to make a contribution towards understanding the challenges facing tourism development in regions within a destination with specific reference to the North Rift region in Kenya. Selected key challenges identified from the current literature forms the framework for this study. These are development of tourist products, accessibility, marketing, financial resources, coordination among stakeholders and insecurity.

4. Methods

This study was carried out between October and December 2005. Three groups of stakeholders namely hotels, tour operators and Kenya Tourist Board were targeted for the study. Hotel managers, officials of tour companies as well as those of KTB were respective target populations.

Questionnaire surveys, interviews and observations were basically the three primary data collection instruments. First, six hotels were interviewed using a questionnaire schedule to provide the general information including star rating, bed capacity and their promotion methods. Availability of conference facilities and accommodation in these hotels were the major factors in selecting these hotels. The initial objective was to represent each star by one hotel, including one hotel without a star-rating. However a three - star (Sirikwa Hotel) and 1 - star hotels existed in the study area, thus Wagon Hotel and Highlands Inn that were the two 1-star rated hotels were selected for the study. It was necessary to select three unrated hotels at random. White Castle, Asis and Mountain View Hotels were therefore selected for the study, bringing to six the hotels included in the study. Secondly, four tour operators were interviewed using a schedule of questions. This number was sufficient because there were only nine registered operators in the North Rift, five of which were active. Finally, officials from Kenya Tourist Board in Nairobi and Eldoret were interviewed and reference made to secondary data materials to establish marketing practices by the board. Findings relating to accessibility and product development were mainly obtained from fieldwork observations.

Secondary data was collected from both published and unpublished works related to tourism development in Kenya. These sources included an unpublished masters dissertation (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007), statistical abstracts, annual reports, journals, research papers, periodicals, study report, books and local newspapers. Finally, the information related to problems faced were organized, listed and discussed under different topics identified from the literature review.

5. Results and Discussions

Through review of literature (Ondimu, 1994; Musyoki, 1985) and KTB information, various attractions in the North Rift region were identified. They include cultural attractions, sports, Elgeiyo escarpment, climate, wildlife and vegetation. Each of these attractions were investigated through observations and follow up interviews with officers from the Ministry of Tourism, those in charge of tourism affairs at Keiyo county council and representatives of the local community with an aim of establishing problems affecting their development and/or attractiveness.

5.1. Cultural Attractions

The study identified many aspects of culture that can be offered for tourism in the North Rift region, and they include traditional homesteads of Kalenjin, Pokot and Turkana. In addition, there are cultural artifacts, musical instruments, pottery, iron smelting products, clothing and adornments, guard containers and furniture of the communities that have lived in the region for centuries. Cultural aspects includes the Field Terraces at Tambach area, the impressive Irrigation works of the Tut community on Cherangany Hills and Sirkwa Holes between Mount Elgon and Uasin Gishu District dating to seventeenth century dug by the Kalenjin people to protect their cattle (Ondimu, 1994). However, culture in the North Rift region remains least popular among tourists (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007).

This is in spite of Ondimu's (1994) assertion that culture has high potential of attracting more visitors to the region. Elsewhere, Mckercher *et al.* (2004) found factors relating to product, experience and marketing as key to popularity of cultural attractions in Hong Kong, and that cultural places must function first and foremost as attractions to be popular. However, the local communities in North Rift region have not packaged their cultural heritage for offer to tourists due to lack of mobilization and absence of a platform such as cultural center to showcase it. In other words, culture, like any other tourist attraction has to be developed and packaged before it is promoted (Vukonic, 1996; Gunn, 1994). Collection of the traditional items in North Region needs a museum for housing and display. While London has 180 museums (Holloway, 1998), the five museums in the region including Lokitaung, Lodwar, Maralal, Kitale and Nandi Hills are too few and remain unknown due to lack of marketing. The major towns in the region (Iten and Eldoret) lacked this facility at the time of collecting the data.

Again, the local community have neither been made aware of their area's resources nor taught of ways to publicize them, meaning they cannot be authentic interpreters of their own cultural heritage. For instance, the over 1000-year old irrigation system along the Kerio Valley believed to have been taken over by Marakwet people from the mysterious Sirkwa people (Musyoki, 1985) has the potential to stimulate tourism in Kerio Valley, but has never been developed for marketing. Thus, it is clear that commodification, which is (Vukonic, 1996) the process in which objects and activities come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value within the context of trade, has not started in the

region. In contrast, Luhya community in the neighboring Western province are reviving their traditional entertainment of bull fighting, and more recently, circumcision ceremony that have become very popular with domestic as well as international tourists.

5.2. *Wildlife*

Rimoi Game Reserve in Kerio Valley was taken as a case to examine the situation of wildlife in the North Rift region. Although wild game is the biggest attraction in Kenya, its popularity does not go beyond Maasai Mara, Amboseli, Tsavo and few other popular game parks and reserves at the Southern part of the country. Rimoi Game Reserve in the North Rift region is home to over twenty species of animals including elephants, rhinos, buffaloes and leopards (Musyoki, 1985). However, failure by Keiyo County Council to develop and market the reserve continues to keep it in obscurity. Lack of involvement by the council has resulted in little popularity of Rimoi Game Reserve. Judging from the visitor book at the gate, tourists hardly visit; hence the locals who preoccupy themselves with charcoal burning remain impoverished compared to locals in Maasai Mara where everyone wants to sell curios to tourists. One of the reasons why the County Councils are not effective in Kenya is due to its governance formation, particularly prior to promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. The mayor was elected by the councilors, making him less answerable to residents. In addition, those aspiring to become councilors were not subject to reasonable academic qualifications such as college education, and hence the unprofessional management of resources in the councils.

The major challenge confronting increased viewing of wildlife in the reserve is inaccessibility. It was observed that the murrum road leading to the reserve has poor signage, and is at a near collapse state. All culverts have been swept away making the road dangerous and impassible during the rainy season. Inside the reserve, deep galleys resulting from soil erosion have rendered driving impossible. Successful destinations such as New Zealand (Gnoth, 1999) and Canada (Lamb and Davidson, 1996) have invested heavily on road network. Ontario's highway network that is in good condition has a significant linkage to the tourism industry. Generally, however, most of the roads within the North Rift region have become rough and remain impassible during the wet season. For instance, by the year 2005, no road in Marakwet District was tarmac. The Eldoret – Lodwar highway leading to Turkana District is extensively pot-holed with two of its main bridges collapsing on river Sebit and Wakor due to flooding.

On the other hand, Eldoret–Nairobi highway requires rehabilitation before it comes to total collapse. Travelling from Nairobi to Eldoret takes over nine hours due to many potholes, which makes the journey extremely tiresome. Although the government has started working on it, the process is too slow. A recent study (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007) indicates that 76% of tourists to North Rift region use the road from Nairobi and other parts of the country. Since the quality of the transportation experience is an important aspect of the tourism and a key criterion for destination choice, the North Rift region could be avoided by the tourists. Thus, the poor state of the roads can actually negate tourism development in North Rift region.

5.3. *Sports Tourism and Climate*

Sport tourists are attracted to the region by annual athletics events such as Tecla Lorupe Run for Peace held in West Pokot District every November aimed at ending cattle rustling amongst pastoral communities living in the region. Small annual events in the region include Chepkoilel Cross Country, Discovery Kenya, Paul Boit Memorial Eldoret Marathon, AK National Championship and Safaricom half marathon. The events have contributed to tourism in the region with majority of tourists being sport-related (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, the region is a home to several world champions in athletics

including the 2004 5000m world champion Eliud Kipchoge, the 2002 5000m World Championship in Jamaica, Hillary Chenonge and many others including Paul Tergat, Moses Kiptanui and veteran runner Kipchoge Keino. Eldoret has produced more champion runners than any other town in the world, and 99% of Kenya's legendary athletes come from this town (Vesley, 2004).

Current literature suggests that high altitude could improve an athlete's capacity to exercise, hence performance. According to scientific research (Simpson, 2007), high altitude increases the supply of oxygen to the muscles and lungs, and enhances production of red blood cells which in turn enhances endurance and performance. The highest altitude at the North Rift region highland is 2400 meters above the sea level, which provides what runners need. Thus, international athletes attracted to this phenomenon travel to train in preparation for international races.

The sports events in the region can positively impact the local service sector including sales, maintenance and personal care if more sponsors were sought to further publicize them. The local community who mostly engage in farming particularly in the highland plateau would find ready market at hospitality facilities for their products from increased production that would reduce the level of poverty in the region. Although there is need to lobby for bigger annual events in North Rift region to improve tourism, it is unfortunate that the small events in the North Rift region have been reduced to *champion discovery* and *talent search* by foreign promoters who are purely in business. To this end, there is need for policy formulation that would protect young athletes from exploitation and losses of potential runners to other countries. These events could be linked to other tourist-related activities such as cultural festivals and promoted together to stimulate interest to the area.

5.4. Landscape and Vegetation

Visitors travel to rural areas to appreciate the natural wonder of the world-features such as great waterfalls, volcanic phenomena, and geological phenomena like caves or spectacular view. Thus, the landscape and vegetation can attract many tourists to the countryside. Elgeiyo escarpment with its indigenous vegetation provides an opportunity to develop countryside tourism in the North Rift region. It was observed that some German tourists visit Elgeiyo escarpment every year for parachuting since the escarpment provides a convenient cliff for this activity. Page and Dowling (2002) indicated that the key to the development of tourism product in a region is to establish unique, authentic and manageable products. Although part of the development of such an attraction could include designating the jumping edge as the major view point of Kerio valley and building a visitor center complex adjacent to it that is able to accommodate personal cars and tour vans, provide things like food services, souvenir sales, pageantry and museum, there has been no arrangement by Keiyo County Council to this end. Hence opportunities provided by this resource continue to go unnoticed as tourists are compelled to find the best point of the cliff to jump. As unguided informal recreation at the escarpment, serious harmful incidents are likely to occur than if it were organized.

5.5. Tourist Facilities

KTB officials cited lack of adequate hospitality facilities as the cause for the slow growth of tourism in the North Rift region. At a glimpse, this postulation appears to be mistaken. The most luxurious hotel in the region is the three-star Sirikwa Hotel, Kiprutto *et al.* (2007) found that the hotel is underutilized with an average of 30% monthly bed occupancy. Besides, there are quality rooms in smaller hotels like The Clique and White Castle Hotels. Several other lodgings are also found in Iten and Eldoret towns.

Although these facilities are important components that make up a tourist destination, supply of these services must respond to its demand. A surplus of accommodation and catering services causes a price decline, while a shortage causes a rise in price. The market mechanism of supply and demand dictates that only those customers willing and able to pay the equilibrium price will make a booking. Similarly, only investors willing and able to 'produce' rooms and rent them out to customers at the equilibrium price will remain in business. It would be inappropriate to start building luxury hotels in the North Rift region with hope that it would fetch business. Facilities tend to induce growth and tend to be developed at the same time as the attractions are developed (Mill and Morrison, 1998). Hence, as attractions in the region are developed, more tourists would visit, thus generating demand and the impetus for construction of more hospitality facilities.

5.6. Marketing

From the interviews with KTB officials and review of printed materials, it was found that KTB does not carry out marketing for specific tourist destination of the country, but markets Kenya as a unit. At the time of this study, the board identified the target market for the country on the basis of region of origin, hence used its offices abroad to promote Kenya using various marketing tools including satellite television, radio, consumer magazines, trade press magazines, brochures, guides, directories, yellow pages exhibitions and the Internet. The marketing agencies and offices abroad included Minneapolis covering USA and Canada, London that cover United Kingdom, Mettman near Dusseldorf in Germany, Paris in France, Barcelona in Spain, Milano in Italy and Amsterdam that cover Netherlands.

It was also found that KTB did not collect specific tourist data at the North Rift region. Most of the tourist data came from Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics - now known as Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) - annual report. This is obviously a weakness towards marketing the North Rift region because a National Tourism Organization (NTO) must first identify and understand the target market through the process of market segmentation. This requires reliable information which is also a prerequisite for determination of market trends, buyer behaviour, product performance and consumer's response to all aspects of marketing campaign. KNBS data is not only generalized but leave out important details. For example, departing visitor data by purpose of tourists to Kenya are categorized as holiday, transit and business, yet other purposes like sports important to the North Rift region is never considered. Another weakness emanates from the nature of the data which combines North Rift region data with those of Western and Nyanza provinces. The lower the quality or absence of information used for marketing decisions, the higher the risks of marketing failure especially in strongly competitive market (Middleton, 1994). Using generalized data is inappropriate and cannot give empirical understanding about the region's market, which may help explain why there has been no significant increase in bed occupancy in North Rift even after it was launched in 2002 (Kiprutto *et al.*, 2007).

The budget for Kenya's marketing program is too small. The funds available to KTB for marketing is less than 1% of receipts from tourism, which may not be effective in making reasonable influence on the highly competitive market. Kenya's marketing program for 2006/2007 costs Ksh. 2 billion, but the treasury allocated only 10% of this budget, meaning that most of the initial objectives proposed by KTB were not achieved. Indeed, stakeholders in the industry including Kenya Hotel Keepers and Catering Association (KHCA) protested over this meager allocation for the Ksh. 48 billion sector in 2005 in vain. The proposed budget of Kshs. 2 billion is only 4% of the sector's total revenue, a figure far below South Africa's allocation for marketing which was US\$65.5 million (Kshs.4.58 billion) in 2006.

Since KTB depends on the treasury for funds, it sets up feasible marketing objectives for the country after rather than before being allocated the funds. This is *top - down* method of budgeting where it is based on how much money the ministry has been allocated. Objectives from such a method will never be achieved (Mill and Morrison, 1998). Emerging as an important source of foreign exchange earner for Kenya, the government must start prioritizing this sector in future estimates by supporting the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in order to increase tourist arrivals and receipts. Partnership Australia Program is a cooperation between the national tourist office, state tourist offices and private-sector tourism organizations, which pools together promotional money that creates great synergy for all the partners involved, thus increasing the promotional budget. Apart from avoiding duplication of promotional efforts, the budget is incredibly increased (Mill and Morrison, 1998). There is no such coordination between KTB, the local government, hotels, and tour operators in marketing the region. Although Wareng and Keiyo County Councils collect a lot of revenue, they do not allocate funds for developing and marketing tourism in their respective counties. In spite of these impediments, KTB must strive to reach the market using the available resources, and utilize other opportunities such as international trade fairs, athletes and establish a network of information centers in Kenya.

The region has not fully utilized the power of athletics to market itself. Frequent appearances of Kenyan champions on international Television Channels open an exceptional opportunity to market the North Rift region, the home of these runners. Documentaries associating athletes with attractions in the North Rift region are yet to be made. British Tourist Authority is already using this idea by producing a film map of Britain, which highlights for visitors the sites of famous films (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998). Major stakeholders in the region could therefore embrace and adopt this idea for the North Rift region instead of ignoring hardworking loyal athletes lest richer countries literally buy them. Denmark, USA and Qatar are examples of countries that have managed to persuade Kenyan runners to change their nationality.

5.7. Weak Coordination among Stakeholders and Insecurity

The key stakeholders in the North Rift region's tourism include the Government, Tour Operators, hotels, the local governments and local communities. Four tour operators and six hotels were examined with an aim of establishing the extent of coordination amongst them. Out of the nine registered tour operators, five were active, and were found to work on their own. As tour operators in popular parts of Kenya continue to market the country as a favourite destination, they do not collaborate with operators in the North Rift region. For instance, nine of the tour companies operating outside the North Rift region partnered for the third time to organize a weeklong educational tour with 54 travel agents and 13 journalists from USA and Canada in May 2006. This point to the need to improve coordination between tour operators based in the North Rift region with those in other areas, which would facilitate easier and cheaper partnering with international companies.

Interview with managers of the six hotels in Eldoret town revealed that they also worked on their own. They neither received support from the government nor worked with local tour operators. Previous studies including Klemm and Martin-Quiros (1996) suggest that coordination manifesting in joint marketing by hotels can be successful. Catalonia is an independent marketing organization composed of 26 small hotels with varied degree of luxury ranging from one to five stars, and as a result of their coordination, overall bookings for the group increased threefold in 1993 compared to 1992. Thus, a joint

marketing organization between the local tour operators and the hotels in the North Rift region could find strong links with international tour operators and improve business in the region.

On the security situation, officials from the four tour companies were concerned with safety in the region. In particular, cattle rustling remain a major security impediment to all forms of tourism in West Pokot, Turkana and parts of both Marakwet and Baringo districts. This cause internal conflicts and divisions between these communities that result in insecurity that hamper tourism development. No tourist would travel to a place where personal security is at risk. This is a big setback considering that in many ways, the Pokot and Turkana are equals of the Maasai people especially in preservation of their culture. Although cattle theft is actually occasional, and that security risks for tourists do not necessarily exist, the perceptions people have of safety and security issues in the region are negative.

6. Conclusion

The objective of the study was to identify and examine challenges facing regional tourism in Kenya with specific reference to the North Rift region. The findings discussed have close similarities with issues drawn from a review of relevant literature pertaining to tourism development in peripheral regions or less visited sites within destinations. Thus, as Kenya attempts to diversify the industry through regional tourism initiatives, these problems should be appreciated and effective solutions sought.

Challenges relating to development of tourism products, issues of marketing and coordination of activities among stakeholders should be tackled jointly by the central government, local government, local communities and private investors. Building and maintenance of roads is the responsibility of both the central and local governments. Thus, stakeholders must cooperate in urging their parliamentary and civic representatives to take their grievances to the central and local government, respectively to open up the region by building and repairing roads. Although warring communities in the North Rift region have responsibility to uphold peace, the central government is the custodian of law and order, and should therefore eliminate all forms of internal conflicts like cattle rustling in the region. Apart from increasing presence of security personnel in the affected area, long term alternative economic activity should be introduced to the pastoral community like farming. Until these challenges are overcome conclusively, the concept of regional tourism in Kenya would remain remote.

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