Patterns of Attitude Change Toward Tourism Development in Africa: A Review of the Last Two Decades

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Introduction

Prior to the mid 1980s, very few countries in sub-Saharan Africa earned any substantial income from tourism. To date, no African country has made it to either the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), stop 25 destinations or the top 25 tourism earners in the world. According to WTO's 1999 statistics, of the 50 countries which make up the African continent, only twenty of them, or less than half received 92.5 per cent of the total tourist arrivals in the region. The top three of these twenty countries were South Africa, Tunisia and Morocco, which received 1 55.9 per cent of the total arrivals in the Africa region. Further more, thirteen of these twenty countries were in Eastern and Southern Africa. These statistics notwithstanding, African countries are beginning to pay more attention to this previously neglected sector.

This paper discusses the evolution of tourism in Africa and some underlying reasons for its growth during the past twenty years. First, it attempts to delineate some the changes in attitudes by some governments towards meaningful tourism development. Second, it discusses some of the reasons for this change in attitudes. Finally, it suggests key areas of future focus for sustainable development on the continent.

Evolution of Tourism in Africa

Historically, Africa's tourism consisted largely of fragmented sets of game reserves and parks designed to serve the recreational needs and economic interests of expatriate whites, settler communities, and foreign tourists in mostly Eastern and Southern Africa. Although political independence for most African states in the late 1950s to early 1960s brought about measures of access control as well as opportunities for various forms of tourism development, the creation and sustenance of national parks systems and a tourism industry were not viewed as important priorities on indigenous post independence agenda. In a few instances where wildlife preservation and tourism issues were tabled for debate, they were viewed purely from an economic, but ultimately dispensable perspective.

In terms of institutional arrangements, there is still uncertainty as to the role of tourism in Africa, as manifested by the variety of ways in which the industry is accommodated in government structures, such as various ministries. For example, in many West African countries, the tourism industry remains incorporated in or closely associated with culture, education, industry, natural resource, etc. Whereas, in many Southern and Eastern African countries with significant wildlife and national park re-sources,
independent ministries or departments have been created to oversee the planning, development, promotion, marketing and administration of the tourism sector.

During the period under review, many African countries have attempted to undertake comprehensive revisions of national legislation to incorporate provisions for the modern approaches to tourism development. However, such legislation still imposes constraints for management, since many legislators find it difficult to break away from past formulations. Further, the inability of those responsible for tourism management to translate such legislation into economic planning terms through tourism development and promotion poses another problem. This results largely from a weakness in training, which often emanates from an ecological, rather than planning, management and marketing orientation.

**Changing Government Attitudes**

During the last two decades, a number of major events in the global political and economic environment have prompted some African governments to reconsider their immediate post-independence thinking. First, since the mid to late 1980's many emerging nations in Africa have finally begun to operate under economic conditions that label international tourism both as a pivotal and ancillary industry in their development process. Experiences in previous decades have allowed for a more realistic appraisal of the characteristics and outlook of the industry.

They have now realised that: it is more capital intensive than initially presumed; agriculture and other local linkages have not developed as anticipated; and domestic management and entrepreneurship have not been fully developed.

Second, there is now greater awareness that international tourism can be a viable source of foreign exchange earnings and tax revenue as well as an industry that attracts foreign investment funds and increases domestic output and employment only when realistic and careful planning is involved. Third, African governments no longer view international tourism investors as agents of "imperialism" or neo-colonialism," a view which was formulated and propagated by the "dependencia school" (Chaudhuri, 1988). According to this perspective, the rate and form of growth of the important sectors of the least developing countries (LDC) economies are determined primarily by international firms acting outside the control of the host LDC governments. Essentially, the "dependencia school" considers the international firms to be one of the instruments by which advanced capitalist societies (the "centre") keep the developing countries (the "periphery") at a disadvantage in the international economy. Instead, the attitude of many African governments today is more in accordance with the "bargaining school," which acknowledges power as being central to the relationship between multinationals and African host countries. According to the bargaining school, the power relationships evolve and shift over time, with a trend towards increasing power for African governments as long as they formulate and follow "correct" public policies.
On the whole, the bargaining power of African governments has increased during the past two decades for various reasons. First, they have moved up on the learning curve of how to deal with international investors. This new knowledge coincides with the overbuilding of attraction and accommodation markets in the United States, Europe and Asia, thereby creating many more international tourism firms competing in the international arena than there used to be when European multinationals dominated the African markets. Therefore, based on the increasing quest for free trade and liberalised markets, and the present international economic situation, international tourism investors and African countries need each other.

Second, with the steady increases in international travel and trade, a strategy used by many hotel chains today is to follow their clients to international destinations. The chains’ desire is to develop and exploit brand loyalty through familiarity of brand name and service through international reservation systems. This implies that although some companies have their properties scattered throughout the world and dramatic investment shifts have taken place from the United States to countries like Japan, Great Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, India etc, the notion of global competition has not yet fully taken hold. More countries in Africa will be included in the foreseeable future, especially with the gradual shift by many countries toward democratic systems of governments. This suggests that there are tremendous opportunities in these countries that are still untapped.

Third, the governments of many African nations have been less ideological during the last two decades than they were in the 1970s especially as a result of the end of the Cold War. Many African leaders have stopped blaming their problems on the legacy of colonialism. As a result, an increasing number of countries are embracing the notion that foreign industrial interests are crucial to their development strategies, and are developing congenial and liberal policy environments to foster business cooperation. Apart from these interests in direct investments, there is a growing number of tourism policy formulation and re-formulation taking place on the continent. Most sub-Saharan African countries today have agencies or organisations that perform the planning and policy formulation at the highest level of government in order to protect the long range social and economic well being of their countries. This is particularly true in Eastern and Southern African countries, where government policies on tourism have been pronounced. Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya for example have effective tourist organisations responsible for the planning and development of the tourism industry.

The Way Forward

In order to undertake sound and sustainable tourism development in the future, and successfully compete in the international tourism market place, African countries would need to critically examine the role of the following factors:
a. Research

Genuine African tourism promotion is to be based on research findings rather than political rhetoric. Research must be intensified by regional and national organisations with respect to the following five areas:

1. The economic impact of tourism in the various societies;
2. The scope and nature of demand for a genuine African tourism product in the market-place;
3. Indigenous components of product delivery in areas of food products, culture, architecture and appropriate technology;
4. The manpower needs of the tourism industry; and
5. The social relationships between hosts and guests.

In the light of research findings it may be necessary to discard or review some outdated management and promotional practices. Those that stand up will provide the basis for tourism education programs.

b. Institution Building

At the national and regional levels there must be structures capable of coping with the complex phenomenon of tourism. Where possible, tourism ministries or departments must be organised with the appropriate sections and manpower reflecting the real needs of the activity. This calls for expertise in marketing, economics, sociology, physical planning, cultural development, and human resources. These might range from the sophisticated level of the richer countries to simple structures in the smallest countries that can be serviced mainly by regional organisations. In order to accomplish this, African countries will need a great deal of external and regional technical assistance.

c. Training

Training should be based on the output of research into manpower needs, and should be geared towards the production of indigenous personnel capable of operating at every level and in every aspect of the tourism activity leading to the "Africanisation" of management.
d. Integration

The process of integration must proceed in a variety of fields. In economic areas the maximum usage must be made of the complementarity of the available resources such as an abundant labour supply through the integration of tourism and agriculture.

e. Tourism Education

The purpose of any education program must be to explain the true nature of the tourism phenomenon through seminars, workshops, and academic curricula. It must be directed to public and private sectors of the tourism industry, as well as external agencies.

References
