
GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UGANDA. CASE STUDY OF MABIRA FOREST BUIKWE**Nantongo Sarah¹, Nkwasiibwe Kenneth²****1,2 Metropolitan International University****Abstract.**

One of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism business is nature-oriented tourism. The travel industry has enlisted the support of environmental organizations and park agencies and is promoting nature travel as the hottest "environmentally correct" activity available as ecotourism being the sound tourism. The study was about Investigating the impact of government policies on sustainable tourism development in Uganda, a case study of Mabira forest reserve in Buikwe district. The study was based on 3 objectives that is; to identify different kind of organizations and other tourism stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism development in Uganda in case of Mabira Forest, to examine the impact of government and other stakeholders in sustainable eco- tourism development in Uganda and to examine the challenges facing tourism policies in developing sustainable tourism as well as the solutions in a case of Mabira Forest Reserve. Questionnaires and interview methods were be majorly used to obtain detailed data related to the topic. Respondents were categorized as local people, key informants (LC 1 leaders, Ecotourism staffs, and Teachers). The research revealed some of the organizations involved in the development of sustainable Mabira ecotourism site such as; NFA, MAFICO and UNEP/UNDP. However, it further looked at other tourism stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira Eco-tourism site for example; local community, Tourists, Researchers, Ministry of tourism and the Media. The research in-depth examined the impact of government and other stakeholders in the development of Mabira ecotourism site such as; carrying out forest conservation activities, forming partnerships for Eco-development, protecting the forest against encroachers, supplying tree seedling to farmers, documenting about Mabira forest reserve and many others.

Key words: Government Policies and Tourism**Background of the study**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world as well as the world's global economy. In developing countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and many others, ecotourism of all types contributes about 50 billion US dollars annually to the extent that even in the present time of widespread economic recession and depression, tourism has remained surprisingly strong (Ivan & Florence, 2023). According to the Kenyan Minister of Tourism, Dr. Nelson Githinji, Uganda is now at the highest position in tourism growth in Africa. According to the 2011 Africa Tourism Review, Uganda's tourism sector grew by 25% in 2011, while South Africa's and Tanzania's sectors grew by 21% and 13.4% respectively. Tourism also contributed to 9% of Uganda's GDP (Ronald et al., n.d.).

Tourism promotes nature-based tourism as a unique opportunity to see and experience the natural environment, local customs and other related cultural values (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). The study of ecotourism offers many opportunities to reflect on the importance of sustainability and the possibilities of implementing approaches that move us in a new direction (Mugabi et al., 2023). At the same time, however, it suggests that there are significant obstacles and more than well-intentioned policies are needed to overcome them; it requires a new correlation of social forces, a shift towards broad-based democratic participation in all aspects of life, in every country and concert of nations

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(Christopher & Micheal, 2022). Strategies to meet these challenges must respond to the dual challenges of isolating these communities from further intrusion and ensuring their viability (Filstar, 2023).

Ecotourism projects must go beyond prevailing notions of "the overlap between nature tourism and sustainable tourism"(1) to include the social dimensions of the organization of production and environmental protection. Ecotourism must do more than create a range of activities to attract visitors, offering them the opportunity to interact with nature in such a way as to preserve or enhance the special characteristics of the site and its flora and fauna, while enabling local residents and future visitors to they continued to use these properties (Sophie, 2023). They must also create a sustainable productive base to enable local residents and ecotourism service providers to enjoy a sustainable standard of living while offering these services (Phiona et al., 2023). Ecotourism must do more than create a range of activities to attract visitors, offering them the opportunity to interact with nature in such a way as to preserve or enhance the special characteristics of the site and its flora and fauna, while enabling local residents and future visitors to they continued to enjoy these qualities.

Problem Statement

According to the report of the World Tourism Organization (1996), which reveals that the recent concept of ecotourism is becoming widely accepted and perhaps practiced with positive environmental, economic and cultural impacts, while local people must be informed to perceive nature conservation. wildlife is in their interest for use in tourism in a sustainable way (Juliet et al., 2023). It is an integrated form of responsible tourism involving all stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental organizations, local community, industry operators and other participants) (Irumba, n.d.). (Sawuya & Rebecca, 2023) noted that ecotourism or nature tourism is a resource-based activity that should be developed for the current and future generation or tourists and therefore needs much more coordination to be developed.

Ecotourism opportunities abound in Uganda, where the tourism industry revolves around the diverse fauna and flora and more than 10 national parks and game reserves. These have the potential to offer a number of activities to different visitors of different kinds (Filstar, 2023). However, based on these activities, Mabira Forest Reserve under the management of the National Forestry Authority, in cooperation with other tourism organizations and other participants, has done a lot to protect the forest through ecotourism activities, and therefore a lot has been done by many researchers on the development of ecotourism, but on the respective roles of the responsible organizations and others of participants in the development of ecotourism in the Mabira Forest Reserve, little is known if any have been documented at all (Filstar, 2023). Therefore, the main purpose of this study/research was to assess the roles of responsible organizations and other participants in the development of Mabira Forest Reserve ecotourism (Christopher, 2022).

Objectives of the study.

- 1) To identify different organizations and other tourism stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira forest ecotourism site.
- 2) To examine the impact of government and other stakeholders in eco-tourism sustainable development in Mabira forest reserve.
- 3) To examine the challenges facing tourism policies in the development of eco-tourism in Mabira forest reserve.

Methodology.

The study was carried out in Mabira forest reserve in Buikwe district and specifically in Najjambe sub-county since it was where ecotourism project and activities are mostly carried out and practiced. 4parishes was selected and this selection of 4parishes (Nsakya, Buwoola, Kinoni and Buvunya) out of 7parishes in Najjembe sub-county Within every village that was to be chosen in these parishes, local council 1 (LC1) was purposively selected and local communities randomly selected basing on the above mentioned limitations to give valid information about ecotourism development in Mabira forest. Mabira forest reserve was one of the Africa's ever green tropical rain forest and the biggest in central Uganda located at only 54km along Kampala- Jinja high way, covering an area of 306sq km. It was gazetted under the forest act of Buganda agreement in 1932.Nevertheless, the management of the forest went on changing from Buganda kingdom through the forest department and finally to National Forest Authority (NFA) to present.

The study consisted of 100 respondents who was selected using both random and purposive sampling. The total of local residents that was interviewed and accounted, Eco-tourism staffs and teachers (key informants). 2 consisted of Tourists and 4 comprised of the investors. Primary data was gathered from respondents during the study who are assumed to give first-hand information on the subject under study. Secondary data was got from sources like; Annual reports, Journal articles, internet, magazines, newspapers and books plus previous research related to the subject of the study and these was consulted at length to extract the information required to support the findings from the study respondents. STATA was used to analyze data, employ charts and graphs in the edited and coded collected data in order to have the required accuracy, quality, consistence and complete information of the study topic (Nelson et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were performed and cross tabulation done at bivariate level. Regression analysis was as well done at Multivariate level. The validity of the instruments was established by the supervisor and the reliability of the instruments and data was established following a pre-test procedure of the instruments before their use with actual research respondents.

Results.

Organizations involved in the development of Mabira forest ecotourism site

With regards to the organizations involved in the development of the ecotourism site, MAFICO, NFA and UNEP/UNDP were identified (Table 2)

Table 1: Organizations Involved in Development of Mabira Ecotourism Site

Category of respondents	Responses on the organizations (%)		
	MAFICO	NFA	UNEP/ UNDP
Local people (n=67)	61	39	0
Key informants (n=27)	37	48	15
Tourists (n=2)	50	50	0
Investors (n=4)	50	75	25

Source; Primary data, 2022

From the study, 61% of the local people were aware of Mabira Forest Integrated Community Organization (MAFICO)while no one reported UNEP/NUDP. This could be because MAFICO is a community-based organization

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involving local people in conservation activities of the forest reserve. The majority (75%) of the investors and the key informants (48%) were aware of NFA while the least (15%) of the key informants and investors (25%) reported UNEP/UNDP either due to the fact that NFA is the one with the overall responsibility of managing the forest reserve and that it's the one responsible for issuing the licenses to the investors who wish to start up tourism related projects within and around the Mabira forest

Other stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira forest ecotourism sites

With regards to other stakeholders involved, different responses were generated across varied categories of respondents (Table 2)

Table 2: Other stakeholders involved in development of Mabira ecotourism site

Category of respondents	Responses on other Stakeholders involving in ecotourism development (%)				
	Local community	Tourists	Researchers	Ministry of tourism	Media
Local people (n=67)	46.3	12	13.4	28.3	0
Key informants (n=27)	46	13	12	15	14
Tourists (n=2)	0	50	0	25	25
Investors (n=4)	50	0	25	25	0

Source; Primary data, 2022

From the study, majority (46.3%) of the local people, key informants (46%) and investors (50%) were much aware of the local community as stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira Eco-tourism. This could be due to the fact that local communities are the core elements with crucial roles for developing a viable sustainable tourism development in a destination. The majority (50%) of the tourists were aware of themselves as stakeholders involved in Eco-tourism development while the rest were aware of the ministry of tourism and the media. This could be based on their contributions towards ecotourism destinations and their influence from the media and the ministry of tourism.

The roles of tourism stakeholders on the development of Mabira Eco-tourism site

With regard to the roles of tourism stakeholders on the development of Mabira ecotourism site, different categories of respondents such as local people, key informants, Tourists and Investors were interacted as presented below;

Local people

During Research, local people's responses were generated about the roles of tourism stakeholders in the development of Mabira eco-tourism site and the responses were presented and illustrated in the table 4

Table 3: Local people's responses on the roles of stakeholders in development of Mabira ecotourism site in sustainable tourism development.

Stakeholders (%)	Responsibilities/ roles	percentage
Local community	Forest Conservation	52
	Entertaining visitors	28.3
	Provision of cheap labour at the site	21
	Preservation of culture through cultural practice	13.4
	Forming up conservation groups/projects	50.7
	Sensitizing and mobilizing stakeholders	40.3
	No known responsibility	9
	pay entry fee to ecotourism center	59.7
	They create market for local products	29.9
	Giving donation in form money	10.4
	Supplying tree seedlings to farmers	55.2
	Creating accessibility of ecotourism site	28.9
	Involved in extension of water and E-power at the site	15.9
Researchers	No known responsibility	50.7
	Carrying out research on new outbreak of diseases	26.9
	Environmental education	22.4

Source; Primary data, 2022

The majority (52%) of the local people were aware of the forest conservation activities while the least (13.4%) reported Preservation of culture. This could be due to influential conservation programs carried out within the community when less time is left for cultural practices. The majority (50.7%) were aware of the forming up of conservation groups/projects by MAFICO while

the minorities (9%) were not aware of any responsibility either due to the fact that they have no interest in MAFICO or due to limited information about MAFICO. Also 59.7% were more conscious about tourist's role of paying entry fees to ecotourism central though the least (10.4%) reported giving out donations in form of money. This implies the fact that donations are rarely given out by the visitors/tourists.

Similarly, 55.2% were aware of NFA's role of supplying tree seedlings to famers and the least (15.9%) stated

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involving in extension of water and electric power at the site. This could be because NFA is more concerned to conservation activities of the forest than voluntary activities of the society. Finally, the majority (50.7%) were unaware of any role of Researchers at ecotourism site. This could be either they have never heard about the word research or they have never participated in any research exercise.

Table 4: Key informant's response about the roles of stakeholders in development of Mabira ecotourism site

Stakeholders	Responsibilities/ roles	percentage (%)
Local community	Involved in Conservation activities	33.3
	Provision of cheap labour at the site	25.9
	Decision making in ecotourism planning	18.5
MAFICO	Entertaining visitors	22.2
	Forming conservation groups	37
	Empowering the community	22
	Making partnerships	30
	Sensitizing and mobilizing stakeholders concerning ecotourism	11
Tourists	Paying for ecotourism services	48.1
	Giving donation	33.3
	They create market for local products	11.1
NFA	Protecting the forest against encroachers	37
	Supplying tree seedlings to farmers	26
	Giving guidelines for ecotourism activities	15
	Creating accessibility of ecotourism site	14
	Carryout stakeholders' conservation meetings	9
Researchers'	Documenting about Mabira Forest Reserve	63
	Discovering of new activities and species	19
	Carrying out research on new outbreak of disease	11
	Environmental education	7

A relatively big number of key informants (33.3%) were mostly aware of local community's involvement in

conservation activities while the least number (18.5%) were aware of local community making decision in ecotourism development. This could be due to the fact that local community's decision making is limited and conservation is mainly their responsibility in the forest. Majority (37%) were aware of the forming of conservation groups/projects by MAFICO compared to sensitization and mobilization. This could be due to the fact that MAFICO is majorly aimed at conservation for sustainable development attained through mobilization and sensitization activities performed in formed groups such as Nagojje Community Biodiversity Association (NCOBA). Further, key informants (48.1%) were also aware of the payment for ecotourism services by Tourists compared to creating market for local products (11.1%). This could be because ecotourism experiences and services are demand generator of Tourist compared to buying local products which comes as an alternative. Further, 37% of the key informants were aware of protecting the forest against encroachers by NFA while the minority (9%) reported carrying out stakeholder's consultative meeting. This could be because protecting against encroacher is a principal role of NFA though consultative meetings are also necessary.

Finally, 63% of the key informants were more conscious about researcher's role of documenting about Mabira Forest Reserve compared to carrying out environmental education. This could be because they might have been researchers and documented books about Mabira forest reserve while environmental education carried out as an alternative.

Tourists

With the concern of tourists, responses were generated across the roles of different stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira eco-tourism site (table 6).

Table 5: Tourist's responses about the roles of stakeholders in development of Mabira ecotourism site

Stakeholders'	Responsibilities/ roles	percentage (%)
Local community	Conserving the forest	75
	Entertaining visitors	25
	Managing ecotourism site	50
MAFICO		
NFA	Protection of the forest	50
	Pay ecotourism service fee	75
Tourists		
	Giving suggestion for improvement	25
Researchers'	Research about ecotourism	75

Source; Primary data, 2022

The majority (75%) of the tourists were aware of local community's forest conservation activities while the minority (25%) reported entertaining visitors. This could be based on the fact that; conservation activities are the core responsibility of local community in the forest reserve compared to the entertainment. Further, 50% of the Tourists were more aware of MAFICO's responsibility of managing the ecotourism site while the rest were not aware of any role of MAFICO either because they were not sure or had limited information about MAFICO. Majority (75%) of the Tourists were much aware of their responsibility of paying fee in form of money for ecotourism services at ecotourism site while the minority (25%) were giving suggestions for improvement. This could be in order to improve on the quality of services being offered at ecotourism site. Similarly, much of the Tourists (75%) were aware of Researchers carrying out research about ecotourism in the forest while the rest 25% claimed to be unaware of any role of

Researchers either because they had never carried out research or they just resisted information.

The investors

During the research, investors were interacted about the roles of different stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira ecotourism site and several responses were generated (Table 7).

Table 6: Investor's responses about the roles of stakeholders in development of Mabira ecotourism site

Stakeholder	Responsibilities/ roles	percentage
(%)		
Local community	Cheap labour to ecotourism site	75
	They provide visitors with souvenirs	25
MAFICO	Setting up conservation projects	75
	Providing a forum for discussion and influence regarding ecotourism	15
	Empowering the community	10
Tourists	Brings money to ecotourism center	100
NFA	Protecting the forest against encroachers	50
	Supplying tree seedlings to farmers	25
	Giving guidelines for ecotourism activities	15
	Creating accessibility of ecotourism site	10

Researchers	Carrying out research on new outbreak of diseases	75
	Discovering of new activities, fauna and flora species	25

Source; Primary data, 2022

From the study, 75% of the investors were aware of the local community's role of providing cheap labour to ecotourism sites. This implies that local people have higher chances of getting employment from the projects that investors set up in the area. Majority (75%) were aware of the setting up of conservation projects by MAFICO while the rest (25%) reported empowering of the local community. This could be due to the need to encourage more conservation activities in the area and allowing locals to take control of the conservation projects formed by MAFICO. From the results, 100% of the investors were aware that tourists bring money to ecotourism center whereas 50% were also aware of NFA protecting the forest against encroachers compared to creating accessibility (10%) and this could be because protecting the forest is the foremost responsibility of NFA. Further (75%) were aware of the Researchers carrying out research on new outbreak of diseases in the forest whilst 25% reported discovering of new activities, fauna and flora species in the forest reserve. This could be based on the fact that research is carried out to investigate unknown phenomenon to effect or affect it.

Table 7: Challenge in the Development of Mabira ecotourism site

Challenges	Responses across different Categories of respondents in (%)			
	Local people	Key informants	Tourists	Investors
Inadequate fund for development	10	15	0	28.3
Illegal logging of trees for timbers	0	20	0	0
Poaching of animals and birds	0	10	0	14.3
Poor and limited facilities	5	10	50	14.3
Inadequate information about forest ecotourism	35	5	50	14.3
Conflicts between locals and forest authority	50	15	0	14.3
Encroachment of forest land for agriculture	0	25	0	14.3

Source; Primary data, 2022

From the study, 50% of the local residents were conflicting with the forest authority over forest resource extraction like firewood, timber, poles and hunting. Relatively high numbers of key informants 25% were aware of the encroachment of forest land for agriculture while the least (5%) reported inadequate information about forest ecotourism. This implies that encroachment is one of the major challenges of ecotourism developments in the area based on this knowledge of the key

informants. Further from the results, 50% of Tourists were aware of inadequate information about Mabira forest ecotourism while the rest (50%) reported poor and limited facilities. This implies that more ecotourism information is desired and good facilities are needed to be set up to improve on ecotourism services at the site. Finally, from the findings, none of the Investors was aware of the challenge of illegal logging of trees for timber in the forest however, 28.3% were aware of the inadequate funds for the development compared to others as shown in table 8 above.

However, the research further looked at whether the challenges at Mabira ecotourism site can be overcome and the responses across different categories of respondents were summarized and presented (Table 6)

Table 8: ways of solving challenges to the development of Mabira ecotourism site

Solutions	Responses across different Categories of respondents in (%)			
	Local people	Key informants	Tourists	Investors
Fundraising	10.8	10.8	0	50
Setting up anti-poaching policies	0	7.4	0	10
Creating awareness of ecotourism in the area	32.1	4	25	10
Demarcating forest land	0	11.1	0	10
Setting up improved facilities	5	22.2	75	10
Allowing locals to access some forest resources	52.1	37	0	10

Source; Primary data, 2022

Majority (52%) of the local people, 37% of the key informants and the minority (10%) of the investors were suggesting allowing locals to access some forest resources. This was in order to reduce on the conflicts between locals and forest authority. Further, the majority (75%) of the tourists reported setting up improved facilities at the site while the least (25%) suggested creating awareness. This could be due to the available poor and limited facilities at the site and the need to adequately publicize the ecotourism site in the area. From the findings, majority (50%) of the investors were carrying out fundraising method to rise on the development fee at the site while the rest were demarcating the land, setting up improved facilities and many others as shown in the table

Summary.

The study focused on organizations and stakeholders involved in the development of Mabira Eco-tourism site, emphasizing their roles and the challenges faced. Notable organizations like MAFICO, NFA, and UNEP/UNDP were identified as key players, contributing to the promotion of eco-tourism activities and the formulation of policies to mitigate negative impacts. Various stakeholders, including the local community, tourists, media, the Ministry of

Tourism, tour operators, and researchers, were recognized for their roles in the development process. Local communities were found to engage in forest conservation, cultural preservation, and decision-making, while tourists played a crucial role in generating revenue, suggesting improvements, and supporting local products. The National Forest Authority (NFA) was acknowledged for its roles in protecting the forest, supplying tree seedlings, providing guidelines, creating accessibility, and extending water and electric power infrastructure. However, challenges such as conflicts with locals, inadequate funding, illegal logging, encroachment, poaching, and limited public awareness were identified. The study outlined various strategies to address these challenges, including fundraising, public awareness campaigns, anti-poaching policies, and collaborative efforts to manage forest resources sustainably.

Conclusion

Mabira Eco-tourism site is faced with a number of challenges which affect tourism development in the area. For example, the conflict between the locals and the forest authority over tree cutting, encroaching the forest land, poaching of animals and birds, limited funds for setting up ecotourism facilities, poor attitudes of some local communities towards ecotourism development brings confusions towards ecotourism in the area.

There are few organizations that are involved in the development of Mabira Eco-tourism site yet their investments and support to Eco-tourism site is limited. This could be due to negative image of the forest national wide over the giveaway 1/3 of the land to Mehta for sugar cane plantation and the lack of strategic ecotourism planning. The would-be effective stakeholders like the local communities, tourists, academician, tour operators and the media as well as the tourism industry at large have limited interests to implementing effective ecotourism development planning strategies that would make ecotourism activities in Mabira forest on both domestic and international market. And it is due to the plan to degazette 1/3 of the forest to Mehta for sugarcane plantation (SCOUL).

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that tourism stakeholders can influence ecotourism development in Mabira forest reserve in case they resort to the formation of conservation groups/projects however, due to limited ecotourism information awareness, inadequate fund, poor and limited facilities and encroachment of the forest have mostly affected rate of ecotourism development in the area.

Recommendations

That tourism stakeholders be called together to form collaborative groups as conservation approach to come up with good development strategies and plans that would let the ecotourism in Mabira forest become more developed and loved by National and International visitors/ tourists who visit the site.

NFA together with MAFICO should look for more supporting agencies or rather create more partnerships with ability to fund and support the Eco-tourism project if it is to be developed and become more attracted by both international and national travelers.

That ecotourism projects in Mabira forest reserve to provide effective incentives for the communities to take into conservation actions. These incentives should take several forms where by the ideal is to create a direct linkage, in which tourism earnings are so high that people deliberately protect forest biodiversity to protect that income.

Various stakeholders, viz. government agencies and staffs, tourism entrepreneurs, local community, and tourists both domestic and international should be sensitized and engaged in responsible behavior towards the natural environment and the community.

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