

The Role Of Eco-Tourism On The Development Of Local Industries. A Case Study Of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

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ABSTRACT

The role of ecotourism as a means of influencing the path of local development or encouraging conservation activities was not unproblematic. Indeed, an increasing body of literature not only challenges the assumed benevolence of ecotourism but critically questions the role of ecotourism in contributing to the greater social and economic justice so often assumed under these programs.

This paper sought to contribute to this growing body of critical literature through an analysis of the impact of ecotourism on the everyday lives of rural villagers adjacent to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda, paying particular attention to the social forms of access to and control over the process through which decisions about ecotourism take place. Drawing on a year of ethnographic-based fieldwork, this paper focused on how the commodification of Bwindi as a product of wilderness, a wild and un-spoilt destination marketed to foreign visitors, promotes the external control of conservation spaces by international organizations that ultimately contribute to, rather than alleviate, poverty and dependency in local communities. Beyond providing just another case study, however, this analysis argues that the 'new' relations between people and parks created under ecotourism in Bwindi have in actuality created new forms of control and vulnerabilities. 80% of the respondents said they were following what they had learned. This answer raised doubt. Most of the respondents thought the investigator was a spy to nab those involved in illegal activities. The Government of Uganda should improve on the security in the major tourist areas with a view to correct Uganda's tarnished image after the massacre of eight foreign tourists in the Bwindi by the Rwandese (Hutu) Interahamwe.

Keywords: Eco-Tourism, Development And Local Industries

Background of the study

Ecotourism has helped in community development by providing the local community with an alternative source of livelihood that is more sustainable (Nicholas et al., 2023). It aims to protect resources, especially biodiversity, and maintain sustainable use of resources that bring travelers ecological experiences, save the environment and gain economic Bwindi Impenetrable National Park with an area of 32,092 ha is one of the largest areas in East Africa. which still has Afromontane lowland forest extending to the well in the montane forest belt (Christopher & Felex, 2022).

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Located on the eastern edge of the Albertine Trench, and considered a Pleistocene refuge, the property is a biodiversity hotspot with probably the highest number of tree species for its altitude in East Africa. It is also host to a rich fauna including a number of endemic butterflies and one of the richest mammals in Africa. Home to almost half of the world's population of mountain gorillas (Ronald & Kazaara, 2023), the property represents the frontline of conservation as an isolated forest of exceptional biological richness surrounded by an agricultural landscape supporting one of the highest rural population densities in tropical Africa. Community benefits from mountain gorilla and other ecotourism may be the only hope for the future conservation of this unique site (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022a).

The property had the greatest diversity of tree species (over 200 species including 10 endemics) and ferns (about 104 species) in East Africa and possibly the most important forest in Africa for montane forest butterflies with 202 species (84% of the country's total), including eight Albertine endemics. The forest is very important as home to almost half of the population (about 340) of the critically endangered mountain gorilla.

With over 347 species of forest birds recorded in the park, at least 70 of the 78 species of montane forest birds found in the Albertine Rift region are found in the forest and 22 of the 36 are endemic. Overall, Bwindi is host to many globally threatened species, including high-profile mammals such as the mountain gorilla, chimpanzee, 'Hoest's monkey and African elephant; birds such as the African Green Broadbill, Grauer's Swamp Warbler, Turner's Eremomela, Chapin's Flycatcher and Shelley's Kestrel; and butterflies such as the African swallowtail and the cream swallowtail.

Statement of the problem

According to Helzer, he used the term ecotourism for the first time in 1971. He described the four pillars of ecotourism, or environmentally friendly tourism (Filstar, 2023). These reduce the extent of environmental impacts of ecotourism, respect host cultures, improve benefits for local communities and accelerate traveler satisfaction. In 1988, Miller worked on ecological development in Latin America, which gives us another reference for ecotourism. A documentary was also produced on a series of Environment Canada road "eco-trips" from mid-2007 to 2016 (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). Several developing countries realized why ecotourism is important and started sustainable tourism programs to protect and develop our environment by the mid-2000s. Also, the first definition of ecotourism was given by Ceballos-Lascurain in 1988. According to him, "Traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific aim of studying, admiring and enjoying the landscape and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural expression (past and present) in these areas." (Christopher & Felex, 2022)

The possible displacement of local residents as ecotourism inevitably led to development. Ecotourism on a large scale means hotels will be built, especially as visitor areas become a big part of tourism. When this happens, expansions occur and sometimes excavations can occur. In such cases, local residents may be forced to move out of their native countries. For example, about 70% of all national parks and game reserves in East Africa are located on land that once belonged to the Maasai. The indigenous peoples have never been compensated and the job opportunities that have arisen as a result favor the elites over the natives. Be part of the solution. It is possible to disrupt their lives while wandering through new ecosystems. If possible, avoid disrupting such life. Do not frighten animals, as this may interfere with their daily lives or interrupt the intentions of someone else on the same animal. With respect to the local people, do not disrupt their lives. Let them continue to interact with the ecosystem as before you got there. Remember that the next person and even future generations will want to visit the place after you. Let them find it better than you.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of eco-tourism on the development of Bwindi Impenetrable.

Objectives of the study.

1. To determine the mode of eco-tourism used in tourism industry in Uganda
2. To analyze the role of eco-tourism to the tourism industry in Uganda.
3. To examine the challenges associated with eco-tourism in Uganda.

Methodology

The researcher used a descriptive research design with quantitative methods, so as to statistically control the extraneous variables and focus her study to the analysis of complex issues into smaller components for better understanding and control of study proceedings. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is located in Kanungu District Uganda. The Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) is in southwestern Uganda. The park is part of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and is situated along the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) border next to the Virunga national Park and on the edge of the Albertine Rift. Composed of 321 square kilometers (124 sq. mi) of both montane and lowland forest, it is accessible only on foot. BINP is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization designated World Heritage Site. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park has an estimated population of 150 employees. The researcher will use both male and female respondents from Bwindi Impenetrable National Park from the top management, middle, and lower management of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park management because the records management function of SDLG is stained with reports of loss of data, poor accountability and failure to guarantee satisfactory access to required information especially where digital systems are not used to create and keep records. This technique used to attain information about ERMS from top management, middle, lower management employees of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Due to the large population of employees in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, the researcher took a representative sample of 25 respondents purposively using the sample size determination Table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) which states that for a population of 25 people was 24

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respondents, therefore the researcher used a population sample size of 25 respondents. Therefore, the sample size will include; 10 respondents from Top management, 10 respondents from Middle management and 5 respondents from Lower managements (Bwindi Impenetrable National Park Planning Unit, 2015; Appendix c).

Table 1: Showing the Distribution of the Sample

Respondent	Sample Population
Top management	10
Middle management	10
Lower management	5
Total	25

The researcher used self-administered questionnaires of both open ended and close ended questionnaires in which written questions are presented and answered by the respondents in written form. The use of questionnaires ensured that there was wide coverage in terms of scope; they included consultations where it was due and responses are checked in case of doubt. This involved editing, coding and presentation of quantitative data. Editing concerned with detecting and correcting errors and ensuring completion of question answering. Field editing employed to ensure that questionnaires are fully answered in respect to all relevant questions to the respondents. The filled in questionnaires checked for uniformity and errors was detected for the omitted questions. Coding involved processing of classified answers to questions into meaningful categories to develop an essential pattern. This will help helped the researcher to summarize the data and get frequency patterns which facilitated the tabulation data. Lastly quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS & STATA and presented in form of frequency tables and figures (Nelson et al., 2022).

Results

TABLE 2: Responses on the employment potentials of tourism

View	No Respondents	Percentage
Potential	25	25%
No potential	75	75%
Total	100	100%

Source: Interview (2023)

Despite the low number of the respondents employed in the tourism industry, the local population support the idea of conservation of wildlife. All respondents interviewed unanimously answered that they support the idea of nature conservation. This is a step in the right direction. They must be sincerely applauded by the government of Uganda and more specifically, the Ministry of Trade Tourism and Industry and by the Uganda Wild Life Authority.

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Sensitization on Ecotourism

Of all the respondents interviewed, 40% of them confessed that they have not been sensitized to nature conservation in the promotion of the tourism industry in the country. However, 60 respondents which represent 60% admitted that they have been sensitized.

TABLE 3: Responses on the kind of sensitization given to the local population

No of Family Members	No of Respondents	Percentage
Conservation of nature	60	60%
Avoid poaching	22	22%
Visitors (tourists).	08	08%
Importance of animals.	06	06%
Benefits of tourism	04	04%
Total	100	100%

Source: Interview (2023)

Conservation of nature was the most common type of sensitization given to the local population. This is important because tourist make Uganda their destination because of its beauty which should be guarded seriously by all Ugandans. Any sensitization devoid of nature conservation would be unfortunate, almost like to tea without sugar. Illegal activities (poaching); 22 respondents representing 22% interviewed said that they were sensitized and warned against illegal activities in the parks. Of course, Uganda is known internationally for its gorilla tourism. Anybody threatening their existence is considered a criminal. The chairman of Uganda Wildlife termed them terrorists who are killing our rare species of wildlife.

Handling of tourists; 8% percentage of respondents said that they attended workshops conducted in the country in relation to developing community tourism products. Here by the locals were trained in setting up tourism craft shops and producing other products which can antique tourists to spend money within their localities. Sensitization on the importance of animals have also been done. This is according to six respondents interviewed. Finally, 4 representing 4% said that they have been sensitized to the benefits of ecotourism. This is evidenced by the mushrooming of craft shops in the trading centers neighboring the parks.

Table 4: Responses on efficiency of the sensitization and awareness campaign to promote ecotourism

View	No of Respondents	Percentage
Not effective	02	02%
Not Very effective	18	18%
Effective	80	80%

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Total	100	100%
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Source: Interview

80% of the respondents said they are following what they have learned. This answer raises doubt. Most of the respondents thought the investigator was a spy to nab those involved in illegal activities. 18% respondents could not commit themselves as to whether the local population really abide by what they have been told. That is why they used very measured language “*not very sure*”.

Two respondents, one of which is an employee said that the local community have not heeded the sensitization and awareness campaign which is why they are still acting contrary to the laws on protection of the environment. On a good note, all respondents agreed that gorillas are not interfered with these days. Even poachers have given up because the game wardens have been tough on them. This excludes the Batwa tribe who are on the eastern Congo (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022b).

Indeed, Bwindi national park retains an image of instability due to the conflicts within and in the surrounding countries which have been covered by the foreign press. These, in conjunction with the current terrorist threats have negatively affected Uganda’s International image to the detriment of the thriving tourism industry.

Table 5: Reasons given to justify that community members follow what they are sensitized to

View	No of Respondents	Percentage
Demarcate	18	18%
Enormous benefits	52	52%
Planting trees	20	20%
Breeding domestic animals	05	05%
Beekeeping allowed		
Give guidance when ever they get lost	04 01	04% 01%
Total	100	100%

Source; Interview (2023)

One of the most notable places of evidence towards conservation of nature by the local community near Bwindi National Park is that there are enormous benefits according to the local population either directly through employment in the tourism sector, or indirectly by selling goods and services to tourists. Because those benefits, the local population have decided to heed to the advice of the organizations which have been emphasizing the importance of conservation of wildlife as a prerequisite for promoting eco-tourism in Uganda. Another point that shows the local population have

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heeded the teachings of those organization, is that people are now used to the practice of planting trees culture, a culture which was previously absent. Indeed, the community members have been planting their own trees especially bamboo species. This is a positive step in the right direction.

Table 6: Responses on the benefits of ecotourism to the local population

Benefits	No of Respondents	Percentage
Employment.	20	20%
Boom in hotel business.	42	42%
Foreign exchange earner.	08	08%
Development road networks.	07	07%
Urbanization •	06	06%
Provision of water.	04	04%
Education.	04	04%
Keeping domestic animals	03	03%
Local markets	02	02%
Improve Security	01	01%
Forestations	01	01%
Control of soil erosion •	01	01%
Improve rainfall pattern.	01	01%
Beekeeping.	01	01%
Improve Health Care system	01	01%
Medicinal	01	01%
Sponsorship of further education.	01	01%
Total	100	100%

Source: Interview (2023)

The most frequently mentioned benefit to the local population is the boom in The hotel business as a result of the thriving ecotourism in the area. Big hotels have been constructed recently to respond to the pressures of the increase in visitors to the park.

The second benefit is, employment in those businesses related to tourism. Most people are employed in these hotels or they track the gorillas in the park. In this way the local population is benefiting very much from the industry.

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The third benefit is the foreign exchange earnings. This was mostly mentioned by students of Kabindi S.S, as it is well known that the tourism industry is a topic in geography syllabus. In class they are taught that tourists bring with them foreign currencies, which first of all helps to stabilize Uganda's foreign market as well as financing imports. This is true, because Uganda imports all equipment, ranging small machines like bicycles to complex equipment such as machines used in road constructions.

Fourthly, eco-tourism leads to the development of rural areas to urban centres. Places which were previously inhabitable now have facilities like electricity, water, roads. Fifthly, the government efforts to attract tourists to Uganda's tourism site, have formed it to supply towns neighboring Mgahriga with piped clean safe drinking water. Indeed the percentage of people with limited access to safe drinking water has been tremendously reduced. The local population attribute such success to the presence of a tourism site in their midst. Sixthly; the education sector got a boost from the tourism sector. Most of the students interviewed said that their school fees are directly earned from sources related to tourism industry. Others said that some tourists are generous and extend sponsorship to bright but poor children to pursue their education. Also the, government has constructed good schools for the children of those who are employed in the tourism industry. At the same time the local people are also benefiting from those schools. Therefore, the linkages between the tourism industry and education sector should be noted.

Keeping of domestic animals; the creation of awareness and sensitization campaigns made the local population turn to keeping animals. One of the arguments the poachers were raising was that, they want to eat meat. Now the authorities gave them alternatives to wildlife meat. Today, through observation you are able to see domestic animals on people's compounds, which according to the resident of Kisoro town was very rare before the Uganda Wildlife Authority had a firm grip on the poachers. Emergence of the local markets; As the Uganda Wildlife Authority intensify its awareness campaigns to make local community responsive to the demands of the tourism; small scale commercial enterprises are springing up to the advantage of the local population.

The following group of benefits receive a 1% response from the respondents. These are improved security in the park in response to the Bwindi massacre of eight foreign tourists, forestation, control of soil erosion, a reliable rainfall pattern, Beekeeping, improved health care system, varied species of trees as sources of medicinal herbs and an improved relationship between the local population with the park authority on the one hand and with the tourists on the other hand. Some tourists describe the hospitality of the local population as very encouraging for the future of Uganda's tourism industry.

Conclusions

The local community neighboring Bwindi National Parks have large families as noted from the interviews with the respondent. 25% of the community work directly in the tourism industry.

Community members support the idea of conservation of wildlife with a view towards ecotourism in Uganda.

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The organizations that carry out sensitization awareness campaigns in the descending order are namely, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Care, Peace Corps volunteers, and the Uganda community tourism association. Most members who attended sensitization and awareness campaign tend to follow the instructions they were given. This is demonstrated by the fact that, they are now planting trees such as bamboo, breeding domestic animals and beekeeping.

Recommendations

The Batwa-pygmyes who are a menace to the national park should be evacuated from the boundary of the park and resettled elsewhere preferably far away from the park. They should also be invited to the local council meetings, so that they are sensitized to nature conservation and its associated benefits. And finally, some of them should be employed as game wardens to crack down on their colleagues found poaching.

The Government of Uganda should improve on the security in the major tourist areas with a view to correct Uganda's tarnished image after the massacre of eight foreign tourists in the Bwindi by the Rwandese (Hutu) Interahamwe. The Government of Uganda should embark on and promote Uganda's unique tourist features, these where it has a higher competitive advantage. An example would be the mountain gorillas in Bwindi.

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