

Community Based Tourism Product Innovation and Economic Sustainability for Rural Community Wellbeing, A Case of Tourism Cooperatives in Musanze District Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

In a country where one culture is practically observed with similar community based tourism product, being innovative can result to higher competitive edge. Within the tourism industry most community based tourism entrepreneurs' try to be innovative targeting economic sustainability driven by external and internal forces like demographic factors, government policies and psychological factors let alone being given the power for innovation. This study investigated different innovations community based innovations community based tourism entrepreneurs use to achieve economic sustainability for rural community wellbeing with the support of community empowerment practices. The study area for community empowerment practices was Kinigi sector in Musanze District, Rwanda that borders Volcanoes National Park. The methodology involved use of descriptive research design anchored on purposive and random sampling, both primary and secondary data were analyzed. The results shows that community empowerment practices stimulates community innovativeness in redesigning the community based tourism products that are not only competitive but also profitable and unique. These CBTE products when consumed by tourists' and other tourism stakeholders helps rural community generate economic sustainability leading to better community wellbeing. The study therefore, concluded that Kinigi sector, neighboring VNP rural community entrepreneurs' have competitive community based tourism products and services developed with the support of community empowerment from National Park management, local government and other stakeholders. It is recommended that the government policy makers, park managers and other stakeholders should provide the rural community a platform for collaboration to showcase their products, information access to the major stakeholder that provide the economic income to the community enterprises.

Keywords: Tourism products; Tourism entrepreneurs; Economic sustainability; Community wellbeing; Community empowerment practices.

INTRODUCTION

Community based tourism entrepreneurs have had similar products and services offered to tourists for as long as community based tourism projects started. The tourism development trajectory for decades received attention from several scholars especially the area of community participation (Tosun, 2006; Bramwell & Lane 2003; Okazaki 2008; Mugenda 2009 and Sebele 2010). As enunciated on the need for communities to be involved in planning and decision making process in tourism argued in most presentations to date, such developments by communities for communities require innovations of the products that communities need to develop. The rationale provided for community inclusion in tourism rural areas is to ensure that communities gain more power to own and hold positive views of tourism or see that they can take responsibilities for the progress through tourism. More so, as Zamani-Furahani and Musa, (2012) theorized, the tourism industry relies on the local community's hospitality, abilities and exceptional products that would make a difference in them being happy, creating a positive image of the differentiated destination.

Tourism host community have positive attitude towards tourism development when they feel and see that they have a role in the process of tourism development, especially the ownership of differentiated products that stand

to be unique (Ambros, 2008). In the tourism industry, there has been attempts to introduce more sustainable practices into the delivery of a unique visitor experience especially with the involvement of community based tourism entrepreneurs (Nistoreanu, 2007 and Yeoman, 2008). Some of the macro tourism approaches used includes (a) the development of regulated programs in community based tourism to allow product differentiation in products and services offered to tourists and (b) the development of tourism associations and cooperatives that are empowered to develop such products (Cottrell *et. al*, 2004 & Gios *et. al*, 2006).

At the micro or tourism business level, all sorts of alternative contributions from the community in events, performances, crafts and others that the community can be involved require an empowered community to move forward. Such collective move require an empowered community as asserted by Akama, (2011) which implies that more knowledgeable, skilled and resourced community are required to provide such unique products for tourists to have differentiated tastes. Peredo & Chrisman, (2017), concurred that ownership of community tourism enterprises comes from the ability to combine and adapt in an innovative way the skills (ancestral, old and new), experiences, corporative practices and value of a community empowerment.

Destinations that have depended on tourism for their livelihoods and contributions to national economies have grown over the years with positive factors such as income, employment and positive change of community wellbeing. Examining innovation on the most basic level, a consensus can be reached that an innovation creates new ideas that brings forth new types of tourism products than mimics, repeat services, reinvention rather than innovation. Bunduchi, Weisshaar and Smart, (2011), shares the same idea that tourism industry struggles with the concept of tourism product innovation globally with an aim of value addition. In tourism a standard definition of the term innovation has yet to be accepted by the academic community, otherwise innovation can imply process, management, logistics or even institutional depending on the scope of the terms use (Schaper, & Valery, 2007 and Markides, 2006).

Innovation, adoption, recreation or even modification sounds similar to most scholars Hjalager (2006), as implied that innovation seems to be more ambiguous in definitions and rightful that only large tourism corporations are capable of introducing new tourism products. Most authors assume that large tourism corporations have the power to alter the functionality of the industry as a whole though communities that are empowered are also able to put together measures that their products and services become innovated, differentiated and unique in nature for the tourists to experience (Khalid *et. al.*, 2019; Aghazamani, & Hunt, 2017). Similar claims then would exclude innovative measures in niche or tourism products from a country that have one culture, language, diet, costumes, history and attractions. However, revolutionary changes through partnerships, education, training and shared knowledge should not be overlooked (Markides, 2006 and Meelroy, 2006).

Since innovation and creative development is significantly cost and benefit related, it is important for scholars and practitioners to understand these aspects of innovation processes. If the benefits outplays the costs then strategies should be put in place in forms of empowered human partnership dynamics, operational effectiveness implementation and economic performance not forgetting the direct, indirect and relational benefits (Paskaleva-Shapira *et. al.*, 2008, and Bunduchi *et. al.*, 2011). Innovation in tourism can manifest in forms of artistic or design that is aimed at enhancing the quality of service or visitor experience frequently described as value innovation (Hjalager 2006). Otherwise innovation can be a result of demographic, government policy changes, environmental changes or even social changes in whichever way tourists are bound to experience some differentiated services and experience.

Innovative development in rural areas of tourism supply areas involving small businesses highly with smaller sized entities can easily make revolutionary changes due to the nature of empowerment through ability and shared knowledge through liaison, alliances with tourism experts, education and familiarization tours or even through exchange programs (Hjalager 2006 and Markides 2006). Tour operators form one of the tourism supply chain amongst international hotel chains and travel agencies that would encourage the use of community based tourism services and products using marketing distribution systems in promoting regional tourism products. In this distribution systems local tourism products and services would then be potential to a wider clientele due to online opportunities to buy such services like traditional dances, traditional dance academies and online tutorials of local cuisines (Hall & Mitchell, 2000).

The development of rural brands and services has had limited attention in the tourism development literature especially for rural tourism in Africa Hall & Mitchell (2000), despite the growing emphasis of tourism destination management organizations that are mandated to promote such areas. Again the issue mostly discussed within the tourism industry is about developing a destination that tourists already know to be attractive due to the activities conducted in such destinations not forgetting that such destinations have to support rural communities in improving their wellbeing. Community product innovation takes shape in the process or the product as discussed by Papazoglou, (2017); Bowie & Buttle, (2013), and Nyawira, (2018), because tourists need to experience and take with them marketed products that are innovatively developed with potential to increased community product sales. So to say community develop new products, develop innovative selling techniques for optimum financial benefits resulting in community improved wellbeing.

The problem for tourism, local, rural and regional development are that tourism option is chosen by the governments as a tool for destination development amongst many others such as agriculture, and mining (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). Having a long history of being chosen as a tool for sustainable development there is a debate about the value assigned to tourism for communities in rural and near rural peripheral areas. Numerous evaluations have always highlighted many negative consequences including; modest or none economic returns from tourism for locals besides tokenism Forstner, (2011); unimpressive impacts on local and social structures Caldwell & Freire (2004); restrictions of access to resources for traditional performances Kiss (2004); disruptive distribution of non-traditional subsistence activities Vail & Hultkrantz (2000) and damages to natural and rural cultural heritage (Akama, 2011 and Abakerli, 2001).

Many researchers and governments brought out the use of alternative forms of tourism such as ecological friendly tourism (Ecotourism), community based tourism (CBT) to respond to critics by (Forstner, 2011; Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Vail & Hultkrantz 2000; Akama, 2011 and Abakerli 2001). Such claimed options have better outcomes due to smaller in scale with greater opportunities for the local business to get involved. Akama (2011), affirmed that community based tourism approaches are popular as they explicitly describe processes for involving local stakeholders in decisions about the types and locations of proposed tourism development giving community chances for innovations. As one of the approaches for innovation Tharenou *et al*, (2007) stated that community empowerment creates conditions that support on-the-task training, community attachment, pride and recognition of innovation and self-esteem. This is where community based tourism enterprises operates in a community membership system seeking collective benefits rather than single remuneration. Therefore, as Munanura *et al*, (2017) emphasized that community empowerment ensures continuous condition improvement of the quality of products and services for better performance and improved wellbeing.

Organization theorists strongly believe that continuous improvement of community knowledge and skills through training creates conditions for innovation, creativeness and efficiency of community products and services (Tharenou *et al*, 2007). Tourism economics depends on many factors including high market tourists, spending habits, proper pricing of tourism products/services amongst others (Armoni *et al*, 2018). Tourism economies and rural development looked at by Spencer & Rurangwa (2012), came up with the following opinions related to sustainable development such as creation of jobs directly in community tourist guides, research assistants, hospitality employment, security search and rescue operators, trail maintenance, food production and retailers amongst others with a multiplier effect both for the national economy and rural community. Local entrepreneurship in rural areas in art and craft, tourist entertainment performers while economic diversification associated with tourism in cases where other traditional industries fall under distress (Spencer & Rurangwa, 2012).

The potential for sustainable development has been constrained due to lack of skilled human and economic capital resources, cutting edge innovation in products/services cum marketing, over-reliance on the (Gorilla Tourism) and misunderstanding the potential of an empowered community (Mazimhaka 2007, Gitira 2008, Ngenzi 2009). Tourism gives lucrative opportunities for community developers' channels for social economic development as stated by (Munanura *et al*, 2017). Research from Briedenhann & Wilkens, (2004); Briggs & Booth, (2004); and Rwandatourism.com (nd) suggests that sustainable economic development of tourism subsector has not been given much attention especially with community participation. A report by Weirplanet, (2010) pointed out that given some innovation, tourism in Rwanda is a lucrative industry for sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation. Recommendation from Spencer & Rurangwa (2012); cites

diversification of tourism products/services, new marketing strategies, financial support, empowering local community and exposure to similar localities brings about economic sustainable development.

Moscardo, (2006), clearly provided an analysis of the socio-economic representations of tourism planning mainly held within the tourism professionals and tourism government representatives in that locals are seen as lacking the knowledge, skills and technics to participate in tourism products/service marketing that also includes designing and innovation. In this case tourism development falls out of bounds for the rural community and can be shaped with the empowerment of the rural community to give them the necessary knowledge, skills and technics that are required for them to contribute to community development. This study was therefore undertaken in the context of rural community in Kinigi sector Musanze District Rwanda. The purpose of this study was to;

1. Establish the types of tourism product innovation adopted by the tourism cooperatives in Musanze while determined the challenges encountered by the tourism cooperatives and suggest strategies adopted to overcome the constraints that affect innovation amongst the community tourism cooperatives.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to achieve the study objective, this research utilized a mixed method approach, including literature review, field survey and interviews with a sample of 189 rural cooperative members who have adopted innovation for sustainable tourism practices in community based tourism enterprises. Descriptive research design was used and both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized. The study also used primary data which comprised of data that was obtained directly from respondents in the field by the researcher and the secondary data that involved obtaining data from the already existing documents or literature. Rwanda is a landlocked country situated south of the equator, located approximately 1°04' south and its southernmost point at around 2°51' south. The country lies between longitudes 30°53' east, while its westernmost point is near 28°53' east of the meridian giving a total surface area of 26,338 km² populated with 12.1 million people (Population Reference Bureau, 2014). From the recent census 2024 the estimate population is approximately 13 million people.

The study area selected is Northern Province Rwanda in a sector called Kinigi particularly tourism cooperatives. The study further targeted members of such cooperatives who engage in tourism enterprises to sustain their livelihood. Selected cooperatives members formed the target population of 598 members a sample of 189 members was determined using the Slovin's formula; $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ Where n the sample size, N being the target population, while e the margin of error 0.05 the confidence level was 95% or 0.95 as cited in (Galero, 2011). The study utilized self-administered questionnaires with both closed and open ended questions to obtain data from the respondents. A pretest of the questionnaire was done early in time to verify the validity of the questions to avoid errors. In order to obtain more detailed data the study also conducted interviews especially in cases where the respondents who had limited time and those who needed straight forward interpretation of the questions. In general two methods of data collection were self-administered questionnaires to community cooperative members assisted by the researchers and the assistants. Detailed interviews were conducted with the leaders of the community cooperatives and RDB Park administrators. Analysis of data involved deriving meaning from the finding by editing, coding, processing and in this study SPSS was used to determine frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

Key Tourism Products Innovated

The results indicate that community based tourism product/service innovation plays a big role in attracting tourists to community based tourism in Musanze, Rwanda. The findings shown in Figure 1 indicate that majority of respondents agreed that innovations in dancing stages in hotel and lodge premises as opposed to cultural villages supported by podcasts were ranked highest 60% compared to innovation in craft and painting which was ranked at 8%. This was followed by innovations in handcrafts and homestays at 12% compared to innovation in woodcarvings and sculptures that was ranked 10%. Basket weaving and traditional food preparation were both ranked at 5%. Finally the banana beer brewing and innovations in supplies to eco-lodges were ranked at 5%.

This therefore, suggests that innovations in traditional dances with a community empowerment were rated highest because dances can easily be performed at any location compared to the other activities and services that

require tourists to physically travel to the sites where such products and services are offered. Through empowerment, community based tourism products can be modified to attract more tourist for an enhanced experience and for generation of more income for the local community thus improving their wellbeing as shown in Figure 1. Types of tourism product innovation adopted by the tourism cooperatives in Musanze.

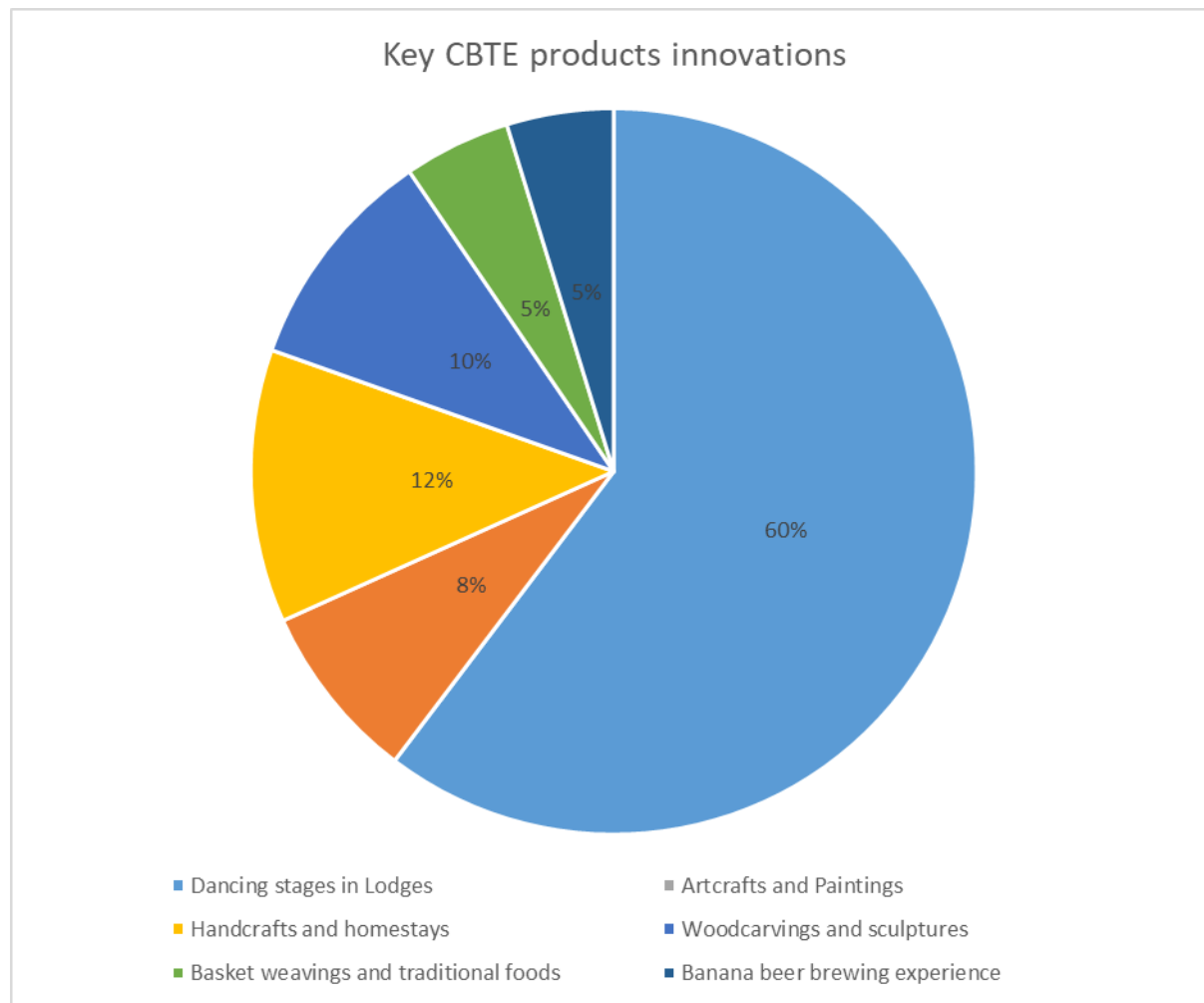


Figure 1. Key Tourism Products Innovations

The findings from the interviews reveals insight to more details in the areas that innovations made significant contributions to community through their entrepreneurs' products development after continuous empowerment aimed at improving their wellbeing. Such innovations were; since the introduction of wireless payments started in Rwanda community use Electronic Billing Machines (EBM) machines or commonly referred to as Electronic Payment Systems EPS for the collection of payments from tourists and general customers who wish to transact using credit cards. This was also supported by the use of PayPal a platform that is available for most businesses in Rwanda using mobile money transfer Apps. Dancing troupe perform in lodges and tourist guest houses as part of the hotel entertainment and paid for by the accommodation establishments together with the recorded podcasts as part of innovations. Besides the payment systems major innovation was identified in the markets, besides the tourists community dance performers conduct to wedding parties, Government festivities and other functions. Such innovations are in line with research by agreement with Ineson, E, Yap, M. and Nita, V. (2022), who identified more than tourists as the main market for community products and services.

The engagement with community cooperative leaders in interviews also on what products and services they innovated or initiated after getting empowerment programs was in line with the administrative and Volcanoes National Park managers. The interviewees had this to say; "we at our cooperatives in Kinigi came up with our ideas on how to engage with tourists and visitors apart from preparing demonstrations at our premises. We participate in cultural festivals/performances at Kwigira gorilla naming ceremony, weddings dancing, hotel and lodge performance and other special functions. For cultural dances we also introduced creative traditional dance academy where we train people how to drum, dance, stich dance attire, and flute playing besides the

use of xylophone in traditional playing”. We participate in story telling around campfire in lodging on topical cultural festivities, exhibit our artifacts in lodges and art galleries. We are always happy to have more empowerment training sessions and information of any national functions where we can perform, exhibitions and opportunities that are given to us which give us chances to showcase what we are able to deliver”.

The interview findings are in agreement with Tasci et al, (2013); Henry, (2009) and Aguda, et al, (2020) on innovation of community based tourism cooperatives’ products and services. The agreement is on changes and improvement that come as a result of empowerment where cooperative members have started small businesses for the betterment of socioeconomic wellbeing. One community member emphasized on the improved wellbeing saying; “I have been able to start packing Irish potatoes creatively and not only the lodges appreciate and makes orders for me to deliver but even the safari driver guides buy to take to their families. Again in our family and community, we started cooking color (processing) for sale. This processed colors for those communities that do basket weaving adding income to our cooperative. Basket weaving communities used to cross the border to Uganda for such colors, and this has added more income to our members rather than relying on tourists alone”.

Accommodation facilities provides space for community to display their crafts and culture instead of tourists having to visit community villages, Hotels and Lodges don’t have spaces for the handicraft makers from the community so such products are made in the cooperatives then displayed in the hotel premises for sale. Community performing story telling in major hotel facilities rather than tourists moving to individual cultural homes has become a common service that the community benefit from the tourism accommodation providers helping the night activities be enhanced in lodges around the Volcanoes National Park. These interviewed respondent confirmed the quantitative data agreement on innovation in dancing stages in hotels and lodges. All interviewed respondents cited innovations in handicrafts and culture, basket weavings and traditional foods identified in lodges and hotel menus after having empowerment practices. The local chefs called to the lodges from the cooperatives in volcanoes to demonstrate local cuisines especially in camp fires were sighted by Bertel, G. & Droli, M. (2018), and has been adopted in lodges in Kinigi. These are usually accompanied by folklore storytelling by the locals using the little English and French with a taste of local dialect has become a kind of innovation attracting many tourists and the community benefits.

These are amongst many innovations in community based tourist products that come up with empowerment that brings about economic sustainability and improved community wellbeing. These innovations with the support of community empowerment is made possible because of the physical and social capital that comes with it as identified in (Normelani *et al.*, 2023). Community empowerment also brings about human capital capability and enthusiasm in implementing innovation in the way community based tourism products are developed aimed at economic sustainability.

The challenges encountered by the community tourism cooperatives

Challenges of tourism product innovation Results revealed that apart from the key product innovation areas in tourism as indicated in Figure 1, communities however, faces a number of challenges. Majority of respondents (20%) agreed that poverty amongst the local community was the highest limiting factor compared to lack of funds that was ranked at 10%. Additionally lack of skills and high imitations were ranked at 16% together with illiteracy and lack of technical knowhow 16% while government policies were both ranked at 12% since they play a role in limiting innovations to the local community. Finally the local community perception about innovation of tourism products was rated at 14%. Foreign accommodation changing operations was rated 12% as a challenge as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Challenges faced by community tourism cooperatives in product innovations

Respondents opinion	Frequencies	Rating %
Poverty amongst the local community	38	20
Lack of funds for innovation	19	10
Lack of skill, knowledge with high imitations	30	16

Illiteracy and lack of technical knowhow	30	16
Government policies	23	12
Community perception towards innovation	26	14
Foreign accommodation changing operations	23	12
Total	189	100

Key informers had the following as challenges for community in developing some innovation in community based tourism products;

Most of the interviewees cited high levels of poverty amongst the communities around Volcanoes national park as a challenge in communities being innovative in tourism including ignorance, especially when it comes to tourism in the area of Kinigi homesteads. The communities fully depend on subsistence farming, typically Irish potatoes *Solaum tuberosom*, maize *Zea mays*, beans *Phaseolus vulgaris*, sorghum *Sorghum bicolor*, and sweet potatoes *Ipomoea batatas* as the main crops cultivated. The few community members who are engaged in tourism are majorly the elderly and do the activities as part time occupations. One interviewee complained of lack of funds to entice community members to be innovative in the products and services that would be attractive to tourists. Thus the initial products and services that were developed ten years ago are still the same with little changes.

One key informer as interviewed summed the lack of funds, illiteracy and lack of skills due to none exposure as a major challenge to tourism product innovation. The same key informer even suggested that if there was a curriculum for improving the communities' knowledge and skills in tourism product innovations through familiarization visits and exchange programs or field visits especially to places where community tourism is practiced then such empowerment would be a game changer. This is in line with Manyara and Jones (2009), who in their research affirmed that when a community is empowered with the skills and knowledge the possibility of such community to develop their tourism products and services are enhanced.

Most of the interviewees cited that the Government policies as a big challenge for the community to engage in tourism with a few appreciating some of the policies that favor local communities to have access to financial grants and soft loans. Cited mostly is the taxes and prohibition to private tourism activities based on none community cooperative members to those that are registered with Rwanda Development Board (RDB). Thus community perception of community based tourism has been viewed with a suspicious attachments. This is in line with the research by Nyataya, (2017), who cited that communities are always suspicious of government policies in development of a community that might even be of benefit to the community.

One interviewee put one comment on the lodges in Kinigi being managed by foreigners from South Africa that give a challenge to community tourism operators, well cited was the issue of tendering for the supply of foods, cleaning services, craft shops and dance performers. All these services and products require procurement process of which the local communities are not well versed with. This challenge has made most local community members be demoralized to be innovative in the ways of approaching the tendering methods in order to acquire such contracts.

As cited by Nyataya, (2017), poverty and community wellbeing is a multidisciplinary and complex concept the communities in Kinigi cannot not reduce these challenges using a single measure but requires a remedy of concocted measures including community empowerment, government intervention, international bodies' intervention and professional advisories. Improved wellbeing requires adequate income, human development, access to safe water, housing, creative life, voice dignity, self-esteem, power, representation and respect amongst others as provided by (Zhao and Ritchie, 2007). Some common challenges cooperatives face include limited financial resources, lack of technical skills and expertise, marketing and visibility, quality control and consistence, seasonality and demand fluctuations.

Suggest strategies that adopted to overcome the constraints that deter innovation amongst the tourism cooperatives.

Findings indicated that as much as there were identified challenges hindering rapid growth of tourism product innovations, the respondents suggested a number of measures to counter the problems. The results revealed that majority 22% of the respondents agreed that diversification of the products through innovation is the only way out. The second biggest number of respondents suggested that infrastructure development with 20% was still a limiting factor to tourism product development so government and other stake holders should improve the infrastructure to enable the local community make innovations. Funding of the projects involving tourism product innovations was the other suggested solution 18% as compared to training which was ranked with 14%. Furthermore some of the respondents suggested that government should provide incentives such as low taxes, low interest loans and grace period of at-least two years to enable them to be in position to come up with innovated tourism products. Community private partnerships enforced by local leaders contributed to 8% same as exchange programs between community tourism cooperative members and similar cooperatives in neighboring countries 8%. While 10% of respondents suggested that there was need for more sensitization of the local community about tourism product innovation and benefits to gain so that majority can pick interest and get involved so that it can improve their wellbeing as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Adopted strategies for community to counter the challenges community members face in product innovation

Respondents opinions	Frequencies	Rating %
Diversification of the products through innovation	42	22
Improvement of the infrastructure to enable the local community make innovations	38	20
Funding of the projects involving tourism product innovations	34	18
Training and capacity building	26	14
Sensitization of the local community about tourism product innovation	19	10
Enforcement of community private partnerships	15	8
Community member exchange programs	15	8
Total	189	100

The key tourism informers interviewed had the following as described in the following paragraphs;

One interviewee took time to explain to the contribution of this paper to emphasize on improvement of the infrastructure to enable the local community make innovations to the already saturated monotony of products and services offered in their community. The key informer suggested that community should be empowered by being given more information on the kinds of innovations that exist in tourism in order for the local people to discover for themselves the opportunities that come with innovation. The key informer went ahead to suggest that local community be given familiarization trip to other community based tourism cooperatives in neighboring countries.

In line with Sabuhoro, et al., (2017), one interviewee suggested that there should be an enforcement of community private partnerships using community leaders and park management in the development of regular community empowerment programs in order to enlighten the community on the benefits of tourism product innovation to cope with the ever evolving tourist needs. While in such forum areas of innovation would be identified so as to get starting points for the community to emphasize as a nucleus. The suggestions included holding annual capacity development in community tourism in Musanze and copied to other areas that communities engage in tourism.

Funding of the projects involving tourism product innovations was suggested by one interviewee aimed at communities diversifying their products and services rather than having same products year in year out this was in line with recommendation by (Nyataya, 2017). The interviewee suggested that researchers should develop a curriculum aimed at capacity development, product development and development of a procedural empowerment, monitoring of community products sales and keeping performance indicators for the community tourism businesses. Some more effective strategies to foster innovation: Promotion of a Culture of Innovation, Investment in Training and Skill Development, Facilitation of Collaborative Ideation, Encouragement of Market

Research and Customer Feedback, Fostering Partnerships and Collaborations, Provision of Financial and Resource Support and last but not least Building a Strong Brand Identity.

DISCUSSION

The findings in line with the objective of this research indicates that community empowerment plays a role in ensuring that communities neighboring protected areas become innovative in the way they package their product and services for tourists and other consumers. The finding also revealed that key policies on community capacity development, skill and knowledge in communities with proper community development policies creates an atmosphere that makes community participate in tourism through their cooperatives. This is in line with Jackson, (2025) who's model on inclusivity and sustainable model for achieving SDG 1 (Poverty alleviation) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) suggested that community innovative practices comes from an empowered, capacitated, trained community that are put at the center of tourism development. Community tourism innovation can be evident with an empowered community where services and products keep changing thus meeting tourists and other visitors changing needs (Harris-Smith & Palmer, 2022).

The few community members who are engaged in tourism are majorly the elderly and do the activities as part time occupations. One interviewee complained of lack of funds to entice community members to be innovative in the products and services that would be attractive to tourists. Thus the initial products and services that were developed ten years ago are the same with little changes. Thus through community empowerment such communities creates a chance for the young generation in musanze to join their elderly members in being innovative in tourism product and service provision bringing some technology into community based tourism.

As cited by Nyataya, (2017), poverty and community wellbeing is a multidisciplinary and complex concept the communities in Kinigi cannot not reduce these challenges using a single measure but requires a remedy of concocted measures including community empowerment, government intervention, international bodies' intervention and professional advisories. Improved community wellbeing requires adequate income, human development, access to safe water, housing, creative life voice dignity, self-esteem, power, representation and respect amongst others as provided by (Zhao and Ritchie, 2007).

lack of funds, illiteracy and lack of skills due to none exposure is a major challenge to tourism product innovation and even suggested that if there was a curriculum for improving the communities knowledge and skills in tourism product innovations through familiarization visits and exchange programs or field visits especially to places where community tourism is practiced then such empowerment would be a game changer. This is in line with Manyara and Jones (2009), who in their research affirmed that when a community is empowered with the skills and knowledge the possibility of such community to develop their tourism products and services are enhanced.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion community based tourism enterprises have contributed to improving wellbeing of local community by involving the stakeholders in tourism activities and thus economic development of the country particularly the poor local community around the protected area. Through the innovations in tourism products that have given new faces of the usual consumed services by tourists has been a game changer where community based tourism has always been on the same dances, culture displays and portage. Also it can concluded that the numbers of local community cooperatives and associations that are used to channel the funds for economic activities are growing every year which in turn has resulted into increased income, employment and infrastructure development which are some of the indicators of economic development in an area. Further this paper concludes that apart from the positive contribution, challenges still existed that affect community based tourism activities in the country that included poverty among the local community, illiteracy, and dynamics of tourism among others needs to be addressed. Finally in conclusion government and other stake holders have put some mitigation measures in place to minimize the challenges faced such as involving them in tourism activities, and funding the cooperatives.

From the results it can be concluded that Kinigi sector, neighboring rural community entrepreneurs' have competitive community based tourism products and services developed with the support of community empowerment from Volcanoes National Park Management, local government and other stakeholders. Therefore, empowering community cooperatives to enhance product innovations involves a blend of fostering

collaboration, leveraging local knowledge, Strengthen Networking and Partnerships and providing the necessary resources both material and financial support.

RECOMMENDATION

This paper therefore recommends that to exploit the full potential of community based tourism the government and related tourism bodies should aggressively create awareness among the local community about the benefit of getting involved in tourism activities. It is recommended that the government policies makers, park managers provide the rural community especially community tourism cooperative members a platform for core collaboration to showcase their products, information access and availability to the major stakeholder that provide the economic income to the community enterprises that is the tourism in all forms. Finally government should put policies and implement community empowerment strategies to achieve sustainable tourism for economic development local community wellbeing.

This paper was developed with the theme “From Theory to Impacts; Aiming for a transformative research in community-based tourism innovations to shape tourism products and services in Musanze District Rwanda”.

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