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Challenges to Tourism Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Case of Malawi

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Abstract

Many countries around the world continue to consider or adopt tourism primarily for the economic benefits associated with it. However, developing tourism has been a difficult aspiration for developing countries as they face significant barriers. This paper examines the challenges to tourism development and their causative factors in Malawi. In-depth interviews were used to collect primary data. Inadequate connectivity between source markets and Malawi, as well as inside the country, underdeveloped tourist destinations and limited access to tourist information emerged as the main barriers to Malawi's tourism development. It was further revealed that underfunding, the centralized management structure of the tourism industry, lack of stakeholder collaboration, and an unfriendly business operating environment contribute to Malawi's tourism development challenges. It is recommended that the government and other key tourism stakeholders should prioritise the identified causative areas and among other things decentralise tourism administration and improve tourism statistics collection and analysis. There is also a need to strengthen stakeholder collaboration and networking.

Keywords: tourism development; challenges; Malawi; Africa; sub-Saharan Africa.

JEL Classification: L83; Z32.

Introduction

Tourism continues to demonstrate its role in the socioeconomic development of destinations through the examination of direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts, attracting the interest of both developing and developed countries (Nunkoo 2015; Rylance and Spenceley 2017). Prior to the disruption of the industry as a result of COVID 19 travel restrictions, tourism reports consistently indicated an increasing rate of international travel and the economic benefits associated with it. Scholars have quantitatively examined the relationship between tourism development and economic growth with some confirming a positive relationship (Ekanayake and Long 2012; Sequeira and Maçs Nunes 2008) and others revealing contradictory results (Pulido-Fernandez, Cárdenas-Garca, and Sanchez-Rivero, 2014). Regardless, tourism yields positive results with careful planning and management (Marzuki 2009; Amuquandoh 2010). Sadly, not all countries that have embraced tourism as a development strategy benefit economically from it. To achieve tourism's economic milestones, a sufficiently developed tourism industry is required. However, developing tourism has been a difficult aspiration for developing countries. Instead, wealthy countries easily develop the tourism industry, hence, benefit from tourism more than LCDs (Rylance and Spenceley 2017). The fact remains, third world countries urgently require tourism to diversify their shrinking economies but face significant barriers (Rylance and Spenceley 2017).

Background of the Study

Regardless of the debate over tourism's economic significance, tourism remains relevant globally, and countries continue to consider or adopt tourism primarily for the economic benefits associated with it (Nunkoo 2015). While tourism is a significant economic sector in both developed and developing countries, it is frequently cited as a panacea for economic development in developing countries (Telfer and Sharply 2015). Tourism is critical to the economic development and growth of developing economies and is viewed as a strategy for poverty alleviation (Rylance and Spenceley 2017). Tourism is the primary, secondary, or tertiary economic activity in more than half of the world's poorest countries (Muhanna 2007). In Africa, the constraint of limited economic opportunities has facilitated the notion of tourism as a viable economic and social development strategy.

Tourism is growing in importance in Africa as a result of the economic opportunities it provides (Moswete and Darley 2012). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), endowed with sufficient resources for the development of nature-based tourism, ecotourism, archaeological-heritage tourism, and cultural tourism, views tourism as a locally accessible source of economic development and diversification (Krstic, Jovanovic, Jankovic-Milic and Stanisic 2016). Tourism has been integrated into other strategies contributing to poverty alleviation in the region by governments and international development partners (Folarin and Adeniyi 2020). However, the region faces numerous constraints to tourism development, including poverty, insufficient marketing and dissemination of information about the tourist destination, a lack of basic human needs such as healthcare, education and free movement of labour, inadequate transportation and other infrastructure, a scarcity of domestic investment, and a political climate marked by civil wars and lack of political support for tourism (Krstic, Jovanovic, Jankovic-Milic and Stanisic 2016). As a result, tourism remains underdeveloped in the majority of the region's countries, with the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index ranking them poorly (TTCI).

Despite the popularity of tourism in Africa, the region remains under-researched (Wamboye, Nyaronga and Sergic 2020). In Southern Africa, which includes Malawi, the majority of research has concentrated on South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Botswana, leaving the rest of Southern African countries under-researched (Hoogendoorn and Rogerson 2016). Numerous studies have been conducted on the barriers to tourism development in the SSA and other developing regions, but gaps for additional research and analysis persist. The majority of research on the subject does not distinguish between challenges and causes but rather lumps the two together under the umbrella term of challenges. Therefore, this paper employs qualitative methods and root cause analysis to examine tourism development challenges and the causative factors in Malawi.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Destination Competitiveness

This study is informed by the conceptual model of destination competitiveness (Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Ritchie and Crouch 2003). The Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness, which is based on Porter's model of national competitiveness, identifies four determinants of destination competitiveness: qualifying determinants (location, dependencies, safety, and cost); destination management (resource stewardship, marketing, organization, information, and service); core resources (physiography, culture and history, market ties, mix of activities, unique events, and tourism superstition) and attractors (notable attractions, accessibility, entrepreneurship, communications infrastructure, local transportation infrastructure, and institutions and principal factors of production). According to Andrades and Dimanche (2017), the model can also be used to identify opportunities and challenges within a destination, even though the primary purpose of the model is to determine destination competitiveness. Andrades and Dimanche (2017) identified barriers to tourism development in Russia through an examination of competitiveness factors and concluded that the framework was effective and could be applied to similar studies in other regions.

A Root Cause Analysis (RCA) was used to identify the root causes of the issues impeding tourism development and growth in developing countries. RCA is a technique used to identify the root causes of a challenge or problem. It is used in a variety of fields, including medicine, management, and engineering. It is based on the premise that every problem has a root cause and that only when the root cause is identified can the problem be solved; otherwise, resources are diverted to addressing symptoms rather than the root cause (Doggett 2005). Doggett (2005) identified three tools used in RCA: the Cause-and-Effect Diagram (CED), the interrelationship diagram (ID), and the Current Reality Tree (CRT). The cause-and-effect diagram is used in this study to identify the causes of Malawi's tourism development challenges. The CED, in addition to being easier to use and more readable, is better at identifying cause categories and facilitating productive problem-solving (Doggett 2005).

1.2 Tourism Development

Tourism development is discussed extensively in tourism literature from two distinct perspectives. The first dimension is concerned with tourism's relationship to models and theories of socioeconomic development, as well as its role as a development agent (Telfer and Sharply 2015). The second perspective views tourism development as a process of elevating the status of a tourism destination from its current state to a better one (Butler 2004). Pearce and Burke (2003) define tourism development as the process of improving tourist facilities and services such as accommodation, infrastructure, transportation, and supporting facilities. Understandably, this definition falls short of encompassing all aspects of tourism development. Tourism development may imply an increase in the number of tourism facilities and services, an increase in tourist arrivals, an improvement in the quality of tourism services, and an increase in the number of tourism stakeholders, or an increase in tourist expenditure. Butler (2004) and Pearce and Burke (2003) attempted to paint a comprehensive picture of tourism development through the use of tourist area life cycle models. Tourism destinations, according to the models, go through several stages of development. Despite some criticism, the models provide a more comprehensive picture of what tourism development entails, what changes occur during tourism development, and potential strategies for reaching the desired stage. While the models do not exhaustively address all critical issues related to tourism development, they do provide a more adequate foundation for understanding tourism development.

1.2.1 Focal Areas in Tourism Development

One of the pressing issues in tourism development is determining where tourism managers, planners, and developers should focus their efforts in order to achieve the desired level of tourism in a particular destination. While this is not a straightforward question to satisfactorily resolve, Leiper's (1979) systems model provides a convenient clue to the fundamental question. Leiper (1979) argues that tourism is comprised of several interconnected elements: a tourist-generating region, tourist transit region and tourist destination region that operate as a system. Tourism planners, developers, and managers are thus expected to analyse and adjust all critical elements within the tourism system's geographical segments in order to catalyse growth and development. The majority of obstacles to tourism development stem from the elements of Leiper's tourism system. However, as Sedarati, Santos, and Pintassilgo (2019) observe, excessive focus on all three components of the tourism system can be challenging, given the complexity of tourism systems as some components of the tourism system are controlled by stakeholders from other sectors.

Then there is the question of whether the supply or demand side of the tourism system should be prioritized in order to achieve the desired tourism development goals. Some argue that tourism developers and managers should put more emphasis on destination systems, particularly tourist attractions and experiences because tourism is dependent on them (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, and Moliner 2006). Similarly, Andriotis (2018) outlines the major supply-side preconditions for tourism development that should be taken into account when planning tourism development. According to Andriotis (2018), the natural and cultural resources of the receiving region, which attract visitors, are critical in the early stages of tourism development. Tourism development in its early stages necessitates significant investment in enabling infrastructure and facilities that serve both locals and tourists. According to Jenkins (1980), third-world countries should direct their resources toward destination-related elements rather than factors that influence demand in tourist-originating countries.

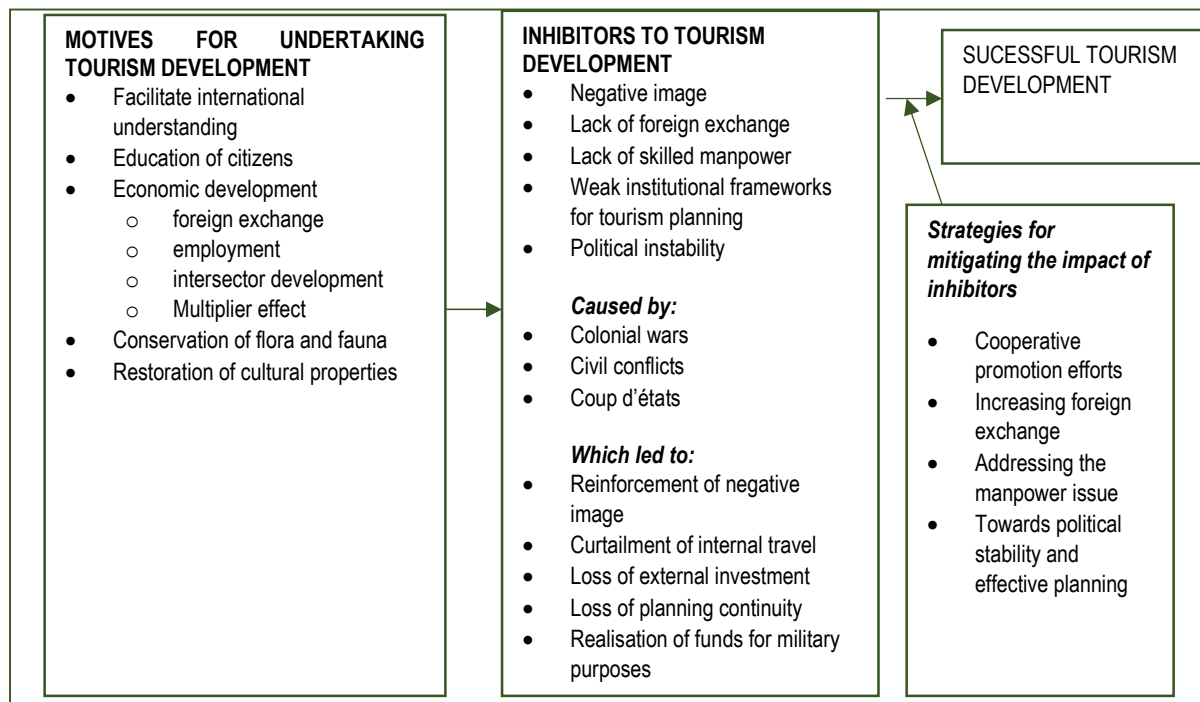
1.2.2 Challenges to Tourism Development in Developing Countries

Several studies have concluded that the development of tourism in developing countries faces numerous challenges. The typical barriers to tourism development in such countries are insufficient economic resources combined with weak institutional and human resources, as well as geographical and environmental constraints (Pigliaru and Lanza 1999). Limiting factors to tourism development in developing countries include lack of supporting infrastructure, limited access to source market countries, unfavourable investment and business environment, a shortage of skilled labour, low-quality tourism products and services, and unsustainable use of tourism resources (Christie 2002). Wamboye, Nyaronga, and Sergi (2020) suggest that the inadequacy of tourism supporting infrastructure is a significant obstruction to the development of international tourism in impoverished countries. However, according to Cleverdon (2002), some countries in the SADC region believe they cannot afford to spend resources on tourism infrastructure in light of other pressing priorities.

Ankomah and Crompton (1990) proposed a conceptual framework for tourism development in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to ascertain the factors impeding tourism development in the region (refer to figure 1). After conducting a root cause analysis, they concluded that the region's tourism development challenges are orchestrated by negative image, lack of foreign exchange, shortage of skilled labour, inadequate institutional

frameworks for tourism planning, and political instability. They went on to suggest that colonial wars, civil wars, and government overthrow were primarily responsible for the aforementioned factors. In other words, Ankomah and Crompton (1990) concluded that efforts to develop tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa failed to produce the desired results, owing primarily to the conflicts and wars of the time. Therefore, it is both interesting and critical to ascertain what the primary factors impeding tourism development and growth would be in the current years if the same analysis were conducted.

Figure 1. A conceptual framework of tourism development in sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Ankomah and Crompton 1990

2. Research Context

Malawi is located in sub-Saharan Africa's southeast region. It is bounded on the south and west by Mozambique, on the east by Zambia, and on the north by Tanzania. The country spans an area of 118,480 square kilometers and is home to over 17.5 million people. Malawi's economy is largely agro-based and the leading export commodities are tobacco, sugar, tea, and nuts, with tobacco dominating all export products. Malawi is exploring and developing alternative revenue streams to agriculture, with tourism being one of the viable alternatives. Since tourism was adopted as one of the priority sectors of economic growth, there has been evidence that the country has reaped some economic benefits from tourism, even if quantifying those benefits remains a challenge. For example, international tourism contributed 6.7 percent to Malawi's GDP (US \$550.9 million) in 2019, and created 6.8 percent of total employment (516, 200 jobs) (WTTC 2021). While the reported figures appear convincing, a comparison to other countries in the region reveals that Malawi has not fully capitalized on the tourism opportunities presented by the country. In 2019, tourism contributed less to Malawi's GDP than it did on average to Africa's GDP (7.1 percent). Once again, tourism's contribution to the country's exports, at 2.2 percent, is less than the average for the Sub-Saharan region (8.5 percent). International tourism in Malawi also faces stiff competition from neighbouring countries. Taking the year 2018 for example, Malawi received 871,000 international tourists while its neighbouring countries, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zambia received 1.2 million, 2 million, and 1.5 million international tourists respectively (UNWTO 2019).

Tourism in Malawi is heavily reliant on natural and cultural resources. The country offers beach and water experiences, scenic landscapes, a diverse wildlife population, as well as historical and cultural experiences. Despite abundant natural and cultural resources, tourism attractions remain underdeveloped. The challenge is in transforming these resources into experiences worth remembering. For example, while Lake Malawi provides a unique and valuable resource for the country's tourism, the lake itself does not offer much to tourists beyond admiring the lake and participating in a few water activities. Natural and cultural resources continue to deteriorate and deplete as a result of deforestation, poaching, and cultural devaluation.

3. Methodology

Phenomenological research philosophy and qualitative research methods were applied for this study as they have an ability to establish diverse and detailed participants' views based on their experience (Altinay and Paraskevas 2015). In-depth interviews were used to collect primary data while secondary data was collected from official tourism reports. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants for the study. Participants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, significance within the tourism sector, and the purpose of the study (Babbie 2021).

A total of 23 participants from different stakeholder groups participated in the study. The participants were from the Department of Tourism, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, the Department of Culture, the Department of Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, tourism operators and associations (Malawi Tourism Council (MTC), Hotels and Lodges Association, Travel Agents Association, Tour Operators Association, and Mangochi Tourism Association), and NGOs/development partners. Table 1 below provides a summary of the participants:

Table 1. Number of people per stakeholder groups

Participant stakeholder groups	Male	Female	Total
Department of Tourism (DoT)	5	2	7
Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)	2	0	2
Department of Culture	1	1	2
Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD)	1	0	1
Private operators and tourism associations	7	1	8
Developmental partners	2	0	2
Department of Civil Aviation (DCA)	1	0	1
Total	19	4	23

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. Transcribing recorded interviews, coding thoughts for each question, combining codes into probable themes and sub-themes, compiling supporting data for each topic, and finally, connecting themes to research objectives were critical processes in the analysis (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012).

4. Findings and Discussion

Inadequate connectivity between source markets and Malawi, as well as inside the country, underdeveloped tourist destinations and limited access to tourist information emerged as the main barriers to Malawi's tourism development. Additionally, the study revealed that underfunding, the centralized management structure of the tourism industry, a lack of stakeholder collaboration, and an unfriendly business operating environment all contribute to Malawi's tourism growth challenges.

4.1 Challenges to Tourism Development

4.1.1 Limited Accessibility to Malawi

Malawi is one of several Southern African countries facing multiple challenges in the airline industry, limiting Malawi's international accessibility. Inadequate access between Malawi and its major tourist source markets has emerged as a major impediment to Malawi's tourism development. Participants mentioned that Malawi has limited accessibility due to lack of adequate international airlines operating on routes connecting Malawi to other countries. As a result, there are no direct flights between Malawi and the main tourist markets in Europe and America. In this regard, airfares are significantly higher due to multiple connecting flights. This has a significant negative impact on international tourist numbers. Airlines have reportedly deemed the route uneconomical due to low demand, even though the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has identified Malawi as one of the fastest-growing airline passenger markets between 2017 and 2034 (Heinz and O'Connell 2017). It was further noted that Malawi's international airports lack some basic supporting equipment and infrastructure to attract some major airlines as noted by one of the participants:

Airlines from Europe and the United States, including British Airways, KLM (Royal Dutch Airline), and American Airlines, are concerned about security and safety at our airports, which fall short of international standards... (Participant 23 - DCA)

...we are currently in a difficult situation because we [KIA] do not have enough passenger ferry buses and firefighting vehicles. We are only using two buses that are not designed for this purpose. Our fire engines are now quite old, making them prone to breakdowns. (Participant 23 - DCA)

Additionally, airline operators shared their views on Malawi's aviation policies, describing them as restrictive and demotivating for airline companies. The participants noted that aviation laws, policies and regulations appear to favour and protect Ethiopian airlines or Malawian Airlines and that discourages fair competition among airlines. Malawi Airlines is a Partnership between Malawi Government and Ethiopian Airlines where Ethiopian Airlines owns 49%, while the Malawian government controls 51% shareholding. Most of the participants were of the opinion that the government favours and defends or protects the operations of the two airlines. As noted by Mhlunga (2017), regulations aimed at protecting national carriers endanger private operators, making the aviation industry unprofitable, hence stifling the region's tourism prospects (Mhlunga 2017).

4.1.2 Limited Accessibility within Malawi

Participants acknowledged that the country's underdeveloped transportation networks and infrastructure limit access to and from major destinations and tourist attractions within the country. Malawi has development opportunities in road, air, railway, and water transportation. However, the country is heavily reliant on road transportation. Road transport accounts for more than 60% of Malawi's domestic transportation, according to the Ministry of Transport and Public Works. Despite being the most important mode of transportation, most areas are inaccessible due to a lack of proper roads, and the situation worsens during the rainy season as noted by one of the participants.

To us and those who come to see our country, our roads are death traps. They are a risk to all of us. We [citizens] hear sad stories on the radio, TV, and in the newspapers about people who have died in car accidents due to the poor state of our roads. It's very frightening. (Participant 3-DoT)

Malawi's top attractions are concentrated in rural areas, where road conditions are considerably worse. Inadequate road infrastructure has a detrimental effect on not just the accessibility of attractions, but also on the safety of travellers. The participants emphasized that the majority of roads are unsafe and prone to accidents. Additionally, the majority of highways lack proper road signs as a result of rising vandalism of public structures in the country. Furthermore, it was noted that the unsanitary conditions in city bus stations also pose a health risk to tourists.

4.1.3 Underdeveloped Tourist Attractions

The study findings also revealed that the majority of attractions lack the necessary amenities to support tourism activities. Certain attractions lack basic necessities such as lodging and essential utilities such as clean water, electricity, and security. Attractions located near major cities and towns benefit from the tourism infrastructure available in the adjacent urban areas.

Additionally, it was noted that the majority of attractions offer a limited range of visitor services and experiences. The limited number of available tourist services falls short of visitor expectations. The participants outlined that visitor attractions do not offer a diverse range of tourist services necessary for an exciting and memorable experience.

We [tour operators] take tourists to Lake Malawi so they can enjoy its beauty and participate in a variety of service activities. However, they only end up seeing the lake and nothing else. What else do they do besides looking at the lake? Nothing. After a few hours, you can tell they're bored because they're doing nothing but staring at the lake. More leisure activities are needed so that tourists do not spend a week at the lake just to see the lake. That is insufficient for someone flying from Europe or America. This is why most tourists only come to Malawi once and never return. (Participant 15-Private operator)

Due to limited facilities and services at attractions, tourists tend to appreciate them solely for their appearance, rather than through active participation in a variety of recreational activities. As Anderson (2011) points out, developing countries may have an abundance of natural resources but fail to develop complementary tourism services to maximise economic benefits.

4.1.4 Limited Access to Tourist Information

The majority of the participants indicated that critical tourism information about Malawi is not readily available to domestic and international visitors. Numerous factors contribute to this limitation. To begin, the challenge is

exacerbated by the country's lack of tourist information centres. Participants believed that tourist information centres, which are currently located in only two cities, Blantyre and Lilongwe, could be expanded to all districts. As Lyu and Lee (2015) note, despite the availability of information from internet-based sources, tourism information centres remain relevant sources of information and are sometimes more trusted than online-based information. Secondly, participants expressed concern that the government marketing efforts are constrained by low levels of government funding. Furthermore, these marketing programs and activities are not evaluated on a regular basis to determine their effectiveness. Malawi tourism is promoted by the Malawian government through marketing attachés stationed in major international tourist markets, participation in international tourism expos, advertising in local and international media, operation of tourism websites and social media platforms, and distribution of marketing materials.

Through their marketing programs, private operators also provide information to tourists. Nonetheless, their efforts are adversely affected by a variety of forces. The majority of tourism operators believe that attending international travel expositions and physically contacting prospective tourists abroad is prohibitively expensive. Alternatively, operators resort to online means. However, online platforms are not fully utilized. The majority of tourism businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), either lack a website or operate one with limited information and services. Similarly, social media platforms are used on a very basic level. According to participants, this is primarily due to high costs and limited, intermittent internet access. As noted by Matidza, Ping, and Nyasulu (2020), scarcity of well-trained personnel is a constraint to digital marketing in Malawi.

4.2 Factors Contributing to the Challenges to Tourism Development

After defining the issues, the study gathered and analysed viewpoints on what might be the principal causes of the challenges. The challenges were viewed as symptoms, and the contributing factors were identified using a 3x5 Whys approach to root cause analysis. When used correctly, the 3x5 Whys integrated methodology elucidates higher-order systemic causes from lower-lever symptoms (Gangidi 2019). It emerged that the factors that contribute to the challenges to tourism development include; insufficient government funding to the tourism sector, centralised administration of tourism, low levels of collaboration and poor business operating environment.

4.2.1 Insufficient Government Funding

Participants largely felt that the government's priority for tourism is purely theoretical and does not translate into action or sufficient budget allocation. According to participants, tourism is identified as a priority industry in important government planning documents but receives insufficient support in comparison to a variety of other sectors. Over the years, the share of funding dedicated to tourism has been insufficient to meet development and operating budgetary requirements. This partially explains why the tourism ministry is unable to adequately facilitate tourism development. This is commensurate with Sharpley's (2009) conclusion that LCDs typically perceive tourism as an important source of government revenue, but investment in the sector is contradictory.

A deeper examination of the disparity between prioritisation and funding uncovered perceived reasons for the tourism sector's lack of funding. Firstly, the national budget is always in deficit and the government identifies priorities among priorities where tourism is outcompeted. At this stage, the government prioritises education, agriculture, and health. Nonetheless, the country continues to face numerous challenges in those high-priority sectors, and financial resources allocated to those sectors remain insufficient. The country wishes to increase tourism funding, but the demand for financial resources is significantly greater than the available resources.

Let us use common sense, Achimwene [my brother]. Should our government build hotels, airports, and buy planes while people go hungry due to a lack of food and die in hospitals as a result of lack of medicine? Would you confidently choose tourism over food if you were the president of the country? Certainly not. (Participant 12-MoFEPD)

Inadequate and unreliable data for tourism economic performance was also cited as a reason for the industry's low government funding. According to the participants, tourism's economic contribution is grossly understated, which creates a false impression of tourism. The government looks at these figures and gets discouraged to pump more money into the sector. The country compiles statistics on international tourism only, with scant information on domestic tourism. Nonetheless, the methods used to collect data from inbound and outbound travellers fall far short of required tourism statistical standards. The ministry responsible for tourism kick-started processes to adopt Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs) but has encountered difficulties in fully implementing the model. The reason being TSA is a resource-intensive approach to tourism statistics, which is

difficult to achieve in Malawi. As Frent and Frechtling (2022) note, TSAs are widely recognized as standard tools for quantifying tourism's contribution to destination economies, but their implementation is not straightforward.

4.2.2 Centralised Administration of Tourism

Malawi's tourism industry is managed and regulated centrally by the government's Department of Tourism (DoT). DoT is tasked with the responsibility of planning and developing tourism products and services, ensuring safety and standards, and marketing Malawi as a tourist destination. While regional and a few district offices exist, participants indicated that regional and district tourism offices lack the authority and capacity necessary to develop, manage and promote tourism products in respective locations. The regional and district offices have less human and financial resources than the central office (headquarters). The headquarters makes the majority of decisions and manages resources.

We [District officers] understand the challenges at the district level and have suggestions for how to address them. The problem is that we don't get enough resources from headquarters. I bet you, you could see the results if we had been allowed to plan on our own and be funded separately. We don't even have enough office space, furniture, or equipment right now. (Participant 5-DoT)

Other tourism bodies, such as the Malawi Tourism Council (MTC), which represent the private sector's interests, are similarly centralised, limiting their effectiveness. As Smoke (2003) points out, centralisation is characteristic of a large number of African countries. Smoke (2003) also observes that, despite the advocacy of international development agencies for decentralisation, centralisation remains firmly rooted in a number of African countries including Malawi.

4.2.3 Low Level of Collaboration among Stakeholders Within and Outside the Tourism Industry

Additionally, the study findings revealed low levels of collaboration and engagement among stakeholders in the tourism industry and outside the industry. The participants emphasized that tourism development is dependent on a number of other sectors, including education for skills development, transport for accessibility, immigration for processing international tourists into the country, land for tourism developments, information and communication technology infrastructure for communication, natural and cultural resources for tourism products, and utility suppliers. Regrettably, these sectors are not controlled or managed by the tourism industry, and their stakeholders view themselves as distinct from the tourism industry. It therefore, becomes increasingly difficult to coordinate the efforts of such stakeholders toward a tourism development agenda as noted by one of the participants.

...other government agencies have their own priorities. It becomes difficult to point them in the direction of our plans. It's as if we're telling them our plans are more important than theirs... (Participant 2 - DoT)

The lack of intersectoral coordination extends to government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), which creates further difficulties. Tourism's critical sectors fall outside the DoT's jurisdiction. For example, the Department of Transport is responsible for the development of road networks and infrastructure, while the Department of Trade and Investment is directly responsible for investment promotion, and the Department of Civil Aviation is responsible for airport infrastructure development and airline regulation. Due to lack of assistance and adequate collaboration from these sectors, tourism development plans and strategies are unable to be successfully implemented. As Adu-Ampong (2017) notes, insufficient coordination between government departments and agencies impedes the implementation of policies and programmes as is the case in Malawi.

4.2.4 Poor Business Operating Environment

Private operators and their representative bodies agreed that the current business operating environment is unsuitable for tourism-related ventures/investments. It was noted that investors face difficulties obtaining electricity and water connections to their facilities during the development stage. Additionally, the majority of remote areas with enormous tourism potential lack access to basic utilities, internet connectivity, and road networks. As a result, investors pursue their own initiatives, escalating initial investment costs and lengthening the investment recovery period. Additionally, imports of building materials, furniture, operational equipment, and motor vehicles are subject to a high duty. While the government provides duty and tax exemptions, the conditions and prerequisite requirements disadvantage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As noted by Majanga (2015), SMEs in Malawi are disadvantaged in comparison to large corporations in various areas in their operations.

It further emerged that business ventures face more challenges once operational. According to participants, private operators are required to pay a variety of taxes and levies, which ultimately increase their operational costs and decrease profitability. Numerous regulatory agencies regulate the industry, which explains the proliferation of regulatory levies or fees. Several of these organizations share similar responsibilities. Additionally, participants cited rising utility bills as a factor in the rise in operational costs. As a result, tourism services in Malawi are excessively expensive in comparison to neighbouring countries, putting Malawi at a competitive disadvantage. Private operators negotiate better operating conditions with the government through the Malawi Tourism Council (MTC) and related groupings, but it was noted that they lack recognition and bargaining power.

Additionally, private operators indicated that Malawi's tourism business environment is unfavourable due to lack of skilled labour. Inadequate competences and skills increase operational costs and have a negative impact on the country's tourism service quality. Certain tourism operators have built magnificent tourism and hospitality structures and facilities but are unable to live up to customer quality expectations due to insufficiently skilled staff. As a result, some private operators hire expatriates in key positions in order to boost quality and performance. While the country has tourism and hospitality training institutions, participants indicated that most of these institutions do not provide competency-based education due to a lack of appropriate training facilities. On the other hand, some participants indicated that the industry's compensation structure is insufficiently attractive, resulting in the employment of some well-trained personnel in other sectors.

Conclusion

The study has identified barriers to tourism development in Malawi and used root cause analysis to identify underlying factors that tourism planners, developers, and managers should prioritize. According to key tourism supply-side stakeholders, limited access to and within Malawi, underdeveloped cultural and natural attractions, and lack of tourist information are the primary impediments to Malawi's tourism development. The challenges identified are not unique to Malawi but are found in the majority of developing countries, as evidenced by Wamboye *et al.* (2020), and Christie (2002). The study determined that the aforementioned challenges are a result of the country's doubtful prioritization of tourism or insufficient government funding, centralised regulatory and management structures in the tourism industry, lack of collaboration between tourism stakeholders and those in other industries and sectors, and finally, poor business operating environment. These issues are prominent in the literature on tourism development in developing countries, but they are frequently presented as broad barriers to tourism development, rather than as underlying factors.

To address the tourism industry's challenges, the government and other key stakeholders should prioritize issues within the identified causative areas. Among other things, tourism-related government departments and agencies should consider decentralizing operations to regional and district offices. Decentralisation will ensure that regional and district governments are more focused on tourism development opportunities and challenges (Timur and Getz 2008). Of course, the government will need to coordinate the decentralized functions to ensure that they work towards a common goal (Kimbu and Ngoasong 2013).

Additionally, Malawi should continue to look for ways to improve tourism statistics and develop strategies for implementing Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) in order to boost government confidence in tourism. TSAs provide enhanced data for tourism policy development and economic impact assessments, which are critical for allocating resources and obtaining support for new tourism development (Jones and Munday 2008). Furthermore, Malawi needs to strengthen its stakeholder relationships and networking, particularly with those in non-tourism sectors. Numerous scholars have demonstrated the critical nature of multi-stakeholder collaboration in the development of tourism (Towner 2018). Malawi should move towards collaborative models, particularly those designed specifically for non-tourism stakeholders.

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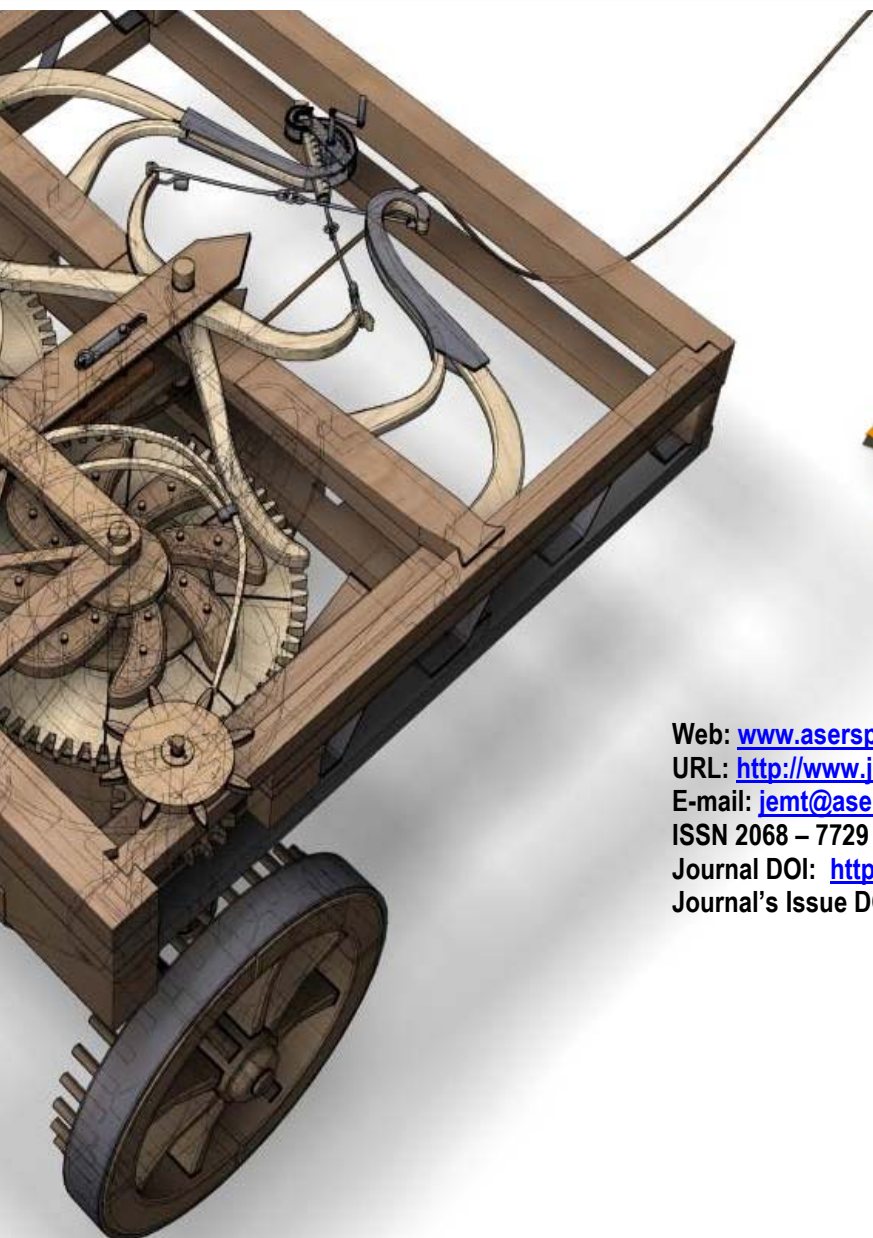
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