

**PIONEERING COMMUNITY TOURISM**  
**IN KAGERA REGION - TANZANIA**

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**AT THE IPT CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY TOURISM GA  
TEW A Y TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN DAR ES SALAAM**

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*SESSION: "POVERTY REDUCTION AND COMMUNITY TOURISM"*

The objectives of this paper are:

- To introduce to the conference the high tourism potential of Lake Victoria zone of Tanzania and its culture. The paper focuses on Kagera in particular, as an emerging tourist destination offering diversity to the traditional attractions of Tanzania as well as wildlife Tourism
- To stimulate international dialogue and recognition of Lake Victoria and the efforts being taken to mobilize the community into taking on Tourism as a job creation, poverty alleviation and contributor to social harmony.
- To relay a success story of indigenous women empowerment under the company 'KIROYERA TOURS" who are leading mobilization of the community in Kagera region to take on tourism as a contribution to job creation and poverty alleviation.
- To create linkages for the Lake Victoria zone with international tourism markets  
Focusing on community tourism development in a poverty and conflict surrounded region in- addition to a high prevalence of HIV / AIDS
- To discuss specific opportunities, problems. Roles and show how they can be tackled.

## **Introduction**

Kagera region is basically rural and off the beaten path of tourists in Tanzania. It is correctly considered by some people to be the loveliest part of Tanzania with an abundance of tourist attractions. KIROYERA TOURS the first pioneer tourist company in Kagera is quick to confirm this based on numerous comments from tourists it has handled as well as prizes and awards already won in the tourism sector. Kiroyera tours through several programs addressed to the Kagera community and the Lake Victoria zone is introducing the fact that tourism is increasingly a key element of the services sector. That it creates jobs and provides opportunity for small enterprises and rural communities in many poor countries and could contribute to alleviation of the high prevalence of poverty and unemployment in the region. However there is awareness that there are examples of areas even in Tanzania that are rich in tourism but where too often the ethnic people remain poor and suffer unemployment. Awareness also exists of some negative factors such as introduction of alcohol abuse, drugs and commercial sex, which may result in reducing the standard of living of the local people. Kiroyera Tours is a company owned by five women indigenous to Kagera region and is devoted to creating awareness and tourism education in the community. This is so that when the region is opened to foreign investment through globalization and the East African Community Market, the local community will not be spectators but will be in a position to get fully involved in the benefits brought about by tourism in the region.

## **Location**

Kagera region is located to the extreme North West of Lake Victoria at the border of Tanzania and Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. It is part of the Great Lakes region. Kagera lies just below the equator between 1 degree and 2 degrees 45' south latitudes. Longitudinally it is between 30 degrees 25' and 32 degrees 40". This includes a large part of the waters of Lake Victoria. Although Tanzania is a peaceful country, Kagera region is an enclave that has received the impacts of turmoil that has taken place in its neighboring countries.

## **Socioeconomic history**

Kagera was once a lucrative region. The society was used to well organised governments. Historically around 14th Century there came a tribe from the north who took over the land and formed strictly hierarchical governments ruled by chains of Kings with high command. Buhaya alone (see map of Kagera) had eight kingdoms still recognisable up to now. Biharamulo and Ngara also had their kings. The history of the kingdoms and their myth, beliefs and culture is very fascinating. Over time traders, the Arabs trading in slaves, ivory and gold between the Congo and Uganda used Kagera as a transit zone creating strong trade centres such as Kyaka, Kamachumu and Muhutwe. Explorers looking for minerals and the source of the River Nile and missionaries largely from Uganda followed. These found the beautiful climate, fertile evergreen environment and the Lake Victoria waters, shores and Islands very attractive that they easily settled. Modern development followed. Religion, education and health facilities were set up. The colonialists, first the Germans and then the English also fell in love with Kagera. Their architecture and strong religious following is still testimony of this historical past. Several wars were fought over Kagera especially Buhaya area between the Germans and the English. This resulted into shifting of the borders of the then German East Africa and then Tanganyika. Wars for chunks of Kagera especially around the Kagera River enclave continued even during Tanzania's independence when Tanzanian led by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere fought off Idd Amin of Uganda out of Kagera region and eventually out of Uganda.

At some stage during this history coffee was introduced to Kagera and as a cash crop this contributed enormously to the economy of the region. Many people got well educated through coffee based cooperative union's fund. There are very many educated people who have attained international recognition as a result of this historical past. To mention a few names - Cardinal Laurian Rugambwa the first ever Roman Catholic Cardinal from the continent of Africa, Bishop Josia Kibira the first African president of the Lutheran World Federation and of late, Prof Anna Tibaijuka the first ever African woman to head a United Nations Organization-Habitat.

Bananas being a perennial staple food have contributed to an intricate culture of strength and pride.

Tourism attractions of Kagera

Kagera has a rich culture and history that is fascinating to visitors. There are ancient rock paintings in a number of areas especially in Mugana. Wildlife is abundant in 4 Game reserves of Biharamulo where even the rare mountain gorilla has been reported, Burigi game reserve, Ibanda and Rumanyika Orugundu game reserves. At the border with Mwanza region we have the Rubondo Island National Park, which is a memorable experience for visitors. There are a number of forests, which have unique wildlife not found anywhere else in Tanzania; this includes Minziro, Kantare and others. In Minziro the unique environment created by Kagera River the thick forest and Lake Victoria has created a habitat in the papyrus swamps with 5 endemic bird species. It is appropriate to announce that the Kagera Museum in Bukoba is presently gearing up for a big photographic exhibition named "WILDLIFE THE GOLD OF KAGERA" with photographs taken by Dick Person a famous wildlife photographer. Tourist wildlife hunting has been going on in Kagera and revenue collected from that type of hunting was \$10,000 in 1996.

Lake Victoria is a whole load of attraction for leisure tours. Fishing, visits to Islands, the white sand beaches, hike through forests near beaches and a number of other water activities are all there to be developed and exploited. Kirojera tours have taken the first steps along this line.

Kagera region has big rivers and a number of attractive waterfalls. There are religious shrines and caves of healing waters such as Mutagata Hot water spring.

The most unique of attractions of Kagera region is that it is a gateway to the west in the heart of Africa. There are many countries surrounding the region and all have their attraction to tourists. Tourists and investors should be encouraged to use Bukoba as a base for visiting the neighboring countries.

## **Poverty**

Tanzanians have formulated a vision for their development that is Vision 2025. The aim is to attain high quality livelihoods and among its goals is eradication of abject poverty. In Kagera events over time have led the region to unexpected poverty. About 90% of all workers are engaged in Agriculture or agriculture related employment. The fall of the coffee price on the world market, the war with Idd Amin, the AIDS pandemic, which has cut down the productive and adult age group, and the political upheavals in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda have repeatedly flooded Kagera with refugees. This has resulted in the state in Kagera region at the moment of low income and expenditure and exclusion of a larger proportion of people from economic capital and social processes. Average individual annual income in Kagera remains much below the national average per capita incomes. Kagera regional GDP is Tsh 224.02bn/= in 2002. The per capita income is Tsh 149,828/=, while the National average is 230,836

This has led to an exodus rural urban migration. There are more people moving out than those coming in with a net lifetime migration of - 5,980 (1988) Census. Kagera region

suffered the fall in the agricultural sector, which has scored negative economic satisfaction level, low productivity of both food, and cash crops in the region, poor industrial development and poor performance of the fishing industry all have contributed to the net outflow of the population especially of the youths. Due to the fall of the price of Coffee on the world market Kagera region has seen a reversal in the state of affairs and the region now suffers from high levels of illiteracy. There are 2,533 persons to 1 primary school and over the years the trend show deterioration. Food inadequacy has been recorded at an average of 120Kg of carbohydrates and 60 Kg pulses per unit of population per year. Infant mortality rates are high ranging at 22% (2002 census). There are problems related to poor technology and lack of awareness of environmental conservation leading to environment degradation. For example the current demand of fuel wood is estimated at 4 million cu. meters while sustainable supply is estimated at 1.7 million cu. meters. Deforestation is going on at an alarming rate.

Health wise there is the devastating HIV / AIDS pandemic in Kagera region. It has decimated the economically active population leaving behind an estimated number of 200,000 orphans through out the region. There are several organizations working on this gloomy situation and Tourism has a role to play.

### **KIROYERA TOURS Community mobilisation**

KIROYERA is a local language- Kihaya -derived word meaning "Turn the dark day bright" intrinsically it means to give education about tourism to a community that is totally ignorant about the tourism resources surrounding them that are lying idle!

The mission of the private company KIROYERA tours is "To widely promote Lake Victoria zone as at tourist destination and operate quality assured mobile tourism around Lake Victoria and beyond." The company seeks to influence, encourage and assist Kagera community to understand tourism with the aim of developing economic gains while using the environment sustainably. The company is a pioneer endeavour focusing on rural development and community mobilisation. The company is a "wholesaler" to local community based and individually owned tourism enterprises. Kiroyera Tours has through out its operations maintained very close consultation with regional, district, local councils and leaders of local communities at the attraction sites. In most of the tours we operate we hire vehicles and boats as well as drivers and even life jackets. We ask the tourists themselves to pay destination fees to cultural sites such as to the traditional iron-smith works after a demonstration or to a king after a visit to a palace and they pay cultural tour guides themselves. This helps to demonstrate how tourists can improve their economy and it creates friendly encounters with the foreigners.

The company thus has provided development advise to a number of groups including: LA VIBOGAM - Lake Victoria botanical garden of traditional medicinal plants, Kagera Museum Trust, KATODEA- Kagera Tourism Development Association, TAUSI Curio

enterprise, Crafts and curio making focusing on rural women and the youth, T A WE - Tanzania Women Entrepreneurs (Kagera chapter). Minziro Forest a trans-boundary resource. Kiroyera tours has formed a joint initiative with Walkgard Hotel in Bukoba-named " Bukoba Conference and Leisure Innovations"

We have made a number of publicity moves including announcements and publications in various media including tourist guide books, television, magazines and Newspapers as well as sponsoring of public events such as Miss Kagera Pageant. Our office in Bukoba has a poster of Tourist Information office.

Initiation of community mobilisation through a series of meetings has taken various forms. The company has run tourism training and awareness programmes focussed at the community. This is in the form of:

- Mass celebration of World Tourism Day 2002 and 2003 with activities aimed at community Tourism awareness creation.
- Lake Victoria Host Programmes in the form of A "Customer Care and Selling skills" Seminar where the company and its partners issued certificates to the participants. We have organised a round table discussion of the theme " Tourism a driving Force for poverty alleviation, job creation and social harmony". Volunteering participants came from all the districts of Kagera Region and Arusha.
- Practical demonstration to the community of how with minimum resources using Available attractions and tools one can run a tourism enterprise. KIROYERA TOURS over its 18 months of existence has given service to more than 180 tourists and this information is published.

On the marketing front, KIROYERA TOURS has been at several Tourism and Trade Fairs in Bukoba, National level in Arusha and internationally in Canada. At the fairs the company portrayed the interest of the Kagera Community as a whole by naming its stall " Destination BUKOBA KAGERA" rather than the name of the exhibiting enterprises. Advertisement is put out to the community to bring in their advertising materials so that we may take them to the trade fairs and a number have responded positively such as women crafts and Tanica.

The company Kiroyera tours is trusted by people and communities who have their meetings at Kiroyera Tours offices and even address at the company including Kagera Museum trust, LA VIBOGAM and Kagera Tourism development Association (KA TODEA). Many individuals and groups have approached us to go visit their sites and give advise on how they can develop them as tourist sites and we have done so. We include on our brochures attractions maintained by other people such as Pebini Picknic Gardend in Kamachumu, Kamachumu Inn, Walkgard Hotel in Bukoba and other hotels.

As a demonstration of the trust bestowed on the company PSDP- Private Sector Development Programme for the Lake Victoria region has sponsored KIROYERA TOURS to come to the conference and be a representative of the Lake Victoria zone in community tourism Development. In July the company was invited by Galu beach hotel to share its experience in developing tourism in Kagera Region at a community mobilisation workshop in Nansio Ukerewe Island of Lake Victoria.

### **Conflict in the Lake Victoria region and the refugee dimension**

In 1994 and 1996 some 600,000 refugees from Burundi and Rwanda flooded the Kagera region overwhelming the districts of Karagwe and Ngora. While they were here the road infrastructure was damaged through over use, school and health facilities were overloaded, trees were cut extensively to make way to refugee settlements. National Parks were poached heavily, the damage by refugees in the Benaco complex alone resulted in so heavy poaching that it is estimated that Tsh 208.4 million was lost in Wildlife meat alone. There were the losses in revenue from tourist hunting which this poaching effectively curtailed. In 1997 of 382 poachers netted in the region 334 were non-Tanzanian. Crime multiplied and local morals got polluted. There was introduction of drug resistant STDs too from refugees perhaps due to poor management of drugs in their places of origin. Refugees outnumbered locals by 2: 1

There were some positive aspects of the refugee invasion

- i. For the first time there was intensive focus by the international community on the region and the inadequacy of its facilities and infrastructure
- ii. Some 15,000 hectares of arable land were cleared and brought under cultivation
- iii. There were some local population access to refugee e.g water supplies and health services.
- iv. Refugees brought a boost to the curio and textile industry

### **Poverty alleviation**

1. There are programmes where local people living around protected areas are allowed a benefit of a percentage of the funds generated from Tourism going to a community fund that then builds classrooms or health centers or anything that the community finds needful. Water has been found to be a key factor in fighting poverty. The benefits of tourism could be tangible if funds accruing could be used in extending and maintaining pipelines and a reliable water supply. This however, can only be done after consultation with the communities involved.
2. Crafts, catering, tour services, accommodation, traditional dance, conference facilities, vending areas at the stopping places for tourists and travelers, recreation and fishing, Museums, theme parks, entertainment establishments and associated facilities are all ideas that Kiroyera Tours wishes to introduce to the community as ways of poverty alleviation.

## Women empowerment, the AIDS scourge and youth development

In Kagera like many other areas, women are marginalised and discriminated mainly through ethnic customs and prejudices. Women are overburdened by domestic responsibilities; they are poorly educated and often cannot take direct or indirect employment. Domestic responsibilities are heavy since they include often single handedly looking after victims of HIV / AIDS. Some burdened with this responsibility are young school going children who head households after their parents have died of AIDS. The existence of over 200,000 orphans as a result of the AIDS scourge poses Kagera with a unique challenge. There is gender imbalance in public institutions and equity in access to education and access to loans and other credit facilities. Financial facilities should aim at women groups perhaps now only making crafts developing and maturing into companies or reputable partnerships. Kiroyera Tours as an indigenous women owned company serves as a role model to the women capabilities.

Referring to the youths, many primary school and secondary school dropouts are unemployed. This is the time these youths need training and jobs for behavioral formation. Neglect by society sometimes leads to antisocial practices resulting in irreversible damage to the generation. Tourism has a role to play and can create a solution to unemployment and can create income to look after the AIDS victims and make education affordable.

### **Challenges**

Challenges are mainly on institution building

1. Tanzania government has yet to recognise the potential of Kagera and Lake Victoria region contributing to diversification of the tourism product in the country and create institutions in the region that will support the development of the sector targeting spreading of the benefits to the wider community.
2. There is need for collecting initially baseline data and continuing with monitoring of the impact of community tourism development efforts in Kagera.
3. Demonstration pilot projects of how community tourism can contribute to poverty alleviation in conflict-affected areas have Kagera region as an appropriate study site. This can be initiated by a deliberate promotion of conference tourism to Kagera especially when the conferences involve neighboring countries surrounding Kagera Region.
4. Not all stakeholders understand or are able to uphold the principles of co management. A concrete training plan needs to be formulated.
5. Funding for attraction site development, tourist route design, brochures of international markets, attending tourism fairs, advertising in market oriented magazines and tour guide



books and other forms of advertising media as well as training for service standards upgrading is absent.

## **Investment potential**

Both local and foreign investment is necessary for taking Kagera out of poverty. Kiroyera Tours is looking for genuine investment partners to develop the high potential tourism sector of this region. Investment in security is a sister area due to political upheavals in neighboring countries. I hasten to say that the insecurity level is localised and as portrayed by some media is highly exaggerated. This is like happens anywhere in the world. Israel still gets many tourists, people still travel to New York, England and Ireland and Iran. South Africa has over the years received more tourists than Other African countries despite constant reports of insecurity. It is wrong for insecurity reports in Kagera to be made to discourage investors and tourists to the region

**Fishing:** Leisure fishing is an industry waiting to be exploited. Lake Victoria is the 2nd largest fresh water Lake in the world after Lake Superior of the USA. There are numerous beautiful islands on the lake perfect for retreats, refuges and resorts. They have beautiful white sand beaches. Improvement of use of fish from small-scale fishermen/women cooperatives could improve their income.

**Energy:** Electricity can be tapped form the water falls of Rusumo, Murgwanza and Mabawe to produce hydroelectric power so as to stimulate rural electrification.

**Water supplies and sanitation:** Kagera has Lake Victoria, Lake Ikimba, Lake Burigi, Kagera River, Ngono and many smaller rivers and marshlands. It is ironic that water is a scarce commodity even in Bukoba town and supply coverage over the region is very low. Garbage collection and disposal in towns also require investment.

**Agriculture:** Kagera has perfect climate, soils and rainfall regime plus high irrigation potential. At the moment Kagera has 15.5% of its land cultivated and can afford a four-fold increase.

**Transport:** Along the main roads linking Kagera, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi and on Lake Victoria to service Islands and trade centres transporting cargo and passengers. This need is great along the lakeshores yet this sector is, poorly serviced. More and better Lake passenger and cargo vessels will be a major boost to Kagera transport sector.

## **The role of tourism/recommendations**

1. Deforestation is going on at an alarming rate. Introduction of the use of Electricity if affordable and improved technology can arrest this problem. Tourism can bring in the

money needed for this.

2. The joint development of Lake Victoria Basin with Kenya and Uganda and the other neighboring countries of Rwanda and Burundi offer the best chance for tourism development in Kagera.
3. Under institution building, there is need to develop the company Kiroyera tours or (KA TODEA when its constitution is signed) as a focal point for support. This should be in tourism development and Environment conservation based on community Education, training and public awareness. In addition development of localised policy, planing, management and monitoring of tourism resources need a local institution too.
4. Kagera community should be encouraged to enter management of tourism resources such as fishing waters where fishing wardens are appointed for community based enforcement of an annual closed season. These will be able to collect fishing fees, fines, confiscate nets and decide on a budget for the community to share. .
5. From the refugee dimension one sees that tourism can assist in contributing to disaster preparedness to host refugees as the causes of refugees are yet to be resolved. This means investing in security, roads and environment conservation.
6. Emphasis should be placed on addressing gender as a development issue and gender policy has to be upheld to encourage gender sensitivity and awareness. A gender action plan to integrate gender considerations into community tourism development through workshops, gender audits and best practices is welcome.

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