

The nexus of Agrotourism and Marketing: A case study of poultry farms in Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana

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Abstract

This paper provides marketing contestations on poultry farms for agrotourism business development in the Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. The qualitative approach was employed for the study and the case study design was used. The study selected purposively five leading poultry farms in Kumasi. Fifty poultry farm workers were selected from the five farms and 50 structured interviews were conducted. In addition, 10 interviews were carried out with the managers of the 5 selected farms along with 5 officials; 2 from Ghana Tourism Authority, 2 official from Ministry of Food and Agriculture and an official from Ghana Tourism Development Company. The data collected were mainly qualitative. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Under the aegis of Flanigan et al's typology on agrotourism and service marketing, the paper examined critically the current state of physical and personnel evidence on the farms for agrotourism business development. The study revealed that although the farm managers seek to embark on various forms of agrotourism, there is dire need for capacity building, and the requisite infrastructure for agrotourism business must be developed in concurrence.

In final analysis, the paper argues that although agrotourism needs specific personnel and tangible facilities, agrotourism is a complex phenomenon, thus there is the need for multi-stakeholder approach and less of insular approach towards its development and marketing.

Keywords: Agrotourism, Poultry Farm, Marketing, Kumasi, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural tourism is a farm and nature-based tourism that combines agricultural activities with leisure (Philip et al., 2010; Hamilpurka, 2012; Tew & Barbieri 2012; Eshun & Tettey, 2014). Agrotourism has been identified as a means for increasing farm revenue in times when agriculture is not as profitable, therefore reducing farmers' economic dependence on their agricultural activities (Che et al., 2005; Malkanthi and Routry, 2011; Rogerson,

2012; Marais, 2014). Agrotourism's potential to create jobs and promote the consumption of locally grown products is also touted (Lobo et al., 1999; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002; Eshun et al., 2014). Agrotourism provides visitors with the opportunity to learn further about the role and impact of agriculture on local communities and their economy (Veeck et al., 2006; McGehee, 2007; Carpio et al., 2008; Thomas-Francois & Francois, 2014); it also promotes the preservation of the rural spaces and local

customs (Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Hall & Campos, 2014).

According to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, [MoFA] (2011), agriculture accounts for 41% of Gross National Product and provides 60% of Ghana's labour force. Agricultural growth in the country has been more rapid than growth in the non-agricultural sectors in recent years, expanding by an average annual rate of 5.5%, compared to 5.2% for the economy as a whole (Bogetic et al., 2007). Eshun et al (2014) argue that although the poultry sector is an important component of Ghana's agriculture, the sector's competitive edge is fast eroding due to untrammled importation of chicken products and lack of government support. In addition, there is lack of research, marketing and entrepreneurial attention to diversification in the agricultural sector. Currently, poultry production in the Ashanti Region with Kumasi as its capital, accounted for 28.07% of the total poultry production in Ghana in 2009, only second to Brong Ahafo Region which registered 29.62% (Food and Agricultural Organisation [FAO] (2014). As a consequence, the Kumasi metropolis was selected specifically to unravel the potential of agrotourism as a viable niche-market in Ghana.

Agrotourism in Ghana is gradually receiving some research attention as a suitable diversification in the agricultural sector (Asiedu & Gbedema, 2012; Eshun & Tettey 2014; Eshun et al., 2014). These research focused mainly on issues of entrepreneurship, Ghana's agrobiodiversity potential and business skill levels of agricultural employees. However, there remains overt gap in research on the types of agrotourism businesses that farmers are willing to invest in, alongside issues of positioning agrotourism by National Destination Marketing Organisations. Thus, the study employs Flanigan et al's (2014) typology on agrotourism to ascertain the various markets that farmers are willing to invest in. Also, although the 4Ps (marketing

mix—price, product, promotion and place) are equally important in agrotourism marketing, nonetheless, this research positions agrotourism under the aegis of service marketing, and focuses on especially the physical evidence (e.g. infrastructure, ambience, parking lot etc) and personnel (e.g. customer care, appearance etc) and its implications for agrotourism business in Ghana. It is worth pointing out from the outset that, although a considerable body of published evidence exists which exemplify the economic viability of agrotourism businesses, surprisingly there is still little published evidence from Western Africa to the agrotourism discourses and practice. This paper thus adopts an exploratory approach, and seeks to contribute to filling this dismal lacuna in literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agrotourism Definitions and Typology

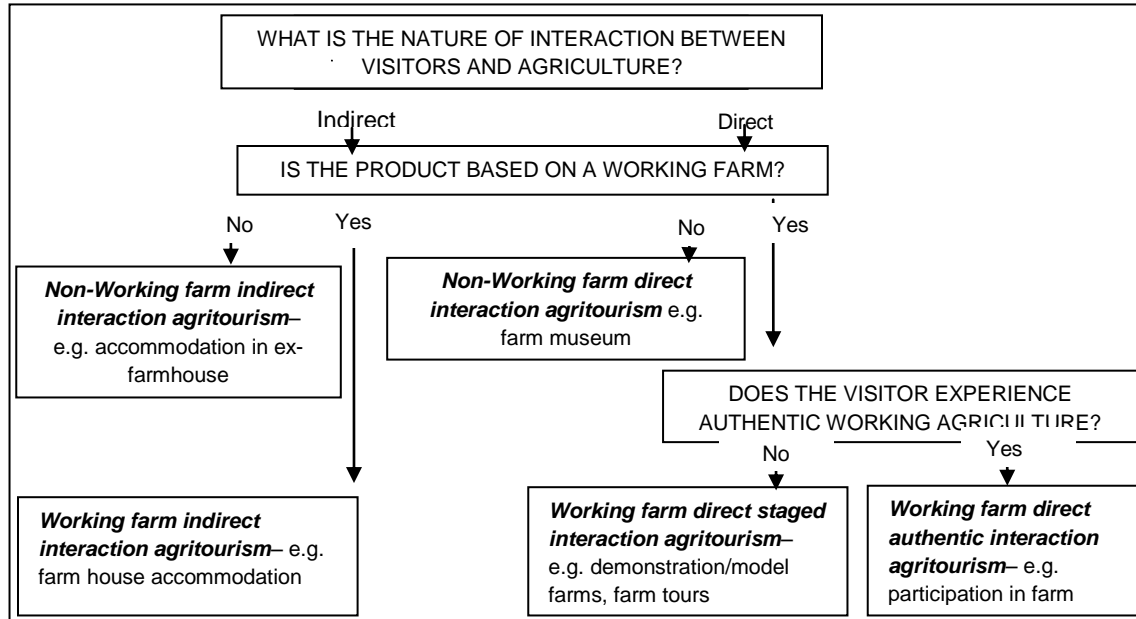
The competitive edge of agrotourism (also referred to agritourism) as niche-market could be captured in the definition of agrotourism by the University of California as, "A commercial enterprise on a working farm, conducted for the enjoyment of visitors and which generates a supplementary income for the farm owner" (Bernardo et al., 2004:1). Kiper (2011:171) defines agrotourism as, "A set of rural activities, including participating in farming activities, exploring local culture, enjoying the landscape and agro-biodiversity, observing organic and conventional agricultural practices and sampling tropical fruits and vegetables". Eshun and Tettey (2014) elucidate lucidly that agrotourism is a sustainable tourism strategy that seeks to increase environmental awareness, reduce leakage and lead to the wellbeing of surrounding communities.

According to Tew and Barbieri (2012:216) there are inconsistencies in the extent of activities that comprise agrotourism businesses, since aspects such as

hospitality, special events, educational activities and sales are either included or excluded from the agrotourism definition. In addition, Tew and Barbieri (2012:216) claim that researchers have struggled to develop a classification system with respect to the characteristics and the broad definition of

agrotourism. Phillip et al (2010) also argue that agrotourism marketing often assume a homogeneous product position. To address this deficiency, Flanigan et al (2014) provided a typology of agrotourism markets (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 A Typology of Agrotourism



Source: Flanigan et al (2014:399).

- **Non-working farm agrotourism:** This can be accommodation offered on a farm which is currently not being used for farming in any way.
- **Working farm, passive contact agrotourism:** tourism activity takes place on a working farm, but the tourist has no contact with the farming activities.
- **Working farm, indirect contact agrotourism:** tourism activity takes place on a working farm, but the tourist is offered the opportunity to experience the produce of the farm for example food which has been grown on the farm at the farm stall.
- **Working farm, direct contact, staged agrotourism:** any form of tourism activity which is taking place

- **Working farm, direct contact, authentic agrotourism:** provides opportunity for the tourist to participate in the farming activities on a day to day basis.

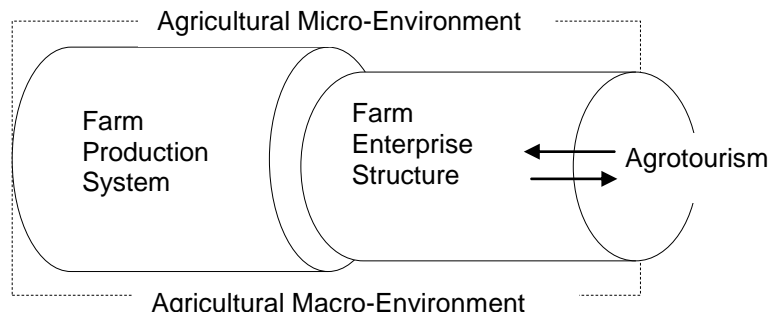
Catalino and Lizardo (2004), also add that tourism that takes place in a farm setting may be supplementary, complementary or primary to the agricultural operation. In a supplementary agrotourism, the tourism activity is not the main focus of the agrotourpreneur. For example, school excursions to farms. Under complementary agrotourism, the tourism activity share equal footing with the agro-activity. For example,

on a coffee farm, there can be coffee shops, where visitors can purchase assorted coffee drinks. Lastly, in a primary agrotourism, the tourism is the main economic activity. For example, a farmer may set up model farms to introduce high-yielding varieties.

In agrotourism business there should be something to do, to see and to buy. However for agrotourism to be developed, there should exist four elements namely: village (this location must be rich in

agrobiodiversity); farmer (the farmer entertains the guest and fills the service gaps); farm (the farm must have a unique selling proposition) and agrotourists. For Edwards (1992), a farm may have a varied combination of enterprises due to the ever-changing marketing environments, and the mix of enterprises in the farm production system, forms the farm enterprise structure (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 Agrotourism and Farm Enterprise Structure Relationship



Source: Adopted and Modified from Edwards (1992:136).

Edwards (1992) further introduce the Constrained Choice Model to farm businesses. The quintessence of the Constrained Model of Farm business, is that, although farmers have the prerogative to the mix of enterprises on their farms, they are restrained by the opportunities and threats posed by the prevailing micro-cum-macro marketing environmental factors. Eshun et al (2014:7), provide a PEST analysis on the poultry sector in Ghana, and indicated that, "The country's poultry sector is besieged with lack of subsidy, influx of imported poultry products, poultry diseases, and limited formal education of employees". These challenges in the poultry sector thus hold constraints invariably to intent that farmers will register for agrotourism ventures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis

Kumasi Metropolis covers an approximate area of 254km² and it is located between latitudes 6°35" and 6°4"N and longitudes 1°30" and 1°35"E. The vegetation of the Kumasi Metropolis falls within the moist semi-deciduous section of the Forest Ecological Zone and is characterized by average temperatures ranging from 21.5 °C to 30.7 °C (Eshun et al., 2014). Average annual rainfall is 625mm with peaks of 214.3mm (June) and 16.2mm (September). The population of Kumasi is estimated at 1,517,000, that provides often ready market for poultry products (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011).

The qualitative approach was employed for the study and the case study design was used. A case study approach aims at understanding a phenomenon clearly by examining an exacting example (Dey, 1993). Consequently, this study selected purposively 5 leading poultry farms in the Kumasi metropolis to examine issues of

agrotourism. For Creswell (2008), purposive sampling involves selecting participants for their experiences and perspectives relating to a phenomenon under study. Fifty poultry farm workers were selected from the 5 farms namely Kumah Farms, Asamoah and Yamoah Farms, Akate Farms, Darko Farms and Mfum Farms. Fifty workers of these farms were purposively selected (10 from each farm) and 50 structured interviews were conducted to ascertain their preparedness for agrotourism business.

In addition, the 5 main managers of the farms were purposively selected to provide responses on their willingness to embark on agrotourism, the type of agrotourism they are willing to embark on, the capacity of their employees to engage in agrotourism service and the adequateness of their infrastructure to support agrotourism. Also, 5 officials; 2 from Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), 2 officials from Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) and an official from Ghana Tourism Development Company (GTDC) were interviewed to examine how the national tourism-related organisations are contributing to agrotourism development and marketing. The interviews lasted between 1-2 hours and the responses were audiotaped with permission from the interviewees.

Following Dey (1993), the qualitative data were analysed through a three-step process namely, description, classification and interconnecting. The description involved transcribing data from the in-depth interviews into an amalgam of text. Secondly, the classification step involved relating the transcribed data into their major themes. Thirdly, the interconnecting step involved making sense of the themes in relation to the study objectives. Moreover, participant observation was undertaken to get the real issues on the ground to reinforce the qualitative data provided by the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions on Economic Viability of Agrotourism

This study sought to find out the respondents' perceptions on agrotourism as a viable alternative economic option, compared to the core activities on the selected farms. At Kumah Farms, the director mentioned that, "Agrotourism is economically viable, because it doesn't change the overall focus of the farm; thus it would supplement the revenue to the farm". The manager further added that, "Marketing of agro-processing industry increases expenses, but agrotourism does the advertisement by default."

Asamoah and Yamoah Farms had a different perspective. The manager stated that, "Although the capital needed for agrotourism business is relatively less compared to the core poultry farming, it is extremely less known in Ghana and many farmers would be risk-averse until a truly viable success story emerges to act as a model". At Akate Farms, the assistant manager indicated, "Agrotourism is an added product or service which adds to revenue in a substantial way, and we are therefore open to assessing how it can complement our existing product portfolio". Responses from Darko Farms showed that comparing agroprocessing and general farming with agrotourism, the latter will seem more lucrative if it is well developed and marketed. At Mfum Farms, the manager maintained that, "Agrotourism doesn't prevent the export of agricultural products but it outdoors the agricultural product for higher purchase".

People often visit farms for business, sightseeing and educational purposes (Tew & Barbieri 2012). These different motivations offer opportunity to segment the market based on the different purposes to farms (Che et al., 2005). Also, the various reasons of visiting farms, put onuses on farm managers to develop a wide range of cutting-edge products by targeting agrotourism markets based on wants and

specific motivations of the actual and potential markets, and not from their sole prerogative as suppliers (Philip et al., 2010).

Agrotourism Typology at the Poultry Farms

After Flanigan et al's (2014) typology on agrotourism, this study focused mainly on the supplier's viewpoints on agrotourism. The various managers indicated different preferences based on the facilities they have available, the nature of the current visitorships, perceived biosecurity risk, and their perceptions about the economic viability of agrotourism as a main business option. The managers at Kumah Farms and Akate Farms expressed that they will embark on Working Farm Direct Authentic Agrotourism. They explained that visitors would be allowed to participate in the farm activities including feeding the fish and helping visitors gather feed for the poultry. They however maintained that, due to poultry diseases such as Gumboro and Newcastle, there would be some restrictions as to the extent of activities that tourists will be allowed to participate in on the farms. Similarly, the managers of Asamoah and Yamoah and Mfum Farms, stated they will initiate the Working Farm Direct Staged Agrotourism. Their choice was hinged principally on biosecurity measures. Thus, the managers expressed they will set up demonstration farms as a form of agri-education.

The manager at Darko Farms showed that the company will embark on Non-Working Farm Direct Interaction Agrotourism. Due to cutthroat competition from importation of chicken products in Ghana, the company now embark solely on importing frozen chicken products. Within this milieu, the manager indicated that tourists will have the opportunity to have a feel of poultry farming through a farm museum.

It was also observed that although, most of the farms are solely into poultry farming

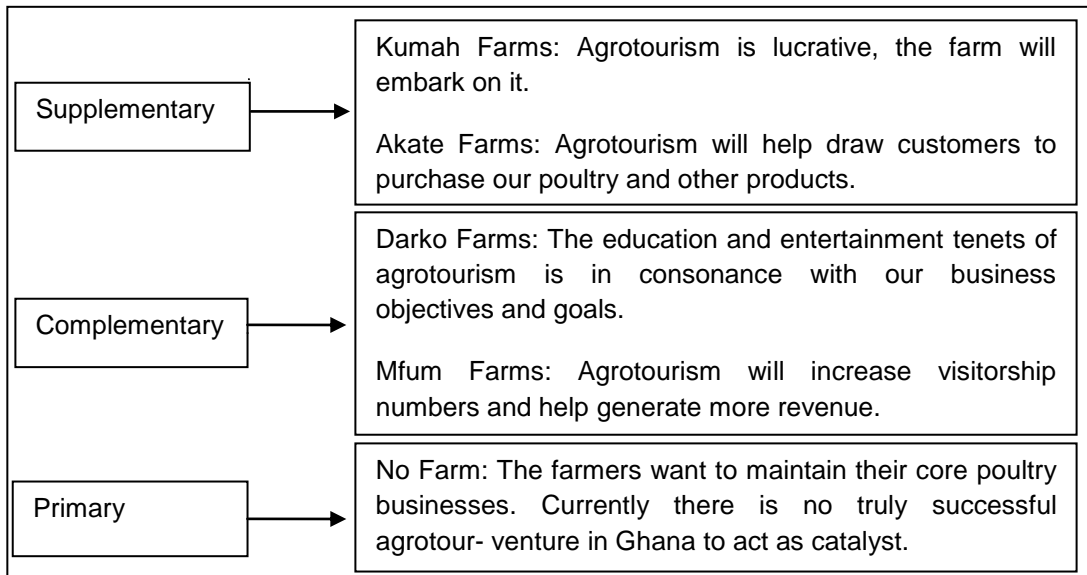
(mainly chicken) — some of the farms are involved in mixed farming. Available animals on these farms include, sheep, goat, cattle, ostrich, fish, rabbit, antelope, tortoise, mango, pineapple and citrus plantations. Eshun and Tetey (2014) argue that farms with mixed-products provide variety to what tourists want to see and purchase at the destination. Furthermore, having a portfolio of products, helps marketers to avoid marketing myopia, since tourists will have more choice in different services and products at an agrotourism destination (Kotler et al., 2006; Hamilpurka, 2012).

Field observation showed that, some of the farmers with mixed-products are willing to allow tourists to participate in feeding the fish, help in artificial insemination exercises and in feeding of the birds. However, biosecurity issues such as threats of avian flu, swine flu, Gumboro and Newcastle diseases constrain the activities that farmers may be willing to offer under agrotourism. Again, some indicated that tourists may take hoes and cutlasses and weed along the trails and bushy areas around hencoops to have a feel of peasant agro-practices which still dominate the Ghana's agricultural sector.

Poultry Farm and Agrotourism Nexus

After Catalino and Lizardo (2004), the study explored how managers seek to incorporate tourism into their farm operations. The study shows that majority of the farmers are interested in supplementary agrotourism, because they are risk-averse about the concept's economic potential as well as the dangers of disease transfer. Earlier, Eshun et al (2014), showed that poultry farmers in Ghana do not want to lose their core business of poultry farming, and thus opted to embark on agrotourism either as a supplementary or complementary activity (See Figure 3).

Figure 3 Poultry Farms and Agrotourism Nexus



Source: Fieldwork (2014).

However, an initial acceptance of agrotourism as suitable economic option, engender attention and support for the marketing of agrotourism businesses (Lobo et al., 1999; Malkanthi and Routry, 2011). Interestingly, the respondents maintained that embarking on agrotourism will advertise their farms by default through high patronage.

Personnel Requirement for Agrotourism Business

The success of agrotourism initiatives is ineluctably intertwined with the quality of frontline employees who create lasting moments-of-truth (Che et al., 2005; Kotler et al., 2006; Thomas-Francois & Francois, 2014). The 50 farm workers were asked to indicate whether they have the adequate skills to be involved in agrotourism. While

few respondents indicated they possess adequate skills in agrotourism, an overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that they do not have the requisite skills. This finding parallels Eshun et al's (2014) stance that the skill levels of employees in the poultry sector in Ghana are woefully inadequate for agrotourism business development.

Indeed, for agrotourism to take off, the necessary capacity building would be needed towards ensuring success. Almost all the respondents expressed that they are happy to see visitors to the farms. On the number of personnel that managers deem will be needed to work in agrotourism in relation to the current number of visitors to the farm, each farm provided their own figures based on their unique requirements (See Table 1).

Table 1 Personnel Requirements for Agrotourism Business

| Company | Personnel Needed | Comments |
|---------|------------------|----------|
|---------|------------------|----------|

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Kumah Farms | 19 skilled and unskilled personnel | The farm will need both skilled and unskilled personnel for collective development. |
| Asamoah & Yamoah Farms | 15 skilled personnel | The farm is only interested in skilled personnel to initiate agrotourism. |
| Darko Farms & Mfum Farms | 12 skilled personnel | The farm lacks adequate information on skilled personnel for agrotourism. |
| Akate Farms | 50 skilled and unskilled personnel | The farm seeks both skilled and unskilled personnel. The unskilled personnel as well are equally needed to maintain aesthetic beauty of the farm layout among others. |

Source: Fieldwork (2014).

Field observation revealed that students from tertiary institutions go to the farms for internship and for their research fieldworks. The managers therefore can build on this to market their farms for agri-education and agri-tainment activities. The managers also often permit Farm Familiarization Tours to secondary school students, however there is the need for a qualified tour guide to ensure quality service output. Sznajder et al (2009:6) maintain that many families want their children to know where their food comes from and this is why some parents bring their children to agrotourism destinations. Malkanthi and Routry (2011) also add, the purpose of people visiting a farm goes a long way to determine how lucrative agrotourism is vis-à-vis other agricultural offerings.

Physical Evidence for Agrotourism Business

Agrotourism endorses infrastructural improvement on farms to help engage tourists and satisfy them. The infrastructural edifice symbolizes the physical evidence of the 3Ps of service marketing mix. According to Kotler et al (2006:55), "The physical surroundings should be designed to reinforce the product's position in the customer's mind". Consequently, the study sought to unravel issues of physical

evidence at the various farms and their implications for creating a competitive agrotourism business.

Generally, physical evidence for agrotourism may include infrastructure such as parking lot, accommodation facility; building of biogas, conference centre, restaurant, lovers' bench areas and washrooms. At Kumah Farms these facilities were visibly missing. The manager at Asamoah and Yamoah Farms indicated that, "Although they have not developed facilities specifically for agrotourism, when management decides to engage in agrotourism in earnest, these facilities would be provided such as washroom, summer huts, and restaurants among others". At Akate Farms the official added aptly, "We are already planning of providing reception facility, cafeteria, exhibition room, improved sales outlet and these will be useful for the agrotourism project". Similarly, at Darko Farms and Mfum Farms, the managers maintained, "That agrotourism as part of their business portfolio will mean they have to provide extra infrastructure such as information desk, washrooms, summer huts; restaurant and accommodation facilities". Field observation showed that although the farms needed improved infrastructure for agrotourism, however, the key constraining factor from

the micro-environment is that the farms lack requisite human resource to initiate and sustain agrotourism.

Destination Marketing—the Case of Agrotourism in Ghana

Tourism marketing in Ghana, is overly fixated on five products, inter alia; business tourism, beaches, events, ecological and heritage/historical attractions. Agrotourism thus continues to register a conspicuous absence in the country's tourism product offerings. Indeed, the National Tourism Marketing and Ghana's National Tourism Plan for 2027 have done little to position the niche-market as a viable business option (Eshun & Tettey, 2014). Exactly a decade ago, MoFA, formed a National Agrotourism Committee, but little progress has been made on developing the country's agrotourism.

The National Destination Marketing Organisations such as GTA, MoT, along with MoFA are yet to come out of the ex abundanti cautela they attach to agrotourism as a truly viable economic venture. According to the chief researcher at GTA, "Tourism stakeholders in Ghana, see agrotourism as an inept concept, thus its potential as a tourism product is overlooked". An official of the marketing department of the same organisation, reemphasized that, "There is the need for innovation in the country's tourism product development, and agrotourism remains a very novel concept in Ghana".

However, an official at GTDC averred optimistically that, "With the abundant agro-ecological resources and the authenticity of the rural spaces, agrotourism has the potential to help position Ghana as a favourable tourism destination, by offering to tourists' authentic farming lifestyles, as well as diverse culinary heritages". This reechoes Joss Croft, the Director of VisitBritain's assertion that, "Marketers of destinations should make the little things count in their programmes, by showing and

sharing the uniqueness of a destination" (Pers. Comm., 2013).

CONCLUSION

Against the backcloth of service marketing and Flanigan et al's (2014) typology on agrotourism, the study examined critically the supplier's perspectives on agrotourism in Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. The type of agrotourism and biosecurity issues underpinned the agrotourism business that managers wanted to initiate on their farms. The study revealed that currently human resource capacity for agrotourism is woefully inadequate for successful agrotourism business. Agrotourism success demands skilled personnel to ensure quality service delivery (Kotler et al., 2006; Eshun et al., 2014). Also, the physical evidence at the farms for agrotourism initiatives is inadequate.

The paper proposes three recommendations. First, there is the urgent need for GTA to work in pari passu with MoFA to establish an association of agrotourism professionals towards positioning agrotourism as a viable business option in Ghana. This will help reduce the visible risk-averse posture exhibited by farmers towards positioning agrotourism as a principal and feasible venture. Second, there is the need for initiating awards at the district, regional and national level for farmers who are into agrotourism as part of the country's Annual Best Farmer Awards. This would create the awareness and position agrotourism as a suitable business option, based on the country's épatant agrobiodiversity. Lastly, just as the NGO—Nature Conservation Research Centre with financial aid from USAID pioneered community-based ecotourism in Ghana, quasi/governmental organisations such as GTA, MoT, MoFA, GTDC and multilateral organisations should select some farms across the country, and provide the requisite business training on agrotourism and assist the farmers to develop agrotourism on their farms to serve as

Iodestar. Also, the Culture and Tourism Section of the Department of Geography and Rural Development of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology can provide support for this initiative. Indubitably, agrotourism as an ex ante project in Ghana would canvass the necessary support if the country gets a domestic model to follow. In concurrence, Ghana can benchmark international best practices from some industry leaders in agrotourism businesses from other parts of Africa (e.g. South Africa), Australia, Europe (e.g. Italy) and North America (e.g. the USA).

Also as Eshun and Tettey (2014:96) indicated, further research is needed on the demand-side perspectives of agrotourism to determine and categorise the domestic demand, "And the characteristics of the agrotourists to Ghana, their generating countries, spending power, preferences, length of stay, identifiable behaviours and motivations". Thus, in final analysis, the paper argues that although agrotourism needs specific personnel and tangible facilities to depict what actually happens on the farm, agrotourism is a complex phenomenon, which demands a multi-stakeholder approach and less of insular approach towards its development and marketing.

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