



# Enhancing Local Economic Development through tourism: Perspectives from a cohort of Got Ngetta rock climbers in Mid-North Uganda

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## Abstract

There is a growing focus on domestic tourism as a complementary strategy to international tourism. This development places a responsibility on national and local authorities to enhance their tourism attractions by ensuring that prospective visitors get value for money. In particular, local governments stand to benefit from tourism due to its potential contribution to Local Economic Development (LED). Considering the various preferences and the evidence of inadequate awareness among would-be visitors in Uganda, the focus of this article is on how Ugandan authorities can enhance rock climbing for domestic tourists. Using a data from personal interviews and self-administered questionnaire administered randomly to visitors at Got Ngetta rock, strategies for enhancing domestic tourism through rock-climbing are examined. It is established that the challenges facing rock climbing tourism revolve around a dearth of user involvement, which brings about considerable disregard of available opportunities including minimising environmental and cultural damage, enhancing user satisfaction and taking advantage of long-term economic growth. This concern necessitates a broader and inclusive strategy. It is concluded that these strategies can help redefine user involvement as an impartial instrument for enhancing rock climbing tourism and boosting the local economy.

**Keywords:** Rock-climbing, user involvement, Got Ngetta, rock tourism

## Introduction

Worldwide, states have enlarged the volume of domestic ecotourism in order to supplement the portfolio of domestic revenue, guarantee stable livelihoods of local communities and protect the adjacent environment. All three aspects are essential in many ways: Firstly, a number of third world countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), have been and continue to experience countless challenges regarding the ratio of domestic revenue in comparison with external financing (Chipeta & Deressa, 2016). This is promoted by several internal factors, including low productivity, low levels of science and technology, skilled labour flight, poor infrastructural networks, inadequate energy resources and over-reliance on imports (Van Waeyenberge & Bargawi, 2015:125). The external factors include conditions imposed by the World Bank,



economic depression in first world countries, international wars, high oil prices, and the resurgence of the cold war between the United States and the BRICS countries (Lipton, 2017:43).

Secondly, the struggle to lift rural communities out of poverty to sustainable livelihoods is key for several third world countries – especially for rural communities (Sinyolo & Mudhara, 2018:42). For SSA in general and Uganda in particular, governments have devised deliberate policies aimed at reducing poverty by targeting the most vulnerable, such as rural women and the youth, through interventions. For example, Satumba, Bayat and Mohamed (2017) assess the success of social grants in South Africa, while Mwesigwa and Mubangizi (2019) examine the implementation dynamics of a youth livelihood programme in Uganda.

Thirdly, environmental protection is a global challenge for all given the amount of environmental destruction for industrialisation, urbanisation, energy sourcing and agricultural purposes (Gatti, 2016:270). Without deliberate efforts aimed at protecting the environment, such as afforestation, wetland conservation, and crop-rotation, humans could face countless challenges including worsening food shortages. Given its changing socio-economic conditions, Uganda needs a unique kind of strategic segment that can remove its younger population from the shackles of death, disease and hunger. While the segment should be sustainable, it should have the ability to enhance revenue, ensure community livelihoods, and respect the environment.

In its National development plan (NDP 2015/16–2019/20), Uganda decided to prioritise five key interventions: agricultural development, tourism development, mineral development, infrastructural development and human capital development, and with two strategic directions: Firstly, by maximising resource utilisation. Nonetheless, Van Waeyenberge's and Bargawi's (2015) study reveals that traditional financial and economic procedures have held back Uganda's economic prospects since 2010. As a consequence, struggling domestic tourism has experienced slow growth, motivated, in part, by political ambiguity, countryside poverty and inadequate awareness. Secondly, by prioritising key sectors with a greater multiplier effect that can propel the country to middle-income status by 2021. In spite of the above, Uganda has experienced 2% per capita growth and 3% population growth in recent years – a situation largely attributed to two factors (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017:4). The first such factor include global effects, including slow economic recovery in Europe, economic recovery in the USA, reduction in capital flows to Africa and a general rise in interest rates (Maweje & Sebudde, 2018). Secondly, while Levine, Muwonge and Batana (2014:384) reveal a reduction in multidimensional poverty, regional factors include civil conflicts in parts of East Africa; the influx of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and South Sudan; climate change and environmental degradation; high interest rates and non-performing loans; delays in government programmes; and corruption in government business, and these continue to hold Uganda back from attaining a robust reduction in poverty (Galadima & Ogbonnaya, 2018).

Due to its poor performance, domestic tourism has been criticised by several stakeholders, such as civil society which has noted that while local citizens have given very little attention to visiting key sites in the country, foreigners have taken advantage of every opportunity by visiting several sites in Uganda (Aporu, Mafabi & Esemu, 2014:280). Save for a few sites that receive high numbers of domestic visitors, such as annual pilgrims to the Namugongo shrines, several sites receive only a handful of domestic visitors per annum. Available studies reveal that despite the information provided on the official tourism website for Uganda (, many tourism sites are rarely visited, while others are not visited at all by domestic visitors, including neighbouring communities (Lepp, Gibson & Lane, 2014:714). For example, very few domestic visitors have visited Bwindi



Impenetrable National Park in southwestern Uganda or Kidepo Valley National Park in north-eastern Uganda (Van der Duim, Ampumuza & Ahebwa, 2014:589).

Few efforts have been put into improving the number of domestic tourists. For example, Uganda has implemented a number of strategies intended to increase awareness. These include promotion of Ugandan food delicacies like chapatti (commonly known as Rolex) and initiating the *Tulambule* buses (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Uganda, 2018:1; Muwombi, 2016). Nonetheless, evidence corroborating the success of the above strategies in terms of increases in the number of domestic tourists is scanty. Further, the input of potential tourists and users of tourism service in such strategies is inadequate. This article aims to examine the prospect of enhancing rock-climbing ecotourism by involving users of tourist services and tourists themselves.

### **Sustainable tourism**

Sustainable tourism has gained worldwide prominence due to the prospect of looking at tourism in a comprehensive manner and focusing on the sustainability triad between host communities and tourists (social), the environment and the tourism industry (economic). According to Roxas et al. (2018), a focus on the triad is likely to drive businesses, jobs and local economies forward. In addition, a study by Cornelisse (2019:3) suggests that sustainable tourism generates several benefits for both the natural and human environments in terms of harmonising the usage as well as protecting elements in the biodiversity which facilitate human life. While sustainable tourism can be used to enhance community livelihoods and conserve nature, unsustainable tourism leads to a number of adverse impacts on nature, such as increased greenhouse gases (Khoo-Lattimore & Prideaux, 2013: 1038). Studies point to a bright future arising from sustainable tourism. One such study by Bricker and Schultz (2011:217) reveals that global-scale trends toward sustainable tourism will become important for several reasons – including socio-cultural and ecological aspects. These reasons are combined with abundant socio-economic contributions that sustainable tourism brings to the community, country and the world in general, such as the flow of foreign exchange to nations, and hence the need to incorporate it in an overall policy framework at every level (Maxim, 2016:983).

While sustainable tourism in several parts of the globe faces numerous challenges including policy deficits, current trends and patterns show a brighter prospect overall (Ruhanen et al., 2015:530). One way to enhance sustainable tourism is engaging communities adjacent to the tourist attraction sites so that they play an active role in the requisite planning (Bramwell, 2010:241). Unfortunately, the participation of adjacent communities, such as those in the Lira District, is often limited by several obstacles. This research sought to fill this void by attempting to explore, from the adjacent communities and would-be tourists, the prospect of rock-climbing as an ecotourism activity and local economic development activity. The research specifically focused on Got Ngetta rocks in the Got Ngetta sub-county of Lira district in Uganda. First however a discussion of the benefits of rock climbing is necessary.

### **Rock climbing as a tourism activity**

Rock climbing has been described in several ways; some describe it as a sport while others describe it as a form of leisure. According to Albayrak and Caber (2016:282), rock-climbing should be described both as a sport but also as a leisure and tourism activity of visiting attraction sites in areas gifted by nature. Even though a number of individuals choose to participate in rock-climbing as a form of amusement or activity, others choose to visit and climb the rock for both sight-seeing and leisure. One of the latest studies suggests that rock climbing has become a popular sport



among athletes who participate for purposes of strengthening the body physique as one prepares for professional competitions (Draper et al., 2011:853; Schöffl et al., 2018:93). Rock climbing is appreciated in everyday life as a form of physical wellness since it burns extra body fat (Rickly, 2016:260). Rock-climbing is suitable for all participants irrespective of ability or skill, and has no restrictions regarding the talent or level of proficiency of participants or tourists (Oriel et al., 2018).

In addition to general wellbeing, rock-climbing is said to bring numerous benefits to local governments and the local communities within which the rocks are positioned. Rock climbing can be used as a strategy to enhance the revenue of communities (Bailey & Hungenberg, 2018). For example, local members can sell drinks, food and other energy supplements to climbers as a form of income. While rock-climbing has abundant paybacks to the local economy, it is necessary that local authorities quantify its contribution so as to make it manageable and secure for several purposes (Lee et al., 2017:258). For example, in terms of estimating its contribution, local authorities can initiate effective policies for managing the adjacent lands and seek to prioritise rock-climbing in relevant Local Economic Development (LED) programmes so as to provide “attraction and satisfaction to its customers” (Ahebwa & Aryampika, 2018:71). The need to satisfy customers in all business ventures is critical and in this research we were particularly interested in exploring the possibility of adopting user involvement as a strategy to enhance rock-climbing ecotourism in Got Ngetta sub-county.

### **User involvement**

Since the adoption of political and administrative decentralisations by many developing countries in the 1990's, local economic development has been a widely touted approach to economic development that is community based and driven. The approach places the responsibility on local government to engage in micro-economic measures that complement national macro-economic ones. For their survival, local governments are in constant search for ways to increase their competitive advantage (Mubangizi, 2008). This is particularly so since sources of local revenue are not only fluctuating but financial transfers from central government are on the decline. The consequence of this fluctuation is that it is no longer appropriate for local governments to depend on traditional sources of revenue but rather should venture into prospective sources to complement their lean revenue base. Sustainable tourism is one such prospect and within the political decentralisation framework, community participation and user involvement is vital.

User involvement in development endeavours is increasingly valuable since governments and local authorities no longer have the monopoly to dictate how communities should engage or live without their direct involvement in development processes (Mubangizi, 2010). Where communities have been excluded, the outcomes have not been impressive or sustainable, and has been very costly for government. Indeed, user involvement leads to several positive outcomes. For example, cases of adhocery, inconsistency and limited knowledge are common under user involvement (Schön, 2016:29). One way by which sustainable tourism can be achieved is through rigorous user involvement in transforming rock climbing into a profitable activity as well as protecting adjacent environs. In Uganda, indications from available studies show that local government structures at all levels have grown over the years as one of the ways through which community participation and/or user involvement can be enhanced (Ishii, 2017:902).

The notion of user involvement challenges the traditional concept of service delivery, besides raising questions about the relevance of government at all levels (Kim et al., 2016:142). It is the



expectation of local communities to get quality services from government. In Uganda, research on user involvement in tourism is limited. Mwije (2018) and Nkwake (2015) point to a range of diverse issues and outcomes that government achieves as a result of user involvement. The writers, however, do not discuss additional elements of user involvement and means by which it can be applied to improve community-based services or activities such as rock-climbing, hence this study.

### **Local Economic Development (LED)**

The attainment of LED in Northern Uganda is, in part, hinged on the success of tourism in terms of growing numbers of domestic visitors from within and outside the region (Dokotum, 2018). In their study, Atelievic, O'Rourke and Poljasevic (2013:282) show that LED involves building up the economic capacity within the jurisdiction of a local government, such as a town council, municipality or a district with a view to improve its economic base and the quality of life for every citizen in that jurisdiction. Studies indicate that LED initiatives were initially introduced by high-income countries in the global north through the structures of decentralisation and or devolution since such structures give more powers to local citizens over decision making and planning (Rogerson, 2010:481). Later, the structures of decentralisation facilitated development programs in a number of countries (including Uganda) during the 2000s and later by giving more power to citizens in politico-economic decision making (Rodriguez-Pose and Tselios, 2019:73). As a result, various stakeholders, including academicians, politicians and development partners, have agreed that LGs are strong pillars to attaining LED strategies. A number of studies have suggested that tourism facilitates economic growth and economic development through several benefits such as direct employment opportunities, incomes, market and indirect benefits such as roads and schools (Munanura et al 2019:2). This is because weak tourism reduces the inflow of foreign exchange, which in turn leads to scarcity of foreign exchange needed to facilitate international trade between and among countries. However, tourism and its association with LED have received attention of late among a cross-section of academics and policy makers. Following a shift in development discourse, decentralisation and its impact on LED has come to the forefront in the development arena. Interestingly, the theoretical linkages between tourism and LED are based mainly on the involvement of local peoples in taking advantage of the potential in their midst.

To date, only a few empirical studies have attempted to scrutinise the notion of LED from the perspective of rock climbing tourism. Hossain and Kumar (2019) analysed LED, and established that improving the capacities of local councillors, through direct training, is likely to be an effective strategy towards achieving LED. Buttazzoni, Arku and Cleave (2019) discussed LED structures in Ontario, Canada, and found two primary structures, namely, in-house structures in which the LED function is hosted within the structures of local governments such as districts, sub-counties and municipalities in Uganda; and arms-strength structure in which economic development is carried out by a specialised agency that is financed by both public and private resources such as the National environmental management authority (NEMA) in Uganda. While analysing the involvement of actors in development decision-making, Larnell (2018) reveals three types of involvement. These are one, public-private partnership (focuses on wide involvement of several actors in LED decision making); two, government-business (focuses on high level participation of local governments and business-related entities), and three, municipal (focuses on urban government coordinating development with a limited set of actors). In this study therefore, LED is



interrogated based on rock climbing tourism that has attracted limited interest among academics in Uganda.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the innumerable prospects and activities for tourism in Northern Uganda and despite the potential for tourism to contribute to the local revenue, there is little indication that local government and communities have taken advantage of these. A case in point is Got Ngetta rock-climbing, which attracts approximately 25 visitors each day, and yet no one has taken an interest in comprehensively enhancing its sustainability triad of host community, their natural and economic environment, and their visitors. In particular, there has not been any attempt to get the views of the community and would-tourists on how to sustainably enhance the experience at Got Ngetta rock. The outcomes of this study will enhance user involvement of rock climbers and contribute to local economic development. While there are several rocks in the country, this article focuses on Got Ngetta rock, which is located in the Lira District of northern Uganda.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this article is to examine the prospect of embracing user involvement as a strategy to enhance sustainable tourism at Got Ngetta rock in Lira District. In achieving this objective, three research questions that reflect areas of concern in this article are answered. These are, (a) how can user involvement be embraced to lessen environmental and cultural damage at Got Ngetta rock? (b) how can user involvement be embraced to enhance visitor satisfaction at Got Ngetta rock? and (c) how can user involvement be embraced to take advantage of long-term economic growth for the Got Ngetta locale?

### **Methods and Materials**

The research adopted a descriptive case study approach in which personal interviews were administered to rock climbers on site. Descriptive case studies are very convenient in qualitative studies, since they allow the investigator to focus on a selected case or cases, and then to conduct an intensive study by looking at the how, why, when and what. El-Akruti, Kiridena and Dwight (2018) reveal that case studies help decide the kind of activities to be incorporated and this encourages an all-inclusive view. Personal interviews were conducted within a period of 30 days beginning in mid-September and ending in mid-October 2018.

### **Locale of the study**

The study was conducted at Got Ngetta rocks in the Ngetta hills in Lira District, Northern Uganda. Lira District covers approximately 1,326 km<sup>2</sup> and is 337 km from Kampala (Republic of Uganda, 2012:2). The dominant indigenous group is the Langi, who are believed to have migrated from Abyssinia in present-day Ethiopia. Lira District is composed of two counties (Erute and Lira Municipality) and 9 sub-counties (Lira, Agweng, Ogur, Aromo, Barr, Agali, Adekokwok, Ngetta, and Amach), as well as four municipal divisions (Adyel, Railways, Ojwina and Central). Ngetta rock is situated in Ngetta sub-county, which borders Lira Municipality to the north.

Among the prominent tourism sites in Lira District is Got Ngetta, an upright, splendid hard rock standing at approximately 4,500 feet (1371.6 metres) above sea level. It is home to a number of primates, a variety of bird species, and in excess of 50 species of butterfly (View Uganda, 2018). While Lira District has hitherto hosted two tourism expos, rock climbing has remained an



occasional excursion. Long protected by the British colonialists, there is growing concern that the ongoing quarry blasts in the vicinity of the rock will damage the rock and negatively affect tourism. Dokotum (2018:2) observed that that dynamite quarry blasts by foreign companies in search of construction aggregates have resulted in ever-increasing damage at the base of Got Ngetta hills. Got Ngetta (Ngetta rock), according to Lango mythologists, fell from Heaven (Dokotum, 2018:1). The mythology highlights the sanctity that local communities attach to the rock and suggests the lengths the local community will go to ensure its protection. It is for this reason that user involvement and community participation could be leveraged to ensure the protection of the rock and related sustainable tourism activities. A total of 24 climbers were interviewed: 8 were female and 16 male. The highest number had attained tertiary education (33.3%) in the form of a diploma or certificate or university degree (41.7%). Half the respondents were married (50%). All respondents were employed of which 20.8% were civil servants, 20.8% were employed in the private sector, 25 % were self-employed and 20.8% were employed in the NGO sector. The highest number of participants (29%) earned USD3,000 to USD4,000 annually, followed by those earning USD1,500 to USD3,000 (25%) and above U\$5,000 (25%) per year. The qualitative findings of the research are presented below organized according to the three key questions of the study.

### How can user involvement be embraced to enhance environmental and cultural conservation at Got Ngetta rock?

The first question of the study aimed to establish how user involvement can be embraced to minimise environmental and cultural damage at Got Ngetta rock. The mean demonstrates the degree of a response and the standard deviation depicts the magnitude to which scores diverge from the mean.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics showing Mean ( $\mu$ ) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the perceived strategies for embracing user involvement to enhance environmental and cultural conservation (N=24)**

Perception	Mean ( $\mu$ )	Std. Dev.
Implementing sound environmental and cultural polices	2.79	1.465
Reducing over-consumption and wastage of resources	3.16	1.456
Maintaining biodiversity within the rock locale	3.19	1.979
Installing appropriate but affordable technological systems aimed at minimizing pollution	2.26	1.265
Sustainable use of resources within the rock vicinity	2.06	1.073
Encouraging responsible and ethical rock climbing	2.02	1.070
Incorporating rock climbing into local government planning	2.15	1.097
Discouraging the growth of abusive sex tourism	2.84	1.260
Encouraging local communities to become involved	2.95	1.051
Supporting local economies within the district.	2.86	0.829
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>2.63</b>	<b>1.254</b>

Legend: 4.21-5.00 (very high), 3.41-4.20 (high), 2.61-3.40 (moderate), 1.81-2.60 (low), 1.00-1.80 (very low)

The results from table 1 demonstrate that six out of nine items rated moderately as far as embracing user involvement to enhance environmental and cultural conservation at Got Ngetta rock is concerned. For example, participants agreed that issues of implementing sound environmental and cultural polices ( $\mu=2.79$ ;  $SD=1.465$ ), reducing over-consumption and wastage of resources ( $\mu=3.16$ ;  $SD=1.456$ ), maintaining biodiversity within the rock locale ( $\mu=3.19$ ;  $SD=1.979$ ), discouraging the growth of abusive sex tourism ( $\mu=2.84$ ;  $SD=1.260$ ), encouraging local communities to become involved ( $\mu=2.95$ ;  $SD=1.051$ ), and supporting local economies within the district are not very important ( $\mu=2.86$ ;  $SD=0.829$ ). However, the results revealed that



installing appropriate but affordable technological systems aimed at minimising pollution ( $\mu=2.06$ ;  $SD=1.073$ ), sustainable use of resources within the rock vicinity ( $\mu=2.02$ ;  $SD=1.070$ ), and encouraging responsible and ethical rock climbing ( $\mu=2.15$ ;  $SD=1.097$ ) rated low among rock climbers at Got Ngetta. According to information generated from interviews, the low rating for technological systems is due to the low level of development in the area – since it suffered two decades of civil war between 1986 and the early 2000s, as stated by one participant:

Our region suffered too much for two decades as a result of a civil war between the Lord’s resistance army (LRA) and the government of Uganda. As a result, we are just recovering from that destruction; it is hard to expect essential technology for minimising pollution, not now; maybe in the future.  
*(Participant 05)*

Also, the issue of sustainable use of resources within the rock vicinity, which rated low, is attributable to poverty. From the interviews, it was mentioned that it is very hard to expect a poor person to use resources sustainably, seeing that such an individual is struggling to survive:

A poor person has no choice at all; issues of sustainable use of resources only become meaningful when a people has attained survival. My guess is that there should be deliberate efforts to reduce poverty especially in this region, which was badly destroyed by war *(Participant 11)*

On why encouraging responsible and ethical rock climbing rated low, the interviews revealed that “unless there are regular climbers who can be sensitised by the hosts, it is harder under the circumstances where different peoples climb the rock on a daily basis” *(Participant 08)*. Overall, the results suggest an encouraging prospect ( $\mu=2.63$ ;  $SD=1.254$ ) in terms of embracing user involvement with a view to enhancing environmental and cultural conservation at Got Ngetta rock.

### How can user involvement be used to enhance visitor satisfaction at Got Ngetta rock?

To establish the possibility of embracing user involvement as a prospect to enhance visitor satisfaction at Got Ngetta rock, descriptive statistics were used to assess seven perceptions presented to climbers at the rock, and the results are presented in table 3:

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics showing the Means ( $\mu$ ) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the perceived strategies of embracing user involvement to enhance visitor satisfaction (N=24)**

Strategy	Mean ( $\mu$ )	Std. Dev.
Allowing visitors to engage in small group comedy	2.79	1.243
Encouraging visitors to share their individual experience	4.01	1.252
Engaging in regular consultations with the visitors	2.83	1.262
Engaging visitors in simple brainstorming	2.86	0.711
Planning for and monitoring every visitor to the rock	2.77	1.242
Recruiting competent tour guides	4.05	1.254
Training and re-training every tour guide	2.88	1.263
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>1.175</b>

Legend: 4.21-5.00 (*very high*), 3.41-4.20 (*high*), 2.61-3.40 (*moderate*), 1.81-2.60 (*low*), 1.00-1.80 (*very low*)

The results in table 2 reveal that participants rated two strategies highly: encouraging visitors to share individual experience ( $\mu=4.01$ ;  $SD=1.252$ ) and recruiting competent tour guides ( $\mu=4.05$ ;  $SD=1.254$ ). On the one hand, based on the outcomes of the interviews, participants feel that sharing individual experience is essential, as it refreshes the mind and spirit of individuals. On the other hand, a competent tour guide does not only guide but also educates, motivates and encourages the visitor. The combination of these aspects can enhance visitor satisfaction.



The results further show that the remaining strategies were rated “moderate”: allowing visitors to engage in small group comedy ( $\mu=2.79$ ;  $SD=1.243$ ), engaging in regular consultations with the visitors ( $\mu=2.83$ ;  $SD=1.252$ ), engaging visitors in simple brainstorming ( $\mu=2.86$ ;  $SD=0.711$ ), planning for and monitoring every visitor to the rock ( $\mu=2.77$ ;  $SD=1.242$ ) and training and re-training every tour guide ( $\mu=2.88$ ;  $SD=1.263$ ). The outcomes from the interviews reveal that small group comedy, regular consultations with visitors, simple brainstorming, planning and monitoring, as well as training for tour guides, are fundamental aspects for enhancing visitor satisfaction among climbers to God Ngetta rock. In particular, one of the climbers said,

I like comedy in all its ways, whether large group or small-group – so by engaging in it especially after climbing to the top of this hill, is very refreshing and mind blowing. Of course, tourism is a business, and so regular consultations between the hosts and us visitors is a good initiative (*Participant 08*).

A different participant said that:

Brainstorming is good, especially when it is done between members that share expertise or common culture. I like it and I think simple brainstorming will complement visitor satisfaction in some way (*Participant 01*).

Overall, the results show that user involvement has the potential to enhance visitor satisfaction ( $\mu=3.17$ ;  $SD=1.175$ ) among rock climbers at Got Ngetta rock.

### How can user involvement be used to take advantage of long-term economic growth for the Got Ngetta locale?

Question three sought to establish whether user involvement can be used to take advantage of long-term economic growth. Results were analysed using mean ( $\mu$ ) and SD, as presented in table 4 (below):

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics showing the Means ( $\mu$ ) and Standard deviation (SD) of the perceived strategies for embracing user involvement to enhance long-term economic growth (N=24)**

Strategy	Mean ( $\mu$ )	Std. Dev.
Analysis of the socio-economic needs of the locale	2.26	1.265
Analysis of tourism assets for future economic growth	2.02	1.072
Considering the visitor carrying capacity and the type of development required at the site	2.15	1.099
Dynamic marketing of the tourism potential within the local community	3.87	0.842
Engaging in discussions about how best rock climbing can be used as a tool for socio-economic, environmental and cultural regeneration	3.28	1.281
Promoting local participation in policy making and decision making	4.15	1.035
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>1.099</b>

Legend: 4.21-5.00 (*very high*), 3.41-4.20 (*high*), 2.61-3.40 (*moderate*), 1.81-2.60 (*low*), 1.00-1.80 (*very low*)

The results in table 3 indicate that three strategies were rated high among participants at Got Ngetta rock: promoting local participation in policy making and decision making ( $\mu=4.15$ ;  $SD=1.035$ ), dynamic marketing of the tourism potential within the local community ( $\mu=3.87$ ;  $SD=0.842$ ), and engaging in discussions about how best rock climbing can be used as a tool for socio-economic, environmental and cultural regeneration ( $\mu=3.28$ ;  $SD=1.281$ ). These results affirm that taking advantage of long-term economic growth cannot be realised unless policy



making and decision making are participatory. Accordingly, during the interviews, one participant stated that:

When the local people take part in deciding what and how [things] should be done, such people can easily take advantage of long-term economic growth seeing that policies and decisions are directed to the appropriate path (*Participant 12*).

In support of dynamic marketing of the tourism potential within the local community, another participant said:

This rock has been here since time immemorial and many of us did not know [of] its tourism potential until very recently when colleagues, at work, told us. Moreover, even our colleagues found out from other friends who had only come to explore the possibility of rock climbing for physical fitness. This shows the importance of marketing this site as a tourist attraction (*Participant 14*).

As regards engaging discussions about how best rock climbing can be used as a tool for socio-economic, environmental and cultural regeneration, one participant noted that:

Regeneration of our communities, especially in this part of the country, requires many discussions so that we can gain consensus on what to prioritise, otherwise, if we assume that government knows everything, and it will work in our interest, the chances of making the most of long-term economic growth may be limited. This is especially true, since nowadays our government is full of corruption (*Participant 10*).

Also, three strategies were rated “moderate”, namely, analysis of the socio-economic needs of the locale ( $\mu=2.26$ ;  $SD=1.265$ ), analysis of tourism assets for future economic growth ( $\mu=2.02$ ;  $SD=1.072$ ), and considering the visitor carrying capacity and type of development required at the site ( $\mu=2.15$ ;  $SD=1.099$ ). These three strategies emphasise the implication of needs assessment and of evaluating the available potential of the tourism resource. When the host assesses the socio-economic needs, analyses the tourism assets and considers the visitor carrying capacity, attaining development that is not only long-term but sustainable becomes feasible. Overall, the results show that user involvement is essential ( $\mu=2.98$ ;  $SD=1.099$ ) in terms of taking advantage of long-term economic growth at Got Ngetta rock.

## **Discussion**

The results have revealed that user involvement can be embraced to enhance three aspects of rock climbing tourism in Uganda. These include, minimising environmental and cultural damage, enhancing user satisfaction, and taking advantage of long-term economic growth.

### **Embracing user involvement to enhance environmental and cultural conservation**

The first question in this study aimed to examine embracing user involvement to enhance environmental and cultural conservation at Got Ngetta rock. Amazingly, the results show that climbers are not convinced that user involvement is necessary, nor are they watchful of the amount of environmental and cultural damage taking place at the hill by neighbouring communities and industrialists. A different outcome that arose from the study is that the concern of enhancing environmental and cultural conservation is justified on the grounds of poverty within the rock environs. The hosts were barely conscious of sound environmental and cultural policies, sustainable use of resources, responsible and ethical rock climbing, abusive sex, lack of



involvement of local communities and available potential at the district local government. If the notion that sustainable tourism enhances LED as well as conserve nature (Khou-Lattimore & Prideaux, 2013: 1038) is acceptable, then enhancing environmental and cultural conservation is in the interest of the host community and local government to advance the mechanisms of embracing user involvement.

A number of tourist destination hosts, especially those at Ngetta rock, have a duty to involve users at the preparation phase of key tourism initiatives (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities – Uganda, 2018). This view does not seem to be appreciated in Uganda and at Got Ngetta rock in particular. Nonetheless, these outcomes are hardly different from Muwombi's (2016) findings that several national strategic initiatives that are projected to raise awareness of simple and significant eco-tourist services such as the Ugandan food delicacy known as *chapatti* or Rolex, as well as initiating the *Tulambule* buses, are thought out without involving the potential users. The perceived dearth of user involvement in enhancing environmental and cultural conservation disagrees with what is envisioned by Roxas et al. (2018) in terms of linking host communities and their locales, persons, visitors with the tourism industry. As a result, this can lead to unsustainable tourism and dearth of LED initiatives in terms of a number of adverse impacts on nature, such as worsening damage to the environment, instead of consolidating Bricker's and Schultz's (2011) idea of sustainable tourism in terms of the socio-cultural and ecological aspects.

### **Embracing user involvement to enhance visitor satisfaction**

Concerning question two which sought to establish the perceptions of rock climbers about embracing user involvement to enhance visitor satisfaction, the results of the present study demonstrate high confidence among participants – seeing that none of the strategies rated below “moderate”. Indeed, over 75% of the rock climbers who took part in this study had confidence in user involvement. Consequently, visitor satisfaction will be enhanced once there is optimal user involvement in terms of group comedy, sharing experiences, regular consultations, brainstorming, planning for monitoring, recruiting competent tour guides and training them. These results appear to agree with the suggestions presented by Bramwell (2010) that in order to enhance sustainable tourism, communities adjacent to the destination who are potential visitors in the first place, need to take an active part in making decisions on issues such as planning for the destination. Nonetheless, several participants gave the impression that users were not yet allowed to give a practical view on how things are or ought to be conducted at Ngetta rock. One potential justification for this disparity could hinge on the diverse intervals within which climbers visit the rock. A different justification for this discrepancy could be attributable to the level of experience and qualifications of the destination managers and their tour guides.

### **Embracing user involvement to take advantage of long-term economic growth**

Question three of this research aimed to examine the potential of embracing user involvement so as to take advantage of long-term economic growth, given that Lira is one of the nine municipalities approved by the Cabinet of Uganda to be elevated to city status (Uganda Radio Network, 2019). Unexpectedly, the results reveal that climbers are not concerned about the long-term economic growth of the locale due to limited involvement in the planning phase, irregular analysis of the socio-economic needs of the locale or of tourism assets, lack of consideration of visitor capacity, passive marketing, disengagement from discussions and lack of local participation. While user involvement is constructive, the destination managers fail to point out how it can be promoted by correcting the potential weaknesses. While this study did not establish the contribution of user involvement for long-term economic growth, obtainable statistics indicate



that rock climbing can enhance sources of revenue for communities, in terms of adding to their daily incomes (Bailey & Hungenberg, 2018). However, it is challenging to conclude how such revenue can be enhanced given the dearth of user involvement as reported by participants of this study.

## Conclusion

The idea offered in this study is not only about the prospect of embracing user involvement to enhance sustainable tourism at Got Ngetta rock in Lira District. While this sounds very important, the paper recognised a dearth of LED as a result of rock tourism and how this may affect the thrust to enhance environmental and cultural conservation, visitor satisfaction, and the attainment of long-term economic growth. The synergies between these aspects might be an overstatement. However, this study found that failure to consider the role of rock climbing tourism from the perspective of LED generates doubts, in particular, on the side of climbers. While this article does not offer an alternative to the challenge of low LED, it has helped us to interrogate the contribution of rock tourism to its attainment. Not only does this study present deep awareness of the advantages of embracing rock climbing activities, it also offers means for probing sustainable tourism as a LED principle in Uganda. In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are deemed to be relevant:

- a) It is the duty of Lira District local government council to facilitate participation, consultation and the contribution of their visitors to Got Ngetta hills and other tourism sites in Lango sub-region. This strategy will ensure that the local government promotes effective time management, attainment of the skills required, setting up favourable financial strategies, and enhancing the level of inter-personal coordination between visitors and the host community.
- b) Appropriate investigations and better quality expertise should be devoted to the conservation of prospective tourism destinations so as to achieve the sustainable utilisation of such assets. A blend of strategies designed to deepen awareness of environmental and cultural practices, improved responsiveness to rock climbers, and integration of long-term economic growth plans can enhance the contribution of user involvement to sustainable ecotourism in the study area.
- c) An investigation should be directed to measure the impact of local engagement on sustainable ecotourism and to establish the physiological benefit of rock climbing. This could encourage vigorous conservation of the resource.
- d) In comparison with similar areas in the country – for example, the Ruwenzori region and Elgon region – the market for local rock climbing is yet to be prioritised in the study zone. As a consequence, prioritising the market openings for this resource can encourage protection of the local tourist sites.

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