Wealth creation using sports tourism in the North Rift region, Kenya

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Introduction

In recent years, tourism destinations in Kenya have deployed various products, themes and resources to compete for a share of tourism capital and other external capital. Some have emphasized wildlife attraction (McNeely et al., 1992; Tosun, 1998; Nepal, 2000), beach and cultural attractions (Craik, 1997; Hughes, 1998; McKercher and du Cross, 2002; McKercher et al., 2004) or their scenic advantages. Others have highlighted historical events or even sports to compete in an increasingly symbolic space-economy. While sports have been developed and employed mainly in cities to further their reputations (Whitson and Macintosh, 1993; Loftman and Nevin, 1996; Loftman and Spirou, 1996; Whitelegg, 2000; Van den Berg et al., 2000), rural areas are also emerging as important sport destinations. Sports is any regular form of physical and/or mental activity done or organized by an individual or a group of people either indoors or outdoors, for recreation and/or competition at amateur and/or professional level (GoK, 2003). The participation in sport can either be passive (a spectator) or active participant (Daniels, et al. 2004). This study focuses on athletes who are active participants in sports.

Sports have evolved over time from being mere play and recreational tools to become an important source of employment and wealth creation. The North Rift region in Kenya, world famous for producing international long distance athletes has over the years experienced an increase in the number of athletes and athletic training camps to tap the athletic talent from the source. In this paper we determine the establishment of athletes training camps in the North Rift region and assess the benefits (economic and awards) athletes in the North Rift region of Kenya accrue from running.

History of sports development in Kenya

The history of sports in Kenya stretches way back to the period before the British rule, where the indigenous Kenyans and the British had different sports. The indigenous Kenyans, initially, were actively involved in traditional sports such as dancing, wrestling, hunting, traditional archery and others (GoK, 2003). Along with a modern economic infrastructure, the British developed sports such as golf, tennis, cricket, horse racing and polo for themselves; and soccer, boxing and athletics (track and field) for the African. At first, Africans sport was concentrated in the army, the police and the few missionary schools but later the British started marking running tracks on pasture land around the country and started conducting regional athletics competitions that built to a colony championship and sometimes to territorial athletics competitions with neighboring countries like Uganda. Just before Kenya gained Independence, in 1963, the country had participated already in Olympics and commonwealth games mainly in athletics and boxing (Manners, 1997).
The first major international competition in which indigenous Kenyans participated and made an impact was during the 1954 Vancouver Commonwealth Games where Kenya attained fourth position in two athletic events (the three miles and 4 x 440 yards races). Kenyan athletes also took part in the first Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, in 1956. During the 1968 Mexico Olympics Kenyan athletes won gold in 10,000 meters, in 3000 meters steeple chase and in 1500 meters. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of Kenyans participating and winning in international athletics competitions. For instance, during the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, Kenya scooped a record of four gold, two silver, and one bronze medals in track and field events, and one gold and one bronze medals in boxing (GoK, 2003).

Kenyan athletes are on record for dominating in middle and long-distance running events for more than 40 years, thus establishing themselves as the world’s premier distance runners (Pitsiladis et al., 2004). Kenyan athletes, like Nyandika Maiyoro, who competed in the 3 miles, and Kunoti Sum, competing in marathon, were Kenya’s first world class runners who paved the way for the subsequent dominance of Kenyan distance runners in world athletics. The Kenyan distance running success story is arguably second to none. Indeed since 1968, Kenya has won every Olympic steeple chase race it has entered, in addition to an impressive 38 Olympic medals in distances between 800 metres and the marathon, far more than any other country (Pitsiladis et al., 2004).

The dominance of Kenyan athletes in middle and long distance running has been attributed to a number of factors. These include favorable environmental conditions, genetic endowment resulting in physiological and/or anatomical advantage (deep chests, long legs) and specific social and cultural development and motivation. The recent demographic study of Kenyan runners’ shows that both the national and international runners were also motivated to run for economic reasons, tradition and Olympic glory. For example 39% of national and 31% of international runners participate in athletics for economic empowerment (Pitsiladis et al., 2004).

Sports have been used to inculcate a sense of nationalism in Kenya. Sports are hence important in building capacities both in individuals and communities that enable them participate effectively in socio-economic development. Sports create opportunities for individuals and communities to play and work together thus creating a cohesive society that gives the foundation for a strong and prosperous nation. Sports open opportunities for cooperation between people who otherwise would not meet, for example in the annual Tecla Lorupe peace run in Kenya. Sport related initiatives, such as the Olympic Truce, provide a crucial point of consensus to the people in conflict for at least temporary ceasing of hostilities (Magglingen, 2003). The call for the Olympic Truce aspires to utilize sport initiatives and ideals to promote peace and understanding throughout the period of the Olympiads, and to provide a window of opportunity for the peaceful settlement of disputes during and after the Olympic Games (Magglingen, 2003).

Pitsiladis et al. (2004), noted that the unparallel achievements of Kenyan winners on the International running circuit are in stark contrast to Kenya’s social-economic infrastructure, where it ranks poorly in nearly every social and economic category.

**Sports tourism and sport re-imaging in the rural North Rift Region**

Sports tourism refers to all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activities, participated in casually or in an organized way for commercial or travel away from home and work locality (De Knop and Standeven, 1999). Athletics, the leading international form
of sport in the North Rift region, can be used to attract both local and international tourists in the region. Athletes, spectators and researchers travel from different parts of the world to come to train, spectate or undertake research in the North Rift region of Kenya. This enables them to train in the high altitude zone and also to train with the world best long distance runners. Due to many puzzling questions as to why the region produces the best long distance athletes in the world, researchers also visit the region to try to unravel the mystery. This unique regional image can be exploited as tourist destination to benefit the North Rift region and the country. Athletics can play a key role in adding a new impetus to the diversification of Kenya’s tourism industry. According to tourism industry’s observers, athletics hold a huge marketing potential to attract traveling fans and other tourists. Hence, with proper packaging of the athletic sports along the line of tourism, Kenya has an edge over its rivals in the global market (Mbasi, 2006).

Sport reimagining refers to a process whereby sport is deliberately exploited to modify the image of a place. It typically involves bidding for and staging events (Hillier, 1997; Whitelegg, 2000). Sport has to some extent been used in promotional literature and other tourism marketing activities. However, sport reimagining involves a more comprehensive approach, where sport is used as a central theme of reimagining efforts. For example, Perth in Australia has marketed itself as the city of sporting events, while Lake Placid is named as the winter sports capital of the United States to attract tourists (Kurtzman, 2001). In the United Kingdom, several cities have employed their recent designation as national cities of sport in tourism marketing initiatives. The North Rift region in Kenya is emerging as an important sport related tourist destination. Unlike other sport destinations in the cities which attract huge crowds of spectators, the North Rift region is a high altitude training ground famous for producing long distance runners. The training ground mainly benefits private agencies and individuals who have established training camps which are used by athletes from all over the world.

The aim of this paper is to investigate athletics as a source of income in the North Rift region of Kenya, in order to get a first grip on the economic potential of sports tourism in the North Rift region.

Study methods

To provide sufficient evidence to meet the above mentioned research aim, the earnings by athletes were analyzed. Both secondary literature and a combination of semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys were used to generate the required information. Secondary data on earnings by athletes were derived from the database of the Association of Road Racing Statisticians (ARRS, 2005).

To address the difficulty of defining who should be included within this sample set, potential sport athletes’ respondents were defined as athletes training in training camps. The intention of using athletes training in camps for study was necessary to avoid freelance athletes training in the region since they are mainly composed of beginners who may not have participated in national and international championships. There are 24 training camps located within five districts of the North Rift Region. Individual participants were selected from eight training camps which were randomly selected from the five districts (see table 1).
These training camps were selected as they provided the best opportunity within each district to access a broad range of sport athletes from different socio-economic groups. Athletes respondents were randomly selected using a computer from the latest record of registered number of athletes in the training camps. In total 175 respondents participated in the study. Although the total number of people involved in the study was relatively small, the sample was closely representative of the entire population of about 2,500 athletes who train in the region. Because of the refusal of some athletes to participate in the study, the researcher also identified and approached other suitable and willing respondents. A disadvantage of this survey was that it became very difficult during the latter stages of fieldwork to link the earnings by athletes with rural livelihood. Hence, this problem resulted in some minor discrepancies where the socio-economic profiles of the respondents cannot be compared with that of the rural population. Nevertheless, the methods used ultimately delivered a sample that reflects the economic status of athletes accrued from sports.

The large amount of qualitative and quantitative information collected from sport athletes was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 11.0 software. In the results first the accrued earnings by athletes and the role of sports in the whole of Kenya are discussed. After this the results focus on and discuss the case study of the north Rift region, the training camps established there and the medals and cash won by athletes.

Results and discussion

Accrued earnings from running in Kenya

Athletes have a common belief that when you are poor, you will stay poor unless you run and that 90% of the Kenyan runners who achieve international results are born poor hence they are motivated to run to escape poverty (Wirz, 2005). According to data compiled by Track profile, an online athletics news service, Kenyan athletes pocketed Ksh. 400 million ($5 million) in prize money in 2004 (table 2). An estimated Ksh. 280 million ($3.5 million) was earned by male athletes in 2005 (Njambi, 2006) excluding appearance fees and endorsement fees from sponsors. Since 1980, Kenyan athletes have earned Ksh. 3.6 billion ($43 million) (Njambi, 2006).
In 2005, Kenya was the largest producer of athletes in the world with over 500 runners competing in all the races all over the world, who earned half of the Ksh. 1.06 billion paid out as prize money (Njambi, 2006). On average, a winning shoe at the Olympics earns an athlete Ksh. 2 million with annual endorsement. According to Njenga (2004), in 2004 track profiles lists seven Kenyans including two who changed nationalities among the top earners in the world. Mr. Bernard Lagat, now a US citizen, earned Ksh. 10 million in prize money. Mr. Said Saeed Shaheen, now a Qatari, and Paul Korir earned Ksh. 9.3 million and Ksh. 8.8 million, respectively. The highest athlete earned in excess of Ksh. 100 million ($ 1.2 million). True earnings are probably many times what the prize money is paid out. Top athletes also make money either from appearance fees in order to lend a particular event an air of prestige and up the stakes of breaking records and or from product endorsement from companies like Nike and Adidas. The Kenyan economy benefits from the money which accrues from athletics and in more other ways through media exposures that would cost millions if the country was to pay for print, television and internet coverage. For instance, Kenya has been getting media exposures worth about Ksh. 560 million during the five greatest marathons in New York, Boston, Chicago, Milan and London (Njambi, 2006). The country can also capitalize on this free international media exposure to boost its image, both to sell locally made goods, tourist attractions and to get foreign investments. The North Rift region is also endowed with beautiful scenic landscapes and wildlife which can diversify tourism products.

Despite the growing importance of athletics and much of the struggling sports business, it is however not recognised in either official government statistics or policy and yet athletics is one of the fastest growing industries in export category. The effect of the money athletes earn can make a big impact in rural development and in creating jobs. The bulk of top Kenyan athletes, come from the North Rift region and have invested hundreds of million shillings in the regional towns.

Sports industry generates at least $5 million (Ksh. 390 million) annually for Kenya in form of prize money, appearance fees from athletics meetings, competitions, promoters and
bonuses from kit manufacturers (Njenga, 2004). Athletes are taxed heavily amounting to 45% of their earnings in state and federal taxes and agency fees abroad. Apparently, the foreign income earned by athletes is a leading source of foreign exchange but it is not acknowledged in economic surveys with other exports like coffee and tea (Njenga, 2004). The government of Kenya has over the last five years been honoring athletes who have excelled well while representing the country in international competitions.

The role of sports in economic development

The high economic benefits gained by athletes in Kenya have brought change in the structure of business and society. Widespread participation in sporting activities therefore helps to generate income among a wide spectrum of the population, thus playing a vital role in alleviating poverty (GoK, 2003). Sports industry is an important source of employment and creation of wealth (GoK, 2004). The economic potential of sport is highlighted by its economic weight, resulting from activities such as the manufacture of sporting goods, sports events, sport related services and the media.

Sports can contribute to the economic development of a country through employment generation, wealth creation, construction of sports facilities and equipment. The provision of sporting goods, including foodstuffs, transport network, medicines, training equipment and other items also contributes to economic development. Sports enterprises in form of athletics training camps in the North Rift play a similar role in indigenous entrepreneurship as any other Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs).

MSEs play an important role in any country's development. In Kenya, the government has equally emphasized the key role of MSEs through various national development papers (GoK, 1992; 2005). MSEs are said to be a seedbed for indigenous entrepreneurship and national development since they energize technological capacity building and innovation diffusion, besides aiding in mobilizing capital, which would not otherwise be generated (GoK, 1992). The strategic shift towards sports tourism could generate more employment, opportunities at semi-skilled, technical and managerial levels apart from promoting cultural and heritage exchanges. The North Rift region, Kenya's western highland, is home to some of the world's finest runners, which if marketed along tourism lines could open the region to the outside world.

In the past couple of years, researchers have been visiting the North Rift region to unravel the mystery of Kenya's long distance runners. The training camps which attract visitors from abroad are recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) as high attitude training facilities (Mbasi, 2006).

Athletes training camps in the North Rift region

In the North Rift region, 24 athletes training camps were identified in five districts (see table 1) which have sprung up to tap the athletic potential and have spurred economic growth in the region. Uasin Gishu District comprised of the highest number of training camps followed by Keiyo and Marakwet district each. Nandi District had the least number of training camps. The training camps have employed a support staff in different sectors whose earnings in terms of salary contributes towards their livelihood. Equally, the training camps have attracted different kinds of businesses whose earnings also contribute towards local people livelihoods. The physical conditions of North Rift region with an
average attitude of 2000 m above sea level and the lower oxygen levels at this height make it ideal for the training of long distance runners (Vesely, 2000).

Dr Gabriella Rosa, an Italian physician, established the first athletics training camp in the region in 1993 at Kaptagat Hotel. Many other camps followed thereafter at Kapsabet, Kapkoi, Ngong and Mt. Elgon. Some of the Kenyan re-known athletes have used their earnings to set up training camps including Lorna Kiplagat camp which train young women athletes. A multitude of training camps have been established in the region by companies such as the London based KIM International Management and the Dutch owned Global Sports Management. The companies recruit up coming local young athletes in order to earn the high fees deriving from the athletes’ income. Other training camps are sponsored by world sports bodies like Nike, Puma or Adidas.

The training camps do not always have training tracks and have to outsource them. Some of the training tracks that are outsourced include Kamariny stadium, the Kipkeino stadium and Moi University’s Chepkoilel Campus. The International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have also build a modern high performance training centre which offers specialized coaching in middle and long distance running for athletes from other African countries (Vesely, 2000).

If wealthy athletes, together with sports federations and development agencies set up training camps, and ensure young upcoming athletes are trained, they could produce more than just the next generation of world athletic champions for Kenya. According to Shontz (2002), training camps could produce productive citizens and better lives for untold productive citizens and improve lives for many people.

The athletes’ choice of training camps is usually decided by the agent. However, the athletes whose sponsors do not have training camps are booked in training camp with good facilities, equipment and services. Training camps enhance performance among a combination of other factors using a training curriculum that teaches training methods and lifestyle (Wirz, 2005). Training camps also offer a variety of services which require specialized professionals to oversee and hence employment opportunities. The earnings accrued as salaries and wages by employees boost their livelihood. Some of the services provided include coaching and training; accommodation and meals; counseling of athletes; medical services; and telephone and internet services. These are serviced by facilities such as a medical clinic, cafeteria, athletics track, massage room, gymnasium and swimming pool. However, not all training camps have all the facilities and services needed which are hence outsourced.

Medals and cash won by athletes’ respondents in the North Rift region

Most (90, n=175) athletes respondents interviewed have won awards including cash, certificates, trophies or medals during competitions (see table 3). 24 respondents have won a total of 58 gold medals. 26 athletes have won 46 silver medals while 24 athletes have won 34 bronze medals. These medals are usually accompanied by cash which is paid to the winners hence contributing towards economic wellbeing of the athletes (table 4). The cash varies depending on the type of event and the medal won.
Table 3: Number of medals won by athletes’ respondents interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Number of medals</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</table>

The majority of the respondents (45%, n=104 for the question; because not all respondents were willing to answer this question) have not received any cash award. For those who have received cash award, a large number of the respondents (32%) received money less than Ksh. 50,000 while 14% received money ranging between Ksh. 101,000 and 500,000. The low amount of money reflected here may not be a true reflection of what athletes earn since most athlete respondents were not willing to divulge the exact amount of money earned. However, it shows the extent to which athletics can be a source of income to households and hence to livelihood improvement.

Table 4: Amount of money won by athletes’ respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount (Ksh.)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50,000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51,000-100,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101,000-500,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 500,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43.3</td>
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</table>

Conclusion

This paper departs from the common emphasis in the hallmark literature on tourism in Kenya on the relationship between the tourist earnings accruing from nature based resources. Instead, it contributes to the literature examining the contribution of athletes’ sports, a form of tourism, particularly in economic benefits derived from running. As a study examining individual athletes, the paper sought to explore the importance of a specific and unique rural area being a source of internationally recognized long distance
athletes who have subsequently derived a lot of economic benefits based on their excellent performance in local and international athletic championships.

Conducting surveys with the athletes respondents provided a unique insight into how athletes derive economic incentives from running. However, retrieving information about earnings from respondents whose appearance was the first contact with the researcher proved sometimes extremely difficult. One expression of this often minimalist responses, often respondents were not willing to answer the questionnaire, especially experienced senior athletes. Therefore, the survey seems less satisfactory for eliciting responses from senior and wealthy athletes. Certainly, the results of these surveys suggest it is difficult to get the actual benefits accrued by athletes probably for security reasons.

The results suggest that the region has the potential of growing into an important tourist destination. The number of athletics training camps in the North Rift region is on the increase and hence should be managed as business enterprises since they have created employment and business for the local communities. The camps offer services to athletes, by providing training environments to enhance their performance. Therefore, there is a serious need to address interventions that would create better environment for these enterprises especially in regard to service provision. This could be done through training of the managers of the training camps on best management practices of the business in order to improve profitability.

The athletics training camps are part of the micro and small enterprise (MSEs) with a potentially high job creation for the athletes, coaches, managers and other support staff. Camps provide coaching and training services, accommodation, meals, counseling services and medical services. They also provide telephone, internet services, park visits and investments training to athletes. Since camps have the potential of being a major tool with which to reduce poverty they should be encouraged and supported like any other MSE's. The training camps also attract tourists and hence they should be promoted as important sports tourism attractions.

The camps should hence be equipped with adequate facilities and equipment to ensure faster growth of the enterprises. It was also evident from the study that those athletes who trained at the camps performed better than those who trained individually (Gitao, 2008). The training camps should be marketed to attract more customers both local and foreign to take advantage of the high altitude factor and a chance to train with the world's best in long distance races. The training camp owners should carry out a needs assessment by clients and seek financial assistance from financial institutions to improve the facilities and equipment. Where the facilities are too expensive for the enterprise good facilities should be outsourced.

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