



Sowing the Seeds of Tourism Growth among Peripheral Rural Communities: Evaluating the Contribution of Missionaries' Guesthouses to Tourism Development in West Pokot County, Kenya

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Abstract

Despite their many years of existence in rural areas offering services to rural recreationists, little is known about the contribution of missionaries' guesthouses (MGHs) in West Pokot County to tourism development in the area. That is, despite their potential to support tourism growth in these rural areas which lack most basic tourism support infrastructures, these MGHs have not featured in discussions on spreading tourism to rural areas. This paper examined the potential Contribution of MGHs to tourism development and management in West Pokot County, Kenya. The study was guided by Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model developed by Butler in 1980. Sequential explanatory research design was employed integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population included 7,103 households, 550 on Missionary Guesthouses (MGHs) guests, 11 MGH managers, 11 MGH management committee members, 4 Church Income-Generating Unit (IGU) managers, and 2 county tourism officers in West Pokot County. A sample size of 369 households and 236 MGH guests was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, while all key informants were included through a census approach. Simple random sampling was applied to select households and guests, whereas purposive sampling was used for key informants. Data collection utilized structured and semi-structured questionnaires for households and guests, and in-depth interviews for key informants. A pilot study was conducted to ensure instrument reliability and validity, with Cronbach's Alpha used to test reliability. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to derive key insights into MGHs' contributions to tourism. Findings indicate that MGHs play a significant role in supporting rural tourism. Stakeholders agreed that MGHs contribute to tourism viability (Mean = 4.266, SD = 0.490) and

promote the county as a tourist destination (Mean = 4.255, SD = 0.563). They also provide essential resources, improve governance and management skills (Mean = 3.937, SD = 0.704), and serve as flagship tourism development projects (Mean = 4.048, SD = 0.532). However, infrastructure challenges persist, as indicated by the relatively lower mean score for accessibility improvements (Mean = 3.667, SD = 0.573). Guest perspectives further affirm the positive impact of MGHs on tourism. Over 80% of guests acknowledged their contribution to tourism viability and marketing of the region. Qualitative findings from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that MGHs act as tourism incubators, setting quality standards, providing human resource training, and promoting a community-led tourism model. The study concludes that MGHs have played a transformative role in promoting community-based rural tourism in West Pokot County. Their contributions range from infrastructure development and skills training to tourism governance and marketing. The study recommends that in order to enhance rural tourism in West Pokot County, the county government should collaborate with missionaries to develop a locally relevant tourism policy aligned with community needs. Missionaries should take the lead in defining tourism service standards, developing tourism products, and providing hospitality training to local communities to improve service quality.

Key words: Missionaries' Guesthouses, Peripheral Rural Communities, Tourism growth, West Pokot County

Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized as a key driver of economic development worldwide, significantly contributing to employment, income generation and regional growth (Sharpley, 2001; Keyser, 2009; Samimi, Sadeghi & Sadeghi, 2011; UNWTO, 2013; Makomere, 2024). The sector's expansion has led many countries to integrate tourism into their national economic strategies (Ong'anya, 2024). In Kenya, tourism contributes approximately 10% to the GDP, employs about 1.6 million people directly and indirectly, and remains a key foreign exchange earner (WTTC, 2023). Despite this significance, the sector's benefits have been unevenly distributed, with traditional tourism hubs such as coastal areas, wildlife reserves, and urban centers receiving the majority of investments, while peripheral regions remain underdeveloped (Akama, 1999; Gitau, Njuguna & Wahome, 2022).

Tourism has the potential to transform rural and peripheral economies by diversifying livelihoods and reducing dependency on traditional sectors such as agriculture and pastoralism (Rongna & Sun, 2020; UNWTO, 2013). However, tourism development in these regions faces several barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited private sector investment, and marginalization of local communities in decision-making processes (Bakker, 2019). The lack of diversified tourism offerings and marketing efforts further inhibits the growth of tourism in such areas.

Kenya's northern regions, including West Pokot County, have largely been left out of the tourism mainstream despite their rich cultural heritage, scenic landscapes, and unique flora and fauna. These areas remain economically fragile, with communities relying on pastoralism and subsistence farming sectors increasingly threatened by climate change, insecurity, and resource scarcity. Given the limited formal employment opportunities, alternative economic activities such as tourism could play a transformative role in fostering development and resilience among these communities.

Historically, Christian missionaries have played a key role in rural development in Kenya, particularly in sectors such as education, health, and agriculture (Ochanda, 2012). Many of these missionaries established operational bases in remote areas where infrastructure was inadequate, leading them to construct residential and office facilities. Upon the completion of their missions, these properties were handed over to local churches and repurposed as guesthouses. These guesthouses, now owned by local communities through church institutions, serve as some of the few quality accommodation facilities in these regions, providing an opportunity for tourism growth.

Missionaries' guesthouses offer a unique avenue for expanding tourism in West Pokot by addressing accommodation shortages, promoting community-led tourism initiatives, and integrating cultural and religious tourism into the broader tourism framework. Unlike commercial hotels that operate on a profit-maximization model, these guesthouses prioritize community development, reinvesting revenues into local projects, thus ensuring sustainable tourism benefits for host communities (UNWTO, 2023). While tourism development in Kenya has been extensively studied, most research focuses on mainstream destinations such as the Maasai Mara, Mombasa, and Nairobi (Akama, 1999; Gitau et al., 2022). Limited empirical studies have explored the role of missionaries' guesthouses in facilitating tourism development in peripheral regions. Additionally, previous studies have not sufficiently addressed the socio-economic contributions of these guesthouses or their potential in anchoring sustainable community-led tourism models.

This study fills this gap by examining the role of missionaries' guesthouses in tourism development in West Pokot County, evaluating their impact on local economic growth, employment creation, and community participation in tourism activities. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader discourse on tourism diversification and the localization of tourism benefits, aligning with Kenya's Vision 2030 strategy to promote home-grown tourism initiatives. The study was guided by the following specific research questions:

1. Are missionaries' Guesthouses in West Pokot County support marketing of the area as a tourist destination?
2. Do the activities and programmes of the Missionaries' Guesthouses in west Pokot County support tourism developments in the area?
3. Are the Missionaries' Guesthouses in West Pokot County building the local community's capacity for tourism development?
4. Are the Missionaries' Guesthouses in West Pokot County contributing to the opening up the area for sustainable community-based rural tourism developments?

Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model. The model was developed by Richard W. Butler in 1980 and is a widely used framework for understanding the evolutionary stages of tourist destinations over time. The model outlines six stages of a destination's evolution: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either decline or rejuvenation (Butler, 1980). In the exploration stage, tourism is minimal, with independent travelers seeking unspoiled environments. Infrastructure is basic, and local communities play a key role in hosting visitors (Sharpley, 2014). The involvement stage sees increased visitor numbers, prompting local engagement in tourism-related activities. Small-scale accommodations and services emerge, with growing interest

from investors and policymakers (Hall, 2005; Cooper & Hall, 2008). During the development stage, tourism expands due to investment in infrastructure and marketing, attracting large numbers of tourists. However, commercialization may lead to social and environmental challenges such as cultural commodification and overcrowding (Butler, 1980; Getz, 1992; Weaver, 2011). The consolidation stage marks peak popularity, with large tourism enterprises dominating. Growth slows, and concerns over environmental degradation and cultural loss intensify (Papatheodorou, 2004; Sharpley, 2014). The stagnation stage occurs when the destination reaches its capacity limit, causing visitor numbers to plateau or decline due to overdevelopment and shifting preferences (Butler, 2006). Destinations must adopt sustainable tourism policies to maintain viability (Hall, 2005; Weaver, 2011). The final phase leads to either decline, where tourism dwindles, or rejuvenation, achieved through strategies like ecotourism, heritage conservation, or diversification (Butler, 1980; Sharpley, 2014). The TALC model is relevant to this study as it highlights West Pokot County's early-stage tourism development, where missionaries' guesthouses serve as foundational infrastructure, attracting visitors and promoting local participation.

Literature Review

The Meaning of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism has been defined as dedicated travel to rural areas with relatively undisturbed ecosystems and ethno-cultural complexes, which directly impact rural development and are subject to control for sustainable rural growth (Ivolga & Erokhin, 2013). It involves organized travels to rural areas, providing a comprehensive tourism product (accommodation, meals, excursions, and entertainment) while preserving the natural and cultural identity of regions and ensuring economic benefits for local communities (Ivolga, 2014). Rural tourism also diversifies income opportunities in rural areas, offering alternative sources of revenue for local populations. In some cases, rural tourism manifests as city dwellers vacationing in the countryside and leasing rural dwellings (Zdorov, 2009). Empirical studies have looked at various aspects of rural tourism, pointing out its potential benefits, challenges and the role of community involvement in fostering sustainable development. A study conducted by Wang, Wang, Niu and Song (2022) focusing on rural leisure tourism satisfaction found that under national development strategies, rural tourism has become a significant avenue for economic growth, offering new opportunities for local communities

Tourism in Peripheral Areas

The term periphery has been adopted from development economics and applied in the tourism development discourse to differentiate between areas of high and low tourism development concentrations. According to Botterill, et al (2002), there are salient characteristics that tend to define peripheral area which include among others: Low levels of economic vitality and are dependent on traditional industries; are more rural and remote; have in most cases high scenic values; have an aging and declining population; are reliant on imported technology and information; are remote from decision making and feel alienated; have poor infrastructure and amenities. These areas are geographically isolated from the core and are distant from core spheres of activity, poor access to and from markets, hence are economically marginalized with much of the business activity confined to micro-business, Brown and Hall (2008). This therefore means that there is disparity in terms of developments,

income levels and even well-being between the center and the periphery, Brown and Hall (2008). However, in terms of tourism development, peripheries are perceived by guests/tourists to possess certain unique attributes such as natural beauty, quaintness, unspoilt and authentic. These attributes are what supports the growth of tourism in these areas. That is, tourism has the potential to reduce regional disparities by spurring developments in the peripheral spaces which are endowed with unique tourism resources that are deficient to the core hence making them uniquely attractive (Hellmann, 2011).

Table 1: The gap between tourism development requirements and characteristics of rural peripheral areas

Common requirements for tourism development	Common characteristics of rural and peripheral areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A product, or potential product • Access – transport infrastructure, limited distance, limited discomfort • Investment in facilities • Skills in service, hospitality • Regular and quality inputs, e.g. of food and other supplies • Marketing skills • Government investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable. May have a high-value unique selling point, may be an attractive desired location for travelers from cities, may have little to offer • Distant from cities, poor roads, few trains/buses/planes • Limited access to financial capital, affordable credit and private investment. • Low skills (skills migrate) • Undeveloped commercial production, distant from markets • Lower concentration of tourism products in one place • Low priority for governments, particularly tourism/trade ministries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa

Source: Holland et al, 2003

The challenge facing tourism development among rural peripheral communities

Despite the tourism resource endowments associated with rural peripheral areas identified above, these areas have not yet harnessed their tourism development potential because of inherent tourism development challenges which include the following among others: lack of control over possible tourism impacts, lack of funding and political support and a heightened likelihood of conflict within the peripheral community, Buhalis et al, (1999). Table 3 below captures some of the challenges facing rural and peripheral communities in the quest to develop their tourism sector as identified in literature.

Table 2: Challenges facing tourism development among rural peripheral communities.

Challenge	Source
Great lack of inconsistency with regards to the quality of services provided and they can vary to a greater or lesser extent	(Meyer-Chec, 2005)
Inability to attract qualified staffs (Limited staff capacities), lack of investment capital (finances) which may force them to join forces with established firms and destinations for more efficient implementation of destination management and marketing programs.	Mitchell and Hall, (2005)
Lack of understanding and/or misunderstanding of the concept of the rural tourism, coupled with the wrong initial assumptions about the simple and easy generation market, income and employment	Sharpley, (2002)
Non-compliance with the development objectives of local governments and development agencies, and as a result of inadequate communication, lack of confidence, and lack of shared vision of development	(Nylander and Hall, 2005)
Lack of planning for further development and limited use of marketing concept as a business philosophy that leads to the lack of information about the tourists' needs and desires	Clarke, (2005)
Lack of funds for starting and/or continuation of business as a result of insufficient understanding and support from the state, banking and other financial institutions, especially in transition countries.	(Demonja and Ružić, 2011);
Lack of information on the possibilities and opportunities for further development of tourism, leading to disconnection of villages in a unique tourist product and lack of support of local, regional and governmental entities	(Sharpley, 2002);

Addressing Tourism Development Challenges: The Role of Missionary Guesthouses

A guesthouse is a residential dwelling providing accommodation and public spaces for guests, often operated in a small-scale, family-style environment (George, 2012). In the context of this study, missionary guesthouses in West Pokot County represent a unique form of rural tourism infrastructure. These guesthouses were originally used by church missionaries engaged in health, education, environmental, and spiritual work. Upon their departure, these establishments were handed over to local churches to operate as income-generating entities. Missionary guesthouses contribute to tourism development by preserving Christian values, promoting cultural exchange, and providing authentic experiences for visitors. They offer employment opportunities to local residents and serve as entry points for tourism growth in remote regions. Through attracting visitors to rural communities, missionary guesthouses facilitate community-based rural tourism, ensuring that tourism benefits remain within the local population. This model aligns with the TALC framework, which emphasizes community involvement and sustainable tourism practices to prevent stagnation or decline.

Research Gap

While existing literature explores rural and peripheral tourism challenges, limited studies examine the role of community-led initiatives, such as missionary guesthouses, in addressing these barriers. Furthermore, recent research on rural tourism primarily focuses on

economic potential and policy frameworks, with minimal attention to faith-based accommodation as a driver for rural tourism growth. This study fills this gap by investigating how missionary guesthouses contribute to tourism development in West Pokot County.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted in eleven (11) villages across the four sub-counties of West Pokot County, Kenya. The county is situated in the Rift Valley region and shares borders with Uganda. It is characterized by a predominantly rural setting with a mix of pastoralist and agricultural communities. West Pokot has historically faced economic marginalization due to its geographical remoteness, inadequate infrastructure, and limited tourism development. However, the presence of Missionary Guesthouses (MGHs) has contributed to tourism growth, providing accommodations for visitors while supporting community-based tourism initiatives. These guesthouses serve as essential infrastructure for tourism, attracting faith-based travelers, researchers, and other visitors interested in rural tourism experiences.

Research Design

The study adopted a sequential explanatory research design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of MGHs to rural tourism development. The study began with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative methods to provide deeper insights into the findings. The mixed-method approach ensured a robust examination of the role of MGHs by integrating statistical data with experiential narratives from key informants.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprised 7,103 households within the eleven villages in West Pokot County. Additionally, 550 guests who had previously stayed at the MGHs were included in the target population. The study also involved 11 MGH managers, 11 MGH management committee members, four (4) Church Income-Generating Unit (IGU) managers, and two (2) county government tourism officers. These categories of respondents were chosen because they directly engage with tourism activities and have firsthand knowledge of the impact of MGHs on tourism development.

Sample Size

A representative sample was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table. Based on the total population, the study adopted a sample size of 369 households and 236 MGH guests. Additionally, all 11 MGH managers, 11 MGH management committee members, 4 Church IGU managers, and 2 county government tourism officers were included in the study using a census approach, given their small numbers and significance in decision-making regarding MGHs. Table 3 below indicate the villages that were selected.

Table 3: The Study Sites (Villages) within West Pokot County

Sub-County	Sub-Location	Village	Missionaries' guesthouses
Pokot Central	Seito	Chesta	Chesta ELCK Guesthouse
	Orwa	Marich	Marich RCEA Guesthouse
	Mbara	Mbara	Sengelel ELCK Guesthouse
Pokot South	Propoi	Propoi	Propoi E.L.C.K Guesthouse
	Chewoyet	Chewoyet	Kapenguria E.L.C.K Guesthouse
West Pokot	Sook	Chepnyal	Chepnyal Catholic Community guesthouse
Pokot North	Cherangan	Cherangan	Cherangan AIC guesthouse
	Kiwawa	Kiwawa	Kiwawa Baptist Guesthouse
	Kauriong	Akiriamet	Akiriamet AIC guesthouse
	Amakuriat	Amakuriat	Amakuriat Catholic guesthouse (Visitor's parlour)
	Naruoro	Naruoro	Alale AIC guesthouse

Source: Researcher, 2017

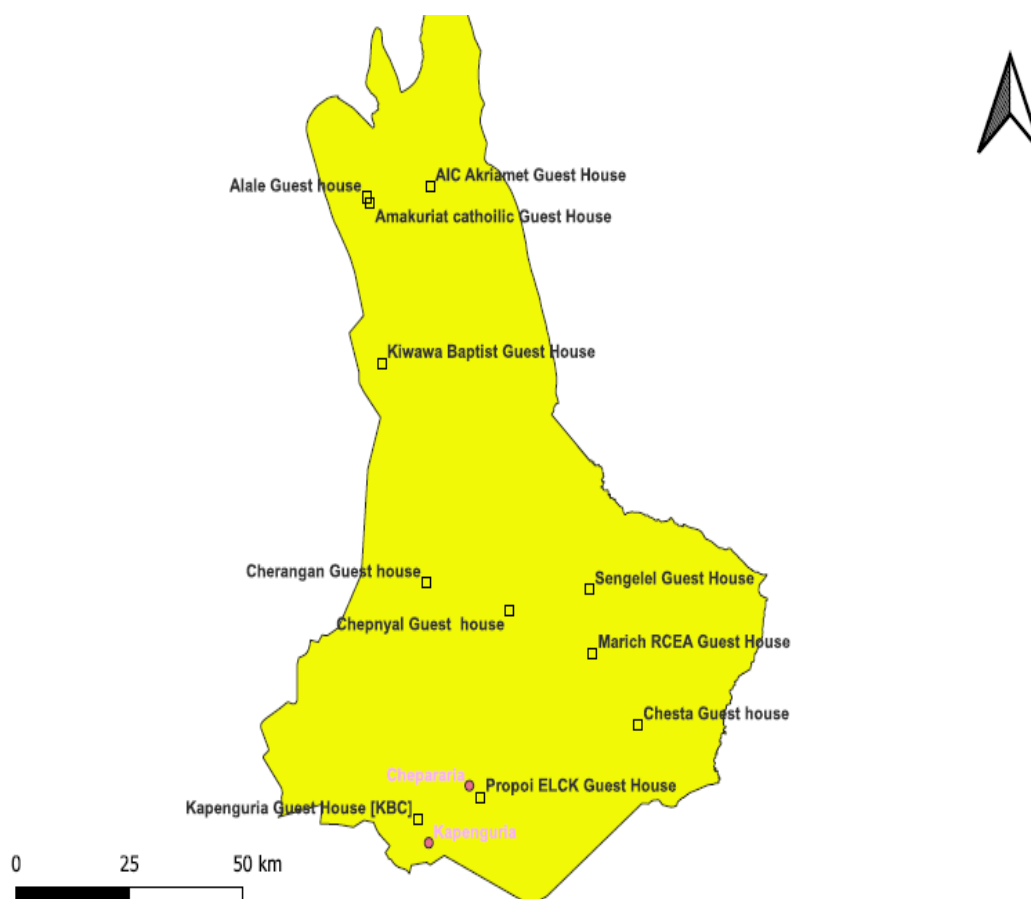


Figure 1: Map of West Pokot County showing the location of the MGHS

Sampling Procedures

A combination of random sampling and purposive sampling was applied in this study. Simple random sampling was used to select 369 households from the 7,103 households in the study area, ensuring that each household had an equal chance of inclusion. Similarly, the 236 MGH guests were selected randomly from a list of past visitors to minimize selection bias. Purposive sampling was applied to select the 11 MGH managers, 11 MGH management committee members, 4 Church IGU managers, and 2 county government tourism officers. These individuals were chosen based on their roles in managing and overseeing MGH operations, making them key informants with valuable insights into the impact of these facilities on tourism development.

Research Instruments

Structured and semi-structured questionnaires were administered to household members and MGH guests. The questionnaires contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture demographic data, perceptions of tourism growth, and experiences with MGH services. In-depth interviews were conducted with MGH managers, MGH management committees, Church IGU managers, and county tourism officers. The interviews were designed to explore qualitative aspects of MGH contributions, challenges faced, and opportunities for enhancing rural tourism.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in one village within West Pokot County that was not included in the main study. The pilot involved 30 respondents (15 households, 10 MGH guests, and 5 key informants). The objective of the pilot study was to test the reliability, validity, and clarity of the research instruments. Feedback from the pilot study helped refine the questionnaire wording, interview questions, and data collection procedures before full-scale implementation.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

Content validity was ensured through expert review and pre-testing. The research instruments were examined by academic supervisors and tourism experts to ensure they effectively captured all relevant aspects of MGH contributions to rural tourism. Construct validity was maintained by aligning the questionnaire and interview items with the study objectives. Reliability of the questionnaires was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 and above was considered acceptable. The test-retest method was also used to check the consistency of responses over time. Any inconsistencies identified in the pilot phase were addressed by refining the questions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. Data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussions

Demographic profile of respondents

Among the non-staff respondents (household heads), the majority were male (52.8%), while among the MGH staff, the majority (54%) were female, indicating that the missionaries' guesthouses employ more women than men. Regarding age distribution, the majority of non-staff respondents (40.2%) were in the 36–45 age bracket, while a similar trend was observed among staff, with 37.9% falling within the same age range. In terms of marital status, the majority (70.1%) of non-staff respondents and 74.75% of staff indicated that they were currently married. Additionally, the majority (57.4%) of MGH guests were male, with most (34.2%) falling within the 20–29 age bracket, and 58.7% of guests reporting that they were married. Regarding guests' level of education, the majority (41.9%) had attained a university-level education, while in terms of occupation, the largest proportion (42.6%) were employed by NGOs or CBOs.

Local Communities' Perceptions of Missionaries' Guesthouses as Catalysts for Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in West Pokot County, Kenya

Developing tourism in rural destinations, particularly those with inadequate infrastructure, presents significant challenges for investors seeking quick returns. To stimulate tourism growth in such areas, flagship projects are essential in laying the foundation for future investments. This study examined the role of missionaries' guesthouses in fostering community-based rural tourism in West Pokot County, Kenya. Specifically, it explored how these guesthouses contribute to tourism development by equipping local communities with hospitality skills, providing visitor accommodation, and enhancing tourism awareness. Respondents were provided with a 5-point likert scale to rate their perception where 5=strongly agree; 4=Agree; 3=Undecided; 2=Disagree and 1=strongly Disagree.

The findings on stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of Missionaries' Guesthouses (MGHs) to sustainable community-based rural tourism development indicate a generally positive impact. Respondents strongly agreed that MGHs play a critical role in supporting rural tourism by providing accommodation to tourists (Mean = 4.266, SD = 0.490). Additionally, MGHs were perceived as significant contributors to promoting and marketing the area as a tourism destination (Mean = 4.255, SD = 0.563). The study also found that MGHs contribute significantly to developing local communities' tourism and hospitality skills (Mean = 4.137, SD = 0.471) and act as flagship projects for tourism development (Mean = 4.048, SD = 0.532). Furthermore, MGHs were reported to positively transform the touristic image of the community (Mean = 4.026, SD = 0.540), which enhances the overall attractiveness of the area. Respondents acknowledged that MGHs stimulate tourism development within their locality (Mean = 4.015, SD = 0.694) and improve the community's capacity for tourism management and governance (Mean = 3.937, SD = 0.704). Additionally, they provide essential physical, financial, and human resources for tourism growth (Mean = 3.897, SD = 0.624) and enhance local ownership of the tourism sector (Mean = 3.867, SD = 0.581). However, while MGHs were found to improve accessibility in West Pokot County, this aspect received the lowest mean score (Mean = 3.667, SD = 0.573), indicating that infrastructure development remains a challenge in the area. Overall, the findings suggest

that MGHs are key in promoting rural tourism by providing key resources, enhancing local skills, and positioning the community as an emerging tourism destination. However, further efforts may be required to improve infrastructure and accessibility to fully capitalize on their tourism potential. These findings align with the study by Ivolga and Erokhin (2013), which pointed out the significance of rural tourism in promoting regional development and preserving cultural identity.

Table 4: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Missionaries' Guesthouses' Contributions to Rural Tourism Development (Staffs and non-staffs, n=358)

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
Missionaries' Guesthouses have stimulated tourism developments in our locality	79.0	19.9	1.1	4.015	0.694
MGHs have developed and improved our capacity for management and governance of tourism among community members	76.4	21.4	2.2	3.937	0.704
MGHs provides physical, financial and human resources that are essential for the local tourism growth	80.1	17.3	2.6	3.897	0.624
MHG's enhances local ownership of their own tourism sector in our community	77.9	21.0	1.1	3.867	0.581
MGHs has contributed to the development of local communities' tourism & hospitality skills	94.8	5.2	0	4.137	0.471
MGHs continue to support rural tourism by providing accommodation to rural tourists	97.8	2.2	0	4.266	0.490
MGHs positively transform the touristic image of the area/community	86.7	13.3	0	4.026	0.540
MGHs has acted as tourism development flagship projects the area	90.4	8.5	1.1	4.048	0.532
MGHs has significantly Promoted and marketed our area as a tourism destination	93.7	6.3	0	4.255	0.563
MGHs in West Pokot County has improved accessibility	74.9	21.0	3.1	3.667	0.573

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Guests' Perceptions of the Role of Missionaries' Guesthouses in Community-Based Tourism Development

Guests constitute an important stakeholder in tourism development and their input while developing a destination's tourism is very critical. In this study, the opinion of the MGHs guests regarding the integral role of the guesthouses in tourism development. Guests were presented with statements and were required to rate the extent to which they were satisfied with the different aspects of the guesthouse. The findings are presented in table 5 below.

Table 5: Guests' Perceptions of Missionaries' Guesthouses and Their Contribution to Tourism Development

Statement on the extent to which MGHs in the area support community-based rural tourism development (Views of the MGH guests)	Strongly Agree (F, %)	Agree (F, %)	Undecided (F, %)	Disagree (F, %)	Strongly Disagree (F, %)
MGHs contribute to the viability of the tourism industry in the area	27(17.4%)	128(82.6%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
MGHs support tourism industry in this area	22(14.2%)	131(84.5%)	2(1.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
MGHs market West Pokot County as a tourist destination in the North Rift	20(12.9%)	131(84.5%)	2(1.3%)	1(0.6%)	1(0.6%)
MGHs has the ability to harness the areas' rich tourism potential of this area	16(10.3%)	129(83.7%)	7(4.5%)	6(0.9%)	1(0.6%)

Source: Survey Data, 2017

From the results, the guests strongly agreed (17.4%) and agreed (82.6%) that MGHs contributed to the viability of the tourism industry in the area; 14.2% strongly agreed and 84.5% agreed that MGHs supported the growth of tourism in the area; 12.9% strongly agreed and 84.5% agreed that MGHs had potential to market West Pokot County as a tourist destination in the North Rift region. These perceptions align with previous research highlighting the positive impact of faith-based accommodations on rural tourism development. For instance, Ng'oriarita (2020) reported that missionaries' guesthouses in West Pokot County significantly contribute to human resource development by imparting essential hospitality skills through on-the-job training, thereby laying a foundation for tourism in these rural areas. Similarly, Moyer et al. (2011) discuss the broader role of faith-based organizations in international development, noting their contributions to environmental sustainability and community development, which are key for promoting tourism.

Qualitative Findings

Research Question: *What are the stakeholders' views about the role and contributions of missionaries' guesthouses towards sustainable community-based rural tourism development in West Pokot County, Kenya?*

Interview theme 1: Role of MGHs in Opening up the area for sustainable community-based rural tourism developments

Being the only hospitality establishments in the rural areas, the MGHs have positioned as the major tourism development flagships in the area. Guests residing in the guesthouses have too participated in several tourism activities like mountain hiking, homestead visits, bird watching, sightseeing, and visit to market centers among other. The guesthouse has also been able to train local guides on-the job who in turn facilitate the guests as they tour around.

"I have worked in this guesthouse for the last 7 years and I can say that the guesthouse is a flagship tourism facility in this area, this is the only place where visitors get a place to rest. It is a good thing that supports tourism and even if it is not fully developed, it is a good beginning to tourism in this area. The guesthouse is having potential to set the tone and pace of tourism development in this area"-Manager, MGH 1.

"Recently, we hosted the guest who is now the first paraglider in the entire county, he went to the mountain cliff in the morning and then flew to Wei-Wei, local were awed by the sight of the paraglider in the sky. This is a new thing in the area and I can tell you, from that day, our clients have gone up, more and more clients are calling to inquire about this place, I think we are adding unto the overall tourism development in this region"-Manager, MGH 3

"The MGHs this County and even Kenya at large presents a unique opportunity to develop rural tourism as well as to harness the touristic potential of these areas. By virtue of being owned by the local community through their local church, this guesthouse therefore presents an excellent opportunity to develop community-based tourism with a wider benefit to majority of the local community members"- Manager, MGH 7

Further, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with the 11 MGH committee members was undertaken; and it emerged that the MGHs greatly support tourism development in the area. Responses from the FGD revealed that the committee members hold strong opinion that the MGHs which the management of behalf of the local community church members play a crucial role in promoting their community for as a tourist destination.

"This is our only place where we receive our visitors were it not because of this guesthouse, visitors would not stop at our area, they would have passed us and may be land in other area."-FGD-MGHCM 1/11

Interview theme 2: Missionaries' Guesthouses and the incubation of a sustainable tourism model among rural communities

One of the areas captured in the interviews with the MGHs managers is the ability of the guesthouses in incubating a sustainable rural tourism. All the eleven (11) managers held a strong belief that the MGHs in the rural parts of the county have huge potential of

incubating and supporting the establishment of sustainable rural tourism in the area. The managers believe can best be captured by one guesthouse manager who had this to say during the interview: -

"In most places, tourism development is pro-investor, its top down but the MGH model here to me is the best. It is bottom-up and the local community is playing a key role. The MGHs can be used to incubate a good tourism model in other rural areas"

Table 6: Summarized KII interview responses on the contribution of MGHs to tourism development in the area (West Pokot County).

Region	Aspects of Contributions				
	Marketing	Human Resources Development	Institutional Capacity Building	Setting the right standards	Capital support
Central Pokot	Sourcing for clients especially international guests	On-the job training of staffs to work in the guesthouses	Establishment of MGH management committees	Overseeing best hospitality standards in guesthouse serves	Providing the initial capital support by constructing the house, equipping and also running
South Pokot	Sourcing for clients especially international guests	Training staffs on costing, rationing and other entrepreneurship skills	Establishment of ground rules and regulations	Equipping the guesthouses with high standard linen, cutlery and other	Coming up with the revenue distribution formula for the guesthouse earnings between the parent church, running costs and other expenses
West Pokot	Sourcing for clients especially international guests	Training staffs on costing, rationing and other entrepreneurship skills	Establishment of ground rules and regulations	Equipping the guesthouses with high standard linen, cutlery and other	Providing the initial capital support by constructing the house, equipping and also running
North Pokot	Sourcing for clients especially international guests	Training staffs on costing, rationing and other entrepreneurship skills	Establishment of ground rules and regulations	Equipping the guesthouses with high standard linen, cutlery and other	Providing the initial capital support by constructing the house, equipping and also running

Source: KII findings, 2017

KII Interviews findings on the contribution of MGHs to community-based rural tourism

The KII interview results with the MGHs managers and income generating unit managers on the contribution of the MGHs to community-based rural tourism development in West Pokot County. The findings indicated that the guesthouses play a significant role in supporting the following aspects of rural tourism:-

Interview theme 3: Meeting/providing the initial seed capital for the infrastructure development.

Tourism literature has shown that tourism investors shy away from investing in these rural areas due to low or no return to investment. It therefore becomes a bit difficult to set up a sophisticated tourism accommodation facility and other infrastructures in the area. The interview results therefore pointed out that the missionaries' guesthouses have played a pivotal role in incubating tourism development in the rural area by way of ensuring that such a good tourism support infrastructure. In most cases, this initial development costs is a challenge to many destination and communities intending to grow tourism in their localities. By building an properly equipping these guesthouses before handing over to the local churches to be run as income generating units, the missionaries helped the local communities by meting the initial cost of tourism developments. Out of the eleven (11) guesthouses under this study, the missionaries are still maintaining contact with the local management committees and they do receive donation of in terms of linen and other guesthouse equipment from the missionaries. They also support the guesthouses by paying maintenance fee for the guesthouses as 'rent'.

"We still receive great support from the missionaries' in Norway and Iceland in terms of maintaining the guesthouses. Of the five (5) houses in this ELCK village/centre, they still support us by 'paying rent' for three (5) houses the whole year. That is a big boost to us"-Income generating Unit (ICU) Manager, ELCK Church.

"I can say we are still benefiting from this missionary. Every year, he sends us new sets of linen, laundry equipment and other forms of equipment"-Manager, MHG 2.

Interview theme 4: Supporting the development of essential hospitality skills among the local community members

The in-depth interviews conducted on how t

he MGHs have contributed to tourism development in the area pointed out the imparting of hospitality skills to the members of the local communities. Since tourism is new in the locality, no much of trained hospitality human resources are available. The local community who is trying to transit from pastoralism and subsistence agriculture to tourism do not have adequate tourism and hospitality skill endowments. The local community generally lack knowledge and tourism development and management and the initial skills are provided through the on-the job trainings offered by the missionaries' guesthouse. Workshops on entrepreneurship to women groups in the area as well as on-the job tour guiding training given to the local youths all add up to build the local communities tourism and hospitality skills and awareness.

'Most of our initial staff most of whom are still here got their experience by working for the missionaries here. Over the period they worked, they learned a lot on how to prepare breakfast, lunch and supper meals. They also learned how to operate equipment some of which are very technical yet they did not train for them. There is one who can repair refrigerators and other office equipment very well and is now of help not to the guesthouse alone but even the neighboring communities, he is now called Mr. Fundi'-Manager, MGH1.

"All our employees never went for any hospitality course. The missionary trained them within and they are now the best. They are very good in food costing, table setting and can make dishes

*for clients from different regions of the world courtesy of the knowledge they learned on-the job”-
Manager, MGH 4.*

Interview theme4: Setting of the best tourism standards

Although located in rural areas, the standards that were set by the missionaries in terms of the facilities in the guesthouses, the serenity of the environment and the quality of foods and other services offered at the guesthouse had a huge bearing in terms of the services that are now offered to the guests at the guesthouses. The Norwegian and Swedish missionaries under the evangelical Lutheran church set standards that are similar to what is offered in their home countries while the American missionaries too set standard that are up to the American standards. Since tourism is an international industry, the standards set by the missionaries in the guesthouses are up to the international standards.

“We have hosted many guests here; most of them well travelled persons working for international non-governmental organizations in Kenya and Uganda. All of them have been impressed by our services. They have commended us for the quality of services that we offer. We credit this to the initial standards set by the missionaries.”-Manager, MGH 10

Interview theme 5: The pursuit of good quality in the MGHs

Managers were asked about the pursuit of good quality in the missionaries' guesthouses and it emerged that the high standard of quality was first set out by the missionaries themselves. They trained their own staffs and ensured that the on-the job trainings gave them a competitive edge.

“From the inception of these guesthouses were founded on quality with the initial missionaries themselves setting the pace. They trained their own employees and ensured that they meet their set quality standards. They left us with the employees and all this time, all the operations of the MGHs has been on the quality benchmark long set by the missionaries”. -Manager, MGH 1

Interview themes: Destination branding and linkage to markets

Linking tourism destinations especially the little-known rural areas such as West Pokot to the market is not easy and may require huge capital outlay. Findings of the KII conducted revealed that the missionaries' guesthouses play a key part in the branding and marketing of these rural destinations. The since they are owned by the local churches, marketing is done through the church up to the diocese and national officers. Any church visitors visiting these areas get recommendations from the church to seek accommodation in the church guesthouses. This has significantly helped to market the area. The presence of the missionaries' guesthouse in the rural areas has have changed the image of these areas with most of the visitors getting to know the place through the word of mount.

“As a church, we have several projects that take place in rural areas. Projects on health, water, agriculture, schooling among other projects. All our staffs working under these projects are always advised to seek accommodation in the church-run guesthouses”-Income generating unit mangers, ELCK church.

“I can say the image of this place has been boosted by the presence of these guesthouses in this area. Most of our guests confess they choose to visit this area because of the quality of services offered at the guesthouse. Others get to know about this area because of the good reports that our guests take

out there by word of mouth. These guesthouses therefore have assisted in marketing these rural areas"-Income generating unit manager, AIC Church.

Interview theme6: Local Leadership of tourism establishment

Leadership is at the heart of success for most tourism establishments the world over. Local communities are elbowed out of the local tourism sector when they do not have adequate skills to manage their sector and benefits. They rural communities too lose tourism benefits if they do not have representatives managing the sector. The KII interview findings revealed that the missionaries' guesthouses have contributed to the leadership of tourism establishments. The guesthouse management committees that manage the guesthouses represent a new leadership model of tourism establishments especially among rural communities. From these Key Informant Interview findings, it is clear that the missionaries' guesthouses contribute to the development of community-based rural tourism among the rural communities. That is, the guesthouses had a positive contribution to the development of community-based tourism in the rural areas.

Interview theme7: The linkage between the MGHs in West Pokot County and tourism development in the area

The study also conducted an in-depth interview with West Pokot County tourism officials regarding the existing and potential linkage between the MGHs and tourism development in the area. With seven years of devolution, there is no proper linkage established by the county government to link the MGHs to the overall tourism development agenda of the County.

Interview theme8: Missionaries' guesthouses marketing methods

Marketing is one of the crucial aspects of tourism developments. In this study, guesthouse managers were asked on how they market themselves. The findings indicated that their parent churches play a crucial role in the marketing of these guesthouses;

"Yes, our parent churches based in the urban areas really help us in referring guests who are interested in staying in our guesthouse. We also have phone contacts where guests can and make their bookings. Word of mouth is also assisting us to market where our existing guests go out to talk good of our guesthouse and we end up receiving more guests"-Manager, MGH 10

Interview theme 9: Missionaries' guesthouses and the creation of a tourism product in West Pokot County.

In this study, the place of the MGHs as tourism product was examined. This involved examining the MGHs in terms of their geographical location, their natural surroundings, and linkages with traditional activities of the surrounding communities as well as other factors that are appealing to the guests. That is, the uniqueness of the MGHs in remote rural areas was examined. From the interview results, it emerged that the MGHs guests hold a positive perception of the MGHs in terms of their serene geographical location, the landscaping, the architecture as well as the cultural dances performed at MGHs. In addition, the interview findings revealed that the missionaries' guesthouses have provided a platform for the local communities to showcase their traditional dances by entertaining the guesthouse guests. Most of the dances are performed on request from the guesthouse guests/visitors. The

guesthouses also offer reception services to those wedding and are also good scenes for photo sessions. Furthermore, guesthouses with gift shops have created additional product offerings for the day guests/visitors. The handicrafts sold at the gift shops tend to attract the visitors to the guesthouse environment. This is further added to the serenity of the guesthouse environments that make it more attractive to visitors/guests. In addition, the guesthouses also have good gardens and lawns that are attractive especially to guests on conferences. The guesthouses have also given meaning to local attractions that had not been exploited before the establishment of the guesthouses. Chesta missionary guesthouse for instance is credited for opening mountaineering tourism to Mt. Kogh where the first paraglider in the County flew from. Also, the interview findings revealed that through the MGHs, members of the local communities have been enabled to understand what tourism is, the kind of tourism products that they own and how to develop and manage them. Through the MGHs also, the local communities have developed networks that have tremendously worked to grow tourism in the area. Further, the MGHs have developed the local communities' tourism skills. The local communities are able to market, manage. The local communities' negotiation and decision-making skills have also been tremendously built by the existence of the MGHs. From the interviews, the MGHs have contributed to organizing, motivating and managing the local communities' tourism undertakings. The pivotal role of the MGHs contribution to tourism development is founded on the guesthouses policy of supporting local community ownership and control. The benefit sharing model advanced by the MGHs also support substantiality of the tourism ventures. In addition, the interview findings revealed that the MGHs play a key role in making West Pokot County accessible to tourism. Before the establishment of missionaries' guesthouses in the area, most of the places remained inaccessible. The establishment of the guesthouses in the interior meant that the missionaries themselves opened up the roads leading to their residences. The opened-up roads made these areas accessible and to a large extent allowed visitation into these areas. The guesthouses therefore eased access into the interior by way of supporting road network. The Iconic Mt. Kogh is accessible because of a road made by the guesthouse. Further, with the assistance of the pioneer missionaries who established the guesthouses, tourist routes (circuits) were established in the rural areas surrounding the guesthouses.

"This guesthouse was well sited, right at the foot of the holly mountain; it blends well with the environment. It is just amazing"-Guest, MGH 10

Interview theme 10: Missionaries' guesthouses and the Competitiveness of the tourism sector in West Pokot County.

Destination competitiveness plays a pivotal role in tourism development and the sustainability of a destination. In this study, the view of the CECM for tourism was sought regarding the role of the MGHs in West Pokot County in growing the County's tourism competitiveness; and the study established that indeed, the MGHs being the key tourism flagship projects play a key role in building the competitiveness of the County's tourism sector. From the interview responses, the MGHs had set pace for tourism development in the area since there were no other such facilities to support tourism in the area. All the visitors to the remote rural areas sought accommodation in the MGHs. The MGHs therefore had contributed to the competitiveness of West Pokot County as a tourist destination by way of supporting the expansion of the tourism sector to the remote and rural parts which are not

attractive to investors; diversifying the County's tourism offerings also came out as a contribution of the MGHs to tourism development in West Pokot County; and by strongly supporting the *spreading-out* of tourism to the peripheral areas throughout the Country. MGHs therefore have ensured the availability of the badly needed tourism facilities in the County. Although most parts of West Pokot are not well covered in terms of tourism development, the areas hosting the MGHs are somehow registering economic activities. The study findings revealed that hiking, mountaineering, filming, photography, cultural performances among other are leading tourist activities taking place at the moment courtesy of the existence of the MGHs in these localities. Ecotourism, volunteer tourism as well as philanthropy tourism are also some of the tourist activities supported by the MGHs in West Pokot County. The training of porters and tour guides drawn from local youths is also an additional input made by the MGHs to the local tourism since these youths will greatly support the success of tourism in the area. From these contributions therefore, it can be concluded that the MGHs has contributed into making West Pokot County a tourist destination.

"As a County, we feel we are slowly getting to the tourism market thanks to the support that the sector is getting from the existence of the MGHs in our County. Visitors to the rural areas get accommodation services in the MGHs and this has stimulated travel to these areas because good accommodation is assured of. The standards of the MGHs having been modelled by the missionaries themselves meet very high standards that as a County, we know it gives us a competitive edge. Going into the future, the County plans to build on this strength as it grows the sector"- County Executive Committee Member (CECM) for Tourism, Wildlife, Culture, Youth & Sports, West Pokot County

Interview theme 11: The role of MGHs in promoting tourism governance among rural communities

Tourism governance plays a significant role in determining the performance and sustainability of tourism ventures especially among the local host communities in destination areas. The capacity of local communities to initiate, develop and manage tourism ventures is still very low in West Pokot County. The contribution of MGHs to the promotion of good tourism governance was examined and from the interview responses, it emerged that the guesthouses had offered significant assistance to the training of MGHs management committees, the making of policies and laws related to tourism in the area, the facilitation of supervision component of tourism ventures, creation of the best tourism circuits in the area, making laws and rules governing the MGHs, documentation, costing & receipting, rules on the activities permitted in the MGHs, the kind of visitors/guest to be admitted into the facility.

".....The election of the missionaries' guesthouse management committees and their subsequent training through capacity building has indeed become a huge blessing to the growth of these guesthouses. The committees have the capacity to make the right decisions on the operations of the guesthouses. They committees also act as a strong link between guesthouse and the local communities, and they always ensure that the relationships between the two are always cordial. The guesthouses have immensely benefited from the governance of the management committees"- Manager, MGH 10.

Conclusions

This paper examined the extent to which the missionary guesthouses in rural parts of West Pokot County can contribute to tourism development in the area. An area with huge tourism development potential but lacks tourism support infrastructures, has limited investor interest and cannot compete for skilled tourism sector workforce with established tourist destinations in the Country. The study findings indicated that although not yet appreciated by rural tourism development strategists or government policy makers, the missionaries' guesthouses indeed contribute to the tourism growth and development in the rural spaces where they are located. They not only provide accommodation to rural tourists/guest but also help in tourism skill development among the rural communities by imparting skills through *on-the-job* training. Their pivotal role in attracting and supporting tourism development in rural areas thereby spreading tourism from the core to periphery has been clearly demonstrated by the findings of the study. By the nature of their operations as well as the activities and programmes, the missionaries' guesthouses work to bridge the many deficiencies facing rural communities in their quest to develop their tourism sectors. From the study findings it was evident that the missionaries' guesthouses contribute to tourism development by way of building the tourism capacities of the local communities. The missionary guesthouse management committee model where members of the guesthouse sponsoring church elect guesthouse committees has demonstrated that the capacities of the make decisions about their local tourism and facilities. This is a departure from what happens in most tourism developed areas where local communities are not at the centre of decision making. In addition, the study has demonstrated that by acting as major tourism flagships in these rural areas, the missionary guesthouses are pioneers in supporting the spread of tourism to rural areas.

Recommendations

To enhance rural tourism in West Pokot County, the county government should collaborate with missionaries to develop a locally relevant tourism policy aligned with community needs. Missionaries should take the lead in defining tourism service standards, developing tourism products, and providing hospitality training to local communities to improve service quality. Additionally, strong partnerships between the county government, local churches, and missionaries should be established to ensure sustainable tourism growth in rural areas. Further, county government, in collaboration with faith-based organizations and private investors, should prioritize upgrading road networks, water supply, and electricity access in areas hosting Missionary Guesthouses (MGHs). Improved infrastructure will enhance accessibility for visitors, increase the attractiveness of these rural destinations, and support broader tourism growth. Lastly, regular training programs should be established for MGH managers, local community members, and tourism stakeholders on hospitality management, customer service, and digital marketing. These programs should be coordinated by tourism development agencies and higher learning institutions to ensure that MGHs offer competitive services, thus increasing their appeal to both faith-based and general tourists.

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