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Challenges to sustainable sports tourism development in a non-metropolitan region in Kenya: A case of Iten township

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Introduction

Sports related Travel traced to 776 BC Olympics (Baker 1982; Davies 1997 and De knop 1999). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2010), tourism has been one of the major contributors to the global economy and employment. In 2008 World Travel and Tourism contributed to approximately USD 5,890 billion and a 9.9% Gross Domestic Product which is expected to rise to 10.5% in 2018 (UNWTO, 2008). One important form of tourism contributing to this growth is sports tourism. Recently the conference on sports tourism convened by the UNWTO acknowledged the contribution of sports related travel and tourism estimated at USD 600 billion (www.worldsportsdestinationexpo.com).

A more important role that tourism plays is its contribution towards GDP in most developing economies. UNWTO estimates that tourism accounts for about 45% of tourism exports among least developing countries (UNWTO, 2010).

In Kenya, tourism is a key economic sector and a major contributor to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (12.6%) and represents 14.7% of foreign exchange earnings (Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis, 2009). A large part of Kenya's tourism product revolves around Safari tours as Kenya boasts for its great National Parks and Game Safaris. Among the least exploited is sports tourism, despite its great potential.

Similarly, the sports sector has a major economic impact to Kenya's economy, contributing to both the economy and providing employment to hundreds of Kenyans. Moreover, sports, and professional runners especially, occupy a central place in Kenya's culture and identity based on their achievements in medium and long distance running. It is therefore not surprising that both active and aspiring athletics are now trooping Kenya to train with the "champions". Historically, sports in Kenya have experienced major setbacks due to poor management of clubs and sporting associations, including local football. However, other better managed sports have continued to flourish both locally and abroad, in athletics especially.

Background

Iten and its environs is the home town for most of Kenya's legendary medium and long distance runners. The city hosts one of the accredited International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) High Altitude Training Centre. The High Altitude Training Centre is located 30km East of Eldoret town in a non-metropolitan town of Iten, which has been a famous spot for both local and international runners. This study focuses on problems linked

to the lack of strategic tourism planning and development. Noticeably is the growth of small-medium sized accommodations facilities in the Iten municipality and its surrounding areas whose operations do not formally contribute to national tourism growth or development. Such facilities cannot be relied upon to bridge the demand and supply gap for accommodation in the area. Camps range from informal camps to formal camps sponsored by major Athletics sponsors including PUMA, FILA, and others. Furthermore a lack of coordinated efforts between and among stakeholders is also noticeable. The ministry of Sports and the IAAF have championed in promoting ITEN as one of the best high altitude training regions, however the ministry of tourism has shown little interest of strategically developing the region. Moreover there is a lack of appropriate enterprise data concerning sports camps and accommodation facilities. On the other hand the region hosts a number of sponsored events aimed at recruiting professional athletes. Such events bring together athletes' managers both local and from abroad, sponsor teams, Athletics organizations, teams and individuals. While these events provide athletes with an opportunity to run for some of the best clubs, the social-economic and cultural values of such organised events to the Iten community are not yet evaluated. While sports business continues to thrive, local operators are faced with a number of challenges related to development of quality facilities to meet the growing demand for their services.

The region is faced with problems linked to the lack of sustainable strategic sports tourism planning and development. Noticeably is the growth of small-medium sized accommodations facilities in the Iten municipality and its surrounding areas whose operations do not formally contribute to regional tourism growth and development. Such facilities, both formal and informal, cannot be relied upon to bridge the demand and supply gap for accommodation in the area. The location of Iten town also presents an environmental challenge. The town is located at the edge of the escarpment where most operators prefer development along the edge which provides beautiful scenery of the rift valley. A lack of proper land use planning presents the risk of uncontrolled development and serious damage to the natural and cultural environment.

With limited strategy and policy intervention among stakeholders the entrepreneurs cannot realise the potential of their businesses.

Sports tourism

An earlier definition for sports tourism was captured as travelling for non-commercial reasons to participate or observe sporting activities away from the home range (Hall, 1992). A latter definition defines sports tourism as all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organised way for non-commercial or business/commercial reason that necessitates travel away from home and work locality (Standeven and De Knop, 1999). In these two definitions it is clear that the motivation behind such travels are sports related and may be to actively 'participate' or 'observe' a sporting activity. See table 1 below for further definitions.

Dimension	Definition and source
Sports tourism	<p>Travel for non-commercial reasons to participate or observe sporting activities away from the home range (Hall, 1992a: 194)</p> <p>An expression of a pattern of behaviour of people during certain periods of leisure time – such as vacation time, which is done partly in specially attractive natural settings and partly in artificial sports and physical recreation facilities in the outdoors (Ruskin, 1987: 26)</p> <p>Holiday involving sporting, activity either as spectator or participant (Weed and Bull, 1997b: b)</p> <p>Leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities or to venerate attractions associated with physical activity (Gibson, 1998:5)</p> <p>All forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organised way for commercial or business/commercial reasons, that necessitates travel away from home and work locality (Standeven and De Knop, 1999:12)</p>
Sport tourist	<p>A temporary visitor staying at least 24h in the event area and whose primary purpose is to participate in a sports event with the area being a secondary attraction (Nogawa et al., 1996:46)</p> <p>Individuals and/or groups of people who actively or passively participate in competitive or recreational sport, while travelling to and/or stay in places outside their usual environment (sports as a primary motivation to travel) (Gammon and Robinson, 1997)</p>
Tourism Sport	<p>Person travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment and participating in, actively or passively, a competitive or recreational sports as a secondary activity (Gammon and Robinson, 1997)</p>

Source: Tom Hinch and James Higham (2001)

Tourists are drawn to a destination by attractions. Highen and Hinch (2003) cite sports as an attraction for cultural tourists. In Leiper's popularly cited framework for defining tourist attractions, three factors considered as 'elements' include: (a) the 'human element' (tourist), 'central element' (nucleus) and (c) 'Informative element' (markers), (Leiper 1990). This framework can be used to understand sports as an attraction. The above elements can be interpreted in this case as: the tourist being people travelling as participants, spectators, officials, media and others; informative element as all marketing activities through media whose main aim is to draw the human element to a destination and the nucleus or the central element. An attraction comes into existence when above elements come together (ibid).

Sports and tourism planning, policy and cross sectional linkage

One of the means that most governments have done to promote rural economies is through tourism (Luloff, 1994). But, in order for any tourism destination to gain maximum benefits and minimise negative impacts at the destination it must be well planned. It is also vital to integrate sporting activities with other tourism products at the destination so that the sporting activity can contribute to the overall tourism development (Chalip, 2001) as the existence of sports tourists at the destination not necessarily deliver economic gain to the host community (Weed, 2008).

Although tourism studies are currently well established as a field of research, development of tourism policy process remains limited in research (Weed, 2008). However some

researchers have contributed exceptionally in the area of policy leisure policy process including Henry (1993); Houlihan (1991, 1997) and Hall (1994), but their work is limited on cross sectional liaison (Weed, 2008). Sports and tourism have been considered as different spheres even in events where sports have attracted sports enthusiasts in a given destination. This notion is not only limited to practice but also in literature where researches on sports and tourism have existed as parallel fields of research. It is inevitable that more benefits can be gained by linking the two spheres of research as indicated in literature (Redman, 1991; Jackson and Glyptis, 1992; Bramwell, 1997). While there are a few incidences where the two sectors have worked together in promoting sports tourism such arrangements has existed in ad hoc (Weed, 2008). Weed's (1998) earlier work suggests that linking the two sectors depends on factors that include: 'ideology', 'government policy', 'organizational structure', 'organizational culture' and 'key staff'.

Methodology

In order to investigate the challenges faced by the entrepreneurs a survey was performed. First a focus group was used to brainstorm some of the challenges faced by local entrepreneurs. A list of those challenges was made and used for the survey. A total of 150 questionnaires were issued and 60 filled questionnaires were returned, representing 40% of the total questionnaires issued. Data was collected, coded, and analysed with SPSS and Excel. A follow up was also done by interviewing government officials on emerging themes. Officials from three authorities were interviewed, including municipality officials, officials from the ministries of sports and from the regional tourist office. Descriptive statistics was chosen to give an overview of some of the challenges that entrepreneurs face in the region in light of overall regional sports tourism development.

The geographical area in tourism context

Eldoret is a western Kenya city in the rift valley province. It is the 5th largest and the fastest growing city. Eldoret and its environs is the home town for numerous legendary and current outstanding Kenyan professional runners like Kipchoge Keino. The major economic activity in the region is agriculture. It is also an important rout for travellers wishing to experience western Kenya tourist attractions. The wider Eldoret is blessed with both natural and cultural attractions including Kakamega forest, Mt Elgon National Park, Kerio Valley National Reserve and a number of viewpoints for travellers wishing to view the Great Rift Valley from the Highlands. Also within its proximity is the famous hot springs of Lake Bogoria, Lake Baringo and Lake Victoria in the far west.

One important region for Kenya's athletics in the wider Eldoret region is Iten town. Iten town is a non-metropolitan town that hosts one of the accredited International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) High Altitude Training Centre. It has been a famous spot for both local and international runners wishing to train in a high altitude region and has continued to attract athletes from all over the world.

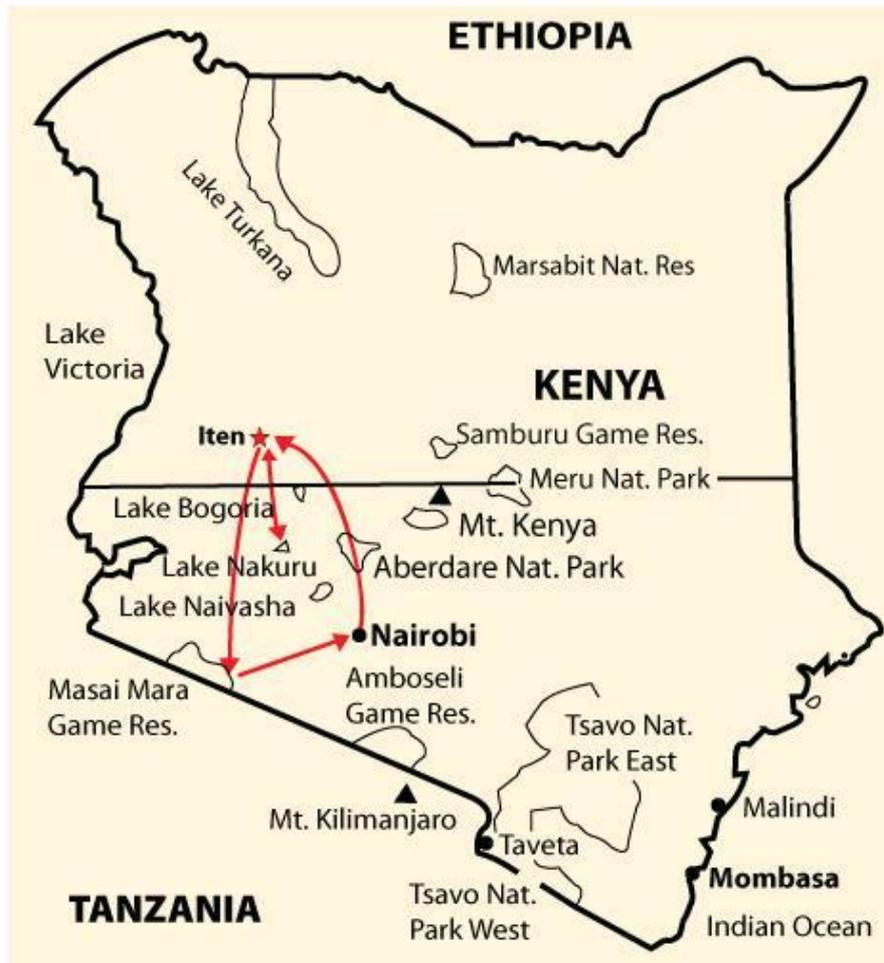


Figure 1: Iten region location

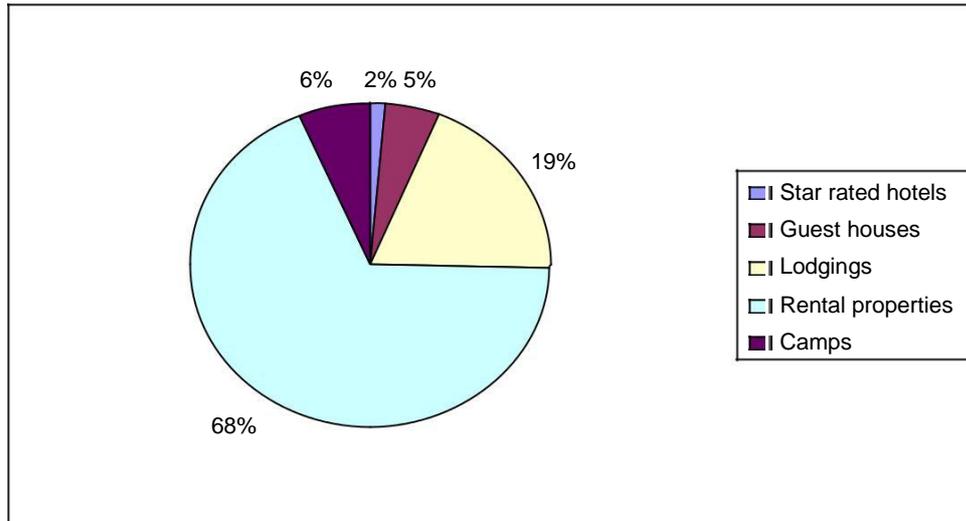
Findings

A total of 63 accommodation owners participated in the survey. They included guest and rental houses, lodging properties and sports camps. Most popular were the rental houses (68%), which they ranged from a single room house to a three bedroom house. See table 2 and figure 2.

Table 2: Accommodation facilities by type

Types of accommodation	No.	Percentage
Star rated hotels	1	2%
Guest houses	3	5%
Lodgings	12	19%
Rental properties	43	68%
Camps	4	6%
Total	63	100%

Figure 2: Accommodation facilities by type



This research report highlights some of the issues that entrepreneurs considered as a challenge in the region. The majority (90%) felt that a lack of national sports policy has limited the region in benefitting from sports tourism, while 77% felt that the lack of planning limited sports tourism development in the region.

On the other hand issues of coordination were raised. The majority (87%) felt lack of coordinated efforts among players including the ministries of sports and tourism as a factor that limits development of sports tourism in the region.

At the operational level, the majority (73%) of entrepreneurs felt that their land had been 'invaded' by rich westerners. This has led to land (value) inflation as believed by 65% of the respondents. Access to capital was also an issue that has limited entrepreneurs wishing to expand their businesses.

The majority of local entrepreneurs (90%) felt that the government and the local authorities have neglected the region in terms of promoting investments while 77% of the respondents felt that the government is doing little to market the region as a sports destination.

Below is a list of issues and their respective levels of percentage count for those issues raised. See table 3 and figure 3.

Table 3: List of issues raised by entrepreneurs in the region

Challenges	No. of Valid Counts	Total	Percentage
Lack of access to capital to establish quality facilities	35	60	58%
Inflation of land prices	39	60	65%
Limited land for expansion	43	60	72%
Little or no marketing of the destination	46	60	77%
Poor road networks	49	60	82%
Neglection by the government	54	60	90%
Lack of land demarcation for long distance running	38	60	63%
Poor road networks especially when rainy	47	60	78%
Lack of access to gym facilities	54	60	90%
Lack of quality field track	48	60	80%
Tricky sports agents	12	60	20%
“Invasion” by the rich westerners actively buying land in Iten leading to inflation	44	60	73%
Congestion	42	60	70%
Lack of coordinated efforts among players	52	60	87%
Lack of clear policies on athlete agency	48	60	80%
Lack of land demarcation i.e. sporting zones,	32	60	53%
Lack of National policy on sports	54	60	90%
Lack of adequate planning for the municipality	46	60	77%

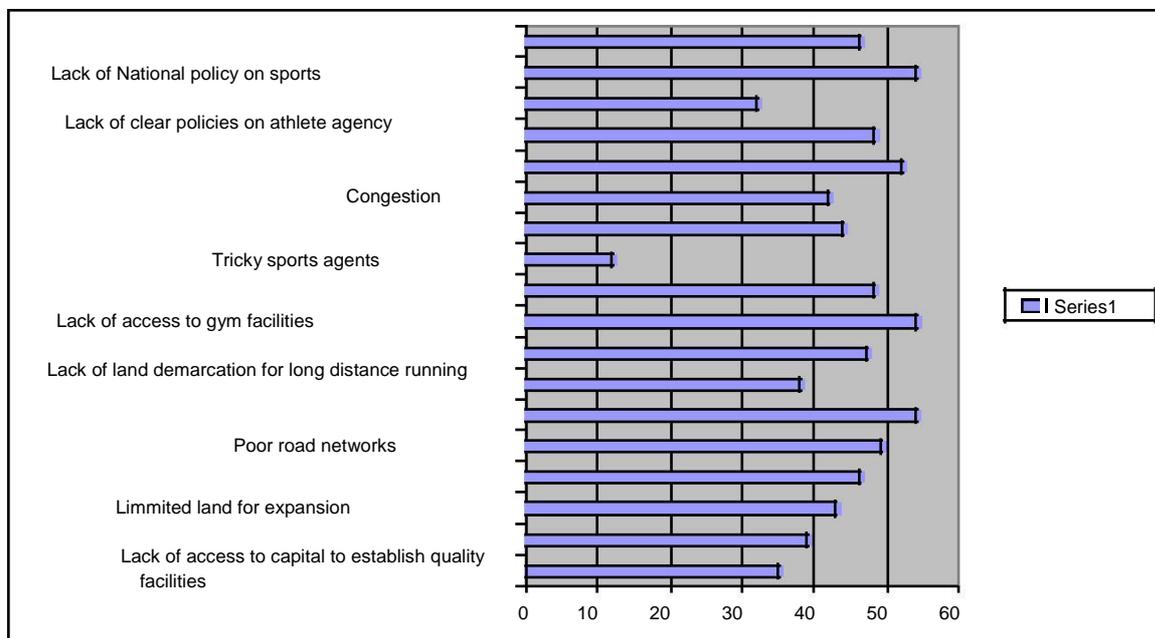


Figure 3: Issues raised by entrepreneurs in the region

Attitude towards government authorities' efforts

This research also sought to highlight entrepreneurs' attitudes towards the authorities' efforts in promoting sports tourism by both national government and the local government.

Respondents were asked to respond on a 5 level likert scale: 1='Not at all', 2= 'To some extent', 3= 'To a moderate extent', 4= 'To a great extent' and 5= 'To a very great extent'.

When the respondents were asked if they believed that the national government was doing enough to promote sports tourism, the majority (47%) felt that the government was not doing anything at all, 27% said 'To some extent', 12% said 'To a moderate extent', 5% said 'To a great extent', and 4% said 'To a very great extent'. See table 4 and figure 4 for the graphical representation.

Table 4: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

To what extent Do you think the government is doing enough to promote sports tourism?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	28	46.7	46.7	46.7
	To some extent	16	26.7	26.7	73.3
	To a Moderate extent	7	11.7	11.7	85.0
	To a great extent	5	8.3	8.3	93.3
	To a very great extent	4	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

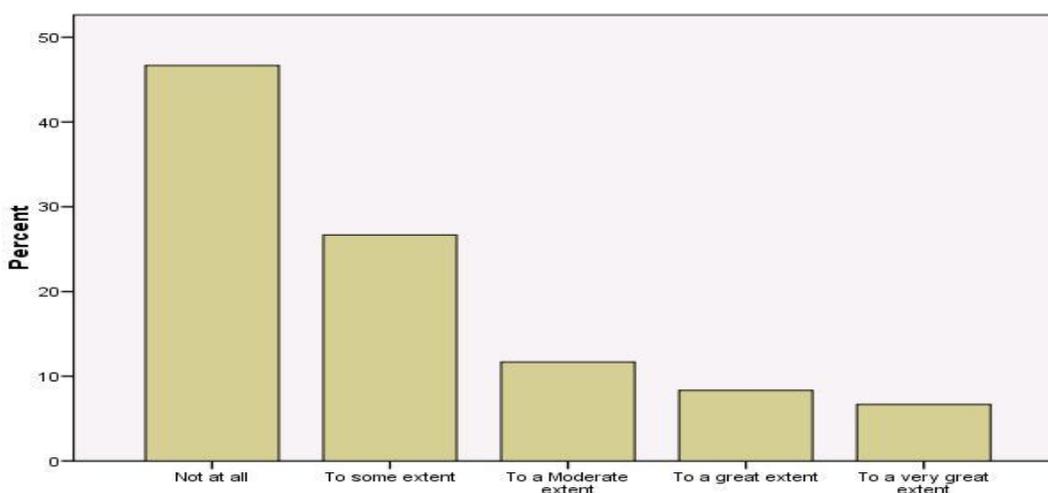


Figure 4: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

When the respondents were asked if they believed that the ministry of sports was doing enough to promote sports tourism in the region, the majority (53%) felt that the ministry was not doing anything at all, 27% said 'To some extent', 10% said 'To a moderate extent', 5%

said 'To a great extent', and 5% said 'To a very great extent'. The attitudes towards the ministry of sports and the national government were similar in such a way that in both instances the majority believed that both institutions were not doing anything at all to promote sports tourism in the region. See table 5 and figure 5 for the graphical presentation.

Table 5: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the ministry of sports

what extent Do you think the ministry of sports is doing enough to promote sports the region?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Not at all	32	53.3	53.3	53.3
To some extent	16	26.7	26.7	80.0
To a Moderate extent	6	10.0	10.0	90.0
To a great extent	3	5.0	5.0	95.0
To a very great extent	3	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

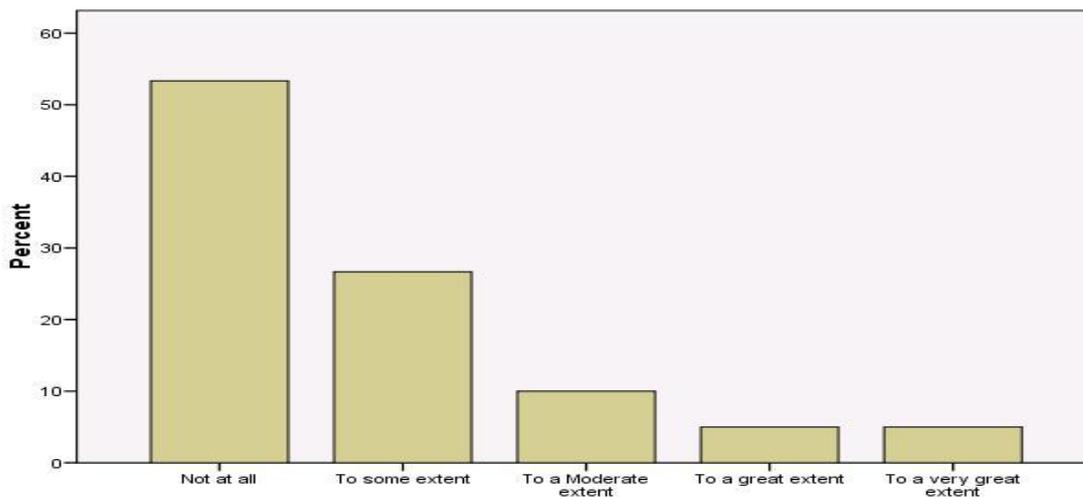


Figure 6: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

When the respondents were asked if they believed that the ministry of tourism was doing enough to promote sports tourism in the region, the majority (80%) felt that the ministry was not doing anything at all, 10% said 'To some extent', 3% said 'To a moderate extent', 3% said 'To a great extent', and 3% said 'To a very great extent'. Respondents also felt that the role for promoting sports related travel was vested in the ministry of tourism as believed by the majority (90%) of the respondents. See table 6 and figure 6.

Table 6: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

To what extent do you think the ministry of tourism is doing enough to promote sports tourism?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	48	80.0	80.0	80.0
	To some extent	6	10.0	10.0	90.0
	To a Moderate extent	2	3.3	3.3	93.3
	To a great extent	2	3.3	3.3	96.7
	To a very great extent	2	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

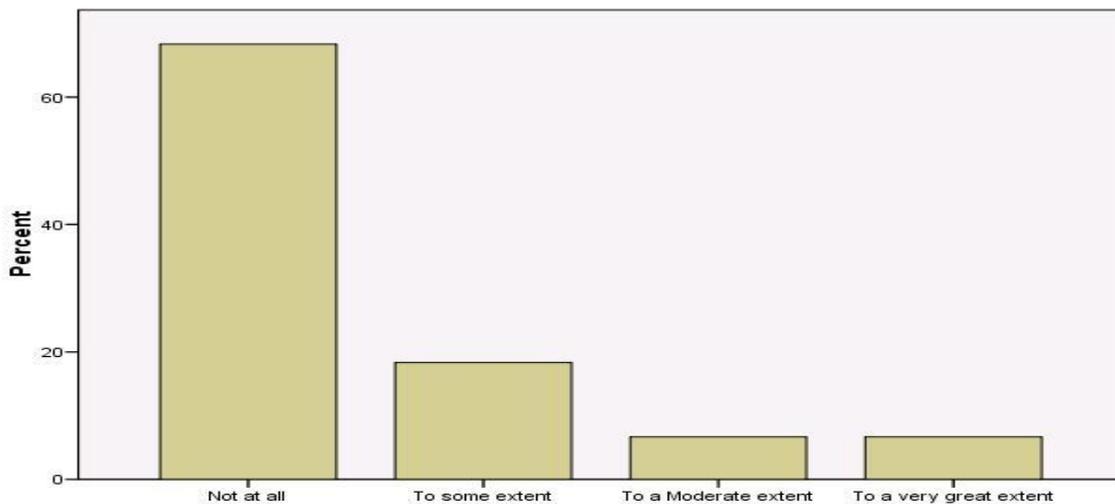


Figure 6: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

When the respondents were asked if they believed that the local government was doing enough to promote sports tourism in the region, the majority (68%) felt that the ministry was not doing anything at all, 18 % said 'To some extent', 6 % said 'To a moderate extent', 0 % said 'To a great extent' and 6% said 'To a very great extent'. See table 7 and figure. 7.

Table 7: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

To what extent Do you think the municipality is doing enough to promote the municipality as a sporting destination?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	41	68.3	68.3	68.3
	To some extent	11	18.3	18.3	86.7
	To a Moderate extent	4	6.7	6.7	93.3
	To a v ery great extent	4	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

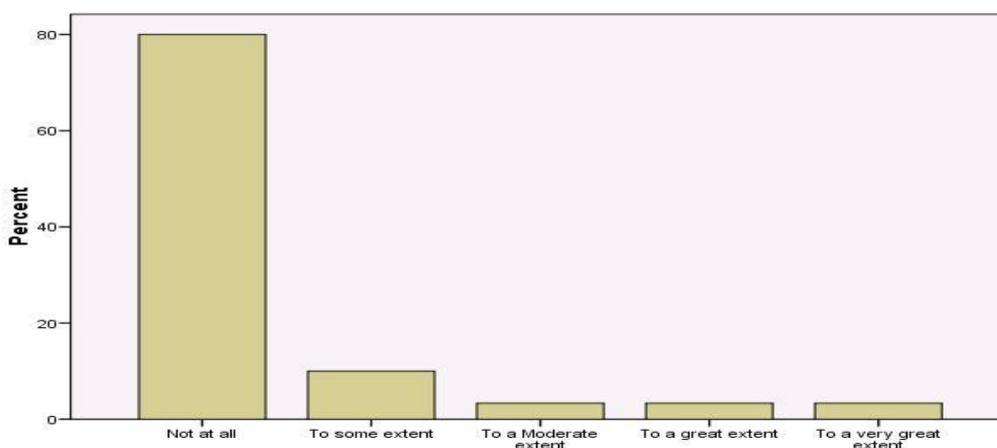


Figure 7: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

In general the government and their authorities received very little trust among the respondents in terms of their commitment towards promoting sports tourism in the region. The calculated means indicates a very low mean of 2 or less. See table 8.

Table 8: Entrepreneurs' attitude towards the government

Statistics					
		To what extent Do y ou think the gov ernment is doing enough to promote sports tourism?	To what extent Do y ou think the ministry of sports is doing enough to promote sports in the region?	To what extent Do y ou think the ministry of tourism is doing enough to promote sports tourism?	To what extent Do y ou think the municipality is doing enough to promote the municipality as a sporting destination?
N	Valid	60	60	60	60
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.02	1.82	1.40	1.58

A follow up interview was done and below is a profile of the interviewees.

Table 9: Interviewee profiles

Interviewee	Profile
1. District sports officer	Has wide knowledge in the development of sports policy in the region
2. Chairman sports committee	Has wide knowledge of sports organization in the region
3. Regional tourism officer	Has wide knowledge in region's tourism planning, development
4. District tourism officer	Has wide knowledge on the development of tourism within the district and has vast information on visits by sports tourists in the region
5. Councilor Iten town council	Has wide knowledge on leadership in the municipality and is well informed on the local municipality policy
6. Chairman Iten town council	Has wide knowledge on the local town planning, policy development and implementation

Sports tourism development in the region received mixed reactions from officials from different authorities and they commented on the need for proper planning, policy formulation and implementation in relation to sports tourism development. This concern is common among all officials. As one official who has worked for over 15 years in the town puts it:

“There are no collaborative efforts among all players in the region. What sports ministry has been doing is to promote athletics and the athletes but we don't see the ministry of sports promoting the region as one of the best training highlands for athletics!”.

A local council official reiterates that:

“There is lack of proper local priority on sports. That's why we have not realised the potential of sports tourism. Sports in the region have been growing at fast pace while the local authorities have failed to match this growth through strategic plans. We see foreigners coming from abroad to train here and we know it is an opportunity for our entrepreneurs, especially in the accommodation sector to earn an extra shilling from their business, but we have not planned on how 'to plan'? (the town)”.

A local official from the sports department added to that:

“The region has a great potential but we have not set our priorities right. While sports are a multi-billion dollar sector, 'are yet'? to develop right policies both at national and local levels. We have also emphasised a lot on our safari, sea, sun and sand, and forgot other sectors like sports. We would wish to have collaborations in developing the region and market it as a sports destination, but we don't have a working formula on how to link the two ministries and the local authority”.

In summary the interview confirmed the lack of strategic planning, proper policy and collaborative efforts among stakeholders as factors derailing or challenging sports tourism development in the region. These factors further constrain the local entrepreneurs in terms of promoting their businesses.

Discussion and conclusion

This research highlights three critical issues related to sports tourism development in a non-metropolitan destination. In this report three emerging themes are realised. The first critical issue to note is the lack of a strategic planning in non-metropolitan regions. In order for any tourism destination to realise maximum benefits it must be planned adequately. Through planning negative impacts will also be minimised. The case of Iten region shows it is evident that planning has been adversely neglected. The development of accommodation facilities have been done in an *ad hoc* manner. This has led to the growth of many sub-standard accommodation facilities that cannot be relied upon to bridge the gap of demand for quality tourist accommodation facilities. On the other hand, with limited land resources the authorities have failed to create land for sporting related activities.

The second critical issue is the lack of policies that govern sports development both at the national and local level. There is a need for the authorities to come up with workable policies for sports tourism. The sporting ministry may have championed the development of sports in the region, but who will cater for sports travellers at the destination in terms of accommodation and other hospitality services? How should the destination be marketed to the world? Such questions and other related questions can be well addressed through workable policies.

Finally, there is the issue of cross sectional linkage among players. Understanding the relationship between tourism and sports policy is important for a sustainable sports tourism development. Wright (1998, pp.609-610) suggests basic 'rules of the game' as desirable behaviours for policy makers. In this report these players include: the ministry of sports, the ministry of tourism and the county council authorities. It is evident that the roles played by these authorities are not clear on who should do what. While a sectional linkage may rip much more benefit this fact is yet to be explored. Perhaps previous works on the link between sports and tourism (e.g. Bramwell, 1997; Gibson, 1998; Glyptis; Jackson & Glyptis, 1992) should guide future policy makers. The three players need to work together in the process of planning, policy formulation and implementation. This will reduce possible friction and help the region to realise much more benefits.

The above emerging themes confirm neglect of non-metropolitan destinations despite their potential in tourism product development. Could this mean that it confirms the observations by Weed (2008) that sports tourism is at cross roads?

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