

Reflecting on Tourism Development in Kenya Through the Mirror of Dependency Theory

Abstract:

The Kenyan Government recognizes that the tourism industry can be a tool for economic development and poverty alleviation. However, the extant tourism development model is anachronistic and colonial, and the involvement of local communities is insignificant. Through a review of relevant literature, this article analyzes tourism development in Kenya within the context of dependency theory. The article [using in-depth semistructured interviews with members, managers, and leaders of community-based tourism enterprises (CBEs), members of academia, and representatives of support organizations and government] analyzes the implications of involving conservation-based organizations in tourism development in Kenya. The article reveals that the Kenyan Government recognizes the potential of CBEs in enhancing the involvement of local communities in tourism development. The development of CBEs in Kenya is solely driven by conservation organizations that in turn rely heavily on donor funding. A preference for community partnerships, particularly those involving white investors, increases dependence of local communities. In addition, heavy reliance on donor funding by CBEs can be regarded as a form of neocolonialism. Such a neocolonial approach hinders indigenous tourism entrepreneurship, particularly among the local communities, who view tourism development initiatives as undertakings only for white people, and thus can be easily re ected upon within the context of dependency theory.

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