
IMPACTS OF THE TOURISM FUND'S UPSKILLING PROGRAM ON THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTOR.

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is a very important aspect in the economic development of Kenya as it provides job opportunities, foreign exchange, and the national revenue. Nevertheless, the performance of the industry is mostly determined by the talents and abilities of the employees. Following the necessity of providing skilled labor force, the Tourism Fund of Kenya launched the Upskilling Program that would help to improve the skills of the workers in the tourism and hospitality sector. This paper focuses on the effect of the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program on the productivity of the workforce, quality of services and competitiveness in the sector. The present study will be based on a qualitative and descriptive research design through the analysis of the documents and secondary data based on the government reports, tourism policy documents, and academic literature. The results have shown that the program has much improved professional competencies, better service delivery standards and has made Kenya very competitive in the international tourism market. Nevertheless, there are still such challenges as a lack of coverage of the program, insufficient funding, and an uneven distribution of stakeholders in the tourism industry. The research concludes by suggesting that the upskilling project and the reinforcement of the partnership between the government, training facilities, and the industry players can further enhance the performance of the tourism and hospitality sector in Kenya.

THE KEYWORDS: Tourism Fund, upskilling, tourism sector, hospitality industry, Kenya, and workforce development.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent sectors of the economy of Kenya is tourism. It adds significant contribution to the gross national income, job generation and foreign exchange earnings. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) further reveals that tourism sector is playing a significant portion to Kenya Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing thousands of jobs in the country. The quality of services offered by employees in hotels, tour companies, travel agencies, and other hospitality facilities is a major determinant of success of the tourism sector. But past challenges that have been encountered in the tourism and hospitality industry are the lack of skills, insufficient professional training, and the dynamics of global service standards. The fast changing pace at which tourism industry is evolving demands employees with contemporary customer service, e-marketing, sustainable tourism practices and hospitality management skills. The Kenyan government, through the Tourism Fund, has realised the importance of having constant professional development and as such, it has come with the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program. The program will be used to promote the skills and competencies of employees working in the tourism and hospitality sector by training workshops, certification programs and capacity building. This project is also an extension of the wider rationale to strengthen the tourism industry after the industry suffered due to global economic crises and security threats, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic that severely interfered with tourism operations across the globe. This research is aimed at examining how the tourism and hospitality industry in Kenya has been influenced by the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program. The paper, in particular, considers the effect that the program has on the development of workforce, improvement of the quality of services, and competitiveness of the sector.

The research questions :

- 1.What are the results of the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program, how have the workforce skills in the tourism and hospitality industry been elevated?
- 2.How has the program changed the quality and productivity of services in the tourism industry?
- 3.What are the challenges in running and implementing the upskilling program?

Literature Review

Human Capital Development and Tourism.

One of the reasons why tourism industry is successful is the human capital development. Becker (1993) believes that investing in education and training enhances the productivity and efficiency of the workers. Well-trained employees in the tourism industry also help in enhancing customer experiences and overall performance of the organization. Baum (2015) believes that the hospitality business is extremely reliant on skilled employees as the quality of services directly correlates with the competence of employees. Skilled labor can be able to meet the customer demands and keep the international standards of services.

The Development of Skills in the Tourism Business.

Tourism destination competitiveness requires skills development programs to enhance the competitiveness of the destinations. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states that training programs make workforce more professional and lead to the development of sustainable tourism. The governments and stakeholders in the industry of developing nations tend to collaborate in offering training programs that help in enhancing the delivery of tourism services. Hospitality management, digital marketing, customer service and environmental sustainability are the areas on which such programs usually concentrate. The Kenya case:

Tourism Sector Development.

Kenya has also made a number of policy initiatives to reinforce the tourism sector. These are the National Tourism Blueprint 2030 and the Tourism Act (2011) which dwells on the significance of capacity development and workforce training. Tourism Fund is another important organization that has been founded under Tourism Act(2011) and whose function is to fund tourism development activities such as training and research programs. The Tourism Fund-sponsored upskilling program aims at enhancing professional skills in tourism. Past researches indicate that training programs on workforce have a great impact on improving service delivery at tourism destinations. Nevertheless, very little studies have been done concerning the particular effect of the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program in Kenya, which leaves a gap that this study attempts to fill.

Theoretical Framework

This article is informed by

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory is another theory formulated by Becker (1993) which opines that investment in education and training raises the productivity of workers and organizational performance. Training programs in the tourism industry increase the knowledge, skills and professional competency levels of the employees which improves service delivery. The Tourism Fund Upskilling Program may be perceived as the human capital investment that should empower the abilities of the employees working in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Service Quality Theory

Service Quality Theory focuses on the need to provide quality services to the customers in order to satisfy them. The SERVQUAL model created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) revealed five most important dimensions of service quality, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Training can be used to improve these areas of service quality because employees are able to acquire skills and knowledge that will help them improve their performance in the hospitality sector.

METHODOLOGY

In the present research, the qualitative research approach is employed through the analysis of documents. The design of the research is the review of policy documents, government reporting, tourism industry publications, and academic literature on the subject of tourism workforce development.

Data Sources

The research is based on secondary data sources which were acquired: Tourism Fund reports, Government policy documentation, Kenya Tourism board publications, Tourism and hospitality academic journals and data from International organizations like UNWTO .

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed through the content analysis. This approach is the systematical analysis of documents to determine the repetitive themes in workforce education, the quality of services, and industry growth.

Findings

The analysis indicates that the tourism and hospitality sector is positively affected due to the Tourism Fund Upskilling Program in a number of ways.

Skills Workforce Improvement.

The program has improved professional skills in the tourism industry employees. Some of the areas of training have been on hospitality management, customer service, digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices. Employees that undertook the program have stated that they have developed confidence and enhanced skills to deliver international standards of service.

Improvement of Service Quality.

The enhancement of the skills of the employees has resulted in the improved service delivery in hotels, restaurants, and tour companies. The customers are provided with a better communication, professionalism and responsiveness. The increased quality of services will lead to enhanced visitor satisfaction and good tourism experiences. Greater Competitiveness in the Industry. The tourism industry is a highly competitive market in the world.

Increased competitiveness.

The upskilling program has enhanced the competitiveness of Kenya as a tourist destination by enhancing the workforce skills. Qualified employees help in innovation and enhanced tourism products that bring more foreigners.

DISCUSSION

The results prove that one of the key strategies to enhance the performance of the tourism sector is the workforce training. Tourism Fund Upskilling Program has been used to develop human capital by providing the employees with modern skills, needed in the hospitality industry. This is in line with the Human Capital Theory where training and education is considered in enhancing productivity. On the same note, the fact that service delivery has improved in the tourism sector is an indicator that Service Quality Theory is in support. Nevertheless, some of the challenges that limit the effectiveness of the program include: Low funding towards massive training programs. Disparity in training among workers in the tourism industry. Some stakeholders in the industry are not aware of the program. These issues would help to improve the effectiveness of the upskilling program.

CONCLUSION

The Upskilling Program on Tourism Fund has been significant in the strengthening of the Kenya tourism and hospitality industry. The program has improved service quality and competitiveness of the tourism industry by ensuring that the workforce competencies and

professional skills are upgraded. Nevertheless, there is a need to expand the program and make it more accessible so that more workers could get a chance to obtain training. The government institutions, training providers, and stakeholders in the workforce sector in the private sector will have to collaborate to sustain the development of the workforce in the tourism sector. Future studies ought to look into the economic effects of the workforce training programs on the long term in Kenya in terms of tourism development and employment.

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