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Building Tourism Excellence at the Community Level: Capacity Building for Community-Based Entrepreneurs in Uganda

RAYMOND VICTURINE

The recuperation of tourism in Uganda will be a slow process. The tourist industry must overcome years of neglect, bad publicity, and the devastation of its most treasured tourism products—its wildlife and natural beauty. With tourism's resurgence, it will be important for people living around Uganda's natural areas to benefit economically from the existence of those areas and from the potential tourist income. Tourism offers the only legal avenue by which people living in rural communities can derive economic benefits from wildlife. However, most rural entrepreneurs and community organizations interested in the tourist market possess neither the skills nor the know-how to operate successful tourism establishments. This article describes a training program aimed at building those skills and establishing strong institutional linkages to ensure the existence of a viable community-based tourism sector so that Uganda's nature-based tourism embraces ecotourism principles, with benefits accruing to those most affected by wildlife.

After decades of serious decline, Uganda's tourism now shows signs of resurgence. Tourist numbers are slowly increasing, as is the opportunity for rural businesses to earn revenue from nature tourism. Revenue opportunities in the sector also contribute to greater local interest in conservation. However, due to Uganda's disappearance from the itineraries of most East Africa-bound tourists over the past two decades, many rural businesses are ill equipped to meet the service and quality standards demanded by the international traveler.

This article discusses an incipient program to impart the skills required to provide quality service and raise standards of rural tourism businesses in Uganda. The program strives to establish a foundation for the development of a viable ecotourism industry supportive of locally run and small-scale businesses. It provides an example of some initial steps taken to move Uganda's nature tourism toward the ecotourism realm and to build up the economic prospects as well as the power base of community and rural-based tourism businesses within the national tourism industry.

EVOLUTION OF TOURISM IN UGANDA

During the decade of the 1960s, Uganda was the premier East African tourist destination, known as the Pearl of

Africa. More tourists embarked on wildlife safaris in Uganda than in Kenya and Tanzania combined (Ben Otto, Uganda Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities, personal communication, September 1996). Consequently, tourism represented one of Uganda's primary sources of foreign exchange revenue. This situation changed dramatically with Idi Amin's rise to power and the subsequent devastation of the country's wildlife and tourism infrastructure. Under the Amin regime, tourism became virtually illegal, and contact by Ugandans with foreigners faded. The invasion of the Tanzanian army that toppled Amin completed the destruction of the tourism infrastructure and exacerbated the demise of wildlife. Uganda's tourism collapse coincided with tourism investment and growth in the other East African countries where abundant wildlife continued to roam.

Since 1994, the luster has begun to return to Africa's pearl. Tourism shows signs of reawakening from the devastation-induced sleep of the past two decades. This reawakening remains tentative but promising. In 1996, an estimated 7,000 international tourists visited Uganda, a 40% increase over the 5,000 who visited in 1995 (Victurine and Carpenter 1996). These tourist numbers indicate the low level of recognition that Uganda has in the international arena as an East African tourist destination, especially when

Raymond Victurine was formerly the technical adviser to the Grants Management Unit of the Action Program for the Environment in Kampala, Uganda. The author acknowledges the contributions of Elissa Williams of the North Carolina Zoo in the development of the training program and her continued efforts on behalf of the Uganda Community Tourist Association (UCOTA). Additional acknowledgment and gratitude is owed to Robert Lillieholm of Utah State University for his editorial comments and encouragement in the development of this article. Moreover, the author acknowledges USAID/Kampala for its support of the training concept and the funding to implement the program. This article mentions that the creation of UCOTA was a direct result of the training program that was funded. On April 19, 1999, UCOTA celebrated its official launch. The king of the Buganda kingdom, Ronald Mutebi, and the minister of tourism, trade, and industry, Moses Ali, officiated at the launch. Foreign dignitaries, tourism industry leaders, government people, and community leaders were in attendance. The Buganda king will be the patron of UCOTA and will support community tourism activities through the Kabaka Foundation (kabaka means king in the Luganda language). UCOTA also received commitments of financial support from several other donors, including the U.K.-based Association for Conservation and Tourism.

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compared to Kenya, which alone received one-half million tourists in 1996 (Kenya Tourist Board 1998).

As seen from these numbers, the recuperation of tourism in Uganda will be a slow process. The tourist industry must overcome years of neglect, bad publicity, and the destruction of its natural treasures. However, with sector investment increasing and wildlife numbers on the rise throughout Uganda's protected areas, and with the security situation slowly improving, many of the constraints to a resurgent tourism are being removed. At the same time, Uganda will not become a mass tourist destination, and its tourist numbers will not approach those of its East African neighbors.

Uganda is looking away from wildlife tourism based on viewing the "big five" (safari tourism based on viewing the five big game species: buffalo, lion, rhino, elephant, and leopard) toward a more integrated natural or ecotourism focus. This new focus stresses nontraditional East African tourist products (primates, birds, and water-based tourism) and integrates them with big game. In this area, Uganda has much to offer. Uganda's natural beauty and its isolation relative to normal tourist destinations in East Africa provide tourists with a more intimate and rugged African natural adventure. Moreover, tourists to Uganda can enjoy intimate contact with endangered mountain gorillas, chimpanzees, and hundreds of species of birds.

The relative isolation and the more direct contact with nature offer the opportunity for communities located near areas of natural beauty to interact with tourists and reap economic benefits from this interaction. These ingredients offer a distinct opportunity for Uganda to capitalize on ecotourism.

THE ROLE OF WILDLIFE IN UGANDA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In Uganda, tourism represents the only legal mechanism through which people living in rural communities can derive economic benefits from wildlife. Fees for accommodation and food services for tourists, as well as for limited tourist guiding, represent sources of income directly related to wildlife viewing and nature-based tourism.

Few other wildlife-based opportunities have the potential to generate revenue for rural Ugandans. The Uganda Wildlife Statute of 1996 fosters the derivation of economic benefits through the establishment of wildlife user rights, including game ranching. However, no regulations exist to allow the exercise of such rights at this time. Two years after the passage of the statute, no single example of extension of wildlife user rights exists in the country. The Uganda Wildlife Authority has attempted on several occasions to advance a wildlife use policy based on participatory processes, but the recommendations and proposed actions have languished. The extension of wildlife user rights implies a limited lifting of the hunting ban, and the country is moving only cautiously in that direction owing to the past devastation and still-limited numbers of some species in the country.

Game ranching offers a direct wildlife use option that would not require hunting. Wild animal capture for breeding purposes would most likely occur initially to stock the ranches. For the most part, game ranching initiatives will require private-sector investment that might or might not

lead to direct benefits to those communities affected by wildlife. Joint ventures with communities, or other mechanisms to ensure a transfer or dispersal of benefits to local communities, represent possible options that policy could address once established. However, the time to achieve implementation of such policies lies several years in the future.

Therefore, tourism offers the greatest possibility to extend the benefits from wildlife to those who interact with it on a daily basis. These people face the costs from crop-raiding animals and from the inability to expand agricultural production onto land designated as protected areas. In the past, they have shared little in the benefits from tourism or from the existence of the protected areas where much of the world's biological diversity exists. They now want such benefits, and policy makers are listening, believing that unless people can earn economic benefits, the job of protecting Uganda's biodiversity will become increasingly more difficult, if not impossible.

Officially, Uganda embraces the concept of ecotourism and expects to become a significant ecotourism destination in the future. However, like many countries that hope to build their tourism bases on natural treasures, Uganda has not developed policies that foster and promote ecotourism. This is especially true in the area of community benefits.

According to accepted ecotourism principles, economic opportunities and benefits must accrue to those people who share geographic proximity with protected areas, that is, those who represent local interests rather than purely national or international interests (Whelan 1991). The adoption of ecotourism principles implies a commitment to support local businesses and entrepreneurs. Promoting the use of local materials, labor, and foodstuffs is a positive first step, but community-based businesses require more. They need the capital and skills that will allow them to compete in the nature tourism market, backed by policy and actions conducive to ecotourism. Otherwise, Uganda will have tourism based on nature but not ecotourism.

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The success enjoyed by the reawakening of the tourist industry depends on attracting and pleasing the tourists that come to Uganda. This implies developing awareness among tourism businesspeople of the needs and wants of today's travelers and instilling the ability to respond to them through quality services. Tourists who feel ill treated or exploited will not serve as Uganda's tourism goodwill ambassadors.

Local entrepreneurs and community organizations need to develop and enhance their skills to fully realize any gains from tourism. These small businesses have neither the experience nor the skills to market their enterprises or provide the quality service demanded by the international ecotourist. The lack of a trained human resource base, especially outside the capital city, Kampala, exacerbates the problem.

Several explanations exist for the lack of human resource capability. The smaller scale entrepreneur or community business operates in isolation and is uninformed about trends and issues related to the industry. Possessing only limited experience interacting with foreigners, the local businessperson knows little about foreign tastes, customs, and expectations. Moreover, many of the people employed to work in

TABLE 1
CHARACTERIZATION OF TOURISTS COMING TO UGANDA

"Affluent Africaphiles"	Typically age 45 to 60 years, have visited Africa three or four times before and love the continent; probably visited Kenya/Tanzania/Zimbabwe and are looking for something different; affluent/well off; professionals; fit and adventurous; require clean, comfortable, and stylish accommodations; want to be well looked after; typically American, some British.
"Yuppy adventurers"	Typically European professionals, age 25 to 35 years, looking for something adventurous and challenging during their holidays; probably first or second time to Africa; prefer unspoiled and less well-known destinations; likely to have been budget-conscious backpackers during university days; now, either backpack or need tour operator assistance to ensure availability/itineraries because of limited vacation time from professions/jobs; maintain independence of spirit and price consciousness; require clean and comfortable accommodations but without the frills.
"Energetic expats"	Typically age 35 to 50 years, mostly British/American, might have young children; want to escape Kampala for weekends and short breaks; prefer simple but adequate style of accommodations, perhaps self-catering; like to be away from overseas tourists (on their own, with another couple, etc.); price conscious but appreciate quality.

tourism facilities suffer from a lack of formal education and training and have had little opportunity to receive informal preparation. Without training, the required skill development and transfer of capabilities to support a locally based ecotourism will not occur in Uganda.

Building capacity and raising the quality level of smaller scale tourism businesses run by rural proprietors or by communities requires a conscious decision to focus on groups that generally have less economic and political power. This commitment had not existed in the past, but beginning in 1995, the Ministry of Tourism, Trade, and Industry (previously known as the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities) began to recognize the important role that rural businesses could play in the country's drive to increase its nature-based tourism. Rural-based entrepreneurs were perfectly placed to capture a portion of Uganda's tourist market and, in the process, to begin to derive direct economic benefit from tourism.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UGANDA'S ECOTOURISTS

To capture the ecotourism benefits, local entrepreneurs and policy makers first must understand the different types of ecotourists who come to Uganda. Three categories can be developed to typify visitors to Uganda (Victurine and Carpenter 1996). Table 1 portrays the profiles of tourists most likely to embark on safaris to Uganda.

The latter two categories in Table 1 offer the greatest opportunity for the small-scale entrepreneur or community-based tourism enterprise to develop a market share. In particular, capturing the budget-conscious backpacker market offers the greatest opportunity. The challenge for the small-scale entrepreneur in Uganda rests with providing the quality and consistency of services demanded by the international market at an acceptable price and marketing the services so that people know they exist. If that challenge is met, then the local economy will benefit from the inflow and circulation of money from tourism while the national industry is served.

Given Uganda's history of political instability and even current recent instability in the region, the backpacker market, in terms of numbers, might be what sustains Uganda's

external tourism. Other more conventional and higher spending tourists might wait for political conditions to stabilize before venturing forth on safaris in Uganda, whereas the more adventurous travelers will be less deterred and will remain drawn to the country. Those backpackers or budget travelers often seek a cultural experience, or a "true African experience," one that many locally based community facilities have the resources and capability to provide.

Capturing that market without proper management and know-how, however, poses serious constraints. Even though government support through training and investment to the community tourism sector would bolster investor confidence and create opportunities, past government priorities did not include training or skill development for rural and community-level businesses; whatever support was available would gravitate toward businesses and enterprises in major cities. Consequently, the people most linked to the concept of ecotourism and most affected by the proximity of wildlife and protected areas had been ignored as candidates for tourism planning and capacity-building programs.

Even if these rural entrepreneurs had enjoyed recognition and consideration from government, constraints would have limited their participation. They cannot leave their places of business or their homes for long training sessions, and even if they could, they do not have the necessary academic credentials to qualify for vacancies. Furthermore, the scale of business targeted in most training differs dramatically from those found in rural areas. Not surprisingly, rural participants find the course content and level of teaching irrelevant to their needs and conditions.

Staff from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Grants Management Unit (GMU) of the Action Program for the Environment recognized the constraints posed by the small-scale entrepreneur's isolation, lack of knowledge, and limited opportunities for skill development. In response, and in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry, the GMU team designed and implemented what has become a three-part training program that provides for classroom training, in-field follow-up and consultation, and business services support. The program, the first of its kind in Uganda, has provided direct need-based training to more grassroots and community-based entrepreneurs to support improved tourism and visitor services in

Uganda and can serve as a strategy to increase community tourism opportunities in the country.

TRAINING SMALL-SCALE TOURISM OPERATORS

Program Goals

The aim of the program is to build the capability of these establishments and their personnel to ensure visitor satisfaction. With visitor satisfaction, more people will be taking services at their facilities, which in turn will increase their profitability. The program is intended to increase the confidence of the proprietors, managers, and operators of these facilities.

The tourism training program was conceived, developed, and funded by the GMU originally as a two-part program to cater specifically to the needs and conditions of local and community-based tourist operations. In development of the training program, the organizers stressed the following general objectives:

- to develop the skills necessary to improve visitor and food services,
- to provide participants with improved management skills, and
- to create a linkage between various local organizations involved in the tourism industry but not necessarily recognized at the national level as legitimate providers of tourism services.

In stressing this last point, the organizers strived to create a way for the local small-scale tourism ventures to receive recognition, and ultimately financial support, for their initiatives.

Specific program objectives were developed so that by the end of the program, participants would be able to implement the following activities:

- adequately cater to visitors, especially international and expatriate resident tourists with a desire to have a more "local" or "African" experience;
- prepare appetizing menus using a variety of different and locally available foodstuffs (the objective was to achieve simple but high-quality and varied meals);
- improve inventory control so that the establishments can keep adequate stocks of drinks and foods to avoid disappointing customers;
- adopt and adhere to standard health and sanitation requirements at the establishments;
- undertake basic planning and forecasting to arrive at good decisions regarding key areas of the operations;
- understand the importance of appropriate bookkeeping;
- receive and look after visitors with the utmost courtesy and hospitality; and
- market and promote the establishments domestically and internationally.

This list represents the basic skill areas covered by the training program. Most of these topics are extremely basic, but the majority of participants had no earlier exposure to

them. For example, many rural people who operated visitor service establishments had limited exposure to dietary likes and dislikes of international visitors. People registered disbelief that local foods, such as pumpkin, could be made into soup and served to appreciative guests. Participants themselves were surprised by the good taste given that such soup is not common local fare.

The reaction was normal. Many of the participants had looked outward from the village, assigning a lower value to local products and ways of doing things. They believed that they had to acquire goods from outside and adopt practices, designs, and styles from the cities and larger towns to operate a successful facility. The understanding of the value of "African" and that people would enjoy and pay for something Ugandan caused some disbelief.

Consequently, the training program had to start from first principles and stress the basics of running a tourist operation that could operate and support itself within a local context. The training allowed participants to discover the possibilities of success simply through the adoption of new techniques in the use of resources already existing in the village or nearby region. This message proved powerful and established a context within which the groups or individual proprietors would undertake investment in their facilities.

Method

The training program combined a 1-week training workshop with a follow-up site visit to each of the participants to provide supervision. The training course, held at a training hotel in western Uganda, served as the venue. Participants received presentations, watched videos, and conducted role plays within a structured workshop setting. Evenings were free to explore avenues of interest and included exploring new recipes in the kitchen and meal planning. Most participants sought the maximum exposure to new ideas and often worked late into the evenings on special projects to take advantage of the training opportunities.

The participants were asked to come to the training program prepared to discuss their individual operations—their successes, barriers, and constraints. The trainers worked with the participants to relate the curriculum to the individuals' specific cases so that the trainees could begin to apply basic principles to their own ventures.

By the conclusion of the workshop, the participants had prepared specific objectives and action plans aimed at the development and improvement of their own or their community's tourism product over the subsequent 2- to 3-month period. This action plan formed the foundation for the second-phase, hands-on field orientation and technical assistance provided to each participant.

Field Visit for Hands-On Support

With these action plans forming the foundation for the training's second phase, the trainers visited each participant's establishment to assess action plan progress and provide technical input into overall facility operations. The site visits provided the opportunity for further interaction and, even more important, stimulated these entrepreneurs to carry

on with the improvement and investment plans. Specifically, these visits provided the following:

1. *Follow-up.* The trainers indicated that each participant would be visited, and this promise was kept. This was important for gaining trust and building morale among the participants.
2. *Technical input.* The trainers could assess progress toward the action plan and observe the entire operation—its strengths and weaknesses. The trainers assisted each group in identifying other priority areas for attention and action, and they provided useful suggestions for improvements in the overall operations.
3. *Information exchange and contact with the broader community.* Many of the operators had felt isolated in the past. During these visits, the trainers would take people to visit another's site nearby. The trainers assisted these entrepreneurs in making contact with groups that would help in marketing or assist with raising funds.

This method allowed participants to learn and explore new ideas and concepts related to the tourism industry and then apply this new learning directly to their operations. Through the field visits, the training team had the opportunity to directly observe the specific tourist operation and provide advice on issues and problems encountered while in the field. Moreover, the field visits provided a morale boost for some of the small businesses that were struggling to build up sufficient financial and human capital to succeed.

This latter point deserves particular attention. In Uganda, as in many countries, rural people hear many promises of follow-through on requests and actions. Most never materialize. With the first postworkshop visit, and then with subsequent support visits made by the trainers and donors, the participants gained confidence in themselves and began to feel part of a larger support network for community tourism.

Selection of Participants

The workshop was intended for proprietors, managers, and operators of hotels and food facilities services engaged in community tourism around Uganda's national parks. This original definition was further clarified to include operators or employees of small-scale tourist facilities, including those providing guide services or visits to natural attractions.

Selection of participants involved discussions with a variety of organizations in an effort to receive broad representation. Applications were submitted from the major tourism areas in the country, with applicants referred to the GMU by Uganda Wildlife Authority staff, the Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry, conservation-related nongovernmental organizations, and Peace Corps volunteers from around the 10 national parks in the country. The response was extremely positive, with close to 50 applications submitted to the GMU.

After a review of the applications, which included a questionnaire and a statement from each applicant indicating how and why the applicant would benefit from the training, a panel selected 27 participants for this first-ever tourism training course for local entrepreneurs in May 1995. All participants came from rural areas; none had received training in any area related to tourism (for some, the training venue was the furthest they had traveled from their villages), and all

were looking for information, advice, and support to improve their businesses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As originally conceived, the training should have ended after the second phase, but that proved impossible. By its nature, the training program was limited in scope, and it soon became apparent that the supply of information and support would not meet the pent-up demand of the participants. The workshop whetted appetites that could not be completely satisfied during the field support visit that focused on only one or two issues from the action plan.

Participants indicated that a continued lack of knowledge and a lack of funds were stumbling blocks to their development. They requested the following:

- additional training related to tourism services (communication skills, improved service provision and guest relations, catering, and improved service delivery techniques);
- improved information exchange and access to information to remove the sense that these groups operate in isolation from the larger tourism industry; and
- funding, specifically access to loans from local banks (under normal conditions, none of these entrepreneurs is eligible for any bank financing).

The articulation of these issues led the GMU to provide additional funding for targeted in-service training, connect with a local bank to promote lending to the tourism sector, and expand the scope of the training to additional businesses, including production and marketing of crafts.

Targeted In-Service Training

A specific request from the community campground/*bandas* at Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla national parks, located in southwestern Uganda, resulted in a week-long training program in food preparation and cash-flow management. The training directly responded to two problems identified by the community-based groups:

- *The complaints of tourists over the limited variety of food and its poor quality at the community facilities.* For example, in one of the facilities, the problem arose of tourists departing earlier than desired because of poor food quality. These early departures led to a significant loss of income. Training was geared to improving menu variety using locally available food inputs. Response was positive and menus did improve, as evidenced by fewer tourist complaints and improved meals tried on-site.
- *Difficulties arising from poor record keeping and cash management.* The community-based businesses needed support with their cash-flow management and reinvestment strategies for improving their facilities. Many of the organizations were keen to take profits immediately but not invest those profits in facility improvements. The training assisted the groups to keep

better records, improve staff and operations management, and modify reinvestment approaches to ensure the long-term sustainability of their businesses.

The enterprises that benefited from the training are two that receive the greatest number of tourists because of gorilla tourism in the country. They have the highest demand for meals (each tourist spends a minimum of two to three nights), and they record significant income from tourist visits. These issues had to be addressed in relatively successful operations, at least in terms of revenue. Other community-level facilities in the country earn much less revenue and suffer from similar but more intractable problems due to the resource constraint.

The success of this targeted training approach argues for similar activities with those organizations, which already have passed through the first two training phases. Since this first targeted effort, the GMU has provided funds to assist other organizations with training in specific areas. The Uganda Tourist Board also has committed funds for 1999 to support community tourism training. In response to various requests, a project proposing the development of a cookbook with easy-to-prepare recipes soon will commence.

Loan Program

Participants identified the lack of investment capital for small-scale entrepreneurs as a serious constraint to the development of community-based tourism in the country. In investigating possible bank interest in a loan program for the tourist sector, the GMU discovered ignorance of the sector by most bankers and very inflexible systems that require most banks to approve loans at the central level.

The first attempts at establishing a loan program failed. The bank chosen by the GMU was launching its village banking program, and the concept of rural tourism loans appealed to it. However, due to a major change in personnel that led to a change in emphasis, the village banking concept received lower priority than was expected. With village banking's relegation to a lower priority, the tourism loan program languished. Borrowers visited rural branches, but the branches had no authority to approve loans, and approvals from Kampala never materialized.

Interest rates represent another constraint. To cover the costs and risks of rural lending, many banks charge interest rates between 40% and 50% per annum. For tourism enterprises in Uganda, these rates are stifling and limit options. Subsequent to the formation of the Ugandan Community Tourist Association (UCOTA), a new initiative stimulated by this training program, the GMU will explore development of a loan program that charges fair market interest rates (15% to 20% per annum) with guarantees provided by UCOTA. The system approximates similar borrower guarantee programs as practiced under micro-finance credit programs and approximates autochthonous borrowing systems under which community members provide capital to each other within a revolving scheme. By borrowing from this approach, the GMU will launch a loan program that can easily be adapted to village mechanisms. Through this approach, the GMU can be responsive to the credit needs of these small tourism businesses while earning additional funds through interest collections to support its conservation objectives.

Expanded Training

The original group of trainees felt strongly that more training assistance was required to make community tourism and ecotourism a reality in Uganda. The need to discuss the failure of the loan program and seek alternatives also was high on the agenda. Therefore, 3 years after the program's completion, the GMU agreed to finance another training program. In addition, the GMU had received requests from other organizations wishing to participate in a subsequent GMU-sponsored, community-level tourism workshop. Based on the needs of the original group, as well as the needs expressed by the newly interested parties, the GMU designed a workshop with three distinct modules. The first module was designed for the group of trainees from 1995 and focused on the following:

- development of a rural, community-based tourist association linked to the Uganda Tourist Association;
- first steps toward the development of standards for small-scale operations; and
- business planning.

A second module was designed for new organizations and used a methodology similar to the one described earlier. The third module focused on craft development and marketing and worked specifically with craft producers in Uganda to improve their products for sale overseas and explore the development of new products and designs. Most of these producers were represented in women's organizations from Uganda's rural areas.

This new training effort was undertaken through joint funding from the GMU and the Uganda Tourist Board. The tourist board has embraced the community tourism concept and expects to provide both financial and technical support to community-level tourism in the future. This financial contribution of \$5,000 represents the first financial support from a Ugandan government agency to a community-level tourism initiative. More is expected in the future as community tourism becomes institutionalized.

The major result of this July 1998 workshop was the decision to create UCOTA. The participants established a committee charged with creating and legalizing the association. They also acquired a commitment of technical support for the process from the North Carolina Zoo and from the Namibian Community-Based Tourist Association, whose representative attended the training to assist in forging the new organization. UCOTA will represent the interests of various individuals and community-based tourism initiatives, hotels, and craft makers to ensure application of standards and quality control to enhance visitors' tourist experience and ensure that members benefit economically from Uganda's ecotourism.

As part of the agreement of association, members will adhere to UCOTA established design and operational standards. In exchange, UCOTA will coordinate marketing, financing, and training for its members. The goal is for UCOTA to become a self-financing membership association as well as an organization that will raise funds to continue with the capacity building initiated by the GMU. A successful UCOTA will ensure the sustainability of this rural tourism initiative and the capacity-building program, and it will provide rural entrepreneurs with a forum through which their issues and concerns can reach the wider tourist industry.

CONCLUSION

The design of the training program became adaptive as the organizers recognized the need to adopt a “learning by doing” approach. In Uganda, there was no precedent for tourism training for this specific target audience. Neither the level of enthusiasm of the trainees nor the true extent of the deficiencies that needed attention was apparent when the training was designed. The direction of the training program responded to the input and responses of the trainees. The result was an expanded program and a dynamic approach for building capacity among players in a much-ignored sector of the tourist industry, which is itself fledgling. A schematic demonstrating the linkages of the various components appears in Figure 1.

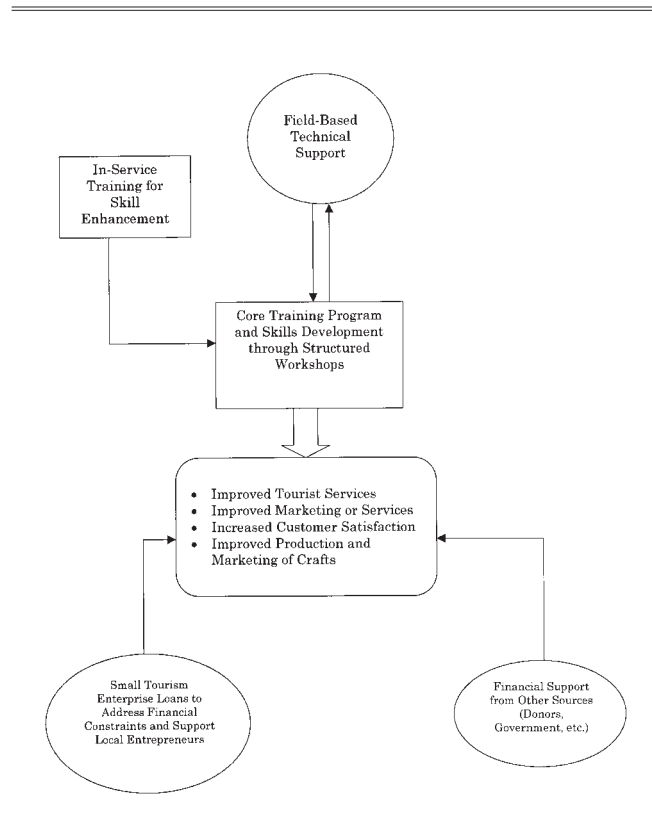
Consequently, the training program lasted longer than was anticipated and truly has become an ongoing venture, taking into account what organizers hope will be a viable community loan program and the establishment of an indigenous community tourist association for the country. The training cost a total of \$11,000 during the first round and another \$18,000 for the three-phase training in July 1998. Other in-service training costs have not exceeded \$7,000. Support for the loan program should cost no more than \$5,000 to cover training costs and materials once UCOTA is launched and the credit scheme is established.

The returns have started coming in on this relatively small investment. Early in 1998, the North Carolina Zoo instituted a program to support community enterprises and conservation. Several of the groups that started the training program in 1995 will receive additional technical and financial assistance aimed at promoting their tourism enterprise and creating greater economic opportunity in the surrounding communities. The national newspaper, *New Vision*, selected one of the trainees as Best Female Entrepreneur of 1997 and presented her with money and a return ticket to England. She invested much of that cash prize in capital improvements to her tourist facility. Already, a delegation from UCOTA has traveled to Namibia to attend the 1998 annual general meeting of the Namibian Community Tourist Association in an effort to learn from their African colleagues and explore options for mutual support and information sharing.

Many of the organizations and businesses have begun earning higher incomes and are now investing their funds to improve their core businesses and develop ancillary support services such as running taxis and producing food. With craft development on the agenda, many women in rural communities now will improve their skills and increase their incomes through linkages established with the tourism facilities and through marketing channels created through the efforts of UCOTA.

Not all enterprises have been successful. The GMU conducted a survey of trainees and found that possibly only 50% of the enterprises represented in the first training program have shown significant improvements and now operate viable businesses. Those businesses that embraced the training concepts have shown a marked improvement in services and reinvestment in facilities, surpassing other local businesses. One of the most successful community ventures funds community projects from its profits so that a wider audience shares in the benefits from tourism.

**FIGURE 1
SCHEMATIC OF TRAINING
PROGRAM COMPONENTS**



Certainly, the pace of development can be considered extremely slow. This measured pace should be expected given the novelty of the program and the limited access to resources that constrain these organizations. The measured pace also represents a commitment to work closely with the first group of trainees within their capabilities without expending exorbitant sums of money. Success requires that the operations not be donor driven; pouring money into these businesses would distort local initiative. People have to make their own successes.

And they have. There has been progress and significant achievement. Businesses have invested their profits to improve facilities and services; employees were sent to training programs sponsored by other organizations, and some businesses even sent trainees to their colleagues’ establishments to learn from their experiences. However, the biggest gain might be in the level of confidence that the various enterprises have achieved.

The decision by the more established enterprises to organize a trade organization called the Uganda Community Tourist Association indicates a serious level of commitment and confidence. UCOTA will be an independent member organization. It will provide marketing support, establish standards, and link tourists to its network of community-based tourist facilities throughout the country. It will be an organization established by the communities for the communities so that tourism begins to leave its benefits at the grass-roots level. Moreover, UCOTA will generate both internal

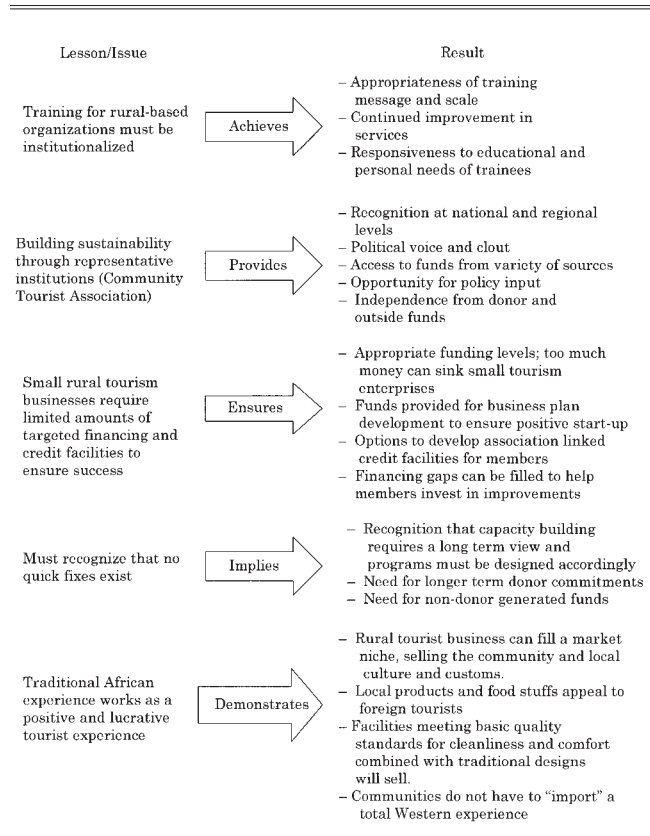
funds and funds raised from a variety of donors. The results should be a greater level of financial sustainability and lessened dependence on any one donor.

LESSONS LEARNED

The experience gained through this training program and the evidence gleaned from those community-based tourism enterprises operating over the past few years provide important lessons for future developments in this part of the tourism sector. Figure 2 provides a framework for exploring these lessons and their implications. These lessons will require attention as Uganda develops its ecotourism program so that the focus on communities benefits those most proximate to protected areas and, ultimately, the industry as a whole.

- Training for community-based operations must be institutionalized, with programs tailored to unique qualities of the targeted local businesses. Training programs designed for the personnel of larger city hotels will not be appropriate for rural businesses. An annual training program for small, community-based tourism businesses should be considered, as should targeted programs to respond to specific needs and deficiencies. Government support through the Uganda Tourist Board offers one mechanism.
- The community tourism organizations need to be better organized and represented at the national level. Fostering the creation of a community tourism association makes sense so that an advocacy agency for community tourism exists and represents the interests of its members in support of finance and marketing. Once established, UCOTA needs to have some level of representation in the Uganda Tourist Association.
- Small amounts of investment capital can make a big difference for these small businesses. Establishing mechanisms through credit schemes to help remove serious capital constraints faced by these small businesses is important. In conjunction with money for credit facilities, financing programs need to budget funds to provide business plan development assistance for the small enterprises.
- With encouragement and support, many of these community-based tourism businesses can succeed. However, progress is likely to be slow. Donors involved in such programming must recognize that the slow pace does not mean failure. Throwing too much money—and too quickly—at such enterprises might doom them to failure.
- Lack of a “quick fix” means that donor funds must be committed to build local capacity in the tourism sector over a long time period. A commitment of 2 or 3 years will prove insufficient. A successful program will require establishment of medium- to long-term mechanisms to support community-based tourism.
- Any training program needs to have budgetary and programmatic flexibility built in so that it can respond to the changing needs of a dynamic industry.
- Participants learned that a traditional African experience can be marketed successfully to ecotourists. The

FIGURE 2
LESSONS LEARNED



course disabused participants of the notion that for success, they must try to replicate “mini-Sheratons” throughout rural Uganda. They learned that limited capital investments in traditional construction, along with commitment to cleanliness and quality service, yields profits.

- The “nuts and bolts” training issues and the work of these entrepreneurs had to be placed within a broader context and related to both the national tourism scene and national conservation objectives.

A viable ecotourism business in Uganda must involve local people and locally based businesses. This training program provided a pilot approach for building the skills and competencies required for excellence and success, but this was only a first step. The program embraced an adaptive strategy, learning about the constraints through work with the participants and designing responses to include as part of the training package. Further program design and modification evolved from those experiences.

Without training, financial support, and outside advice provided by organizations dedicated to building Uganda’s tourism, many of these fledgling businesses cannot be sustained. These small businesses must acquire both moral and financial support from the Uganda Tourist Board as well as from Kampala-based tourist associations and must be recognized as integral partners in the development of Uganda’s tourist industry. This training program has demonstrated that, with a limited investment, this much-ignored sector of

the ecotourist industry can get a boost and contribute effectively to national tourism objectives.

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