Cultural Tourism Enterprises as a way out of poverty?

How sustainable pro-poor tourism works in Tanzania

Masaï women welcoming visitors at Rundugai CTE — © Caroline Roger

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.

Msambwe Madiwa is one of the very few woman trekking guides in Tanzania's male-dominated tourism sector, thanks to her participation in a cultural tourism enterprise (CTE) initiated by her community and accredited by the Tanzanian Tourism Board (TTB). In Tanzania, cultural tourism adopts a community-based tourism approach in which community members are directly involved in designing and organizing tours, and showing tourists aspects of their lives. Cultural tourism development takes a sustainable and pro-poor approach, focusing specifically on unlocking opportunities for the poor to benefit more within tourism, rather than simply expanding the overall size of the sector.

An innovative approach to tourism

There are currently 66 Cultural Tourism Enterprises (CTEs) nationwide. While they are popular with tourists, many do not attract the numbers they would like. Also, CTEs are mostly run by men; women are found in supporting roles rather than in managerial or decisional roles. Uniterra's partnership with TTB seeks to support local CTEs to increase their share of the tourism market —through branding/marketing and product development— while also attracting and retaining well qualified women.

Since 2015, 11 Uniterra Program volunteers specialised in marketing, website development, communications, entrepreneurship, and tourism product development, have worked with TTB and CTEs to improve their products and increase their online visibility through brand development and promotional materials. The goal was to build CTEs' capacities to market themselves effectively so that they can attract more tourists, thereby increasing revenues for themselves and for community projects.

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Key themes of the story
Cultural tourism/women's integration into the tourism sector

Emerging results and next steps

TTB now has a new, attractive website, with an interactive map and direct links to all the CTEs' websites and Facebook pages, as well as the capacity to keep it updated. 63 out of the existing 66 CTEs have received training in marketing; each has its own personalised logo and brochure, and has staff with the capacity to use social media, photography, and e-mail for marketing support. Several CTEs have started reporting more inquiries from tourists. "We have seen an increase in visits and inquiries on our Facebook Page", says Ndoss Ndumiaita from Rundugai CTE. The result of effective marketing is invaluable not only for CTEs as businesses, but also for their communities, as a portion of profits raised from CTE activities are put into a Village Development Fund to support projects such as water collection, health care facilities and school classrooms.

"It takes a minimum of 8 people to form a CTE. Each $1 received by a CTE member benefits an average of 10 people. Cultural Tourism Enterprises employ 6,000 people, for a total reach of 30,000 direct beneficiaries and around 60,000 indirect beneficiaries."

Elirehema Maturo
Tanzania Tourist Board

The work of Uniterra volunteers also had an impact on tour operators who now have a better product to sell to tourists. Today, 80% of tour operators are packaging cultural tourism programs with their safari offers.

To increase the number of women within the CTEs, a volunteer Gender Advisor engaged with a local organization —Enriching Skills and Action Research Tanzania (ENSAT)— to provide a Gender Action Learning System or GALS training to promote women's economic and social empowerment within 20 Cultural Tourism Enterprises organizations. As an example, Mto Wa Mbu CTE is creating a Tanzanian Female Guide Network on WhatsApp, to enable female tour guides to share and learn from each other.

The Uniterra Program difference

"Before the arrival of the Uniterra program, CTEs were all branded alike in a manner that did not highlight their differences and made it difficult for them to sell their products. CTEs did not have the capacity to brand themselves, so Uniterra volunteers were key in the way the CTEs now communicate with the tourism industry/tourists in the branding and marketing of each CTE" says Elirehema Maturo, Tanzania Tourist Board.

What's next?

The Uniterra Program also has a partnership with Village Monde, a Canadian social enterprise that supports responsible village tourism by promoting accommodations in remote villages outside of the traditional tourist circuits. A volunteer from Village Monde is to identify and certify some of the best homestays in Tanzania. With the reinforced success of the CTEs, it is believed that more communities will show interest in sustainable income that can be generated through cultural enterprises.

Elizabeth Matte, volunteer Marketing Advisor, has worked with TTB for a year, visiting as many CTEs as possible throughout the country, staying one to two weeks in each to assess their offer and marketing needs. Her goal is to train as many CTEs possible in online marketing and branding. She also provides group training on "In-person marketing" and "Attending fairs". She says the biggest challenge for women to join a CTE is a lack of confidence and not being taken seriously in a male dominated-world.