

# The Dimensions of Tourism Businesses and Associations Collaborations to Promote Tourism Development Lesotho

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## Abstract

African countries depend on tourism to boost their economies and expand the business sector. Tourism opens doors for revenue of the economy, elevates job creation, contributes to infrastructure development, improves exportation of local commodities, and leads to cultural exchanges between host countries and the international community. This study is aimed at identifying tourism businesses- and associations' collaborative areas that are designed to accelerate tourism performance in Lesotho. Tourism partnerships have proved to be an effective tool of integrating different sectorial interests. Little is understood of the dimensions of tourism collaborations especially in African countries that are not highly competitive in the tourism industry. The study utilised the interpretivistic paradigm using the qualitative research approach where government- and business organisations, and tourism associations played as key informants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide to generate primary data for this study and a constant comparative data analysis method was used to analyse this data to identify main- and sub-themes. The findings indicated a low level of tourism development collaborations among the tourism businesses- and associations. The strategies that decision-makers can adopt to upsurge tourism collaborations and competitiveness especially in African countries were suggested.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Business Sector, Tourism Associations, Tourism Development, Collaborations

## Introduction

In a world dominated by rapid changes, since the 1950s, one constant sector that has managed to maintain sustained growth and resilience is the tourism sector (Cooper, 2012:5). Pablo-Romero and Molina (2013:29) noted that many researchers have investigated the connections between tourism and economic growth. The studies of Chulaphan and Barahona (2017); Ohlan (2017); Seghir et al (2015); Kim, Chen and Jang (2006) have found that tourism has a positive impact on economic growth. Therefore, the world has viewed tourism as a

crucial weapon to accelerate economic growth and development (Mowforth & Munt, 2016:1), and according to Mason (2009:45), the sector has been linked to job creation, foreign exchange earnings, regional development, government revenues, and human resources development. Goeldner and Ritchie (2009:6) described tourism as a process, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interaction among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in attracting and hosting visitors. Van der Zee and Vanneste (2015:45) stated that tourism is a complex phenomenon made up of unified stakeholders, partially or fully related to tourism. Many stakeholders inclusive of the public and private organisations are involved in tourism providing services, infrastructure, information, and primary- and secondary tourist products that are vital for a successful tourism destination.

The development of tourism has been recognised by the Lesotho government as a strategic area that can improve economic sufficiency as well as an opportunity to create jobs for many low and semi-skilled members of the population (Yiu, Saner & Lee, 2015:1). The tourism industry proved to be an important sector to the Lesotho economy due to its contribution to revenue generation from travellers, its job creation, and its general contribution to the lives of the people of Lesotho (Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, 2017:3). However, according to the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index Report 2019, out of 140 countries ranked in tourism performance, Lesotho appeared to be ranked number 134 (World Economic Forum, 2019: xiii).

This indicates that the Lesotho's tourism performance is weak and not competitive. Realising the importance of tourism collaborations in accelerating tourism performance, the aim of this study is to explore the dimensions of the collaborations established among the Lesotho tourism business sector and tourism associations. The study further intends to find out how these alliances contribute to the tourism sector development as there are no traceable studies around this area. The study's aim is also to contribute towards building knowledge surrounding tourism collaborations in Africa as little is understood about tourism collaborations dimensions in the continent. This study shall also extend the body of knowledge regarding current practices of tourism management in Africa and whether this is affecting the much-desired tourism improvements. In particular, this research shall identify the established collaborations within the accommodation- and entertainment sector, and tourism associations which is an area narrowly not only in Lesotho but even in other less tourism competitive African countries. The outcome of this study is anticipated to provide guidance to tourism decision-makers on critical areas to focus on when developing policies to promote tourism efficiency.

### **The Role of Collaborations in Tourism Development**

According to Worku and Tessema (2018:3), tourism is viewed as a multi-discipline, multi-stakeholder sector that requires unifications to attain its sustainability. Laila, Paul, and Morrison (2005) emphasised that tourism collaborations are an essential weapon for economic development. At a local destination stage, such partnerships have a considerable contribution towards sustainable tourism taking up community and commercial interests. Tourism collaborations seem to have been a noticeable trend in previous decades. For example, in the early nineties, Selin (1994: 217) highlighted those collaborative alliances as a management tool and as an object of scientific inquiry in the tourism field, was noted to be surging as rapid changes economic, social, and political seem to provide powerful incentives

for tourism stakeholders to notice their inter-dependencies and to engage in joint decision making. Subsequently, in the early 2000s, Bramwell and Lane (2000) also highlighted an increasing call for tourism stakeholders' collaborations. However, Saito and Ruhanen (2017:189) warned that in as much as tourism collaborations are highly necessary, tourism collaborations' stakeholders come with different powers in these transactions. These were inclusive of coercive-, legitimate-, induced-, and competent power. It seems private sector organisations hold more legitimate power. It is therefore important to note the significance of these powers in the effective administration of tourism collaborations. It has also been identified that trust is a key element in tourism collaboration which should be harnessed by all collaboration players and more importantly, roles within networks need to be clarified, and regular communication be maintained (Park & Kohler, 2019:107).

According to Camilleri (2018:6) the tourism sector intends to provide services to visitors; therefore, its success depend on meaningful collaborations across the sectors because the synergy derived from these transactions contribute to destination effectiveness. Rao, Zach, Racherla and. Fesenmaier (2016:97) also noted that interactions between tourism stakeholders add more value to the tourism sector. The government organisations' have been identified as significant players in tourism development initiatives (Nguyen, Dong & Ho: 2021:200) and on the other hand tourism strategic partnerships allows tourism businesses to direct resources and capabilities to generate revenue for clients (Connect World Wide, 2021).

### **The Lesotho Tourism Associations, Accommodation- and Entertainment Sectors**

Not much has been documented about associations within the tourism sector in Lesotho. The tourism associations include members of the Lesotho Hotel and Hospitality Association (LHHA), Tour Operators Association of Lesotho (TOAL), and others directly involved in promoting quality tourism products and services across the country (The World Bank, 2018b). Little has also been studied about the accommodation sector in Lesotho although the country has witnessed an expansion in the number of accommodation facilities over the past years. This growth has made the accommodation sector a key source of revenue in the tourism industry as well as employment. The accommodation sector in Lesotho encompasses hotels, bed and breakfast establishments, lodges and guest houses, self-catering cottages, and backpackers' hostels (Lesotho Review, 2017:36). In addition to these, Lesotho lodging facilities also include hostels, Farmers Training Centres, and rural homestays. Camping and caravan sites are also available at key attraction sites (Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, 2017b:14). These accommodation facilities are found in all ten districts of Lesotho and mainly in major tourist regions (Yiu, *et al.*, 2015:10). All these establishments range from sophisticated, well-appointed establishments, with casinos and conference facilities, to those which offer more basic amenities (Lesotho Review, 2018:43). Not much has been documented about the entertainment industry in Lesotho and no study can be traced regarding any issue concerning this industry. Leisanyane (2018) adds that countries such as South Africa, China, and Australia have documented much about their entertainment sectors inclusive of the value being added by this sector on their economies; yet, Lesotho has no statistics and no studies regarding the local entertainment industry.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

There are three research paradigms namely positivist, interpretivist, and critical paradigm (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017:30). Positivism relates more to the quantitative method, while interpretivism is associated with qualitative research (Al-Habil (2011:948). This research

adopted a qualitative design as little had been studied regarding the Lesotho tourism sector, therefore, little is known regarding this industry. The study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of issues pertaining the Lesotho tourism development to extend tourism information. Table 1 explains the characteristics of qualitative research.

Table 1  
*Characteristics of Qualitative Research*

Features	Aims
Humanistic	Focuses on personal, subjective, experiential knowledge and practice
Holistic	Seeks to situate meanings of particular behaviors and ways of doing things in a given context
Interpretive	Often aimed at explaining rather than describing
Reflexive	Often explicit about how personal history and biography shape questions asked, the framing of research and presentation of data

Adapted from: Kielmann, Cataldo and Seeley (2012:9)

As can be depicted from Table 1, qualitative research is more elaborative and seeks to provide a broader view of issues being studied. Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa and Varpio (2015:669) add that qualitative research is the systematic enquiry into social phenomena in natural settings, and the design comprises, how an individual or a group of people act, how organisations operate, and how interactions shape relationships. This study adopted purposive sampling and according to Kapur (2018:43), this method is appropriate where the population is homogenous and comprises of elements that can be itemised or represented and where every element should be mutually exclusive. A total of 13 participants were selected in this research and these included government organisations, private businesses, and tourism associations. Table 2 indicates the organisations and the number of key informants in this study.

Table 2  
*Organisations and Number of Participants*

Type of organisation	Number of participants	Pseudo name
Accommodation establishments	4	P2; P3; P5; P6
Entertainment organisations	2	P1 P4
Association of tour operators	1	N 2
Music association	1	N1
Department of Culture	1	G4
Tertiary institution – government	1	G1
Lesotho Tourism development Cooperation	1	G7
Department of Transport	1	G3
Tertiary institution - private	1	T2

From Table 2, it can be learned that private businesses were represented by six participants from four accommodation establishments and two participants from the entertainment sector. It can also be depicted that two tourism associations (music association and the tour operator association) served as key informants in this study. Also, government organisations related to the tourism industry served as key informants and these included the Department of Culture, Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, Lerotholi Polytechnic, and the

Department of Transport. One private higher education institution also played role in this study – Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. Only one individual was selected to play a role from all the 13 organisations. These participants were selected with the assistance of the Lesotho Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture.

All the business sector and tourism associations selected played a role in the tourism industry for over five years hence it was believed that they have acquired adequate experience of tourism related issues. Officials from the government organisations were selected on the basis of their seniority in the organisational hierarchy and the number of years they have served in their organisations. Only government officials who were in middle management and have served more than five years in their prospective organisations were selected as participants in this research. Representatives from higher education institutions were selected on the basis of the number of years they have served and their involvement in tourism activities. All higher education institutions participants have been with their institutions for over five years and had served as heads of the department. The selection conclusion was based on the fact that these participants had a fair share in tourism decision making and have a strong operational experience in tourism related matters and therefore could provide well-informed data regarding the subject under investigation.

Primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews utilising a structured interview guide. Primary data refers to the sources whereby the investigator can access data by direct, detached observation, or measurement of a phenomenon in the real world undisturbed by any middle interpreter (Walliman, 2011:175). Interviews were held at a place that was convenient for the participants. An audio recorder was utilised during the interviews with the consent of the participants. According to Cresswell (2014:249), the normal method used to present data in qualitative research is the utilisation of narrative passage to express the findings of the analysis that might be a sequence of events or discussions with connected themes and patterns. Using constant comparative data analysis, the themes were identified to be presented in main and sub-themes by clustering likewise issues. All the 13 participants were given pseudo names to maintain anonymity as indicated in Table 2.

## **Results and Discussions**

The results from the interviews with the business organisations, the tourism associations, and the government organisations revealed themes that were consistent among all the three groups. The tourism alliances that emerged from the constant comparative analysis were categorised in two main themes namely the business sector alliances and tourism associations' alliances. However, the sub-themes subsequently emerged within these main themes and they were also discussed.

### **Business Sector Alliances**

It appeared that the private sector organisations have alliances with local government organisations, inter-business sector organisations, non-tourism Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and tourism associations.

#### *Private sector- and local government organisations alliances*

The Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC) highlighted collaborations with tourism businesses focusing on funding their training to enhance their performance. To



improve services at the airport, the Department of Transport through corporate social responsibility outreach programmes seem to have ties with the one private sector organisation not associated with tourism. As noted by these participants:

*G7: We partner with businesses in tourism such as hotels, tour operators and travel agents if we have funding, which is a challenge, we train them. We also invite them on international exhibitions, we sometimes hold training sessions for tourism businesses and invite experts to these training and normally they pay nothing.*

*G3: We also work with Metropolitan Lesotho for helping out with plastic wrapper for suitcases at the airport.*

#### *Inter-business sector alliances*

Two accommodation establishment appears not to have any collaborations with any tourism related organisations however, it seems two other accommodation establishments do collaborate with their competitors and formed informal relationship (gentleman's agreement) to assist each other when their capacity is filled. As noted by the participants:

*P3: We have ties with other two guest houses, when they are full, they contact us, and we do the same. This is not a written agreement.*

*P4: A lot of times when we have events, the liquor distributors sponsor these events and we in-turn allow them to advertise their products during our events as we host a lot of people. Sometimes these liquor distributors sponsor artists that we invite in exchange of advertising platforms. Additionally, we have a bed and breakfast establishment that we use to accommodate our artists.... we do not have a formal partnership with them at the moment.*

*P6: There is an establishment located not far from us..... when we are full, we call them and they do likewise. We just assist each other like that.*

#### *Business sector organisations with non-profit making organisations*

It appears one accommodation establishment has collaborative relationships with other non-tourism sector organisations through an MoU to offer special rates. As noted by the participant:

*P3: Mostly with other NGOs who we have an MoU with. This is an agreement that when we have guests, we would consider them and provide discounts where applicable.*

#### *Business sector with higher education institutions*

The two tertiary institutions have a collaborative relationship with industry, in particular with accommodation establishments, in an advisory capacity on academic and non-academic matters to assist with implementing students' experiential training programmes. Consequently, two accommodation establishments confirm the relationship with tertiary institutions on advisory committees and students' attachment services. As noted by these four participants:

*T2: My institution only partners with the industry through students experiential learning. We work with the lodging facilities in these programmes. Otherwise, we meet with the industry through the tourism advisory council that we have established. This industry committee provides us with information relating to the current trends in tourism and this assist us in offering industry relevant courses.*

*G1: We advise establishments, mainly lodging facilities with the current trends and this is mainly done during student experiential training programmes. Our department also liaises*

*with the industry through students' experiential training...mainly by advising each other where weaknesses are spotted.*

*P5: We sometimes get training from LTDC but they have not invited us for the past two years..... I have also worked a lot with Lerotholi Polytechnic regarding students experiential training.....we do not have a MoU though.*

*P6: My establishment only have informal ties with the Lerotholi Polytechnic because their students come here for attachment.*

### **Tourism Associations' Alliances**

It appears that tourism associations have working collaborations with the local government, business sector and international organisations.

#### *Tourism associations with the local government*

The Department of Culture seems to have relationships with various tourism associations providing establishment support. The music association further confirmed working collaborations with the Department of Culture by noting that the department also supports them during their music events. As noted by these two participants:

*G4: ..... To ensure smooth operations for intangible cultural assets, the department facilitates establishment of associations and we currently liaise with these associations when required: Lesotho Music Theatre Association, Theatre Association of Lesotho, Motion Picture Association, Lesotho Musical Association, Fashion Association of Lesotho, Corral Music Federation.*

*N1: We meet a lot with the Department of Culture to discuss regulations, and they support us with a conference centre to hold our events.*

The tour operator association has met with the Crime Prevention Unit and the Ministry of Trade and Industry about issuance and renewals of licenses. The tour operator association also has a working relationship with the LTDC who facilitates international tourism exhibitions and provides capacity building training programmes, and provides office facilities. As noted by these participants:

*N2: With the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we get our licenses here and we renew them here, after every three years, police services for transport permits when we have trips using a bus. With LTDC, we use their board room, because we do not have an office. Since I have joined the sector LTDC has only facilitated training once. We normally tell them our needs and they always claim lack of financial resources. LTDC pays for stalls in exhibitions and we go there to show people what we offer..... Like we go to Tourism Indaba in South Africa and Germany. We do not meet with the Ministry, LTDC does it on our behalf for budget purposes.*

#### *Tourism association with the business sector alliances*

It appears that tourism associations have established tourism-related alliances with the private sector and some international organisations. The tour operator association seem not to have a strong alliance with the Lesotho Hotel and Hospitality Association; however, they do work with individual hotels regarding tourist accommodation bookings. As noted by this participant:

*N2: Our association hardly works with the Lesotho Hotel and Hospitality Association and we do not have strong ties with them. But then, when we go to exhibitions, we meet and discuss so that we understand what each of us will be doing. We only work with individual hotels when we have clients and need to book accommodation. Individual hotels do contact us when they have visitors who want to explore the country.*

*Tourism associations with the international organisations*

The music association seems to have bilateral collaborations to regulate the sector and organise joint music events with international counterparts from neighbouring countries. As can be noted by this participant:

*N1: Our organisation has strong ties with South Africa e.g. we build strategies on how to regulate the choirs. So that when their choirs come to Lesotho, they do not face problems and vice-versa. Some individual choirs have established relationships with other choirs in South Africa .... With South Africa, Botswana and eSwatini choral organisations e.g. we hold competitions together.*

**Discussion**

The study findings reveal that tourism businesses- and associations are not operating in isolation and tourism collaborations have been formed at a local and international level. Figure 1 indicates the dimensions of the tourism businesses alliances.



Figure 1: The dimensions of tourism businesses alliances

It appears that the private sector to government organisations alliances is not highly utilised in Lesotho as confirmed by both the private and public sector participants. Only three government organisations do collaborate with the private sector, yet they all seem to have



weak linkages. For example, the tertiary education institution does work with accommodation establishments through student internships, Department of Civil Aviation through minor sponsorships, and LTDC through capacity building programmes offered to tourism businesses.

The government of Mauritius affirms that public-private sector alliances are crucial as supportive tourism infrastructure (International Trade Administration, 2017; Government of Mauritius (2018:3). However, White (2016) warned that business-to-government alliances are not always easy, and proper alliance agreements must be in place for it to be successful. It seems that the business sector organisations are not keen to form alliances with each other. Only one private sector organisation in the accommodation sector appears to have formed alliances with few competitive accommodation establishments to accommodate their overflow of guests. This affirms the United Nations Development Programme (2017:43) finding that there are no formed alliances between the private sector organisations in Lesotho. According to KPMG (2003:3), private-to-private sector tourism alliances can lead to benefits when these organisations are brought into contact with each other at meetings and they can assist each other to access new markets and obtain knowledge about best practices and product diversification.

The entertainment organisations are noted to have no ties with other entertainment businesses and this finding confirms Leisanyane (2018) argument that lack of alliances and collaborations in the entertainment sector has resulted in the unfruitfulness of advocacy attempts and promotion of this sector. The general findings of the business sector also confirm the United Nations Development Programme, (2017:43) note that the Lesotho tourism industry consists of poorly developed value-chains across the sub-sectors and activities. The tourism business sector also seems not to have any ties with neighbouring South Africans businesses and this finding confirms what has been revealed from the research findings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2013:53) that Lesotho has not prioritised tourism linkages at a regional level and linkages between tourism and other sectors are weak.

Figure 2 highlights the tourism associations established collaborations



Figure 2: The dimensions of tourism associations' alliances

Both participating tourism associations seem to only have collaborations with two government organisations. Similarly, the Indian Association of Tour Operators interacts closely with all Government Ministries / Departments, though it extends its relationships to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Diplomatic Missions (Indian Association of Tour Operators, 2021). The music association obtains premises from the Department of Culture for music events and the LTDC provides skills training for the tour operator association members and arrange tourism exhibitions to showcase whereby Lesotho tourism businesses can benefit by showcasing their tourism products, attract media attention and potential international visitors. Kalbaska, Janowski, Estevez and Cantoni (2016:80) affirm that government and tourism associations' alliances are critical as the government provides information and communication related to policies or possible financial support to these organisations. The music association also acknowledged formed collaborations with peers in neighbouring countries where they jointly hold events and regulate the sector. Mauritius has embarked on the same strategy by promoting and signing cultural exchanges programmes with countries such as India, Seychelles, China, Russia, Egypt, France, Mozambique, and Madagascar (Ministry of Arts and Culture, 2018). Although the strategy was implemented, no concrete evidence of the impact on Mauritius tourism could be traced.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The tourism business players seem to not be keen to form collaborations with other business sector players which might be prohibiting tourism growth and causing benefit leakages therefore making Lesotho a less competitive country in tourism. Through collaborations accommodation establishment, airlines, cruise lines, destinations and car rental companies can direct resources and capabilities to revenue improvement projects and growth ambitions (Connect World Wide, 2021).

Additionally, it appeared that public-private tourism collaborations are weak; a fact that could be contributing to Lesotho's less market share in global tourism. Government ought to provide support, favourable terms and services to the private sector, communicating tourism vision and providing incentives to the business sector, while the tourism business sector ought to form alliances with governments to ensure issues inclusive of the safety and well-being of tourists, research development, understanding the concerns of the government (Franco & Estevão, 2010:606). The business sector also seemed to have no ties with the local communities. When the local communities have knowledge regarding the type of tourism facilities available and the cost regarding the visits, they will be motivated to consider visiting (Mwesigwa & Mubangizi, 2017:10). From what has been gathered, it is suggested that tourism-related business sector organisations in Lesotho should:

- The LTDC should facilitate formation of partnerships between the government Ministries and tourism business as these relationships can lead to better customer service, efficiency on both sides, and transformed government approaches;
- Purposefully seek international collaborations within their field of business in neighboring countries, as this might enable access to facilities, skills, and unique tourist attraction sites in both countries. For example, the South African tour operator could arrange for a tour to a tourist attraction site in Lesotho using their vehicles but a tour guide from Lesotho;
- Actively seek to collaborate with other private sector organisations within their field of business or with those offering complementary services locally. For example, tourism accommodation establishments could send their overflow of guest bookings to another accommodation establishment, form liaisons with the tour operators, transport organisations, and attraction centres to offer an all-inclusive itinerary filled with as many possible activities within the given timeframe to make the most of the tourist's stay and promoting tourist satisfaction. Frequent meetings between these tourism and hospitality organisations could result in the establishment of strong alliances that could drive effectiveness through value chain leakage eliminations;
- Build collaborations with the local community by ensuring that the community is aware of their services, tourism efforts and support entrepreneurialism (by mentoring youth, offering small business loans- and small business training). The private tourism sector can also encourage community art projects and use videos on their social media pages to make these products known and also buy from local farmers, and
- Ensure visibility of their organisations with a web presence and/or linked to social media so that potential partners can spot them.

Additionally, it appeared that some tourism associations do have ties with the business sector, other tourism associations, or the community, while only one association acknowledged having international collaborations. However, these were also noted to be relatively weak and this fact could also lead to less tourism advocacy. For example, the Indian Association of Tour Operators acts as the common medium between the decision-makers and the industry, and presents the complete perspective to both sides, synergising their common agenda of tourism facilitation (Indian Associations of Tour Operators, 20121); Lesotho is losing out on these opportunities. From what had been gathered from the tourism associations, it is recommended that:

- Strong international alliances should be formed between Lesotho tourism associations and South Africa's tourism associations so that best practices can be learned. For example,

South Africa's musical choirs might have a strong brand name that collaborating with such a choir could serve as a benefit for a Lesotho choir to gain local favour, and

- Local tourism associations could form an umbrella governing body that acts as a voice to express their views to the government. This could also serve as a platform to exchange knowledge and solve problems together.

This study has achieved to establish the dimensions of tourism collaborations of the tourism business sector and tourism associations. It is acknowledged that this study neglected the other tourism sectors in Lesotho due to time and financial constraints. It is recommended that future research could attempt to look into the strategies that the Lesotho tourism business sector and tourism associations could engage to develop international collaborations with neighbouring countries peers who are performing better in tourism. The spill-over effects that could emerge from these partnerships could boost Lesotho's tourism performance. Future research could also explore the tourism collaborations established with the local tourist attractions as this sector plays a key role in the Lesotho tourism and it is ideal that it also form ties with other tourism related organisations to attain excellence in this sector.

In as much as the role of collaborations in tourism had been widely studied in developed economies, this has not been the case in the developing economies especially in the African region. For this reason, this research is important because it has established an example of tourism collaborative structures in an African setting to add more knowledge in this under studied area. However, the findings of this research indicated low collaborative engagements among tourism players in Lesotho, and this has also been a challenge in other African countries. For example, Adu-Ampong (2017:295) established that there are low levels of collaboration between tourism organisations both within the public sector and across the public-private sectors in Ghana. It appears that some African economies are struggling to develop tourism partnerships which have been described as a major tool to support tourism development. The proposed recommendations can also be adopted by other African countries to expand the level of tourism collaborations.

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