The challenges of marketing destinations in the Central African sub-region: The Cameroon example

Keywords: Cameroon, tourism industry prioritization, destination marketing, destination branding,

Introduction

Though sub-Saharan Africa has been faring better than many other regions in terms of tourism growth during the last five years with average growth rates of +12% in 2006, and +6% between 2007 and 2010 respectively (UNWTO, 2008a), (UNWTO, 2010a), (UNWTO, 2011), not all countries in the region have profited from this growth. Countries in the Central African sub-region even though experiencing increased visitor numbers are still lagging behind countries located in Eastern and Southern Africa. This is mainly due to their inability to position, properly promote and market themselves as interesting cultural and nature/eco tourism destinations in the tourist generating countries (Shackley, 2006). It is only very recently that the governments of some countries in the Central African sub-region began committing considerable financial resources towards developing the sector with the governments of Cameroon and Gabon going as far as employing specialists in destination marketing and branding to come up with blue prints for the marketing and branding of these destinations. Tourism marketing and development has to be done in a sustainable manner and accompanied by developments in other sectors of the economy and the general infrastructure base of the destination environments. This combined with the necessary service infrastructure or enabling environment of tourism guarantees the tourist destination experience (Khadaroo and Seetanah, 2007), (Murphy et al., 2000). Both have to be available before the countries of the Central African sub-region (Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe) could market themselves as attractive and interesting sustainable nature (and cultural) tourism destinations. However, the successful marketing of destinations in the sub-region poses a serious challenge to public and private sector stakeholders.

This main aim of this paper is to identify and examine the challenges presently faced in the marketing of little known, under developed and under exploited but potentially rich nature and cultural tourism destinations in developing countries located in the Central African sub-region in general and Cameroon in particular with a view to proffering some concise measures aimed at addressing and redressing them.

Geographical context and tourism in Cameroon

While travellers are drawn to West Africa because of its rich historical and cultural heritage and to Eastern and Southern Africa because of its fascinating wildlife and incomparable topography, Central Africa is not only a combination of both but goes a

step further in that it adds another dimension, i.e. the equatorial experience to its portfolio (Kimbu, 2010a). The central and southern parts of Cameroon and the Central African Republic as well as Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are all in the heart of the equatorial rain forest (Congo Basin) and contain some of the highest concentrations of biological and endemic species found worldwide (WWF, 2010). This region is also home to some of the first inhabitants of the Congo basin, the Pygmies whose unique culture, customs and tradition face the threat of extinction (WWF, 2010).

Located at the crossroads between West and Central Africa in the Gulf of Guinea with English and French as the official languages, Cameroon has a total surface area of 475 442 km² and had a population of about 19.4 million inhabitants in 2010 (NIS, 2010). It is just 6 hours away from continental Europe and one of Africa's most peaceful countries. The country has been described as "all of Africa in one country" because of its geographical, topographical and multicultural diversity (Figure 1), (Molua and Lambi, 2007), (Government of Cameroon, 2004), (Neba, 1999). Cameroon is home to 300 mammalian species, 849 bird species, 143 reptilian species, close to 200 amphibian species, 542 fish species, and an estimated 9000 plant species (MINEF et al., 1999), (Vivien, 1991), (Stuart et al., 1990). It is in this regard that in 1997, the World Bank and the WWF classified Cameroon as one of the 13 countries worldwide with the highest amount of biological diversity (Graf, 1997). In addition, the 2008 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (TTCR) ranked Cameroon 15th out of 130 countries in terms the concentration and number of total known faunal species but only 38th in terms of the current level of ecologically sustainable tourism development and opportunities (Blanke and Chiesa, 2008). As of 2005, only 14% of Cameroonian territory was actually under some form of protection on paper in the form of national parks, UNESCO-MAB biosphere reserves, wildlife reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, forest reserves and protected areas (Table 1). In addition, the country has a 402 km coastline with pristine beaches near the foot of Mount Cameroon in Limbe (South West Region) and at the entrance of the equatorial forest around Kribi and Campo in the South Region (MINTOUR, 2007).

Figure 1: Transport and tourism map of Cameroon

Source: Cameroon Tourism Information Corporation, 2007

The rich biodiversity and varied topography coupled with its relative peace and political stability when compared to its neighbours makes Cameroon a potential and emerging hotspot for ecologically sustainable nature tourism development (Shackley, 2006). The country's bilingual character, its rich and diverse cultural heritage manifested in a blend of colonial and traditional architecture, clothing, masks and statues, cuisine, music, song and dance (Chilver and Röschenhalter, 2002), (Lauber, 1988) together with the friendliness of the people are primary factors that could facilitate the development of a cultural tourism industry. Unfortunately, this is presently not the case. Available data clearly indicates that before 2010, tourists' arrivals into the country had been virtually stagnating or even declining (Figure 2a).

In 2006, about 40% of visitors to Cameroon undertook business, conferences, meetings and events related trips with about 50% stating visiting the country for recreational and leisure purposes such as game hunting, safaris and eco/nature tourism trips (EMG, 2008). More than 50% of the visitors came from the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) countries followed by French visitors (Figure 2b).

Table 1: National parks, reserves and protected areas in Cameroon

Protected areas	Number	Surface area (ha)
National parks	11	2,577,930
Faunal reserves	6	702,995
Synergetic zones (wildlife/forest reserves)	35	3,083,750
Faunal/floral sanctuaries	2	132,000
Zoological gardens	2	4.07
Total	56	6,496,499.07

Source: Ministry of Tourism (MINTOUR, 2007)

The low positions occupied by Cameroon and other neighbouring countries in the 2008 TTCR clearly indicated that Cameroon and the sub-regions' full potentials as interesting nature and cultural tourism destinations still have to be tapped, harnessed and developed in conjunction with other accompanying service infrastructure like transport, accommodation and human resources (Blanke and Chiesa, 2008). It clearly elucidated the fact that there were many obstacles hindering the industry's

development and growth in Cameroon. One of these was the inexistence of a sustainable tourism marketing framework aimed at promoting and marketing tourism in the country and in the tourist generating markets.

Figure 2a: Arrival of non-resident visitors in hotels and similar establishment to Cameroon from 2000-2006

Source: UNWTO, 2005; UNWTO, 2008b

Figure 2b: Arrival of international visitors to Cameroon by country of residence in 2006

Source: MINTOUR, 2007

Methods

Using Cameroon as a case study, the main objective of this study was to determine the principal challenges of marketing destinations in the Central African sub-region.

Cameroon is used as a case study in this paper because with the exception of Gabon, it is the only other country in Central Africa that has made some advances in developing its tourism industry and presently receives the highest number of

international visitors to the sub-region when compared with the other countries (UNWTO, 2010b), (EMG, 2008), (Expansion Strategies Inc., 2002). That notwithstanding, Cameroon still receives 50% less visitors (572,728 visitors in 2010) and tourism contributes less than 2% to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) when compared to Kenya or Botswana for example where tourism is the second highest foreign exchange earner contributing as much as +6% (MINTOUR, 2010), (UNWTO, 2010b). A key contributor to successful tourism growth in Botswana or Kenya for example can be attributed to the existence of a tourism destination marketing framework which ensures that regular promotion and marketing campaigns are carried out in the tourist generating markets (Blanke and Chiesa, 2009). However, Cameroon's tourism industry virtually had no coordinated tourism promotion and marketing strategy in place and there was a dearth of academic research on this topic (Kimbu, 2010a).

It is therefore important to understand the reasons for this void in Cameroon with a view to proffering some recommendations.

The existence of very limited published data coupled with the desire to fully comprehend the situation in Cameroon meant that a mixed research strategy was adopted for this study. This enabled the researcher to get answers to both confirmatory and exploratory questions as well as to verify and generate theory in the same study (Teddlie and Tashakorri, 2003). Data-collection was by way of a questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews and observation. Primary data was collected during a field trip to Cameroon in 2009.

A tourist satisfaction survey (in the form of a questionnaire) was conducted with 100 visitors who had come to the end of their stay in the country between the months of January and February 2009. The aim was to obtain information from a representative selection of tourists about what they thought about tourism marketing and management in Cameroon. These were then analysed (with the aid of SPSS software) and patterns extracted. These then formed the basis of the questions for semi-structured interviews. Of the 100 respondents, 53% were men and 47% were women while the average age was 49. 67% of the survey respondents were from Western Europe, 22% from North America, 6% came from Eastern Europe, 3% from Asia and 2% from Africa and the Middle East.

A purposive, quota-based snowball sampling method i.e. non-probability sampling was used to select interviewees. Consequently the sample number was small. It is worth noting that though it could be erroneous to claim that non-probability sampling results are representative of a wider population, their use in this study was not be achieve

representativeness but to gain a deeper insight into the interviewees' views about tourism destination marketing in Cameroon. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted with ten resident tour operators and five officials of Cameroon's tourism ministry who were directly responsible for tourism promotion and marketing in the country. All interviews were conducted at their convenience and in their offices.

Observation, which is widely used to study people's behaviour and involves *"the researcher immersing herself or himself in a research setting and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events and so on, within it"* (Mason, 2002 p.60). Observation permitted the collection of contextual information about the dimensions of tourism promotion and marketing presently being undertaken in Cameroon (such as the existence and quality of visitor information centres in existing and potential tourism attractions) as these play an important role in determining the quality of the holiday experience.

Though the main focus of the questionnaire survey and interviews was related to subjects dealing with tourism promotion and marketing, other issues which could have an impact on the overall development and indirectly contribute to successful marketing of Cameroon were also addressed. Consequently, results of a thematic content analysis of the interview data combined with the questionnaire survey results and field observation notes revealed some major challenges which were hampering the marketing of Cameroon as an attractive tourism destination.

Challenges to successful tourism marketing in Cameroon

The adoption of new marketing strategies combined with hard and soft infrastructural developments, political, socio-economic and environmental changes as well as constantly addressing stakeholders concerns are some of the factors influencing the successful marketing of destinations. In Cameroon, some of the main challenges faced in marketing the country as a tourism destination include the non-prioritization of the tourism industry by the government which has led to the absence of a destination management/marketing organisation or National Tourism Office to draw up appropriate and practically implementable marketing plans, develop a branding and positioning strategy and strategise the role of ICT in tourism marketing.

Non-prioritization of the travel and tourism industry by government

The travel and tourism industry in Cameroon is "electorally weak" with no clearly defined industry leadership and lacks any form of patronage. Until very recently, the

tourism industry was not considered as a very important income generating sector. This is substantiated by the low 122nd position it occupied in the 2008 TCCR in terms of prioritization of the travel and tourism industry, 98th position in terms of travel and tourism trade fair attendance, 118th in terms of the effectiveness of marketing and branding and 103rd out of 133 countries examined with regards to government expenditure in the travel and tourism industry (Blanke and Chiesa, 2008). In 2009, the direct travel and tourism industry contribution to Cameroon's GDP was only 1.6% and 1.3% of direct industry employment (WTTC, 2009). The non-prioritisation of the tourism industry by government in particular means that since its upgrade into a fully fledged ministry in 1989, the Cameroon's tourism ministry till date still has one of the smallest budgets when compared to all other ministries in the country (MINTOUR, 2010). Due to the limited financial resources, neither the Ministry of Tourism nor independent travel operators until 2008 were able to regularly attend international tourism fairs which have proven to be very effective avenues for networking, destination marketing and acquisition of distribution channels. This is in stark contrast to other African countries with well established and developed tourism industries like Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana and Senegal (where the tourism economy contributes between 6% and 10% to the GDP and also employs close to 10% of the work force) who have made it a priority to be present in the world famous travel and tourism fairs of Berlin, London, Paris and Johannesburg to say the least (Blanke and Chiesa, 2009), (Mintel Report, 2007a), (Mintel Report 2007b). However, according to tourism ministry officials interviewed, the ministry's budget has been steadily increasing since the appointment of a new minister and some qualified tourism professionals during the last three years. Consequentially, some effort is now being done towards attending renowned travel and tourism trade fairs and very recently (2008) towards creating an effective destination brand image of the country (EMG, 2008). The effects are already starting to be felt as Cameroon received more than half a million visitors in 2010 and could thus be considered as a tourism destination if the UNWTO criteria (of +500,000 visitors) taken into consideration (MINTOUR, 2010). According to public and private sector operators, it is hoped that these positive figures would spur the government into committing more resources towards developing the industry and addressing important marketing constraints. The issue of absence of distribution channels which was already cited in the 2002 Marketing Plan (Expansion Strategies Inc., 2002) and reaffirmed by private sector stakeholders during the interviews as a major handicap will have to be addressed and resolved as soon as possible. The government could support this by

fully or partially sponsoring local tour operators and travel agents to international tourism fairs where they can network and create of partnerships with foreign tour operators in the tourist generating regions. Since 2004, Cameroon's government has repeatedly stated its desire to move away from its over dependence on oil and other extractive industries by prioritising the development of other sectors amongst which is tourism (Government of Cameroon, 2004). However, if the industry's development and marketing are not sped up, Cameroon will in future be visited mostly by conference participants and specialist travellers, with the holiday tourists preferring to go to other destinations like Gabon which during the last five years has installed an efficient tourism development, promotion and marketing machinery in place (Gabontour, 2010).

Absence of a National Tourism Office and non implementation of marketing plans

The creation of a National Tourism Office (NTO) responsible amongst others for destination promotion and marketing which tourism ministry officials revealed has been in gestation for the past 5 years will have to be sped up (Kendemeh, 2009). In addition the now defunct regional and divisional tourism boards which were in existence up till the late 1980s and were responsible for coordinating tourism activities in the different regions would have to be revamped. When eventually established, the NTO together with the regional offices and assisted by local community stakeholders should be empowered and provided with the necessary financial and technical resources necessary for tourism destination management and marketing. This will permit the different stakeholders to *"...carry out their individual and organisational responsibilities on a daily basis in efforts to realise the macro-level vision contained in policy, planning and development"* (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003: 111). The NTO will assume full responsibility for strategy planning and policy, product development, engaging in a diverse range of inbound tourism promotional and marketing activities overseas, representation of interests and creation of a strong and unified voice for the industry. The NTO will also be responsible for setting up information collection systems and better research organization, development of infrastructure and support services for home and overseas visitors (Fyall and Wanhill, 2008) through the construction of visitor information centres in the various regions, towns and sites of interest, as well as overseas in the key target markets. The Ministry of Tourism would however remain the supervisory authority.

One of the key tasks of the NTO would be to come up with a tourism marketing plan for Cameroon. In this regard, a point of reference could be the Cameroon Tourism Marketing Plan drawn up and adopted in 2002 (Expansion Strategies, 2002) which till date remains only a theoretical framework. Its recommendations were never fully implemented, financial constraints being the main factor according to officials of the tourism ministry. The plan identified key priority markets in Europe, North America and Asia which were to be targeted with public relations and reassurance campaigns under the supervision of marketing agencies in those markets whose appointment was envisaged in the plan. It also envisaged the creation of a national tourism website as well as the creation of new partnerships and the solidification of existing ones with foreign tour operators. This plan should be reviewed and revised where necessary and steps taken to ensure that the recommendations made therein be prioritised and implemented in a phase by phase approach.

Decentralisation and devolution of powers together with empowerment would also encourage local community participation in all aspects of tourism development (Tosun, 2001), (Tosun, 2000). Local community members would have a feeling of ownership and a sense of pride and this in turn would make them actively participate in developing and marketing their different regions both nationally and internationally (Tosun, 2000). A case in point where active and profitable community participation in tourism promotion is presently being experienced and which has drawn the attention of the government is the biennale Nguon cultural and religious festival that takes place in the sultanate of Foumban in Western region of Cameroon. The festival which was revived in 1992 after almost a hundred year break was initially sponsored and promoted only by the indigenes of the sultanate (Mbohoun, 2010). However, due to networking, financial and technical support started coming from private sector individuals and economic operators who also used it as a medium to promote their activities. The festival has now become one of the most recognised cultural festivals in Cameroon attracting both a national and international audience. Its popularity eventually drew the government's attention and according to the organisers, since 2005 the government has regularly provided some financial assistance towards the organisation of the festival which has also become one of the main employment and income generating avenues to the inhabitants of Foumban (Yufeh, 2004). In addition the government now helps in publicising the festival through its embassies abroad and in turn uses the festival to promote Cameroon's multicultural richness and diversity.

The success of such national examples it is hoped would encourage the government to commit more efforts towards the promotion and development of the industry.

Placing strategic emphasis on the role of ICT in tourism marketing

The 2002 Tourism Marketing Plan clearly emphasised the need to create a national tourism website as well as take advantage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) especially the Internet in promoting and marketing Cameroon's tourism industry. This is because, ICTs especially the Internet, through its ever increasing globally distributed infrastructure has proven to be a very effective tool for the delivery of inexpensive multimedia information, marketing, promotion, distribution and coordination of tourism (Buhalis, 2008). Many developing countries such as Botswana, Kenya and the Gambia for example have recognized this potential and developed a strong Internet presence (at both the public and private sector levels) to promote their tourism products and increase their share of the competitive international tourism market (BTO, 2008) (KTA, 2011), (GTA, 2011). This is however not the case with Cameroon and other countries in the Central African sub-region with the exception of Gabon which in 2008 established a National Tourism Office and an up-to-date web portal for tourism (Gabontour, 2010). A majority of the survey respondents (75%) deplored the absence of a National Tourism Office and web portal, lack of well developed websites by local tour operators and the general absence of up to date and concise information about Cameroon on the World Wide Web (WWW). This is a serious setback when consideration is given to the fact that according to IPK International's *European Travel Monitor* for 2006, 45% of European outbound travellers used the internet as their main source of information while only 20% used travel agencies and 17% used friends/relatives.

Considering the relatively inexpensive nature of setting up and delivering multi media information through the Internet, and mindful of the country's level of ICT developments, priority in the short term would be to maximise the use of the Internet as a tourism promotion and educational tool that will provide up-to-date information about the country. The creation of a national web site and Internet portal (that is nowadays widely acknowledged as a very important requirement for any country wanting to develop its tourism industry) which is in the development stage should be prioritised in Cameroon. This site/portal will enable a much wider audience and potential visitors to be reached which otherwise would be difficult to reach through public relations campaigns and trade fair attendances alone. It will also provide information about the

country tourism products and serve as an avenue to counter and respond to any negative discussions and publicity about the country that might arise. In addition, tour operators should be encouraged to upgrade and/or create qualitative content-rich websites for their companies. An examination of some of the websites of some operators with an internet presence revealed that they were still at the very elementary stage of ICT development if the model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA) frequently used to determine the level of ICT development in the tourism industry was taken into consideration (Burgess and Cooper, 2000). Services provided on the sites examined were still very elementary and only basic company information was displayed. In some cases, basic in-country travel and tourism information was lacking and existing information was found to be out of date and displayed on pages whose content, presentation and graphics left much to be desired. That notwithstanding, there was general agreement amongst public and private sector stakeholders on the urgency and need to adopt ICTs especially the Internet as a tourism promotion and sensitisation tool. Meetings and workshops which are being organised now by the government albeit irregularly would have to become a regular feature for public and private sector tourism operators. The focus of these workshops would be to educate participants on the necessity, effects and advantages of incorporating ICT in tourism marketing with references being drawn from other African countries which have successfully applied it to their tourism industries. Their web pages could all be linked to the portal of the National Tourism Office when it is eventually goes online. A strong internet presence will help in making them to remain competitive in this highly demanding and competitive industry.

Cameroon brand strategy development and implementation

In sub-Saharan Africa, safari tourism immediately comes to mind when Tanzania or Kenya are mentioned. In the same vein, winter sun and white sandy beaches come to mind at the mention of Senegal and Gambia (Kimbu, 2010b). This is what makes them unique. Apart from football, almost no particularly poignant image(s) is conjured in peoples' minds at the mention of Cameroon. In spite of its almost unique advantage of being "all of Africa in one country" in terms of landscape, biodiversity, and culture (Kimbu, 2010b), Cameroon until 2008 had not done anything to project itself on the international market by creating and fostering its own familiar, distinct and unique brand. This was in spite of Aaker's 1991 salient observation that *'people will often buy a familiar brand because they are comfortable with the familiar'* (Aaker, 1991:19).

Nation branding is a complex procedure involving many stages and various stakeholders from government through tour operators to local communities whose views all have to be taken into consideration when coming up with the concept of national identity (Hall, 2004). In the case of Cameroon, the process should begin with identifying what makes it unique preceded by the sensitisation of all stakeholders on the raison d'être and importance of creating this brand and what their involvement will be. This uniqueness will form the basis of the brand and it will be represented by a logo to be created. This logo should encapsulate some of the main qualities of the country. Parallel to the designation of a logo should be the appointment of an official(s) responsible for developing and managing the brand and coordinating relations with all the stakeholders as well as the designation brand guardians/promoters. Brand promoters should be respected members of society with enough political clout and leverage whose main role will be to encourage the various stakeholders to adopt and use this newly created brand in the various sectors of the economy and at the international stage. The institution of brand promoters will provide the industry with the necessary patronage that it presently lacks. At the same time, brand associates (which could be government ministries, embassies and corporations) with strong national and international presence would have to be sort. They will be encouraged to incorporate the value of the Cameroon brand in their marketing and publicity programmes (Kotler and Gertner, 2004). Since branding is about promising that the industry's offerings will create and deliver a certain level of performance, the promise behind the brand becomes the motivating force for all activities of the industry and its partners (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006). Therefore in order to guarantee quality and the effective utilisation of the brand as well as to avoid the misuse of the Cameroon brand name, it will be advisable to outline some basic guidelines to the various stakeholders on how to use the brand. Emphasis here will be placed on its role and application in marketing and communications, as well as on technical design specifications on how to use the brand in advertisements, internet portals and publications for example. Conclusively, all stakeholders will be called upon to ensure and guarantee that visitors to Cameroon actually live the brand experience, for failure to live this experience will lead to negative publicity from the visitors and hence destroy the image of the country. In order to constantly guarantee this unique experience, resource sustainability and visitor satisfaction, all stakeholders dealing directly and indirectly with visitors from travel agents and operators through embassy staff, immigration, police and custom officials to nature park conservators and tour guides, front office staff in hotels, taxi/cab drivers,

local communities with tourists attractions, will have to be sensitised, conscientised and constantly monitored in workshops, seminars, conferences on the importance of maintaining the standards prescribed in the Cameroon brand. The fact that Cameroon's government with the financial support of the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned the production of a Cameroon branding strategy document in 2007 shows that efforts are currently being made to develop the industry. That notwithstanding, since the draft report was submitted in 2008, the implementation of its recommendations has been slow. However tourism trade fair attendance (a key recommendation) has been regular since 2009. Public and private sector tourism stakeholders now hope that with the tourism growth witnessed during the last year, the government (and other stakeholders) would speed up the implementation of all the other recommendations proposed in the brand strategy as well as adopt a Tourism Investment Code and devote more resources towards professionalizing the industry.

Lack of human (professionalism) and financial resources

Four-fifth of the survey respondents and all the tour operators interviewed lamented the poor behaviour and corrupt practices of the customs and immigration officials at the airports as well as the excessive and sometimes unwarranted road controls by police officers on the highways. This was considered to be a nuisance and serious disincentive by many tourists who said they would think of visiting Cameroon again or recommending the country to their friends only if such ills were redressed and rectified. Considering the fact that 90% of the questionnaire respondents visited Cameroon upon recommendation from others, this is a serious issue which has to be addressed by the authorities responsible if 'mouth-to-mouth' marketing has to continue. The presence of very few professional institutions dealing with tourism and visitor management meant that less than 50% of those employed in the travel and tourism sector had any formal training. Most trainings if at all were done in-house especially in the classified hotels. It was thus observed that in classified 3 and 4 star hotels, the staff were well trained while in the non-classified hotels which actually formed the bulk of the accommodation sector, the staff were not properly trained or not even trained at all. As a result their professional conduct was bound to cause dissatisfaction amongst the visitors. This was evident in the responses of 65% of tourists who lodged in lower classed and non-classified hotels. They were not satisfied with the quality of services offered. In addition it became evident from the discussions with the tour operators and tourism ministry

officials that with the exception of a handful, more than 80% of the tour operators in the country were actually ticketing agents who had strayed into the tourism operation business. As such they lacked the necessary professional skills needed in running, coordinating and managing such operations in an international scale. In addition they also lacked the necessary collateral security needed before going into partnerships with international tour operators. This led to an atmosphere of mistrust between the local tour operators and potential international operators who doubted the ability of many local operators to manage clients as well as handle finances following international norms and standards. It is thus no wonder why in the 2009 TTCR, Cameroon was classed 94th in terms of the availability of local research and training facilities and 104th out of 134 countries in terms of the extent staff training in the tourism sector, clearly showing that a lot of improvements need to be done in this domain before the country can become competitive (Blanke and Chiesa, 2009).

With regards to the behaviour of customs and immigration officials and other members of the public (airport staff, taxi/bus drivers, park officials, and hotel staff) who come into direct contact with tourists, it would be advisable for government to institute sensitisation campaigns with these groups on how to deal with foreign visitors. In addition, the establishment of professional training centres for those working permanently in the travel and tourism industry should be prioritised. A Tourism Department was opened at the University of Yaoundé 1 in 2009 and a few other institutions are already in existence being managed by private sector individuals but they lack the necessary technical and financial resources for effective training and management especially in tourism studies. The focus in the curriculum in most of these establishments is hospitality management oriented. These curricula would have to be expanded to include other programmes such as tourism development, management and marketing. Success in any national and international marketing campaigns can only be guaranteed if they are conceived and run by well trained professionals in tourism marketing and if the feedback from departing tourists with regards to service quality is positive. If instituted, these measures will certainly help in attracting more tourists as they will visit the country knowing that the quality is in conformity with international standards.

Conclusion and recommendations

Recently, the governments of the sub-region in general and Cameroon in particular have started realising the important role the sustainable development of tourism

resources can play in the development of their countries as well as in the attainment of some of the Millennium Development Goals. Consequently, there is now a gradual investment of capital and human resources not only to aimed developing the infrastructure base (transport, security, health and accommodation) but also geared towards increasing the quality and quantity of tourism promotion and marketing. All these elements directly and indirectly contribute in making a destination attractive and in so doing generate a positive tourist experience.

Cameroon's participation in important tourism trade fairs of Berlin, Paris, London and Johannesburg has been regular especially since 2009 and the results are already being felt. This clearly demonstrates that progress is being made albeit slowly. For meaningful and effective change which will be beneficial to all stakeholders to be witnessed in Cameroon's tourism industry, the government will have to inscribe tourism as a key developmental item in its national development agenda. This prioritisation will be manifested by the creation of a National Tourism Office (that among others will assume responsibility for destination marketing) and the institution of a Tourism Development Fund which have already been proposed but have not yet been created. The NTO with resources from the fund will then assume responsibility for the development and implementation of an effective marketing and branding strategy involving the assimilation and use of the latest methods of marketing and communication like the World Wide Web in a phase by phase approach taking into consideration the country's level of ICT development.

In the same vein, the construction and upgrading hard and soft infrastructure would have to be promoted and encouraged. Also employee training and the professionalization of services in the tourism and hospitality industry and related services would have to be encouraged through the creation of institutions for the training of industry workers, improving quality standards and expanding the portfolio of courses in already existing institutions to cover other important segments of tourism education. These changes will however not occur overnight. In order to guarantee success, a carefully planned phase by phase approach will have to be adopted taking into consideration the financial and technical resources available at any given moment.

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List of tables

Table 1: National parks, reserves and protected areas in Cameroon

Protected Areas	Number	Surface area (ha)
National Parks	11	2 577 930
Faunal Reserves	6	702 995
Synergetic Zones (Wildlife/Forest Reserves)	35	3 083 750
Faunal/Floral Sanctuaries	2	132 000
Zoological Gardens	2	4,07
TOTAL	56	6496499,07

Source: Ministry of Tourism (MINTOUR), 2007