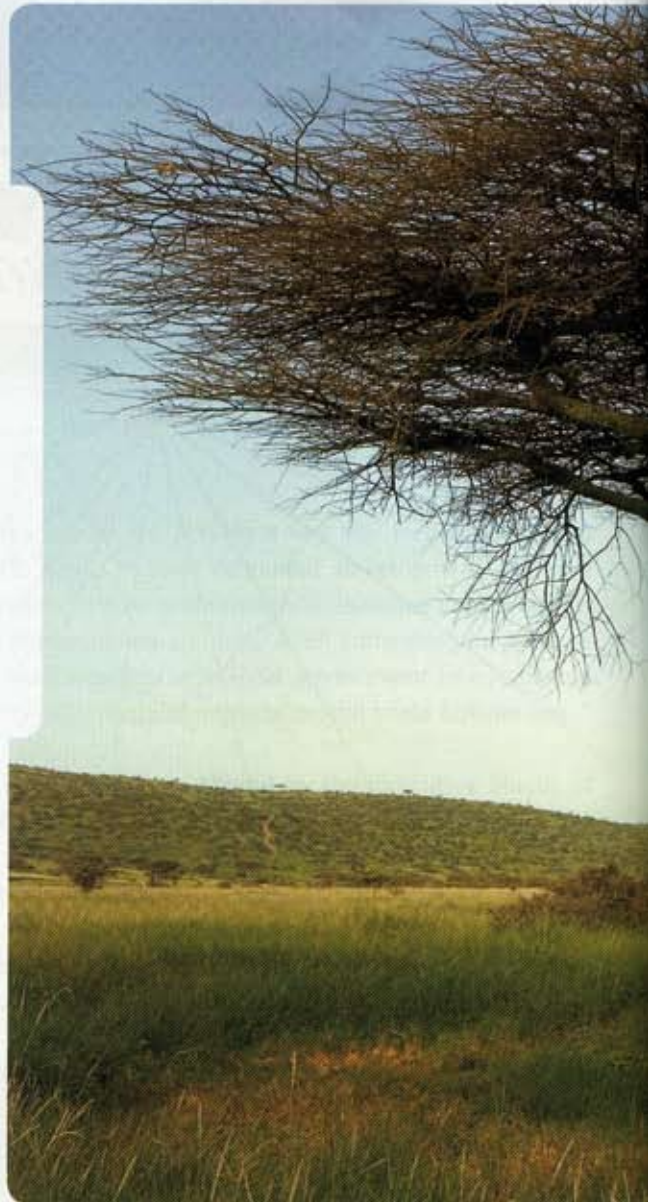


hamba kahle africa

If you accept that tourism enhances the natural pride of a country, why not use it as an antidote to poverty?

Kerry Dimmer investigates



Life goes on, no matter what, doesn't it?

In 1994, the people of Rwanda began to recover from the effects of the unbearably brutal genocide that had devastated their country. More than 800 000 Rwandan people had been killed and as is usual following a war, the country set about repopulating to make up for those who had been lost. But they sort of overdid it ... with 343 people per square kilometre, Rwanda is officially the most densely populated country in Africa.

With such high population figures, the economy is bound to take a beating. Tourism remains one of the world's largest growing industries and for developing or recovering nations, like Rwanda, tourism can contribute significantly to the upliftment of the poor. Annette Tamara Mbabazi is the Rwanda

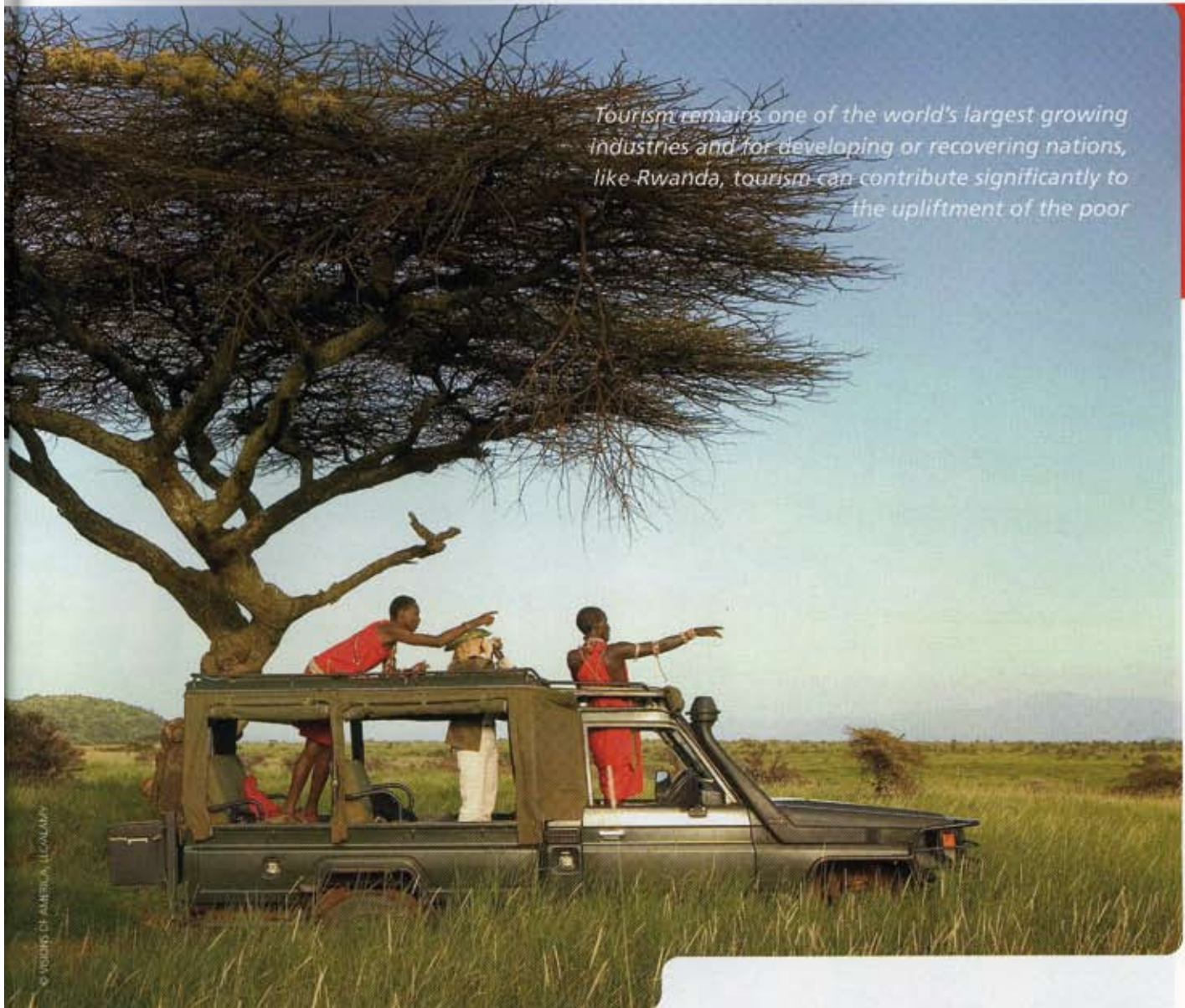
Tourism Board's communication officer: 'We have positioned Rwanda as a high tourism destination. Our strategy and future plans are driven by this objective. We have a vision of attracting 70 000 visitors to help generate US\$100 million by 2010.'

Some of this money is already being directed to the Community Revenue Sharing Scheme, a Tourism Board-driven initiative whereby 10% of total revenue collected from tourism activities is allocated to communities on the borders of the country's national parks. 'We are portraying to these communities the tangible benefits of tourism as well as involving them in the conservation of wildlife,' says Mbabazi. One such example is the community that lives around the Volcanoes National Park, a tourist destination famous for its gorilla population.

The mountain gorillas of Rwanda have always been one of the country's major attractions. Mbabazi believes the introduction to the world, this year, of the gorilla-naming *Kwita Izina* ceremony has propelled it into one of the world's premier tourist events. 'Kwita Izina means "to give a name" and we have adopted this to celebrate the birth of gorillas in their natural habitat. Every birth is a confirmation of a successful conservation and protection programme that will one day achieve its principal objective of removing the mountain gorilla from the endangered species list.'

Rwanda is using this event to achieve three objectives. Mbabazi expands: 'Firstly, this auspicious occasion is a platform to create awareness of mountain gorillas at both national and international level. Secondly, it gives us an

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opportunity to advise on the success of Rwanda's conservation of the mountain gorilla and its habitat. Thirdly, it attracts tourists.'

During 2005/6 approximately US\$200 million from the Community Sharing Scheme was allocated to various projects. 'We have constructed two primary schools, two health centres, bridges and valley dams. We have introduced bee-keeping, mushroom growing, goat rearing and handcrafts, all aimed specifically at poverty reduction,' says Mbabazi.

'Some of the funds have also been used towards reducing human-wildlife conflicts, for example, the construction of 12 water collection tanks to reduce people movement into the park to fetch water, and the construction of a 74 km buffalo wall to reduce animal movement out of the parks.

'Our biggest success has been the construction of the Sabyinyo Community Lodge. It is a community trust that has employed over 600 people with further job creation ahead. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of those who have been employed are women.'

African wildlife parks are always going to be hotspots for tourists. The Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa is one of the most visited destinations in Africa. It too has realised the impact that tourists have had on alleviating the poverty of local communities. Park spokesperson Raymond Travers, says that while such impact is difficult to measure, the Potchefstroom University of Technology's research puts it in the region of ZAR400 million.

'Despite any number of shops, lodges, fuel stations and businesses that may exist as a direct

result of the KNP's footprint, the Contractor Development Programme that we run, as part of the government's Extended Public Works Programme, alongside a grant from central government, gives local communities an opportunity to be trained in all aspects of contracting,' says Travers.

'If the candidates participating in the Learn-as-they-build course offered by the KNP really work at it, they can become fully-fledged contractors with the knowledge of how to tender for government work. In total, 20 have graduated and 11 are currently undergoing training.' Graduates have already been successful in tendering for government projects outside the park such as creating tourist facilities that in turn contribute even further to local well-being.

This programme assists the poor to initiate and manage small and sustainable community-based enterprises that provide services such as accommodation, catering, transport, retailing of souvenirs, tour guiding and entertainment



Travers points out that the involvement of local communities has long been an aim of conservation in South Africa as presented by the SANParks (South African National Parks) People and Conservation programme. By explaining to local neighbouring communities what the National Parks does and why it's important, communities are becoming aware of factors such as how to use water more effectively.

The African Pro-poor Tourism Foundation (APTF) is a non-profit organisation that seeks to use tourism as a strategic tool to alleviate poverty in Africa. Pauline Ngoya, programme manager, says: 'Pro-poor tourism is an approach that seeks to harness the financial

benefits from the tourist spend so that poor local communities can benefit.' Research undertaken by APTF shows that even when tourism earns large sums of money for a country, in most cases, less than five percent actually reaches the local people whose resources are used to fuel the industry.

The APTF has a number of programmes that help achieve its objectives, particularly in Kenya where it is most active. Ngoya adds: 'Tourism as a Catalyst to Community-based Conservation in Kenya (TACK) lobbies for communities to embark on community-based projects through which they can earn direct returns from accommodating wildlife. For instance, TACK suggests that having a share in

the wildlife resource gives communities an incentive to not only protect the animals but to also participate in the management thereof. Ownership of this natural resource,' says Ngoya, 'provides economic freedom.'

PAT (Poverty Alleviation through Tourism) is another branch of the APTF. This programme assists the poor to initiate and manage small and sustainable community-based enterprises that provide services such as accommodation, catering, transport, retailing of souvenirs, tour guiding and entertainment.

It is precisely in these areas that tourism really does enhance poverty-stricken people. Tourism analyst, publisher, writer and tour guide, Richard Kwame Debrah reminds us that

'The more tourists we receive, the bigger the monies. What makes tourism money thick is that, very often, it ends up directly in the hands of those that need it most'



Africa's most spectacular attractions are usually located in rural areas where poverty is most prevalent and visible. He says that because poverty is an everyday punishment, 'God must have deliberately kept attractions in the rural areas because when tourists visit they don't worry about the cost of things.'

Debrah is convinced that tourist money in his homeland, Ghana, does end up in the right place. 'The more tourists we receive, the bigger the monies. What makes tourism money thick is that, very often, it ends up directly in the hands of those that need it most. I mean the poor, abused and neglected village folk and street vendors. Think about the young and old people who roast plantain,

sell fruit, drinks and everything else along the roads, who have to brave all odds, high temperatures and rains just to feed the family and pay bills.'

Ghana deliberately takes advantage of tourism to reduce poverty. The focus is deeply rooted in the district-assembly concept whereby each district plans and manages its own tourist attractions, sourcing staff from their local communities.

There are a number of areas where this concept has been applied successfully. In Hohoe district, where we have West Africa's highest waterfall and a "human-monkey" community, entrance fares are directed towards school fees and national health

insurance contributions for the poor,' says Debrah. 'In Kakum National Park, the preservation of the forest is ensured by the training of the locals in grass-cutting techniques and park guarding. In this way, needy families, located in the vicinity of Ghana's attractions, benefit. You must also bear in mind that lands are owned by the chiefs – stool land – so royalties paid to them are distributed to sponsor development projects in poor communities.'

'Tourism is the largest foreign exchange earner in 46 of the 49 poorest countries in the world,' continues Debrah. 'If African politicians would be humble enough to hear the stories of sustainable tourism, God would smile.' **AD**