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Tourism sector thriving

Tourism is one of the sectors where Uganda earns a lot of revenue.

As a result, different interventions are being made to protect tourist attractions and sites as well as fighting poaching.

Government has ensured mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts in areas neighbouring national parks and wildlife reserves, including implementation of deterrents and other measures to stop wildlife endangering people's lives and property.

According to Mr Godfrey Kiwanda, the State minister for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, the ministry and other line agencies have for long been battling with people who kill wild animals. This is common in areas where people stay near game parks.

The residents, however, say wild animals from game parks kill and eat their domestic animals such as cows, goats and pigs, which are a source of income.

"Instead of killing the animals, get in touch with the different au-

thorities so we can forge a way out on how to compensate you. We have in the past been consoling the victims but in the newly drafted law, we shall be compensating the victims in case the animals spoil your valuables," he says.

Tourism marketing

Funding tourism promotion and marketing has been done and it has enhanced presence in the existing tourism source markets of Europe and USA and intensified in new sources such as China.

In 2016, Uganda hired companies to sell the country abroad.

This was followed by the strengthening of the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) to tell the story of Uganda's tourist attractions to the world and also invite world celebrities to tour Uganda.

Programmes of branding the country and its tourism products, including working on improving the image of the country abroad, which was damaged by past lead-

ers have also been taken up to boost tourism.

Achievements

In a bid to enhance tourism promotion and marketing, UTB was restructured, its budget increased from Shs1.4b in 2011 to Shs11.6b in 2015, to enable the tourism sector market the country in key foreign markets of USA, Germany, UK, South Africa, Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

A single tourism visa was launched to ease the access of visitors to the three East Africa States of Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda and joint EAC marketing efforts.

Regional tourism promotion efforts of the Buganda Expo and initiatives in the Toro, Bunyoro, Ankole, Busoga and Kigezi have also boosted tourism.

Others include the Eastern Tourism Forum Culture and faith-based initiatives such as Uganda Martyrs Shrine Namugongo.

The Namugongo Martyrs Shrine

was also expanded and refurbished into an elaborate and interconnected tourism center and trail, under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements, with the view to make it an all-year round domestic and international tourists' destination. Overall, the tourism sector supported by the Presidential Initiative on Sustainable Tourism has been strengthened to enhance tourism development, promotion and marketing.

Investment in the road infrastructure, ferries and air transport have also made it easy for tourists to move around the country, thus, contributing to promotion of tourism. Security in the various national parks has also been beefed up for both tourists and wildlife. Uganda Wildlife Authority has also created an intelligence unit manned by 80 persons to fight poaching.

This has seen the animal population in national parks increase as a result of the strict vigilance. Aerial wildlife census in Murchison Falls,

Queen Elizabeth, Kibaale, Toro Semiliki, Bwindi Impenetrable and Kidepo Valley national parks revealed the elephant population increased heavily. In an interview with this newspaper recently, the minister for Tourism, Mr Ephraim Kamuntu, said the sector had recorded a fair performance but can do more particularly by developing the domestic market in Uganda.

"We want Ugandans to get to know, tour their own country and be directly involved in tourism promotion. This is because in times of trouble, domestic tourism is the most reliable," he said.

Figures from the 7th annual tourism sector performance report indicate that tourism continues to be a pillar of Uganda's economy, contributing nearly Shs7.3b to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the financial year 2015/2016. This translates into 9 per cent of the country's GDP. This was an increase from Shs6.3b in 2014/15 financial year.

According to the report, there was 1.7 per cent increase in total employment during 2015, with more than one million people benefiting directly and indirectly from the tourism sector.