Chapter 38

ICT and Skills Transfer:
The Case for Diaspora Involvement in Tourism Development in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Ghana is continuously exploring new development models to generate economic growth and enhance the life of her citizens. Tourism has been identified as an area with the potential to prime the Ghanaian economy. However, a major impediment likely to stall the strategy is the lack of skilled labor. Ghana could address this problem by tapping into the skills, experiences, and resources of its diaspora. The objective of the chapter is to advocate the adoption of a virtual community framework (via ICT) to access the skills and expertise of Ghanaians resident abroad to train personnel in the tourism sector. The chapter outlines the virtual community creation process, instructional delivery strategies, identifies challenges to be encountered in these collaborative efforts, and provides some viewpoints for addressing such problems. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research and concluding remarks, including the study's implications.

INTRODUCTION

Ghana like many Sub-Saharan African countries has been exploring new alternatives to stimulate economic growth and sustain human development. Several knowledgeable individuals have identified tourism as an area with the potential to prime and invigorate the Ghanaian economy. For instance, in a paper delivered in Abuja, Nigeria, Mrs. F. O. Oyakhilome, acting Director General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) noted that tourism was the fastest growth industry in the world and several African countries, including Ghana had taken steps to develop their tourism attractions to benefit from this potential (Oyakhilome, 2005). She added that tourism was one of the key sectors in the country's economic recovery program and the third source of foreign exchange after minerals and cocoa (Oyakhilome, 2005). In an interview with the Ghana News Agency, Mr. Owusu Amoakohene, the Research Advisor at the Ghana Ministry of Tourism pointed

out that tourism had a competitive edge over agriculture, industry and mining and emphasized that the tourism sector provided the best option for Ghana's economic development (Tourism is key, 2007). Similarly, in another interview, Mr. Joao Ingles, the General Manager of Portugal's national airline (TAP Portugal) for Cape Verde and Ghana claimed that tourism could generate additional revenue for Ghana if the right approach was adopted (Andoh, 2013).

However, the lack of skilled labor has been identified by Ankomah (1991) as a major impediment likely to stall any tourism development efforts. To address the skilled labor problem, this chapter suggests that Ghana taps into the skills of the Ghanaian Diaspora via Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This approach provides an opportunity for Ghanaian expatriates to participate in the country's development. The strategy is also consistent with recent pronouncements by the AU (African Union), the World Bank and other donor agencies for Sub-Saharan African countries to utilize the expertise of their nationals resident abroad for economic development. According to a World Bank publication, donor-funded projects in the sub-region have failed largely due to heavy reliance on foreign nationals who often lacked the knowledge of local conditions necessary for making such projects successful (World Bank, 2007). Diaspora in the context of this chapter refers to Ghanaians resident in Western Europe and North America.

The remainder of the chapter is categorized into five sections. The first section reviews the literature on ICT-based learning and Virtual Community (VC) and relates the two concepts to the skill-transfer strategy. The section also provides an overview of the theories underlying the framework of the Ghana Tourism Virtual Community (GTVC). The next section, the creation of the GTVC, identifies relevant skills and expertise of the Ghanaian Diaspora, outlines the process for creating the GTVC, reasons each entity would want to be part of the arrangement, and the

roles of these entities. The third section details the skill-transfer strategy. The fourth identifies potential barriers to establishing the ICT-based tourism skill-transfer strategy and provides some viewpoints for addressing these challenges. The final section makes suggestions for future research and concluding remarks, including the study's implications.

BACKGROUND

ICT-Based Learning

The ever-evolving and phenomenal growth of ICT is making it possible to expand and deliver education and training beyond the traditional brick and mortar paradigm. As a result, more developing countries have established favorable telecommunication policies that seek to bridge the digital divide between those who have information access and those who do not (Rashid & Hassan, 2012; Sumbwany, Nel, & Clarke, 2011). The World Bank identifies components of ICT to include: hardware, software, networks, and media for collection, storage, processing, transmission, and presentation of information (World Bank, 2002). Due to some inimitable characteristics, ICTs may provide more effective, economical and flexible educational delivery strategies than previously possible, particularly for developing countries (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Kuroda & Shanawez, 2003). The realm of cyberspace created by ICT makes learning available by removing many of the barriers of traditional education (e.g. geographical dispersion, infrastructure and time-space constraints) since learners need not be physically present at an instructional site at a particular time to participate in the teaching and learning process. In recent years, researchers have employed numerous terms to refer to ICT-based learning (e.g., distance learning, distance education, online instruction, and e-learning), often using them interchangeably (Anderson,

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