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SEX TOURISM IN KENYA: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW

KEMPE RONALD HOPE, SR.

Development Practice International (DPI), Oakville, Ontario, Canada

Although the Kenyan tourism sector has been beneficial to the country's economy, it has not been cost free. There are also a variety of negative aspects of tourism development in Kenya, and one of its least desirable characteristics and most visible negative aspect is the impact on indigenous cultures and values. Kenya's beach tourism has spawned prostitution, crime, and corruption along the coast. Inland, tourists visit cultural villages semidressed, kiss and caress, and offend traditional sensibilities because they are given no code of conduct. But perhaps the most significant negative impact of the travel and tourism activities in Kenya is sex tourism. This article analytically discusses and reviews the increasingly popular phenomenon of sex tourism in Kenya.

Key words: Kenya; Tourism; Sex; Prostitution

Introduction

In addition to agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, business process outsourcing, and financial services, tourism is also identified as one of the six priority sectors targeted by the Kenyan government to spur economic growth by increasing the national GDP growth rate (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Tourism currently contributes about 6% of GDP and 5% of total employment in Kenya. However, through backward and forward linkages, the general tourism economy, as a whole, contributes about 14% to GDP, 12% of total employment, and almost 23% of foreign exchange earnings (Kenyan Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis [KIPPRA], 2009; World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2012).

In terms of world ranking with respect to importance of total contribution to GDP, by 2011 Kenya's

travel and tourism industry was ranked 77 (out of 181 countries) in absolute size (amount in billions contributed to GDP) and 54 in relative contribution to national economy (percentage share of GDP). The world ranking with respect to total contribution to employment in 2011 was 58 (WTTC, 2012). The rankings in sub-Saharan Africa (out of 42 countries) in 2010 placed Kenya at 5 in absolute size and 9 in relative contribution to the economy (WTTC, 2010). The real growth forecast rankings by 2020 (annualized real growth adjusted for inflation for the period 2011–2020) is 88 globally and 24 in sub-Saharan Africa (WTTC, 2010).

Kenya is therefore one of the leading tourist destinations in sub-Saharan Africa and there is tremendous potential for the tourism sector to play the role envisaged for it in the "Kenya Vision 2030" (Hope, 2012). The Kenya Vision 2030 is the long-term

development blueprint for the country, motivated by a collective aspiration for a better society by the year 2030 that proposes to create a “globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life by 2030. It aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all citizens in a clean and secure environment” (Republic of Kenya, 2007, p. vii).

Over the years, and through to 2007, tourist arrivals and tourism earnings have been steadily increasing. From 1990 to 2007, tourist arrivals increased from 814,000 to 1.8 million, resulting in 2007 tourism earnings of approximately US\$939 million (Honey & Gilpin, 2009; Republic of Kenya, 2010). However, the 2008 postelection violence took a heavy toll on the tourism sector as total visitor arrivals contracted to 1.2 million during that year, while earnings from the sector declined by 19% to US\$761 million (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Partly due to the impact of the global economic downturn and the residual effects of the 2008 postelection violence, the expected recovery and growth of the tourism sector in Kenya did not materialize in 2009. Total visitor arrivals in 2009 numbered 1.5 million, representing a 25% increase over the 2008 arrivals, but this was 17% less than the volume of arrivals in 2007 prior to the postelection violence. Similarly, tourism earnings rose to US\$903 million, which was 18.6% higher than for 2008 but 4% less than for 2007 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2010). However, the available data for 2010 point toward improved fortunes for the recovering travel and tourism industry. Visitor arrivals in 2010 were 1.6 million. Compared to 2009, this represented a 7% growth in tourism arrivals with earnings of approximately US\$930 million (KNBS, 2011; Mugambi, 2010). These 2010 earnings were 3% higher compared to earnings in 2009.

Studies of the role of tourism in growth and development have recently been proliferating in the literature. However, tourism has always been recognized as an important activity, both nationally and internationally, because of its multiplier effects and, hence, its impact on income generation, its stimulation of investment, and its impact on foreign exchange earnings. There are also secondary spill-over effects in other sectors. Through increased demand for food products, souvenirs, and other goods, it generates employment in agriculture, food

processing, handicrafts, and light manufacturing, for example. However, the emphasis given to any one of these roles in any given economy depends on the extent to which governments perceive tourism as a sector with net economic benefits. East Africa, for instance, has always been a natural destination for tourists—boasting the richest and most varied concentration of wildlife on the continent—and Kenya recognized the potential for tourism early, opening its first national park in 1947 and building a flourishing industry based primarily around the safari (Honey & Gilpin, 2009). Since the 1990s, Kenya has also pursued ecotourism (responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people) that has been backed by national legislation aimed at protecting wildlife as well as representing communities (Western, 2008).

Nonetheless, there are still a number of emerging issues and challenges confronting the country’s tourism sector. Government reports have enumerated some of the primary emerging issues and challenges that continue to confront Kenya’s tourism sector (Republic of Kenya, 2008, 2010). They include the following:

1. Insecurity in the Eastern Africa subregion associated with political instability, terrorist threats and activities, income inequalities, unemployment, and poverty.
2. Poor or inadequate infrastructure and hospitality support services to handle the forecasted tourist numbers. For example, poor roads leading to key resort areas as well as in tourist parks.
3. Narrow product diversity leading, in turn, to a narrow concentration of tourism activities primarily on wildlife, which accounts for 70% of Kenya’s gross tourist earnings and 5% of its GDP. Almost one quarter of the parks receive about 80% of the visitors to the country.
4. Inadequate hotel/bed capacity as demonstrated by bed occupancy levels during peak season, being close to full capacity and particularly in the four- to five-star categories that represent 18% of premier hotels.
5. Untapped domestic tourism occasioned by the overreliance on traditional markets from western countries, which, in turn, makes the sector vulnerable to external shocks.

6. Inadequate financial resources being allocated to the sector from the government despite being a leading foreign exchange earner as well as a contributor to GDP. The sector has been receiving only about 50% of its budget requirements, and this is also reflected in terms of spending on marketing per tourist. In Africa, Kenya spends the least per tourist, whereas South Africa spends the highest and equivalent to more than twice what Kenya spends based on the most recent data (KIPPRA, 2009). According to Kenya's tourism minister, South Africa's 2010 allocations for travel and tourism marketing were seven times higher than Kenya's at US\$70 million compared to US\$9 million for Kenya (Mugambi, 2010).

In addition to the foregoing emerging issues and challenges, there are also some undesirable characteristics of tourism in Kenya. Although the Kenyan tourism sector has been beneficial to the country's economy, it has not been cost free. In fact, there are a variety of negative aspects of tourism development in Kenya, and one of its least desirable characteristics and most visible negative aspect is the impact on indigenous cultures and values. According to Western (2008), for example, "Kenya's beach tourism has spawned prostitution, crime, and corruption along the coast. Inland, tourists visit cultural villages semidressed, kiss and caress, and offend traditional sensibilities because they are given no code of conduct" (p. 5). But, perhaps the most significant negative impact of the travel and tourism activities in Kenya is sex tourism (Jones, 2006; Kibicho, 2009). The growth of tourism as a result of the expanding global economy constitutes one of the most significant engines fueling the increase in commercial sex (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001).

This work analytically discusses and reviews the increasingly popular phenomenon of sex tourism in Kenya. Although primarily based on a review of the literature (both conventional and gray), it also draws on the author's own knowledge and observations derived from his living and working in Kenya and his frequent visits to the coastal areas of the country. It briefly reviews the literature conceptualizing sex tourism and against that background examines the popularity and scope of sex tourism in Kenya, drawing on its nature, influencing factors,

and impact, and concludes with considerations on how to curb this type of tourism in the country and suggestions for a future research agenda.

The Concept of Sex Tourism: Literature Review

Sex tourism, also known as tourism prostitution, has been generally defined as tourism for which the main motivation, or at least part of the aim of the trip, is to consummate or engage in commercial sexual relations. "It is travel by buyers of sexual services for the purpose of procuring sexual services from another person in exchange for money and/or goods" (Shared Hope International, n.d., p. 1). It is therefore regarded—plain and simple—as travel to engage in sexual activity with prostitutes. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, defines sex tourism as trips organized within the tourism sector or from outside this sector, but using its structures and networks, with the primary purpose of effecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination (UNWTO, 1995). Consequently, sex tourism highlights the convergence between prostitution and tourism, links the global and the local, and draws attention to both the production and the consumption of sexual services (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). In that regard, Brennan (2004), in her study of sex tourism in the Dominican Republic, has identified and coined the term "sexscape"—a new kind of global sexual landscape and the sites within it. "Sexscapes link the practices of sex work to the forces of a globalized economy. Their defining characteristics are (1) international travel from the developed to the developing world, (2) consumption of paid sex, and (3) inequality" (Brennan, 2004, p. 16).

However, sex represents an important tourist attraction in many countries, either very explicitly, as in the case of Thailand and Amsterdam, or more covertly, as in Kenya, although Ruxin (2009) has observed that tightened restrictions in Thailand and elsewhere in Asia have pushed the trade to Kenya's coasts, where dozens of weekly flights from Europe fuel its existence. However, for most people, travel and sex are frequently linked, even among those traveling in their own countries. As a result, sex tourism is not limited to traveling to foreign

destinations in order to have sexual intercourse with a foreign partner. It can also be a domestic phenomenon, as witnessed in the major Japanese cities as noted by Uzama (2011). Therefore, and as claimed by O'Connell-Davidson (2004), sex is widely understood to be part of the tourist experience, and whether with other tourists, with local "holiday romances," or with sex workers, many people just expect to have more sex while on vacation. Ryan (2000) therefore concludes that the issues that arise through sex tourism, being the need for sexual adventure, pair bonding, sexual exploration, gratification, fantasy, and exploitation, do not begin in foreign countries but in an individual's home and place of work and within themselves.

In that context, Puccia (2009) has put forth a definition of a sex tourist as a person who travels to a place where he/she does not usually reside and who, pleasure seeking, has sex with a native or migrant person during his/her leisure time. It does not matter if people go to the countries with the specific motive of having sex or if they happen upon the possibility after they arrive in the host country. If people have sex with native or migrant persons in the places where they travel they are participating in sex tourism activities (Puccia, 2009). Consequently, sex tourism, as currently understood, includes both domestic and international demand and supply. For domestic demand, this entails travel within the same country and engaging in sexual activities, which may be commercial—by paying usually in cash, gifts, or other favors—or noncommercial, whereas international demand involves travel across national borders and engaging in sexual activities that may or may not be commercial.

What the foregoing clearly suggests, and as observed by Ryan and Hall (2001), is that the representation of sex and sexuality are integral parts of contemporary tourism, just as are the economic benefits of the industry. Some analysts have put it succinctly that sex can be an expected outcome of a trip, as may be the case in a romantic weekend escape (see, e.g., McKercher & Bauer, 2003). The prevailing situation indicates, as found by Ryan and Hall (2001), that there are significant levels of evidence to suggest that many tourists, both male and female, are not adverse to sexual adventure if it happens during a holiday. In fact, a considerable

number of tourists who consume commercial sexual services are often opportunistic users of the existing sex industry infrastructure at a destination. Therefore, it can be argued that sex tourism may not be possible if there was not an already established sex industry aimed at local residents (McKercher & Bauer, 2003). Subsequently, it also stands to reason that as the tourism industry expands so will the sector of the local sex industry that services tourists. It is partly for that reasoning that Jeffreys (2009) prefers to use the term "prostitution tourism," rather than sex tourism, which is a part of the sex/prostitution industry in all those areas where tourists travel for fun.

Domestic supply is the pool of available members of the local community (male and female) at tourist destinations who are able and willing to have sex with both local and international travelers/tourists and which may be a commercial or noncommercial transaction. International supply is the pool of available tourists (male and female) from abroad who are able and willing to have sex with both members of the local community and fellow international visitors. This international supply pool tends to be composed primarily of women who mainly have sex with male members of the local community and they may or may not pay for such sex. The international supply pool members have the power to decide whether to pay for sex or not depending on the nature of the relationship developed. Similarly, they also have the power to choose their partners, as well as the economic advantage that allows them to decide the extent and duration of these relationships.

Whereas sex tourism can refer to a variety of commercial or noncommercial sexual activities, it can also be further differentiated into general adult sex tourism as defined above, child sex tourism (CST), and female sex tourism (FST). CST is defined as travel to a foreign country for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts with children (US Department of State, 2008). It is the sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons who travel from one place to another, usually from a richer country to one that is less developed, and there engage in sexual acts with children. It means, therefore, that children are being made available to these tourists for the latter's sexual

gratification. However, a big difference between general adult sex tourism and CST is that the latter has been recognized the world over as a crime (George & Panko, 2011). CST is motivated by the need to victimize children sexually (Lim, 1998; Panko & George, 2012).

Child sex tourists can be domestic or international travelers (ECPAT International, 2007). CST is a shameful and reprehensible assault on the dignity of children and a form of violent abuse (US Department of State, 2008). It results in both mental and physical consequences for the exploited children that can be long-lasting and may include “disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and possibly death” (US Department of State, 2008, p. 1). The commercial sexual exploitation of children is also a criminal practice that violates children’s rights and where the issue of consent is irrelevant because the victim, being a child, cannot consent to abuse (ECPAT International, 2007). It is an expression of contemporary slavery and a major human rights challenge of our times (Panko & George, 2012). Some of the comparative statistics of CST globally include the following: the average age of child sex workers in South African cities is 14 years; in Sri Lanka, approximately 5,000 children between ages 10 and 18 are working in tourist areas; and in Mexico, more than 20,000 minors are working in the sex industry (Dixon, 2011; ECPAT International, 2008).

FST is travel by women, partially or fully, for the purpose of having sex. Female sex tourists, unlike male sex tourists, do not typically use the structures of the sex industry (such as strip clubs or organized tours) to meet partners at their tourist destinations. FST is also therefore referred to as “romance” tourism, which generally and more frequently involves sex with locals from the holiday destination country, rather than sex with other tourists. As was found to be the case in Jamaica, for instance, this type of romance tourism inverts commonly held notions about gender and sex and challenges concepts of what sex tourism actually entails, with the men involved being referred to as “gigolos,” “beach boys,” “rent-a-dreads,” or “rent-a-local” (Johnson, 2009). Participants in this type of tourism are likely to consider this a temporary romance or seduction

that occurs, rather than an actual transaction based on sex (Johnson, 2009).

FST continues to be the least studied aspect of sex tourism in general. The early studies of FST focused on the beach-hustling men in the Caribbean, and even current studies do not regard men who provide sexual services to female tourists as prostitutes. In fact, the term “romance tourism” emerged to differentiate the demand of female tourists for sexual services. However, from this author’s point of view, such a distinction does not neatly stand up to scrutiny given the fact that both male and female sex tourists do specify and make decisions about their exact requirements as purchasers of sexually objectified bodies (Sanchez-Taylor, 2001). Moreover, adequate analysis of contemporary sex tourism must consider both the supply and demand sides of the equation (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). From this perspective, the men (beach boys) are reaping benefits from the female tourists in much the same way the women (prostitutes) reap benefits from the male tourists. Nonetheless, one can concede that the men who sell sex to female tourists are much less vulnerable than the women who sell sex to male tourists.

Sex tourism and sex trafficking are also interwoven as the former supplies the demands presented by the latter. In the sex tourism markets, demand exceeds supply of women to provide the commercial sex services that buyers are groomed to expect through advertising and popular culture. Sex traffickers fill this deficiency by delivering women and children to meet the demand of buyers in sex tourism markets. This creates a single market of sexual exploitation in which sex tourism is fueled by sex trafficking (Shared Hope International, n.d.). Every year, tens of thousands of children and young women are trafficked across borders to engage in sexual activities. This human trafficking, primarily for prostituting women and children, has become one of the fastest growing criminal industries (Panko & George, 2012). In fact, many transnational trafficking networks and organized crime syndicates have proliferated and have become sophisticated businesses that are now entrenched within the economies of many developing countries—in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America—that they rely on sex trafficking as

a major source of income (George & Panko, 2011; Glover, 2006).

Sex Tourism in Kenya: Popularity, Scope, and Impact

Sex tourism has become rather significant in Kenya. It has been observed by Omondi (2003) that “although not officially stated, a good percentage of foreign tourists who visit Kenya often indulge in sex tourism or at least as part of the activities during their trip” (p. 3). This is also evidenced by the inclusion of Kenya among the world’s leading sex tourism destinations (Kibicho, 2009; Omondi, 2003). Tourism, having become an important sector of Kenya’s economy, has resulted “in continued tourism development, subsequently inducing a massive growth of the sex trade, especially within the leading tourism destinations” (Kibicho, 2009, p. 78).

Kenya’s sex tourism activities are primarily concentrated in the country’s coastal areas. Omondi (2003), for example, has stated that “the Kenyan coast along the Indian Ocean is notorious for sex tourism. It caters for about 66% of Kenya tourism activities and although no precise figures are available, sex tourism is one of the main activities at the Coast” (p. 6). The Kenya coast, like the islands of Jamaica, Barbados, and Bali, for example, has therefore become an attractive tourist destination because it offers several of the elements sought after by both international and domestic travelers/tourists including the five S’s that some modern tourists demand—sandy beaches, sun, safari, scenery, and sex. Kibicho (2009) and Wasonga (2010) also found that in Malindi, a coastal resort town close to Mombasa (Kenya’s most popular tourist destination), there was a direct linkage between the sex trade and tourism with local sex workers categorically reporting that their business was totally dependent on the tourism industry. Consequently, a large proportion of the income generated by the sex trade is derived from tourism-related activities.

Although the figures may not be accurate, it is believed, for example, that, on average, one of every five women touring Kenya is a sex tourist who engages in sexual activity with one or more of the local young men who roam the beach resorts to find tourists who are interested in establishing

relationships with them (Boissiere, 2010; Tharu, n.d.). In fact, one survey found that 66% of the female tourists in Malindi had the intention to engage in sex with local men at their destination before departure from their home country, and 94% of these traveled independently of each other (Kibicho, 2009). Known locally as beach boys, these local young men are generally between the ages of 25 and 30, wear dreadlocks and tight T-shirts to exhibit their biceps, and may have up to five or six different sexual partners during the high tourist season, and most of the women with whom they will have sexual intercourse will be more than 60 years old (Boissiere, 2010).

The engagement of the beach boys by female tourists had no correlation to age, origin, or marital status, and a significant majority (91%) of them (female tourists) admitted that they chose Kenya for their holiday adventures based on their knowledge of the country being a safe destination for women on romance tours either through their past experience in the country or through recommendations by their friends or colleagues (Kibicho, 2009). However, none of the women in this survey considered themselves as sex tourists and therefore did not perceive their encounters with the beach boys as a commercial sex transaction, nor did they view their beach boy’s or boys’ sexual partners as commercial sex workers. In fact, although 60% of these women admitted to certain economic aspects to their relationships with the beach boys, they were emphatic in their belief that “they were helping the local men, and to some extent the local economy, by giving them money and gifts (Kibicho, 2009, p. 103).

With respect to CST, the best data currently available suggest that by 2006, some 10,000–15,000 girls living in the coastal areas, an estimated 30% of all 12- to 18-year-olds residing in those areas, were involved in sex tourism (Jones, 2006). It was also estimated that (1) the number of children engaging in sex tourism as a full-time year-round commercial activity is much lower at 2,000–3,000; (2) more than 75% of key informants accepted the practice of CST as normal and tolerable or actively approved of it; (3) almost 60% of key informants also thought the involvement of boys in sex tourism as beach boys, procurers, and middlemen or engaging in sex work with tourists was acceptable;

(4) more than two fifths of girls involved in prostitution and CST began transactional sex for cash or for goods and favors between the ages of 12 and 13 years; and (5) more than 10% of girls begin transactional sex below age 12 (Jones, 2006).

According to Kibicho (2009), the child sex trade in Kenya is a result of complex socioeconomic factors, at the heart of which is poverty. Kenyan children are introduced into the sex industry in various direct and indirect ways including being lured away from broken homes by recruiters who promise them jobs in the cities; being sold by their parents in exchange for basic necessities such as food and shelter; and being cultivated as friends by tourists as they (the children) roam the tourist destinations, especially the beaches, in their begging expeditions stemming from their abandonment or their attempts to escape the poverty or other deprivations at home.

Ruxin (2009) has also noted that the core of the CST problem is poverty. In Mombasa, the go-go bars and clubs frequented by sex workers form a patchwork of poverty along the road that is highly visited by European sunseekers (Ruxin, 2009). Young girls between 12 and 14 years old are being lured into hotels and private villas along Mombasa's north and south coasts where they are sexually exploited with promises of riches and trips abroad (Ruxin, 2009). Also, in Malindi, impoverished children of both sexes looking for a new life sell their bodies to tourists, and other parts of the coast, such as Lamu Old Town, have become well known as places that attract men looking for young boys. One result is that many visitors to the Kenya coasts travel there specifically for sex (Ruxin, 2009).

Another significant aspect of the sex tourism industry in Kenya is related to sex trafficking. According to the 2012 "Trafficking in Persons Report," "Kenya is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to . . . sex trafficking" (US Department of State, 2012, p. 205). In many cases, children are lured into the coastal sex tourism industry by traffickers who gain the trust of poor families through familial, ethnic, or religious ties and falsely offer to raise and educate children in towns or to place adults in lucrative employment (US Department of State, 2012). "Both women and 'beach boys' as young as 14 pimp children in coastal areas and

receive commissions as high as the equivalent of US\$240 from tourists for each girl secured" (US Department of State, 2012, p. 205). Children are also trafficked from other East African nations such as Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda and subjected to prostitution in Kenya (US Department of State, 2012).

In 2011, Kenyan government officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Development identified 99 child trafficking victims (23 of whom were in prostitution) and provided protective services to all of them (US Department of State, 2012). Despite such actions by the government and all of the available evidence on the magnitude of the problem, Otieno (2012) reveals that the Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association (MCTA) has accused civil society organizations of blowing the issue of CST out of proportion. The MCTA chairman said that although there are some incidents, there is a possibility the civil society organizations have bloated the numbers "to attract funding from donors." He further said that there have been reports that there are about 3,000 underage girls involved in CST with tourists but that this is incorrect and wrongly portrays the Coast as a haven for CST. He said the hoteliers at the Coast signed an agreement with the Ministry of Tourism and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to eradicate CST in the region. He accused the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of not appreciating this fact and concluded that underage girls are at far more risk from their stepfathers, stepbrothers, and paternal uncles than they are from tourists.

Undoubtedly, in order for sex tourism to flourish, in Kenya or elsewhere, men and women must participate in prostitution. For the most part, poverty is the driving force that influences people to sell sex. Most of the women who work as prostitutes in the sex tourism industry do indeed come from poor families. Female sex workers in Kenya are often the primary source of income for their families and generally have many people including children, parents, partners, and others dependent upon the money they earn. On the other hand, the men who work as beach boys—although they may face similar economic circumstances (generally unemployed or underemployed)—are usually single and tend not to be supporting others financially. "The cost of sex tourism is that the demand for prostitution is

increased and many people see no other choice but to engage in prostitution” (Puccia, 2009, p. 30).

Consequently, in Kenya the victims of sex tourism are becoming younger as demand is increasing. Demand for younger girls is increasing as buyers believe they are less likely to be infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Also, younger girls present the vision of innocence and vulnerability sought by tourists. Ruxin (2009) found several girls (and boys), no older than age 10, dressed for sale in Mombasa. Also, Kibicho (2009) has narrated the experience of young girls and boys, some of whom were forced into their sex tourism careers at ages 6–8. So, although the perception of sex trafficking is often of women and girls being moved from their impoverished homes into a wealthier country for commercial sexual exploitation, this view is overly simplistic and even outdated, as there are many variations to the face of sex trafficking and sex tourism. Increasingly, and as also observed by Shared Hope International (n.d.), that face is one of a local victim caught in a sex trafficking and sex tourism market generated by foreign and local demand.

However, poverty is not the only factor influencing or contributing to the now vibrant sex tourism industry in Kenya. Poor governance, emanating from inadequate state capability, also plays a role. A capable state, as opposed to a “weak or failed state,” is a crucial foundation for effective programs to tackle poverty, improve livelihoods, and sustain good governance (Hope, 2012). A capable state, therefore, possesses the appropriate capabilities to respond effectively, efficiently, and timely to domestic needs and demands as well as to meet global challenges. Capable states demonstrate governance at all levels. They are at war with corruption, for example. When states are not capable they become weak states. When states are weak for long periods, they run the risk of becoming failed states with all the attendant negative outcomes of such a nature of being.

Thus, despite the official view of the MCTA (as expressed by its chairman) denying the magnitude and impact of CST in particular, CST exists in part due to the lack of enforcement of the appropriate laws and the existence of corrupt public officials, including the police, who are responsible for enforcement of those laws. Hope (2012) has pointed out that “Kenya is still classified as one of the most corrupt States in the world” (p. 101).

Consequently, and as observed by the US Department of State (2011), “corruption among law enforcement authorities and other public officials continued to hamper efforts to bring traffickers to justice; in certain regions, corrupt police, immigration, or labor officials were complicit in, received bribes to overlook or provide lighter penalties for, or obstructed investigations of human trafficking” (p. 213). The result is that although the Kenyan government has recently stepped up its CST and trafficking prevention and protection activities, there is still much more for it (the Kenyan government) to do. Most CST incidents go unreported, and when they are brought to light influential players in the government and the tourism industry, such as the MCTA, downplay their occurrence.

Conclusion

Sex tourism has become globally popular in recent years and Kenya has become a popular destination for such activities. The Kenyan government faces a struggle to end a tourism sex trade that many young girls see as a fast way out of poverty and a move into a more glamorous life. Similarly, young men are also now fully engaged in the sex tourism trade as a means of making a living and improving their economic circumstances. Many of these so-called beach boys—the young men who hang around the beaches—also act as pimps for tourists seeking young girls and are paid handsome commissions, fueling the cycle of child sex work in the country (“Kenya: Fight Against,” 2011).

Undoubtedly, the only way out of this state of affairs is through national and local development policies that rapidly lead to education and employment opportunities that offer a distinct alternative to Kenyans engaging in sex tourism and/or prevent the shameful and reprehensible sexual exploitation of Kenyan children. Moreover, in both the immediate and longer term, the Kenyan authorities need to much more vigorously enforce existing laws against prostitution and sex tourism and especially the country’s Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. In particular, and as also advocated by the US Department of State (2012), the country needs to fully implement the anti-trafficking law (Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act) to prosecute

trafficking offenses and convict and punish traffickers and also use the Sexual Offenses Act to prosecute and punish child sex tourists.

Future research needs to examine and measure the extent to which other factors besides poverty—such as poor governance—contribute to and/or influence sex tourism in Kenya. It is too simplistic to say poverty is the only contributing factor when the evidence suggests otherwise. Poverty is indeed the primary factor but not the only one contributing to the growth of sex tourism in the country.

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