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White Water Rafting and Its Role In Entrepreneurship at Bujagali Falls

by Alex Nelson
Spring 2011 Semester

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Academic Director: Martha Wandera

Project Location: Bujagali Falls, Jinja District, Uganda

Dedication:

This paper is dedicated to what once was five of the greatest kilometers of big volume white water on the planet. Unfortunately I never had the opportunity to paddle Total Gunga, the G-Spot, Big Brother, or Silverback. I hope the loss of this section will forever remain as a testimony to human's neglect for natural beauty and may it help promote awareness for the preservation of rivers and everything natural around the world for generations to come.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Martha Wandera for all of the help you provided in allowing me to pursue the study of my true passion: white water rafting. Although I was not allowed by the program, I greatly appreciate your help in working with SIT to allow me this opportunity.

Additionally I would like to thank everyone I worked with in the Bujagali falls area and at Nile River Explorers, especially Jack Bestbier and Mitch Andrew. With your time outs and friendly good nature I was able to not only learn an incredible amount about the rafting industry, I was able to do it with as much fun as possible.

Abstract

The intention of this report was to explore the white water rafting industry on the Upper White Nile. Although the White Nile is widely considered one of the greatest stretches of white water in the world, there is little actually known about the industry itself. As a result the following research investigates the entrepreneurial nature of the rafting industry and its related adventure tourism activities. Additionally the research investigates the role of the soon to be finished Bujagali Hydroelectric Project and future dams to examine the impacts they are making on the local businesses and the community as a whole. Finally the role of the government in regulating and marketing these adventure tourism activities was also examined in this report. The bulk of the research came from the Bujagali Falls area of the Jinja district.

Research was conducted in a multitude of ways in order to gain a full understanding of the rafting industry on the White Nile. In addition the researcher participated in an internship with white water outfitter Nile River Explorers (NRE) to gain an intimate grasp of the industry from the outfitters perspective. Over the six week period the researcher interviewed business owners, managers, entrepreneurs, craft shop owners, and government officials to accomplish his objectives. This was done while also working different jobs for NRE.

Through this research a vast amount of information was gained on the nature of this industry. The rafting industry revealed its entrepreneurial nature through unique, unconventional business tactics. The impacts of the current and future dams are widespread throughout the entire industry and future impacts would stretch beyond the rafting industry having effects that would change the town of Jinja for a long time to come. Finally there was also a great deal learnt about the role the government plays in the adventure tourism industry in Jinja, basically none.

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Definitions

Put in: Where rafts are “put in” to the river marking the start of the rafting trip.

Take out: “Where rafts are “taken out” of the river marking the end of the rafting trip

Quad bike: Also known as an all terrain vehicle (ATV), these are small off road vehicles.

Family Float Trip: Rafting trip offered by NRE involving short river trip for children on beginner rapids.

Grade V: Extremely difficult rapids with precise and technically demanding routes to be followed. Stoppers, currents and waves will be powerful and inspection is essential.

Sunset Cruise: Cruise offered by NRE on their two story cruise boat on Lake Victoria

Jetboat: A high speed highly maneuverable jet propelled boat.

Eskimo Roll: Kayak technique that allows a person to right themselves after rolling upside down on water.

Tandem Kayaking: A two person kayak offered by NRE that allows unskilled clients to kayak down grade V rapids.

Parasailing: The act of being pulled by a speed boat into the air with the aid of a parachute.

River Boarding: Extreme boogie boarding where participants go down the river on a small foam board.

NRE: Nile River Explorers

Village Walk: Activity offered by NRE showing clients the local villages surrounding Bujagali Falls.

Introduction

Over the past six weeks the researcher embarked on an internship with Nile River Explorers to learn more about the white water rafting industry on the Upper White Nile in the Jinja district of Eastern Uganda. This internship was designed to help reveal the entrepreneurial nature of the rafting industry and its role in helping develop the local communities it operates in. Additionally the researcher anticipated learning about the impacts of the recently constructed Bujagali Hydro Electric Project on the rafting industry.

To compliment the internship and add to the depth of this report, the researcher engaged in interviews with surrounding businessmen, tourists, and entrepreneurs, both foreign and local to see the impacts the adventure tourism industry and specifically rafting has had on the villages surrounding these companies in the vicinity of Bujagali Falls.

Tourism as an industry in Uganda plays a crucial role in the national economy. The tourism industry is actually the number one contributor to GDP and the largest employer of any industry in the country.¹ Although the adventure tourism sector may play a smaller role than others, it is nonetheless a unique addition to Uganda's repertoire of tourism activities. Uganda's white water rafting industry is only rivaled by the Zambezi River as the best rafting on the African Continent and is certainly considered one of the best sections of river for rafting in the world. For these reasons the researcher decided to study the rafting industry. In addition, he has worked within the industry around the world and wanted the opportunity to explore another unique area where the sport is very popular to gain more insight to further his knowledge of the industry.

Background Information

Before divulging into the depth of this report, there are a few subjects that will be discussed to give background information on the subject being researched. This includes a brief background on tourism in Uganda as well as a thorough definition of both adventure tourism and white water rafting.

Worldwide, travel and tourism accounts for 9.2 percent of global GDP, 4.8 percent of world exports, and 9.2 percent of world investment.¹ Within Uganda the tourism industry is a significant contributor to the national economy. The industry's total contribution of UGX 3,256.8 billion (7.6%) to the nation's GDP demonstrates the importance of the industry.² In addition, tourism employs 17% of the formal Ugandan workforce. 80% of the Ugandan tourism industry is wildlife based.³ However, adventure tourism is still a significant factor to the nation's tourism industry.⁴

Adventure Tourism

Nile River Explorers is an adventure tourism company that offers a multitude of "adventures" which focuses on white water rafting. Before examining these different activities a definition of adventure tourism must be made. It is a form of tourism which involves activities that contain the concepts of risk and danger which ultimately evoke the feelings of adrenaline. Adventure tourism is defined as having "freedom of choice; intrinsic rewards; and an element of uncertainty, for instance when the experience outcome is uncertain, or its risks are unpredictable."⁵ The *EIU Travel and Tourism Analyst* gives another definition as "adventure [tourism] can be defined as one that contains an element of personal challenge, through controlled risk, daring and/or excitement, often in an inaccessible (wilderness) environment."⁶

These two definitions both state that adventure activities have inherent risks. Undoubtedly the risk, or perceived risk, involved in the activity is one of the main reasons that draw participants. Cheron and Ritchie view risk as a “multidimensional psychological phenomenon that influences individual perceptions and decision processes.”⁷ These definitions suggest that adventure tourism companies offer activities of considerable risk often under the supervision of trained professionals. Having described the nature of adventure tourism it must be established that white water rafting falls under this category.

White Water Rafting

White water rafting combines most of the characteristics that label adventure tourism above; mainly risk, intrinsic rewards, and personal challenge among others. The Upper White Nile is considered a grade V river.⁸ As defined by the British Canoe Union, grade V rapids are “Extremely difficult rapids with precise and technically demanding routes to be followed. Stoppers, currents and waves will be powerful and inspection is essential.”⁹ For this reason it is must be established that white water rafting on this grade V river is high adrenaline adventure tourism. These characteristics are apparent given that rafting requires the navigation of technical rapids while attempting to avoid dangerous hazards including turbulent rapids, rocks, and even objects inside of the raft. The challenges faced daily during the rafting trips are what make the adventure activity so popular. As founder and managing director John Dahl explained in an interview, the rafting industry and NRE in general rely on the high adventure nature of the White Nile, the intense emotions drawn out by the difficult navigation of grade V rapids is what makes the rafting industry a success.¹⁰

Statement of Objectives

Listed below are the four objectives the research set out to investigate during an internship with Nile River Explorers. Given the limited time frame of only four to five weeks to create a report it was believed that these objectives were plausible and realistic.

1. Examine the entrepreneurial dynamics of the local rafting industry and the related activities in the Upper White Nile River region.
2. To assess the impact of the Bujagali Falls Dam project on rafting the Nile and related activities in the area
3. To investigate the effects of the construction of new dams on the rafting business
4. To learn about the government role in promoting the rafting industry in Uganda

Justification of Research

Given the reliance on tourism as a significant contributor to the Ugandan economy it is important to know as much about this industry as possible. It is crucial for policy makers, business owners, and the community to become more informed of the many opportunities and challenges within the tourism industry in order to take advantage of these for the benefit of the entire country.

Although the most known and popular sectors within the tourism industry remain Mountain Gorilla tracking and wild game safaris, the young and emerging adventure tourism sector is beginning to become more prominent within the industry. This study has been formed with the intent of investigating deeper into the adventure tourism industry and more specifically the white water rafting industry on the Upper White Nile River in the Jinja region. Upon

preliminary research it was revealed that there is little known about this adventure sport that employees many and contributes much to the local Jinja economy. For this reason it is hoped that this report will contribute to the general knowledge of the rafting industry on the White Nile and will expose the contributions these companies make to the local communities they operate in.

Uganda's white water rafting industry is currently approaching a very significant change to its operations. As the Bujagali Hydroelectric Project comes to a completion there is still little known to the extent of how this will impact the rafting industry. As the rafting companies will be forced to change their daily rafting trips; the research will focus on investigating the impact these changes will have on the local communities and companies that also rely on the rafting industry. This will be important and timely information that will help policy makers and related enterprises be able to help improve the rafting industry.

Location of Study

The research involved with this study took place mainly outside of Jinja in the area surrounding Bujagali Falls. It was essential to gain more insight within the adventure tourism industry by actually visiting the areas and investigating the enterprises present. The researcher was based out of Nile River Explorers (NRE), one of the original and most successful rafting companies on the Nile. While being based at NRE's campsite at the entrance of Bujagali Falls the researcher was able to investigate and interview many people at NRE to help complete the objectives aforementioned. In addition further insight on the adventure tourism industry was gained through interviewing related businesses within the vicinity of Bujagali Falls.

Research Methods

The researcher found it necessary to undergo many different means of research in order to further develop his report. There were many obstacles in doing so given the lack of actual information on the rafting industry. Because of this, the researcher decided to undergo an internship which would give him the most intimate understanding of how these companies operate on the Nile River. To support the information gained in the internship, the researcher decided it would be necessary to interview local community members and different business owners, both local and foreign owners. Additionally it was thought that interviewing government officials would also help reveal the role the government has with the rafting industry. This part of the research process became the most difficult for the researcher as these officials were generally unreceptive or unknowledgeable of the rafting industry, and to make things worse political turmoil with in Kampala made reaching these people even more difficult.

Secondary Sources

—There is very little research done on the rafting industry and virtually none conducted on the Nile River. The researcher was only able to find data on the Nile that dealt with studies of the prevalence of bilharzias on rafters. The secondary research gained on rafting in general was almost equally unhelpful; most was outdated or needed remedial revisions. The researcher was able to find some information on adventure tourism and tourism within Uganda, but this data only had limited significance as background information in this report.

Internship

As a result the research had to come from the source. The researcher found it necessary to undergo an internship with NRE to become familiar with the daily operations of a rafting

company on the Nile. Additionally this helped him become well acquainted with employees of NRE and other related companies which helped set up essential and valuable interviews. In fact most of the knowledge and information gained from this report has come from the work experience and the people worked with at NRE. By taking on a responsibility within in the company, the researcher was able to learn more about the company. Through being an employee who has to deal with customers and sell the different adventure products offered at the company the researcher became more knowledgeable of how the rafting industry and its related adventure activities are run on the White Nile.

Interviews

To supplement the internship and gain different local perspectives the researcher realized the importance of speaking with people from different companies in the area, both competitors and co-operating companies. These interviews helped backup similar opinions of people at NRE and also in some instances contradicted. For this reason they helped round the data gained from the internship to get multiple opinions of each subject

Research Inefficiencies

The biggest difficulty with the research was the unavailability of good and insightful interviews with government officials. These people proved to be very difficult to get into contact with and were also unknowledgeable of the rafting industry. As a result most of the information about the role the government plays in the rafting and adventure tourism industries was gained through interviews with company operators, not government officials. The researcher does recognize the potential for biased and incomplete data as little information was actually gained from government officials, but there was actually very little information that these people could provide. Additionally these operators are on the ground seeing everyday the nuances of their

businesses and are very aware of the different ways the government is involved with their own companies. Yet it should also be noted that this may not give the balanced, full spectrum of opinions more political officials may have added to the research. Due to program restrictions the researcher was forbidden from experiencing first hand the high adrenaline adventure of grade V white water rafting on the White Nile. Because of this, he had to rely on observing the response of clients and the video documentation to estimate the experience of others.

Findings and Analysis

This section contains the findings of each objective and a brief analysis of each. The section is organized by each objective; its findings then analysis followed by the next objective and its findings and analysis etc.

Objective I: Examine the entrepreneurial dynamics of the local rafting industry and the related activities in the Upper White Nile River region.

Nile River Explorers was founded in 1996 by current Managing Director John Dahl and two colleagues. Previously the three had toured the Upper White Nile to explore the potential viability of rafting in on the section of river. Over the next fifteen years, what started with a trio of friends and three rafts has turned into a multi-adventure sport resort with two bases, an entire fleet of rafts, and over eighty employees. Although the one day grade V rafting is the main generator of revenue for the company, NRE also offers mountain biking, tandem kayaking through grade V rapids, river boarding, sunset cruise at the source of the Nile, grade III rafting, multi-day rafting trips, and village walks, family float rafting (see glossary for definitions). In addition to these activities, NRE works closely with other adventure tourism companies to offer

as wide range of products as possible for all of their clients. These activities include horseback safaris, quad biking, volunteering opportunities, kayak school, Tubing, Bungee Jumping, and Jet Boat adventures.

For NRE rafting acts as the “anchor” for the company.¹¹ This activity is the one that draws clients into the company’s grasp, while the other activities are the ones that keep them at the facilities which draw them to spend even more money while staying for additional days partaking in additional adventures. These extra activities are the ones that add value to NRE’s overall product, generate additional revenue, and draw in more clientele. Although the company would be nothing without rafting, the company would also look completely different without all of the extra activities they offer.

Additionally NRE and similar businesses support the local communities in ways that typical Ugandan tourism companies do not. These companies pay their highly qualified workers highly competitive wages. As mentioned by Kayak the Nile owner Jamie Simpson, many of the local river guides at NRE have the ability to make more money than local doctors.¹² NRE alone employs over 80 local workers in many different fields of work.¹³ And Dahl explained, compared to the upper market, a far larger portion of company revenues stays within the local communities and therefore helps more people locally. Additionally people like Peter Knight, owner of All Terrain Adventures, are involved in building schools and developing clean water projects.¹⁴

Analysis

The rafting and adventure tourism industry in the Bujagali Falls region shows a remarkable amount of innovative and enterprising skills. The entrepreneurial nature of these

companies is very strong. Whether it is their unconventional methods of business, the way they create great benefit to the community through high paying jobs, or their uncanny ability to recognize and exploit opportunity, these businesses are innovative in the way they operate.

One of the main ways Nile River Explorers and similar companies in the area display their entrepreneurial nature is through the way they operate. These companies are highly cooperative in nature. Through the researcher's internship it became clear that NRE would cooperate with even its largest rival in the rafting business, Adrift. During the internship the researcher had to call Adrift regularly to book bungee jumping for NRE clients. In addition it was discovered that during the busy season NRE would readily lend its own guides rafts and equipment to Adrift if the company was in need, of course Adrift would do the same for NRE. The cooperation observed between these two companies verifies the unique and innovative operating standards of the main industry players which therefore identifies the entrepreneurial nature within.

NRE and the other adventure tourism companies in the area also work to improve the quality of life of the local community through competitive employment. As mentioned earlier these companies pay the local raft guides wages that can be incredibly lucrative. The opportunities NRE and other rafting companies provide their employees is nothing short of enterprising. During the researcher's internship it became evident that many of the local raft guides even work on rivers in other countries such as Canada and the United States. The experience they are able to gain in through NRE has given them the chance to travel and earn high wages. NRE's ability to improve the lives of its employees through high wages and travel opportunities is certainly unique within the tourism industry in Uganda, and for that reason the company's entrepreneurial nature is very strong.

Finally the researcher was also able to witness the entrepreneurial nature of NRE through the company's ability to recognize and exploit opportunities. As mentioned earlier, the rafting acts as an anchor activity which draws in clients to the company's facilities. Once there the clients are then enticed to partake in one of the many other activities offered by NRE. Through this it is evident that people like John Dahl have innate entrepreneurial skills. He was able to realize the potential benefit of offering additional activities and exploited the opportunity. The company's ability to exploit opportunity is certainly a testament to their entrepreneurial nature. Additionally they are also very adaptive to changes within their operating environment. The best example of this would be their reaction to the Bujagali Hydro Electric project which will be discussed in the next section.

Objective II: Impact of the Bujagali Falls Dam project on the rafting enterprise and related activities in the area

One of the greatest threats to the viability of the rafting industry on the Nile River since the beginning of the era in the mid 1990's is the implementation of the Bujagali Hydroelectric Dam. The creation of the new dam will have an enormous impact on NRE and every rafting company in Jinja. As of February 27th, 2011 all watercraft access to the upper portion of the Nile was ordered closed by the Ugandan Government.¹⁵ This removed four significant rapids; Bujagali Falls, 50:50, Total Gunga, and Big Brother/Silverback from the beginning of the rafting trip. With Bujagali Falls being one of the most famous rapids in the world and Total Gunga being one of the "craziest" as put by many guides and Kayak the Nile owner Jamie Simpson, the river has changed significantly.¹⁶ Currently water levels have reached up to the base of 50:50 while Total Gunga and Big Brother/Silverback are underwater. Bujagali Falls, the rapid furthest

up stream is estimated to be under water by October.

Undoubtedly the loss of these rapids will and already has changed the white water trips companies can offer. NRE, and the other three local companies, have decided to move their trips downstream of the dam to the “day two” section of the river, which previously was only reserved for over night rafting trips. Because of the new start, at Overtime rapid, the rafters continue the trip further down stream ending after the rapid “Nile Special” at the Hairy Lemon, a hostel located on an island in the Nile. The trip now has a number of different rapids, which although significant are considered to be less intense than the rapids lost.¹⁷ Although it might be expected that the loss of significant rapids would create a huge impact on the value being offered to rafters this is not the case. As NRE’s founder and Managing Director, John Dahl explained; the clients will not know the difference, if they have never seen the river before they will not be able to know what they are missing out on. As explained earlier, the rapids that are remaining are still sufficient to provide an entertaining and marketable product.¹⁸

While the actual rafting trip might not have resulted in significant changes, the logistics behind the river trip have. Since the trip has been moved five miles down river and thus further away from Jinja the added driving costs will be significant for each rafting company, . Furthermore the increased distance has brought up the question of poor road conditions. Since the worse road conditions exist on the Eastern side of the Nile NRE has decided to access the river from the Western bank which further adds even more driving time. One manager at NRE explained that he could not imagine the company vehicles being able to survive for more than a few weeks on the Eastern bank roads. As a result clients are shuttled from the Explorer’s Campsite into Jinja before then heading back down the opposite side of the river to the put it. From this point the transport vehicles travel down to the take out, The Hairy Lemon.

Impact of Bujagali Dam on other local businesses

Nile River Explorers is not the only company to have witnessed significant impacts on their business as a result of the completion of the Bujagali hydroelectric dam. Every business owner and manager interviewed during the research process cited minimal to significant negative impacts to their company resulting from the dam project. Each company has attempted to make adaptive plans to in hopes of minimizing the negative impacts of the dam. However research revealed that some of the businesses will be operating in very different manners and not the way they were intended to.

Kayak the Nile

Kayak instruction and guiding company Kayak the Nile was one of the companies interviewed that felt the least impact from the closing of the upper section. The company, founded by the Scottish Jamie Simpson in 2003, works directly with NRE and operates within the confines of the Explorer's Campsite. In an interview Simpson explained that his company began mainly renting out kayaks to advanced kayakers who would then go down some of the more challenging rapids.¹⁹ The Kayak the Nile guides were mainly used to show these kayakers how to navigate the rapids safely; basically telling them what to expect on each rapid. As the company developed Simpson explained that more of his business has been generated through teaching and kayak instruction. Today he employs between five to seven guides to teach people basic skills like paddle strokes and the Eskimo roll.

As a result of this evolution from kayak renting and limited guiding to one on one instruction and training, Kayak the Nile will be relatively unaffected by the changing of the river. Simpson explained that since over sixty percent of his business comes from instruction on

beginner sections of the river, Kayak the Nile actually rarely used the more challenging section of river that is disappearing. He went on to explain that the only loss he may witness would be from his already limited advanced market that could look to other more challenging rivers since there are now fewer rapids to run on the Nile.

Fatia Namugayi and other Craft Businesses.

Outside the gates of the Nile River Explorer's Campsite there are about seven different local craft shops. Since the gate of NRE's Campsite is also at the entrance to Bujagali Falls this area is a very prominent tourist intersection. One of the craft shop owners is Fatia Namugayi; she is a local painter who over the past five years has operated at Bujagali falls with great success. However in an interview she explained the drastic effects the dam is already starting to have on her business. Over the past few years Fatia claimed that her revenue was averaging around five hundred thousand shillings per month.²⁰ With the dam already having flooded three significant rapids Fatia has seen a decline in kayakers and believes the biggest impact will be the loss of Bujagali Falls, sometime in the next few months. She believes her revenue will fall below two hundred thousand shillings, she estimates about one painting per week at forty thousand shillings or roughly one hundred and sixty thousand shillings per month.²¹

The impact the Bujagali dam will have on Fatia is undoubtedly significant. Having to support her three children, she explained that her business will no longer be able to generate enough money for her family citing problems of school fees and rising prices in general as reason for needing more not less income.²² This dilemma is also shared by each craft owner as Fatia explained that all of the shop owners are planning to move to different areas in hopes of selling more products. The problem for people like Fatia and the other shop owners is that they all live in the Bujagali area and cannot afford to move, yet cannot afford to stay where they are.

Fatia explained that the two big issues would be financing the construction of a new shop since most shop owners lack the capital. While the other issue would be the extreme increase in transportation costs, living in the Bujagali area these owners would have to travel to the town of Jinja (eight kilometers away) at the very least in hopes to sell more crafts. The impact on these craft owners is significant and their futures unknown as they may or may not be able to continue their professions.

Speke Campsite and Equator Rafting

Of all the businesses researched, Equator Rafts and Speke Resort, Bujagali Falls will perhaps be most largely impacted by the dam and flooding of the river. The rafting company and resort offers budget trips and accommodation right at the base of Bujagali Falls. In an interview with the Operations Manager, Hitesh Vora, it was revealed that upon the completion of the dam the entire Speke Resort, Bujagali Falls will be underwater. Vora explained that Bujagali Falls itself is one of the best attractions in Uganda and that people come from all over the world to view and brave the rapid itself.²³ Being located on the shores of this massive rapid Vora explained that the success of the resort relied significantly on the falls itself.

As a result the Speke Resort has decided to rebuild their facilities further uphill above the predicted new water line. Vora is still skeptical to the viability and future success of the resort since the original site was supported by day visitors to the falls.²⁴ Unlike NRE's John Dahl, Vora expressed fears that people will stop coming to raft the Nile since the more popular rapids have disappeared. However out of every person interviewed, Vora was the most understanding of the new dam. He was the only person who acknowledged the need for more electricity throughout the entire country of Uganda.

Analysis

The impacts derived from the new Bujagali Hydroelectric Dam varied for each company and for some, have yet to be fully determined. The bottom line for each business interviewed is that there were negative impacts for all of them. The sentiment of each business owner or manager varied significantly from generally understanding to absolutely enraged. However the entrepreneurial abilities of many of the businesses did emerge as many of them have plans to take advantage of the new dam. Overall, the research does prove the significance of the dam; the impacts will be felt for years if not generations as a major contributor to the Ugandan Tourism Sector will be completely lost for ever in only a few short months.

The impact from the loss of the significant rapids is still yet to be fully realized as the river has only been effectively closed by the dam since 28th of February 2011. Additionally, Bujagali Falls will still flow freely for a few more months. Given that these developments are so recent, it is still very difficult to definitely determine what impact the dam will have on all of the rafting companies and related local businesses. Of course each rafting company has already moved their rafting trips down stream causing some logistical issues, added fuel costs, and added time issues. However the actual impact on any change in business or number of clients is still unforeseen. Although operators like John Dahl are confident that little to nothing will change NRE and the other rafting companies; the next few months should indicate the dam's impacts as it will be the busy season. More tourists come visit these rafting companies during the northern hemisphere's summer months. These months are crucial in determining if rafters will be able to notice the loss of the four significant rapids, or if the new rapids successfully make up for the ones lost.

In addition to the uncertainty of the dam's impact on NRE and the rafting industry, other

businesses that rely on clients drawn to the area by rafting also have uncertain fates. Companies like Kayak the Nile and All Terrain Adventures both estimate about thirty percent of their business comes from people who are in the area due to rafting.^{25 26} If the rafting business was affected harder than expected these businesses would be hurt likewise, and potentially to the point where they could not operate. More insight was gained on the speculation of the dam's impact in an interview with quad bike safari specialist and All Terrain Adventures owner Peter Knight. Knight explained fears that his company's business would be greatly jeopardized not only by being restricted from safari trails near the river, due to dam security, but also due to the fact that NRE may begin losing business.²⁷ He explained that because of his reliance on NRE, he could not afford to see the company face any decline in business as it would directly impact his own business. As it is easily noticed, the smaller tourism companies which rely on the larger rafting companies could be face the same negative impacts the rafting companies might see if the number of visits declines the way it potentially could.

There will be a widespread impact seen throughout the Jinja area tourism sector resulting from the completion of the Bujagali Dam and subsequent flooding of the Upper Nile. Despite the obvious negative results, many companies are using innovative and enterprising ideas to take advantage of the new opportunities a new large lake will provide them. For the past fifteen years NRE has had a campsite along the banks of the White Nile River, in a few months they will have a campsite on a giant lake that is part of the Nile River system. As a result John Dahl and other like minded business operators have seen the opportunities in developing more lake sports for the tourists staying at their campsites.

There are many different activities that can be undertaken on a large, deep, and tranquil lake that cannot be done on a shallow and dynamic river. As a result the opportunities have

already been discussed by companies like Kayak the Nile, Equator Rafts, and NRE despite still being months away from actually having a lake in front of their respective campsites. Kayak the Nile owner, Jamie Simpson explained that he has already ordered a number of touring kayaks which will be rented out to clients staying at the NRE campsite to explore the lake on their own.²⁸ Speke Resort and Equator Raft's manager, Hitesh Vora, also explained some of the ideas his company has been discussing, which include; lake cruises, water sports activities, and possibly even a jet boat (a high speed and highly maneuverable small watercraft powered by a jet engine).²⁹ Like the other two companies mentioned, Dahl has been very quick to recognize opportunities given the emergence of the new lake. In addition to working with an independent jet boat company out of the NRE campsite, Dahl and NRE are also planning to bring in a parasailing expert to allow clients to soar high above the Nile river basin behind a speed boat with nothing else but a giant parachute. Tubing and wakeboarding are two other ideas Dahl has been researching to see the viability of these two other high adventure lake sports. Finally Dahl is also planning to bring down the Source of the Nile sunset cruise boat down to the new lake where it will be parked at and depart from a new dock being built once the lake fills up.

The plethora of new activities due to the advancing waters of the Nile is actually something that may make up for the loss of four world class rapids and even has the potential to make these different companies even more successful in the future. The preparedness of these companies is actually a testament to their enterprising skills, these companies have been adapting to what uncontrollable circumstances gave them. As a result they will not be ruined as many previously feared, unlike the outcome for local crafts people.

Objective III: Potential construction of new dams further down the river

On the first day the researcher arrived at Nile River Explorers he heard employees of the different companies that operate out of the NRE Campsite discussing the construction of new dams and the potential impacts they would have. The researcher was shocked to learn about these dams which could potentially have far larger impacts than Bujagali. Currently there are four different sites that the government is deciding upon; two would have minimal impacts on the locale's rafting and adventure tourism industries while the other two would have impacts varying from significant to catastrophic.

One of the proposed dam sites is near Isimba Falls, 41 kilometers North of Rippon Falls (the Source of the Nile).³⁰ According to Jamie Simpson of Kayak the Nile this site has two different height dams that are being considered, one which would flood to the base of the Hairy Lemon and Nile Special (see Appendix A for map).³¹ Simpson explained that the Second and larger dam would flood over the Nile Special to the base of Kulu Shaker (see Appendix A).

The other proposed area for a dam is at Malalu Falls (see Appendix A). This dam would flood above the grade VI Itanda Falls. In an interview with NRE owner and Managing Director John Dahl this dam would flood all of the day II section including the grade IV-V rapids Kulu Shaker, Hair of the Dog, and Morning Shower leaving only three significant (grade III-V) rapids left for rafting trips.³²

The impacts of these different proposed dams do vary significantly. Of course any dam in a populated area will have vast impacts on the local population, but this research is solely concerned with the potential impact they would have on the rafting industry and its related adventure activities. The smallest of the proposed dams located at Isimba would have the least of impacts as it would only cover the Malalu rapid and not affect the new day one rafting section. However the loss of Malalu rapid would mean the loss of a rapid renowned for its world class big

water wave (see appendix B for photo). According to Simpson the loss of this rapid would have a significant impact to the world of white water kayaking it would have little impact to his company Kayak the Nile or any other tourism company in the region.³³

The larger proposed dam at Isimba would have a greater impact as it would force water further up river above the grade V Nile Special rapid (see appendix C for photo). The impact here would reach into the day one stretch of rapids removing one more rapid from the rafting companies. Additionally the researcher had the opportunity to visit the Hairy Lemon, a small island resort located below the Nile Special. It quickly became apparent that the entire island was far enough below the rapid that it too would certainly go underwater if this version of the Isimba dam were commissioned. While at the Hairy Lemon the researcher met with an American kayaker who is widely known as one of the best kayakers in the world. In a brief interview with the kayaker the researcher learned that he flew from California to Uganda for the sole purpose of training on the famous Nile Special wave for the upcoming White Water Grand Prix, a two week international kayaking competition in Quebec, Canada. In addition to the damage it would cause to rafting trips, the dam would steal two world renowned rapids from river and therefore make it less of a landmark for world class kayakers like the kayaker the researcher met with.

The final dam which would actually be located at Malalu rapid would have the most significant impact to the rafting industry and related activities. As Dahl mentioned it would put an end to NRE as the rafting product would be no longer viable for clients.³⁴ Simpson went as far as to explain that the damming of this significant amount of the river would “destroy the town of Jinja” as it currently relies on tourism too significantly.³⁵ The loss of jobs would be severe, NRE alone employs over 80 people, all of which would become unemployed.³⁶

Additionally companies like All Terrain Adventures would quickly go out of business as they rely heavily on rafting clients as well.³⁷ The impacts would be so significant that they would cross over to the industries that rely on the success of rafting, which is essentially every adventure tourism company in the Jinja district.

Analysis

The research confirmed what the researcher initially overheard upon his arrival to the NRE campsite; the dams could have huge impacts on the rafting and adventure tourism industries in Jinja. Even the dam that would have the smallest impact would still diminish the Nile's status as one of the world's premier kayaking destinations. Meanwhile the dam at Malalu would not only impact rafting and other white water sports, it would also impact the entire tourism industry and economy of the Jinja district. As to whether any of the proposed dams will actually be constructed is still being debated by the local business men. Some cite a document signed by the Ugandan government forbidding them from making any more dams that would hurt the tourism industry, while others firmly believe that the government will more than likely just disregard the legal document and make the dams anyway. Either way the next few years of government actions will have huge and lasting impacts on the white water rafting industry.

Through his interviews the researcher found a lot of differing views as to whether the government will commission any of these dams. Some of the business owners adamantly and even angrily believed that the dams would be constructed. Peter Knight of All Terrain Adventures was one of the more vocal in admitting his contempt for the government over the matters of dam construction.³⁸ Hitesh Vora agreed with Knight that the dam will go into effect.³⁹ This certainly reveals a general disdain for the government and their lack of cooperation with

adventure tourism companies in the Jinja district, however these sentiments will be covered further in the subsequent section.

The people who held faith in the government for not constructing harmful dams did so hesitantly and only with legal documentation saying the government would be allowed to. In interviews with both Dahl and Simpson it was revealed that the Ugandan government signed an agreement with the World Bank during the commission of the Bujagali Hydropower Project that forbade them from making any other dams that would harm the tourism business in Jinja.^{40 41} They each explained that the World Bank would be forced to reduce future funding and projects in the country if they Ugandan government broke the contract. Because of this, Simpson and Dahl agreed that the only way for the country to construct a dam in this area would be from the help of countries like China or India. Although the researcher did not have access to the document, the interviewees did reveal the consequences if Uganda was to commission a dam and these were very serious.

The chance for these proposed dams to be created makes this era in the young Ugandan rafting and adventure tourism industry even more volatile. Not only has the Bujagali Dam brought new and still unrealized impacts to the industry and region, there is the potential for these to be overshadowed by impacts that could reach into the town of Jinja and permanently destroy the town's new found adventure tourism industry. The potential for these dams to be constructed is still unknown but the impacts are; and they would be devastating. It is in every interviewed company's interest that these dams not be commission, but unfortunately for them they have little say with regards to the future of their own businesses.

Objective IV: Government involvement within the rafting industry in Uganda

Objective number IV was the most difficult for the researcher to accomplish. This was in large part because he was located too far from Kampala. Additionally there was widespread political turmoil which led to canceled interviews. The interviewer also struggled finding people within the Ugandan government who actually had extensive knowledge of the rafting industry. Finally the limited amount of time for research held the researcher to choose which portions of his research he would rather pursue. Unfortunately there is still much to be learned about the government involvement within the adventure tourism industry, but given the constraints the researcher used all of the resources at his disposal to get the best vision possible of the its role.

In light of not having significant access to government officials the researcher took advantage of the resources he had, which were typically the business operators. Since these were the people who the government would potentially deal with when making policies. These business people explained that the government did nothing to promote or regulate the rafting industry. Some of these people had very harsh criticism of the government's role in tourism, actually so harsh that the researcher believes them to be inappropriate for academic writing. However the more reasonable operators explained that the lack of proper marketing from the government puts extra strain on these companies as they need to do all of their own marketing by themselves.⁴² Although these operators were very critical of the government, each person interviewed was equally critical which helps validate their claims that the government does need to do more in behalf of this unique industry.

Since these companies do not have the backing of the federal government in regards to safety regulation, they created their own organization to monitor and regulate themselves within the Jinja adventure tourism industry. This organization, Jinja Adventure Safety Association (JASA), holds itself to United Kingdom safety regulations for all of the different tour companies

that are involved including NRE, Kayak the Nile, All Terrain Adventures, Nile Horseback Safaris, and Nalubale Rafting.⁴³ As Simpson admitted, these companies are afraid of companies with no safety qualifications making a bad name for the companies that hold themselves to international standards.⁴⁴ He admitted that there are companies that attempt to take his kayaking clients who have nearly drown people due to their own lack of experience in river safety. The emergence of an organization like JASA further demonstrates the lack of government involvement in the most risky form of tourism in the country; adventure tourism. Without an organization like JASA and responsible outfitter operators, the adventure tourism in Uganda would be in jeopardy of losing significant business from excessive yet avoidable accidents.

The biggest struggle in this report for the researcher happened when trying to contact government officials who would have considerable insight on the adventure tourism industry. The difficulties first arose in trying to figure out who would actually have insight on the topic. The researcher's project advisor had numerous contacts, however upon meeting with them they would normally admit to knowing very little about the rafting industry and try to point him towards other more "qualified" officials within different departments of the government. The researcher was only able to find one interviewee who could give more than a minute of insight on the rafting industry. Cuthbert Baguma, the Executive Director of the Uganda Tourism Board, was able to share his thoughts on rafting and adventure tourism and what the Tourism Board is doing to promote it. Baguma immediately acknowledged his limited knowledge on rafting but also mentioned that it is not being promoted as much as it should be.⁴⁵ With the help of the researcher's extensive work at NRE, it was clear who knew more about the rafting industry; Baguma even acknowledged that he was learning more from the researcher than he may have been teaching the researcher. This confirmed what many operators back in Jinja had explained;

the government officials, even the Executive Director of the Tourism Board, knew very little about this industry.

In the end the research on the government's role in this industry may have been more effective through interviews with company operators rather than with government officials themselves. These operators knew more about what the government is doing in regards with rafting and adventure industries better than anyone, because they have more at stake; their company is their career and their livelihood. It is crucial for them to know about the difficult import taxes and need to market on their own in order to ensure their own company's prosperity. While conversely the government officials look at the big picture of national tourism and can understandably overlook the emerging rafting industry.

Analysis

The research proved beyond doubt that rafting and most other adventure activities in the Bujagali Falls area and beyond to the Jinja district are lacking any help from the government. The operators involved argued that the most important role the government should have with the companies is marketing. Although safety is a large concern, the companies in these adventure tourism activities are actually doing a good job regulating themselves to standards that are internationally recognized. Most of the operators were actually hesitant to say they would welcome more government regulation within their industry. The bottom line to the issue is that the government is not properly dealing with the rafting and adventure tourism industries, and as a result these companies have had to take on the burden themselves.

The shortcomings in marketing starts with the lack of funding the Ugandan government commits to all of tourism. The government only spends \$900,000 on tourism compared to the

\$667 million the entire industry generates towards GDP.⁴⁶ Although all of the people interviewed agree on the lack of marketing towards their respective industry, each had different explanations to their shortcomings. Hitesh Vora of Equator believes the government simply does not care about rafting and is more concerned with safaris and gorilla tracking.⁴⁷ Meanwhile operator Peter Knight simply says the marketing scheme is all wrong because the government and tourism board are aiming at the top of the market when they should be looking at every part of the market in order to bring more people into the company.⁴⁸ The end result of these explanations is that these companies are being forced to take marketing into their own hands when the Ugandan government should be helping more. Undoubtedly the government cannot do all of the work for these companies, but having the support of a country to promote the African capital of adventure would be a step in the right direction.

The role of the government in safety regulations for these companies is another important aspect to this subject. Initially the researcher wanted to figure out the proper way for the government to regulate the rafting industry. However after interacting with the different companies and learning more about JASA it became evident that these companies are better off regulating themselves. At least beyond very general regulations most operators were skeptical of how the government would be involved. As Jamie Simpson put it, having no involvement would be better than companies adhering to regulations that simply required bribery to ensure their well being.⁴⁹ Dahl shared similar sentiments about not wanting a governing body by saying “[the government] does not care about safety, just money”.⁵⁰ The complete lack of faith is apparent when examining the role government should play safety regulation. Although support through marketing is welcomed, these companies take their clients safety more seriously; serious enough to not want government entities to be involved with them. This reflects the negative sentiment

shared by every business operator interviewed in this report, the adventure industries will actually do better without the government involvement.

Conclusion

Upon the conclusion of this report there are many different things that have been revealed about the unique white water rafting industry on the Upper White Nile. The objectives of the research have been met and have effectively exposed new information about these little known adventure tourism activities. The research proved the entrepreneurial nature of the rafting industry. In addition it was revealed that the new Bujagali Dam has had widespread impacts in the Bujagali Falls region and the dams being proposed right now have potentially devastating impacts reaching to the destruction of the town of Jinja. Finally the research also proved that the government's role in the rafting and adventure tourism industries is significantly lacking. The information that has been provided about these industries has seen very little academic research over the approximate fifteen years of their existence, and for that reason the report has been a been effective.

With the help of a productive internship with Nile River Explorers the researcher was able to effectively investigate the entrepreneurial nature of the rafting industry on the Nile. The company is able to use their grade V rafting day trip as an anchor product in a way that lets them exploit clients to stay and partake in other activities from the NRE campsite which equates to further revenue generation. Additionally the company is able to work cooperatively with competing companies to ensure that the entire industry is running successful which in turn helps them out in the future. The company also effectively gives high paying employment to many local community members. By examining these characteristics of NRE it becomes obvious that

not only this company but also the companies it works with are very enterprising, and because of this they should be able to effectively avoid the large impacts of dams like Bujagali Hydroelectric Project.

The Bujagali Hydroelectric Project has already caused significant impacts to the rafting, the loss of some of the most famous rapids for white water rafting being the most significant. NRE has been forced to change their river trip to less extreme of rapids making the day's trip less thrilling. Although people like John Dahl are confident that the impact will be little to the company, much of the total impact is still unknown. For craft shop owners, like Fatia Namugayi, their fate has already been sealed. They can no longer remain profitable with the loss of the daily visitors to Bujagali Falls. Although every company has been negatively impacted, the dam serves as a testament to the truly entrepreneurial owners and managers. People like John Dahl and Jamie Simpson have been able to recognize the new opportunities and are ready to exploit their new lake front property with a myriad of different lake sports. As adaptive as these companies have been the next dam could be the end.

The three different dams being proposed at the moment all have varying impacts on the rafting and adventure tourism industries and have the potential to be catastrophic. The research revealed that these dams may only further hurt the Nile's reputation as a world kayak destination; or to the other extreme, have long-lasting and very destructive impacts on these industries and Jinja. The impact the proposed dams could have on the region helps to reveal the nature of the government and the role they are playing in the industry.

The government's role in the industry studied is lacking significantly. It has been so vehemently criticized by local company operators that their shortcomings have even been admitted by members of the Uganda Tourism Board. The businesses simply have no faith in the

country's marketing scheme and look at the inefficiencies and corruption as the reasons their companies are not reaching their full potential. They distrust the government to the point that they would rather regulate themselves with regard to safety than allow government officials to help aid in safety regulations.

Recommendations

By the end of the research period many ideas were revealed for the companies, individuals, and the government that could improve revenues and the business for future growth. Many of these recommendations came straight from the people that were interviewed while others were realized by the researcher. There are ways for the rafting and adventure tourism companies to increase their profitability through simple and inexpensive means. The government could take the opportunity to adapt in many ways to improve these businesses; the measures they could take range from small changes to massive ones to ensure the continued success of these companies.

Nile River Explorers, although successful even given the impacts of the Bujagali Dam, could improve their business significantly with little effort. A simple yet effective measure the company should take to improve their own marketing is through the internet. Given the rapid increase in social media over the past decade, NRE is not taking advantage of this opportunity to the fullest extent. Websites like Facebook and Youtube are highly effective ways to successfully encourage more travelers to visit NRE. Although the company does have a presence on both websites, they do not do this effectively. When searching Youtube for "rafting on the White Nile Uganda" the name NRE does not appear anywhere. By changing this, anyone searching videos of rafting on the Nile would become aware of the rafting company and see the high adrenaline

opportunities they could have with NRE. Additionally the company does not encourage their clients to follow them on Facebook. As of May 17th 2011 the company only had 23 followers on their face book page. By encouraging more clients to follow the webpage the company's exposure would grow to like minded people which in turn would help gain a larger client base. These two recommendations are free and have zero consequences. Simple adjustments like these could and should be taken by every adventure outfitter in the area to ensure higher revenue for their companies.

In addition to this NRE could also improve their customer service skills company wide. Through the internship process the researcher noticed many instances where employees lacked basic customer service skills that would improve the stay of every client and potentially increase return customer business. Given the fact that most of the clients at NRE come from Western countries, the provided customer service should be held to these standards. The standard observed of some of the workers was of a "Ugandan level". Many of the local workers did not realize the importance helping the customer with every effort possible. A simple customer service training seminar for the employees is another easy and cost effective method for NRE to improve their revenue.

There are also many ways the Ugandan government could change their operations to improve the success of the rafting and adventure tourism industries in Uganda. Due to a lack of time and ability to interview key tourism officials the recommendations will be concise and not as in depth as could be. However company operators did express the need for a revamping of the national marketing scheme to entice adventure minded people to visit the country. Uganda is inherently a place of adventure, and rafting on the White Nile is one of the country's most unique products in this sector. No other country in the region can offer rafting trips of this caliber and

for that reason the marketing should take advantage of this. Additionally the government should offer incentives for growth within these companies. One of the main options for this would be through import tax breaks. Currently the companies face heavy import taxes on rafting equipment and transportation vehicles. These taxes are forcing the companies to withhold investments that would help the companies improve their products. Although these options would be slightly cost intensive; when looking at the potential revenue the government would gain through increased visitors, there would be a net benefit involved. These are two simple options the Ugandan government could undergo to promote the rafting and adventure tourism industries however the research did reveal the potential for many other efforts the government could undergo to improve these industries. Yet given the widespread inefficiencies in the government and relatively small scale of the industries involved, the companies must continue their innovative and self reliant methods to remain successful for the future.

Appendix: A Map of Upper White Nile_



Map found at: <http://whitewater-koa.blogspot.com/2007/09/sad-day-for-kayaking-and-kayakers.html>

Appendix B: Malalu Wave



Appendix C: Nile Special Wave



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