

Chapter 4

Cultural Festivals of Botswana Ethnic Communities: Business Values and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Botswana is known in the recent years for the variety of its ethnic communities' cultural festivals. Activities that celebrate culture of indigenous communities have hitherto remained in the ethno-cultural domains of manifestation or production. While their initial purpose was to celebrate culture, they are increasingly integrating business strategies for the purposes of supporting their annual celebrations and also attracting people with diverse leisure interests. Cultural festivals are emerging local tourism activities that can effectively contribute to economic development and diversification. Strategies that emerge from annual events have been honed over the years and better logistic approaches have ensured their success in commercialization. Coordinated national strategies are required to make festivals attractive tourist destinations on the national calendar.

INTRODUCTION

Botswana is historically known for the heritage sites such as the Tsodilo Hills that enshrines ancient rock paintings and the Okavango Delta which has recently been declared a World Heritage Site (Denbow & Thebe, 2006; Botswana Tourism, 2015, 2016). These have been the backbone of economic tourism. However, the Botswana society, albeit its small population has an impressive diversity of indigenous communities with various cultural practices which are quickly becoming tourist attractions. These communities enshrine socio-historical and cultural knowledge systems that can be as ramified and present an interesting characterization of their livelihood and existence. The indigenous knowledge system of Botswana communities can be derived and distilled from the rich diversity of its ethnic communities that still maintain a measure of vibrancy in their exercise of their culture. The country can develop its

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specific indigenous cultures within the general cultural policy to contribute activities that help communities to fight poverty by creating employment and wealth. Indigenous cultural celebrations, historical and archaeological sites, practices, and heritage sites have aroused interest for touristic and commercial exploitation

Because most of Botswana's culture and associated practices are still rustic and still belonging to the informal sector domain, the development of their commercialization will require strategies that are informed by business best practice. The fact that information about them still remains in the oral domain presents challenges for their accessibility and appreciation by enterprising communities or adventuring tourists. Business value mean that indigenous knowledge as presented in ceremonies, cultural celebrations, intangible and tangible knowledge systems will be undertaken with the sense of profitability and improved accessibility to enhance enjoyment of leisure. These may also entail modernization of facilities, venues, presentations, and scheduling events to target seasons of maximal business.

Turning Botswana traditional practices into business ventures will therefore mean devising business strategies that are accommodative of the traditional values that define the practices and are appropriate for turning them into business activities. For business to be business, these knowledge systems will have to be presented in a manner that is informed and is competent to balance the concerns that are often levelled against commercialization of cultural knowledge as something that destroys cultural value. The chapter argues that while business values are important; as they contribute to making indigenous knowledge (expressed through ceremonies, celebrations, heritage sites, etc.) dynamic, due care must be taken to ensure that over-commercialization does not kill the meaning of these practices (Debate.Org, 2016)).

The chapter will first classifies and defines the cultural or indigenous practices that are being targeted for commercialization. In the second instance the chapter discusses how communities or their associates exploit them, and whether such exploitation yields tangible community benefits. The question of sustainability, maintenance of indigenous cultural values and their respect by adventuring tourists will be critical in the discussion. Importantly also is that as communities venture into business with what they cherish as heritage, they should also understand that they have varied treasures in the form of intangible and tangible knowledge systems and that they should start formalizing for modern consumption. The discussion submits that at the national level, there is need for business strategies for the commercialization of culture and arts, and coordination of activities that celebrate them so that unnecessary competition can be avoided and maximization of benefits can be attained.

This chapter does not pursue the debate on the pros and cons of merchandizing culture as these views are raised either for political or ideological expediency. This chapter seeks to simply respond to questions of benefits, sustainability, promotion, and maintenance of value for prosperity (Richards, 2003). Some of these commercialized cultural forms need to be repackaged for them to make business sense. The discussion seeks to contribute information on indigenous knowledge systems that can be considered in the business domains. It is true that hitherto, one of the fundamental problems in engaging some of these business concepts has been the fact that cultural or indigenous knowledge systems that are exploited in ceremonies and celebrations of cultural events have been taken for granted. That is, their performances in ceremonies have not critically examined their real contribution to business in the form of tourism or public consumption.

This chapter, therefore, outlines these cultural and heritage activities to help define them and to determine their business value. The question that guides the discussion is whether cultural manifestations in their current forms can be attractive for consumers who have more modern exigencies? The point that is made is that a more efficient knowledge system management needs to be devised to ensure

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