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# State of the nation address and tourism priorities in Ghana- a contextual analysis

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**RESEARCH NOTE**

*Title:*

**State of the Nation Address and Tourism Priorities in Ghana – a contextual analysis**

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**Abstract**

Tourism development tends to be seen as a largely private sector driven activity. However, especially in developing countries the state continues to wield considerable power in the governance and policy arena of tourism. Thus the priority given to the tourism sector through state policies and the statements of government officials is considered as key in shaping tourism development. This paper offers a brief analysis of the level of priority given to the tourism sector in Ghana through a contextual analysis of the President's yearly state of the nation address given between 2010 and 2014. The findings show that while overall national [tourism] development plans are important, the policy speeches of government officials provide a glimpse into the immediate policy concerns of the state regarding tourism development. In some instances there are inconsistencies between policy objectives in national development plans and government's policy speeches. This research therefore highlights the importance of assessing policy speeches in addition to the analysis of existing tourism development plans.

**Introduction**

Tourism is considered key to economic development – especially in developing countries endowed with 'unspoilt' natural resources (Jiang et al., 2011; Mitchell and Ashley, 2010). While the tourism sector is considered as a mainly private sector activity, the policies that shape the sector are state driven. Consequently, governments are seen as central to tourism development in any destination (Adu-Ampong, 2014; Slocum and Backman, 2011). How governments affect tourism and the influence of state public policy on tourism development have long been of interest to a number of academics (Hall, 2008; Jeffries, 2001). The priority given to the tourism sector through state policies and the statements of government officials is considered as key in shaping tourism development and to a less extent the revenue generated from the sector (Yuksel et al., 2012).

In the context of my ongoing research on tourism governance and poverty reduction in Ghana, this research note looks at whether tourism is given the required priority in state policy statements. The analysis is based on a review of the President's State of the Nation Address (SNA) from 2010 – 2014.  Article 67 of Ghana's Constitution enjoins the President to present a SNA at the beginning of each session of Parliament which is usually in February of every year. The SNA provides the President an opportunity to highlight the key issues in the past year as well as outline government's priority areas for the ensuing year. Thus the President's SNA is considered as an agenda setting and prioritising address as it points to the areas of government commitment. The analysis for this research note consisted of a contextual search and analysis of the number of times 'tourism' appears in each address.

Ideally, the SNA fits within the larger context of the medium-term and long-term development plans of Ghana. In this regard, it is important to highlight the existence of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2010-2013). The GSGDA 2010-2013 is a medium-term development policy framework that represents a coordinated programme of economic and social development policies by the ruling government. The GSGDA 2010-2013 identifies the tourism sector as one of seven growth pillars [in addition to agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, services, extractive industry (oil, gas and minerals) and creative arts] on which the foundation of Ghana's long-term growth and economic transformation is to be built through direct private and public sector investments. This

notwithstanding, each government through its speeches and directives places different emphasis on the areas they find as a priority in a given time period. Yuksel et al. (2012) in a study of Turkish tourism ministers' speeches found inconsistencies between the priorities of ministers and the corresponding policy objectives in national [tourism] development plans. Thus in some instances government's speeches and directives do not line up with existing medium to long term development plans.

**Results and Discussion**

*State of the Nation Address 2010-2012*

The tourism sector in Ghana between 2010 and 2011 was the third highest foreign exchange earner behind cocoa and gold exports (Appaw-Agbola et al., 2011). The SNA of 2010-2012 made many references to cocoa and gold - the first and second highest foreign exchange earner – but failed to mention the impact tourism was having on the national economy. There is not a single mention of the word 'tourism' neither was there a mention of the Ministry of Tourism's estimate that the tourism sector generated $1.8 billion as revenue, which constituted 6.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the country in 2010. What is clear from this omission of the tourism sector from the SNA of 2010-2012 is that the central government at this time did not consider the sector a key priority. This is notwithstanding the fact that the GSGDA 2010-2013 clearly identified the tourism sector as a pillar on which to build the socio-economic development of the country. Coincidently, tourism in 2012 became the fourth highest foreign exchange earner after its third position was taken over by remittances. A number of factors may account for this of which the state's lack of priority is one of them. Although tourism development is driven in part by the activities of micro-firm entrepreneurs, the state especially in developing countries certainly plays a crucial role through the creation of an enabling business environment. Thus the state's actions and/or inactions do have effects on the tourism sector.

*State of the Nation Address 2013-2014*

The word 'tourism' appears five times in the 2013 SNA and another five times in the 2014 SNA. This clearly signifies a (re)prioritisation of the tourism sector even as one and two paragraphs were devoted to the tourism sector in the 2013 and 2014 address respectively. In his 2013 address, the President highlighted the realignment of the Ministry of Tourism into the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts and stated that "our government is committed to using Tourism as an instrument for the full realization of the economic potential of our culture and creative arts" (Government of Ghana, 2013:12). In the 2014 SNA, the President indicated that in the year ending 2013, the tourism and creative sector maintained its position as the fourth highest foreign exchange earner. The sector made a 4.7% contribution to the GDP with a US $ 1.9 billion in the process creating a total of 319,000 formal and informal tourism enterprises-based jobs. The President reiterated his government's commitment to invest in the sector since "with appropriate investments in this sector, tourism can become a leading revenue earner for our economy" (Government of Ghana, 2014:44).

This commitment to the tourism, culture and creative sector is very much in line with the GSGDA 2010-2013 goal of using tourism as a key economic pillar. Indeed, the tourism sector is now being streamline with a number of hitherto semi-autonomous government institutions now being brought under the authority of the realigned Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts. These include the National Commission on Culture, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the Bureau of Ghana Languages and the National Theatre of Ghana among others. Whether a new government maintains this realignment is different question but for now, there is a renewed commitment from the government to make tourism a priority and this is translating into real changes in the structure of the tourism sector.

**Conclusion**

The state continues to play a crucial role in tourism development through its policies and this research note has highlighted how an analysis of the yearly SNA by the President of Ghana offer clues as to the extent of priority given to the tourism sector from year to year. Hitherto, many researchers resort to the analysis of only national [tourism] development plans in gauging the prioritisation of tourism in a given country. This brief analysis has shown that while national development plans are important, the speeches of government leaders offer a glimpse of which areas are considered a priority within a given time period. Whereas the GSGDA 2010-2013 provides an overall development policy framework in which tourism as to be a pillar, the SNA from 2010-2012 failed to prioritise the sector. This period coincided with the decline of the contributions of the tourism sector to the national economy. The SNA in 2013 and 2014 however show a renewed focus on the tourism, culture and creative arts which underscores the government's commitment to utilising the sector for economic development and poverty reduction. Further research and analysis is needed to fully understand the policy implications in terms of implementation although early signs indicate that the speeches are being backed up with action. This research note has shown the importance of policy speeches in setting tourism priorities and how this has implication for tourism development in developing countries where the role of the state is still very important in shaping policies.

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