

Lamu County boosts local economy through the annual Lamu festival.

Lamu County, located in Kenya, is one of the cultural landscapes in the country on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The County has a population of 143,920 people according to 2019 census. Over 30% of this population depends on tourism as the main source of income. In 2003, the Lamu Tourism Association established the Lamu Cultural Festival. The annual festival attracted high tourist numbers over the years until the world was forced to go on a lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the tourism industry is still trying to recover post the pandemic, the impact of the lockdown severely affected the economy of the County. Between 2020 and 2021, travel and large events were banned, and all recreational facilities including hotels and museums were closed. Over 600 businesses in the travel industry such as local tour companies, hotels and restaurants were forced to close shop and this led to the escalation of depression cases. In an effort to bring the local tourism economy back to its former glory, the County Government of Lamu invested in the revival of the annual Lamu Cultural Festival with the main goal of boosting the recovery of the sector. The County desired for the festival to attract more local and international participants and for this platform to be utilized for increasing the popularity, utilization and visibility of the Swahili language and culture.

The County Government worked with various partners to revive the cultural festival. These are: LAPSET, Diamond Trust Bank (DTB), Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), Davis and Shirtliff, Captain Andy's, Brooks East Africa, Safaricom, Redcross, Moroccan Embassy, Kenya Ports Authority (KPA), Equity Bank, Stuart Herdy, Skyward Express and Tourism Fund.

A Committee was established to organize the four-day event, comprising of the following members:

1. A representative from the Lamu Cultural Initiative;
2. the County Secretary;
3. the County Executive Committee Member in charge with Tourism and Culture;
4. the Chief Officer in charge with Tourism and Culture;
5. the Director in charge with Tourism and Culture;
6. the County Tourism and Culture officers;
7. a representative from the office of the Governor;
8. the Director of Procurement;
9. one representative from Lamu Tourism Association;
10. one representative from the business community;
11. one representative from the National Police Service;
12. one representative from the County enforcement department;

13. one representative from the County finance department; and
14. one representative from the County department of ICT.

The Committee had clear Terms of Reference, a key main one being identification of Lamu's prominent cultural practices for showcasing. Key activities selected for the festival included:

1. A Cooking activity. The County showcased their different cuisines including Swahili desserts such as malalande, chakula cha mkono, shela, and mkate wa kutetema. The participating women were given Kshs 30,000 each by the County government to buy necessary ingredients and spices for the preparation of the festival food.
2. A Dancing Competition was organized, where traditional Lamu dances were performed. These included shabwani, a traditional wedding dance, goma la siu, a unique dance from the siu village, kunyoza and many others. The competition provided visitors with an opportunity to experience the local traditional dances, music, and costumes.
3. Donkey Races- use of the donkey is a traditional mode of transport in the region. This event allowed visitors to witness the unique and exciting competition.
4. Boat Racing: The festival also featured boat racing competitions, which showcased the importance of the ocean and waterways in the County.
5. Fishing Competitions: The festival included fishing competitions, with the fishermen with the highest number of harvest receiving an award of Kshs 100,000. This event highlighted the importance of fishing as a livelihood for the local communities.
6. Ladies' Nights: The festival had an event where Islamic weddings were showcased, which allowed the visitors to learn more about the local Islamic culture.
7. Football Competitions: The festival included football competitions, which allowed visitors to participate and experience the local sports culture.

To advertise the festival, the Committee designed a marketing strategy which included the use of billboards, radio and Tv short video clips and social media campaigns.

During the cultural festival, 43 County residents participated in exhibiting their Lamu Cultural products and each participant was paid by the County Kshs 6000 for three days to exhibit.

The festival attracted over 10,000 visitors with attendance from Ambassador of Greece to Kenya, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Kenya, Ambassador of Sudan to Kenya and Ambassador of Kuwait to Kenya among others. This festival provided a source of income to over 300 tour guides and generated over Kshs 9,075,000 to the County Government. This

revenue is planned to support initiatives such as replacement of old machines in the dhows for the transportation industry and start-up funding for local businesses.

The County Government aims to sustain this festival by cultivating strong long-term partnerships. Additionally, the annual festival has been included in the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP).

Lessons learnt

To carry out a successful festival the following is necessary:

1. Inclusivity: Kenya is a country with diverse cultures. This calls for inclusivity when organizing cultural festivals. There is a need to make everyone feel included and recognized.
2. Establishment of a Planning Committee: The committee organized what needs to be showcased, developed the marketing strategy and planned the entire festival.
3. Involvement of security agencies: When hosting such a high-level festival, the County Government has to ensure that security is guaranteed both prior to the festival and during the festival.

Conclusion

Kenya is endowed with unique, beautiful and rich cultures. To create visibility and awareness for Kenya's cultural heritage, County Governments can seek to work with local institutions to host mega-cultural events. Such platforms have clearly proven to be useful in attracting local and international tourists, thereby boosting local tourism and marketing Kenyan culture to the region, the continent and the world. Further, cultural festivals have the power to unite and bring cohesion within the County, and in the country at large.

The Lamu Cultural Festival 2022 was a successful event that celebrated the rich cultural heritage of Lamu County. The festival promoted tourism, trade, and culture while highlighting the diversity of Kenya's cultural heritage. The festival had positive economic and social impacts on the region including creating job opportunities, promoting social cohesion and unity and boosting tourism. It is essential for other Counties to embrace and promote cultural festivals and share their cultures with the rest of Africa and the world.

ANNEX

Annex 1:

Mashua Dhow Competition	
Category	Price in Kshs
1 st Category	200,000
2 nd Category	150,000
3 rd Category	100,000
4 th Category to 10 th Category each	10,000
Total	520,000



Jahazi Dhow Competition	
Category	Price in Kshs
1 st Category	150,000
2 nd Category	100,000
3 rd Category	75,000

4 th Category each 10,000	70,000
Total	395,000

CASA DHOW	
Category	Price in Kshs
1 st Category	150,000
2 nd Category	100,000
3 rd Category	75,000
4 th to 10 th Category	70,000
Total	395,000

Mashairi/poems

Category	Price in Kshs
1 st Category	30,000
2 nd Category	20,000
3 rd Category	10,000

Donkey Riding

Category	Price in Kshs
1 st Category	70,000
2 nd Category	50,000
3 rd Category	30,000
4 th to 10 th Category	20,000
Total	170,000

