

# Sports Tourism in Kenya: The Kalenjin Runners as a Source of Development for the Rift Valley



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# Context & Objectives

### Introduction

- Kenya's Kalenjin runners dominate middle- and long-distance running globally.
- Their success has transformed Iten & Eldoret into sports tourism hubs.

Research Question: What are the key determinants of their contribution to sports tourism?

## **Objectives**

- Explore runners' impact on tourism
- Assess economic & social benefits
- Map local & international investments
- Examine branding power of "Champions"

# Methods & Findings

# Methodology

- Exploratory qualitative research
- 15 interviews + fieldwork in Kenya
- Stakeholders: athletes, coaches, businesses, gov., tourists, investors
- Data analyzed via Thematic Content
  Analysis

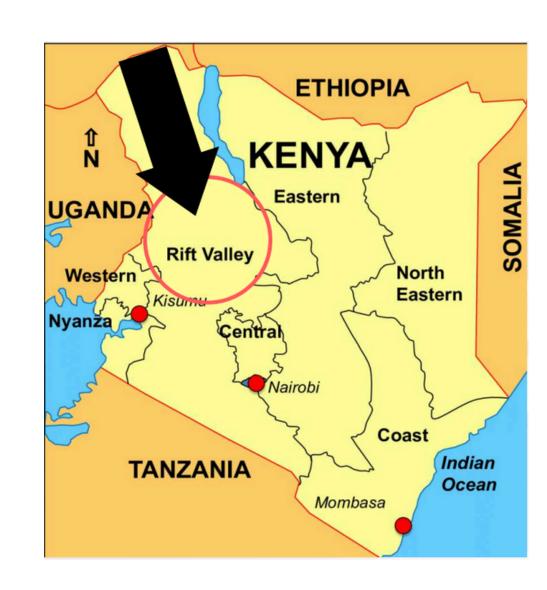
## **Key Findings**

- Branding: "Home/City/County of Champions" draws global attention
- Athlete investments: camps, hotels, rentals, agriculture, schools
- International role: Nike, Adidas, philanthropy (Shoe4Africa, Simba4Kids)
- Economic impact: 2nd tourism driver after safaris, jobs, taxes, entrepreneurship
- Challenges: weak governance, fragmented branding

# Impact & Future

### **Conclusion**

- Sports tourism = key driver of socioeconomic growth in Rift Valley.
- Athletes are catalysts for development through reputation & investment.
- Stronger coordination + policies needed to maximize potential.
- Future: quantify financial data, gender-balanced research, coherent brand use.





Iten, the Home of Champions, aka "Mecca of Athletics"



Drinking "mursik", the runners' drink, with my host family



With Brother Colm O'Connell, Godfather of Kenyan Athletics



With Eliud Kipchoge, only runner to have ran a marathon < 2 hrs









