



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

Konstantinos Loukianos MARAGKOS



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MASTER AFRICAN STUDIES
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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 socio-economic 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"



With Brother Colm O'Connell, Godfather of Kenyan Athletics



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



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

CONTACT



+306947980665