

Optimizing public–private partnerships in Uganda’s tourism sector: critical success factors and best practices for sustainable project outcomes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the critical success factors (CSFs) and best practices appropriate for public–private partnership projects within the Tourism Sector in Uganda.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted an exploratory qualitative methodology using data collected through an interview guide. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 public and private sector employees/investors and local community leaders. The collected data from the interview transcripts were analyzed using the standard qualitative content analysis technique to develop themes and subsequently specific findings. Verbatim texts were used to explain the emerging themes and findings.

Findings – The study findings provide the CSFs and best practices appropriate for public–private partnership projects within the Tourism Sector in Uganda. The CSFs include stakeholder engagement, government commitment, monitoring, evaluation and performance management, policy and regulatory framework, market demand and feasibility study, risk mitigation and management, community participation, capacity building and institutional strengthening and financial viability. While the best practices identified include; clear objectives and scope, stakeholder collaborations, feasibility studies and risk assessment, legal and regulatory framework, capacity building and monitoring and evaluation.

Practical implications – This study focused on CSFs and best practices suitable for the planning and implementation of PPP projects within the tourism sector in Uganda. Therefore, the study findings will enlighten policy makers, industry practitioners, local communities as well as researchers/consultants working on PPP projects about the CSFs and best practices pertinent to the success of the tourism sector, particularly in the context of a developing country.

Originality/value – This study provides more innovative aspects such as new frameworks on the CSFs and best practices appropriate for PPPs success within the Tourism Sector. The Ugandan government is being compelled to foster a strong commitment to sustainable tourism through clear policies and practices that encourage environmental conservation, local community involvement and long-term planning. Fast forward, the government must provide a transparent and predictable regulatory and overall operating environment in order for the private sector to have the confidence to invest in PPP projects within the Tourism sector.

Keywords Critical success factors, Best practices, Public-private partnership projects, Tourism sector, Uganda

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Public–private partnerships (PPPs) have increasingly emerged as a viable model to support countries in the provision of public infrastructure and services. This is primarily because many countries have struggled to meet the growing demand for sustainable infrastructure development and maintenance, largely due to budget deficits (Yusuf & Mohd, 2024; Babatunde & Perera, 2017). This inadequacy of infrastructure development has made many countries globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) focus on innovative means of procuring and financing infrastructure developments for improved service delivery (Ackloo, Alawar, & Amaro, 2022). Several governments have identified PPPs as an innovative system of procuring infrastructure to address the budgetary deficit and achieve risk sharing. Thus PPP projects have become the ideal way to have public infrastructure worldwide (Magoola, Mwesigwa, & Nabwami, 2023) in the quest to improve economic growth and development (Yusuf & Mohd, 2024). These come in the form of a special-purpose vehicle for the public sector to utilize the strengths of the private sector to improve and deliver country infrastructure projects (Debela, 2022). Such enables governments to find resources for infrastructure development by utilizing alternative private sector sources of finance while simultaneously gaining the benefits that the private sector can bring regarding skills and management (Ahmadabadi & Heravi, 2019).

PPPs have great potential to foster sustainable tourism by leveraging the strengths and resources of both the public and private sectors (Akomea–Frimpong *et al.*, 2023). These arrangements can address a range of challenges in the tourism industry, from environmental degradation to local community development and economic growth (Ayikoru, 2015). Therefore, PPPs if well managed within the tourism sector can boost local economies, create jobs and generate tax revenue for the government while being profitable for private companies. The collaborations can also help promote social equity by involving local communities in decision-making, ensure that tourism development benefits the local people, preserve cultural heritage, protect natural resources, foster social inclusion and develop eco-friendly tourism offerings. Over 20 years, Uganda in particular has had a massive infrastructure deficit of about US\$1.4 billion a year, losses nearly US\$300 million per year and experiences inefficient infrastructure spending mostly through underpricing and the inability to complete projects within cost and on schedule (Magoola *et al.*, 2023). The Government of Uganda seems to be resorting to PPPs to procure public facilities in order to leverage private resources with the interest of closing the financing gaps and achieving higher levels of efficiency (World Bank, 2017). Despite some successes, for instance, Entebbe Express highway and Umeme concession, many PPPs in the tourism sector have not achieved the intended objectives. Quality output from PPPs in the tourism sector has been below the standard, there are cost overruns and many are completed beyond the project time. The best example is the Bujagali hydroelectric PPP project which has failed to achieve a reduction in power tariffs in Uganda since it was commissioned in 2012.

While Uganda has made significant strides in promoting sustainable tourism, several challenges hinder its full realization and effective implementation (Ayikoru, 2015). These issues stem from environmental degradation, social and economic challenges, governance issues and infrastructural constraints. Uganda's natural resources, particularly its forests and wildlife habitats, are under threat from deforestation, poaching and land encroachment. Unsustainable agricultural practices, especially in protected areas like Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (home to endangered mountain gorillas) contribute to the destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems. Poor road infrastructure, particularly, in rural or remote tourism areas is a significant barrier to sustainable tourism development. Many areas that attract tourists (such as Kidepo Valley National Park, Lake Bunyonyi and Bwindi) are difficult to reach, especially during the rainy season, which deters tourists or makes travel less sustainable. Uganda's tourism infrastructure, especially eco-lodges and sustainable accommodations is still developing. There are few high-quality eco-friendly hotels and lodges that adhere to environmental best practices such as using renewable energy, water conservation or waste

management (Sendawula, Turyakira, Akileng, & Vincent, 2024). Waste management is a significant problem in many tourist areas, especially in Kampala and around popular natural attractions. Plastic waste, littering and inadequate waste disposal systems in tourist hotspots create an unsustainable environment and negatively affect the visitor experience. Although Uganda has policies aimed at promoting sustainable tourism, enforcement is often weak. Regulations on conservation, waste management and sustainable business practices are in place but are poorly enforced due to a lack of resources, insufficient monitoring and corruption.

Several studies have been conducted on the critical success factors (CSFs) and best practices responsible for successfully implementing PPP projects in different sectors and countries (Zhang, 2005; Cheung, Chan, & Kajewski, 2012; Chileshe, Njau, Kibichii, Macharia, & Kvishe, 2022; Mwesigwa, Basulira, Mayengo, & Mugarura, 2024a; Mwesigwa, Nanteza, Mayengo, Nabwami, & Tumwesige, 2024b). Despite several prior studies on CSFs and best practices for PPP projects (Chileshe *et al.*, 2022; Babatunde, Opawole, & Akinsiku, 2012; Amies, Jin, & Senaratne, 2024; Cheung *et al.*, 2012), such research within the tourism sector and particularly in Ugandan context has remained scarce and received less attention (Alinaitwe & Ayesiga, 2013), yet the tourism sector contributes significantly to Uganda's GDP. Between 2022 and 2023 the Tourism sector increased Uganda's earnings by 48.5% (from 2,571.5bn to UGX 3, 818.6bn). Similarly, in 2024 Uganda was ranked one of the top countries in the world with the most outstanding tourist attractions by CNN, Lonely Planet and national geographical and rough guides (Kakembo & Luwemba, 2024). On the African scene, Uganda is positioned as the fourth top tourism destination on the continent ahead of the renowned tourism areas in Africa-Madagascar and Zanzibar (Briggs & Van Zandbergen, 2024). Kakembo *et al.* (2024) assert that when infrastructure is improved and natural resources and cultural heritage preserved, the Uganda's tourism sector has immense potential to triple tourism arrivals for resultant growth and development of the economy.

Although PPP projects have been promoted as an alternative procurement method for improving public infrastructure development and overall provision of public services in Uganda, the CSFs and best practices for PPPs in the tourism sector seem not to have been identified, yet they can be used as a roadmap for the successful implementation of PPP projects in Uganda. Moreover, the unique characteristics of PPPs across countries require studying CSFs and best practices specifically for PPP implementation in Uganda. The current study highlights the importance of CSFs and best practices as perceived by the respondents for PPP delivery in the tourism sector in Uganda. Therefore, the CSFs and best practices of PPPs must be continuously monitored and evaluated to inform future PPP project implementation in the tourism sector.

The study adds to the existing literature on CSFs and best practices for PPP project implementation in Uganda's tourism sector. The findings of this study will enable the stakeholders, especially the practitioners, researchers and policymakers in the tourism sector to understand the essential elements if PPP projects have to be implemented successfully. By understanding the CSFs and Best practices for PPP implementation, both the Ugandan private and public sector practitioners in the tourism sector might be in a position to adopt PPP projects. To achieve the research objective, the study presents the recent trends and developments in the tourism sector, sustainable tourism, theoretical review, reviewed literature, methodology, results, discussion of findings, conclusions and implications.

Recent trends and developments in the tourism sector in Uganda

The tourism industry in Uganda has undergone significant changes in recent years, driven by both global trends and domestic efforts to enhance the performance of the sector. These developments reflect global shifts in how travel and tourism are experienced as well as the country's focus on leveraging its natural resources and cultural heritage in a sustainable and innovative way. The country's rich biodiversity, cultural heritage and commitment to

responsible tourism are expected to continue attracting international and local tourists. However, further investments in infrastructure, marketing and capacity building will be critical for sustaining the industry's long-term development. Some key trends and developments shaping Uganda's tourism industry include;

Digitalization trends

The growing digitalization of the tourism industry has significantly transformed how tourists plan, book and experience travel in Uganda. Key developments in this area include the rise of online booking platforms such as Airbnb, [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) and specialized local sites, which have made it easier for both international and domestic tourists to book accommodations, safaris and tours. Many tour operators have introduced mobile apps to assist tourists in navigating the country's attractions. As a response to pandemics, some Ugandan attractions and wildlife reserves have embraced virtual tourism, offering online wildlife viewing options such as virtual safaris and live-streaming of rare animal sightings particularly by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). Uganda's tourism sector has increasingly leveraged e-marketing and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube to showcase the country's natural and cultural heritage with influencers, bloggers and vloggers, playing a significant role in promoting destinations, for example, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Murchison Falls and Lake Bunyonyi. Furthermore, mobile apps for tour bookings, information guides and digital payment systems including mobile money platforms, for example, MTN Mobile Money and Airtel Money, have streamlined transactions for both tourists and operators.

Sustainable tourism trends

Sustainability has become a central focus in Uganda's tourism development driven by both international pressure and local efforts to preserve the country's unique ecosystems. Key sustainability initiatives include the promotion of community-based tourism, where local communities directly benefit from tourism by offering cultural and homestay tours, particularly in conservation areas and rural regions. This model ensures that tourism benefits are equitably shared. Additionally, many tour operators and accommodation providers have adopted eco-friendly practices, such as constructing sustainable lodges using solar energy, rainwater harvesting and local construction materials while minimizing waste and reducing carbon footprints to meet global sustainability standards. Several lodges for instance, in Bwindi and Queen Elizabeth National Parks are working toward eco-certification and Green Globe standards. The Uganda's tourism sector that is heavily reliant on wildlife attractions, for example, mountain gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants, has seen a stronger push toward wildlife conservation and responsible tourism. Tourists are encouraged to follow guidelines for tracking endangered species and engage in practices that minimize environmental harm. As such, tour operators are gaining popularity with an increasing number focusing on reducing environmental impact by using hybrid or electric vehicles for safaris, supporting wildlife conservation projects and promoting low-impact activities such as hiking instead of motorized tours.

Innovation and new product development

The COVID-19 pandemic among other factors sparked an increased interest in niche tourism offerings and unique travel experiences. In response, several innovations and developments were pursued to adapt to the changing landscape of tourism. Uganda introduced strict health and safety protocols in tourism facilities including mandatory health checks, sanitization stations and social distancing measures in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and tourism stakeholders to regain travelers' confidence. With international travel restrictions, the focus shifted to promoting domestic tourism. This encouraged Ugandans to explore their country's

rich natural and cultural offerings through marketing campaigns, discount packages and special promotions for local visitors. To further reassure travelers, tour operators and hospitality providers implemented flexible booking and refund policies so that travelers would not lose money during periods of lockdown. Additionally, Uganda partnered with global tourism organizations to offer “Safe Travel” certifications so that tourism establishments adhered to international hygiene and safety standards. The government also initiated and extended financial support to the tourism sector by providing loans and grants for small and medium-sized enterprises as well as funding programs aimed at supporting cultural heritage sites and national parks. Tour operators began offering new experiences, such as adventure activities like hiking and birdwatching and wellness retreats featuring yoga and meditation at remote lodges. Furthermore, Uganda promoted its cultural and heritage tourism which facilitated interactions between tourists and local communities such as the Karamojong, Bakiga, Bagisu and Batwa who offered cultural tours to showcase Uganda’s diverse ethnic traditions.

Sustainable tourism as a global concept

Tourism is one of the most promising and dynamic industries globally. It is crucial to plan and develop tourism in a purposeful and sustainable manner, balancing the environmental, economic and social goals of society (Sendawula *et al.*, 2024). Sustainable tourism development must focus on meeting tourists’ needs while ensuring a high level of satisfaction. It should provide meaningful experiences for visitors, raise their awareness of sustainability issues and promote sustainable tourism practices among them (Streimikiene, Svagzdiene, Jasinskis, & Simanavicius, 2021). Sustainable tourism is the form of tourism that seeks to minimize damage to ecosystems, improve compliance with socio-economic interests and promote wildlife protection and natural resources conservation while maximizing benefits to society. The concept has evolved in response to the growing recognition that tourism if not properly managed can contribute to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, social and economic inequality (Ramaano, 2024). Such demands pursuing interventions relating to minimizing wastage in the utilization of resources, promoting green agricultural practices, avoiding activities that threaten local habitats and low-carbon travel options (e.g. electric transportation), having eco-friendly accommodations, distributing tourism revenue equitably (especially for the vulnerable/underserved areas), providing fair wages for the local population and ensuring that the local businesses benefit from the tourism. Therefore, for tourism to be sustainable, it must provide long-term economic, social and environmental benefits without over-exploiting resources and communities (Ramaano, 2022).

Theoretical grounds of the study

The agency theory, new public management theory, new public service theory and sustainable tourism theory underpinned this study.

Agency theory (Meckling & Jensen, 1976) focuses on the relationship between principals (owners or shareholders) and agents (managers or executives) within a company. The theory addresses the conflict of interests that arise when agents, who are supposed to act in the best interest of the principals, have different goals or incentives. This leads to Agency problems due to information asymmetry, where the agent possesses more information or expertise than the principal (Schieg, 2008). This makes agents to pursue their interests rather than those of the principal. As such, this theory has been criticized for its simplified assumptions. For example, the assumption of self-interest and rationality may not always hold in practice. Additionally, agency solutions can be costly and may not always be effective in addressing complex organizational dynamics such as PPPs. This weakness is addressed by the New Public Management Theory (NPM).

NPM theory introduces the methods of business or enterprise management to government (Xu, Sun, & Si, 2015). NPM advocates for a more business-like approach to public sector management.

NPM places greater emphasis on achieving measurable results and outcomes. The theory uses performance targets and indicators to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector organizations. Mugarura (2019) notes that NPM encourages flexibility and innovation in the delivery of public services. NPM also emphasizes the importance of meeting the needs and preferences of the citizens as customers of public services. It seeks to enhance citizen satisfaction and engagement by providing services that are responsive, accessible and user-friendly. NPM places a strong emphasis on accountability and transparency in the use of public resources. Thus, public sector organizations are expected to be accountable for their performance and outcomes and to operate in a transparent manner that allows for public scrutiny and oversight. The theory, however, has been criticized for its emphasis on market-based mechanisms, which can lead to the commodification of public services and undermine the public interest. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential for NPM to exacerbate inequalities and weaken democratic governance. This limitation can be addressed by the New Public Service (NPS) theory.

The NPS theory, as outlined by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), prioritizes core values of public service, citizenship and democratic governance in public administration. Ethical leadership is a key component that emphasizes integrity, honesty and accountability in decision-making and conduct (Mugarura, 2019). NPS promotes collaborative governance and fosters partnerships among public, private and nonprofit entities to address complex issues. It encourages a culture of learning, innovation and continuous improvement within public sector organizations in order to respond to evolving societal needs. Attracting and retaining talented individuals committed to public service is essential as a means of valuing professionalism, expertise and dedication to public interest.

Sustainable tourism theory aims to provide guidelines for managing tourism to minimize adverse effects while promoting long-term benefits for local communities, the environment and the economy (Ramaano, 2023). Sustainable tourism theory is well anchored within the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach. This theory asserts that businesses including tourism operators, should evaluate their success based on financial returns and their impact on the environment and society (Elkington & Rowlands, 1999). Therefore, sustainable tourism requires PPPs to be economically profitable, environmentally responsive and socially inclusive projects. This includes creating jobs, generating revenue and supporting local businesses. Environmental sustainability minimizes tourism's environmental impact by preserving natural resources, protecting ecosystems and reducing carbon footprints (Sendawula *et al.*, 2024). Social sustainability ensures that tourism development promotes social equity, respects local cultures and contributes to community well-being. As such, the TBL approach emphasizes that sustainable tourism should focus on environmental protection, generating economic and social benefits for all destinations.

Literature review

Numerous studies have examined CSFs and best practices in PPPs with scholars such as Rasool, Chin, Wang, Asghar, Khan, and Zhou (2022), Debela (2022), Amies *et al.* (2024) and Babatunde *et al.* (2012) among others, contributing significantly to the discourse. Debela (2022) identified CSFs within the road construction sector for PPP projects in Ethiopia to be an enabling PPP policy, a committed and well-organized public agency, a stable social and political environment, a favorable legal framework, good governance and a proper procurement process. Alinaitwe and Ayesiga (2013) also identified CSFs and best practices for the road construction sector in Uganda and emphasized a competitive procurement process, a well-organized private sector, competent manpower and good governance. Similarly, Chou and Pramudawardhani (2015) pinpointed five key success factors that drive PPP success; economic viability, proper risk allocation, a robust financial market, a reliable technical partner and a favorable project environment. Their comparative study of Taiwan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, China and Indonesia highlighted the importance of these factors across diverse geographical contexts.

Zhang (2005) further added that high dedication and shared vision among stakeholders are crucial CSFs in construction projects, illustrating the importance of stakeholder alignment for successful project execution. In Nigeria, Babatunde *et al.* (2012) identified six CSFs which included a transparent procurement process, efficient management, a favorable investment climate and the economic and technical feasibility of the project. Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010) underscored the need for a stable economic environment, mutual commitment, a strong and organized procurement process, political stability and rational government support as key success factors for PPP projects. In Malaysia, Ismail (2013) identified factors such as good governance, guarantees from both public and private sector players, a favorable legal framework, comprehensive monetary policy and the availability of financial markets as CSFs.

Muhammad and Johar (2019) highlighted several CSFs for PPP success to include equitable risk allocation, transparency, good governance, public backing, social accountability, a stable political environment, access to financial markets competitive procurement process, government guarantees, an efficient legal framework and a stable macroeconomic system. In Ghana, Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017) emphasized strong government commitment, community support, honesty, continuous communication, project effectiveness and profitability and competent private partners, as the key drivers of PPP success. In Kenya, Chileshe *et al.* (2022) identified community support, project feasibility, laws and regulations, access to financial markets and a strong private consortium as the most important CSFs for housing projects. On the other hand, Chileshe *et al.* (2022) further ranked transparency, equity in the project process, resource allocation and shared authority between public and private sectors as less critical for PPP project success in Kenya. Earlier, Ismail (2013) highlighted the importance of good governance, sectoral commitment from public and private partners, sound economic policies and access to financial markets as the most critical factors for PPP success.

Kavishe and Chileshe (2019) identified additional CSFs in Tanzania, including a dedicated team of professionals, government support and guarantees, good governance and trust and integrity. Similarly, Debela (2022) identified key factors in Ethiopia, such as an enabling environment, a well-organized and committed public agency, good governance, political stability, appropriate risk allocation and a transparent procurement process. Jafari Ramiani, Sarvari, Chan, Nassereddine, and Lotfata (2024) categorized 20 CSFs for private participation in public sports facility projects in Iran, organizing them into five categories: legal/regulatory, strategic/executive, political/cultural/social, process/structural/human and economic/financial. They highlighted the importance of clear policy and legal frameworks, governance structures and procurement procedures in building investor confidence and ensuring project viability. Similarly, Mwesigwa *et al.* (2024a, b) noted that stakeholder engagement is crucial for effective PPP implementation by fostering transparency, inclusivity and social acceptance. Emphasis was placed on engaging local communities, tourism industry stakeholders, civil society organizations and government agencies for consensus-building.

Chou and Pramudawardhani (2015) argued that effective risk management strategies are fundamental for mitigating project risks and ensuring financial sustainability. Emphasis was put on the need for thorough risk assessments and appropriate risk allocation between public and private partners to enhance investor confidence. Osei-Kyei and Chan (2021) outlined several best practices for PPP implementation including clear project objectives, stakeholder engagement, feasibility studies, risk assessment, a solid legal and regulatory framework, capacity building, good governance and political stability. Mugarura (2019) identified additional best practices to be value for money, dispute resolution, due diligence, innovation, participation, transparency, accountability, trust, commitment and competitive tendering. These best practices underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of PPP implementation, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive approach to project design and execution.

Despite the growing body of research on PPPs, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies specifically focused on Uganda. As PPPs continue to be a promising avenue for infrastructure development in Uganda, understanding the CSFs and best practices that drive

successful PPP implementation in the country is vital. The reviewed literature underscores the scarcity of research on CSFs for PPP project implementation in developing countries, particularly in Uganda. Furthermore, there is a notable gap in studies that examine CSFs within the East African context, especially for tourism-related PPP projects. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by examining the CSFs and best practices for PPPs in Uganda, with a specific focus on the tourism sector.

Methodology

Research design

The study adopted an exploratory research design because it is appropriate for studies conducted in new or less researched areas and where detailed information about the study phenomena is being sought (Brink, 1996). A qualitative research approach was employed so that the study findings could be largely shaped by the respondent's own framed statements, feelings, thoughts, examples and experiences to enrich the study outcomes (Yilmaz, 2013). Although qualitative research is criticized for being non-numerical, subjective and at times lacking the required transparency and scientific rigour (Ajibade, 2018), the novelty of PPPs in the context of the tourism sector in Uganda clearly justified the utilization of exploratory design and qualitative approach as suitable methodologies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during data collection to allow intense probing of the respondents for deeper meaning and understanding of the CSFs and best practices of PPP in the tourism sector (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Study area

The tourism sector in Uganda is a vital part of the economy, significantly contributing to its GDP and providing numerous employment opportunities. The country is home to diverse natural attractions that include national parks, wildlife reserves, mountains, rivers and lakes, which make it a sought-after destination for adventure, wildlife encounters and cultural experiences. Uganda is renowned for its rich biodiversity with iconic sites such as Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks, home to endangered mountain gorillas, as well as Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls, Kidepo Valley, Mt. Elgon and Lake Mburo National Parks. Additionally, Uganda offers world-class birdwatching opportunities with over 1,000 species that include hot spots like Mabamba Swamp and Queen Elizabeth National Park. The country also boasts a range of adventure tourism activities, from white-water rafting on the Nile River and mountain climbing in the Rwenzori Mountains to chimpanzee trekking and zip-lining, while cultural tourism allows visitors to engage with local communities and explore traditional lifestyles. Uganda's scenic landscapes, including the Rwenzori Mountains, Kidepo Valley, Ssese Islands on Lake Victoria and the Crater Lakes, further enhance its appeal. To boost tourism, Uganda has made significant strides in infrastructure development that includes roads, airports and accommodation. The country has also made notable progress in wildlife conservation, particularly in protecting endangered species (e.g. mountain gorillas) and engaging local communities in conservation efforts. Despite some challenges such as inadequate infrastructure development in remote areas (Ayikoru, 2015), Uganda remains committed to advancing its tourism sector, highlighting its unique natural beauty and cultural heritage to the world.

Sample size, technique and procedure

The study employed a purposive sampling method to collect qualitative data. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who have specific experiences, knowledge and characteristics relevant to the research question. The study targeted 50 respondents who have worked with PPP projects, however only 15 respondents were interviewed given that at the 15th respondent no new insights were being observed. This is in agreement with

Patton (2002) who recommends that a sample size of between 5 and 50 having attained the saturation point is good enough for a qualitative study. The respondents included six public sector employees, six private sector investors and three local community leaders. The unit of analysis was a PPP in the tourism sector while the unit of inquiry was the public and private investors and managers in lodges, restaurants, cottages and the local community leadership (local council chairpersons). Procurement/finance/contract managers were selected because they have the relevant knowledge on the subject matter. Before the interviewing process started, the researchers made personal visits to the tourism sites and national parks to determine the willingness of respondents to participate in the interviews. This was intended to create rapport and minimize the possibility of wasting time with unprepared interviewees.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method, which enabled the generation of descriptions grounded in reality (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The questions in the interview guide were open-ended and designed to get in-depth information from the respondents about the study objective. Each interview lasts for about 40–60 minutes. Interviews were conducted until the saturation point was reached (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which was at the 15th interview. By the 15th interviewee, the researchers started noticing that the interviewees were presenting similar views in the areas under investigation. While a sample of fifteen respondents seems a small one, Robinson, Gordon, and McAdams (2023) equally considered only 15 interviewees in their study as adequate. During the interviews, probing questions were asked whenever the interviewees mentioned events of interest until nothing new was elicited (Kaawaase, 2022). Probing questions such as “Could you describe this? How? Why?” allowed the researchers to get detailed information about CSFs and best practices for PPPs in the tourism industry. The interviewees were interviewed from their workplaces at their time of convenience. Both audio recordings after getting permission from interviewees and notes were taken to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. The study received ethical review and approval as well as institutional permission for publication.

Data analysis

The data analysis process involved an iterative and cyclical approach to verification and confirmation. To ensure accuracy and validity, transcripts were shared with interviewees via email or WhatsApp to solicit their feedback and confirmation. This step enhanced the reliability of the data. Following the approach of Liu and Wilkinson (2011), the qualitative data underwent content analysis. Specifically, the data were examined using standard qualitative techniques to identify patterns and themes related to CSFs and best practices, that emerged from the interview scripts. Finally, the data were analyzed using the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012), employing a three-stage coding process that integrates both deductive and inductive approaches, informed by a pre-existing understanding of CSFs and best practices (see Figures 1 and 2). The first stage involved first-order coding, where relevant concepts were extracted directly from the empirical data. At this stage, the “raw” concepts identified were broad and reflective of the interviewees’ perspectives. In the second stage, these initial concepts were refined, narrowed and organized into second-order themes. Finally, in the third stage, the second-order themes were further synthesized and grouped to form the aggregated dimension, representing the construct of interest.

Study findings

Respondents’ characteristics

The majority of interviewees were aged between 36 and 40 years, accounting for 53.3% of the sample. This was followed by those aged between 30 and 35 years, representing 26.6%. These

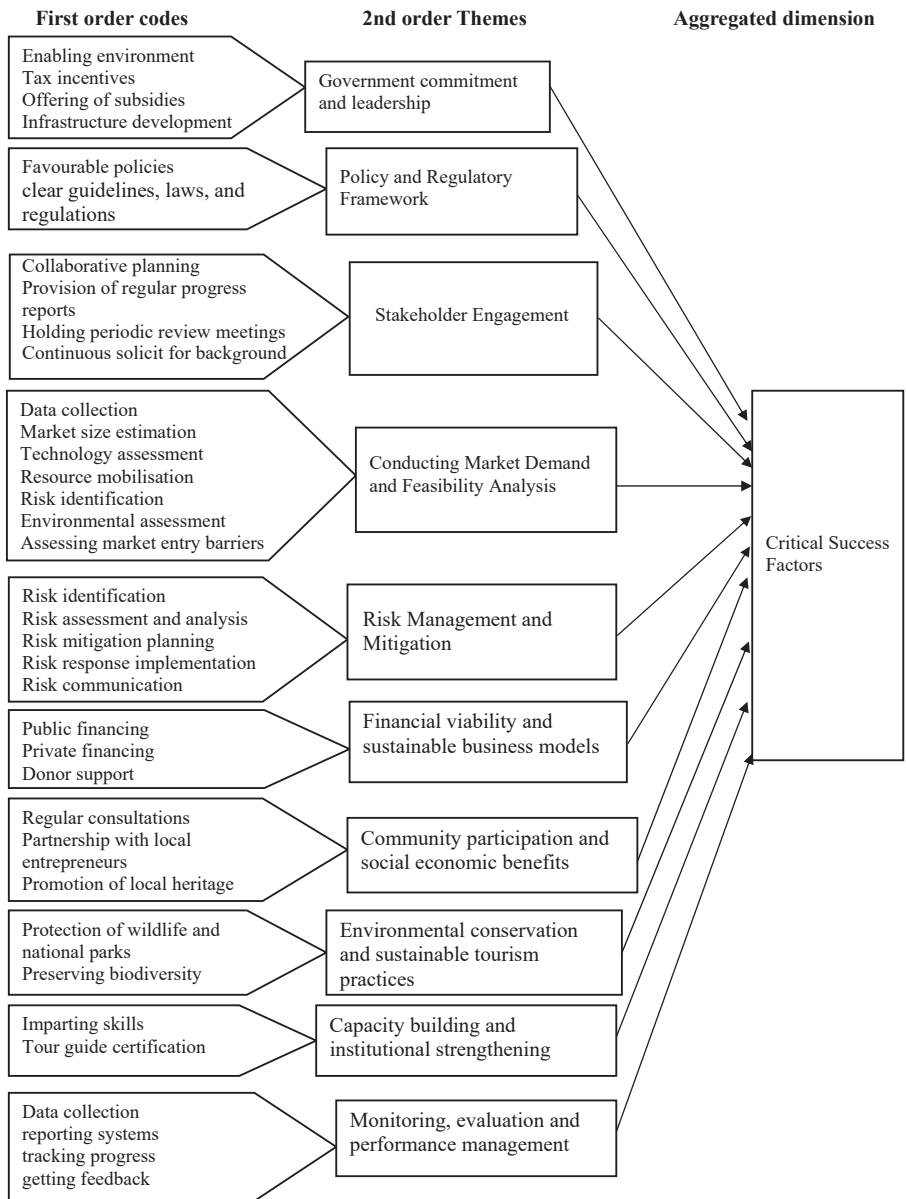


Figure 1. Critical success factors. Source. Authors' own work

age groups suggest that the respondents were mature enough to understand the CSFs and best practices in the tourism sector. In terms of gender, 60% of the respondents were male, highlighting the male dominance in PPP projects and their active participation in the study. Regarding experience, 46.6% of respondents had been involved in PPP projects for at least 5–10 years, indicating a solid understanding of these projects. Educationally, 46.6% of respondents held a Bachelor's degree, followed by those with Master's degrees (3.33%) and Diplomas (1.3%). This suggests that most respondents had a strong academic background

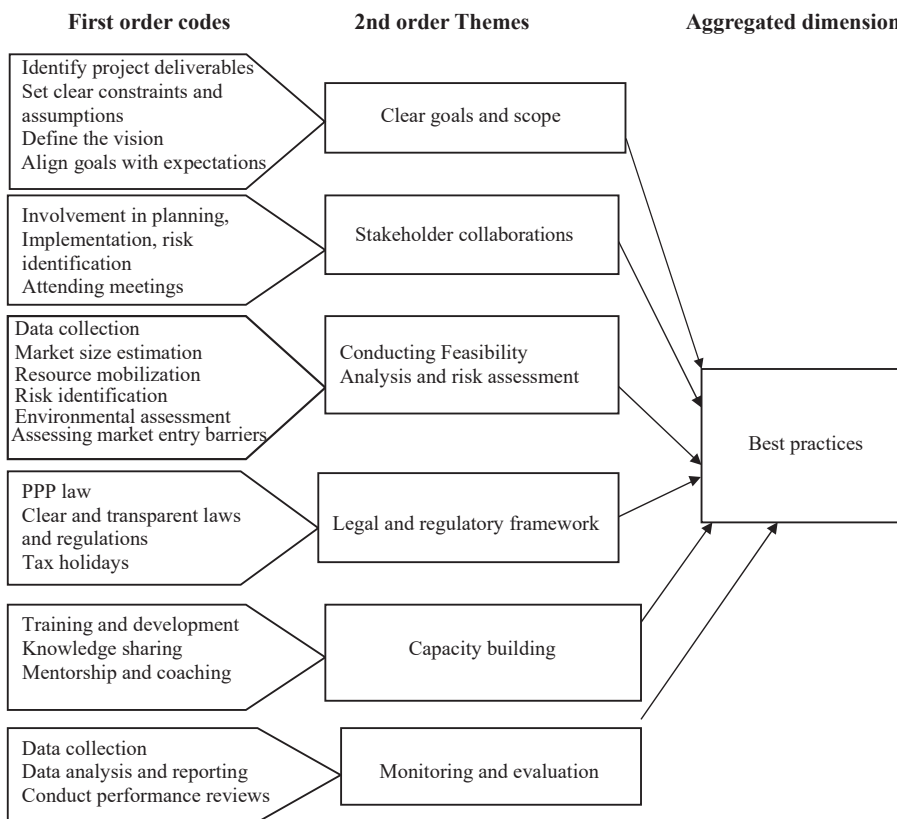


Figure 2. Best practices. Source. Authors' own work

relevant to PPP projects. In terms of professional background, 8% of the respondents were from the government and private sectors, while 20% were local community leaders. This diverse composition underscores the significant relevance of the respondents for the study, as they represent key stakeholders in the tourism sector. For better reporting of results, interviewees are uniquely identified as "IW", and IW 1-IW6 represents interviewees from the public sector, IW7-IW12 from the private sector, while IW 13–15 are community leaders.

Findings on the CSFs of PPPs within the tourism sector

Findings in [Figure 1](#) indicate that the CSFs for PPP projects within the tourism sector in Uganda are presented in the themes and sub-themes as shown below.

Government commitment and leadership. The interviewees mentioned that strong commitment and leadership from the Ugandan government are essential for driving tourism PPP projects forward. This includes political support, policy advocacy and institutional coordination to create an enabling environment for private sector participation and investment. IW2 stated that *there is a need for the government to create a conducive policy environment that encourages private sector participation in the tourism industry*. IW5 is more specific by suggesting that *the government needs to put in place clear regulations, transparent processes and legal frameworks for PPPs to provide certainty and attract investment*. This is supported by IW6 who states that *the government can offer tax incentives, subsidies or grants to attract private investment in tourism infrastructure projects such as hotels, resorts, transportation*

and attractions. These incentives reduce the financial burden on private investors and make PPP projects more attractive for the tourism sector, and this resonates well with the view of IW12 who states that *the government can put up infrastructure development projects to benefit the tourism sector, such as building roads, airports, seaports and other transportation networks.* These investments improve accessibility to tourist destinations and enhance the overall visitor experience. The above narratives mean that there is a need for the government's commitment to providing a conducive environment for PPP projects within the tourism sector to thrive.

While Uganda has made significant strides toward promoting sustainable tourism, several contradictions and challenges persist in terms of government commitment and leadership. The Ugandan government has frequently emphasized the potential of tourism to boost the economy, create jobs and attract foreign investment. However, the drive for higher revenue from tourism has come at the expense of environmental conservation. For example, increasing the number of gorilla permits sold in high-demand areas or opening up new regions for tourism development can lead to overcrowding, habitat destruction and increased risks to wildlife.

Policy and regulatory framework. With a conducive policy and regulatory framework, governments can create an enabling environment for PPPs in the tourism sector. An enabling environment stimulates investment, promotes sustainable development and enhances the competitiveness of tourist destinations. This involves having clear guidelines, laws and regulations that govern PPP procurement, project implementation and risk allocation. A transparent and predictable regulatory environment builds investor confidence and ensures project sustainability. IW7 stated that *establishing clear laws and regulations governing PPPs in the tourism sector provides certainty and stability for investors.* IW 10 noted that this calls for *...designing the regulatory framework that would accommodate the diverse needs and characteristics of tourism projects* and rejoinder made as follows by IW3 *...flexibility in regulations allows for innovative PPP models tailored to specific project requirements and market conditions.*

The above narratives mean that establishing a robust policy and regulatory framework is essential for the success of PPPs in the tourism sector.

While the Government of Uganda has made efforts to promote tourism, the political leadership often faces challenges related to prioritizing long-term sustainability over short-term gains. Political leaders are incentivized to pursue policies that yield immediate economic results, such as large infrastructure projects or extracting natural resources, rather than more gradual, sustainable approaches that may not show returns in the short term. The nature of political cycles can limit the implementation of long-term sustainable policies in tourism.

Stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement fosters collaborative partnerships, dialogue and consultation to ensure that project priorities align with stakeholder interests and local needs. IW1 stated that *engaging stakeholders assists in gathering input, identifying concerns and building consensus. Inclusive engagement ensures that diverse perspectives are considered and incorporated into project planning and decision-making processes.* According to IW3, *effective engagement ensures that projects align with the needs and priorities of local communities, businesses, government agencies and other stakeholders. Therefore, engaging stakeholders helps in fostering partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders to leverage their respective strengths, resources and expertise* (IW5). The above narratives mean that by engaging stakeholders in a meaningful and inclusive manner, governments, private sector partners and civil society organizations can build trust, foster collaboration and ensure the success and sustainability of PPPs in the tourism sector.

Conducting market demand and feasibility analysis. There is a need to conduct thorough market demand assessments and feasibility studies to identify viable tourism PPP opportunities and analyze market trends, visitor preferences, competitor analysis and investment potential to inform project selection and development. IW8 stated that *there is a need to analyze market demand and feasibility analysis to determine the viability and potential success of PPPs in the tourism sector.* IW 5 coins it in *assessing the competitive landscape of*

the existing tourism offerings, attractions, accommodations and other services in the destination area and identify gaps and niches for better run PPP projects. Consider... seasonal fluctuations and market dynamics that may impact tourism demand, such as peak travel periods, off-peak seasons and special events is extremely important (IW4). It is necessary to develop PPP projects that can adapt to seasonal variations and capitalize on peak demand periods. Furthermore, IW2 noted that it is necessary to conduct a financial analysis to assess the economic viability of PPP projects in the tourism sector. There is a need to evaluate revenue potential, investment costs, operating expenses and projected returns on investment (ROI) over the project lifecycle. It is vital to determine whether the project generates sufficient cash flows to cover costs and provide a reasonable return to investors. This narrative means that by conducting thorough market demand and feasibility analysis, stakeholders can identify viable PPP opportunities in the tourism sector, mitigate risks and maximize the potential for success and long-term sustainability.

Risk management and mitigation. Findings indicate that effective risk management strategies to mitigate project risks and uncertainties are CSFs for PPPs in the tourism sector. PPPs need to identify, assess and manage risks related to market conditions, regulatory changes, political instability, environmental factors and financial viability. Findings further indicate that PPPs need to develop contingency plans and risk-sharing mechanisms to minimize adverse impacts on project outcomes. IW6 ignites the need for PPPs to clearly define how risks will be allocated between the public and private sectors, taking into account each party's ability to manage specific risks. As such there is...to develop mitigation strategies for identified risks, such as insurance coverage, contingency funds or risk-sharing agreements(IW5). IW7 agitated for...build flexibility into the partnership agreements to accommodate changing market conditions, regulatory environments or unforeseen events. IW 10 asserted that, PPPs should be regularly reviewed and updated based on risk assessments and mitigation strategies to address evolving risks and relatedly and IW1 noted that PPPs need to foster open communication and collaboration among stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. Transparent decision-making processes can help build trust and mitigate potential conflicts. This narrative means that by implementing these risk management and mitigation strategies, PPPs in the tourism sector can thrive, delivering mutual benefits for all stakeholders involved while minimizing potential risks and uncertainties.

Financial viability and sustainable business models. Findings indicate that financial viability and sustainability business models are CSFs for tourism PPP projects. PPPs need to explore diverse financing sources including public funding, private investment, donor support and innovative financing mechanisms. PPPs also need to adopt pricing strategies, revenue-sharing arrangements and cost-recovery mechanisms to ensure project profitability and long-term viability. IW2 emphasized the need for PPP contracts to implement cost optimization measures to minimize operational expenses and improve efficiency. Such could involve streamlining processes, adopting technology solutions, negotiating favorable procurement contract terms and optimizing resource utilization. Also, as suggested by IW12, PPPs need to secure long-term financing and investment to support the sustainability of the tourism project over its lifecycle. This could involve securing debt financing from financial institutions, attracting equity investment from private investors or accessing funding from development banks or international organizations. Similarly, IW14 postulates that PPPs need to Develop multiple revenue streams within the PPP project to reduce dependency on a single source of income, such as ticket sales, merchandise sales, concession fees, sponsorship deals and ancillary services such as guided tours or workshops. Finally, pricing and amount of users were found critical. For instance, IW5 stated that there is a need to implement user fees and pricing strategies that strike a balance between generating revenue and ensuring accessibility for visitors; and further noted that, dynamic pricing, seasonal pricing and package deals can help maximize revenue while catering to different market segments.

The above narration means that by implementing these strategies, PPPs in the tourism sector can develop financially viable and sustainable business models that contribute to the long-term prosperity of both the tourism destination and the stakeholders involved.

Community participation and socio-economic benefits. Findings indicate that community participation and ensuring that socio-economic benefits are CSFs for the sustainability of PPPs in the tourism sector. Engaging local communities in project planning, employment opportunities, skills development and revenue-sharing arrangements is key for PPP success. Fostering inclusive tourism development to empower marginalized groups, preserve cultural heritage and promote social cohesion. This is evident in the views of IW7 . . . *PPPs need to involve local communities in the planning, development and decision-making processes of the tourism project from the outset by conducting regular consultations, workshops and public forums to gather input, address concerns and foster cooperation among stakeholders.* IW6 acknowledges the need for PPPs to foster. . . *partnerships with local businesses, entrepreneurs and artisans to promote economic empowerment and create opportunities for local employment and enterprise development. This could be realized through sourcing goods and services locally, supporting local tourism operators and facilitating skills development and capacity building.* This is in line with IW8 who states that *PPPs need to respect and promote the cultural heritage of local communities by integrating authentic cultural experiences, traditions and storytelling into the tourism project. This could include cultural performances, heritage trails, craft markets and culinary experiences that showcase the unique identity and traditions of the destination.* As W3 indicates the focus of PPPs should be on community engagements in environmental conservation efforts to . . . *promote sustainable tourism practices that minimize negative impacts on natural resources and ecosystems, e.g. encourage community-based initiatives for waste management, renewable energy, biodiversity conservation and eco-friendly tourism operations.*

The above narratives mean that prioritizing community participation and maximizing socio-economic benefits assists PPPs in the tourism sector to contribute to inclusive growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development while enhancing the overall tourism experience for visitors and residents alike.

Environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices. Findings indicate that environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices are critical to the success of PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector. Integrate environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices into PPP projects to minimize negative impacts on natural resources and ecosystems. Implement eco-friendly infrastructure, waste management systems, energy-efficient technologies and biodiversity conservation measures. Promote responsible tourism behavior among visitors and tourism operators to preserve Uganda's natural heritage for future generations. IW3 observed that *for PPPs in the tourism sector to thrive, there is a need to collaborate with local communities, government agencies, tourists and conservation organizations to effectively manage and protect Uganda's national parks, wildlife reserves and other protected areas. Implementing sustainable tourism practices minimizes human-wildlife conflicts, preserves biodiversity and maintains the ecological integrity of these areas. Community-owned lodges, cultural tourism initiatives and sustainable agriculture projects that generate income for residents and contribute to conservation efforts need to be encouraged (IW11).* In a bid to enhance eco and sustainable tourism practices, IW13 suggests that *PPPs need to launch environmental education and awareness campaigns to promote conservation ethics, sustainable behavior and responsible tourism practices among tourists, local communities and tourism industry stakeholders. As such training and capacity-building programs on topics such as waste management, energy efficiency, water conservation and wildlife conservation become paramount for the success of PPP projects.*

The above narrative means that by integrating environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices into PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector, stakeholders can enhance the long-term viability and resilience of the tourism sector.

However, one of the primary contradictions in Uganda's tourism policy is the tension between economic growth and environmental protection. Tourism is one of Uganda's largest

sources of foreign exchange, with wildlife tourism, for example, gorilla trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and Mgahinga, serving as key revenue earners. This generates significant income for the national economy, but it also places pressure on natural resources.

Capacity building and institutional strengthening. Findings indicate that capacity building and institutional strengthening are critical for the success of PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector. This is achieved by strengthening the capacity and capabilities of government agencies, private sector stakeholders and local institutions to plan, implement and manage tourism PPP projects effectively mainly in areas of project management, financial planning, marketing and destination management. IW 4 stated that *...building capacities and imparting skills to government officials, tourism industry professionals and community members would involve vocational training, hospitality management courses, tour guide certification programs, institutional governance and development, leadership management, project planning and management, procurement management and entrepreneurship training tailored to the needs of the tourism sector.*

The above findings imply that by prioritizing capacity building and institutional strengthening initiatives, Uganda can enhance the effectiveness, sustainability and inclusivity of PPPs in the tourism sector, thereby maximizing the sector's potential to contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Monitoring, evaluation and performance management. Findings indicate that monitoring, evaluation and performance management are essential components for ensuring the success and sustainability of PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector. This involves establishing robust monitoring, evaluation and performance management systems to track project progress, assess impact and measure outcomes. As such, it is critical to define key performance indicators (KPIs) and set targets and benchmarks to evaluate project effectiveness, financial performance, visitor satisfaction and socio-economic benefits. IW15 agitates for *... robust data collection and reporting systems to gather relevant data on the performance of PPPs in tourism. Both quantitative and qualitative data sources include surveys, interviews, financial records, visitor statistics and environmental assessments to track progress and measure outcomes.* According to IW7, *Monitoring and Evaluation would be a successful exercise by conducting regular performance reviews and evaluations of PPPs in tourism to determine actual progress against predetermined targets and objectives. Monitoring and evaluation officials should engage public and private stakeholders in performance reviews to ensure transparency, accountability and shared ownership of results. In doing so, timely adjustments to project strategies, activities and resource allocation must be made based on the as-needed identified PPP success areas, challenges and opportunities for improvement (IW9).*

The above findings imply that by implementing these strategies, Uganda can strengthen its capacity to monitor, evaluate and manage the performance of PPPs in the tourism sector, thereby maximizing their contribution to economic growth, sustainable development and inclusive prosperity.

Findings on the best practices for PPP projects within the tourism sector

The sub-themes that emerged on best practices for PPP projects within the Tourism Sector include

Clear goals and scope. Findings indicate that one of the best practices is to establish well-defined goals and expectations for both public and private partners to ensure alignment with broader tourism strategies and economic development plans. This ensures that all parties involved have a mutual understanding of the project's objectives, deliverables and responsibilities, which helps in aligning efforts and expectations. Given this, IW8 noted that *... there is a need to delineate the scope of the project, including responsibilities, deliverables, timelines and performance metrics if the PPP project is to succeed.* This finding means that having clearly defined goals and project scope helps minimize misunderstandings, manage risks and achieve desired outcomes efficiently and effectively.

Stakeholder collaborations. Findings indicate that there is a need to engage all relevant stakeholders including local communities, businesses and tourism boards from the planning phase to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. This can lead to better social, environmental and economic outcomes. Such is evident in the opinion of IW6 which postulates that . . . *there is a need to introduce and implement mechanisms, for example, suggestion boxes, hotlines or dedicated email addresses to swiftly voice and provide feedback to stakeholder concerns.* This finding means that effective stakeholder collaborations ensure that the interests, needs and concerns of all parties are considered, leading to greater project success and sustainability.

Conduct feasibility studies and risk assessment. Findings indicate that there is a need to perform thorough and comprehensive market, financial and technical feasibility studies to assess the viability of the project. These processes ensure that the project is viable and sustainable and has managed risks effectively before significant resources are committed. IW10 stated that . . . *before committing resources to the PPP project in the tourism sector, there is a need to analyze current tourism trends, visitor statistics and market demand by considering factors such as tourist demographics, preferences, spending behavior and seasonal variations.* This finding means that conducting thorough feasibility studies and comprehensive risk assessments ensures that tourism-related PPP projects can be well-planned, financially viable and resilient to potential challenges.

Legal and regulatory framework. Findings indicate that one of the best practices is to establish a robust legal and regulatory framework that supports PPPs with clear guidelines on project implementation, dispute resolution and contract enforcement. This is anchored in the submission that, . . . *there is a need to develop detailed regulations that provide clear guidance on implementing the PPP law These should include procedures for project approval, bidding, contract management and compliance monitoring (IW3).* The finding means that the legal framework should provide clear guidelines, ensure transparency and accountability, protect environmental and social interests and foster effective collaboration between public and private partners.

Capacity building. Findings indicate that investing in capacity building for public sector officials and private partners ensures they have the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and execute PPP projects effectively. This helps to ensure that PPP projects are planned, implemented and managed effectively. IW13 stated that . . . *PPP projects need to conduct workshops and seminars that encourage active participation and knowledge sharing among stakeholders.* This thought is shared with IW 9 who emphasizes that . . . *PPP projects need to create communities of practice where stakeholders can share experiences, challenges and best practices.* This finding means that enhancing the skills and knowledge of all stakeholders ensures that projects are managed efficiently, meet regulatory and community expectations and deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Findings indicate that establishing robust monitoring mechanisms to track project progress, performance and compliance with contractual terms is a good practice. This is supported by IW 15 in the view that *PPP projects need to conduct a mid-term evaluation to assess progress toward objectives, identify any issues or challenges and make necessary adjustments to the project plan.* To realize this, *PPP projects need to develop a schedule for regular reporting such as monthly or quarterly, to track progress and identify any deviations from the plan (IW11).* This finding means that effective M&E ensures that projects meet their objectives, stay within budget, adhere to timelines and achieve the desired social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Discussion of findings

The findings suggest that government commitment is crucial for the successful execution of PPP projects in the tourism sector. This commitment enhances project success by facilitating effective coordination of project activities, increasing the efficiency of collaboration efforts and fostering

long-lasting relationships among the parties involved. Moreover, public sector commitment provides essential support in terms of policy, finance, administration and strategy, ensuring the project's viability, attractiveness and long-term project success benefits all stakeholders. This finding aligns with the research of [Muhammad and Johar \(2019\)](#), who emphasized the importance of commitment from all parties involved in ensuring the success of PPP projects.

The results indicate that effective risk management and mitigation are essential for the successful implementation of PPP projects in the tourism sector. Proper risk management is critical to ensuring project success, as it enhances planning, financial stability, stakeholder confidence, compliance, operational efficiency, sustainability, competitiveness and crisis management. This finding is consistent with [Muhammad and Johar \(2019\)](#), who emphasized the importance of allocating risks to the party best equipped to manage and control them. Additionally, the results align with [Debela \(2022\)](#), who identified appropriate risk allocation as a crucial success factor in the context of Ethiopian PPP projects.

The study's results emphasize the importance of a favorable legal framework for successful PPP project implementation in the tourism sector. A robust legal framework provides for clarity, risk management, financial security, regulatory compliance, investor confidence, sustainability, operational efficiency, public trust, adaptability and long-term stability, all of which are essential for successful project planning, execution and longevity. Additionally, it guides handling legal issues that may arise during project implementation. This finding is consistent with [Muhammad and Johar \(2019\)](#), who stressed the importance of a transparent and stable legal framework in making contracts and agreements bankable. The results also align with [Debela \(2022\)](#), who identified an enabling environment including a favorable legal framework, as a CSF in Ethiopian PPP projects.

The results show that community participation is a crucial element for the successful implementation of PPP projects in the tourism sector. When local communities are involved in PPP projects, it leads to increased project acceptance, design relevance, economic benefits, social cohesion, effective implementation, marketing, resilience, cultural exchange and long-term success. This community-centric approach ensures that tourism projects are not only successful but also equitable and sustainable, benefiting all stakeholders. This finding is in line with the research of [Babatunde et al. \(2012\)](#), who highlighted community support as a vital factor in the success of PPP projects.

The results indicate that government involvement through guarantee provisions is essential for the successful implementation of PPP projects. By entering into a contractual agreement to assume the debt or performance obligations of the private sector, the government minimizes the risk of project failure, hence enabling PPP projects to operate efficiently and achieve their objectives. This finding is consistent with the research of [Babatunde et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Chou and Pramudawardhani \(2015\)](#), who identified government guarantee provisions as a CSF in PPP projects, promoting confidence and stability in PPP partnerships.

The results show that political stability is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of PPP projects. A stable political environment fosters confidence, enables swift decision-making and ensures political support, which is essential for project success. This finding is consistent with the research of [Cheung et al. \(2012\)](#), [Muhammad and Johar \(2019\)](#) and [Kavishe and Chileshe \(2019\)](#), who all emphasized the importance of a stable political environment for successful PPP implementation. Unstable political and social conditions have led to failed projects, such as rail projects, highlighting the need for a supportive and stable government environment for PPP projects to thrive.

Findings show that for PPP projects to be implemented successfully, there is a need for a suitable and adequate financial market. Financial markets provide finance to private investors that is much needed for infrastructure development. The availability of the financial market enables the parties, especially private firms, to access funds for investing in PPP projects by issuing out shares to the public. This finding agrees with [Cheung et al. \(2012\)](#), who noted that a well-organized and established financial market with the benefits of financing costs and diversified financial products would incentivize the private sector to take up PPP projects.

Results stipulate that for PPP projects to be implemented successfully, there is a need for public/community support. Community support builds confidence and minimizes disagreements and conflicts which result in project delays. Community support ensures the long-term sustainability of the project, as residents are more likely to maintain and protect what they have helped create. This result is consistent with [Verweij, Loomans, and Leendertse \(2020\)](#), who noted that inventions would request additional provisions from the public party to implement them interactively and successfully.

The findings identify key best practices that significantly enhance the development and sustainability of tourism infrastructure and services through PPPs. These best practices include: stakeholder collaborations, establishing a legal and regulatory framework, defining clear goals and scope, capacity building, conducting feasibility studies and risk assessments and monitoring and evaluation. This is consistent with the research of [Mugarura \(2019\)](#) and [Osei-Kyei and Chan \(2021\)](#), who highlighted a comprehensive list of best practices for successful PPP implementation to include clear objectives, stakeholder engagement, feasibility studies, legal frameworks, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, good governance, public support, competitive procurement, political stability, value for money, dispute resolution, innovation, sustainable management, transparency, accountability, networking, trust, commitment, competitive tendering, due diligence and balancing success factors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the CSFs and best practices for PPP projects in the tourism sector in Uganda. The study identifies CSFs in PPPs in Uganda to include: commitment of stakeholders, stakeholder engagement, suitable risk management and mitigation, government support, environmental conservation, a robust legal framework, capacity building and institutional strengthening, market demand and feasibility study, monitoring, evaluation and performance management and an appropriate financial market. The best practices include defining clear goals, stakeholder engagement, conducting a feasibility study and risk assessment, capacity building and monitoring and evaluation. CSFs and best practices in tourism PPP projects can help Uganda to leverage PPPs to unlock the potential of its tourism sector, drive economic growth and promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Implications

Socioeconomic implications

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should actively involve local communities in the planning, development and management of tourism projects. This can be achieved through regular consultations, capacity-building programs tailored to tourism skills and the establishment of revenue-sharing mechanisms that ensure local communities directly benefit from tourism activities. Such efforts should focus on integrating community-led tourism initiatives, such as cultural tours and sustainable practices for communities to gain economically and socially from the tourism projects in their areas.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should prioritize the preservation and promotion of the country's cultural heritage by integrating traditional practices into tourism projects. This can be achieved through collaboration with local communities, cultural institutions and heritage organizations to safeguard cultural assets. Tourism projects should focus on creating authentic cultural tourism experiences, such as village tours, traditional performances and craft-making workshops to ensure that cultural heritage is both protected and showcased in a way that benefits local communities economically.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should prioritize and maintain high standards of service quality, safety and hygiene across all tourism destinations. This can be achieved by

implementing quality assurance mechanisms, such as regular inspections and certification programs (e.g. Safe Travel certifications) to ensure tourism facilities meet international standards. Additionally, training initiatives should be provided to tourism operators, staff and local businesses on customer service, health and safety protocols and hygiene practices to enhance the overall visitor experience and build trust in Uganda as a safe and quality travel destination.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should foster inclusive tourism development by creating opportunities for marginalized groups, such as women, youth, persons with disabilities and indigenous communities. This can be achieved by promoting inclusive employment opportunities in tourism-related businesses, supporting entrepreneurship initiatives and offering targeted skills development programs that empower these vulnerable populations. Additionally, tourism projects should prioritize accessibility and ensure that tourism facilities and services are inclusive and provide equitable benefits to all segments of society, hence promoting social inclusion and economic empowerment.

Policy implications

The Ugandan government should establish a robust legal and regulatory framework specifically for the tourism sector to facilitate the successful implementation of tourism-related PPP projects. This framework should clearly define the roles, responsibilities and obligations of all stakeholders involved in PPP agreements and ensure transparency, accountability and effective dispute resolution. It should also include specific regulations for tourism infrastructure development, environmental protection and community engagement to facilitate projects aligned with national tourism goals and international standards.

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to the theoretical framework of sustainable tourism by examining how PPPs can support the TBL approach. Specifically, it sheds light on the integration of environmental, economic and social sustainability through collaboration between public and private sectors to redefine sustainable tourism practices in emerging markets like Uganda.

This study advances existing theories of PPPs by providing empirical evidence on the specific success factors and best practices for implementing PPPs in the tourism sector. It refines models of how public and private entities can align their goals to achieve sustainable outcomes, hence offering a nuanced understanding of the roles that government policies, private investment and local community involvement play in PPP success.

The study enhances stakeholder theory by examining the diverse interests of stakeholders involved in tourism PPPs such as government agencies, private enterprises, local communities and international donors. It provides a deeper understanding of how different stakeholders' needs are balanced and managed to achieve optimal project outcomes in the tourism sector.

The study deepens the understanding of the principal-agent dynamics within PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector. It may highlight how public sector entities (the principals) and private sector partners (the agents) manage their relationship to ensure mutual benefits. The study provides insights into how to align the objectives of both parties where the public sector seeks societal benefits (e.g. job creation, environmental sustainability) and the private sector pursues profit maximization.

Theoretical implications also extend to tourism management theory, especially regarding strategic planning for sustainable tourism. The identification of CSFs and best practices inform the development of frameworks and models for managing tourism destinations effectively. In addition, the study contributes to the understanding of risk management in tourism PPPs. It reveals how risks such as political instability, regulatory changes and environmental concerns are mitigated through collaborative partnerships, adding depth to theoretical discussions on risk in tourism development projects.

Environmental implications

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should prioritize the integration of environmental sustainability principles into all tourism-related projects. This includes adopting eco-friendly practices such as efficient waste management, energy conservation and biodiversity protection. This helps to minimize the negative impacts on Uganda's natural resources and ecosystems, hence ensuring the preservation of the country's rich natural heritage for future generations. This approach not only supports environmental stewardship but also enhances the long-term viability and attractiveness of Uganda's tourism industry.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector can play a pivotal role in conserving natural resources and protecting biodiversity. These partnerships can ensure the effective preservation of Uganda's unique ecosystems and wildlife, addressing challenges that may be beyond the capacity of either sector alone. This collaborative approach enhances both environmental protection and the sustainability of tourism, ensuring long-term benefits for the country's natural heritage and tourism industry.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector can drive the adoption of green infrastructure and sustainable resource management practices in tourism development. The private sector with its investment capabilities is often more inclined to invest in energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy sources and advanced waste management systems that align with environmental sustainability objectives. The public sector can support this by establishing favorable regulations and offering incentives for the adoption of eco-friendly technologies and infrastructure. This collaborative approach ensures that tourism development in Uganda not only thrives economically but also contributes to long-term environmental sustainability.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector can play a key role in establishing and promoting sustainability certification programs for tourism operators, thereby raising industry standards and encouraging environmentally responsible practices. Through public-private collaboration, these certification schemes can be developed and promoted, providing incentives for tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices and meet recognized environmental standards. This initiative can help enhance the reputation of Uganda's tourism industry, attract eco-conscious travelers and contribute to long-term environmental preservation.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector can significantly contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation by implementing strategies that reduce the sector's carbon footprint and improve the resilience of tourism destinations to climate-related risks. Through collaborative efforts, these partnerships can promote sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, the use of renewable resources and the development of climate-resilient infrastructure, hence helping tourism destinations to better adapt to environmental challenges and secure long-term sustainability.

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for practitioners and researchers working on PPP projects in the tourism sector, especially in developing countries. Key factors that contribute to project success, timely completion and cost-effectiveness have been highlighted. Such if followed would enable the making of informed decisions and enhance project management practices, hence supporting the creation of sustainable and impactful tourism PPP projects that benefit local communities, the economy and the environment as a whole.

PPPs in the tourism sector should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the performance and impact of tourism projects over time. These mechanisms should focus on key indicators such as tourism arrivals, visitor spending, employment generation and socio-economic benefits. These metrics can help stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism PPPs, make data-driven decisions and adjust strategies as needed to maximize positive outcomes for local communities and the tourism industry.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should prioritize building the capacity of government agencies, local communities and tourism stakeholders through targeted training programs, technical assistance and knowledge-sharing initiatives. These programs should include

specialized workshops on project planning, management and sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, ongoing support should be provided to enhance skills in contract negotiation, financial management and other essential areas. This capacity-building approach will ensure the effective implementation and long-term success of tourism PPP projects, hence fostering a more skilled workforce and promoting sustainable development in the tourism sector.

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector should conduct comprehensive feasibility studies to include market assessments, demand analysis and financial modeling, before project implementation. These studies should assess project viability, identify potential risks and evaluate the socio-economic impacts, to ensure that tourism PPPs align with market needs and meet investor expectations.

PPP projects in Uganda's tourism sector should be explicitly designed to align with the country's national and regional tourism strategies, such as the Uganda Tourism Development Master Plan and the regional East African tourism goals. These projects should prioritize the development of essential tourism infrastructure including transportation, accommodation and visitor facilities, with a strong focus on sustainability by promoting eco-friendly practices and minimizing environmental impact. Additionally, PPP initiatives should integrate community-based tourism models to ensure that local communities directly benefit through job creation, skills development and increased access to tourism revenue. Furthermore, clear mechanisms for monitoring the socio-economic impact of these projects should be established to ensure that they maximize long-term benefits for local populations and contribute to the broader goals of inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction.

PPP projects in Uganda's tourism sector need to establish clear and transparent procedures throughout the procurement, contract negotiation and project implementation phases. Specifically, the government and private sector partners should make procurement processes open to public scrutiny by publishing tender documents, selection criteria and contract details. Additionally, the contract negotiation process should involve consultations with relevant stakeholders including local communities and industry experts to ensure fair terms. To promote accountability, regular reporting should be mandated including quarterly progress updates, financial performance reviews and compliance checks on environmental, social and contractual obligations. Independent oversight bodies, such as the Uganda Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA), the Public-Private Partnership Unit or external auditors should be involved to monitor and verify project compliance and performance. Furthermore, a publicly accessible platform should be established for stakeholders to track the status of projects and raise concerns if necessary.

PPPs need to foster collaborative partnerships between the public sector, private sector, civil society and international organizations to leverage resources, expertise and networks for tourism development. PPP needs to encourage joint ventures, co-investment models and knowledge-sharing platforms to drive innovation and sustainable growth.

Technological implications

PPPs in Uganda's tourism sector need to prioritize the adoption of green technologies to reduce the environmental footprint of tourism activities. By leveraging the private sector's technological expertise alongside the public sector's regulatory frameworks and incentives, PPPs can promote sustainable practices such as the development of solar-powered resorts, wind turbines for energy generation and geothermal heating systems for hotels. Additionally, the integration of energy-efficient technologies like smart grids, LED lighting, energy-efficient HVAC systems and low-carbon technologies in hotels, airports and other tourism infrastructures should be encouraged. These efforts would support environmental sustainability and enhance Uganda's appeal as an eco-friendly tourism destination.

Study limitations and areas for further research

This study used an exploratory qualitative approach and was situated in one sector of tourism. This means the findings from this study may not easily be applicable to all PPP projects. Future

research should incorporate quantitative methods and be conducted on PPPs in other sectors of the economy. Related, there is a need to conduct comparative analysis between Uganda and other similar developing countries to gain a more comprehensive understanding. This study only focused on public, private and local communities as respondents, leaving out tourists, lower-level tourism workers, civil society and intergovernmental players yet these are key stakeholders as well. Future studies should consider these categories of stakeholder to get more insights into the suitability and application of CSFs and best practices for successful planning and implementation of PPPs within the Tourism sector.

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Further reading

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