

# Designing and Branding Highway Roadside Refreshment Centres for Travelers in Rwanda

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## Abstract

*This study was about designing and branding highway road side refreshment centres in Rwanda. Travelling is an inevitable activity which is full of activities ranging from refreshment and rest. It is a challenge for travelers to continue travelling without having inevitable services being offered to them on the way. Such facilities meant to help travelers involve putting in place an organised position for rest and refreshments. The study assumed that highway refreshment centres would offer a lot of opportunities to a traveler, support tourism, and help communities around. The methodology used involved coming up with a mood board, ground plan, landscaping, branding through development of signage among others and getting feedback through interviews and questionnaires administered to stake holders of this project. The study used qualitative research method. The sampling technique used was stratified. Within each category structured questionnaires were administered. Since these were self administered, further probing for information relevant to the study was done using in-depth interviews. The respondents involved. It was found out that there are two refreshing centres Nyirangarama's in Rulindo and at Hadji's in Nyanza. Even these don't qualify being called one stop refreshing centres. It was found out further that the communities living around the project are produce artifacts with no sure market. Truck and tour guides concurred that there is need to have centres which cater for medical, rest, food, ATM, service and refueling. The tourists and tour guides emphasised the importance of way finders on a site, the branded site would be fine to define what Rwanda can provide. It was concluded that establishing a refreshment centre would help travelers through bringing services closer. Surrounding communities would be economically helped by getting jobs and being able to sell their products like crafts. Community development was seen as a means to reducing pressure on parks and promotes a more positive attitude towards having parks conserved plus other tourism sites. The study further found that there was need to cater for the environment through tree planting and waste management. Drivers too noted a need to rest and to service their vehicles. The study recommended the idea of one stop refreshment centres to be implemented all over Rwanda highways. Such installations would promote a positive mind-set about visiting parks and other tourism sites which would in the long run build tourism. The study further envisions that tourism would sustain biodiversity conservation because people travel on roads to get to and from Rwanda's National parks, museums, visiting heritage sites, holding picnics in sites away from home and doing business.*

**Keywords:** Branding; Highway stop center; Landscaping; Tourism; Biodiversity.

## Introduction

According to Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Rwanda is experiencing one of the fastest economic developments in Africa (RDB, 2012). This economic development is likely to result into increased travel either business oriented, recreational or tourism oriented both by Rwandans and foreigners. Most of these reasons of travel involve money and indeed are potential sources of revenue (Mincofin, 2015). Rwanda has in the past improved its road network quality (RDB, 2012; ADBG, 2013). Tarmac has indeed extended far into the rural areas. Some of these are roads that lead to tourist sites and heritage sites. Despite all this development, rest areas and other roadside facilities are still lacking to offer reliable services and facilities to travelers.

Refreshment areas on highways are common in the United States, Canada, Australia, and parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia. In South Africa they are referred to as Ultra City (Gaigher, 2012). Highways that support high volume of traffic need refreshing centers for travelers as well as being an employment hub for the local community (TRMS, 2015; Gaigher, 2012). This project views construction of high way refreshing centres to be a one stop centre that offers services to travelers; these services which include fuel at stations, car service, pharmacies, restaurants, restrooms, parking and, most often, a hotel or a motel. The study focused on upcountry roads which are vied by tourists and other travelers.

The existing refreshing centres in Rwanda are offering majorly food. The notable one is at Nyamagabe along Musanze road. There is no one stop centre refreshing centre where travelers can refuel, service their vehicles, refresh themselves, rest, get food medicine among others. Majorly most travelers ply routes with high tourism potential. Even the Rwanda Transport Sector Review and Action Plan does not appear to further the installation of such refreshment centres (ADBG, 2013). Yet this project viewed such installations as an inevitable development towards tourism, business, biodiversity conservation, community development among others. Rwanda is said to rely more on the tourism sector as source of revenue (Rwanda, 2009). Vuuren & Slabbert (2011) posit that tourism worldwide is seen as the fastest and largest growing industry. They further alleged that this sector strongly influences the economy of a country.

Most of the travelling in Rwanda to the countryside is by Road (ADBG, 2013; PTPAS, 2012). Traveling is the movement from one place to another depending on one's needs and intentions need. (Wong, *et al.*, 2013). The reasons of travel are diverse. People have been known to have a need for change in scenery, others for tourism, research, vacation, business among others. Inland traveling in Africa is dominated by road transport (Wong, *et al.*, 2013). Its advantage is having a chance to see the scenery at close range. It however becomes a challenge for travelers to continue travelling without rest. That is why this undertaking came into being.

The good road network Rwanda has according to ADBG (2013) is a trend to the right direction. However, it will always be haunted by absence of one stop refreshing centres on the highways to cater for travelers as is a rational idea by Gaigher (2012). Traveling requires having an organised refreshing centre where travelers can refresh themselves. (TRMS, 2015).

Through brainstorming and secondary research, we thought of a centre to even offer a lot of opportunities like medical services. Traveling exposes people to many health risks (WHO, 2005). Among these is Diarrhea and Malaria. The likelihood of exposure to disease is high in the countryside in tropical regions depending on the period of visit and the behaviour and lifestyle of the traveler according to (WHO, 2012). This is why this venture envisioned designing a centre with almost all basic needs primary health care facilities at a highway refreshing centre. It becomes crucial for travelers to have a place where they go to address health needs away from the main stream hospitals. Such facilities are still lacking on Rwanda highways.

Basing on the lack of a one stop refreshment centre, we explored the possibility of creating one with international standards through using of landscape design and branding. A branded one stop refreshing centre was viewed as a means of providing travelers with a non-regrettable experience. Branding was viewed by this undertaking to involve signage which could make the whole area communicating business; this all together would be an innovation which would eventually brand the tourism sector of Rwanda. In this regard branding the one stop refreshing centres needs to live up the standards of excellence so as to place one's self in a favorable position. Building an image through branding procedure was one of the long-term goals of undertaking.

It fits to paint design as being a bridge to all activities, economic, environment and nation building. Through its job opportunities are created. In here, design is also viewed as a means to improving tourism potential, rising the revenue from tourism, creating jobs for local community among others. In this submission we lastly redraw the real shape between design and its role of bridging and actualising all innovation. This reassessment is important because through it we overturn misconceptions which have developed over time about design's role in development.

## **Literature Review**

The branded one stop highway refresh centre on a major highway and its relationship to tourism, environment, biodiversity and economic prosperity of the nation is the foundation of this review. It is guided by opinions that design is the common denominator to a country's development. Through innovation

design, the discipline has an impact on economy. The project itself is design having an impact on national development and also hinges on the environment and other ecological implications.

What is a one stop refreshment centre? This is answered by Tint, *et al.*, (2013:01). They call it a Highway Rest Centre. They further refer to it as a public facility, located next to a large thoroughfare such as a highway, expressway, or freeway at which drivers and passengers can rest, or refuel without exiting on to secondary roads. Among the services one could get are park-like areas, fuel stations, restroom and restaurants. Tint and company deviate from the intentions of this research by omitting services such as medical, food, shops, craft shops among others. Further to this, this undertaking viewed such centers in a tourism and environment perspective; the authors continue to fall short of emphasizing how the surrounding communities are going to benefit and how their livelihoods might be improved as a result of such development projects.

Much as this assists in the giving this review a definition of centers on the highway, it falls short of the recognition of the one stop highway centre from a purely tourist and community based perspective, the environmental impact and biodiversity facilitation. However, Tint and partner's hold similar views with this study when an issue of driver fatigue is addressed on both sides. Driver fatigue is said to be the main cause of accidents (ETSC, 2001). This fatigue might cause drowsy driving which is related to driving for quite a long time without resting. (Tint, Maung, & Wiyiti, 2013). According to Tint, *et al.* (2013), passengers and drivers are also prone to health related problems during travel. That is why primary health care and pharmacies were incorporated in our project as inevitable ingredients of the proposed installation.

The installed one stop refreshing centre is a form of business, like other business outlets the installation needs branding and signage. Todor (2014) asserts that a brand is the name and symbols that identify the foundation of a bond with the consumer. It is the foundation of a promise to the consumer about the products and services. He further punctuates this assertion by saying that if operated properly, branding creates value and influence. He concludes by emphasizing that branding, entirely, is key for any enterprise just because a company's brand is what distinguishes it from its rivals.

Todor (2014)'s submission holds a similar view with other writers who believe that branding adds confidence in consumers of an item, service among others (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). Consumers are individuals who are enticed by a nice and trustworthy brand. The trustworthy of the brand breeds a positive brand image and has major function in generating brand loyalty (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). This is among the reason why a branded one stop refreshing centre as viewed by this undertaking was one which would build brand loyalty amongst travelers and hence impart a permanent impression in the traveler's mind. The impression of "Rwanda is excellent" will be an axis towards building the country's tourist potential. This undertaking in this regard views one stop refreshing centres as an incentive which if elevated to international level, would be a source of revenue and will possibly contribute to growth.

It was assumed by the study that the tourists visiting Rwanda have a background of branding and the story of building a brand image. Having facilities which build a brand image of a sector like tourism needs debate this regard. Several businesses, multinationals have realised the significance of their brand names and are trying to establish a good brand reputation (Stine, 1990; Todor, 2014). Todor (2014:03) gives a description of branding as "A set of tangible and intangible attributes, symbolized by a trademark (name, logo, etc.) which operated properly, creates value and influence". To be influential in the market a brand image is vital. Basing on this submission, image is everything when it comes to targeting revenue.

Brand development and creating a distinctive image and present a new tourism positioning for Rwanda is possibly the way forward. This is to design and highlight Rwanda's competitive advantages in the areas of wildlife/eco-tourism, activity and adventure travel through establishing yet another opportunity aimed at creating a good brand image for Rwanda.

The branding of the site and its services is a function of Signage. CSC (2010) in their manual *Global Workplace Standards*, signage is the representation of an organisation, or a wayfinder meant to assist people to locate services, locations among others. Signage is meant to have been specifically developed to support and reflect what the brand is all about. It is meant to send a clear message to the users (WSDT, 2016). To minimise visual distraction is the motive of engaging signage in the branding of the one stop refreshing centre WSDT concludes.

The functions of branding and signage are interrelated with the landscape design of the project and installed infrastructure. This is because it helps to communicate the services offered and to signal to the road users about what is taking place at a distance. This helps the driver in managing their behavior on the road in an attempt to minimise accidents. However, such road signs signaling drivers is the work of the town council as outlined by ADBG (2013). Rwanda road sign control attests to this by saying that the work of road signs and warning on the highway itself is the work of the city council (Rwanda, 2001). The installation of warning road signs is therefore beyond the scope of this undertaking.

The introduction of new facilities in an environment comes with a lot of challenges and new things to learn. Among these is studying the environment and the changes going to be introduced to it. A Good environment implies the overall well-being of individuals, communities and society at large. It is human nature that people become inquisitive about new changes in their environment. Environment precautions are said to be a necessity where unnecessary tree removal for new infrastructure needs to be accessed. (NC, 2016).

Anyaegbunum *et al.*, (2004) emphasise community participation and involvement of community members in projects brought to them. Against this backdrop, this project took heed by considering community members in the proposed area as part of the respondents. The authors highlight the community in this regard is being in making the project a sustainable venture. Sustainability however comes with new changes which are indeed depletion to their natural habitat. Among the items to be cleared are trees, vegetation and clearing land. Tree felling is illegal in Rwanda (The New times, 2017). The forest is seen an ecological right which is seen to have a place economically in Rwanda (Rwanda, 2010). That is the reason why this policy is strict a guarding tree as they are viewed as support to the livelihoods of Rwandans.

Tree felling is seen by the policy as to be impacting negatively on Rwanda's pace towards the course and goals set in the Vision 2020 (Rwanda, 2010:01). The policy further bases on the conference, Earth Summit of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992 which emphasised tree planting on every available land in order to minimise desertification, erosion, climate change, degradation of water sources among others. To punctuate the significance of forest and trees, it has been emphasised in the report (Rwanda, 2010:13) that, ecologically and physically fragile areas; special care shall be taken to conserve ecologically fragile areas in order to shield the biodiversity therein and to protect areas prone to soil erosion and landslides. Whilst this is true, the installation of the one stop refreshing center is not leaving vegetation cover intact it will tamper with trees although the project itself is believed to be aimed at improving the tourist industry. To be in line with respecting the ecology the landscaping will ensure a green environment is restored.

The project of putting up a one stop refreshing centre would require getting permission to fell trees basing on the regulatory framework in the (Rwanda, 2009). To work within this framework, it was assumed that the design needed to be entirely friendly to the environment through landscape design by introducing new trees to replace those which are removed during project implementation. This is done to reflect on the objectives of *The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* where sustainability was key (UN, 1992).

Although the study was to touch on the trees, it was foreseen that a need of a one stop refreshing centre as a means of taping tourist confidence was vital. Building tourist confidence is what possibly the Rwanda Tourism Policy appears to call countering negative perceptions about Rwanda (Rwanda, 2009). The tourism

industry has been one of the sectors identified to bring in sizeable revenue to the country. To side with this notion, the idea of a one stop refresh centre makes it relevant venture.

Access to Rwanda country side has been responded to through making roads which are good. (Rwanda, 2012). The introduction of a new infra structure means new safety measures for road users. This is purely a role played by other organisations beyond this project. It is Rwanda Transport Sector Review and Action Plan (ADB, 2013), which has the right to roadside management.

Normally installed facilities introduced have consumption of food and other materials. The byproduct of this is waste. For the purpose of this study, wastes were defined as are byproducts which are disposed after being used. They byproducts may be discarded anywhere or disposed off in a designated area. The designs after the site analysis saw a need for waste management provision. This is in line with other town's worldwide (Leone & Fabio, 1997). Waste management is a wide topic to be handled exhaustively here. The scope from which we operated was to design a functional and up to standard one stop refreshing Centre based on international standards. For this reason, we borrowed a leaf from Leone & Fabio (1997) to go into Waste to energy. To be a project of sustainability, biogas installations were incorporated in the design. Biogas is said to be a gaseous fuel usually composed of methane, formed by the fermentation of organic matter such waste from humans, domestic animals among others (Horváth *et al.*, 2006). This gas according to Horváth and partners, could also be produced from various organic waste flow or as a byproduct from industrial processes. It was expected that a lot of waste would accumulate. To put it to proper use, and conforming this project to renewable energy, it was seen as prudent to incorporate the biogas as an annex in the overall design. It was anticipated according to Horváth *et al.*, (2006), that this would save on the energy consumption from hydro electric power.

Marketing and awareness and awareness play a centre stage in the roles of the one stop refreshment centre. Rwanda needs to become more visible as a tourism destination, by providing information about the tourism attractions, products and services, and making it a competitive. It is through design that such prospects are realised. Projects which are brought in an area are said bring about prosperity of people staying around.

## **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Nyamagabe district, Kitabi sector in Rwanda by making a site analysis and coming up with a mood board. The study involved ideation and brainstorming on what are the components of a refreshing centre intended to be established amongst communities. The study looked into possible safety measures of the community and intended users through an elaborate site visiting and inquiries. This involved studying existing refreshing centre, Nyangarama, Rukomo, and Rulindo district on the Kigali-Musanze-Rubavu road the study further fore saw the role of the community in which this facility was going to be made.

The study was divided into two:

- i) Site analysis which involved making a mood board and establishing what the current situation about road side refreshing centre is all about.
- ii) Design Process which involved making visual proposals. The design process involved two wings: 1). Site development and landscaping; 2). Branding and Signage of the site. The design was made to blend in with the local landscape and more emphasis was put into green design. The proposed design is rich in green vegetation. This was done in order to replace trees according to the policy guidelines in National Forestry Policy (Rwanda, 2010).
- iii) The social component involving data collection of opinions of users and their expectations which was termed as a User survey. The sampling technique used was stratified. Within each category structured questionnaires were administered. Since these were self administered, further probing for information relevant to the study was done using in-depth interviews.

The respondents involved:

- i. Heavy truck drivers
- ii. Public transport drivers and passengers
- iii. Tourists and tourist guides
- iv. Communities living around the site

The data collected was safely kept and recordings were transcribed. Data was analysed using atlas ti7.

### **Outcomes**

This study established that there are two refreshing centres Nyirangarama's in Rulindo and at hadji's in Nyanza. Even these don't qualify being called one stop refreshing centres. They don't have facilities like fueling centre, resting provisions, parking among others. The standard deviates from one this project intended to promote. The community members had an impression of creation of an opportunity where they could sell their agricultural produce to passengers who stop in their vehicles. This however contrasts with this study's objectives.

The seemingly viable option was that the nearby communities just supply foodstuffs and other produce other than rushing to traveler's cars. It was further found that communities had expectations of getting employment. This is congruent with the literature review which highlighted that projects established within communities contribute to economic gain of the nearby community by through creation of job opportunities (TRMS, 2015). TRMS notion becomes plausible in this regard. This is because Kitabi sector for example, has a vocational training center alongside 12 years basic education school. A sizeable number of youths do migrate to urban areas to look for jobs. The proposed site is anticipated to provide youths with jobs.

It was further found out that by the nearby communities produce artifacts and other crafts. They take long to realise sales. A one stop refreshment centre to be introduced would boost their livelihoods by creating ready market to their products. This would also possibly help the tourists to get items as memory guide to their expeditions.

Truck drivers and tour guides all concurred that there was need of a centre where they can have food and refuel their vehicles. The fact that the available stop centres didn't provide this gave this study confidence to proceed with design proposals. These two respondents further mentioned that there was need to have medical outlets. Having a medical outlet or pharmacy installed in the project meant that the travelers with malaise and other minor ailments could be catered for en route to their destinations. Tourist and tour guides mentioned that availability of automated teller machines (ATMs) was so vital in that it would iron out financial insecurity when they are away from the major towns. This means that the centre having these would be crucial as an incentive to those going for business on that route and to the travelers going for holiday or tourism. This implies that banking services were vital if such facility were to be installed. This finding was an asset to the design process which kept on evolving based on the needs mentioned in the survey.

The tourists and tour guides emphasised the importance of way finders on a site, the branded site would be fine to define what Rwanda can provide. They only visited places which are on the map they are given. This means that anything unbranded and not on the map did not attract them. This assertion implies that a non-branded place looks deserted and strange even if it offers the services like food, pharmacy, vehicle service among others. Branding was found out to be an awareness tool as to what is happening at the site. This finding augres well with what Hampf & Lindberg-Repo (2011) testify. Signage was found to be the quickest universal communication for everyone on and off the road. Drivers for example saw a need for signage to be able to know which services were available.

### **Conclusions**

The one stop refreshment centre would give motorists and chance to stop, revitalize, and carry on later when they are fresh. It is hoped that this would reduce on fatigue-based accidents, eventually the road will be a safe infrastructure to use. It will further help to augment road safety. Like other businesses a one stop refreshment centre will never thrive without marketing themselves. Marketing becomes efficient when branding is attached on the service and product being marketed. Brands can give a boost every stage of the journey a traveler encounters by creating a cocktail of experiences. It is therefore important to introduce branding to one stop refreshment centers in Rwanda.

A one stop highway refreshing centre is one way to demonstrate how design indirectly affects the economy. Design is a major bridge for most user related problems this is because from the findings we have seen that it actualises concepts into tangible objects. It brings about new opportunities where many people do benefit accordingly through coming up with new innovations.

As this study reveals, design assists branding to improve the country's image. Branded things are a confidence builder, to people like tourists; it is a way of trapping their loyalty of those receiving service. Tourism industry will thrive on design because it brings about new dimensions and new values. Design influences branding to seduce the target groups to have permanent impression on the branded items; this increase brand loyalty among consumers. Tourism a source of revenue in Rwanda (Rwanda, 2009), will always move hand in hand with design. This is because it is design concepts that come up with facilities which mould tourist sites into areas worth visiting. Branding punctuates this through creating trust. The country's image is therefore built. This good image spreads through and builds the host country's reputation. The tourists themselves will not keep it a secret if they get good services in a properly branded refreshing centre. They will indeed do the marketing for the nation's tourism for free.

For Rwanda to gain sizeable revenue from sectors that involve traveling: tourism industry, business among others, design innovation, improved service delivery and hospitality are crucial. In order for tourism industry to grow therefore, there is need for favourable travel arrangements for those intending to visit the country (Costa & Eccles, 1996). These favourable conditions are further punctuated by reliable road network with accessories like one stop refreshment centres which incidentally Rwanda has achieved (RDB, 2012).

The Traveler's mindset looks for convenience during travel. The travelers attach value to what impressed them and compares it with other experiences. Incentives such as one stop highway refreshing centres will always be an unforgettable experience which will be broadcast by the traveler to a wider area. They will do the marketing themselves about the tourism incentives. To Rwanda this becomes a continuous mode towards revenue collection, job creation, biodiversity conservation among others.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommended that the scale model of this project be blown to real life situation and that the idea of one stop refreshment centres to be put into practice all over Rwanda highways. It is hoped that by installing such facilities it would encourage even local people to visit parks and other tourism sites. This would build tourism and help the economy in the long run. The study further hopes that tourism would sustain biodiversity conservation because a change in local peoples' mindset would induce travel on roads to get to and from Rwanda's National parks, museums, visiting heritage sites, holding picnics in sites away from home and doing business.

The place would eventually grow it is therefore recommended that a fire fighting department be introduced together with a police post to handle crime related issues. Lastly, this undertaking recommends that in case it is implemented, a biogas system be installed at the facility for it to be self sustaining and the recycling of human and other waste into reusable energy. The information provided by the relevant literature attests to this belief (Horváth *et al*, 2006).

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