



Planning for Eco-tourism Development in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Options

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore past and current contexts of eco-tourism in Zimbabwe and present options that are worth considering for the realisation of successful eco-tourism in the country. This is against the background that eco-tourism is key to local and national development as well as a fundamental climate change mitigation strategy. However, the major drawbacks and options for eco-tourism in Zimbabwe remain not fully explored. To find out the reality, the study engaged a case study method that was based on extensive literature and document review. The study used seven local cases; five are

from larger towns and cities namely: Harare, Bulawayo, Chipinge, Victoria Falls, Mutare and the other two were selected growth points in Mashonaland West Province namely Siakobvu and Magunje. Evidence from the sources indicates that eco-tourism in Zimbabwe has been promoted since the late 1980s but it is yet to significantly meet the goals of preservation of pristine areas and improve livelihoods of local communities. It has also emerged that climate change presents both threats and new opportunities to eco-tourism at both global and national scales. It is concluded that eco-tourism is crucial for both economic development and ecological preservation but remains a sleeping giant that remains untapped in Zimbabwe. It is recommended that government, private sector, NGOs and community members collaborate to revive eco-tourism in Zimbabwe. Strategic policies and plans which amplify the active participation of local communities are essential for the realisation of eco-tourism goals.

Keywords: *Eco-tourism, Climate change, Local community participation, Livelihoods*



1. Introduction

This study aims to unpack the hurdles and options for eco-tourism planning in Zimbabwe as a way of feeding into vibrant eco-tourism policies that will boost the tourism sector in Zimbabwe. The eco-tourism concept has been adopted in many countries worldwide as a shift from mass tourism which was being criticised for being unsustainable (Diamantis & Johnson, 2004). Though the concept has succeeded in some countries like Kenya, South Africa, Australia and Costa Rica, in Zimbabwe this segment is still contested. Stronza (2008,3) posits that;

“tourism is a mammoth industry that generates an estimated US\$300 billion in annual revenues and nearly 10% of all employment in the world”.

Similarly, the United Nations (2018) asserts that tourism has become one the fastest growing sectors globally and it is estimated that by the year 2020 the sector will generate 1.6 billion tourists. However, challenges emanating from conventional mass tourism have been encountered.

Unlike mass tourism, eco-tourism is a panacea to some of the challenges raised by

mass tourism as it introduces benefits to local communities at the same time preserving pristine and natural areas. Eco-tourism is esteemed as a mitigation approach to climate change as it promotes carbon storage by forests, maintains local hydrological cycles and reduces deforestation rates (Moore, 2015). If adequately planned, eco-tourism can be harnessed to generate much needed national and local development (Spenceley, 2008). However, in the Zimbabwean context eco-tourism is yet to deliver meaningful development despite its widespread adoption in the late 1990s and 2000s, though scholars like Chiutsi et al., (2011) argue that the segment is still in its infancy stages.

1.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

The study adopts the eco-tourism concept, sustainable tourism and the modernisation theories as parental philosophies underlying eco-tourism. The first concept is eco-tourism. Though eco-tourism has long existed in the history of men the concept became more familiar with the rise of environmental awareness in managing tourist destinations during the 1980s. In West America, eco-tourism has long existed since the 18th century with the



exploration of species and setting up of national parks (Ballantyne and Parker, 2013). In Ecuador, research interest in biological species and natural features also stimulated the rise of business in tours guiding researchers undertaking nature studies and thereby contributing to the rise of small tourism as a business (Wood, 2002). In the context of African countries, the concept of eco-tourism has risen as a panacea to address issues of wildlife-human conflict and over-exploitation of natural resources.

By definition, eco-tourism can be considered as a subset of sustainable tourism (Holtz and Edwards, 2004). Eco-tourism can be defined by Brandon (1996,5) as;

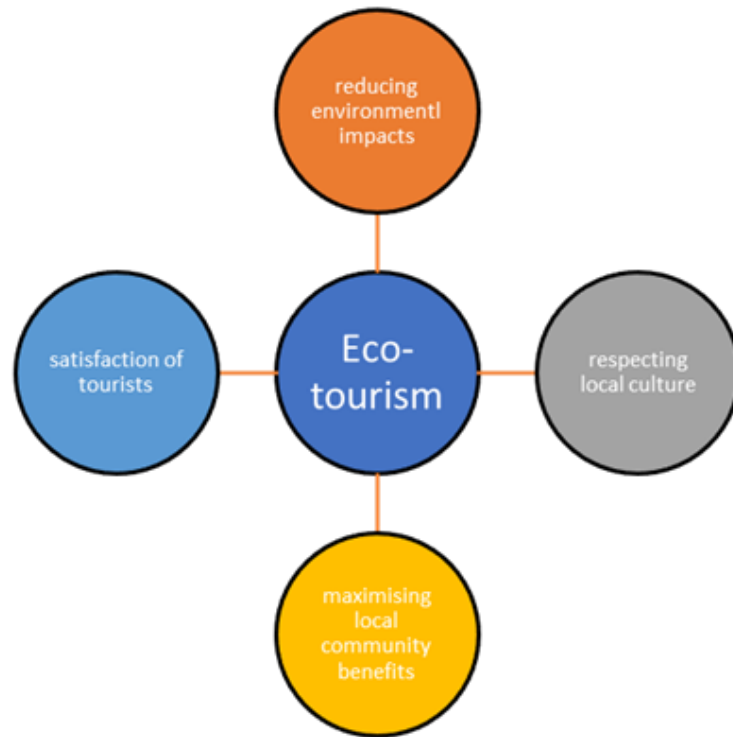
“responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people”.

This definition is similar to the International Eco-tourism Society’s definition of eco-tourism (Fennell, 2007). Eco-tourism can also be defined as nature or culture-based tourism- usually defined by small scale, local ownership and more sustainable than mass tourism (Higham,

2007). It can also be defined as nature-based tourism aiming at low impact consumption whilst benefits and scale are often local (Fennell, 2007) though some eco-tourism programmes are international. Thus, eco-tourism can occur effectively across all scales given that the appropriate scale varies by the size of the area, local population size and sensitivity of the ecosystem (Ferne, 1993).

Although consensus is yet to be reached on defining eco-tourism (Sharpley, 2000; Mader, 2003) three common aims emerge. These are conservation of ecological and cultural assets as well as livelihoods improvement in local communities (Higham, 2007; Van der Bank and Van der Bank, 2018). However, the magnitude of the achievement of these broad objectives hinges on the structure and functioning of the eco-tourism system (Ferne, 1993). Furthermore, the success of eco-tourism also depends on a variety of principles. These are illustrated in figure 1.1. In the context of this study, these principles serve as models for assessing eco-tourism experiences across the globe.

Figure 1 . Pillars for Eco-tourism



Source: Fernie (1993)



There are also two basic models of eco-tourism which are hard and soft eco-tourism. These explain the relationship and interests between humans and nature which shape eco-tourism. Under hard eco-tourism, eco-tourists have a deep and long-term interest in nature and ecology. As a consequence, the tourists are prepared to experience whatever form of discomfort associated with access to an eco-tourist resource. On the other hand, soft eco-tourism entails casual interests. Soft eco-tourists are less prepared for discomforts and their interest is short term (Orams, 2001). The relevance of these models is that understanding the behavioural characteristics of eco-tourists is necessary as it influences motivations and interaction between tourists (both local and international). These interests shape the outcomes of eco-tourism.

Another theoretical construct is sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism became fully conceptualised about three decades ago (Sharpley, 2010). Tourism as a development activity has to respond to fundamental principles of sustainable development which requires meeting the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Holtz and Edwards, 2004). The response was necessitated by the international mass tourism boom in the 1960s which was associated with destructive environmental and socio-cultural effects (Dowling & Fennell, 2004; Sharpley, 2010). Thus, the concept of sustainable tourism was adopted in the early 1990s to redress the negative effects of destructive socio-cultural and environmental effects that were resulting from mass tourism (Sharpley, 2010). Sustainable tourism activities should meet economic, social and environmental needs whilst preserving cultural integrity, ecological diversity, biological processes and livelihood systems (Holtz and Edwards, 2004). Sustainable eco-tourism, therefore, promotes strategies aimed at ensuring that the needs of present tourists are met without jeopardising the needs of future tourist.

The modernisation theory is also relevant in providing a theoretical foundation for eco-tourism in this study. As a development theory, the modernisation theory is premised on economic growth which, transform societies from the traditional age of mass consumption through stages (Rostow, 1960). As argued by Perroux (1955) economic benefits at the centre are expected to trickle down to the underdeveloped regions. Eco-tourism yields economic and environmental benefits beyond local boundaries. Sharpley (2010) refers it to as "tourism-induced development". Thus, through the benefits which are derived from eco-tourism, not only will societies advance economically, but these communities also become more resilient.



2. Literature review

This section presents the literature review of global and regional experiences and trends. Challenges, successes and opportunities of global and regional eco-tourism are explored and discussed.

2.1 Global Experiences, Context and Trends

The global tourism planning industry continues to experience sustained growth, though at the expense of the environment, ecology and local communities (Buckley, 2003; Dowling and Fennell, 2004). This has forced governments and policymakers to adopt new tourism approaches and segments such as sustainable tourism, cultural tourism and eco-tourism (Diamantis & Johnson, 2004; Dowling & Fennell, 2004). Eco-tourism originated from Europe, North America and Oceania and later spread to Asia, Africa and South America (Buckley, 2003). International development authorities such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) were instrumental in planning and sponsoring eco-tourism initiatives in Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions (Sofield & Li, 2004). However, the proliferation of eco-tourism to developing countries' destinations is not uncontested. Despite the undoubted expertise of foreign experts, eco-tourism plans drafted by these development agencies were rarely implemented. A study by Mader (2003) exemplifies numerous USAID sponsored eco-tourism programmes in Latin America as only existent on paper. Reasons cited for both limited implementation and sustenance of such programmes include; incompatibility with local cultural values and existing government priorities as well as poor local expertise and capacity (Mader, 2003; Sofield & Li, 2004).

Though eco-tourism has received global adoption in continents such as Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Australia, the most successful eco-tourism destinations are situated in Canada, Australia, Central America, South America and the United States of America (USA) (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008; Stronza, 2008). The successes are mainly a product of coordination among different stakeholders such as the central government, local governments, private sector, the tourism industry, NGOs, local communities and research institutions (Ceballos-



Lascurain, 2008). The other success factor is shared interests between the private sector and the government (ibid).

Eco-tourism policies are also instrumental in guiding tourism. Although most countries lack clear cut eco-tourism standards and rigorous eco-tourism certification, Australia and Nepal are exceptional. Australia is one nation with advanced eco-tourism certification systems (Lück & Kirstges, 2003; Mader, 2003). The Eco-tourism Association of Australia (EAA) guides conceptualising and designing eco-tourism policy used to guide government actions, decision-making, funding and eco-tourism plans (Zeppel, 2004). This enhances the management and attractiveness of the country's assets- (flora, fauna and coral reefs) to ecotourists (Zeppel, 2004). Similarly, Nepal has crafted policies aimed at harmonising the interaction between local communities, tourists and the environment (Mader, 2003). On the contrary, eco-tourism policies had not been instituted in about 60 regional tourism offices in North America by the early 2000s because of disagreements on the definition and scope of eco-tourism products (Dowling & Fennell, 2004).

Looking at the eco-tourism trends, Stronza (2008) argues that in comparison to the development of eco-tourism in Europe, Central America and Asia, North America lags. Europe for instance has active and rigorous eco-tourism activities (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008). Contrastingly, weak relationships exist between the eco-tourism community and travel operators in the Papoose Creek Lodge in Montana, USA although significant research efforts to improve the operationalisation of eco-tourism were initiated in 2005 (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008).

Besides poor coordination and interventionist models of eco-tourism, climate change is also amongst the challenges confronting marine and coastal eco-tourism across countries like Canada, Australia, Mexico, Dubai, Iceland, and Bangladesh among other countries) (Jones and Phillips, 2017). Changes in global warming prompt degeneration of existing tourist attractions like coral reefs and at the same time affect the productivity of fauna and flora—thereby altering the eco-tourism package of local communities (World Tourism Organisation, 2008). A typical example is an acidification of coral reefs in the Maldives (Prideaux & Pabel, 2018).



2.2 Regional Experiences, Context and Trends

Eco-tourism was embraced as a key development strategy for most African countries about 30 years back (Spenceley, 2008). The impetus behind the adoption of eco-tourism in Africa was the recognition of eco-tourism as a key generator of foreign exchange and jobs particularly for the locals (Chiutsi et al., 2011). Africa has recorded significant success in eco-tourism because of wildlife diversity and the abundance of charismatic wildlife species. Eco-tourism is one of the fastest-growing component of the tourism industry in Africa contributing the main share to Africa's 2% tourism growth (Backman & Munanura, 2015; United Nations, 2018). Eco-tourism in Africa is mostly promoted in wildlife management areas with companies such as Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA) and Wilderness Safaris Southern Africa (WSSA) instrumental in promoting eco-tourism (Spenceley, 2008; Backman & Munanura, 2015). Both CCA and WSSA focus on community equity, local economic development and education and awareness and manage eco-tourism infrastructure (game lodges) across six African countries (Buckley, 2003). Some of the African countries that recording phenomenal success in eco-tourism include Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Botswana (Stronza, 2008).

Several African governments have direct policies that promote eco-tourism (Weaver, 2001; Stronza, 2008). These policies influence the flow of eco-tourism benefits to different stakeholders. In Guinea-Bissau for example, Second National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2011–2015) recognises eco-tourism as one of the instruments in curbing unemployment (United Nations, 2018). In Namibia, the progressive conservancy policies give local people the rights to manage and benefit from natural wildlife resources (Spenceley, 2008).

Botswana has had mixed impacts regarding biodiversity conservation and livelihood improvements as a result of policy (Backman & Munanura, 2015). Successful eco-tourism projects in the Okavango delta owe to the participation and support of numerous stakeholders in planning, designing, and implementing eco-tourism programmes (Mbaiwa, 2015). On the other hand, poor integration of tourism to the rural economies or the indigenous livelihood activities of communities is cited as a limitation to the impact of eco-tourism in Botswana (Mbaiwa, 2017). Moreover, the banning of safari hunting in the northern part of the country since 2014 also reduced local livelihood benefits to communities (ibid, 2017).

In Zimbabwe, a typical eco-tourism initiative is the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) which was adopted in the late 1980s (Marunda &



Chaneta, 2014). The programme contributed to resolving poaching and wildlife-human conflicts (Duffy, 2000). However, due to the political volatility of the country in 2000 and 2002 as well as conflicts between resource management agencies, this program suffered from the withdrawal of financial support from the private sector, donors and the government (Buckley, 2003; Frost & Bond, 2007; Marunda & Chaneta, 2014).

3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted the case study method as the strategy for exploring eco-tourism experiences as well as opportunities and challenges in Zimbabwe and across the globe. The 5 towns considered are Harare, Bulawayo, Chipinge, Mutare and Victoria Falls. Harare and Bulawayo were selected because they are the major cities in Zimbabwe. Victoria Falls, Mutare and Chipinge are some of the internationally recognized tourist attraction centres and therefore were selected to explore the experiences and opportunities of eco-tourism in the areas. Nyaminyami in Siakobvu Growth Point and Hurungwe in Magunje Growth Point was selected mainly because they are some of the areas where the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) programme was initiated.

This desktop review utilised data gathered from literature and document review. Literature review facilitated the drawing of lessons from global and regional experiences. Document review was mostly used to explore local cases from selected sites in Zimbabwe whereby past and present experiences were traced. The findings of these experiences together with lessons from global and regional literature provided the basis for establishing eco-tourism opportunities in Zimbabwe. A narrative analysis of data was adopted.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents results from 5 urban areas and 2 growth points that were selected for this study.

4.1 Harare

Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, has some significant tourist resort centres that can be used to promote eco-tourism (Vumbunu & Manyanhaire, 2010; NewsDay, 2018). Some of the sites and places include the balancing rocks in Epworth, Domboshava heritage in Harare peri-urban, Mukuvusi Woodlands, Lake Chivero Recreational Park and the Jacaranda streets



(Vumbunu & Manyanhaire, 2010). Apart from these natural related assets, Harare's high-density suburbs like Mbare also host great potential development of township tourism where local culture and art centres are products that can be offered (Musavengana, 2018).

However, the capital faces enormous challenges that inhibit eco-tourism. The capital suffers infrastructural challenges ranging from unmaintained infrastructure to infrastructure capacity deficiency (Dohwe & Kwangwama, 2019) as well as grim congestion (NewsDay, 2018). This deters tourism in general by complicating the ability or cost of accessing particular tourism destinations, let alone eco-tourism (Christie, et al., 2014; NewsDay, 2018). Furthermore, poor domestic and international marketing strategies have resulted in pristine areas lying idle (Vumbunu & Manyanhaire, 2010). Rather, the pristine areas in the capital are being depleted by anthropogenic factors. For example, the Chiremba Balancing Rocks and monuments in Domboshava suffer from vandalism, veld fires and insecurity of visitors (The Patriot, 2016). The locals are yet to benefit economically from the site. Moreover, the continual building of residential settlements on the borders of such resorts is turning the places into eyesores (ibid).

Additionally, uncontrolled urbanisation and expansion of Harare have resulted in the obliteration of natural heritage (Mbiba, 2017). Flora and fauna that would otherwise be used to promote eco-tourism are threatened by human activities including deforestation, human settlement water pollution and fish poaching in water bodies (The Patriot, 2016). Developments on wetlands have been noticed in Harare (Mbiba, 2017). Settlements in wetlands in urban areas in Harare have been increasing since post-2000. This is prompted by poor institutionalisation where political bigwigs subvert the role of the municipality (Musavengana, 2018). Of significant note, is the controversial development of the Chinese Shopping Mall near the national sports centre which received considerable debate from environmentalist that it was constructed on natural areas that are supposed to be preserved (Mbiba, 2017). Arguably, mechanisms for locals to benefit from tourism activities are still weak in Harare.

4.2 Bulawayo

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city has dozens of tourist attraction sites, and the city can be likened to cities like Beijing, Barcelona and Paris in terms of tourism opportunities (Daily News, 2018). Bulawayo has a complete package that includes unique cultures and



heritage, eco-tourism natural water reserves, safari tourism, urban tourism and cruise tourism (Gulinck, et al. 2001). Some of the tourist attraction sites in Bulawayo include Matobo National Park, Khami Ruins, Railway Museum, Museum of Natural History, Bulawayo Amphitheatre, and Bulawayo National Arts Gallery (Herald, 2012; Marunda & Chaneta, 2014;). Animal displays in the city are part of its eco-tourism assets crucial in educating the populace about the local wildlife and environment (Herald, 2012; Daily News, 2018). Thus, the eco-tourism package is diversified, though culture-related assets are emphasized (Moyo & Tichawa, 2017).

The city's complete tourism package remains untapped (Herald, 2012; Daily News, 2018). Part of the reasons explaining underutilisation includes lack of the requisite eco-tourism amenities, isolation of some of the resorts, limited participation and poor marketing of some of the pristine eco-tourism sites. Bulawayo lacks competitive eco-tourism amenities that offer a wide range of choices of activities for tourists (Daily News, 2018). Gulinck et al., (2001) argue that inefficient transport infrastructure linkages are another challenge that has resulted in the isolation of some prominent eco-tourism sites such as the Mtshabezi dam in Bulawayo. The Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZEPARU) (2013), also argue along the same lines that eco-tourism has not been fully utilised because the touristic resources are not being effectively marketed.

Other drawbacks to the success of eco-tourism are negative perceptions and lack of support by local communities. For example, a case where households are displaced to facilitate the development of a dam and also cases where there are threats to cultural values (Muzvidziwa, 2013; Moyo & Tichaaawa, 2017). Gulinck et al., (2001) highlight a case of the nature reserve adjacent to Mtshabezi dam where community members had mixed perceptions. The communities who were benefiting through fisheries and irrigation rallied behind the use of the area for eco-tourism; however, those who had no financial benefit were not in support of the project. The challenge of negative perception on the motives and benefits from eco-tourism in Bulawayo is largely attributed to the limited participation of residents in such activities (Moyo & Tichaaawa, 2017). Nonetheless, participation raises awareness and creates an increased demand for local eco-tourism.



Mutare

Mutare city, the capital of Manicaland Province, is surrounded by misty mountains and is linked to several tourist attraction sites such as Vumba Botanical Gardens, Chimanimani Mountains, Honde Valley and Christmas Pass (Tonderayi, 2000; Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). Mutare is the gateway to the tourist attraction centres in the Eastern Highland region (NewsDay, 2018).

According to the Daily News (2017), the natural and pristine areas like the Vumba/Bvumba rainforest in Mutare are being threatened by over-exploitation by individuals, communities and companies. Closely related to the exploitation of forests by communities are conflicts of land use between resettled tobacco farmers and pristine areas in Mutare (Tonderayi, 2000). Veld fires, illegal settlers and firewood poachers are causing significant damage to the pristine flora and fauna in Mutare Tonderayi (2000) adds on. Furthermore, infrastructure challenges are also prominent. Newsday (2018) argues that bad road networks linking tourist destinations in Mutare have a negative impact on the accessibility of some eco-tourism sites. Like with Bulawayo, eco-tourism in Mutare and the Eastern Highlands at large has not yet taken a firm footing despite the abundance of pristine sites in the area (Tonderayi, 2000).

Chipinge

Chipinge, an urban area in Manicaland, is endowed with natural forests that have the potential to aid both local and national development as well as preserving the forests against depletion through the adoption of the eco-tourism concept (Chiutsi et al, 2011). Chirinda Forest in Chipinge is a typical example where eco-tourism was adopted to generate income for local communities and promote sustainable resource management (Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). Other eco-tourism projects include the Mahenye Eco-tourism Venture (Jamanda Wildlife Conservancy) and the Limpopo Transfrontier Park (Zanamwe et al., 2018).

The success of eco-tourism and conservation of the forests in the late 1990s to early 2000s was attributed to positive cultural values which prohibited cutting down of specific tree species and sometimes allowed the felling of only dying plants. Furthermore, the peak was a result of financial assistance from donor communities in the 1980s to early 1990s as well as a partnership with business operators such as African Sun (Hasler, 1996; Mombeshora & Le Bel,



2010). However, the decline in the role of traditional leaders in community resource management has resulted in a loss of observance of these positive cultural practices in managing the Chirinda Forest (Mudzengi & Chiutsi, 2014). The role of local traditional leaders remains a contested terrain as some are still actively engaged in the planning of the eco-tourism adjacent to the Transfrontier Park which covers parts of Chipinge (Backman and Mananura, 2017). Even in cases where the local chiefs are responsible for managing the welfare of eco-tourism resources, allegations of unequal distribution of benefits from eco-tourism access on a partisan basis have emerged. Thus, elite capture further reduces the probability of conservative projects improving the welfare of the whole community. This is typical of not only Mahenye but other wildlife conservancies in the Mbire District (Mombeshora & Libel, 2010).

Chiutsi et al., (2011) argues that, since the post-2000 era, socio-economic benefits derived from eco-tourism in Chipinge's Mahenye Eco-tourism Venture began to decline (Chiutsi et al., 2011). Success stories of eco-tourism that were once witnessed in the late 1990s particularly in Mahenye during the peak of the CAMPFIRE programme are no longer evident in Chipinge (Frost and Bond, 2007). Consequently, there has been a decline in visitor numbers in the once-thriving Mahenye Eco-tourism Venture (Frost & Bond, 2007; Chiutsi et al, 2011; Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). Some of the causes of the decline include; the withdrawal of World Bank support in the early 2000 and the withdrawal of African Sun-following low-profit margins (Mudzengi and Chiutsi, 2014). In addition to these challenges, climate change generally resulted in the degeneration of these fauna attractions like Chirinda Forest.

Zanamwe et al (2018) raise the issue of participation as another notable challenge in the wildlife conservancies. Unlike in the case of Bulawayo where participation is restricted to municipal authorities and the private sector, in the case of the Transfrontier Park, authorities are barely part of the body governing policy formulation although the same policies have to be implemented in managing parks and wildlife conservation at local levels (Musavengane, 2018; Zanamwe et al., 2018). Usually, the local authorities responsible for implementation are often devoid of the financial and human capacity to effectively manage the resources or develop eco-tourism related business to improve livelihoods (Musavengane, 2018). As such participation of communities is relevant such that policy reflects these values and shapes the interaction between community and nature positively.



On a more positive note, despite the withdrawal of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and private companies from supporting eco-tourism in Chipinge, there are still opportunities for local entrepreneurship where eco-tourism can be led and financed by local communities in the Transfrontier Park Reserve (Chirozva, 2017). This new model of managing eco-tourism has been prompted by the adoption of the indigenisation policy (Government of Zimbabwe, 2008). However, Mombeshora and Le Bel (2010) noted an experience where the local community failed to sustainably fund an eco-tourism project handed over to it by an NGO (CIRAD). The challenge highlighted was that project running costs exceeded the value derived from the project. This calls for project management and other financial empowerment skills development of local communities for successful management of locally managed eco-tourism projects.

Victoria Falls

Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is the main tourist destination site not only in Zimbabwe but in Southern Africa (African World Heritage Fund, 2016). The magnificent Victoria Falls presents an ideal destination for eco-tourists (Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). Nearby lodges such as Gorges lodge and Victoria Falls Safari Lodge are used to promote eco-tourism. Joint ventures between private companies and community members have been used to promote eco-tourism through the use of lodges that are also actively involved in the preservation of nature (Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). However, Victoria Falls resort centres suffer from non-competitive products that are overpriced hence tourists may choose other neighbouring centres such as those in Zambia and South Africa (ibid).

The natural sites in Victoria Falls have suffered considerable damage. According to The African World Heritage Fund (2016), the pristine and natural areas in Victoria Falls suffer conservational challenges that are emanating from urban development, tourism pressure, invasive species, poaching, and water pollution and abstraction. Scoones (2016) argues that significant poaching for animals such as elephants, rhinos and buffalos and deforestation for firewood and wood carving continues to be experienced in protected areas in Victoria Falls. The African World Heritage Fund (2016) further contends that there is little cooperation



between government, the private sector and the local community thereby resulting in challenges in the management of protected areas. Moreover, hospitality infrastructure and road infrastructure continues to cripple smooth tourism in Victoria Falls and most parts of Zimbabwe by destroying ecology (flora and fauna particularly when carrying capacities are surpassed (Milanzi, 1996; NewsDay, 2018). Poor marketing strategies continue to stifle tourism and eco-tourism. This is evidenced by the observation that South Africa even marketed its tourism package including Victoria Falls as part of the package (African World Heritage Fund, 2016).

Selected Growth Points

Hurungwe district and Nyaminyami district both situated in Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe, are some of the districts in Zimbabwe that initiated eco-tourism through CAMPFIRE programmes in Zimbabwe (Chiutsi et al, 2011). The CAMPFIRE programme in its early days yielded much-needed revenues to the local community and was successful in providing the economic basis for conserving wildlife in the two districts (Scoones, 2016). However, this was short-lived (Frost and Bond, 2007). Scoones (2016) notes that the decline in the economy as well as the bankruptcy of Rural District Councils which affected crippled its revenue-sharing measures resulted in a significant decline of CAMPFIRE programmes.

Frost and Bond (2007) also noted the dominance of district councils in the CAMPFIRE programme meant that local members were simply 'supporters' but not 'owners' of the programme. The boundaries between beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project became somewhat ambiguous. Successful eco-tourism ventures should spell out the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Eco-tourism ventures that have been identified in Hurungwe and Nyaminyami Districts are Gandavaroyi and Mahwindo Falls along the Sanyati River and also around Magunje Dam. Projects that have since been set aside for eco-tourism activities include; game rearing, crocodile farming and establishment of lodges however investors are yet to be found (Herald, 2016). This presents opportunities to create a more conducive policy environment and aggressive marketing strategies.



The results presented above indicate that eco-tourism planning is important for integrating the diversity of natural, cultural, social and land-use resources (Buckley, 2003). The success of eco-tourism is hinged on the coordination between various actors that include central government, local government, the private sector and the local communities. This has been evidenced by the success stories of eco-tourism in countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Ecuador and Belize (Stronza, 2008; Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008). Contrastingly, evidence from Mahenye eco-tourism venture in Chipinge and other CAMPFIRE projects indicate that local communities alone without technical support, capacity skills development, business promotion and marketing support from time-honoured tourism enterprises will likely face hurdles in facilitating eco-tourism businesses (Chiutsi et al., 2011). This evidence supports the propositions of the modernist management theory where cooperation of both the private sector and the public improves eco-tourism management (Nipon, 2009).

Policies and programmes specifically designed for eco-tourism have proved to be useful in the success of eco-tourism. Evidence from Europe and Australia indicate that eco-tourism has been a success in those regions mainly because of active and rigorous policies, plans and programmes for eco-tourism (Stronza, 2008; Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008; Lück & Kirstges, 2003; Buckley, 2003). Policies and plans will result in tourist attraction centres and lodges being developed in a manner that attracts tourists and promotes the preservation of ecology (Buckley, 2003). Eco-tourism must allow both local communities and future visitors to continue enjoying the benefits of tourism. Striking this balance between local benefits and economic and ecological benefits requires sound policies and planning and coordination amongst various stakeholders. However, Zeppel (2004) argues that eco-tourism as a stand-alone policy and initiative will likely deliver little in terms of resource conservation. Complimentary productive economic activities are needed otherwise eco-tourism on its own will result in further damage to the environment and insignificantly contributing to local community development (Spenceley, 2008; Zeppel, 2004). Eco-tourism must be integrated into the political, economic and institutional settings (Spenceley, 2008).

The Zimbabwean CAMPFIRE programmes in early 2000 did not receive a significant number of visitors; this meant district councils and local communities had to tussle in sharing the



dwindling revenues (Frost and Bond, 2007). However, this contrasts with the principle for eco-tourism where ecotouristic resources should generate benefits for local communities (Fennie, 1993). Where benefits flow to communities, projects can be sustained in cost-effective ways.

The integrity of eco-tourism for some projects has been compromised due to the violation of principle respect and integration of local cultures and ways of life. Such has been the case in Vhumba and Chirinda Forests and also in Kenya (where the Masai people (locals) were banned from hunting in the Serengeti Reserve). Interventionist management of eco-tourism resources imposed by central governments sometimes fails to consider the linkage between local communities and ecology from which local communities livelihoods' have historically revolved around. This is exemplified by the declaration of Chirinda Forest by the Zimbabwean government as of national importance, followed by banning of communities from deriving benefits they used to get from the forest (such as religious purposes, traditional rainmaking ceremonies, deriving medicinal plants, timber) (Ndumeya, 2017). It has also emerged that climate change presents both threats and new opportunities to eco-tourism at a global and regional scale.

5. Conclusions

This paper sought to explore the experiences and opportunities of eco-tourism in Zimbabwe. An introspection of global experiences reviewed some of the avenues that can be adopted in Zimbabwe to counter the past and present challenges of eco-tourism in Zimbabwe. The widespread experiences of CAMPFIRE crippled in the early 2000s and there have been very limited national programmes on eco-tourism. Emerging from the study are three aspects namely: the underutilisation of eco-tourism in areas that have natural and pristine areas, the continued extinction and damaging of pristine areas due to neglect and incapacity by local authorities which is unsustainable and lastly the lack of coordination between various stakeholders in eco-tourism. It can be concluded that eco-tourism in Zimbabwe has not been fully explored but presents great opportunities that are worth exploring.

Based on the results and experiences in other eco-tourism ventures across the globe, several options are presented for improving the state of eco-tourism in Zimbabwe to; achieve ecological sustainability, improve the livelihoods of communities at the grassroots and



contribute to national economic development. One of these is the promulgation of clear policies to guide eco-tourism. These policies are necessary for fostering effective stakeholder coordination between the government, the private sector, the tourism industry, NGOs, grassroots communities, and research institutions. The priorities of local communities should not be underestimated. However, authorities need to strike a balance between benefits to local communities and making the tourism business financially and ecologically feasible.

In addition, marketing the potential destinations is critical for the success of eco-tourism in Zimbabwe. Instead of overly marketing popular destinations such as Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe and the Eastern Highlands, eco-tourism marketing should also advertise pristine eco-tourism destinations like the balancing rocks in Epworth to improve their visibility both locally and internationally. Eco-tourism resources should be packaged in a way that addresses the needs of international consumers whilst simultaneously addressing the needs of communities at the grassroots in the present and future.

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