CHALLENGES FACING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE IN MANAGING THEIR TOURISM ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The tourism and hospitality industry in Zimbabwe today provides an essential and noteworthy contribution to Zimbabwe’s economy in terms of employment creation and foreign currency earnings, especially now that the country does not have its own currency. The tourist attractions are however, grounded on the country’s delicate ecosystems, incorporating national parks and wildlife. The focus of this study was to investigate the premonition that the ever increasing investments in tourism in the country might result in adverse long term effects that distress developments in biodiversity and accelerate loss of wildlife. The researcher set out to identify challenges facing rural communities living within or neighbouring tourism attractions. In a bid to come up with these challenges, a survey was carried out in Zimbabwe’s major tourist resorts encompassing 145interviews. Identified challenges facing local communities were, possible acculturation, imminent commoditisation of community culture, rampant environmental degradation, unregulated ill-defined ownership of resources, inadequate project management skills amongst the communities, and prevalent lack of finance.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Community development, community education

1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe’s tourism is centred on the country’s unique attractions, comprising abundant diverse wildlife and its distinctive cultural draw cards the Great Zimbabwe ruins or the majestic Victoria Falls. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA, 2012) [1] also reports that, international arrivals peaked 1.7 million and tourism revenues increased from under 39 million in 1980 to over 749 million United States dollars in 2012. The major source markets are the USA, UK, Germany and China. This state of affairs has brought with it opportunities and challenges. More than 46 000 people are now directly employed by tourism and hospitality businesses such as game ranching, tour operations and restaurants (WTTC, 2011). [2]

1.1 Background to study

Large animal herds, especially the big five (elephants, buffalo, lions, leopards and rhinoceros) need vast expanses of land for their survival. This necessitates movement of humans from their homesteads in order to create an appropriate and large enough animal habitat. Communities in Zimbabwe have been intermittently relocated to pave way for the establishment of such national parks and the building of dams for power generation. National parks and other extremely fragile ecosystems have been enhanced in the initial stages but the advent of tourism activities poses a threat to this development. Evidently, a lot of economic benefits are being reaped out of tourism and hospitality developments, but social, environmental and cultural problems are creeping in.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Subsequent to the thrust of government’s tourism policy, more and more investments are being made in the tourism and hospitality industry. It is imperative that the challenges facing local communities be investigated.

1.3 Research objective

The objective of this study is to establish the challenges facing local communities living within the environs of national parks and tourist attractions and how they cope with the ever increasing
numbers of visitors. The advent of tourism will leave tourism footprints that affect and influence the host community culture and customs. It is the objective of this article to establish how the hosts are protecting and preserving their culture in the face of this new industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Perspectives of viewing tourism

It is widely acknowledged that tourism underpins four major important concepts:
- The temporary travel or movement of people to an unusual place or destination with a clear intention of returning home within a short space of time;
- Their motivation to travel which excludes taking up residence or employment;
- It is a sector of the economy or an industry; and
- It involves a broad system of interacting relationships of people – visitors and hosts and the travel trade meeting, the needs of those travellers (MacCannell, 1996). [3]

Middleton (2001) [4] identifies four striking aspects of tourism that make it unique:
- The product is invisible and cannot be tried out before purchase, as a result of the intangibility nature of the product;
- It is consumed where and when it is produced, bringing in the idea of inseparability of the product;
- The place and people where it is produced are part and parcel of the product; and
- Demand for the product fluctuates between seasons of the year.

Petersen (1991) [5] states that communities have no idea whether the revenues they receive are as a result of their complaints about wildlife and tourists or whether they are due to the presence of wildlife and tourists.

2.2 Cultural, Heritage and Historic tourism

According to Richards (2001) [6] cultural, heritage and historic tourism describes all tourist trips to experience places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present encompassing historic, cultural and natural resource. LORD Cultural Resources Planning and Management (1999: 3) [7] adds that cultural and heritage tourism encompasses visits to museums, art galleries, archaeological monuments, mausoleums, ruins, lost cities, cathedrals, mosques etc. Culture can be tangible in the form of buildings and artefacts or intangible in terms of people’s values, attitudes and way of life (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). [8] Mathieson and Wall (1982), [8] UNESCO (2000: 2) [9] further argue that culture is the ‘conditioning elements of behaviour and the products of that behaviour’ such that it can be seen in many forms including buildings, areas, dance, food, dress, events, values, lifestyles and handicrafts.

Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects, but includes intangible and verbal traditions as well as customs inherited from descendants passed on to their children, in the form of manners, activities, drama, visual arts, festive events, protocols and conventions vis-à-vis fauna and flora including skills to produce traditional crafts, music and dance UNESCO, 2011).

[10] Linking tourism and cultural heritage can enhance the preservation and protection of heritage and culture at the same time ensuring economic and other benefits like employment creation, new businesses and higher property values for tourism and the local communities (Sharpley, 1994). [11] Doswell (1997) [12] adds that such tourism can stimulate initiatives to trigger conservation and enhancement of the environment as there maybe society-wide improvements in income, employment opportunities, education, local infrastructure and services. There exists a symbiotic relationship between the combination of tourism development and cultural preservation and protection resulting in a number of challenges to be addressed:
- Maintaining and conserving the cultural heritage;
- Achieving a better state of economic and social wellbeing for all sectors of a community;
- Providing the tourist with a quality experience;
- maintaining unspoilt nature; and

Sharpley (1994) [11] concurs and argues that cultural heritage tourism results in the enhancement of the following attributes of sustainable development:
- The perpetuation and fortification of cultural resources;
- Meaningful elucidation of resources;
- Authentic visitor experiences; and
- The incentive to raise economic benefits from cultural resources.
It is therefore clear, that cultural heritage tourism is fundamentally apprehensive about the identification, preservation, management and protection of heritage values. Furthermore, it is also concerned with accommodating the impact of tourism on communities and regions, fostering social benefits, providing financial resources for protection, as well as marketing and promotion. Indeed this presupposes that it is necessary to educate the local communities about tourism development vis. a vis. protection and conservation of cultural heritage.

2.3 Education Tourism

Education tourism has its origins in the Grand Tours of the 17th and 18th centuries where young English elites often spent two to four years travelling around Europe in an effort to broaden their horizons learning languages, architecture, geography and culture. The term Grand Tour was coined by Richard Lassels (1670) in his travel guide book involving trips from England to Italy. Grand tours heading mostly to Paris, Rome and Venice were risky, daunted by sea-sickness, illnesses, and sometimes robberies and shipwrecks. The institution of the Grand tour was unpopular at home because it involved large expenditures of money abroad although grand tours are given credit for the dramatic improvements in British architecture and culture (Towner, 1985). [14] Today, education tourism is comprised of several sub-types including ecotourism, heritage tourism, rural or farm tourism and student ex-changes between educational institutions. The notion of modern travelling for educational purposes is widely acknowledged and its popularity in the tourism market is only expected to increase.

2.4 Sport Tourism

Weed and Bull (2004) [15] categorise sport tourism as a segment of special interest tourism where the desire to pursue sports activities at the destination is the major motivation to travel. They argue that travellers generally have more reasons to travel than one although one motive may play a more dominant role than others and in the case of sport tourism; sports-related motivations supplement the generic tourism ones. Hall (1992) states that sport tourism falls into two categories, on the one hand those who travel with the intention of participating in the event and on the other hand, those who travel to watch the sporting event.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Face-to-face interviews were used as the primary method of data collection for the current research. A semi-structured inquiry form was employed as an interview guide. Some of the open-ended questions helped the researcher to probe further where more detailed information was sought. Interviews happen to be amongst the most challenging and rewarding forms of measurement. They require a personal sensitivity and adaptability as well as the ability to stay within the bounds of the designed interview protocol. Face-to-face interviews have long been the dominant data collection technique in the field of qualitative research. The researcher also observed the respondents and their environment before, during and after interviews.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Resort areas under study from where the data were collected

Data were collected from 145 respondents through observation, face to face interviews, telephone interviews, e-mails, unstructured questionnaires where respondents remained unavailable for interviews or any combination of the aforesaid instruments. It can be noted that most respondents constituting 30% were from Harare which is conveniently poised for the researcher who also resides in the same city. The Eastern Highlands, Bulawayo, Hwange and Victoria Falls are major tourist resorts in Zimbabwe where the rest of the research was carried out. Figure 1 below presents the resort areas where raw data were collected and the distribution of the respondents from whom the data were collected.
4.2 Industry sectors of the respondents

Figure 3 below shows a third of the respondents constituting 32% from the education sector, whereas just over 23% were picked from the hospitality sector with the remainder having been chosen from tourism related organisations, 17% tourism authorities, the tour operations sector 20% while 8% came from communities.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Benefits attributed to tourism

Amongst the benefits singled out by respondents was use of renewable energies besides participation and involvement in the tourism and hospitality ventures as shown in figure 4 below.
5.2 Mitigation of cultural and eco-tourism’s impacts

Questions were also asked as presented in the following section with a view to establishing and identifying eco- and cultural tourism’s impacts on schools and local communities and how the resultant negative impacts emanating thereon could be minimised.

5.3 Challenges fronting communities

Acculturation and commoditisation of culture were the two major concerns raised by respondents who feared losing their traditional way of life as Zimbabweans. The search for economic imperatives threatened to overshadow the protection and preservation of culture. The social fabric lay at the mercy of stronger and more established western and eastern cultures.

Power and energy problems bothering communities especially in relation to lack of renewable energy resources was emphasised by 17% of the respondents. Locals hardly have any choice but to cut down trees to source wood energy for cooking. Another reason for cutting down trees is to get materials to enable vendors to create wood carvings for sale to tourists. Diminishing forests call for the immediate implementation of tree planting programmes to avoid a calamitous dilapidation of the environment.

5.4 Marketing tools for communities’ tourism and hospitality products

Respondents were asked to suggest ways that would enable local communities to market their wares and artefacts effectively. Figure 7 below shows over 29% of the respondents advocating for the use of electronic and print media for the marketing of artifacts and wares targeted at the tourist market while 26% of the respondents preferred localised fairs and exhibitions.

Government assisted programmes for marketing were proposed by 21% of the respondents as 14% of the respondents suggested use of the internet and connectivity. This obviously poses a serious challenge as connectivity is still low in the resorts and tourist zones of Zimbabwe. The rest of the respondents recommended working together with partners or foreign investors.

Literature reviewed established that genuine proprietorship of natural resources is necessary if communities are to effectively manage these resources. Nevertheless, in order to facilitate and enable communities to take up ownership of community projects, it is essential to empower the communities, allowing them to reach a position that enables them to manage their resources optimally. Respondents were in favour of conscripting processes that moderate on conservational degradation upraised through education or economic incentives. Substantial local employment in tourism and hospitality ventures would go a long way in instilling a sense of responsibility towards tourism ventures and that would ultimately translate
into responsible behaviour towards the environment.

5.5 Incorporating the learning domains of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Possibilities

Reviewed literature reveals that Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives is widely used to develop schools curricula, normally incorporating aims commonly written in the form of (Bloom et al., 1956): [17]

- Affective domain which refers to aspects of human development embracing non-cognitive, emotions, aesthetic sense, attitudes, values, beliefs and the spectrum of value systems;
- Cognitive domain which refers to the recall or recognition of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities categorised into Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation; and
- Psychomotor domain which contains aspects of learning associated with movement and skill demonstration and integrates the cognitive and affective consequences with physical performances.

Basing on Bloom et al (1956)’s [17] cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, schools prepare learners and educate them to accept their social responsibilities as members of a democratic society. Furthermore, learners acquire knowledge and develop skills, values and attitudes which will enable them to contribute to society as active, informed and confident citizens. When asked to explain what needs to be done to the primary school and communities curriculum to be responsive to the needs of the labour market and to prepare learners for the world of work in the tourism and hospitality industry, respondents advocated for the introduction of Tourism and Hospitality as a separate subject at primary school level or settle for subjects related to tourism in practical form. They even went on to suggest that tourism and hospitality education be included in the teacher education curriculum and its related disciplines be taken as examinable subjects. They were adamant about the inevitable active interface between industry and schools through pupil, learner or student excursions to resort areas. Another demonstration of the importance of incorporating the psychomotor domain in the primary school curriculum is the proposed assimilation of Tourism with ‘Design and Technology’.

Respondents reiterated that a learner-centred curriculum provides a basis for personal fulfillment and prepares learners for coping with today’s dynamic changing environment. Such a curriculum also provides a basis for enhancing the learners’ future employability. As a result, respondents agree with Castles and Rossiter (1983) [18] that, it will not be appropriate to presume that a subject should have a place in the school curriculum simply because it represents a traditional academic discipline, imparts specific knowledge and skills or develops a set of key employment related competencies. Rather, the justification of its place requires a clarification of how it contributes in both general and distinctive ways to the personal development of learners and society.

If the apparent concern of a school or community is to develop language, mathematical, scientific and other academic and vocational abilities, and if there is no comparable study of culture, language, art, music, traditional customs, tourism and hospitality, then the absence of attention to these areas can alert young people that there is no educational interest in the way they perceive their environment, their heritage and ultimately their visitors. The perception is that the environment, heritage and visitors management can take care of itself, or it will happen incidentally while the ‘real’ education goes on.

5.6 Environmental management and marketing of local tourism products

The tourism and hospitality industry is dogged by the following five major problem areas:

- Large amounts of liquid and solid waste are produced mainly through kitchens, ablutions, boating and transportation only regularly left to flow into rivers, lakes, seas and oceans;
- accommodation provision such as safari lodges in fragile or sensitive environments can cause serious damage to flora and fauna; and
- Lack of, limited or absence of employee codes of conduct ensuring best practices by the communities can affect the hosts in their understanding of their guests.
5.7 Interventions addressing schools and community challenges

Educating communities on ecological conservation is of utmost importance as communities are central to environmental protection and preservation. Respondents expressed that given the intricacy, emotiveness, diversity and multiplicity of tourism stakeholders, several challenges come to light pertaining to host culture, the employability of locals and investments into tourism.

They argued that mingling with visitors can easily encourage the ‘demonstration effect’ where locals develop a low appreciation of their own culture, tradition and custom. Respondents voiced concern on commodification of host cultures following the ever increasing numbers of tourists who exhibit an alien tourist culture which triggers delinquent behaviour especially amongst the vulnerable youth.

The need to earn money through tourism often leads to the creation of imitations or fake art leading to the degeneration of cultural values. Some respondents argued that religion had no impact on tourism developments although others felt that some religious practices brought by tourists had a negative bearing on cultural beliefs. Communities are at a loss as to how they may perpetuate their good cultural practices whilst simultaneously they assimilate good foreign practices. Respondents pointed out that if indigenous business people were involved in tourism there would be further degeneration of cultural values. This calls for a new approach to tourism by the local business people which incorporates family values.

Respondents articulated and showed anxiety over environmental ruin. Whilst they acknowledged the dangers brought about by climate change and greenhouse gas emissions they however emphasised that poverty posed the greatest threat to the environment. Therefore policy planners need to come up with land use options that encompass tourism entrepreneurship. Such actions would alleviate poverty. Reforestation should accompany all tourism activities that involve deforestation.

A need was identified by respondents to equip communities with project planning and management skills. To mitigate problems brought by drought respondents suggested educating communities in permaculture and conservation farming. It was also suggested that in order to ensure good harvests rain water harvesting techniques needed to be practised.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this article was to establish the challenges facing local communities living within the environs of national parks and tourist attractions and how they cope with the ever increasing numbers of visitors. It was also the objective of this article to establish how the hosts are protecting and preserving their culture in the face of this new industry.

This objective was realised as the major challenges facing local communities were identified as possible dangers of acculturation, imminent threat of commoditisation of culture and the ensuing land degradation.

6.1 Use of ICT in communities

Tourism and hospitality developments are largely dependent on the use of information and computer technologies. It is therefore essential that computers and connectivity are availed to all primary schools and rural communities. In order to curb the negative effects of social networks, there is need to develop locally based e-learning software on the learning of music, dance, computers, home economics, sport, arts and culture.

6.2 Tourism and hospitality promotion

It is prudent for the government to avail computers to learners at an early age. Incentives can be put in place to allow schools and communities to source computers and accessories at rebated customs duties.

The creation of a website with a dedicated tourist menu that supplies details about use of renewable energy sources in the country and policies encompassing codes of conduct and best practices for communities, operators and tourists alike, will go a long way in promoting sustainable tourism.

6.3 Spatial developments in the creation of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries

The establishment of the Yellowstone National Park in USA in 1872 triggered a global national park programme creating over 1200 national parks worldwide to help preserve local history and create
close-to-home recreational opportunities for many countries. Zimbabwe followed suite with the founding as far back as 1928 of Hwange National Park which today is Zimbabwe's largest national park and one of the world’s last elephant sanctuaries. The concept behind the creation of these national parks saw to a large extend the relocation of local communities to make way for animal habitat. There is a need for further research to establish if it is a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development for communities to live separately from wildlife or for humans and animals to share the same habitat as was the case before the creation of national parks. Research should also extend to probing issues relating to ownership and title to natural resources and wildlife. Who owns the mountains, rivers, plains, monuments, forests and the Victoria Falls? Who should champion the further developments of tourism and hospitality and how far should the traditional norms and customs be incorporated into these developments?

REFERENCES

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