

# Community Tourism Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Tourism Management in Southern Africa: Lessons from Zimbabwe

**Simon Chiutsi**

Department of Travel and Recreation Management, Chinhoyi University of Technology,  
Zimbabwe

Email: [schiutsi@gmail.com](mailto:schiutsi@gmail.com)

**Boycen Kumira Mudzengi**

Department of Geography and Environmental Science, Great Zimbabwe University

Email: [boycenmudzengi@gmail.com](mailto:boycenmudzengi@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Zimbabwe tourism development has suffered the pitfalls of uneven development often producing disproportionate distribution of returns. While tourism has been promulgated as a panacea to the socio-economic development challenges Zimbabwe is facing, local and often marginalized rural communities have not meaningfully reaped the benefits through tourism income. In this paper community tourism entrepreneurship is suggested as a viable option to promote sustainable tourism as it places the local communities at the centre of tourism planning and management. The entrepreneurial model puts limelight on the Community Based Tourism evaluation criteria that fosters a broad-based ownership of the tourism resource base, and focuses on the degree of individual participation and the extent to which the tourism income is earned directly by local communities through entrepreneurial activities and administering tourism services. The findings of this study, based on a survey of the Community Based Tourism Enterprises in Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe indicate that local communities occupy a peripheral role in the tourism sector matrix. The real tourism industry is taking place outside of community control and influence. There is therefore need to build Community Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs) capacity in terms of tourism product development, linkages with the tourism market and further enhance community collective awareness of tourism opportunities in their locality. In this paper it is therefore notable that a higher level of community tourism entrepreneurship leads to greater socio-economic benefits for the majority of residents leading to biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism development.

**Keywords:** community tourism entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, tourism value chain

## **1. Introduction**

The contribution of tourism to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development has received great attention from the academia, entrepreneurs and practitioners (Sharpley, 2000). There is scholarly convergence on the pontification that the tourism sector can stimulate pro-poor growth as it has potential to generate more jobs and enterprises. Furthermore, the scholarly enquiry in the tourism sector has broadened to address issues of the ownership of the tourism resource base and leveraging of tourism benefits. The new research paradigm in tourism is concerned about the distributional issues. Distribution determines who does what in the tourism value chain and the returns which accrue to different parties (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2004). Another element of distribution is actual distribution of income from tourism activities. Issues of power and exchange relations come into play (Clancy, 1998). This focuses on issues such as barriers of entry, the measurement of income and profitability, locality dimensions of the tourism value chain distribution, recipients by class, gender, ethnicity and the integration of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and the informal sector into the tourism value chains. Value chain analysis is very closely related to pro-poor tourism research in that it analyses the sequence of multiple and complex products and services across sectors that are delivered to tourists which make it possible to identify market-based solutions to improve opportunities and earnings of the poor.

Most Southern African countries including Zimbabwe have expressed their commitment to use tourism as a vehicle for reduction of poverty and improving the livelihoods of disadvantaged communities. As such Zimbabwe is a signatory to Southern African Development Community (SADC) Tourism Protocol of 1978. The protocol underlines the importance of tourism as a resource which can be capitalised upon to improve the livelihoods of marginalised communities including women and the youth. Therefore, tourism's main advantage as a development option as Ashley and Roe (2002: 61) noted is that "it is labour intensive, inclusive of women and the informal sector; based on natural and cultural assets of the poor; and suitable for poor rural areas with no other growth options." Roe and Elliott (2006) further added that tourism resources such as forests and wildlife are part and parcel of the livelihoods of poor communities who live with resources. Involving the poor and ensuring that they benefit from tourism is therefore one way of ensuring sustainability of tourism resources.

Zimbabwe, like many other countries in Southern Africa relies mainly on the abundant wildlife as the main attraction. Mashonaland West Province which was the focal point for this study boasts of Lake Kariba, the largest man made dam in Southern Africa and has rich cultural diversity. The aim of the study was therefore to explore the extent to which the local communities are involved in the tourism sector through operating vibrant tourism enterprises sustained by their local tourism resources. The community tourism entrepreneurship model is premised as an integrated approach to collective tourism resource ownership and collective accrual of tourism benefits to local communities

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Community Tourism Entrepreneurship Model*

Community tourism entrepreneurship signifies a departure from the conventional tourism planning and management approaches to put local communities at the epicentre of tourism product development and distribution chain. In the past tourism has been largely accepted as an economic sector that has potential to grow the national economies by including poor people as beneficiaries in this growth through working in the industry as cheap sources of labour for the large tourism conglomerates (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2004). Hampton (2005) noted that although local communities are custodians of tourism attractions they are not always involved in decisions about their heritage and cultural sites nor do they receive any meaningful benefits from tourism development. To avoid negative environmental impacts through biodiversity loss and endangering fragile environments new tourism business development models which gives a higher degree of control to local residents for administering tourism services are needed (Reid and Sindiga, 1999). The community tourism entrepreneurship approach is specifically targeting tourism impact on poor people, buttressing strategies focusing on expanding the overall size of tourism, and more on unlocking opportunities for specific groups within it (on tilting the cake, not expanding it)'. (DFID, 1999:1). The community tourism entrepreneurship strategy can be best advanced through the pro-poor tourism development approaches that fall mainly into 3 categories:

- Increasing access to economic benefits, for example, availing business and employment benefits, training of communities and spreading income to the whole community rather than one individual.
- Addressing negative social and environmental impacts of tourism such as demonstration effect, commodification of culture, loss of land and grazing lands for domestic animals.
- Focusing on policies, processes and partnerships. Focus on policies that remove barriers to poor participation, participation in tourism planning processes, partnerships between the private sector and poor people in developing new tourism products (Scheyvens, 2007).

While scholars, entrepreneurs and practitioners are beginning to understand the need for placing greater emphasis on community tourism entrepreneurship, there is no consensus on how this can be implemented. Even more importantly, donors are beginning to acknowledge contributions tourism can make towards economic development and community livelihood goals (Ashley and Hayson, 2004). Most importantly, Ashley and Roe (2002) work has influenced research on pro-poor tourism and in different parts of the world. The rationale for taking a pro-poor perspective on tourism development is that as Moscardo (2005) noted tourism resources are generally located in remote areas where the poorest members of society live. These are areas where there are no other forms of development. Other arguments advanced by Ashley and Roe (2002) include the uniqueness of tourism in that it can employ large numbers of

unskilled labour and the most disadvantaged members of the community, women and children (Cattarirch, 2001). It is further argued that pro-poor tourism reduces leakage from and maximises linkage to local economies (WTO, 2002).

Against this background community tourism is increasingly promulgated as a panacea for environmental sustainability and local communities' development. This is a paradigm shift towards developing a community tourism entrepreneurship model that seeks to place local communities at the centre of tourism management thereby deriving direct income from tourism activities. The model aims at the promotion of local communities' development and biodiversity conservation. The local communities are envisaged to derive socio-economic benefits through employment and income generation (Walker, 1995). Communities are further expected to develop positive attitudes towards natural resource conservation particularly wildlife as they begin to see the economic contribution through tourism.

Ashley and Roe (2002) further highlight that benefits vary from economic, social and environmental opportunities. What happens is that opportunities are created for poor to utilise and improve their livelihoods. This therefore calls for changes in the way big corporations running tourism businesses operate to ensure that they create an environment which can make it possible for poor communities to benefit (Scheyvens, 2007). Scheyvens (2007:244) emphasised the fact that it is not about establishing numerous community-run bungalow-style ventures with dubious business prospects. Scheyvens goes further to advocate for legislative framework which promotes the principles of pro-poor tourism rather than the present entrenchment of existing inequalities in society. She further highlights the point that big players in the tourism industry have very powerful lobby groups which can easily thwart efforts to open up opportunities to the poor.

## *2.2 Community Tourism Resource Base In Zimbabwe*

Zimbabwe, like many other countries in Southern Africa relies mainly on the abundant wildlife as the main attraction. Mashonaland West Province which was the focal point for this study boasts of Lake Kariba, the largest man made dam in Southern Africa and has rich cultural diversity. Zimbabwe has great potential for community-based tourism to develop and flourish as it has a unique array of its cultural diversity which appeals to cultural tourists. The Zambezi basin is endowed with breath-taking wildlife including the big five. Zimbabwe was a pioneer in Southern Africa with its Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) which has been emulated by other countries as a way of conserving the natural resources and also ensuring that communities benefit from the resources (Swatuk, 2005).

However, notable is that the CAMPFIRE model had its own pitfalls and trappings. Research findings by Dzingirai (2004) and Spencely (2005) confirms that experiences by the local communities in Zimbabwe who have been involved in the CAMPFIRE activities particularly the Sengwe in Chiredzi Rural District Council (RDC) have indicated that the state and RDCs are not interested in equitable distribution of tourism benefits with local communities, but rather aim to retain as much revenue as possible for their bureaucratic processes. This observation

therefore puts credence to the claim that there is need for a robust intervention to capacitate local communities to run tourism ventures of their own, where communities are in full control of income flows.

Other models have been developed targeting specifically the accommodation sector (Meyer, 2007). Meyer argues that accommodation sector can provide a lead in opening up opportunities for the poor. She divided the sector into two units; the core and non-core functions.

Under the core functions, employment is one area where the poor can benefit through creating formal employment focusing on local skills and capacity building through training, internship and good working conditions, for example, better salaries than other establishments. Secondly, companies can source food, building materials, decorations from the local communities. They could also ensure that they work with local dance groups/entertainers and incorporate them as part of guest experience. The second aspect of Meyer's model is the non-core business of the accommodation sector. Included in this area are outsourcing such functions as laundry, retail and entertainment to local CBTEs. The accommodation sector can also mentor small enterprises and do capacity building in tourism and hospitality management. This would involve utilising the skills already available e.g. animal trekking for hunting safaris, development of cultural and heritage tourism. Both Meyer's and Ashley and Roe (2002) frameworks will be used to analyse the gaps in community tourism development in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe government further subscribes to the view that sustainable tourism can be a tool for economic development and poverty reduction. However there is paucity of information on academic research based information on how the poor are benefitting from tourism. For example, in Community based natural resources management (CBNRM), Transfrontier park/Peace park projects and CAMPFIRE who are the beneficiaries (class, gender, and ethnicity)? Which opportunities could be opened up for the poor in the tourism value chain? These are issues that have not been adequately addressed by existing literature.

While this literature review is by no means exhaustive, what is most evident is that local communities' participation in tourism entrepreneurship remains a big challenge in developing countries. Spierenburg (2006) buttresses this observation by reiterating that local communities first have to live up to the rigid standards and requirements set up by international conservation authorities before they are considered fit to participate in natural resource exploitation for tourism purposes. This is further compounded by the fact that most local communities on their own have no tourism business acumen that can quickly parachute them into competitive tourism entrepreneurs.

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the extent of local communities participation in tourism development through entrepreneurial activities related to the local tourism resources. The research effort was focused mainly on socio-economic factors that are highly likely to affect

communities through taking an active in tourism entrepreneurship. Research techniques for this study included desk top research, key informant interviews and participant observation. The perceptions and experiences concerning tourism value chain and pro-poor strategies were examined by interviewing tourism entrepreneurs, local communities and policy-makers. Qualitative methodology by key informant interviews was applied to obtain more information about local communities' knowledge of tourism opportunities in their locality, tourism sector parameters, product development, marketing and pricing options. Relevant literature on community tourism development was reviewed to give insight on the cutting edge issues of community tourism entrepreneurship.

#### **4. Analysis and Recommendations**

This study showed that the question of who controls the tourism industry in Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe generated mixed results. Research findings indicate that most of the tourism services are owned by and operated by private companies and some government departments. The boat operators, tour guides and tourist agencies are manned by people from other provinces. One local resident had to openly say that their source of income is fish poaching from Lake Kariba but this often results in communities running battles with law enforcement agencies. At times the residents are arrested and their illegal fishing nets are impounded by the anti-poaching units. The few locals who are employed in the tourism services sector cite that they are mainly involved in menial jobs. These jobs were said to, be seasonal and not very rewarding. This kind of set up threatens the sustainability of the tourism industry. If communities continue to perceive themselves playing a peripheral role in the ownership and management of tourist resources they end up engaging in activities that threaten biodiversity in the Zambezi basin. Poaching of wildlife and fish will be rampant.

Through this research, it has been observed that the CBTEs operating in Mashonaland West Province are not economically viable as there are few tourists attracted to these CBTEs. Most tourists are coming to Kariba through well established tourism packages with no meaningful tourism income getting into the hands of the locals. The local CBTEs lack capacity at both technical and entrepreneurial levels to compete with well established tourism players. The only income accruing directly to residents is through handicraft production mainly along the Harare-Kariba highway and the earnings are not that significant compared to revenue being generated by the established private sector.

Research findings reveal that the province's poor participation in community tourism could be linked to the marginalization of the local communities in mainstream tourism, limited skills and technical knowhow, lack of linkages to the tourism market, lack of entrepreneurial skills and capital. Most CBTEs sampled in this research are in great need of marketing intelligence in order to successfully compete with mainstream tourism operators. Lack of interest by the existing tourism establishments to build partnerships with local communities is further noted in this research as a hindrance to the development of CBTEs. There is therefore need for private sector mindset shift towards engagement of local communities as tourism entrepreneurs and not just sources of cheap labour. CBTEs can make a huge contribution towards sustainable



tourism development in the Zambezi basin if there are viable tourism projects initiated and managed by the local communities for their own economic benefit.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings of this study, based on a survey of the Community Based Tourism Enterprises in Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe indicate that local communities occupy a peripheral role in the tourism sector matrix. The real tourism industry is taking place outside of community control and influence. There is therefore need to build Community Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs) capacity in terms of tourism product development, linkages with the tourism market and further enhance community collective awareness of tourism opportunities in their locality. In this paper it is therefore notable that a higher level of community tourism entrepreneurship leads to greater socio-economic benefits for the majority of residents leading to biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism development. The higher revenue leakages experienced in the Zambezi basin are negative tourism impacts that could be reduced through involving local communities in tourism product development, planning and management. Leakages have great potential to contribute towards biodiversity loss, while increased tourism earnings to the residents will motivate residents to adopt a stewardship role towards biodiversity thereby contributing to sustainable tourism development.

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