

TOURISM, BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND RURAL COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE:

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ABSTRACT

The need to conserve Zimbabwe's natural resources as a base for its tourism industry has encountered innumerable problems since independence. The majority of the resources are located in rural areas and directly impact rural livelihoods. An evaluation of the programmes implemented by the government on tourism development, biodiversity conservation and rural communities was undertaken. This entailed carrying out desk research on the topic covering developments in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and selected parts of the world. Field research was undertaken on the following community based tourism enterprises (CBTEs): Gaerezi in Nyanga, Cholo/Mahenye in Chipinge and Ngomakurira in Goromonzi.

The paper highlights the challenges that CBTEs face with regard to long term sustainability.

Research findings include the need to improve national policies affecting CBTEs, lack of management capacity within the communities and inability to market the products offered. Recommendations aimed at improving the sustainability of CBTEs are provided.

Keywords: Tourism; Biodiversity Conservation, Communities, Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE)

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's tourism is mainly based on its varied natural resources ranging from wildlife, flora, water and outstanding physical features. The sustainability of the country's biodiversity and hence the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry is dependent on the attitude of rural communities towards these resources. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the resources are located in areas that are adjacent to rural communities or within the rural communities. Rural communities therefore bear the major costs of either living with wildlife or abstaining from cropping natural resources for their livelihoods.

The amendment of the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act in 1982 devolved authority of natural resources to rural communities. The devolution of authority on natural resources to rural communities through Rural District Councils engendered a sense of ownership of the resources by rural communities. This helped rural communities to develop a more positive attitude towards natural resources conservation.

The change in policy led to the implementation of the CAMPFIRE programme. However the fact that effective authority on the natural resources resides in Rural District Councils has lead to the development of antagonistic relationship between the rural communities and their respective RDCs.

LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREAS

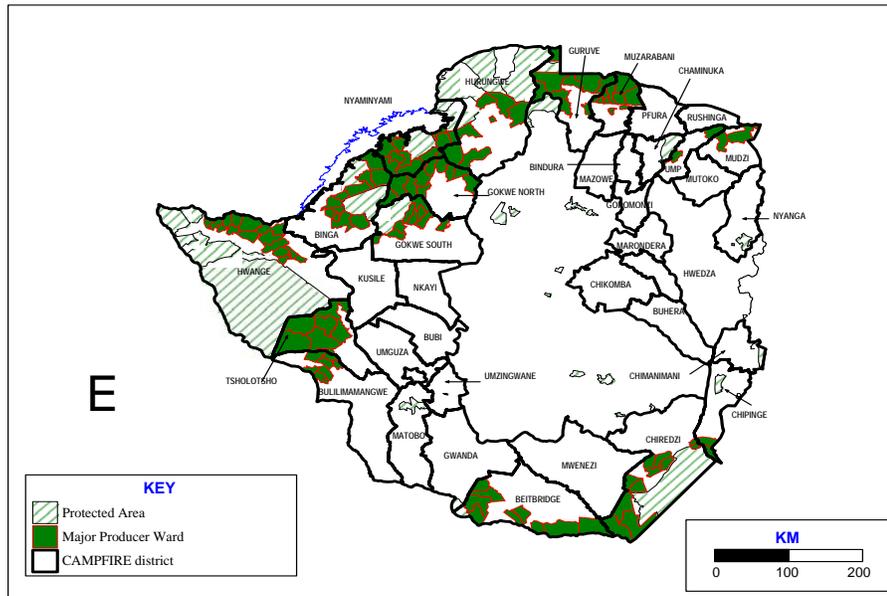


Figure 1 Location of the study areas

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study was undertaken in order to evaluate the success or failure of community based tourism enterprise programmes in Zimbabwe with special reference to those under the CAMPFIRE Association.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Firstly the study seeks to assess the challenges being faced by CBTEs in Zimbabwe. Secondly the study seeks to assess rural communities’ views towards natural resources conservation. Finally the study will provide recommendations that address the long term sustainability of CBTEs in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on the concept of community based tourism (CBT) has grown dramatically since the mid 1980s: Child, B. (2009), Johnson, Roe, Elliot (2006), Joppe, M. (1996), Kiss, A. (1990&2004), Mbaiwa, J.E. (2004&2008), Secheyvens, R. (1999&2002), Spenceley, A. (2008), and Sproule, K.W. (1996). One of the major challenges that the literature on community based tourism has had to deal with over the years is that of definition. The concept has posed both theoretical and practical

problems. The Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute defines CBT as ‘tourism that takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account’. On the other hand the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) views CTB as a form of tourism ‘where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in its development and management and a major proportion of the benefits remain in the community’.

The issue has been compounded by a lack of consensus on what constitutes a community. According to Sproule “A community is a group of people, often living in the same geographical area and who identify themselves as belonging to same group” (1996). Similarly Joppe, states that a “A community is self defining in that it is based on a sense of shared purpose and common goals. It may be geographical in nature or a community of interest built around heritage and cultural values shared among community members” (p475).

Despite the above theoretical and practical problems relating to the definition of the concept of community based tourism as well as that of community evidence from the field research show that the concept of community based tourism development is not a uniform development entity. It is a continuum of business forms ranging from entities where the community is fully involved in the day to day running of the venture to entities where the community is a passive observer and only receives an agreed income from the organization that is exploiting the resource.

Within Zimbabwe there is now a wide range of literature on the CAMPFIRE programme; Child, B (2009), Child, G. (1995), Murphree, M.W. (2001), Nabane, (1995), Sinclair and Pack, (2000) and Taylor, (2009). The initiative has been used as a model for a number of similar Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programmes that are being implemented in a number of Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) member states. (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia). The growth of the literature on the CAMPFIRE programme is a result of both academic interest on this model of community based tourism development and the practical needs of the stakeholders involved in the programme who are endeavouring to come up with the best practices of delivering benefits to communities in rural areas whilst at the same time ensure biodiversity conservation.

METHODOLOGY

The study entailed undertaking extensive desk research including the internet. Field research was undertaken at three project sites in the country. The field research was undertaken in order to establish what is currently happening on the ground on CBTEs in Zimbabwe.

Sample

The three project sites visited; Gaerezi in Nyanga, Cholo/Mahenye in Chipinge and Ngomakurira in Goromonzi were chosen because they give a fair representative sample of the spread of products being promoted by CBTEs in the country, (fly fishing, hunting/game viewing and cultural/historical, respectively).

Data collection instruments

A combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used to obtain data from stakeholders. Two questionnaires were administered at each of the sites visited. A skills audit questionnaire was used to gather data on training needs of the participants. Another questionnaire was used to obtain data on the current state of the enterprises. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the participants on the three sites. The approach gave the researcher the opportunity to probe into a number of areas that came out as a result of the discussions with the participants. The responses were quantitatively as well as qualitatively analyzed depending on whether the questions were closed or open ended.

BACKGROUND

Tourism development and biodiversity

There are varied definitions of the term “biodiversity”. For purposes of this discussion it suffices to adopt that which is commonly used by biologists which defines biodiversity as the “totality of genes, species and ecosystems of a region” (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biodiversity).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) definition of tourism covers the following categories:

Visitor: A person traveling to a country other than the country in which he/she has usual residence for a period not exceeding one year without seeking work in the country visited.

Day visitor: A person staying in the country visited for less than 24 hours

Tourist: A person staying in the country visited for more than 24 hours (at least one overnight stay) (UNWTO Market Trends; Africa; 2004.)

With the exceptions of a few years like 1974, 2001 and 2009 the tourism industry has experienced continued growth since the end of the 2nd World War. International tourism declined in 1974 as a result of the dramatic increase of oil prices that took place in that year which resulted in the increase in the price of airline tickets. The September 2001 terrorist bombing of the Twin Towers in New York in the United States of America created an unsafe travel environment which resulted in a large section of tourists holidaying at home. The global economic meltdown of 2009 reduced disposable incomes of a large number of potential international tourists hence the year witnessed a 3.8% annual decline of tourist arrivals. However the sector has recovered recording an annual growth of 7 % in 2010 and 4.4% in 2011 (UNWTO, 2012).

Global tourist arrival figures grew from 25 million in 1950 to 685 million at the turn of the 21st century (ibid). In 2010 the total global tourist arrival figure stood at 940 million (www.unwto.org). Figure 2 below shows the trend of global tourist arrivals for the period 1950-2010.

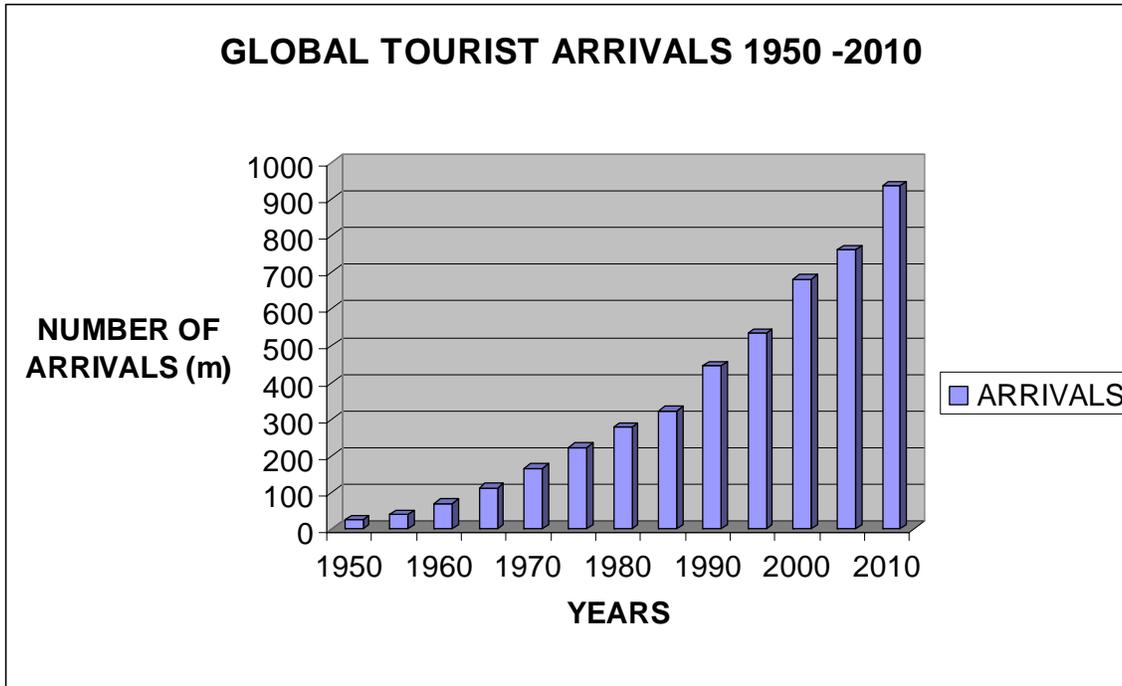


Figure 2 Global Tourist Arrivals 1950-2010

Source: UNWTO; publications 1951-2011

Since the late 1980s large numbers of tourists have been attracted to biodiversity hot spots like Laos, Cambodia, South Africa, Madagascar, Brazil and Nicaragua (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) study;2003). The study among other things highlighted the need to create effective awareness of the dangers posed by the growth of tourism on biodiversity. In its key recommendations the report among other things points out that “By linking tourism development with biodiversity conservation and the wellbeing of local communities, we can develop strategies that both conserve Earth’s most endangered ecosystems and help make significant contribution to alleviating poverty” (UNEP:2003).

Given the above concerns at global level it was therefore not surprising that 2004 saw the development and adoption of the Guidelines On Biodiversity and Tourism Development which were drawn up by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The introduction to the guidelines clearly spells out the rationale for producing the document; “The Guidelines aim at making tourism and biodiversity more mutually supportive engaging the private sector and local and indigenous communities, and providing infrastructure and land-use planning based on principles of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity”(Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development, 2005: 3).

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN ZIMBABWE

Since independence in 1980 the Zimbabwean government’s focus on tourism development has been on the need for earning foreign currency, job creation and contribution of the sector to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). The tourism industry experienced sustainable growth for a number of years after independence in 1980. Figure 3 below shows the trend of tourist arrivals to the country since independence in 1980.

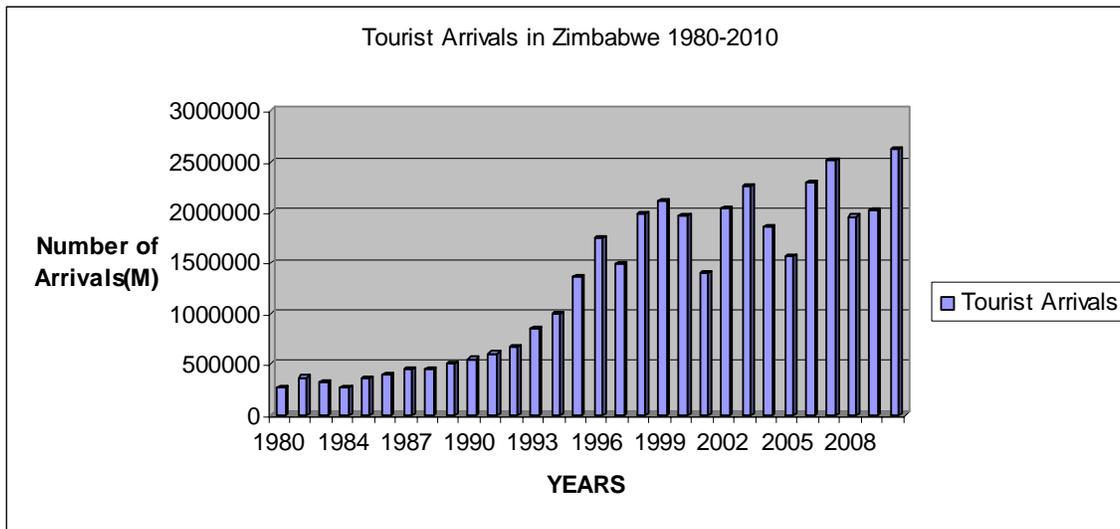


Figure 3 Tourist Arrivals in Zimbabwe 1980-2010

Source: Annual reports: ZTB; ZTDC and ZTA annual reports (1981-2010)

Whilst tourist arrivals to the country in 1980 were 273.6 thousand the total had reached 582.6 thousand by 1990. The upward trend reached its peak in 1999 when the country received a total of 2.24 million tourist arrivals. (Zimbabwe Tourist Board, Zimbabwe Tourist Development Corporation and Zimbabwe Tourist Authority reports; 1981-2010)

Since 2000 the industry has experienced a number of challenges as a result of the negative publicity the country received after the implementation of the land reform programme. However the focus on the sector is still evident in current government developmental thrust. For example in the 2009 Short Term Economic Recovery Plan (STERP) tourism is identified as one of the four pillars of economic recovery sectors along with agriculture, mining and manufacturing. Mainstream private sector tourism players like the government have also over the years focused on growing their businesses. Very little attention has been paid by the private sector on the need to bring local communities into meaningful partnerships except for a few isolated cases.

Natural resources conservation policy changes

Policies and programmes that have addressed issues of natural resources conservation and the involvement of rural communities in tourism have stemmed from the historical protectionists ethic which focused on protection of natural resources as a public good. This approach saw 13% of the country’s land mass being devoted to national parks estates (Taylor, 2009). It is important to note that the areas devoted to national parks estates are on the one hand located in poor rainfall areas and ecologically marginal regions of the country and on the other hand that they are found adjacent to areas where 76% of country’s population lives (Jonga, 2009).

With its highly diversified ecozones ranging from Afromontane to dry and moist savanna woodlands Zimbabwe is endowed with a rich biodiversity which if properly conserved is a sustainable base for rural livelihoods through a variety of economic activities including tourism.

Population growth, periodic droughts and general economic decline within the rural areas as well as continued destruction of crops and livestock by wildlife created an economic and social environment where rural communities started to illegally harvest the natural resources within or adjacent to their local areas especially wildlife. In response to the problems of poaching especially of wildlife the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM) now the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA) instituted a policy of devolving Appropriate Authority (AA) to the rural communities through the Rural District Councils (RDCs). This was accomplished through the amendment of the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act in 1982 (Taylor, p203). The amendment gave rural communities the legal right of utilizing wildlife resources through RDCs.

It is however important to note that the law under the 1975 Act gives the appropriate authority to the land owner to conserve, manage and benefit from wildlife (Nduku, 2008). In the case of rural communities the land owner is the local government. This has created a situation in which the rural communities are marginalized with regard to resource ownership and utilization. The underlying policy assumption was that wildlife would receive greater protection if given a monetary value as had happened within the commercial farming sector. The government hoped that by empowering communities in terms of the use of natural resources within their vicinities this will lead to a sense of ownership and responsibility on utilization of the resources and hence ensure biodiversity conservation.

CAMPFIRE

One of the major outcomes of this policy change was the implementation of the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). The programme operates on the basic philosophy of entrusting management and conservation of natural resources to local inhabitants (Jonga, 2009). It aims to promote rural development and sustainable land use based on wildlife in agriculturally marginal rural areas.

Originally CAMPFIRE was to focus on the conservation and exploitation of four natural resources: wildlife, forests, grazing and water (Taylor, 2009). However the initial focus was on wildlife with special emphasis on consumptive tourism as this was able to provide immediate returns to the community. Whilst the programme covered only two districts in 1988 it has now spread to over forty districts in the country (Taylor, 2009).

Current indications are that the programme is now focusing on the other elements of its devolved authority covering areas like eco-tourism, beekeeping, fisheries, timber harvesting and crafts manufacturing and marketing (Jonga, 2009).

During the initial stage the programme was funded by the government. Technical support was provided by a coalition of support agencies which included the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS), Zimbabwe Trust and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). However by 1994 the programme was receiving substantial funding from external donor organizations like

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. (Taylor, 2009)

The CAMPFIRE programme has gone a long way in changing the ambivalent attitude of rural communities towards biodiversity conservation. This has been due to the visible economic benefits that the communities have enjoyed. These have ranged from infrastructural development to income generating investments and annual dividends. There are however still a number of challenges that need to be addressed if the programme and similar CBNRM programmes are going to be effective tools for biodiversity conservation and rural communities' empowerment through sustainable tourism development.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1 CAMPFIRE SWOT ANALYSIS

Table 1 below summarizes the strengths, weakness, opportunities and the threats of the CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe.

| Strengths | Weakness | Opportunities | Threats |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established brand name-the CAMPFIRE brand name is well established internally and internationally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No market link to the brand name • Limited marketing budget • Lack of skilled personnel to drive the marketing programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the CAMPFIRE brand to position CBT enterprises in the market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgetary constraints • Paucity of marketing personnel |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to major tourist attractions, e.g. Gonarezhou national park | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and communication challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique location appealing to niche markets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of improvement in macro economic and political environment • Limited growth of the tourism industry |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to major tourist routes ,e.g. Eastern Highlands, Kariba | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No core attraction-sidelined when tourism is not booming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive prices-appeals to niche markets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived as low quality products by the general market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for product improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued competition from mainstream tourism |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture as an additional attraction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong regional competition e.g. Swaziland, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and sustainability of local culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited focus on cultural activities |

The findings from the field research can be grouped into four major categories:

- Institutional challenges
- Capacity challenges
- Marketing and promotion challenges
- Rural communities perceptions on natural resource conservation

Institutional challenges

Rural District Councils and the communities

The relationship between the RDCs and the rural communities is characterized by lack of trust. On the one hand RDC officials at both Nyanga and Chipinge expressed the view that the rural communities were uncooperative in their dealings with them. For example the official at Nyanga District Council complained that the Gaerezi Executive Committee and its manager hardly gave them any insights into the operation of their activities. Further the officials were of the opinion that the communities had ambitions to run their activities without any reference to the RDCs which are the custodian of the resource being utilised by the community.

On the other hand executive committee members at both Gaerezi and Mahenye indicated that they were continually being short changed by the RDCs in several operational areas. For example at Mahenye the community claimed that the council was having a corrupt relationship with the operator who had won the hunting concession in the area. The group pointed out that the hunter was not fulfilling a majority of the obligations in his contract and that the council had not paid any attention to complains they had submitted about the operator.

Rural communities and trustees

A number of CBTEs in the country are guided by a body of trustees whose mandate is to give strategic oversight to the executive committees. However communication between the trustees and the communities has not been effective and hence the relationship is not cordial. For example the Gaerezi community complained that on a number of occasions their trustees made decisions which affect them without any consultations.

Rural communities and the local political power brokers

Executive committee members at the sites visited felt that their ability to make sound decisions on their enterprises was often compromised by the interference from political brokers who often reside outside the area. These included among others, councilors, members of parliament, senior government officials based at the provincial centres and chiefs. Similar challenges were reported in a study carried out in the Masoka area in the Mbire rural district council (Kamuriwo, 2010).

Rural communities and private sector partners

There was a general community consensus that the private sector partners were exploiting the lack of business knowledge of the rural communities and hence depriving them of a fair share of the benefits of the resources being exploited. For example

in the case of the Gaerezi project the community was not happy with a situation whereby their partner the Nyanga Downs Fly Fishing Club (NDFC) sets up the prices for accommodation and the fishing license fees when the NDFC is the major client to the project. In Mahenye the community complained that the hunting safari operator had every year neglected to fulfill his contractual obligations and that he pays his dues to the RDC late every year. This resulted in the community receiving its share of hunting sales very late.

Capacity challenges

The skills audit questionnaire revealed a wide range of skills gaps in the personnel that is involved with CBTEs in the areas visited. Whilst all members of the executive councils and those in management position of the projects had attained “O” level education none of them had any form of formal education in tourism. Lack of skills was attributed to a number of factors. Firstly a majority of the interviewees were relatively new in their jobs and had therefore not gained adequate experience and understanding of their positions. Secondly some experienced personnel had been poached by the private sector and there was no one to pass on relevant skills to the new participants in the business. Finally due to the harsh economic conditions that the country had been experiencing no funding was available from both the government and the donor community to undertake training programmes.

The following were identified as priority training areas for CBTEs:

- Introduction to the tourism industry
- Tourism in Zimbabwe
- Sustainable tourism
- Tourism marketing,
- Tour planning and guiding,
- Customer care,
- Leadership skills in business management
- Bookkeeping and introduction to financial management

Marketing and promotion challenges

Interviewees at the sites visited and those at the RDC offices had little or no idea on how their products were reaching the markets. There was a general belief that both CAMPFIRE Association and the private sector partners will make sure that the market is aware of the products. This orientation of the communities seems to derive from the way the projects were initially developed. The majority of CBTEs in the country were donor driven in their initial set up. The communities were therefore hardly sensitized to issues of market demand and the need to understand the channels of distribution of the tourist product. The withdrawal of donor participation in the projects has created a marketing vacuum which the communities are unable to address due to their lack of understanding of the tourism industry in general and tourism marketing and promotion in particular.

Rural communities' perceptions on natural resource conservation

The communities in the sites visited acknowledge the need to conserve the natural resources within their vicinity and jurisdiction. At both Gaerezi and Mahenye the community employs security guards to prevent fish and wildlife poaching respectively. The executive committee members interviewed indicated that the task of natural resources conservation was becoming difficult because there was a general perception that the community was not getting adequate benefit flows from their resources. Poaching in both areas had increased and there was general concern that the situation may deteriorate in future if the administrative and management challenges with RDCs are not solved quickly.

CONCLUSION

The mistrust between RDCs officials and rural communities with regard to resource management and benefits flow results in communication breakdown. This has led to slowing down of programme implementation and a return to poaching and other negative practices which are not conducive to biodiversity conservation.

Marginalization of communities by trustees has led to loss of interest by some members of the community as they feel that their views on the types and form of benefits they should be getting are not being taken seriously by those appointed to give them strategic guidance on the management and use of the resources which the government has given them custodianship. Some members of the community especially at Gaerezi have stopped participating in the project as they believe that it is not substantially improving their livelihoods

The communities are facing a major dilemma in dealing with the private sector partners. Whilst they are aware that they are not maximizing the benefits from their partnership with the private sector they currently have no alternative means of selling their products.

The majority of community members entrusted with the management of the CBTEs lack knowledge of the industry and have very limited management skills and financial know how. The sustainability of the enterprises can only be assured if the community members receive appropriate training.

Lack of marketing and promotion skills has resulted in the reduction of tourist numbers purchasing CBT products within the country. The poor sales volumes have discouraged members of the communities in participating in the programme as the hoped for benefits have not materialized.

The policies and programmes that have been implemented by the government since the mid 1980s with regard to assisting rural communities to gain economic benefits from the natural resources in their areas have yielded some positive results in a number of ways. On the one hand many rural communities are generally aware that natural resources within their vicinity can give them direct economic and social benefits. On the other hand there is evidence of a general improvement of wildlife in some of the areas where communities are involved in CBTEs. (Taylor: 210).

A wide range of natural and cultural tourist attractions are located in the economically marginal areas of the country where the majority of the population live. The tourism industry offers an opportunity to economically empower rural communities through their participation in community based tourism. Improvement of the livelihoods of rural communities as a result of tourism development will incentivize them to participate in biodiversity conservation as well as revival of cultural activities in order to ensure the sustainability of the industry. However for community based tourism to be sustainable in the country it is essential that the current institutional, policy, governance and product distribution challenges are effectively addressed by the government, the private sector and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for rural communities to continue to effectively participate in biodiversity conservation perceived benefits from tourism should outweigh the costs of conserving the resources. There are therefore a number of issues that need to be addressed if CBT is to be a meaningful strategy for biodiversity conservation in Zimbabwe.

Policy

It is essential to review the current policy of devolution of authority to RDCs and ensure that the “producer communities” have more say on how the resources are used. This may engender a deeper sense of responsibility to the resources than is the case at present. It may be necessary to devolve the authority to the village level so that specific homesteads become responsible for the resources in their area. This will give rural communities the level of devolved authority on similar lines to that of occupiers of commercial farms and conservancies.

The other area for policy review and intervention is that of sharing of the benefits. As the law currently stands there is nothing stopping an urban dweller to go to “his/her village” in the rural area and demand benefits from the proceeds of CBNRM programmes. The current situation is not fair to residents of the communal areas who daily bear the economic and social costs of living with wildlife.

Mainstreaming community based tourism

Very little effort has been made over the years by tourism authorities to make community based tourism part of the national agenda on tourism development. This attitude has also filtered across the mainstream private sector tourism industry. At present CBT is almost an appendix to the programmes of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA). Participants involved in CBTEs feel left out and hence their effective participation in biodiversity conservation is discouraged. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority needs to appoint an officer at management level who will be responsible for mainstreaming CBT in the programmes of the organization. The officer will also be responsible for liaisons with organizations that are engaged in CBT activities in the country.

Marketing

Channels of product distribution in tourism are complex and at times highly personalized. For the enterprises outside consumptive tourism to be viable it is essential that an effective and innovative marketing programme is implemented. This will require close collaboration between ZTA and the stakeholders driving CBT enterprises and organizations like CAMPFIRE Association.

Private sector partnership

There are a number of areas where partnerships ventures are operational in both consumptive and nonconsumptive tourism. However in the majority of cases the contractual arrangements tend to favour the private sector partner. The communities are ignorant of the finer details of the contract and this often leads to future disagreements with the partner.

This is an area that needs further research with a view of developing win-win contractual arrangements between the community and the private sector partners.

Capacity building

The decline in tourism in Zimbabwe since 2000 has seen an erosion of the personnel that had tourism management, marketing and administrative skills within most of the CBTEs. There is therefore a strong need to train those that are currently involved in running the CBTEs in areas like management, tourism, administration, accounting, tour guiding and customer care. The training will also go a long way in making rural communities understand and appreciate the need to conserve the resources which the government has given them custodianship.

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