

## Chapter 5: Application of Sustainable Tourism Concepts by Small and Medium Enterprise in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

The concept of sustainable development has taken centre stage globally in the development of any sector. The concepts involve, among other things, waste minimisation through re-use and recycle, energy efficiency and the use of clean energy, efficient use of water resources, employment of appropriate waste management strategies, appropriate land-use planning and management, staff and community involvement in environmental issues and respect for cultural authenticity. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) constitute a large proportion of enterprises that are involved in the development of the tourism industry in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate and highlight how far the SMEs have adopted sustainable tourism concepts in the operation of their businesses. Data and information for this study was collected through extensive literature and document review, observations at some SMEs and interviews with key informants. The study covered private-sector operated SMEs, those operated by communities and those operated as partnership ventures between communities and the private sector. The business areas included accommodation facilities, tour operations and cultural villages. The results showed that SMEs in tourism in Zimbabwe have not fully embraced concepts of sustainable tourism development in their operations. There is inadequate awareness of the importance of the concepts of sustainable development. Further, SMEs do not seem to appreciate the relationship between adoption of sustainability concepts and the overall profitability of their enterprises. It is recommended that government implements an intensive awareness programme on sustainability concepts targeted at SMEs in the country. It is further recommended that the government develops guidelines on how to implement sustainable tourism concepts in the sector. Finally, the government needs to embark on an inspection programme that will ensure that SMEs adhere to implementation of sustainable tourism concepts in their business operations.

The objectives of the chapter are:

1. To highlight the concepts of sustainable development in the tourism sector;
2. To assess the level of application of sustainable tourism concepts by Zimbabwean SMEs; and
3. To proffer recommendations that will encourage SMEs to adopt sustainability concepts in their business operations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The notion of sustainable tourism development evolved from the concept of sustainable economic development that was initially highlighted in the 1987 Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future”. At the centre of sustainable tourism development is the need to ensure that current utilisation of a destination’s resources has an inbuilt mechanism that guarantees long-term continuity of the sector. This chapter assesses how far tourism SMEs in Zimbabwe have integrated the concept of sustainable development in their operations.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Brundtland Report raised the need to make considerations for future generations in all forms of economic development. The report emanated from the general global concern about the form and nature of economic development approach of the post-2<sup>nd</sup> World War period that viewed world resources as infinite and seemed to have minimum concern about the needs of future generations. The report defined sustainable development as follows (:41) : “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to their own”

The concept of sustainable development became a major global agenda after the publication of the Brundtland Report. The main focus has been coming up with global policies and frameworks that guide overall economic development to ensure that future generations are able to meet their own needs with the resources that are available in the world. Some of the highlights of the global agenda on sustainable development include the following:

1. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit - attended by 172 countries that built on the outcomes of the Brundtland Report and focused on the development and adoption of a global framework for development;

2. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg - that followed up issues agreed upon at the Rio 1992 Earth Summit and added new dimensions to the agenda;
3. The 2010 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -10 core development goals that were aimed at bringing equity and balance in overall global economic development; and
4. The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -17 core development goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015 in New York in the United States.

The notion of sustainable tourism was, on one hand, a result of the diffusion of the general concept of sustainable development to the tourism sector. On the other hand, it was a reaction to the overall economic, social and environmental impacts of the growth of mass tourism that occurred during the 1960s and the 1970s (Sharpley, 2009). As has been experienced in the case of the general sustainable development agenda, there also have been several key developments that have occurred in the evolution of sustainable tourism development. Key milestones in the development of the concept include the following:

1. 1992 inclusion of tourism in Agenda 21 of the Rio Summit;
2. 1992 establishment of Sustainable Tourism journal;
3. 1992 Tour Operators Initiative on Sustainable Tourism Development;
4. 1993 World Travel and Tourism Council Green Globe Initiative;
5. 1999 World Travel and Tourism Council Proposal to governments and the private sector on programmes to implement sustainable tourism; and
6. The 2002 Cape Town Declaration on sustainable tourism development that focussed on the following principles-
  1. minimising negative environmental impacts,
  2. minimising negative social and cultural impacts;
  3. generating greater economic benefits for local people and enhancing the well-being of host communities,
  4. improving working conditions and access to the industry;
  5. involving local people in decisions that affect their lives;
  6. making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and to the maintenance of the world's biodiversity;
  7. providing more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people;

8. providing access for people with disabilities and socially disadvantaged people; and
9. engendering respect between tourists and hosts.
10. 2003 launch of Tourism for Tomorrow Awards by the World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC);
11. The 2005 UNWTO/UNEP Report: “Making Tourism More Sustainable-A Guide for Policy Makers” that covered, among other issues, employment quality, community well-being, biological biodiversity, economic viability, local control, environmental purity, visitor fulfilment and social equity; and
12. The 2015 inclusion of sustainable tourism targets in SDGs numbers 8, 12 and 14.

The extensive global advocacy on sustainable tourism development has led governments and the private sector in different parts of the world to attempt to adhere to the principles of the sustainable development agenda (*ibid.*). However, the level of commitment to the concept differs from country to country, depending on broad national approaches to economic development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of sustainable tourism took centre stage in academic circles during the early 1990s (Sharpley, *ibid.*; Day, 2012). During the same period, international organisations involved in tourism began to initiate frameworks that would assist destinations to come up with practical guidelines for implementing sustainable tourism at both national and local levels (Sharpley, *ibid.*). The concept has received international endorsement in both policy and academic circles as the core tourism industry paradigm. However, what became clear during the period was the lack of clarity on what constituted sustainable tourism from both a theoretical and operational perspective (Moscardo and Murphy, 2014). According to Day (2012:1) the term is “ambiguous”. The assessment by Day is a reflection of the challenges that academics and practitioners at different levels have grappled with in trying to come up with what precisely constitutes sustainable tourism.

The challenge of the ambiguity of concept is seen through the multiplicity of definitions that have been given by different authors and organisations. In his review of the concept, Butler (1999:10) highlighted eight definitions that had varied emphasis, depending on the conceptual/ideological orientation of the

author. Having reviewed the challenges of the different definitions, he proposed the following as the most appropriate one (Butler: 12):

Tourism that is developed and maintained in an area (community environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an infinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes.

Having come up with an all-encompassing definition, Butler was still of the opinion that it was most unlikely that there ever will be a consensus on the definition of the concept because it means different things to different people. He pointed out that academics of different ideological persuasions, planners in government and international organisations, business operators, politicians and consumers will always have different notions of what the concept means and entails.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)'s definition of the concept was articulated as follows

“tourism that takes full account of the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts addressing the needs of the visitor, the industry and the host communities” (UNWT/UNEP, 2005:11)

Whilst the definition of the concept by UNWTO is extensive, it is not prescriptive and, hence does not give planners a clear roadmap when coming up with national frameworks (Day, 2012). The challenge of consensus on the definition of the concept has been compounded in recent years by a mushrooming of competing concepts relating to green tourism (*ibid.*). These include, among others, alternative tourism, ecotourism, community-based tourism, adventure tourism, wilderness tourism and volunteer tourism. Day (*ibid.*: 2) further postulates that there is no single way of practising sustainable tourism. He goes on to highlight the need to recognise a continuum of practices that are found at different scales of operations, ranging from international, national, business to non-governmental organisations, to communities. In his view, the key issue is to create adequate awareness about the body of knowledge on sustainable tourism to a broad range of stakeholders so that there will be a willingness to adopt innovative ways to develop future tourism.

An extreme position is taken by Moscardo and Murphy (2014:2538) who argue that there is no such thing as sustainable tourism. They advocate for a new approach to the concept of sustainable tourism and introduce the concept of the Quality of Life (QoL). They posit that the QoL concept should cover a range of capital types that include financial capital, natural capital, build capital, social capital, human capital and political capital. Each variable is given a detailed description of what it encompasses. They further argue that for tourism in a given area to be considered sustainable, each of the capital variables must show a net positive contribution.

It is evident from the exposition of Moscardo and Murphy, that the fundamental issue of lack of consensus on the definition still persists even if one was to fully embrace their approach. A similar view to that of Moscardo and Murphy is expounded by Nepal *et al.* (2015:2) who claim that sustainable tourism can exist only in rhetoric and that it is not a realistic concept in practice.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the flaws that are inherent in the concept of sustainable tourism, what is important to appreciate is the fact that the tourism industry is complex and dynamic and that economic sustainability and hence sustainable tourism is a value-laden concept that must be understood in the cultural context in which the development is taking place (Soontayatron, 2013).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative approach was used in gathering data for the study. Extensive literature review was undertaken with a view of getting a comprehensive review of the debates that have surrounded the topic since it started to dominate academic circles in the 1990s. The internet was used as the main tool for accessing current and past publications on the topic. Observations were made at several SMEs business sites in the country that claim to practise sustainable tourism with a view of assessing what forms of sustainable tourism was practised and how far those practices were in conformity with the current understanding of the concept. The tourism projects were chosen using purposive sampling during a broader study aimed at producing a tourism master plan for the country. Interviews were also held during the period with owners of businesses at these sites and key informants in the six provinces

were the businesses were located. A total of six SMEs was observed in the Masvingo, Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South and Bulawayo Provinces.

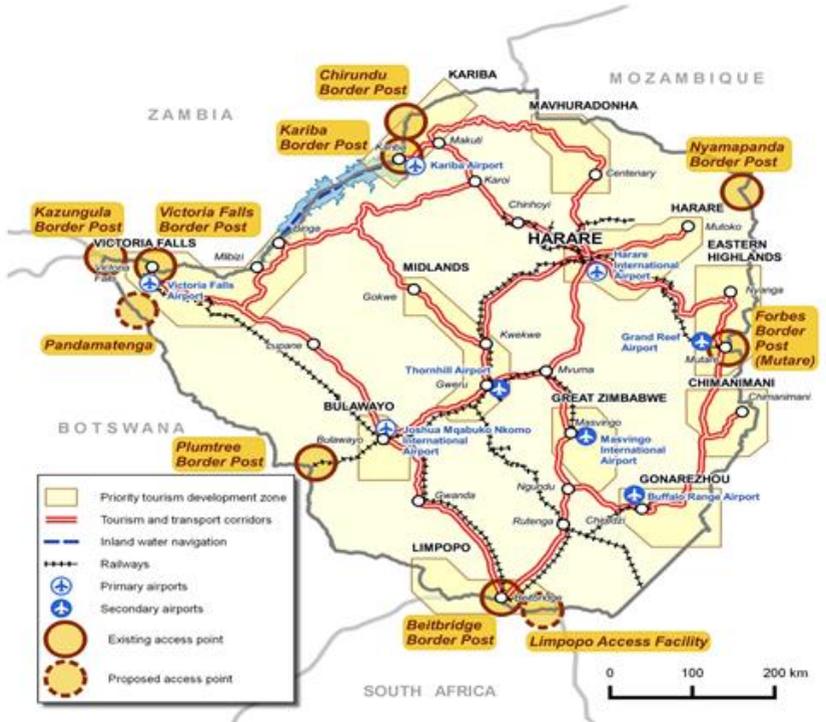
## **CASE STUDIES**

The three SMEs case studies that were chosen for deeper interrogation are located in Masvingo Province, Mashonaland Central Province and Manicaland Province. The types of business enterprise cover accommodation, cultural centre and tour operations. The case studies help to illustrate how SMEs in Zimbabwe are trying to incorporate the concept of sustainable tourism in their operations. The three business enterprises further help to highlight the challenges that tourism business enterprises in general, and SMEs in particular, face when they try and balance the broader issues of business sustainability and the need to minimise the environmental, economic and social impacts of tourism in a destination.

### ***CASE 1: ECO WILDERNESS LODGE, MAVURADONA***

The Eco Wilderness Lodge is located in the Mavuradona wilderness area north of Centenary town in Muzarabani District in Mashonaland Central Province. The lodge is one of a few non-consumptive successful Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) projects in the province. The wilderness area was declared a protected area in 1988 by the Muzarabani Rural District Council (MRDC) because of its scenic beauty and richness in biodiversity. Part of the area is designated as Important Bird Area, with 229 bird species having been recorded. The protected area covers some 600km along the Zambezi escarpment. The wilderness area is part of the Mavuradona Tourism Development Zone (IDZ) (National Tourism Master Plan, 2016) that covers other attractions like Tengenenge Stone Sculpture Village and Mashumbi Pools tourism resort. The TDZ northern section forms the boundary of Zimbabwe –Mozambique (ZIMOZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), and in the west, it is adjacent to the hunting concessions of Dande, Doma and Chewore. The whole area forms part of the tourist route to Mana Pools National Park and to the lower Zambezi area of Kanyemba.

Figure 1 shows the TDZs in the country as established in the National Tourism Master Plan. The case studies are all located in the these zones. The Eco Lodge is located in Mavuradona.



**Figure 1:** Location of Tourism Development Zones where the study cases are found (GoZ - National Tourism Master Plan, 2016)

The lodge offers a variety of accommodation facilities that blend well in the wilderness area’s environment. There are four bashes that accommodate two persons per night. A total of six chalets, with different capacities, are also available at the property. Several camping sites are also available at the lodge. At full capacity, the lodge accommodates a total of 100 clients spread in different modes of accommodation.

Figure 2 shows a basha and a single chalet accommodation type, whilst Figure 3 depicts multiple room chalets and a public area.



**Figure 2:** *A basha and a single chalet* (Author's photo library)



**Figure 3:** Multiple room chalets and a public area with another basha in the background (Author's Photo Library)

The core activities offered by the lodge are as follows:

1. Hiking within the wilderness area where tourists choose from several set routes of different duration and difficulty;

2. Mountain climbing - major opportunities offered by the Zambezi Escarpment;
  3. Sight-seeing that includes the tour of the Showe Falls;
  4. Walking safaris and game viewing on horseback - 41 wildlife species identified in the area;
  5. Cultural tours in the idyllic villages surrounding the Eco Lodge; and
  6. Corporate conferences and team building activities.
- Some of the activities require fitness on the part of the clients.

Figure 4(a) and (b) show clients going up the sides of the Showe Falls.

A.



B.



**Figure 4a):** *Going up on the sides of Showe Falls; (b) Resting at the top of the waterfall (Author’s Photo Library)*

The guides offered by the lodge for both site seeing tours and mountain climbing are well trained and familiar with dangers that clients might face as indicated in Figure 5, a reminder of the tragedy that befell some clients in 1998.



**Figure 5):** *A memorial to clients who perished at the Showe Falls (Author’s Photo Library)*

In recent years, the lodge has witnessed the growth of volunteer tourism. The customers, mainly international tourists, stay for periods ranging from two to five weeks. These groups undertake several activities in the area that focus on wildlife and biodiversity conservation and community projects. For example, clients interested in wildlife and biodiversity conservation undertake the following programmes during their stay at the lodge:

1. Foot patrols in the wilderness area to prevent poaching;
2. Camp management, including repairs and maintenance of the facilities of the lodge; and
3. Wildlife photography and research.

Clients who are keen on community projects participate in activities that include the following:

1. Building projects - schools, clinics etc;
2. Teaching and mentoring of local students; and
3. Training and awareness on human wildlife-conflict issues.

The tour packages for the volunteer tourism clients range from US\$1 452 for a two-week package to US\$2 255 for a five-week package ([www.smallworldlodge.com](http://www.smallworldlodge.com)) The prices include return transfers from Robert Mugabe International Airport to the Lodge and accommodation on a full board basis.

The current developments in the Kanyemba area is likely to increase the popularity of the destination and hence management will need to put in place strategies that will ensure that the increased numbers of visitors will not jeopardise its focus on sustainable development by making sure that the physical and social environment is not negatively affected.

#### ***CASE 2: KAMBAKO “LIVING MUSEUM”, CHIREDDZI***

The “Living Museum” is a cultural Shangaan village that focuses on showcasing Shangaani cultural tradition and demonstrating the traditional skills of the Shangaan people. The cultural village is located in Masvingo Province in the Chiredzi District, adjacent to the Malilange Trust Conservancy. The conservancy is located within the Gonarezhou Tourism Development Zone (NTMP, 2016). One of Zimbabwe’s most high-end accommodation facility, Singita Pamushana, is located within the conservancy. Other tourism properties within the area includes: Nkwali, Nduna and Simbiri Lodges.

The attraction is a partnership arrangement between the Malilangwe Trust Conservancy and the Shangaan community that resides adjacent to the conservancy. It is located about a 45- minute drive from Singita Pamushana

Lodge. The “Living Museum” was set up by the Malilangwe Trust Conservancy to facilitate the preservation and showcasing of Shangaan bush craft.

For the community, it gives them the opportunity to teach the young generations the skills that have been passed on from generation to generation that helped the community to survive in their natural environment. The “Living Museum” enables the Singita Pamushana and the other lodges to offer their clients a cultural product whereby they are able to interact directly with members of the community. Visitors to the museum are able to participate in the following activities:

1. Making fire from friction using wood;
2. Water divining;
3. Pounding and winnowing of indigenous grains;
4. Beer-brewing using indigenous grains;
5. Smelting and forging of iron;
6. Basketry making;
7. Traditional Shangaan dances;
8. Food production and cooking; and
9. Bow and arrow making and practising shooting with the tool;



**Figure 6:** *Tourists arriving at the Kambako “Living Museum” (Author’s Photo Library)*

Being located on the boundary of Malilange Conservancy and the Shangaan communal area, the museum has been set up with a deliberate focus on conservation of the biodiversity of the area. Attempts have been made to minimise disturbance of the ecological balance of the area. Visitors to the area are carefully managed in terms of frequency of visits to the museum and the total number of clients per visit.



**Figure 7:** *Visitors being taught bush craft skills by a Shangaan elder at the museum (Author's Photo Library)*

Visitors are given lessons on how to undertake certain activities and are later encouraged to try some of the activities, for example fire making or water divination using a forked stick.



**Figure 8:** *Visitors immersed in education on Shangaan culture with the Shangaan women adorned in their cultural dresses (Author’s Photo Library)*

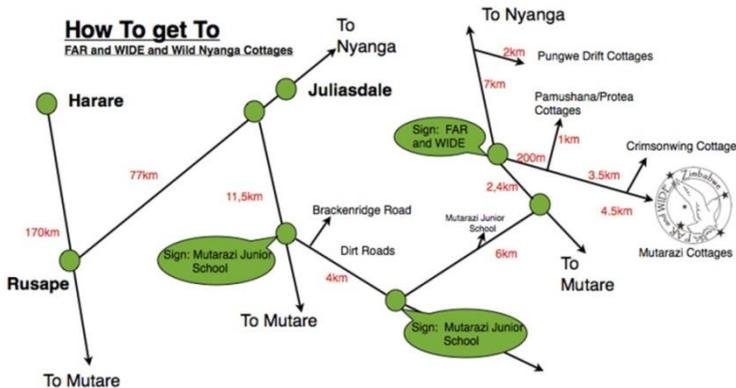
The marketing of the tours to the attraction is done by Singita Pamushana as part of its overall marketing of their products within the Malilangwe Trust Conservancy. The project is also part of the organisation’s corporate social responsibility in the area. Besides helping preserving the Shangaan culture, the project also brings in financial benefits to the community as the tourists are charged to visit the museum as part of their tour package to the Malilangwe Trust Conservancy. The money is paid to Singita Pamushana Lodge as part of the tourists’ holiday package. The lodge disburses the funds to the community at the end of each month. The community then decides how to spend its earnings that are normally used to undertake community projects.

### ***CASE 3 FAR AND WIDE TOUR AND TRAVEL, NYANGA***

The tour operator is based in Nyanga in the Manicaland Province. The company started its operations in 1991 and has gradually developed a wide range of products, all based in the Nyanga/Honde Valley area of Manicaland Province ([www.farandwide.co.za](http://www.farandwide.co.za)). Its initial product offerings were in response to schools’ demand for outdoor activities for students. However, with time the tour operator has broadened its products to include those that

cater for corporates, families, general leisure travellers seeking soft adventure and those that are seeking to connect with nature.

Figure 9 shows the location of the centre of the activities of the company and how to get to the area.



Please leave enough time to travel in the light.  
This map is a sketch map and is not to scale.

Please note distances especially decimals!  
FAR and WIDE mobile telephone: 0772 469 229

**Figure 9:** Location of Far and Wide cottages (Far and Wide website)

Activities offered by the company include the following:

1. Fly fishing;
2. White-water rafting on the Pungwe River;
3. Kayaking;
4. Rock climbing;
5. Mountain bike trails;
6. Hiking trails - across rivers, waterfalls, valleys, mountain peaks, gorges and different vegetation ecosystems; and
7. Sky walking across the Mutarazi Falls.

Figures 10-13 show some of the activities offered by the tour operator in the area.



**Figure 10:** *White-water rafting in the Pungwe River (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 11:** *Bird watching in the Honde Valley (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 12(a):** *Hiking in Nyangani Mountains (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 12(b):** *Hiking trails in the Nyangani Mountains (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 13:** *Sky-walking across the Mutarazi Falls, Nyanga (Far and Wide)*

The tour operator has invested in accommodation facilities that it uses as a springboard for its activities. It also uses the lodges of the Aberfoyle tea estate to house clients who will be on hiking trails within the Rhodes Nyanga and Mutarazi National Parks areas. Efforts have been made to ensure that the accommodation facilities blend well in the physical environment in which they are located. The Education Centre in the Mutarazi National Park has a total of 72 beds in six wooden cabins built on stilts. Tented camps are also provided and are used mainly to house students. The Aberfoyle area offers three luxury cottages that houses 24 clients.

Figures 14-16 show the type of accommodation offered by the tour operator.



**Figure 14:** *Tented accommodation at the Far and Wide Education Centre (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 15:** *Lodge accommodation at Mutarazi Falls (Far and Wide)*



**Figure 16:** *Aberfoyle lodges (Far and Wide)*

It is evident from the above description of the products and services offered by the tour operator that the company has endeavoured to follow its original vision of focussing on sustainable tourism.

## **CONCLUSION**

The case studies outlined in this chapter reveal that the concept of sustainable tourism development in the Zimbabwe is still confined to special cases. These cases are a result of either the geographical location of the enterprise or the vision of the entrepreneur involved in the business. In the majority of cases, tourism development in Zimbabwe is dominated by lip-service to the concept of sustainable tourism development. It is, therefore, essential for the government through the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) to embark on an awareness programme to educate tourism stakeholders on the need to have a paradigm shift in tourism development that is anchored on the principles of sustainable development. The government of Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015 and hence overall economic development in the country need to be anchored on the SDGs.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. ‘Adoption of sustainable development philosophy in tourism enterprises make business sense’. Discuss this statement using specific examples from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region to illustrate your arguments.

2. How far do you think it is practical for SMEs in tourism in Zimbabwe to adopt sustainable tourism practices in their daily operations?