

## The perceptions of managers of SMEs operating in the tourism industry on sustainable development in the Gambia

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### Abstract

Despite the prolific representation of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) in tourism activities in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), there seems to be little attention given to their perceptions of sustainable tourism development. Despite their large presence, few, if any tourism products are still said to be truly sustainable, or few, if any destinations can be called sustainable (Mckercher, 2003). They are now the subject of interest with a particular interest and focus on their ability to a changing environment, and how they adjust to change fast enough for their survival (Ball, 2005). Hence the importance of tourism in LDCs, and understanding the perceptions of such an important investor group in sustainable tourism is essential.

The aim of this paper is to present the diverse perceptions of managers of SMEs in the tourism industry in The Gambia on sustainable tourism development (Drammeh, 2014). Data was collected from 73 participants, using a self completed questionnaire. It asked questions on business practices, awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism and what it means for SMEs, and knowledge of sustainable tourism. Findings show fragmented views among managers of what sustainable tourism means. They are fragmented in their perceptions of whether tourism in The Gambia is operated in a sustainable manner. Their ethical business strategies are also not clear. The majority of the managers do not agree that most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism. Hence, the diverse perceptions that exist. It thus seems that the concept of sustainable tourism development does not seem to be universally understood.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism development, managers of SMEs, perceptions, The Gambia



**Gambia Tourism Board**  
The Smiling Coast of Africa

## Introduction

The majority of managers of Small Scale Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) seem to be members of the local communities in a particular destination. Their understanding and knowledge of the socio-economic issues, the natural environment and the cultures of the people in the destination tends to be important in the practice of sustainable tourism. However, there is little evidence to suggest that individual tourism businesses are performing in a more sustainable manner in accordance with local community needs, or, indeed, at the required destination level (Sharpley, 2010). Thus, understanding the links between environmental sustainability and equity is critical if we are to expand human freedoms for the present and future generations (UN 2011).

The aim of this paper is to present the diverse perceptions of managers of SMEs in sustainable tourism development in The Gambia (Drammeh, 2014). The objective is to enable an understanding of the reasons behind the fragmented views of these managers on sustainable development in The Gambia. It will therefore reflect upon the literature in sustainable tourism development and previous studies that were conducted in the area. The section ahead briefly describes the research method, and then presents the diverse perceptions of managers of SMEs operating in tourism on sustainable tourism development in The Gambia. The final section provides a discussion of the results and the conclusions reached.

## Sustainable tourism development

The impacts of tourism can be positive or negative (Kreag, 2001), falling under a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses economic, social, cultural, ecological, environmental and political forces (Singh et al. 2003). Its positive impacts means solidarity, mutual respect,

and the participation of all players implicated in the process, especially those indigenous to the location and must also be based on efficient cooperation mechanisms at all levels: local, national, regional and international” (Gartner, 1996 in Birch et al., 2002:48). This requires “reconciliation of the ecological imperative to stay within the carrying capacity of the planet, the economic imperative to provide adequate standard of living for all, and the social imperative to develop forms of governance that promote the values people want to live by (Sustainable Development Research Initiative (SDRI). However, many of the demand patterns in tourism is said to reflect the unsustainable lifestyles of industrialised consumer societies (UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 1999). As such, The United Nations (2003) points out some proactive measures to be adopted by host countries in their tourism development efforts to include the protection of the environment, and preservation of local culture and historic sites. Current tourism development literature emphasises issues relating to sustainability in the economic, environmental and social arenas of tourism host nations, defined as the type of tourism development:

*“that meets the needs of present tourists and the host while protecting and Enhancing opportunities for the future...envisaged as leading to management of resources in a way that the economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems”.*

(World Tourism Organisation in Cernat and Gourdon, 2005).

Whilst tourism was not the subject of Agenda 21, the General Assembly of The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) adopted the notion at its nineteenth special session in 1997, and included sustainable tourism as one of its sectoral themes (CSD, 2001).

Appendix 1 Positive and negative impacts of tourism.

**Tourism development in The Gambia.**

Tourism activities, and foreign investment are particularly strong in the development of accommodation facilities, restaurants, tour operating and travel businesses along the Tourism Development Area (TDA)

concentrated on a 10 km strip along the Atlantic Ocean from Cape Point in Bakau and eventually spread to Fajara, Kotu and Bijilo in the coastal areas of south Gambia. The TDA is shown in the figure 3 comprising Bijilo, Kololi, Kotu, Fajara and Bakau.



Figure 3: Map of tourism development area (TDA), The Gambia. Source: Modified after Mitchell, 2007 (Ekenberg, 2010).

Figure 3 illustrates the area where tourism development is highly concentrated around the coastal region which is a flat and monotonous area of unconsolidated marine and Aeolian sands; low dunes being typical (UNESCO, 2001) along a strip of sandy beaches, some part of which has been important source for fishing

before the coming of tourism in the country.

Foreign companies heavily invested in the tourism sector in the country concentrating their activities around the TDA where they control the majority of the tourism related

operations. Hotels, guest houses, lodges, bars and restaurants, tourism service facilities, and souvenir shops were provided, with local people employed as unskilled workers. The Gambia then gradually emerged as a sun, sea and sand winter destination, particularly attractive for vacation around the Atlantic Ocean and its sandy beaches. Not only are the visitors dependent upon air travel, but the dominance of organised packages is also clear (Mitchell and Fall, 2007). Package tours representing different elements sold as a single product, put together in an inclusive way catering for the visitor's transportation and accommodation arrangements; half board or full board are sold to tourists visiting the country. The majority of tourists visiting as holiday-makers with 84% on packages (Mitchell and Fall, 2007).

Although tourism has contributed to the uplifting of local communities in The Gambia that comes in contact with tourists, it is also accused of negative socio-cultural impacts on the destination. The all-inclusive nature of the tourism industry does not only seem to be a challenge for government in realising its aim of foreign exchange earning but also for local communities that are excluded from taking active part in the tourism business activities. Tourism Concern suggests that, local businesses in The Gambia, such as restaurants, shops, taxi drivers and small guest houses, all lose out to the all-inclusive model, as guests are deterred from leaving their hotels. The tourists' experience in terms of cultural exchange and consumption of local products throws up some serious questions about the sustainability and ethics of this model of tourism. There is no economic sense in this sort of tourism (Wheat 1997), and a major oversight of sustainable development, reflecting a lack of appreciation of the nature and significance of tourism (Wall, in Wahab and Pigram, 1997).

Drammeh (2014) investigated the perception of managers of SMEs in

sustainable tourism development in LDCs in a case study of The Gambia, using Sharpley, (2010), the destination capitals model to understand sustainable tourism development, namely the environmental, human, socio-cultural, economic, technological and political capital of destination that are relied upon by investors to create tourism business activities a conceptual framework for the study. From the analyses of the collected data, there were divergent views, with fragmented perceptions of Managers of SMEs operating in tourism on what sustainable tourism development means in The Gambia.

### **Research methodology**

A case study was proposed to collect data for this type of investigation (Beeton, 2005). The exploratory approach was adopted and focused on seeking to discover existing research which might throw light on specific questions (Veal, 1998:84). In this regard, the destination capitals model proposed by Sharpley (2010) as a model to understand sustainable tourism was the centre of attention to capture the perceptions of managers of SMEs in regards to sustainable tourism in The Gambia. A similar approach was used in Zapata-Campos, (2008) referring to it as a simplified representation of reality. Models identify basic concepts and describe what reality is like, and the conditions by which we can study it (Clark, 2005).

### **Research Respondents.**

The respondents in this research are managers of operations within tourism industry and characterised as SMEs by The Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA). Thus, even foreign owned companies with similar characteristics compared to local SMEs which include small hotels and lodges, restaurants, eco-camps, craft market vendors, tourist taxi drivers, service providers, equipment hirers, guest houses and ground tour operators are also

included in the survey. They are the structured sectors operating in tourism under the purview of the organised economic activities representing around

61% of SMEs registered with GTA. The categories of operations that responded to the survey are provided in table 2.

**Table 2. Frequency of category of operations that participated in the research**

Category	Frequency	Valid Percent
Art and craft vendors	7	9.6
Car rental	2	2.7
Eco-Camp	5	6.8
Equipment hirer	4	5.5
Flight operator	2	2.7
Ground tour operator	7	9.6
Hotel	10	13.7
Hotel and restaurant	8	11.0
Lodge	9	12.3
Other	3	4.1
Public sector	6	8.2
Restaurant only	5	6.8
Service provider	3	4.1
Tourist taxi	2	2.7
Total	73	100.0

This research covers a wide geographical area in five administrative regions in The Gambia with SMEs operating in tourism. The locations of the operations are referred to as Tourism Development Area (TDA) or outside TDA. At the time of this research there were 120 registered with The Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA). Although the majority of operations in the sample, (70) potential respondents are from the TDA, nevertheless SMEs outside the TDA (50) are also included in the

sample. A questionnaire containing statements on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1 is strongly agree- 5 strongly disagree) (Maddox, 1985) was distributed to 120 SMEs operating within tourism and registered with GTA, which generated 73 respondents.

**Generalisability and transferability**

The findings reflect the answers generated from managers of tourism SMEs

**Table 3 Generalisability**

Small and medium size enterprises			Sample	
Within TDA	70	58 %	38	52 %
Outside TDA	50	42 %	26	36 %
No answer	-	-	9	12 %
Total	120	100 %	73	100%

Table 3 presents the operations within the TDA (52%) as well as operations outside the TDA (36%), with most non-respondents (12%) from outside the TDA. The non-response might be due to distance of the location of the operations, avoiding self-disclosure, suspicion or lack of knowledge of the usefulness of the research. However, there is still possibility to generalise the findings to SMEs

operating in tourism in The Gambia and similar countries. Type of ownership of operations that participated, their awareness, and perceived dimensions of a sustainable tourism are presented herein, and a discussion of the results and its conclusions.

**Research findings**

Since, the respondents to this research are themselves members of local

communities in The Gambia, it was essential to first investigate their level of awareness of the concept of sustainable tourism development shown in table 4.

**Table 4. Are you aware of the term Sustainable tourism development?**

	Frequency	Percent
No answer	5	6.8
yes	66	90.4
no	2	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100.0</b>

90% of the respondents affirmed to be aware of the term sustainable tourism development. However, they are also fragmented in their perceptions of whether tourism in The Gambia is operated in a sustainable manner, ethical issues, and level of awareness in establishments.

Table 5 shows that 37 % disagreed that tourism in The Gambia is operated in a sustainable manner, (29% disagreed respectively 8.2 % strongly disagreed), more than 40% agreed to the statement (34.2% agreed respectively 6% strongly agreed).

**Table 5. Tourism in The Gambia is operated in a sustainable manner**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	6	8,2
Disagree	21	28,8
Neither agree or disagree	15	20,5
Agree	25	34,2
Strongly agree	4	5,5
Total	71	97,3
Missing	2	2,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The differing perceptions of how tourism is been implemented maybe reflecting on the different interests of the enterprises.

Perceptions of managers of SMEs on their strategies and ethical issues are presented in table 6.

**Table 6. Business strategies of SMEs are ethical**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	6	8,2
Agree	15	20,5
Neither agree or disagree	9	12,3
Disagree	4	5,5
Strongly disagree	1	1,4
Total	35	47,9
Missing	38	52,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Around 48% (47, 9%) that have responded, in which 29% agreed (8.2% strongly agreed respectively 20.5% agreed) that business strategies of SMEs

are ethical. The figures in the table 6 are in agreement with findings in table 5 showing a split in perceptions concerning whether tourism in The Gambia is operated in a

sustainable manner. Ethical issues concerning business strategies of SMEs is not clear. Table 7 presents findings to the

statement that, “most of the establishments are aware of sustainable practices”.

**Table 7. Most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism development**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	7	9,6
Disagree	18	24,7
Neither agree or Disagree	18	24,7
Agree	25	34,2
Strongly Agree	1	1,4
Total	69	94,5
Missing	4	5,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table 7 shows a division in the perceptions of respondents concerning SMEs awareness of sustainable tourism development. Equally, 35% agreed, respectively 35% disagreed to the statement that most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism development, 25% neither agree nor agree to the statement.

provoked by a destroyed coastal ecosystem in which the coastal rainforests and the mangrove forest plays a protective master role (Willms, 5005). The majority of tourism development activities on destination studied are located along TDA. Table 8 shows the distribution of the respondents operating within the Tourism Development Area (TDA), and those outside of the TDA.

Tourism-induced coastal developments disregards the negative consequences

**Table 8 Location of operations**

	Frequency	Percent
.	9	12,3
OUT OF TDA	26	35,6
TDA	38	52,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table 8 shows a missing of 12% response rate on their location of operation, with 36 % respondents suggesting that they are operating within the TDA, and 52% outside of the TDA. This means that the majority of SMEs operating in tourism in The Gambia are located outside the TDA. Willms (2005) suggests that to be sustainable tourism in tropical coastal

rainforest areas has to adapt itself to the vulnerability of that specific environment. Location of operation could be an important factor of sustainable tourism, and also seems to describe a characteristic of the type of ownership of the operations illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9. Type of ownership of operation**

	Frequency	Percent
Multinational	7	9,6
Locally owned	33	45,2
Multinational partnership with local resident	12	16,4
Private foreign owner	20	27,4
Other	1	1,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The categories of the SMEs comprised of between 2- 115 employees with 45, 2% locally owned, respectively 16.4% in partnership with a foreigner. This means that local investors are directly or indirectly involved in more than 58% of tourism operations that responded to the research. Around 10% (9.6%) of the operations are owned by multinationals, 16.4% foreign partnership with a local resident, and 27,4% foreign owners as illustrated in table 9. The educational background of respondents is shown in table 10.

Education challenges the way people think about the world, the way they live in it and relate with each other. (UNESCO, 2010). Table 10 shows that the majority of managers of SMEs affirm the presence of a large number of qualified labour in the

There are local actors too with no formal training of sustainable practice management but having capabilities in accordance with their local traditional conservation methods to provide informed views on such a business environment. Local knowledge helps in data collection, scenario analysis, management planning, designing of the adaptive strategies to learn and get feedback, and institutional support to put policies in to practice (Getz et al., 1999). These are useful tools in achieving a sustainable tourism.

**Theoretical perspectives and discussion of research findings**

Briefly it was found that:

- SME managers operating in

**Table 10. Education and training of manager related to hospitality and Tourism**

	Frequency	Percent
.	6	8,2
Yes	39	53,4
No	28	38,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

hospitality and tourism sector in The Gambia, with 53,4% managers whose training and educational background is related to hospitality and tourism. Expert knowledge plays an integral role in applied ecology and conservation (Burgman, 2005),” is what qualified individuals know as a result of their technical practices, training, and experience (Booker and McNamara 2004).

- Tourism parties have a fragmented perception of how sustainable tourism is practiced in The Gambia.
- A split in perceptions concerning ethical business strategies of SMEs in The Gambia exists.
- A split in perception that most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism development.

Hence there are fragmented perceptions of managers of SME on sustainable tourism in Gambia, and it is essential to reflect on the literature and previous studies in the area.

### **Possible reasons for the diverse perceptions on sustainable tourism development.**

Sustainability has been an agenda item for many governments, non-governmental entities and private sector interests for the past twenty years, with tourism development on the agenda for more than half of that period (Liu, 2003). It is defined, interpreted and imagined differently between individuals, organisations and social groups (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). There are complex issues within the concept that continuously puts it under the microscope and subjected to a continuous debate dating back from the 1980s, with still no universal agreement on what sustainable development really means in its application to tourism. The standard guideline follows the general global accepted impacts of tourism as illustrated in Appendix 1.

Whilst it seems to be easy to conceptualise the concept, it is far more challenging to develop an effective technique that can be applied in a variety of situations (Goodwin, 2006). The definition of the concept has been criticized as "so vague and in-consistent with almost any form of action or inaction" (Pearce and Atkinson 1993), also, its meaning is not immediately obvious (Berke and Manta, 1999). A major problem is the ambiguity and subsequent vulnerability of the concept to interpretation and employment on ideological grounds (Weaver and Lawton, 1999). Thus, conflicts between stakeholders prevail where tourism develops, and balancing the need for ecological responsibility and economic realities is a constant struggle (Curtin and Busby, 1999; Knowles-Lankford and Lankford, 2000; Liu, 2003).

Hence the geographical, historical, political, socio-cultural, environmental and economic distinctions between countries, sustainable practices seem to be a local development strategy. An understanding of what is to be sustained, for whom it is to be sustained, and the level at which it is to be sustained, is what is needed (Johnston and Tyrrell, 2005). For instance, the environmental issue as a theme of attention in tourism is critical source of survival; shelter, food, medicine, and energy in LDCs.

When sustainable tourism development advocates that the environment should be protected, or managed in manner that would lessens indigenous people's freedom to utilise it as they used to without providing an alternative, it would mean the concept does not consider the situation of the people without that environment- opportunity cost. Hence such differences, it is not surprising, that managers of SMEs operating in tourism have a fragmented perception of how sustainable tourism is practiced in The Gambia. The tourism business environment in the country is controlled by foreign companies; thus the strong ideological reinforcement of western philosophies by such investors may play an important role in the practice of the concept in the country with little attention on ways of living of local communities. The great influence of tourism on communities such as Bakau and areas that are in direct contact with tourists have not been beneficial as was expected. A split in perception on ethical business strategies of SMEs in The Gambia is not surprising either, and might be reflecting on respondents reaction to the type of tourism practiced in the country.

### **Ethical business strategies of SMEs in The Gambia.**

It is said that poverty, unemployment and lack of manufacturing industries are among the overriding social and economic issues LDCs are facing with the most

severe structural impediments to sustainable development (UNDPAD, 2011). Despite the the country's (49 yrs), long history of tourism development, The Gambia still complains about the negative economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts of the tourism industry.

The tourism industry competes with locals on the use of limited resources that are important sources of survival for communities in the destination. It may thus be presented negatively as a form of exploitation (Huybers 2007, Sharpley and Telfer 2008). Local communities are often deprived from using local resources as they used to for the benefit of leisure activities of tourists. Investors may thus be tempted to make short-term gains by promoting activities that are profitable for their operations with less regard to locals, consequently throwing doubts on the ethical standards of such establishments. However, people can have different views about ethics which can be problematic. It is therefore, often described as an area that needs further investigation, and frequently considered in the conclusion of academic research (Fennell, 2006). Ethics can be described as the code of moral standards which people use to judge the actions and behaviours of themselves and the others (Bowie and Schneider 2011, 10). In the context of The Gambia, despite the large presence of locally owned SMEs, the tourism industry is largely controlled by foreign companies who set the code of moral standards in the business environment. It is "the low levels of concentration in an industry where small businesses (SMEs) dominate despite the fact that relatively few, large corporations have market prominence" (Cooper et al, 1998:22). There is a split in perceptions concerning ethical business strategies of SMEs operating in tourism in The Gambia, which might be due to different interpretations of what is considered to be moral. Different societies have different cultural expectations of sustainable

development further complicating the process (Brown et al, 1987).

Ethical issues arise in four main areas: *the supply chain, the local community (in the tourism destination), the workplace, and customers* (Leadlay, 2011). The industry is characterised by a high degree of monopoly, characterised by asymmetrical power relationships, which are dominated by the more developed countries (Shaw and Williams, 2005:43). Around 10% (9.6%) of the respondents in this research are owned by multinationals, 16.4% foreign partnership with a local resident, and 27.4% foreign owners. The majority of establishments 45, 2% are locally owned, 16.4% foreign partnership with a local resident. Local investors in The Gambia are involved in 62% (61.6%) SMEs operating in tourism, and foreign investors involved in around 53 % (53.4%) of such operations in the country. Most SMEs participating in tourism in LDCs are operating as representatives of foreign companies or relying on foreign operators for the survival of their businesses.

Critics pointed out the dependency on foreigners' investors and the vulnerability of the destination to factors outside the control of the destination, with reinforcement of socio-economic and spatial inequalities (Goodwin 1998:2). Some these challenges are direct consequences of the lack of capital, difficulties to access tourists generating markets, lack of qualified labour, and lack of technology are among the difficulties LDCs are confronted with. Most of the foreign owned tourism businesses undergo audits for sustainable practices with certification programs that are purely based on western values and standards. The EU Package Travel Directive, for that matter suggests to European operators to encourage their clients to use the operators' own excursions and to stay within the confines of the products over which the originating market operators have control, and furthermore, tour operators often earn important revenue from their own sale of excursions, which

would also be undercut by promoting services sold by local

businesses (Pro-Poor Tourism Sheet No.10). From the preview of *the supply chain*, local SMEs are thus bound to follow such trends in the market place, and needs to abide by rules to stay competitive and successful. They tend to follow the homogenisation process described by DiMaggio and Powell, (1983) as isomorphism; a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environment (Hawley in DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

However, despite these programs, there are still exists economic leakage, domestic social dissatisfaction and resentment (Pearce, 1989:14). Local guides are excluded from information meetings of tour operators in The Gambia (Bah and Goodwin, 2003). Their fears over health and safety liabilities, may mean that they do not recommend fresh juice sold on the beach, despite high standards on the part of the new juices' sellers' organisation in The Gambia (Bah and Goodwin, 2003). Research also confirms that little of the actual package cost directly reaches the poor (Ashley, 2006). At *the local community* level, people often perceive that they have little or no share in the economic benefits of tourism, while bearing a disproportionate burden from environmental degradation (Leadlay 2011). In a survey of local people who are dependent on the tourism industry in The Gambia, it was found that 99% of the people are opposed to all-inclusives because local restaurants, bars, guides and taxi-drivers were losing business to the resorts, which are mainly controlled by foreign companies (Bah in Tourism Concern). Locals are also often disadvantaged in terms of unequal power relationships with multinationals (Shaw and Williams, 2005). At the *local community level* Tourism SMEs in The Gambia reflects on local production, and most of their products geared towards traditional authenticity and local

representation. Values that people assign to a given resource, and their perceptions of that resource, will influence the

pathways deemed appropriate to achieve outcomes that are considered sustainable (Hall, 1998).

However, their dependent on the tourist suppliers for the survival of their businesses with standardised packages might mean, SMEs follows on the directions of the tour operators, and consequently even local entrepreneurs out of economic interests conduct activities that can be harmful for the environment as well as disadvantaged local communities in gaining from tourism. Their business activities can therefore affect ethics at *the workplace*, as well as at *the customer level*. The foreign operators bringing tourists on the destination have directives with guidelines for their agents to adhere and follow on contacts them on the bases of such agreements. Sustainable tourism development is a normative process which involves stakeholder values (Walsh, Jamrozy and Burr, 2001).

#### **Aware of sustainable tourism development**

Whether through local traditional or scientific knowledge, being aware of the concept of sustainable tourism development is an important foundation for the success of the practice. There is a split in perception of respondents, 35% agree, respectively 35% disagrees to the statement that most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism development, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed to the statement.

Sustainable tourism is mostly used in relation to ecosystem and natural environment driven by Western aspirations, norms and values. However, in the context of tourism, tranquility, nature and familiarisation with local customs all play a prominent role (Reguero in López and García, 2006). The tourism businesses operate in contexts where

social interaction occurs through networks of relationships in local proximity, with particular attention paid to the “sense of belonging”, “shared beliefs” of individuals, and socialisation (Grängsjo and Gummesson, 2006). The split in perceptions of awareness of the concept of sustainable tourism is probably highlighting the importance of both traditional conservation and scientific methods in the practice of the concept. It might also be based on an outsider perspective that indigenous local knowledge maybe inconsistent, base on superstition, or just plain wrong, but a member of a local culture see it as logical, useful, a consonant with other beliefs (Mundy, 1993).

However, it is suggested that SMEs taken together makes up the environment of the destination: natural, economic, cultural, and social (Mazilu, 2010). 53, 4% of respondents say that their education and training is related to hospitality and tourism. Indigenous knowledge and sustainability are often intertwined, and often it is the indigenous practice that is sustainable, whilst many modern technologies are harmful to the environment or force local people into economic dependency (Mundy, 1993). The perception on awareness SMEs of sustainable tourism seems to be the competing views of foreign business or western standards and local investors on the meaning of the concept, or its practice.

## Conclusions

The complexity of tourism and its socio-economic impact on host destinations has been pointed out by the UN (1999) suggesting that there is a need to balance environmental and social impacts in economic terms while achieving economic and community development. In accordance with the data generated from the case study on the perception of managers of SMES in The Gambia on sustainable tourism development, 2014; this paper presented the fragmented

perceptions of managers of SMEs on sustainable tourism development in The Gambia. It shows that:

- Managers of SMEs are fragmented in their perceptions concerning whether tourism in The Gambia is operated in a sustainable manner.
- A split in perceptions concerning ethical business strategies of SMEs in The Gambia.
- A split in perception that most of the establishments are aware of sustainable tourism.

To understanding the reasons behind the fragmented views, the paper made reflections on the literature on sustainable development, suggesting that there is no universal agreed meaning of sustainable tourism development. The concept is usually associated with western beliefs, values and scientific, journals of which are also not within easy reach to developing countries (de la Carlos, 2000). Hence the geographical, historical, political, socio-cultural, environmental and economic distinctions between countries, the paper suggests that sustainable practices seem to be a local development strategy. Thus, an understanding of what is to be sustained, for whom it is to be sustained, and the level at which it is to be sustained, is what is needed (Johnston and Tyrrell, 2005) and further suggests that, through the participation of local SMEs, we can understand what is to be sustained, for whom it is to be sustained, and the level at which it is to be sustained.

The paper reflects on the ethical business strategies of SMEs operating in tourism in The Gambia. It seems that ethical business standards are not clear, and can mean they might be doing business as it favours them with little considerations to ethics. However, it is suggested that the root cause of unethical business standards might be due to the rules and business guidelines that are provided by suppliers to locally owned SMEs who act as agents on the destination. They are obliged to abide by the rules and regulations as

stipulated in their contracts. The paper then suggests that split in perception concerning SMEs awareness of sustainable tourism might due to the competing ideas between locally owned SMEs operating tourism and the foreign own companies who are suppliers of tourists on the destination. It thus seems that there is no universal direction of sustainable tourism practice.

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**Appendix 1 Tourism impacts.**

**Table 1 illustrates potential positive and negative impacts of tourism on a destination.**

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE IMPACTS
<p><b>Economic Aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased household earnings from tourist activities.</li> <li>• Multiplier effects (e.g. the redistribution of tourism spending from tourism related sectors).</li> <li>• Better infrastructure: road, water, sewage, transport modes, recreation Opportunities.</li> <li>• Foreign exchange earnings for government</li> <li>• Labour-intensive service industries</li> <li>• Income from use of amenities and taxes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic Aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonality (e.g. weather, timing factors) creates loss of income for the destination and employees</li> <li>• Economic leakage (e.g. large-scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host communities/exclusion of local Businesses products and services)</li> <li>• Dependency of foreign goods and services (importation of foreign food and drink, immigration of outsiders as tour managers/leaders, guides, laborers)</li> <li>• Cost of security to offset crime in the local areas</li> <li>• Loss of receipts owing to external economic crises/terrorism</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sociocultural Aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation of local heritage resources and ethnic identity</li> <li>• Widening of social perspectives</li> <li>• Preservation of family ties</li> <li>• Upward mobility</li> <li>• Folklore stimulus; creation of museums</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sociocultural Aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural clashes, loss of cultural identity</li> <li>• Commodification of local culture</li> <li>• Deterioration of historic sites owing to overuse</li> <li>• Fearfulness from terrorism and crime</li> <li>• Misuse of intellectual property rights</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental Impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of conservation needs</li> <li>• Establishment of eco-labels</li> <li>• Awareness of local resource limits</li> <li>• Establishment of land use regulations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental Impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollution and preservation costs</li> <li>• Transformation of national parks and green/open spaces</li> <li>• Loss of native ecological systems/values</li> <li>• Overuse of tourist facilities and services (e.g. accommodation, parking and toilets especially where</li> </ul>

	tourism is seasonal)
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Source: Drammeh (2014) adapted from Smith, (2001:110).