Stakeholders' assessments of tourism policy and product development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to determine the stakeholders' assessments of tourism policy, and the state of tourism product development in Zimbabwe. The study is argued from the perspective that stakeholder views on tourism have remained an under-researched phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa. Adopting an exploratory qualitative study design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key tourism stakeholders identified by way of a purposive sampling technique. From the interviews, key issues that came to the fore, were that the tourism policy of Zimbabwe was said to be outdated, the distribution of tourism offerings limited, the economic performance poor, and the state of tourism offerings in the country having been negatively influenced by the political instabilities wracking the country. The study provides some insights into the importance of the role of tourism stakeholders in terms of policy formulation, planning and strategy implementation.

Keywords: Stakeholder, tourism policy, tourism product development, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Whereas the developed economies tend to accumulate much of their wealth through tourism, the developing economies usually regard tourism as doctoring their environmental, social and economic ills (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2017). Despite the growing significance of tourism globally, its positive impact has not yet been maximised by a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and tourism product development has not yet been prioritised as a major economic booster (WTTC, 2015; 2017). According to Christie, Fernandes, Messerli and Twining-Ward (2014), most low- to middle-income sub-Saharan African countries with significant tourism potential plan to receive tourists in the absence of a comprehensive policy to guide tourism product development, despite the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2015) noting that 83 per cent of the countries concerned bank on tourism for their survival. While some countries (South Africa, Kenya, Botswana, and Tanzania) have been acknowledged as being destinations that have plans and policies, as well as detailed implementation plans (World Bank, 2017), in place, and, consequently have a vibrant tourism sector, others (Cameroon, Gambia, Madagascar, and Nigeria) merely have plans in place that provide objectives for the tourism sector (World Bank, 2017).

In the case of Zimbabwe, the WTTC, (2017) reports that the country's current plans and policies are based on the tourism trends of more than a decade ago, making them no irrelevant, considering the economic and political fluctuations that have so negatively affected tourism well-being in the country since 1999 (Makoni & Tichaawa, 2017; Tichaawa & Makoni, 2018a; Tichaawa & Makoni, 2018b). For instance, while Zimbabwe's National Tourism Policy (Government of Zimbabwe, 2014) focuses on attracting and retaining the trust of the previous major/source tourist markets (i.e. the United Kingdom [UK], Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia), the tourism trends and statistics of the country provided by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency [ZIMSTAT] (2016) and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

[ZTA] (2015) prove that the source markets' arrivals shrunk by 60.3 per cent between 1999 and 2015, whereas the Asian and African markets grew by 65 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively, during the same period. The pattern remained consistent throughout the first quarter of 2017, with a 5 per cent increase in the number of tourism arrivals, but with a 9 per cent drop in tourism receipts, from the source markets involved, whereas the Asian and African markets have increased by 3 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively, over the same period (WTTC, 2017). Subject to the current investigation is the extent to which the nature of the current tourism product development strategies and marketing efforts, as well as the guidelines of the current tourism policy, have influenced the above-mentioned tourism performance of Zimbabwe.

The vision of the National Tourism Policy (implemented in 2014) is to be "the destination of choice and leader in the development and sustainable tourism in Africa by 2018" (Government of Zimbabwe, 2014:15). After 2014, tourism arrivals increased by 2.1 per cent in 2015. Such an increase was, however, less than the estimated 2.7 per cent indicated in the new tourism policy. Further to the above, despite the 5 per cent increase in the number of tourist arrivals in 2016, compared to in the previous year, the tourism receipts were recorded to have dropped by 9 per cent, from $886 million in 2015 to $819 million in 2016. The tourism performance of Zimbabwe, after enactment of the above-mentioned policy, clearly shows that the country is far from achieving its vision stated in its National Tourism Policy. The aforementioned statistics raise the need for an assessment of the current policy framework linked to product offerings and development.

The need for conducting, and the significance of, the current study were born from the issues of concern raised by the researchers:

(1) Scant analysis exists in the literature with regard to the stakeholder views on tourism policies within the African context;

(2) The involvement of the stakeholders and their views has been limited with regards to tourism policy design; and

(3) The current policies driving tourism development in Zimbabwe, as is typical of many African countries, might no longer be relevant, due to the ever-changing market trends that occur in response to the fluctuating political and economic dynamics of the country.

With regard to the highlighted issues of concern, the present researchers sought to obtain the Zimbabwean key tourism stakeholders' assessments of the tourism policy and of the state of tourism product development. The rationale for the study was to gauge the extent to which the key tourism stakeholders were involved in destination planning, as well as to obtain an indication of the implications involved for securing sound stakeholder involvement in the tourism policy design, so as to achieve sustainability on a broader sub-Saharan perspective. The theoretical grounding of the present research, and a review of the relevant literature in relation to the current study, is explored in the next section, in an effort to achieve the objectives of the study. Furthermore, the methodology employed in the study, as well as the associated results and implications, are discussed. The study culminates with the discussion of limitations and future research.

Theoretical grounding and the literature review

Stakeholder Theory (ST) and Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) Theory

Tourism policies are put in place to guide tourism planning and development so as to attain a degree of sustainability (Mhlanga, 2009; Tefera & Govender, 2017). For sustainability to be achieved, the tourism stakeholders have been identified as being the key drivers of the process (Burger & Niles, 2017; Gomulya & Mishina, 2017; Makoni & Tichaawa, 2017; Ramus

& Vaccaro, 2017). In the light of the above, the current study was grounded on ST and STD theory. ST is defined as being a concept that originates from within the ranks of ordinary management, with the theory having been developed with a view to (1) encouraging firms to focus on the diversity and heterogeneity within traditionally defined stakeholder groups; (2) engaging marginal stakeholders; (3) the flexible strategies accounting for changing stakeholder motivations; and (4) increasing the collaborative relationship between the different stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Khazaei, Elliot & Joppe, 2015). STD is defined as an economic, social and environmental concept that is aimed at guiding human activity to ensure that the society involved is enabled to meet its present needs (Katukiza, Ronteltap, Niwagaba, Foppen, Kansiime & Lens, 2012), while preserving the natural environment (Swarbrooke, 1999).

ST helped in identifying the relevant tourism stakeholders (Business Analyst Learning, 2013; Kokemuller, 2017; Poudel, Nyaupane & Budruk, 2016) for the current study, while the principle of STD theory underscored the need for the identified stakeholders to drive tourism development in the direction of sustainability as being the ultimate goal for any development (Felicite, 2017). Keeping in mind that Zimbabwe's tourism industry has experienced much fluctuation since the country's declaration of independence in 1980 (Mzembi, 2014), the two theories address the associated tourism issues and challenges, and how the relevant stakeholders should help to ensure a sustainable future for tourism in the country.

Tourism policy in context

The WTTC (2015) advises that, if the designing of a tourism policy is to be successful, there is need for a supportive physical, regulatory, fiscal, and social environment that will help tourism to develop in a sustainable manner, delivering benefits to all parts of the relevant communities, as well as opportunities for businesses and investment development. Additionally, there should either be an enabling infrastructure in terms of accessibility, road network, amenities, and high-quality tourism offerings to complement the tourism policy, or the policy itself must advocate for the development of said infrastructure, in case it is lacking at the time of policy design (Tseng & Huang, 2017). Edgell & Swanson (2013) define a tourism policy as being the formulation of a set of objectives that affect long-term tourism development.

The above means that tourism policy gives the direction and the pace at which tourism must be planned for, developed, marketed, and promoted (Swanson & Brothers, 2012). The WTTC (2015) advances that the future of tourism relies on having a sound policy in place that is complemented by strategic planning. Edgell and Swanson (2013) note, further, that, for tourism product development to be successful, a suitable policy must be in place. According to Ritchie (1991), the underlying factor in this regard is that a tourism policy must aim to achieve sustainability through emphasising the economic, environmental and social contributions made by tourism.

Edgell and Swanson (2013) agree with the above assertion, in terms of which they highlight that tourism policy is developed from a standpoint that tourism planning and development are devised so as to ensure sustainable growth. Thus, the tourism policy provides a guideline to destinations on how the above can be achieved. The relevant tourism stakeholders must develop a policy that advocates for economic benefits, while embracing the principle of environmental and social well-being (Swanson & Brother, 2012). The above might then allow for the formulation of a tourism policy that is balanced between the public and private sectors (Tse & Prideax, 2017), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), (UWTO, 2012) the local communities (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012), and the voluntary sectors (WTTC, 2015).

Furthermore, a number of studies (Airey, 2013; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Edgell, 1999; Jenkins, 2001; Tse & Prideax, 2017; Wachowiak, 2016) argue that tourism, per se, is a multidisciplinary industry, with different stakeholders having varying interests in the existence, and furtherance, of tourism as a whole. The varying views, according to Edgell and Swanson

(2013), create a scenario of upshots on the well-being of communities. In terms of such a scenario, a tourism policy provides guidelines on how to incorporate all the concerned stakeholders' interests, as well as how to provide a framework for tourism-related planning (Edgell & Swanson, 2013; WTTC, 2015).

In addition to the above, consultation with all the different tourism stakeholders is deemed key to developing an effective tourism policy that might help to achieve sustainability going forwards (Wachowiak, 2016). The WTTC (2017) advances the argument by indicating that a successful tourism policy is one that reflects all the affected stakeholders' views and concerns. Some researchers (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Edgell & Swanson, 2013; Estol & Font, 2016) argue, however, that a major challenge of tourism policy is the complexity of institutional structures within destinations that makes it difficult to implement. However, given the heterogeneous nature of tourism, the situation is understandable (UNWTO, 2015). The multidisciplinary nature of tourism results in any collaborative effort being relatively informal (WTTC, 2017), in the absence of a well-defined leading body to mandate the policy design involved (Swanson & Brothers, 2012). The above provides a gap in terms of the level of commitment that is obtained from the involved stakeholders, leading to the policy being comparatively ineffective (Edgell & Swanson, 2013).

Elsewhere in the literature, some studies (Edgell, 1990; Edgell, 1999; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012; Wachowiak, 2016) argue that a tourism policy must be developed with a view to marketing and promoting tourism both domestically and internationally. Therefore, updating the tourist products to respond to new needs and expectations must be prioritised in terms of tourism policy (Edgell & Swanson, 2013). In the above regard, it is important for destinations to note that the tourism industry has moved from mass tourism to appealing to a greater market segment than before, as well as to the implementation of new technologies, and product differentiation and diversification, in terms of tourists' needs and expectations (Edgell & Swanson, 2013; Tseng & Huang, 2017; WTTC, 2015).

The WTTC (2015) advances that the making of such changes requires looking at the destinations' current tourism policies in greater depth than before. Edgell and Swanson (2013) argue, however, that most developing communities are currently heavily associated with such disruptions as political instability, terrorism, economic sanctions, poor tourism marketing, and bad publicity, which greatly hinder the successful implementation of tourism policies and product development strategies. Edgell and Swanson (2013) advise, in the above regard, that an effective tourism policy must be in place that articulates specific strategies for dealing with disruptions, in such a way that the STD is not compromised.

Other scholars (Airey, 2013; Goelbner & Ritchie, 2012) argue that tourism policy involves not only marketing and promotion, but also considering the changing dimensions of tourism that force destinations to focus more than they did in the past on the changing economic, cultural, ecological, environmental, social, and political consequences of tourism, in respect of the future of the overall tourism product development. Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) state, further, that tourism planning, product development, and marketing and sustainability are key issues in policy design. In addition to the above, a policy must be adjustable to suit changing trends (WTTC, 2015).

According to Edgell and Swanson (2013), the need for a tourism policy emanates from a perspective that tourism is not just about tourists travelling to destinations, but that it also involves the protection of the visited destinations' environment and communities from, and/or for, tourism activities. Thus, a tourism policy caters for the provision of regulations as to how the destinations can be protected through tourism product development (Edgell & Swanson, 2013). Therefore, successful tourism product development is, undoubtedly, influenced by the presence of a sound tourism policy (Airey, 2013; Edgell & Swanson, 2013; Ritchie, 1991).

Significance of stakeholders' views on tourism policy and product development

Tourism should be developed for its potential to enhance economies (UWTO, 2015). Chief among tourism's benefits are that: (1) it boosts economic regeneration; (2) it offers a future, meaning that it holds out a promise for growth; (3) it is one of the fastest growing economic activities; and (4) it is a key driver towards economic growth (WTTC, 2015). The UNWTO (2015) defines tourism product development as a process whereby the assets of a particular destination are moulded to meet the needs of both national and international customers. The above-mentioned development involves compiling a portfolio of things for visitors to see and do at a destination (UWTO, 2015). According to Weaver and Oppermann (2000), the portfolio should cover such aspects of local tourism as active pursuits, like sports, hiking, and water- and leisure-related activities, cultural heritage, organised entertainment, health and wellness, and recurring festivals and events.

Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) and Poudel et al. (2016), as well as Kokemuller (2017), argue, therefore, that the stakeholders of tourism at a destination are the drivers of tourism product development. Muchapondwa and Pimhidzai (2011), as well as George, Henthorne and Williams (2016), advance that the stakeholders concerned are those who will, probably, be the most directly/indirectly affected by the changing trends (which are brought about by both external and internal variables). The decisions that the stakeholders make thereafter greatly affect the overall tourism offerings of a destination (Zengeni & Zengeni, 2012). The school of thought offers the perspective that stakeholder views map out the way in which a destination functions (Poudel et al., 2016). According to Salsberg and Macridis (2016), such views help to describe the direction in which a product development process should go. The above is so because the developments undertaken reflect the views and concerns of everyone affected by them (Morakabati, Page & Fletcher, 2017; Poudel et al., 2017; Salsberg & Macridis, 2016). Some researchers (see Anja & Bronik, 2009; Chen & Turner, 2012; Khazaei et al., 2015; Nugraha, Hamin & Elliot, 2016) argue that the stakeholders' views should be incorporated in considering tourism product development, mainly because their views are those that help the destination managers to understand how their tourism offerings are perceived by both the primary/internal, and by the external/secondary, stakeholders. The above should, accordingly, result in the destination managers concerned formulating relevant tourism policies and strategies reflective of the views of all stakeholders concerned (Morupisi & Mokgalo, 2017).

According to Inskeep's (1991) tourism planning process model, the views and interests of the stakeholders should be represented throughout the planning process. Doing so, according to Trawoger (2014), as well as in terms of Gomulya and Mishina's (2017) thinking, should help, with reference to any tourism product development project, in addressing the concerns and requirements of all the stakeholders involved. Trawoger (2014) expresses the belief that incorporating the stakeholders' needs in relation to tourism product development can pave the way to sustainable development. Furthermore, such incorporation assists in achieving consensus among all the affected stakeholders, as well as in ensuring the smooth progression made in terms of tourism development at the destination in question (Avraham & Ketcher, 2016; Carlisle, Kunc, Jones & Tiffin, 2013; Wilbert, 2017). Poudel et al. (2016) advance the proposition that the incorporation of all stakeholders' views also helps them to address challenges successfully, and to press home the issues affecting STD. Incorporating the stakeholder views and concerns on tourism offerings in terms of tourism product development is seen as a means of: (1) increasing efficiency (Illankoon, Tam & Khoa, 2016); (2) bettering destination performance (Jani & Nguni, 2016); (3) increasing destination performance (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016); (4) enhancing the destination's competitiveness (Holden, 2016; Kim & Youn, 2017; Lee & Chen, 2017); (5) paving the way to economic development (Holden, 2016); and (6) building and enhancing the destination's reputation (Wadekar, Agrawal, Paunikar, Dobarkar, Chaudhary & Wankhede, 2017).

Above all, successful tourism destinations are those whose tourism policies and strategies are reflective of all involved stakeholder group's views and attitudes (Kokemuller, 2017). Inasmuch

as the stakeholders differ from one another, their views should be considered as equally important in striving to achieve STD (Poudel et al., 2016).

Methodology

MacMillan (2013) defines a research design as the planning of a scientific enquiry and the formulation of a strategy to find out something. Along the same lines, Creswell (2009) defines a research design as a process that is comprised of plans and procedures for research, which span the taking of decisions from the making of broad assumptions to the adoption of detailed methods of data collection and analysis. Creswell (2014) concur that, in defining research design, there are three key components that one has to understand: (1) the decision-making as to the appropriate research design to employ; (2) the strategy, consisting of the plans and procedures to be followed in data collection; and (3) the research methods that are relevant to the study. With regard to this paper, the research design included a qualitative research design and case study technique to obtain the stakeholders' assessments of tourism policy and of state tourism product development in Zimbabwe.

Qualitative research design is defined by Creswell (2014) as an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social, or human, problem. Qualitative research design involves the researcher generating, or formulating, questions, and adopting procedures that are directed towards gathering the participants' views, or opinions, on a particular topic (MacMillan, 2013). The views are expressed, based on the participants' experiences with the subject or phenomenon under investigation. In the above regard, a qualitative research design was deemed necessary in the current study, for it allowed the key participants to express their views on the tourism policy and product development in Harare, based on their own experiences with the city as a tourism destination.

According to Yin (2014), a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in its real world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not be clearly evident. Case study research is used to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, and organisation, social, political and related phenomena (Yin, 2014). The distinctive need to conduct case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. A case study allows for investigators' to focus on a case and retain a holistic and real world perspective.

Zimbabwe was the study area of the current study. Figure 1 below shows the map of Zimbabwe. The case of Zimbabwe: political upheavals that affected the country's tourism industry, has raised much concern regarding the development, packaging and positioning of the country's tourism offerings as a way of rejuvenating the tourism sector and paving way for economic revival. Given the circumstances that Zimbabwe has gone through, from being the best tourist destination in Africa in 1995 (ZTA, 2015) to one of the most dangerous places to visit between 2000 and 2008 (UNWTO, 2012), the country becomes a perfect case study on the topic under discussion. Harare, the capital city, was the focus case study area. The city was selected because it is the capital and economical hub of the country and it is at the centre of development in the country. It is also the main gateway city into the country and research has shown that it is amongst the three most visited cities in Zimbabwe, including Bulawayo and Victoria Falls (ZTA, 2015). Harare was used as the case study area, because of it being at the centre of development in the country, as well as due to it being the country's main gateway city.

Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing the location of Harare

Source: Modified from Maps of the World. Com

In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with selected tourism stakeholders whom the researchers considered to be informants' in Harare who could speak to the study objectives. According to Rieger (2007), key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in relation to the problem under discussion. Key informants are experts on a particular subject, who, with their depth of knowledge and understanding, can provide insight into the nature of problems, and recommend solutions (Payne & Payne, 2004). Payne & Payne (2004) note that the key informants are important when the researcher needs to obtain more candid or in-depth answers, to learn more than before about a pressing issue, to discuss sensitive topics, to glean information from people with diverse backgrounds and opinions, and to be able to ask in-depth and probing questions.

However, Rieger (2007) caution that key informants are not involved in the analysis of the evidence, or in the writing of reports. Hence, the conclusions of a study do not necessarily represent the views of individual key informants, but their views add value in respect of the conclusions drawn, and the recommendations made. Due to the nature of the study, engaging with key informants was deemed crucial to be able to determine their assessment of tourism product development as well as the effectiveness of current tourism policy imperatives. A total of 20 informants, representing five stakeholder groups as seen in Table 1 were selected by the researchers to take in the research.

Table 1 Group composition of the key stakeholders

Stakeholder group	Number of stakeholders interviewed per group	Position	Participant category
Tour operators	4	Managerial	(p1)
Hotels	4	Managerial	(p2)
Game Parks	4	Managerial	(p3)
Airline companies	4	Managerial	(p4)
Tourism Authorities	4	Managerial	(p5)
Total	**20**		

The highlighted key stakeholders in Table 1 were selected because the researchers needed: (1) to obtain candid, or in-depth, answers, so as to learn more than they knew before about the pressing issue at stake; (2) to discuss sensitive topics related to the theme of the research; (3) to glean information from those coming from diverse backgrounds, and, hence, with a wide variety of opinions; and (4) to be able to ask in-depth and probing questions in relation to the current tourism policy and product development in Zimbabwe. A purposive sampling technique was used to target four participants per stakeholder group. As the study sought to garner the stakeholders' assessments, the researchers involved purposefully selected stakeholders with expertise on the topic under discussion, as well as those who were involved in the policymaking and planning relating to tourism offerings in the country. To this end, the snowballing technique was employed by the researchers in targeting relevant informants as the fieldwork unfolded. The group of people concerned knew exactly what was going on within the tourism industry of Zimbabwe, and how the currently available tourism offerings were positioned and marketed. Hence, the researchers selected the survey population in question to gauge the assessments of the key individuals who were directly linked to the phenomenon under discussion.

Two sets of interview guides, designed for the stakeholder groups in the private sector and those in government were used to generate the primary data and to achieve the purpose of the study. The questions, were constructed as a means of exploring, and understanding, the meaning that individuals, or groups, ascribed to a problem. An electronic recording device was used to record the interviews. A typical interview lasted between 35 and 45 minutes at a pre-determined location chosen by the interviewee. The recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The content analytical technique was then used in analysing the data which yielded the themes as presented in the results section below.

Results and discussion

The findings revealed that the state of tourism product development in Zimbabwe has largely been influenced by the economic and political challenges that the country has faced since the year 2000. Four main issues emanated from the respondents' assessments of tourism policy and of the state of tourism product development in Zimbabwe: (1) the outdated tourism policy; (2) the limited distribution of the tourism offerings available; (3) the prevalent poor economic performance; and (4) the ongoing political instability. These issues are advanced on in the following sections:

Revisiting tourism policy

The key issue of concern raised by the respondents was that the tourism development in Zimbabwe had taken many shapes and forms in a short period of time, but that, despite this, the current policy had not responded to the new and ever-changing dynamics present in the tourism sector. In assessing the tourism policy in Zimbabwe, a respondent (hotel manager) indicated that:

> *Little attention is being paid to developing a policy framework that promotes sustainable tourism development initiatives in response to the current trends in the country's tourism sector* (p2).

In addition to that, another respondent belonging to a game park expressed that:

> The current tourism policy, apart from being outdated, was designed to promote the development of tourism offerings catering for European market needs and expectations, which had been in decline (p3).

The assessment confirmed the Zimbabwean tourism statistics provided by the ZTA and ZIMSTAT between 1999 and 2015, which had previously shown that the source markets of the country, in terms of the European countries combined, had dropped by 60.3 per cent, whereas the Asian markets had grown by 65 per cent. In addition, the statistics also showed the growing interest from inland African markets, which had increased by 37 per cent over the same period. Considering the level of consistency in tourism performance with regard to arrivals and market development, the same scenario is expected to continue in future. Regardless of the fact that the European markets were found still to remain higher in number than the Asian, the statistics provided deserve attention with regards to Zimbabwe's tourism product development, as well as to the formulation of germane tourism policy. In relation, a respondent from the tourism authorities expressed the view that there is a great need for a policy revisit with regards to tourism product development in Zimbabwe in which she stated:

> A change of policy would be key to our country's realising its full potential as a competitive and sustainable destination. It will be important to look at policies that seek to revitalise the sector owing to the current economic challenges that exist in the country. (p4).

Limited distribution of tourism offerings

Apart from the lack of a proper tourism policy, the respondents also indicated **the limited distribution of tourism offerings** in Zimbabwe as being one of the main concerns related to the development of such offerings in the country. Accordingly, a respondent (tour operator) lamented over the issue of the country having too few tour operator and travel agent companies. The respondent's main issue of concern was in regard to the significance of tour operators and travel agencies in the distribution of tourism offerings as the following quotation showcases:

> Considering that the operators and agents concerned are an important feature of the distribution of any tourism offering, their absence could be of great concern (p1).

The limited numbers of tourism distributors in Zimbabwe was said by another respondent (Airline Company) to result in reduced numbers of tourists travelling to the country. The respondent pointed out in the interview that:

> The difficulties experienced by tourists in attempting to avail themselves of some of the tourism offerings in the country meant that the tourists concerned might decide to visit other destinations, which would be more likely to meet their expectations (p4).

Another stakeholder (tourism authority) had a different view from others with regards to the limited distribution of tourism offerings in the country. The respondent indicated that:

> The limited distribution of tourism offerings is due to the heavy taxes that had been imposed on tourism businesses that had led many of them to close down (p5).

The high taxes levied as a result of the high levels of unemployment in Zimbabwe had resulted in very few workers being able to pay taxes. The Zimbabwean government had sought to compensate for the above shortcoming by exacting high taxes from the businesses concerned. A stakeholder belonging to the game park advanced on this issue, in which he indicated that:

> As a result of high taxes, many tourism companies have chosen to conduct their business elsewhere, with only a few having come onto the market in recent years, opening up a big gap in the country's tourism industry (p3).

As indicated above, the reason for most tourism companies to have left Zimbabwe might have been the high taxes imposed on businesses by the government. The main challenge to the industry, as highlighted by the stakeholders, and especially by the tour operators, concerned, was that:

> The companies to which tourists had, in the past, proved loyal were, mostly, those that had left (p1).

Poor economic performance

The stakeholders also raised concerns over certain economic issues, such as the industry shutdown (especially in terms of the most productive industries, such as mining, agriculture and manufacturing), the mushrooming of informal businesses that did not utilise banks, and the lack of currency, as contributing to the staggeringly poor economy of the country. Another stakeholder (tourism authority) indicated that:

> Although there are ample tourism resources and offerings in Zimbabwe, there are no investment opportunities, either for the locals or for foreign investors (p5).

A stakeholder belonging to a hotel condemned the government of Zimbabwe for being corrupt in which she stated:

> The lack of investment in tourism in Zimbabwe could have been addressed, if there had been less corruption in the country (p2).

A stakeholder belonging to the tour operating company was in agreement with the issue of corruption being a stumbling block to a successful tourism investment in Zimbabwe, as the following quotation proves:

> The allocation of land and resources for purposes of tourism prioritised certain individuals who, in most cases, had no interest in developing tourism (p1).

The above-mentioned factor might have demoralised a number of potential tourism investors in the country, who might, otherwise, have invested in the sector.

A respondent from an airline company, however, felt that:

> The lack of developmental tools impedes the ability of those involved in tourism to reach their full potential (p4).

Other stakeholders shared the same sentiment as (p4) as they lamented the fact that the poor infrastructure, as a result of poor economic performance, had negatively impacted on the tourism experience in the country. At the time of the current report, a tour operator indicated that:

> It is difficult to refer tourists to certain places of interest, due to the limited basic enabling infrastructure that might otherwise have enhanced the tourists' experiences while they were there (p1).

The lack of a proper tourism product development plan was blamed solely on the government, for it not creating an enabling environment for investment. Whereas the respondents agreed that the economy was suffering from poor growth, they perceived corrupt activities to be a major issue for concern. For example, a stakeholder in the airline industry mentioned:

> Developments are poor here. Sometimes, there is [i.e. are] funds to develop the tourism infrastructure and airport, but the few individuals assigned with the funds use them for personal use, and no one can touch them, because they are on [i.e. in] high positions. Sometimes there are no funds at all, and we have limited investors in [terms of] tourism, so [the] development of tourism products continues to be a great challenge (p4).

Political instability

A number of researchers (Chingarande, 2014; Dieke, 2009; Mupawaenda, 2007; Douglas, 2017) have postulated that political instability has been a variable influencing the development of tourism in Zimbabwe. Most of the stakeholders involved indicated that the political situation in the country was the leading challenge faced by the tourism sector as a whole. Another stakeholder (tourism authority) indicated that the political disturbances had marked a turning point in the development of tourism:

> Ever since our political situation … led to the tarnishing of our country's appeal to the world in 2000, sanctions were imposed, and most of the country's main tourist markets issued travel bans to Zimbabwe for their citizens. We really have not yet recovered from that (p5).

The above response yet again illuminated the extent to which the stakeholders involved felt strongly that the imposition of sanctions had harmed the Zimbabwean tourism economy. In addition to the above, the political instability of the country was said to have brought about negative perception and publicity. A stakeholder form a game park expressed herself as being of the view that:

> It is difficult for Zimbabwe to erase the misconceptions created by the western media since 2000, about the country being one of the most dangerous places on the planet, which had led to travel bans being issued by the country's source markets (p3).

Further, a tour operator indicated that there were efforts put in place with regards to changing the image of Zimbabwe, but expressed that the efforts were unsuccessful due to a lack of a guiding policy. The tour operator stated that:

> The change of the country's tourism brand name to 'Zimbabwe, A World of Wonders' had not been successful, as it was not complemented by a policy framework replete with plans and strategies aimed at ensuring that the country did, indeed, become 'A World of Wonders' for its visitors (p1).

However, a respondent from the tourism authority provided what could be described as a defence of the country's current situation, pointing to external issues that were beyond its control as being the main reason for its retention of a poor image, in the following words:

> Zimbabwe has been negatively painted as an instable and insecure country in both [the] local and [the] international media, mainly because of political issues that occurred over a decade ago, coupled with economic sanctions that are currently in place, and negative travel advisory by countries in Europe and

America. Without this, maybe we would have been having [i.e. had] a thriving tourism section (p5).

Implications

The issues raised by the respondents in the current study exposed the state of tourism product development and the nature of tourism policy in a number of sub-Saharan African countries. Other studies on the area's tourism development (Christie et al., 2013; Makoni & Tichaawa, 2017; Tichaawa, 2017) present similar issues as those highlighted by the respondents in the current study as being matters affecting several of the countries concerned. Tichaawa (2017), for example, highlights that, in Cameroon, the poor infrastructure and a weak economy has been a stumbling block to the development of the hotel industry in the country. Christie et al. (2013) lament that political instabilities and heavy taxes on tourism businesses have affected the nature of tourism development in such countries as Angola, Kenya and Mozambique. Makoni and Tichaawa (2017) express their concern that the lack of involvement of relevant stakeholders in tourism has resulted in the development of a poor tourism policy in most African tourism destinations. With regard to the above, the results presented could have a number of implications for the development of tourism products in sub-Saharan destinations. The implications are discussed below.

Firstly, the study has implications for tourism policy, planning and strategy. The themes presented above call for critical consideration regarding the context of tourism policy and the nature in which the different tourism products are being developed and marketed in sub-Saharan Africa. The respondents' concerns on the issue of policy agree with those expressed by Christie et al. (2013) who lament that countries in the sub-Saharan region are tending to develop tourism in the absence of an appropriate sound tourism policy. Thus, there is a need to take another look at the current policy, and to redress the developmental challenges in the region. In the context of Zimbabwe, a major concern emanating from the study relates to the current tourism policy (Government of Zimbabwe, 2014), and to the extent to which the stipulated guidelines for tourism product development have already been successfully implemented. Questioning whether the policy is reflective of all the affected stakeholder views, concerns and interests is of primary concern. The UNWTO (2015) raises a similar issue, as it highlights the fact that tourism in Africa could be on the verge of an economic turnoff, in the event that proper collective plans and policies are not put in place timeously.

The ramifications of the failure to maximise tourism potential could be blamed on a lack of sound tourism policy, planning and strategy implementation. In the light of the above, the key principles of successful tourism product development could be the adoption of: (1) a holistic and integrated approach to planning for tourism; (2) a comprehensive tourism policy that is representative of all the tourism stakeholder groups' interests and concerns; and (3) an implementation strategy that clearly states the tourism *marketing* and *development* objectives and action plans, the implementation dates, and the allocation of resources and responsibility involved. The findings further showed that the relevant stakeholders were not being involved in the policy design of Zimbabwe's tourism, although policy formulation should, ideally, be holistic and reflective of multidimensional views, interests and concerns.

Thus, the current study advocates for the focus to be lain on two key issues in the policy, planning and strategy design for sub-Saharan countries: tourism ***development*** and ***marketing***. In the above case, the tourism stakeholders involved could adopt tourism planning and policy containing comprehensive details of: (1) what relevant strategies to implement; (2) who should implement them; (3) why certain strategies should be put in place, and why certain stakeholders are supposed to implement them; (4) when to implement the strategies; (5) how to implement them; (6) what resources to allocate, and to whom; and (7) how to control and monitor the implementation process (i.e. the review plans and contingencies).

Secondly, the findings of the study have implications for sustainability and the role of tourism stakeholders. The theoretical grounding of the study urged the importance of ST and STD theory, in terms of tourism product development and policy design. The two theories allowed for the identification of the key stakeholders in tourism product development, as well as for the need for the relevant stakeholders to observe the principle of sustainability in their efforts to transform tourism at their destination. Tourism planning can be seen as the organising of the future to achieve certain objectives, while optimising and balancing the economic, environmental and social benefits of tourism (i.e. by means of STD). Sub-Saharan destinations would benefit in the above regard if the tourism planning process were to abide by the guided tourism planning process frameworks of Keyser's (2009) and Inskeep's (1991) models. Considering that 83 per cent of African countries rely on tourism for survival (2015), such countries would need to ensure that tourism development is managed in a sustainable manner. In this regard, the main role of the tourism stakeholders is to adopt the two planning process models. With such models in place, the planning process for the destination might be able to aspire to its defined vision and strategic objectives, as well as to implement the action plans that are geared towards addressing the contemporary tourism trends and issues. In addition, a future could be secured for tourism.

The tourism policy must, to a greater extent than before, be directed towards promoting social, economic and environmental development, in the light of the fact that the current study found a major omission in the implementation of STD principles in tourism product development efforts. The above could probably explain why the tourism sector of most of sub-Saharan destinations has not yet been maximised. In addition, the present study has greatly emphasised stakeholder involvement in tourism policy formulation and product development, for the success or failure of tourism at a destination tends to impact either negatively or positively on the decision-making concerned. The latter are, therefore, advised to remain consistently aware of the need to uphold the four pillars of sustainability, consisting of sound governance, economic prosperity, social justice and environmental responsibility, when developing tourism.

Thirdly, and lastly, the study has managerial implications for sub-Saharan destinations. The respondents' assessments offer a perspective with which the current tourism product development has to engage, in terms of managing both the associated internal and external variables, so as to ensure that tourism benefits all concerned. The above could help address such concerns raised by the respondents as corruption, the high taxation rates imposed on tourism businesses, and the lack of tourism investment in Zimbabwe. With regards to the above, Gozgor, Demir and Bilgin (2017) found the most fundamental role of destination managers to be having to deal with the various variables involved affecting the tourism product development at their destination. In such a sense, the ability to manage tourism offerings comes from the development of the frameworks for the implementation, and for the measuring, of the outcomes of a variety of management options (Butcher, 2017).

The results of the current study, therefore, also imply that the tourism industry needs to be managed with scrupulous consideration of how the associated variables can influence its continued existence. The above could be seen as an effective means of reducing the possible impacts of the manifestations of irreversible change on the tourism resources at a destination. Further, managing tourism product development is impossible without taking into consideration the variables affecting the overall goal of STD.

Conclusions

Destinations need to understand the complex policymaking, planning and management that is required in tourism, and to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to the implementation of all the strategies involved. In the light of the above, the management of tourism product development should be an interdisciplinary process, in terms of which all groups and

individuals affected need to analyse the prevailing issues. Such issues relate to politics, economics, marketing, and image perception, as well as to internal issues and decisions within the tourism sector environments, affecting the nature of the tourism products and offerings and their development. In addition, the stakeholders concerned need to devise mechanisms for reducing the negative impacts associated with the identified variables, and to learn how to maximise their positive impacts. They also need to learn how to formulate the required plans, policies and strategies that should be dedicated to ensuring successful STD. Above all, the stakeholders are advised to work together in addressing variables influencing tourism development in the present, as well as to devise strategies ensuring that the tourism industry survives to glean the resultant socio-economic and environmental benefits from its endeavours.

The study was limited to the interviewed stakeholders' assessments of the current tourism policy and state of tourism product development in Zimbabwe. The residents and tourists, although being seen as major tourism stakeholders, were not included in the study. However, a study focused on the residents' and tourists' assessments in the above regard is envisaged. Future research could also be conducted focusing on the influence of tourism policies on tourism product development. The researchers also envisage the need for future research that should be conducted with regards to determining and comparing the stakeholders' assessments in two or more regions of a single destination, with a view to ascertaining how their views and concerns vary across regions. Such research should keep an eye on developing a holistic tourism product development plan and a policy design catering for the different stakeholders' needs and expectations.

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