

## The Negative Impacts of Tourism in Africa: The Case of Botswana

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### Abstract

It is not in dispute that tourism contributes immensely to Botswana's economy and raising the economic profile of remote rural communities within tourist destinations. However, as with many other African tourist destinations, the tourism industry in Botswana has had many dynamics, including the less written about negative impacts on local communities' livelihoods and the environment. This article examines the negative impacts of tourism in Botswana over time, as well as communities' perceptions, which influence attitudes towards the industry. Because of its capital-intensive nature, tourism is almost exclusively foreign owned, elite dominated, with only very few citizen investors making inroads in this 'enclave' sector, thus excluding local participation except as unskilled labourers who are usually subjected to racism and poor working conditions. The study reveals deep seated hidden costs such as psychosocial well-being, exacerbated by a malevolent outbreak of the debilitating COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism in Botswana is based on viewing pristine biodiversity, namely wildlife and scenic beauty. With increasing numbers of wild animals, this led to protracted human-wildlife conflict, accentuating poverty levels, consequently eliciting anti-conservation attitudes among locals. The study uses a qualitative document analysis, utilising secondary sources comprising books, book chapters, academic theses, journal articles, newspapers, government documents, and internet sources.

**Keywords:** Botswana; tourism; negative impacts; poverty

### Introduction

In many cases, the political economy of tourism development in Botswana, and indeed in the Global South, has tended to give glowing accounts of the positive impacts of the tourism value chain, while not as much scholarship coverage has been made on the negative impacts of the industry (de Kadt, 1979; Kotler et al., 1999; Leiper, 2004; Timothy, 2001). According to Mowforth and Munt (1998), for example, tourism is viewed as a new engine of growth for many developing economies, arguing that the industry has a huge propensity to alleviate poverty among rural communities. Levy and Hawkins (2009) associate tourism with the potential to promote peace as travel brings international understanding and collaboration among nations of the world. In southern Africa, tourism has been viewed as an important policy instrument for local community-based development (Saarinen & Manwa, 2008).

The thread of tourism's positive contribution to economic development also extends to Botswana. In Botswana, tourism is regarded as the second largest economic sector, after the diamond industry (Mbaiwa, 2005; Mogomotsi et al., 2018; Moswete & Mavondo, 2003). As such, it is seen as playing a vital role in increasing government revenue, and the potential to diversify the country's economy from the hitherto diamond-led economy. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2021), tourism's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was BWP15,664.4m/(US\$412.8m), representing 8 per cent of the GDP. As elsewhere in developing economies, the sector is also credited with creating job opportunities, especially in poverty stricken rural areas. There is empirical evidence of employment creation in the various institutions and sub-sectors of tourism including within the wildlife industry which is the custodian of game wildlife in its different forms, namely wild animals, wilderness,

and water resources. To this end, in 2021, the Botswana tourism sector contributed 7.7 per cent of the total employment (WTTC, 2021).

While it is beyond doubt that tourism is an ideal niche sector through which developing countries can escape poverty and thus attain sustainable development, recent studies have, however, provided empirical evidence pointing to the flip side of the industry. Despite the lauded success of the industry, local economies are yet to experience real benefits from the industry (Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh, 2017). In his analysis of the tourism impacts, businessman-cum-author, Magang (2015), states that negative impacts of tourism in Botswana abound, albeit not being so obvious. Gravitating towards a pro-poor trajectory, Magang cautions against too much faith in using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures to measure economic development. He argues that GDP as the total value of goods and services produced by the country does not however, translate to the economic well-being of local communities per se. He stresses that GDP is not necessarily a measure of livelihoods of rural communities. Magang is not alone in this view. Reviling at the seemingly generalised liberalist-oriented pro-economic growth standpoint that tourism is an economic ‘game changer’, Mbaiwa and Darkoh (2006), argue that tourism development should be seen rather in a holistic sense. In their words, ‘...the broader sense of tourism development as not be limited to economic matters but to also encompassing social, economic, environmental, and ethical considerations such that its measurement may incorporate indicators of poverty, unemployment, inequality and self-reliance.’

The purpose of this study is to examine the negative impacts of tourism and their multifaceted nature in the tourism industry in Botswana over time. As stated earlier, there are many publications that deal primarily with the positive impacts of tourism at global, regional, and national levels, with only few detailed studies of negative impacts (Bolaane, 2004; Gumbo, 2010; Keep et al., 2005; Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh, 2017). This study is thus an attempt at filling this lacuna. Among the most critical negative impacts are the following: a) Enclave character of tourism in Botswana and the concomitant foreign domination by a transnational elite class, b) De-agrarianisation of peasantry through land loss to tourism imperatives; c) The enduring human-wildlife conflict and associated impacts on local livelihoods, d) Policy regime, e) Tourism and environmental degradation, f) Corruption, and g) The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Enclave tourism: Internal colonialism?**

According to Mogalakwe and Nyamnjoh (2017), internal colonialism in the context of tourism refers to ‘...a situation whereby natural resources in a host region mostly benefit outsiders, while the majority of locals derive little or no benefits.’ Globally, tourism is a capital-intensive industry whose assets are owned by foreign elites, mostly wealthy multinational corporations boasting of tourism facilities such as the hospitality sector (hotels, restaurants, lodges, camps), travel agencies, tour operators, safari companies and related services (Magang, 2015). Generally, investing in the tourism industry requires very strong financial wherewithal. As such, investment in developing countries became the purview of Western capital which has dominated the industry hitherto. As in most countries in Africa, Botswana’s tourism industry is foreign-owned, foreign dominated and managed by foreign capital. In part, this is due to the erstwhile southern African liberation wars which were fought between freedom fighters and colonial forces in Botswana’s neighbouring countries, namely South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Angola in the period between the 1960s up to the mid-1990s (Gumbo, 2020). While not directly involved in the wars, Botswana found herself caught in the crossfire between the warring parties, owing to the country’s geographical position in relation to these countries. In the circumstance, the government was forced to pay more attention to the country’s security situation while ignoring tourism. It was then that the private sector led by South African capital



started and dominated tourism in the Chobe District and later in the Okavango region, in northern Botswana. This trajectory obtains to date. Be that as it may, international hospitality chains have contributed significantly to developing tourism in Botswana. Aided by their expertise and experience garnered over the years in many countries, together with their close association with international finance, foreign operators were able to marshal sufficient resources to create the brand that Botswana tourism is today.

Tourism in Botswana has since been owned and dominated by foreign capital translating to enclave tourism (Bolaane & Kanduza, 2008; Republic of Botswana, 2000). This is most pronounced in the Chobe District and the Okavango Delta – the tourist bastion of Botswana. Yet it is very important for government and the industry to ensure participation of those on whose land tourism operates. Local communities have sacrificed a lot in the form of, *inter alia*, losses in land, damages to their property and threat to life at the hands of wildlife. But securing a foothold in this corner of the country requires resources beyond the reach of the average citizen. As Mnguni (2021) puts it: ‘Much of the billions of pula flowing in the tourism sector is in the hands of foreign-owned or controlled entities or non-indigenous Batswana, due in part to the historical barriers to entry for citizens.’ To gain a better understanding of the character of ‘enclave tourism’ it is necessary to define the concept first. Anderson (2011:361) defines enclave tourism as ‘... a trip bought at a single price in the tourist's origin covering a broad range of items from commercial transportation and accommodation to meals and sightseeing, sometimes accompanied by an escort or a guide.’ In this type of tourism, tourists purchase holiday packages that are all-inclusive package deals, resulting in economic leakages – a situation in which tourists’ money is spent in the tourist’s country of origin and only very little coming to the tourism destination. Enclave tourism is notorious for the repatriation of revenue obtained from the running of tourism business in the host country. It has been stated that only 10 per cent of Botswana tourism revenue is retained in the country (Morgan-Jarvis, 2016). In buttressing the asymmetrical benefits between the tourist and the destination economy Anderson (2011:361) observes that, ‘...it is more likely that the tourist and the origin economy gain more from the business of enclave tourism arrangements than the destination economies.’

In Botswana, a similar trajectory obtains with most tourists’ visit in prepaid group holiday packages. Loss of revenue to the host country is also incurred through the bookings which are made through international travel agencies. Consequently, ‘...the region [Southern African Development Community – SADC] is denied the service fees and all its associated benefits as they accrue to outside providers’ (*Sundaystandard* online, 2019). Tourism’s supply chain is also foreign-dominated (Morgan-Jarvis, 2016). Special tourists’ food is largely sourced from outside the country despite availability of local varieties. Fish is a good example where, in both the Chobe and Okavango, hotels order hake from South Africa when there is the Chobe or Ngami bream (tilapia). Hotels also prefer procuring alcoholic beverages of South African origin when there is a local national brand, *St Louis*. Related to these negative impacts, is the issue of weak linkages between the tourism industry and other sectors of the local economies. Local communities subsist on agriculture from which the hospitality industry could engage back and forth linkages for food supply for tourists, a possible avenue for empowering local communities and addressing poverty. Management positions in hotels are largely reserved for highly paid white expatriates while citizen workers remain performing unskilled tasks, as well as being tour guides receiving very low wages (Mbaiwa, 2005). ‘Local investors’ were mostly whites who had acquired local citizenship with only an ignoble number of black Batswana owning any assets in the tourism industry. The only modicum of investment by the few Batswana is in areas in the periphery of the industry – areas with no value compared to prime areas. And yet, one of the government’s stated objectives in investing in the tourism industry

has been the desire to reduce poverty through the many services associated with the industry and through empowerment of citizens (Republic of Botswana, 1990). But the tourism-poverty alleviation nexus is complex. Dismissing the view that enclave tourism can potentially alleviate poverty, Mbaiwa (2005:157) reiterated:

...[there is] a general failure by tourism to significantly contribute to rural poverty alleviation in the Okavango region. Tourism as a result has a minimal economic impact on rural development mainly because it has weak linkages with the domestic economy, particularly agriculture.

While a niche specialty for tourists, the Okavango Delta's ecological uniqueness in the inaccessible remote hinterland has often been associated with some occurrences of racial abuses by management, who often take advantage of the inaccessibility of the Delta making it far from the radar (Morongwe, 2005). Morongwe states that in some cases, workers in the Delta have been denied permission to travel to Maun to source Ante-Retroviral (ARVs) drugs, thus compromising the health of such employees. Some unscrupulous employers discouraged their employees from joining workers' unions where they would be able to bargain for better wages and working conditions.

### **Land loss: 'De-agrarianisation' of the peasantry**

Tourism and conservation developments in Botswana reflect the state's top-down approach to land ownership and resource management, which is characterized by lack of engagement with local stakeholders and a reluctance to devolve power because it would mean 'leaving highly lucrative industry in the hands of local people' (Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh, (2017:7).

Almost invariably everywhere in southern Africa, protected areas have resulted in fierce contestations and conflicts between state agencies and local communities over land use. National parks, game reserves and forestry reserves are colonial creations, inherited and maintained by post-colonial administrations. These fortress conservation structures were established to protect game animals – the main tourist attraction - from unscrupulous poachers and trophy hunters (Bolaane, 2013). In Botswana, the wilderness habitats and wildlife sanctuaries such as the Chobe National Park; the Moremi Game Reserve and the iconic Okavango Delta are found in the northwestern part of the country. State authorities annexed large chunks of land from the local communities, evicting some of them. Casualties included the Bhugakhwe Khoisan/Basarwa communities of Mababe and Sankuyu villages of the northern Ngamiland who were evicted from their ancestral land to give way to the creation of the Moremi Game Reserve (Taylor, 2000; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008). The forced removal effectively deprived them of land resources which constitute the mainstay of their livelihoods. Commenting on the state of affairs on the conservation-development nexus, Kepe et al, (2005:3) noted; 'The creation of many protected areas around the world has often resulted in the alienation of indigenous populations from their land and resources.' In the Chobe District, for example, government set aside 80 per cent of land for conservation of wildlife through the Chobe National Park and forest reserves adjacent the park (Republic of Botswana, 1986). In real terms, the Chobe District measures 20,800 square kilometers and out of this the Chobe National Park forked 11,700 square kilometers (Republic of Botswana, 2003). This is a clear demonstration of how government prioritised wildlife conservation over human welfare, leaving local communities with limited spaces for socio-economic activities such as settlement and agriculture. More communal land was annexed to form numerous protected forest reserves including the Kasane Forest Reserve, the Chobe Forest Reserve, Maikaelelo Forest Reserve (Republic of Botswana, 2004). These measures had profound effects on livelihoods of local

communities as conservation had to compete with other land uses for allocation of resources. The allocation of the larger part of land to wildlife conservation, and forestry reserves and tourism infrastructure such as hotels and guesthouses left only very little land for socio-economic activities such as expansion of settlement, pasture, and farmland for the essentially rural agrarian economic base (Gumbo, 2015). Landlessness contributed significantly to the contraction of the agricultural economy in the Chobe District. This contraction led to the de-agrarianisation of the peasantry, a phenomenon that forces a historically agro-pastoral peasantry to shift their livelihood portfolio from the tried and tested farming to non-farm activities such as wage labour in nearby nascent tourism industry around Kasane. Most economic pundits on the political economy of tourism in the Chobe District take a swipe at the way the state gnawed at communities' land which, as stated before, formed the basis of their livelihood and accentuating poverty levels in the area. Authors such as Cross (1999:12) points out that, "Land is a critical resource in relation to production and to residential rights. Land rights also determine community citizenship and the right to use both physical and social resources."

Pieters-James (*Sunday Standard*, 12-18 October, 2014), also weighs in on the resultant poverty:

Chobe District has a high incidence of residents living at or below the poverty line, particularly in the outlying communities that don't always have access to the high-income tourism economy. This incentivizes individuals to participate in illegal activities that provide [for their subsistence].

### **Human-wildlife conflict**

Because the tourist industry in Botswana is based on fragile biodiversity assets, government put a high premium on wildlife conservation by taking measures that included, *inter alia*, setting aside large chunks of land for wildlife habitat. Nationally, approximately 40 per cent of the country is designated as national parks and game reserves (Republic of Botswana, 1986). The creation of fortress conservation led to increases in the population of animal species whose numbers challenged the carrying capacity of park spaces causing a spillover of wild animals into human settlements (Manatsha & Gumbo, 2022). A protracted human-wildlife conflict ensued, in some cases involving human life. The increase in predation on farmers' assets such as crops and livestock profoundly threatened food security. Game animals destroyed property including homes and farm fences, making agriculture a risky livelihood strategy, and as indicated earlier, marked the beginning of de-agrarianisation of the poor farmers. Angry farmers have been a common sight at the offices of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) – the custodian of wildlife, demanding compensation which did not measure to the losses suffered (Taylor, n/d). Officials from DWNP on the other hand blamed the communities for not looking after their livestock and not adequately fencing their crop fields (Republic of Botswana, 2003). Due to poorly managed human-wildlife conflicts and non-resolution of cases of property destruction by wildlife, communities living adjacent parks continue to harbour negative attitudes toward wildlife and conservation (Mogomotsi and Madigele, 2017).

### **Appropriateness of policy regime**

A major sticking point in Botswana's tourism trajectory today is that of managing tourism related policy regime. There is dearth of published material on negative impacts of some policies associated with tourism. The following discussion seeks to demonstrate how, some of the policies may have been intended to promote both the conservation and development agendas as well as international best practices but that in practice they resulted in 'scoring own

goals.’ Some policies have served government’s conservation agenda well while at the same time marginalising local communities. A case in point is the adoption of the ‘High-Value Low-Volume’ (HV-LV) policy, a corner stone of the *Tourism Policy* of 1990 (Republic of Botswana, 1990). The policy was premised on protecting the pristine lands associated with tourism in Botswana, especially the fragile ecosystem of the Okavango Delta and at the same time focusing on international high-spending tourist from the developed world. The policy thus deliberately aimed at:

“guaranteeing that only the wealthiest tourists, especially from Western Europe and the United States and now more recently, those from China and Japan could come here. That model was good when it lasted. The dollars kept coming. And there was little disturbance of Save for the elite, Botswana tourists were explicitly left out of the equation” (Sundaystandard, 2020).

While the policy may have preserved the environment by ensuring limited visitors to the parks and other conservation areas, the model became, albeit inadvertently, a boomerang in that it was exclusionist in its operation by catering only for the wealthy and denying ordinary Batswana (citizens of Botswana), touring in these areas and by extension, sacrificing domestic tourism on the altar of international tourism. Some of the tourism facilities demand payment in United States of American dollars (US\$), with some still, requiring bookings to be made in South African Rand (ZAR), even though they operate in Botswana (Gumbo, 2010). Many Batswana including those living in the proximity of tourist destinations and protected areas, cannot experience tourism in their areas because they do not afford the rates of the tourism facilities. This neo-colonial policy is evidence of the enclave character of Botswana’s tourism industry.

Ironically, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Republic of Botswana, 2020), challenged the sustainability and profitability of the HV-LV policy. Globally, including Botswana, countries embarked on lockdowns, effectively banning travel, with the global tourism industry bearing the brunt of these stringent measures that were aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus. Even when restrictions were eased in some countries, international travel remained in force. In an effort to resuscitate tourism in Botswana, the captains of industry in tourism were desperately forced to reduce prices with a view to attracting citizens. However, only a few middle-class families profited albeit fortuitously and travelled to the erstwhile ‘prohibitive’ destinations to also explore tourism in their country. According to a *Sundaystandard* (2020) newspaper report, the bulk of Batswana clung to their belief that tourism in niche destinations was never meant for them, thus staying away. In its commentary, the newspaper expressed dismay at government’s choice of ever excluding its citizens in the tourism industry while many other countries were quick to prioritise domestic tourism:

It is astonishing to see a government policy that deliberately but subtly excludes its own people. Yet this is one. There was something particularly nasty and even wicked about pricing tourism out of the reach of a majority of citizens. Let’s face it, there was also underlying racism that provided impetus and also motivation to exclude citizens. Most of the tourism operations in the Chobe and Okavango enclaves are owned by white people. Even one-time fervent promises by the current administration to put more indigenous citizens into tourism seem to have fizzled away and is most unlikely to bear any fruits. Every country in the world prides itself with the strengths of domestic tourism. Botswana needs to rethink its current tourism policy. There is absolutely no basis to continue with it.

A controversial policy in the tourism industry is that of ‘Shoot to Kill’. Its implementation resulted in the deaths of seventeen poachers by July 2020 (Hambira, 2022). Another contested policy in Botswana tourism is one that concerns fishing on the Chobe River. The Chobe River constitutes the international boundary between Botswana and Namibia. The river has historically provided natural resources to communities on both sides of the river. Riparian communities subsist on, among others, fish for their livelihood. With the establishment of the Chobe National Park, strict regulations were put in place including on fishing. As such, fishing is prohibited on the Botswana side of the Chobe River around Kasane as the area is regarded as part of the Chobe National Park (Conradie, n/d). Botswana are not allowed to catch fish in this area except at designated spaces but only with hook and bait and not by gill nets (Republic of Botswana, 1988). Puzzlingly, on the other side, there is no law that prohibits Namibians from fishing using gill nets (Gumbo, 2010). This is the same river, the same fish that is supposed to be protected on the Botswana side, yet Namibians are free to set an many nets as they wish overnight, collecting them in the morning, full of fish. In flies in the face of logic the rationale of this trajectory. What irks Botswana even more is that the Namibian fishermen are allowed to cross the river into Botswana to sell their catch at the Kasane market. Officials at Kasane reiterate that Botswana is an open market if one has a licence to trade (Gumbo, 2010). The net effect of this policy was to deprive local communities of a resource that has been integral to their economy across the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times, thus exacerbating poverty levels.

Fishing regulations had contrasting outcomes. While it was unlawful for local communities to catch fish on the Chobe River around Kasane tourists booked in hotels on the Chobe River front engaged in angling on the river (Conradie, n/d). Part of the tourism packages with some local hotels was to allow international tourists to engage in spot fishing over the prized tiger fish which, at maturity weighed 28 kilograms and described variously as ‘notoriously ferocious’, or ‘the lion of the Chobe River’ (Conradie, n/d). It cannot be just to outlaw access to a food source to citizens only to give a blind eye to tourists for whom fishing was a pastime activity but taking the fish to the local hotel for dinner!

To ensure compliance with set standards in the tourism business, government occasionally carried out inspections on tourism establishments to ascertain especially the state of labour relations between hotel and lodge owners, tour operators and their employees countrywide. A good policy intention indeed. However, in the Okavango Delta, surprisingly, the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, in some instance the inspectors found themselves in a quagmire by having to notify in advance, the tourist institutions of their impending inspection visit. Not only that, according to a local newspaper (*Mmegi* 2010, 19 April), the inspectors even asked the lodge owners and tour operators to provide them with accommodation, food, and aircraft to transport them to the Okavango Delta. The Delta is accessible only by light aircraft, boat, or a four-wheel-drive vehicle. In so doing, arguably, the inspectors compromised their professionalism as it was them who were now ‘embedded’ and at the mercy of lodge owners. As a result, objectivity was the biggest casualty in such unprofessional conduct by government officials. As the *Mmegi* newspaper (19 April 2010), aptly captured Goitseone Kokorwe, an official at the Department of Labour:

At the moment, they [inspectors] depend on transportation provided by business operators and this creates an opportunity for corruption to fester. When you go feed you. How do you conduct a proper inspection and write an objective report in that situation? It is difficult as officers are embedded. I know it is expensive, but for quality service, it is important that we have our own aircraft. I am urging the leadership of the

ministry to consider buying it so that we do our job properly without being compromised. We are tired of always being told in public ‘these officers are corrupt’.”

It is such practices and policy inconsistencies that blemish the image of tourism. This is an indictment on the state which is the policy driver and the custodian of the industry.

### **The ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy**

Adopted by the Botswana government in 2013, and operationalised by the Botswana Defence Force (BDF), the controversial ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy is an unwritten law that was designed ostensibly to curb suspected poachers (Mogomotsi & Madigele, 2017). The adoption of the policy as a conservation measure by the Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, was motivated by an alleged increase in poaching activities especially on rhino and elephant in the Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta. It is beyond doubt that poaching portends serious threats to wildlife species prompting some tourism economy countries in Africa to declare ‘war on poaching’. That wildlife is the bedrock of tourist attraction in Botswana, the subsequent threat to the numbers of these species spurred the Botswana government to put a high premium on conservation by deploying the military into the parks to monitor any poaching activities. It should be noted that the president of the country at the time of the adoption of the policy was Lieutenant-General Sir Seretse Khama Ian Khama, himself a military man by profession and a former commander of the BDF. It would not be far-fetched to assume that the military instinct in him may also have contributed to the radical decision to implement the shoot-to-kill measure.

While admitting to the prevalence of incidents of poaching, some critics of the policy argue that the measure is extreme, likening it to extrajudicial killings and thus borders on the infringement of human rights (Lorimer, 2021). Almost invariably always, it is the ‘small fish’ and not the ‘big fish’ that fall victim to the policy. As Lorimer notes, [‘the] shoot-to-kill policies affect only the lowest levels of huge crime networks without even beginning to infiltrate the higher echelons. A shoot to kill policy is non-constitutional and is unlikely to place pressure on the highest levels of rhino poaching networks.’

In their nuanced approach, Mogomotsi and Madigele (2017), show appreciation of the importance of wildlife to Botswana’s economy, while also cautioning against the excesses of the shoot-to-kill policy despite its role as a potential deterrent to would-be-poachers. The duo points to the benefits that accrue to rural communities in the form of job opportunities in the wildlife industry and cash income through legal trophy hunting and food from game meat. On the other hand, calling it the ‘militarisation of conservation’, they argue that the shoot-to-kill policy resulted in creating fear among locals occasioned by regular raids on communities by armed members of the BDF ostensibly looking for poachers. In their view, human life should not be equated to that of wildlife. As they put it, ‘describing parks as war zones normalises deadly violence against humans, in defence not of human life but of wildlife’, suggesting that government tends to prioritise wildlife conservation over human being. Clearly, such voices are a call to the Botswana government to reconsider the policy and find other strategies that do not outrightly take human life without even interrogating the suspects. The policy has strained international relations with neighbouring countries such as Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe following incidents of the BDF shooting at citizens of these countries on suspicion of being poachers. Namibians have borne the brunt of BDF’s numerous attacks on the Chobe River, the common boundary between the two. Namibia has repeatedly argued that their people were unarmed fishermen on the Namibian side of the Chobe River, a position that Botswana denied (*City Press*, 2020). Grief-stricken Namibians in the Zambezi Province across the Chobe River have since formed a movement ‘Namibian Lives Matter’ (NLM) through which to voice their



anger over BDF's shootings, accusing the latter of being poachers. Huynh (2015) summed the policy and its effects, posing a rhetoric question with a melancholic tone: 'Is it ever OK to defend a policy that can mean the loss of human life in order to protect wildlife?'

### **Tourism and environmental degradation**

One of the more obvious criticisms levelled against tourism development has been that on environmental pollution (Chib, 1980). As stated earlier, wildlife resources and the fragile wilderness environment are the foundation on which Botswana's tourism industry has been built, necessitating appropriate protection measures for a sustainable tourism industry (Jefferis, 2007). These tourism attractions have over time lured to the country, large numbers of relatively affluent tourists especially those from the developed economies, thus contributing to the growth of the industry and government revenue and the development agenda. Such growth has however come with costs of various kinds on the environment. Threats to the environment have come from many fronts, namely from development of tourism infrastructure such as clearing of land for hotels, campsites, offices, roads, airports (Mbaiwa, 2003). Environmental destruction is also occasioned by a myriad of deviant behaviours by tourists and their guides. Excited tourists sometimes veering outside of the demarcated tracks in the parks, inflicting damage to the ecology. The point here is that much as tourists contribute to the country's revenue, they are equally culpable in degrading the environment thus negating sustainability of the environment. Veld fires caused by tourists are a common sight at picnic spots and sometimes destroy rangeland; and littering around campsites at which it is common to find empty beer cans, disposable plastic utensils coca cola bottles and other material such as broken glasses which can injure wildlife (Moswete & Mavondo, 2003). All these constitute negative impacts of the tourism industry.

Environmental damage is a generic concept referring to harm on different components of biodiversity. For example, aquatic life is threatened from various human activities including overfishing, noise pollution from motorised boats by local fishermen especially around Samochima village in the Okavango panhandle, and noisy recreational speed boats by tourists (Gumbo, 2010). In Kasane, Maun and the Okavango, while airplanes and safari aircraft serve the convenience of moving tourists from one place to another, they create noise pollution to wildlife including birds around airports especially at take-off and landing (Moswete & Mavondo, 2003). Recently, the Maun and the Kasane airport terminals have been upgraded, refurbished, and expanded to increase capacity to cater for relatively larger aircraft to bring larger numbers of tourists even more frequently (Republic of Botswana, 2017). In order to achieve, at least a modicum of sustainable development, government must engage in the delicate balancing act between income generation from tourists and protecting the environment, at the same time, given the serious threat of climate change.

### **Corruption**

Tourism development in Botswana has been associated with corruption (*Sundaystandard* online, 2019). Among other corrupt practices, some elites in the country used their political power, to influence decisions on the direction tourism development should take. The erstwhile president Ian Khama's presidency (2008-2018) was associated with a 'vice grip' on tourism as he sought to control it together with wealthy multinational companies such as Conservation International, Wilderness Safaris, National Geographic filmmaker Derek Joubert – companies that had very little to do with developing local communities (Newel & Dickson, 2018). In his tourism roadmap, Khama banned trophy hunting, preferring photographic tourism, arguing that this was a more effective form of wildlife conservation. Critics however poured scorn on the adoption of photographic tourism stating that trophy hunting had brought meaningful benefits

to local communities through concessions and hunting quotas that they sold to trophy hunters. They also received game meat from hunted animals. As Newel and Dickson (2018) observed, ‘...former President Ian Khama, in cahoots with personal friend Derek Joubert and Conservation International (CI), deliberately introduced the hunting ban to benefit filmmakers, especially Joubert and wildlife photographers, to the detriment of Native Batswana.’ Besides, Khama ran the tourism industry through nepotism, appointed his relatives and members of his inner circle to control the industry and ensure his interests were guaranteed. A fervent conservationist, Khama functioned based on nepotism by appointing unqualified family members to positions of power (Ditlhase, 2012). A palpable example is that of appointing his younger brother, Tshekedi Khama, to the position of Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism even though he was not qualified, nor had he been active in parliament to warrant such a position. Ditlhase quoted the then Leader Of Opposition in Parliament, Dumelang Saleshando:

Tshekedi is a low-profile MP [Member of Parliament] who has not distinguished himself in Parliament and it is unclear what qualification he has for the job. He is a poor performer and has not brought a single motion to Parliament, although that was his role as a backbencher.

According to the newspaper, Khama purchased 5 per cent in Linyanti Investments, a subsidiary of a tourism multinational company Wilderness Holdings. Khama’s attorney Parks Tafa and Khama’s nephew Marcus ter Haar were appointed directors of Wilderness Holdings. This, according to the article, was for the advancement and protection of Khama’s interests. Mogalakwe and Nyamnjoh (2017) echo similar sentiments on Khama’s hold on the tourism industry stating that the appointment of Tshekedi Khama also makes the latter ‘patron of all national environmental-based NGO [Non-governmental Organisations]. The authors further show concern over the militarization of conservation by President Khama. In their words, ‘The increasing militarization of conservation in the Botswana context and the involvement of political interest in conservation and tourism development offers another example of Botswana’s powerful elite at work.’

### **Covid-19: Lord have mercy**

The outbreak of COVID-19 otherwise known as the Coronavirus towards the close of 2019 had a profoundly negative impact on global economies, Botswana included. COVID-19 is defined as ‘...a severe acute respiratory infection that started in Wuhan, China in 2019... The infection is caused by a novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 that is transmittable by respiratory droplets or person-to-person contact’ (Chatibura, 2020: 123). Tourism has been one of those sectors that were negatively affected by the Coronavirus, disrupting economies and livelihoods and most of the tourism value chains across the world (United Nations World Tourism Organisation - UNWTO Report, 2021). The debilitating effects of the pandemic on the tourism industry have been viewed as worse than any other pestilence or any socio-economic crisis ever to befall global economies (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021). Reflecting on the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on global tourism, some pundits on tourism studies associated the visitation of the pandemic with nature’s anger and therefore vengeance over the humankind’s perceived brutality on nature through ‘unregulated neoliberal extractivism’, and other ‘exploitative’ activities that included tourism (Rogerson and Baum, 2020). COVID-19 knew no borders, spared no nation or isle, ‘causing economic havoc across all countries and territories worldwide’, with its origins traced from China and impact reverberating like a veld fire across the globe (Ezra et al, 2021:1711). In Africa, Rogerson and Bow (2020:728) noted

the sombre state of how some pre-COVID-19 tourist attractions had now remained desolate following the sustained lockdowns and international travel restrictions and closure of borders due to the outbreak and spread of the pandemic. In their words:

As early as early April 2020 COVID-19 effectively had shut down most of Africa's iconic tourism attractions. Deserted pyramids of Egypt lit up at night messaging people to 'stay home' 'stay safe', motionless cable cars at Cape Town's Table Mountain, the cessation of tours along Ghana's forts and castles as well as empty safari lodges across several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa are powerful symbols of COVID-19 ravages on Africa's tourism economy.

For the tourism-dependent countries of the East African Community, an economic block consisting of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, the impact on their economies was unprecedented, given that they relied on tourism in their efforts to reduce high levels of poverty which was already gnawing at the fabric of their well-being. As an industry, tourism in the region was gradually verging on near irrelevance. As Ezra et al. (2021:1712-1713) put it, 'All the five states heavily depend on tourism to alleviate poverty and spur sustainable development in remote and peripheral areas. The industry has been pushed to near-total collapse, with international arrivals falling drastically.'

In Botswana, the first three cases of the Coronavirus were reported on 30 March 2020 (Hambira, 2020). As elsewhere in the world, the pandemic gradually spread across the country with devastating repercussions on both life and economy, prompting the government declaring a state of emergency, series of lockdowns and restrictions on movement locally and internationally with dire ramifications on the economy in general and the tourism industry in particular (Chatibura, 2020). At the individual level, as elsewhere globally, in Botswana, livelihoods took a huge knock following massive job losses and therefore purchasing power – also reversing the gains made by women who made the bulk of the employees in the hospitality sector. Some women, and most importantly for female headed families had become dependent of wage labour in the tourism districts of Chobe and Ngamiland (Gumbo, 2010). Through tourism some women had made inroads as wage earners providing for their families, thus breaking the barrier on gender imbalance in gainful employment but COVID-19 left them unemployed and exposed them to abject poverty.

At the level of business institutions, against the background of significant losses in revenue resulting from the scourge, many tourism enterprises closed. The severity of the impact of the Coronavirus extended to conversion of some hotels into isolation centres. Some hospitality facilities countrywide including those in prime destinations such as the Chobe and Ngamiland Districts were utilised as quarantine facilities wherein COVID-19 patients were isolated and received medical attention (Republic of Botswana, 2020). Luxury hotels such as the Chobe Safari Lodge and the Chobe Marina Lodge were converted to isolation centres for the COVID-19 patients from the Chobe District. Fortuitously, such hotels, though closed to tourist visits, benefitted from government rentals of their property as quarantines paid for by government, a practice that was adopted globally during the COVID-19 era.

Those businesses that survived either put workers on unpaid leave or outrightly retrenching them, exacerbating poverty levels among the rural communities (Stone et al, 2021). In Maun, for example, small scale tourism operators had their properties including vehicles auctioned on account of failing to service bank loans. In 2020, at the height of the impact of the virus, many international clients cancelled their bookings, demanding refund, and threatening litigation (*The Patriot on Sunday*, 2020, July17). The first clients to cancel their bookings were from China, where the virus first broke out before spreading globally (*The*

*Voice*, 2021). Hotels traditionally also served as conference centres and Kasane has historically been the hub of government conferences, but with travel restrictions hospitality facilities experienced a surge in revenue losses. In their 2020 Annual Report, Cresta Marakanelo Group, a countrywide upmarket hospitality outfit with branches in Botswana and Zambia, reported huge revenue contraction due to the circumstances occasioned by the Coronavirus. For example, whereas the Group's revenue for 2019, the year before the outbreak of the pandemic, was P275.0 million, in 2020 the figures plummeted to P194.3 million (*The Patriot on Sunday online*, 2021).

A whole value chain in the sector experienced hardships as a result. Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and the bulk of the informal sector were hit the most. These included producers of crafts items such as baskets, mats, and other traditional ornaments, income from which community members paid for the education of their children (*The Voice*, 2021). Polers in the Okavango Delta, for example, used to cash in on tourists who had a penchant for their traditional *mekoro*, dug-out canoes, taking them from one end of the river to another, along which they passed by women basket weavers who benefited from selling their wares to tourists. COVID-19 sounded a death knell on these sources of income within the tourism industry, portending poverty to these rural communities within the tourism destinations. Lately, just when recovery seemed within reach, the Russia-Ukraine war created new threats forcing international tourists to cancel their bookings on account of safety concerns with some clients cancelling their bookings due to safety reasons (*The Patriot on Sunday*, 2020). The point being made here is to show a negative aspect of tourism on account of the global nature of the industry and therefore its susceptibility to international shocks as exemplified in this case by the outbreak of COVID-19 and that of the Russia-Ukraine war, both of which have exposed the industry's vulnerability.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the negative impacts of tourism in Botswana. It has argued that much as tourism is regarded as an important engine of growth in Botswana as indeed in developing economies elsewhere, it nevertheless has had and continues to have serious negative impacts that are usually glossed over in the broader tourism literature. It is not in dispute that the industry has been rapidly changing and contributing significantly to the country's economic growth. However, evidence adduced shows that tourism in Botswana is enclave in character with many negative outcomes, including economic leakages, instances of corruption, ownership and domination by wealthy foreign investors which has systematically created barriers of entry for local communities. While local communities' input in policy formulation is critical, most policies that regulate the industry were drafted without the former's participation as some of these policies are creating conflict between government, and local communities. The near over-zealous nature of the operationalisation of some unilateralist policies on tourism have led to loss of life of nationals of countries with contiguous borders with Botswana, creating conflict between the government of Botswana and her neighbours. The article has also interrogated the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry, noting the despicable disruptions on African economies including Botswana. Also, anchored on wildlife viewing, tourism has been blamed for the incessant human-wildlife conflict that has contributed immensely to poverty on account of the destruction of agricultural products and compensation that has not measured to the losses suffered. Government thus needs to engage in a balancing act that will be sensitive and responsive to the needs of both tourism and community development. There is also need for special funding for indigenous Botswana to enable them entry into the competitive industry. In this way, the negative impacts of tourism can be reduced.

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