

Development and Management of Small Agro-Tourism Enterprises: A Rural Development Strategy

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Abstract

The development of agro-tourism which brings together the agrarian and tourism sphere, can contribute to the socio-economic development of rural regions and enhance the well-being of rural population, especially for the sustainable development of small-scale farms. The aim of this paper is to examine the development opportunities for small-scale farms through agro-tourism; moreover, to obtain comments that can inform government policy on the development of small-scale farms in agro-tourism; and lastly to determine the importance of agro-tourism in rural development. The study utilised a qualitative single case study that examined the views of a small-scale farmers on the prospects of introducing elements of agro-tourism in farm development. The results suggests that, for small-scale farms to continually develop and obtain sustainable success, it necessitates a well-constructed agro-tourism strategy. Furthermore, the significance of government support to small-scale farms sustainable development, as agro-tourism is recognised as an alternative farming activity that can diversify operations of small-scale farmers, and overall contribute to the sustainable development of a rural economy. Therefore, the development of a strategy for agro-tourism needs not only small-scale farmers understanding of government policy-decisions but should incorporate the small-scale farmers point of view on the subject to develop a sustainable agro-tourism destination.

Keywords: Agro-tourism; strategic management; rural economic development; small-scale farm; government support

Introduction

Agriculture is, and has always been, the most vital sector for human sustenance as well as for communities (Calabro & Vieri, 2015; Sgroi et al., 2018; Ibeagha-Awemu et al., 2019). For some time, the very concept of agriculture has been evolving. Indeed, in the past, the agricultural sector was exclusively entrusted with the function of ensuring the livelihood of farmers and understood to be the main source of food for the world population. The diversification of agriculture activities aims not only at ensuring the survival of farmers, more so, small-scale farmers, but also creating alternative means of generating income, and concurrently, to enhance and promote economic development in rural regions (Calabro & Vieri, 2015; Prestamburgo et al., 2016; Barbieri et al., 2017; Galluzo, 2017; Sgroi et al. 2018). Urbanisation of the population and industrialisation have led to reduced economic opportunities in rural areas, as explained by Romanenko et al. (2020).

Historically, the rural areas in South Africa have been characterised by remarkably high levels of poverty and unemployment, combined with very limited employment prospects in the agriculture sector, as indicated by Mahajan (2014). The situation largely reflected the economic structure that was designed by the colonialism and apartheid system, in particular the apartheid system from 1948 that aimed to force predominately the African population into rural regions, which the government called Homelands (Mahajan, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme of the Department of Rural Development and

Land Reform (2009) indicated that 10 to 15 million South Africans lived in rural areas that are characterized by extreme poverty and underdevelopment. In 2020, an estimated 19.5 million (32.7%) South Africans lived in rural areas, according to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2020). Tourism and agriculture were initially identified as the economic potential pillars for rural development by the South African government. As a result, the National Department of Tourism (NDT) (2012), in its endeavour and response, to rural development prepared the rural development strategy with the aim of initiating support programmes that seek to promote economic activities in rural areas, including tourism, agriculture and culture activities to ensure that rural areas utilise their unique assets, basic resources and characteristics.

The development of agro-tourism that brings together the agrarian and tourism sphere, can contribute to the socio-economic development of rural regions and enhance the well-being of rural populations. Conventionally, agro-tourism encompasses recreational experiences involving visits to rural settings or rural environments for the purpose of participating in or experiencing activities, events or attractions not readily available in urbanized areas (Sznajder et al., 2009; Kunasekaran et al., 2011; Choo, 2012). Among a host of activities that can be linked to agro-tourism in developed rural settings are village accommodations, farm restaurants and wineries, ranch resorts, canoeing, leisure fishing, renting of rooms on farms, selling of artifacts, and distinctive food cuisines, as explained by Rogerson and Rogerson (2014). Agro-tourism, as described by Bakhmatova (2021), is one of the opportunities for rural development; it serves prospects of optimising the natural resources that are available in a rural environment. Therefore, agro-tourism will allow the diversification of the sectoral composition of rural areas, supplementing the agricultural component with tourism activities, as this endeavour will create sustainable development for all stakeholders to benefit, especially small-scale farmers (Henderson, 2009; Choo & Petrick, 2014; Adu-Ampong, 2017; Ahmad et al., 2017; Maharjan & Dangol, 2018; Khanal & Shrestha, 2019; Kubickova & Campbell, 2020; Bakhmatova, 2021). Diversification of farm activity into agro-tourism is expected to add value to the operations of small-scale farmers. Therefore, formulating a strategy for agro-tourism development, as identified by Kubickova and Campbell (2020), needs to include not only the understanding of the government perspective, but also incorporate the small-scale farmers' point of view to develop a successful agro-tourism destination as an inducement for rural development.

Agro-tourism is a hybrid type of agricultural system that merges elements of farming and tourism to create markets for farm products and services and provide travel experiences for tourists (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Choenkwan et al., 2016). Agro-tourism, which has existed in Europe, North America, and other parts of the world for many years (Busby & Rendle, 2000), has more recently gained growing attention in developing countries, including South Africa (Choo & Retrick, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Shaffril et al., 2013; Choenkwan et al., 2016) Agro-tourism can serve as a strategic tool in the development of rural areas in South Africa, and improve small-scale farmers' and quality of life. Tourism has the potential to benefit the agricultural sector by creating market opportunities for farmers to sell their products and services directly to tourists as it provides an incentive to small-scale farmers as an opportunity to diversify through hosting events, producing high-value crops, selling merchandise, and many others, to meet new tourist demand (Flanigan et al., 2014). Moreover, tourism can provide a secondary source of income that can off-set challenges that are associated with the agricultural sector (Schilling et al., 2014; Shaffril et al., 2015).

The aim of this paper is to examine the development opportunities for small-scale farms through agro-tourism; and moreover, to obtain comments that can inform government policy of the development of small-scale farms in agro-tourism; and lastly, to determine the importance of agro-tourism in rural development. Agro-tourism is an alternative activity in the rural development process that can contribute to rural areas both socially and economically.

Therefore, formatting a strategy for the agro-tourism development needs of small-scale farmers needs to include not only the understanding by the government, but should also incorporate the small-scale farmers point of view on the subject to develop a sustainable agro-tourism destination. The ensuing section elaborates on the theoretical background.

Literature review

Agriculture has been an economic mainstay in South Africa throughout history. Recently, its importance and essential role in rural economic development and growth have been acknowledged by policymakers and other key role players, as established by Sgori et al. (2018). As reported by the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development in South Africa, the agricultural sector ended 2021 on a positive note - the sector reached record exports of about R173 billion by the end of the year, an increase from 2020's agricultural exports of about R160 billion. In the third quarter of 2021, agricultural employment increased by 3% to 829,000, which according to the Department, is above the long-term agricultural employment number of 780,000 (Sonjica, 2021). The top ten export products, as described by Moore (2021), were citrus, grapes, wine, apples, pears, maize, nuts, sugar, wool, and fruit juices, with Africa and Europe serving as the largest markets for South African agricultural exports – followed closely by the Asian market. Notwithstanding the number of underdeveloped farms in South Africa, the diversification of activities can enhance and promote the sustainable development of farms, especially those owned by small-scale farmers (Mazilu & Iancu, 2006; Evgrafova et al., 2020). Basically, earnings from agricultural products will not be sufficient to sustain the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. Despite past efforts made by agricultural researchers, private institutions, and government, agriculture production in South African small-scale farms remains lower than the potential of the land (Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, 2012; Mutero et al., 2016; Myeni et al., 2019). The lower yields obtained, as indicated by Myeni et al. (2019), are attributed to prolonged droughts, inefficient farming practices, limited water and nutrients availability, lack of equipment, and ultimately resource constraints (in terms of access of credit and education). Agro-tourism is recognised as an alternative farming activity that can diversify the operations of small-scale farmers, and overall contribute to the sustainable development of a rural economy. In general, rural areas are characterised by features such as poverty, low-income levels, poor infrastructure, increasing populations, low entrepreneurship initiatives, and poorly utilised natural resources, as mentioned by Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005) and National Department of Tourism (NDT) (2012).

Agro-tourism a strategy for rural economic development

Agro-tourism has multifarious contributions to make to rural economic development, as identified by Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005). Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005) described rural economic development as the process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increases in rural resources productivity in rural communities. Rural areas, and specifically in South Africa are not only attractive in terms of natural resources and heritage potential, but also specific architecture reflecting particular ethno-culture characteristic and traditional tools used for decades in farming work, highlighting the ethnic originality and creativity, as formulated by Stanovic et al. (2018). Despite the substantial contribution the agriculture sector can have to the rural economy, as constructed by Evgrafova et al. (2020), farm managers have been facing a series of challenges, such as devastating effects to the global economy as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, increased worldwide competition in output markets, high production costs escalated from increasing input costs, and lack of transparent rules and regulations imposed by government agencies. As a result, farm owners have been searching for alternative farm-oriented activities that potentially generate additional income to their on-



farm revenues so that they can remain in such a highly competitive environment (Haghiri & Okech, 2011; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Stanovcic et al., 2018; Evgrafova et al., 2020). Agro-tourism can serve as an alternative for farm-oriented activities that can generate additional income and assist in the sustainable development of a rural environment. Agro-tourism activities are carried out by exploiting the potential of nature, such as agricultural festivals, wine tasting, wedding hosting, horseback riding, farm-staying or guest houses, hiking, and many more (Chandrashekhara, 2018; Ismail et al., 2020). Agro-tourism has been described by numerous scholars and following is a synthesis of the description. Table 1 presents different descriptions of agro-tourism over a period of time.

Table 1: Agro-tourism described

| Author(s) | Description |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fleischer & Tchetchik (2005) | Rural areas endowed with numerous historic natural and social qualities; it is common that tourism spreads in conjunction and combined with farming activities. |
| Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005) | Agro-tourism by mere logic is the practice of agriculture for tourism. |
| Henderson (2009) | Can be found in locales where the town meets the country, but it is commonly associated with non-urban environments and seen as a dimension of rural tourism, itself a very broad concept that covers the many ways in which the countryside is harnessed for tourism purposes. |
| Yang et al. (2010) | A combination of agricultural production and tourism that encourages short and long-term visitors to farms or rural areas for the purpose of enjoyment, education, and active involvement in the activities of agricultural production and farming life. |
| Chemnasiri (2012) | Is a mild form of sustainable tourism development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get acquainted with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional cuisine and the daily life of people as well as the cultural elements and the authentic features of the area, while showing respect for the environment and tradition. |
| Olya et al. (2014) | It comprises an extensive range of generic tourism products based on farm resources and agricultural outputs located in a working farm environment. |
| Rogerson & Rogerson (2014) | Any activity that attracts visitors to a farm or other agricultural setting contemplates the farm landscape or participate in an agricultural process for recreational or leisure purposes. |
| Khanal & Shrestha (2019) | Any custom developed on a working farm with the objective of attracting tourists.. |
| Ismail et al. (2020) | Agro-tourism can be in the form of natural scenery, diversity of agricultural production, technology activities and preservation of community culture. |

Most agro-tourist centres are located in rural settlements, and, as analysed by Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005), the level of patronage to agro-tourist centres is more by urban dwellers than rural dwellers. This could be attributed to the fact that rural dwellers have been with the resources or centres all through their lives and that urban dwellers appreciate recreational centres more than rural dwellers do. Agro-tourism is one form of activity that can utilise agricultural business as a tourist attraction (Ismail et al., 2020). Agro-tourism, as established by Sgori et al. (2018), brings in other business opportunities for small-scale farmers to remain in their rural areas and equally important optimise the agricultural products to generate additional income. Agro-tourism allows for the full employment of family members and the provision of services to local residents and tourists, in particular tourists looking for a place to stay or have a meal in rural areas.

Government support for small scale farmers in South Africa

South African agriculture is characterised mainly by two groups, with the one consisting of highly capitalised and established farmers and the other comprising of small-scale farmers who in many instances do not have the necessary resources, in particular capital, to support their farm operations and enable for sustainable development, as analysed by Zantsi et al. (2019a). The main difference between these two groups, other than financial resources and the scale of production, is the reason for engaging in production; the latter produces to improve their household food security and if any be commercial oriented at pocket size level (selling mainly

to community members that reside in and around the farm), while the former produces to sell to supermarkets and other well-established food retail outlets, given that it serves as their primary or secondary sources of income (Nieuwoudt, 2000; Van Averbeke & Mohamed, 2006). While the dualism between the two groups has a historic origin, it persists to the present despite the focus of the government to develop and support small-scale farmers (Zantsi et al., 2019b). Post-apartheid in South Africa, agricultural support by government has been largely focused on the disadvantaged and formerly neglected small-scale farmers (Karaan & Vink, 2014; Zantsi et al., 2019b). Government support, as indicated by Hall and Aliber (2010), manifested through an array of initiatives, with the largest expenditure being in Land Reform and the Comprehensive Agricultural Support programme. The Land and Agricultural Development Bank of South Africa operates in the primary agriculture and agribusiness sectors (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), 2020). As a development finance institution, its mandate is to address agricultural and rural development in South Africa (Land and Agricultural Development Bank Act No. 15, 2002).

In its ongoing effort to facilitate the entry of small-scale farmers, whom are predominantly generation of black African agri-entrepreneurs into the sector, over the medium term, the Land and Agricultural Development Bank of South Africa was expected to focus on growing its loan offerings and, in doing so, create appropriate equity investment structures and opportunities, enable existing farmers to undertake transformational projects to grow their enterprises, increase funding for agricultural activities, and continue to assist small-scale farmers access supplier and enterprise development programmes to expand their operations, as indicated by DALRRD (2020). However, while the expenditure on the support programmes has markedly increased over time, the impact has been very minimal, with only a few farmers benefiting (Aliber & Hall, 2012). In general, despite the significant support programmes implemented by the South African government to promote the development and growth of small business enterprises in all economic sectors (Mbekeni, 2009; Hall & Aliber, 2010), the demise rates of small businesses seem to be on the rise, as explained by Mbekeni (2009), Zwane (2014) and Sutton (2015). From another perspective, Zantsi et al. (2019b) analysed that the anecdotal evidence and strong allegations have been more pronounced on reckless spending and corrupt transactions on services rendered to small-scale farmers.

Small-scale farms can play an important role in the enhancement of livelihood amongst the rural poor, according to Department of Agriculture, forestry and fisheries (2012). Likewise, small-scale farmers are important for household food security and therefore the significant increase in the productivity levels of small-scale farms will enable their long-term survival. This can be achieved through government support and by encouraging small-scale farmers to diversify their production mix through innovation and entrepreneurship. The small-scale farmers' involvement in the decision-making process is an opportunity for them to express their desires on how to develop their respective farms. Equally important, the effective engagement of small-scale farmers is essential for good cooperate governance, as reported by Nzimande and Bob (2020). Moreover, transparency and effective communication are especially vital for building trust and confidence with small-scale farmers (Nzimande & Bob, 2020; Capellan et al. 2021). It is acknowledged by both scholars and policy planners that in order to reduce rural immigration, it is necessary to optimise the usage of environmental, agricultural and tourist potentials of rural areas through innovations and entrepreneurship, as compiled by Stanovcic et al. (2018). Fostering entrepreneurship in the agro-tourism sector not only creates an alternative source of income, but also creates value for the local community and contributes to the preservation of rural heritage. McElwee (2008) and Phelan et al. (2011) highlight the increasingly important role of entrepreneurship in developing modern farming, arguing that farmers are requested to develop entrepreneurial skills and capabilities in order to

remain competitive and diversify their activities. Furthermore, agro-tourism is increasingly seen as one of the most significant diversification strategies, promoting sustainable management of natural resources and a viable economic development for small-scale farms.

Research framework

Tourism activities offers other prospects to small-scale farmers who previously were focused on agricultural products to remain profitable in the rural area. Indeed, amongst many challenges encountered by small-scale farms are such as: increased competition, climate change, lack of access to working capital, barriers to enter the market, and many others has made it difficult for the farm enterprise to remain profitable and be sustainable in their operations. For members in the rural communities who are unemployed or have never worked, agrotourism affords them with employment and business opportunities, and furthermore the provision of services in rural areas for travelers seeking (1) direct sales (on farm sales: crops, fruits, olives and processed products such as wines); (2) education (classes, workshops, student visitors); (3) hospitality (camping, Airbnb/bnb, lodging/other rentals, retreats, farm-stay or guest houses); (4) outdoor recreation activities (hunting, fishing, horseback riding, biking, hiking), (5) entertainment (wine tasting, music, events, weddings), as shown in Figure 1. The diversification of farm activities aims not only at ensuring the survival of farmers, but also at increasing their individual and household incomes. At the same time, it enhances and promotes the development of the rural economy.

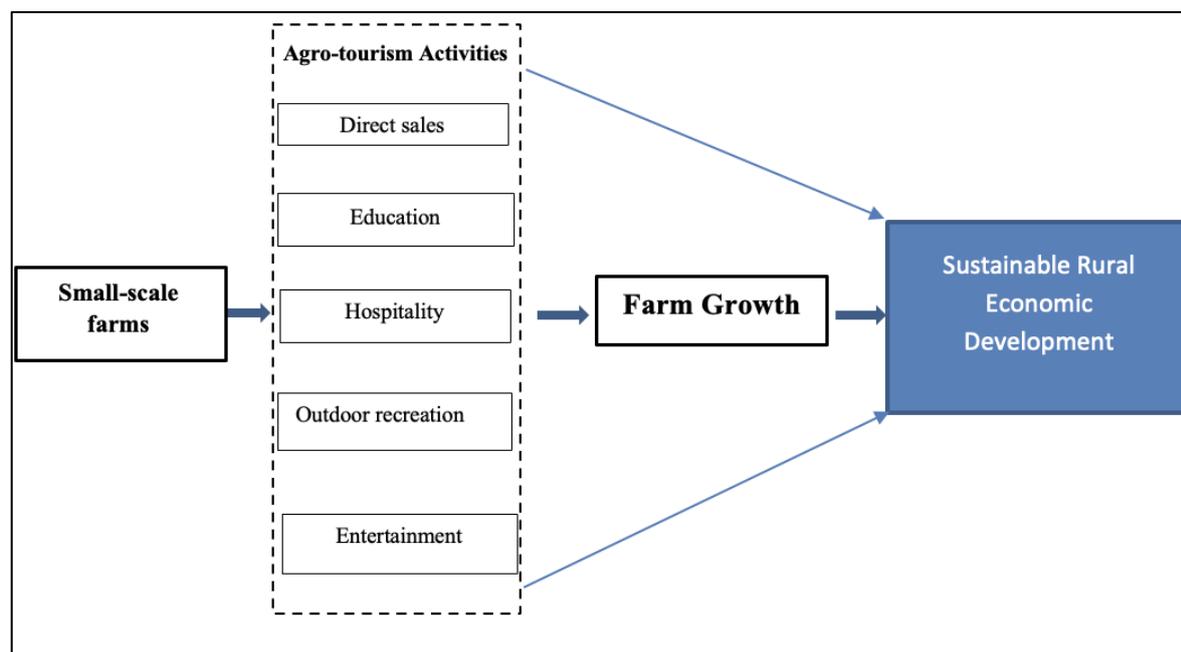


Figure 1: Small-scale farms growth through agro-tourism
Source: adapted from Stanovicic et al. (2018) and Gomwe (2022)

Research method

Secondary data research was embarked on with the purpose of establishing the theoretical framework upon which this paper is based on the significance of small-scale farms developing growth strategies for the sustainable development of their enterprises. In business management research, the interest in the case study as a method for generating testing theory has recently gained strength (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Lee et al., 2007; Platt, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007; Gibbert et al., 2008). The case study method facilitates the collection of more extensive

amounts of information than other methodologies. This provides for more comprehensive data and a greater understanding of the phenomenon, as explained by Morse and McEvoy (2014). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) argue that it is one of the best bridges between rich qualitative evidence and mainstream deductive research. For the purpose of the research paper, the focus was on the single qualitative case study method and theory building. Mariotto et al. (2013) and Vannoni (2015) argues that multiple cases are favourable when case studies are compared to each other, and the researcher also can provide the literature with an important influence from the contrasts and similarities. Somewhat surprisingly, single case studies can enable the creation of more complicated theories than multiple cases, because single case researchers can customise theory exactly to the many details of a particular case. In contrast, multiple case researchers retain only the relationships that are replicated across all of the cases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

To create high quality theory, Dyer et al. (1991) argue that single case studies are better than multiple cases because single case studies produce extra and better theory. Furthermore, Gustafsson (2017) proposes that the undertaking of a single case enables the researcher to question old theoretical relationships and explore new ones, and because of that, a more careful study is conducted. Yin (2009) justified that if a researcher only wants to study one single case (a person from a specific group), a single case study is the best choice. An interview-guide was used to obtain data from the small-scale farmer. This interview was aimed at exploring the views of small-scale farmers on how they can develop their farms through agro-tourism. Agro-tourism is a hybrid type of agricultural system that merges elements of farming and tourism to create markets for farm products and services and provide travel experiences for tourists. The interview guide consisted of the following sections, starting with section A, farm profile – the small-scale farmer's background information in farming and number of years the farm has been operating. This was followed by section B, a series of questions concerning how the farm can grow through the introduction of agro-tourism activities. The following section C, dealt with exploring the small-scale farmer's views concerning agro-tourism as a strategic tool for rural development. Lastly, section D, dealt with comments on government support received in general. For purposes of this paper, detailed information was obtained from the small-scale farmers on what mechanisms and strategies are needed to realise business survival and continuous growth.

Furthermore, was to explore the small-scale farmers' perceptions and viewpoint on diversifying the farm product/service offerings through innovation and entrepreneurship were explored; agro-tourism is increasingly seen as one of the most significant diversification strategies. The ethical dimension of the study was considered, as an informed consent letter explaining the purpose of the study was emailed to the participant. In addition, the participant was well informed of his rights before participating in the interview process. The interview was conveniently organised at the owner's farm located in Ventersdorp, North-West Province of South Africa. Farming and agriculture are the main economic sectors in the region. Note-taking and tape-recording during the interview session were used to capture the verbatim discussion. Data extracted was analysed using Atlas-ti and this enabled for the combining of data, grouping data into themes and ultimately coming to well-informed conclusions (Matthews, 2010; Saunders et al., 2016). Elaborative coding was undertaken; that is codes were identified prior to collecting and analysing of data, and this elaborative coding phase stems from the literature review and elaborated theoretical framework, as indicated by Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2019). The elaborative coding method is more deductive in nature.

Results and discussion

The interviewer commenced the session by asking general questions about the profile of the farm and background information of the owner. This was followed by general questions of the small business owner’s level of knowledge or understanding concerning agro-tourism, in particular prospects of growing the farm through integration of agro-tourism activities. In these findings, there were four themes that were identified, and the data was further classified into categories and codes.

Table 2: Layout of themes

| Theme | Category | Code |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Farm profile | Challenges for development | Crime Load shedding Water shortages Low morale Inadequate finance |
| 2. Agro tourism development | Benefits of agro-tourism | Increase market Job creation Exposure for students Preservation of natural environment |
| 3. Farm growth through agro-tourism | Agro tourism category | Hospitality Entertainment Outdoor recreation |
| | Key success factors | Employee expertise Hard work Promotional activities Farm security |
| | Staff required | Experience staff Trained staff |
| | Areas of improvement | Employee skills Marketing strategies |
| | Market segments | Local and international |
| | Risk mitigation | Promotional campaigns |
| 4. Government support | Government support required | Financial assistance Training Marketing techniques and opportunities |

The four themes are (1) farm profile, (2) agro-tourism development, (3) farm growth through agro-tourism, and lastly (4) government support. The categories allowed for probing the small-scale farmer’s understanding of elements of agro-tourism and prospects of growing the farm through diversification, as agro-tourism is increasingly seen as one of the most significant strategies that can aid the sustainable development of a farm.

Farm profile

The session commenced by asking general questions such as “the business owner’s educational background, length of time the farm has been operational, purpose of managing a farm, and challenges associated with managing a farm.” The participant presented a brief description of how the farm was started:

“... I grew up in the farming environment and it all started when we used to visit a farm during our school holidays as my parents worked at a farm. Perhaps that is the time the passion for farming was ignited, and currently I have been managing this farm for over 10 years as the farm was official registered in 2012. Capital was sourced partly from my own personal savings, local government and private business to start the farm.”

The participant explained his experience with mixed crop farming that ultimately led to viticulture or wine growing through cultivation and harvesting of grapes:

“...prior to acquiring a farm, I obtained a business management and farming qualifications at a tertiary institution and worked for a mining company. With the training and experience acquired I wanted to establish my own farm business as I had an inclination of being an entrepreneur by nature.”

The farmer indicated that only 12 hectares of the farm have been used despite the farm being 90 hectares. At the same time, he has four permanent employees and more than 30 seasonal employees during the harvest season. Moreover, the farmer indicated that the most satisfying part of farming is during the harvesting season – rewards for hard work. Subsequently, during the harvest season, there is employment created for the unemployed community members:

“I was specifically inspired to be community-based entrepreneurship as I consider it as an opportune moment to empower the community living in and around the farm through creation of employment and transfer of skills...”

In response to the discussion point on challenges the small-scale farmer has encountered during years of farming, the following responses were obtained: Inadequate funds to manage the farm productively because there is an opportunity to diversify operations in the farm as there is plentiful of land and this will generate more income. In addition, this will create secured jobs for the local community as there will be sustainable development in the farm. “... other challenges are the adverse effects of loading shedding as it affects the water system, and criminal elements in and around the farm.”

Agro-tourism development

The discussion turned to “the small-scale farmer’s level of knowledge or understanding concerning agro-tourism?” The small-scale farmer had a relatively good understanding of the concept ‘agro-tourism’ and the benefits associated with this subsector of tourism. At the same time, the farmer indicated that agro-tourism presents a unique opportunity to combine aspects of the tourism and agriculture industries to provide several financial, educational, and social benefits.

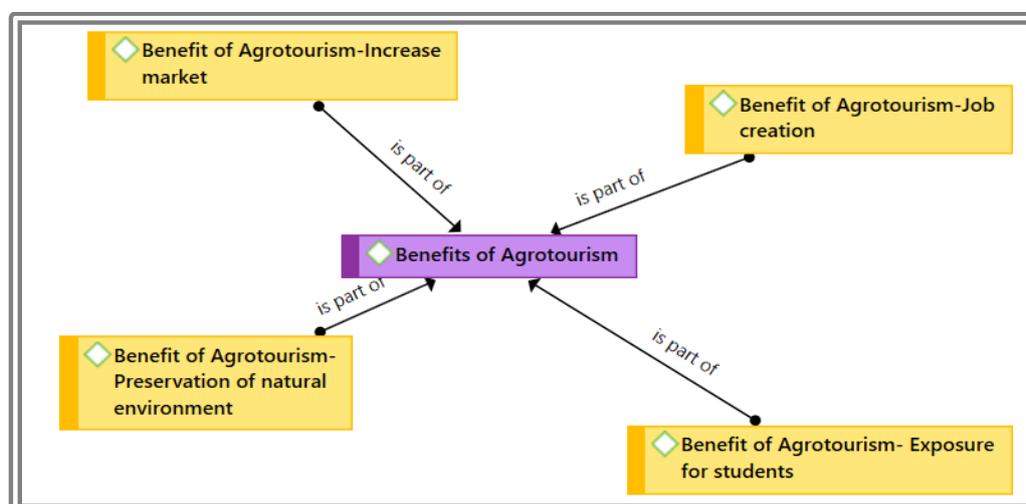


Figure 2: Benefits of agro-tourism

“...previously the farm had a student from the University of Free State. The student received training on viticulture that involves monitoring and control pest, monitoring the development of fruits, vine pruning during winter season, when to harvest and many more. The student was taught on horticulture – plant production for six months. Other agro-tourism activities that were undertaken on the farm were hospitality, outdoor recreation, and wine testing events. Infrastructure is noteworthy challenge as the farm is using dilapidated structures.”

Response to the discussion point on how important agro-tourism to the farm is, the following responses were obtained: agro-tourism will offer a variety of advantages to the farm – it will bring along economic benefits, job creation, rural-community upliftment, and in general sustainable development in the farm.

Farm growth through agro-tourism

The discussion progressed to “What role does agro-tourism play in the sustainable development of a farm?” Agro-tourism is recognised as an alternative farming activity that can contribute to agricultural sustainability across South Africa farms, especially small-scale farmers, through rural economic diversification and with the further advantages of providing educational opportunities to urban visitors, which can engender greater community cohesion in rural areas:

“... this type of tourism in the farm can create exposure for the products being sold in the farm, products such as grains, wines and other vegetables. Agro-tourism in the farm will create entrepreneurship opportunities for the local communities, and equally important it critically important to understand the drivers for travellers to visit and purchase the products, services, or experiences and then to develop a marketing strategy unique to the farm.”

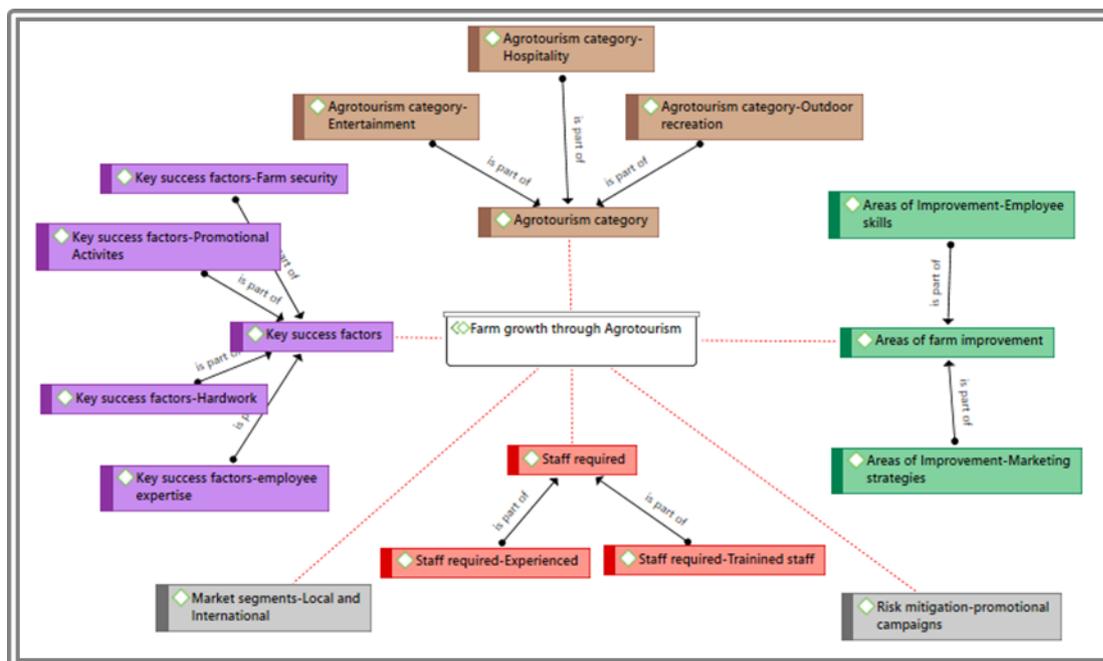


Figure 3: Farm growth through agro-tourism

In response to the discussion point on what infrastructure or resources are needed for the success of agro-tourism in the farm, the following responses were obtained: The development of new infrastructure in the farm for agro-tourism activities – hospitality, outdoor recreation, wine tasting, sales of vegetables, and many others, will create new tourist markets by employing previously untapped natural resources, such as the underutilised land. More importantly employees can significantly impact the success of the agro-tourism business in the farm in several ways:

“Employee training is fundamental if we to be successful in implementing agro-tourism activities on the farm. Agro-tourism businesses relies on employees to provide travelers with good service and interact with them in meaningful manner to provide an extraordinary experience for consumers, it is important for the employees to be familiar with the history of the farm and agro-tourism business, what makes the business unique and be skilled at conveying that to consumers.”

Government support

The development of agro-tourism in most countries, in particular developing economies such as South Africa, is considered an integral component of the comprehensive socio-economic development of rural communities, as analysed by Romaneko et al. (2020). Traditional paradigms of economic growth have relocated population and investment to urban metropolitan areas, causing rural areas to become depopulated, compounded by issues such as the seasonal nature of agriculture, excessively dependency on the agricultural sector, rapid growth of the population, and overall lack of economic activities, which necessitate for government to intervene to bring about necessary change through policy development and stakeholder management.

The discussion on “Have you received government support with regards to agro-tourism development in your farm?”, the following responses were obtained: At the present period the farm has not received adequate support from government, and probing was used and resulted in this response “I have used my own funds to upskill myself by affiliating at different colleges to enhance my skills and abilities in managing a productive business and overall not enough is been done by government...” In response to the discussion point on how government can provide business support to small-scale farmers to enable for participation in the agro-tourism sector, the following response was obtained: Financial assistance – necessary to purchase agricultural working tools, construction of tourism infrastructure, funding of pesticides, training of employees on aspects of tourism and hospitality and many others. A probe question, “Has the farm received business support from a private business?”, the following response was obtained: “...yes we have received financial support from a private business and will interested to have a partner in future provided we share the same vision”. The value of this investor type can provide leverage and increase farm profits because the private investor provides a long-landing field before repayment is required. Private businesses offer funding based on the promise of a future return that they are willing to wait to trade in on while farm operations grow. In response to the discussion point on the involvement of small-scale farmers in government’s plan to assist in the development of sustainable agro-tourism, the following response was obtained: The involvement of small-scale farmers in the decision-making process is essential as it recognises them as primary stakeholders and not just as beneficiaries of government programmes. Therefore, the development of agro-tourism strategies needs to include not only understanding from government perspective, but also incorporation of small-scale farmers point of view to develop a successful and sustainable agro-

tourism that can bring in socio-economic benefits not only for the small-scale farmer, but also for the rural community.

Conclusion

Numerous agro-tourism businesses are seasonal in nature and can assist in offsetting seasonal challenges associated with agriculture and ensure that consumers visit the farm throughout the year. Rural areas in South Africa record gradual economic decline with small-scale farms dwindling in numbers and experiencing income stagnation, as assessed by Mkuhlani et al. (2020). Agro-tourism is viewed as a catalyst for revitalising the challenged rural economies, and in addition, the development of agro-tourism in economically impoverished areas has the potential to develop rural sites into tourist destinations, providing additional employment and income to the local and surrounding communities in which they operate. Agro-tourism can contribute to the overall income, cash flow, and profitability of a farm, especially of small-scale farms, by providing alternative income via farm products and tourism activities activities. Fostering entrepreneurship in a farming community through elements of agro-tourism will not only create value for local community, but also contribute to the preservation of the rural heritage. The primary goal of government is to create employment opportunities and thereby contribute to the overall economic and social development of a country, as explained by Kubickova and Campbell (2020). Therefore, the government should take on a more leading role and adapt to the role of entrepreneur, formulating policies, and initiating plans to support small-scale farmers to grow their farms through agro-tourism. Not only is government support is essential, but also private business investors who can inject much needed capital into the small-scale farms to enable for growth and expansion. Private investors sharing similar visions can inject much needed capital into the farm and as a result it will allow the farm to purchase tractors, tools, and farms in other regions of the province and develop a much bigger footprint. Generally, if private business investors are convinced of a return on investment, they are much more likely to commit to the business venture. This study seeks to contribute not only to theory building, but also provides significant and practical knowledge for government in understanding the needs and where the opportunities lie for the growth and sustainable development of small-scale farmers through agro-tourism. Therefore, the implication of the findings will tend to suggest that for the sustainable development of agro-tourism occur it is important for government to incorporate the small-scale farmers views and opinions in the decision-making process. The bottom-up approach will allow for the involvement and active participation of small-scale farmers in development initiatives. Likewise, the approach will ensure small-scale farmers have a sense of ownership, are committed, and accountable to the development projects.

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