

Mountain as A Source of Livelihood: A Qualitative Assessment of The Sustainability of Matopos Mountainous Region Tourism in the Economic Development for Local Citizens in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The Matopos mountainous region in Zimbabwe is a treasure trove of natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and diverse wildlife. This qualitative study explores the sustainability of tourism in the region and its impact on the economic development of local citizens. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, tourists, and community members, as well as observations and document analysis.

The findings indicate that tourism in the Matopos region has the potential to contribute significantly to the local economy, creating employment opportunities, generating income, and stimulating entrepreneurship. However, the study also reveals several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and concerns about environmental degradation and cultural exploitation.

To ensure the sustainability of tourism in the region, the study recommends the implementation of community-based tourism initiatives, capacity-building programs for local entrepreneurs, and measures to protect the environment and cultural heritage. By adopting a participatory and inclusive approach, tourism can become a viable source of livelihood for local citizens, contributing to their economic empowerment and well-being.

Keywords: mountainous region; livelihood; tourism; cultural heritage; environmental degradation; economic development;

1. INTRODUCTION

Mountains have long been a source of livelihood for millions of people around the world. They provide a range of ecosystem services, including water, food, and tourism opportunities. In Zimbabwe, the Matopos mountainous region is one such area where tourism has become a significant contributor to the local economy. However, the sustainability of tourism in this region is a concern, given the fragile nature of the

mountain ecosystem and the potential impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities.

2. Background

The Matopos mountainous region, located in South-western Zimbabwe, is a unique and fragile ecosystem that supports a wide range of biodiversity. The region is characterized by a mixture of granite hills, wooded valleys, and grasslands, and is home to a variety of wildlife, including white rhinoceros, giraffe, and leopard (Child, 1968). The Matopos region has a rich cultural heritage, with evidence of human habitation dating back thousands of years (Walker, 1995).

Tourism in the Matopos region has grown significantly in recent years, with visitors attracted to the area's natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage. The region offers a range of tourism activities, including hiking, rock climbing, game viewing, and cultural tours (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2020). However, the growth of tourism in the region has raised concerns about the sustainability of tourism development and its impacts on the environment and local communities.

2.1 Environmental Context

The Matopos region is a sensitive and fragile ecosystem, with a range of environmental concerns that need to be addressed. These include:

- **Soil erosion:** The region's granite soils are highly susceptible to erosion, particularly in areas with high levels of tourism activity (Stocking, 1988).
- **Water pollution:** The region's rivers and streams are vulnerable to pollution from tourism-related activities, such as sewage and waste disposal (Moyo, 2001).
- **Loss of biodiversity:** The region's unique and fragile ecosystem is under threat from tourism-related activities, such as habitat destruction and disturbance of wildlife (Barnes, 2001).

2.2 Social Context

The Matopos region is home to several local communities, including the Ndebele and Kalanga people. These communities have a rich cultural heritage, with a strong connection to the land and natural resources (Walker, 1995). However, the growth of tourism in the region has raised concerns about the impacts on local communities, including:

- **Displacement of local people:** The growth of tourism has led to an increase in land acquisition and the displacement of local people, particularly in areas with high levels of tourism activity (Moyo, 2001).
- **Cultural degradation:** The growth of tourism has also led to concerns about cultural degradation, particularly in areas where local customs and traditions are being eroded by tourism-related activities (Barnes, 2001).

2.3 Economic Context

Tourism is an important contributor to the local economy in the Matopos region, generating significant revenue and employment opportunities (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2020). However, the growth of tourism has also raised concerns about the distribution of benefits, particularly in areas where local communities are not benefiting equitably from tourism development (Manyara & Jones, 2007).

2.4 Geographical Context

The Matopos Mountainous Region is situated in the Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe, approximately 30 kilometres south of Bulawayo, the country's second-largest city. The region covers an

area of approximately 3,000 square kilometres and is characterized by a unique granite landscape, with towering hills, valleys, and rock formations.

2.5 Cultural Context

The Matopos Mountainous Region has a rich cultural heritage, with evidence of human habitation dating back to the Stone Age. The region is home to the Matopos Hills, a sacred site for the local Ndebele people, who believe that the hills hold spiritual significance. The region is also home to the grave of Cecil John Rhodes, the British colonialist who played a significant role in the colonization of Zimbabwe.

2.6 Tourism Development in the Region

Tourism development in the Matopos Mountainous Region dates back to the early 20th century, when the region was declared a national park. Since then, the region has developed a range of tourism infrastructure, including lodges, campsites, and recreational facilities. However, the region's tourism industry has faced significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and environmental degradation.

2.7 Research Questions

This study aims to assess the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region, with a focus on its contribution to the economic development of local citizens. The research questions guiding this study are:

- What are the economic benefits of tourism in the Matopos region, and how do they contribute to the livelihoods of local citizens?
- What are the environmental impacts of tourism in the Matopos region, and how can they be mitigated?
- What are the social impacts of tourism in the Matopos region, and how can they be managed to ensure that local communities benefit from tourism development?
- What policies and strategies can be implemented to ensure the sustainable development of tourism in the Matopos region?

2.8 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will contribute to our understanding of the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region, and its impacts on the environment and local communities. The study will provide insights into the economic benefits of tourism in the region, as well as the environmental and social impacts of tourism development. The findings of this study will be useful for policymakers, tourism developers, and local communities, as they seek to develop sustainable tourism strategies that balance economic, environmental, and social objectives.

3. Literature Review

The Matopos Mountainous Region in Zimbabwe is a unique and fragile ecosystem that provides a range of ecosystem services, including tourism, which is a significant source of livelihood for local communities. The region's tourism industry has been growing in recent years, driven by its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities. However, the sustainability of tourism in the region is a concern, given the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts on local communities. This literature review aims to assess the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region and its contribution to the economic development of local citizens in Zimbabwe.

3.1 Tourism and Sustainable Development

Tourism is recognized as a significant contributor to economic development, particularly in developing countries (UNWTO, 2019). However, the tourism industry also has the potential to negatively impact the environment, culture, and local communities (Butler, 1999). Sustainable tourism development is therefore critical to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably among stakeholders, while minimizing its negative impacts (WCED, 1987).

3.2 Matopos Mountainous Region Tourism

The Matopos Mountainous Region is a popular tourist destination in Zimbabwe, known for its unique granite landscape, diverse wildlife, and rich cultural heritage (Moyo, 2012). The region's tourism industry is driven by a range of activities, including hiking, rock climbing, game viewing, and cultural tours (ZTA, 2020). However, the region's tourism industry is also facing a range of challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and environmental degradation (Moyo, 2012).

3.3 Economic Benefits of Tourism

Tourism is a significant contributor to the economy of Zimbabwe, generating foreign exchange earnings, creating employment opportunities, and stimulating local economic development (ZTA, 2020). In the Matopos Mountainous Region, tourism is a major source of income for local communities, with many households relying on tourism-related activities for their livelihoods (Moyo, 2012).

3.4 Environmental Impacts of Tourism

The tourism industry in the Matopos Mountainous Region also has the potential to negatively impact the environment, particularly through the degradation of natural habitats, pollution, and climate change (Butler, 1999). The region's fragile ecosystem is vulnerable to the impacts of tourism, including the erosion of trails, the degradation of water sources, and the loss of biodiversity (Moyo, 2012).

3.5 Social Impacts of Tourism

The tourism industry in the Matopos Mountainous Region also has the potential to negatively impact local communities, particularly through the displacement of people, the loss of cultural heritage, and the exacerbation of social inequalities (Butler, 1999). The region's local communities are vulnerable to the impacts of tourism, including the loss of traditional livelihoods, the degradation of cultural sites, and the erosion of social cohesion (Moyo, 2012).

3.6 Sustainable Tourism Development

To ensure the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region, it is critical to adopt a sustainable tourism development approach that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of stakeholders (WCED, 1987). This approach should prioritize the involvement of local communities in tourism development, the conservation of natural and cultural resources, and the minimization of negative impacts (Butler, 1999).

The Matopos Mountainous Region in Zimbabwe is a unique and fragile ecosystem that provides a range of ecosystem services, including tourism. While tourism is a significant contributor to the economy of Zimbabwe and provides livelihood opportunities for local communities, it also has the potential to negatively impact the environment, culture, and local communities. To ensure the sustainability of tourism in the region, it is critical to adopt a sustainable tourism development approach that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of stakeholders.

3.7 Current Challenges and Opportunities

The Matopos Mountainous Region's tourism industry faces a range of challenges, including:

- Inadequate infrastructure, including roads, accommodation, and recreational facilities
- Limited access to markets, including limited air connectivity and inadequate marketing
- Environmental degradation, including soil erosion, deforestation, and pollution
- Limited community involvement in tourism development and benefits

Despite these challenges, the region also presents a range of opportunities, including:

- Unique and diverse natural and cultural attractions
 - Growing demand for tourism in Zimbabwe and the region
 - Potential for community-based tourism development and benefits
 - Opportunities for sustainable tourism development and environmental conservation.
- economic benefits and challenges

3.8 Economic Benefits of Tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region

Tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region generates significant economic benefits, including:

- **Job creation:** Tourism creates employment opportunities in various sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, and recreation.
- **Foreign exchange earnings:** Tourism generates foreign exchange earnings, which contribute to the country's foreign exchange reserves.
- **Local economic development:** Tourism stimulates local economic development by creating demand for local goods and services.
- **Government revenue:** Tourism generates government revenue through taxes, levies, and fees.
- **Poverty reduction:** Tourism provides income-earning opportunities for local communities, contributing to poverty reduction.

3.9 Economic Challenges Facing Tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region

Despite the economic benefits, tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region faces several economic challenges, including:

- **Infrastructure constraints:** The region's infrastructure, including roads, accommodation, and recreational facilities, is inadequate and in need of upgrading.
- **Limited access to markets:** The region's tourism industry faces challenges in accessing international markets, including limited air connectivity and inadequate marketing.
- **High operating costs:** The region's tourism operators face high operating costs, including energy, water, and labour costs.
- **Seasonality:** The region's tourism industry is seasonal, with peak demand during the summer months and low demand during the winter months.
- **Competition from other destinations:** The region faces competition from other tourist destinations in Zimbabwe and the region, which can make it challenging to attract visitors.
- **Limited financial resources:** The region's tourism industry faces challenges in accessing financial resources, including funding for infrastructure development and marketing.
- **Brain drain:** The region's tourism industry faces challenges in retaining skilled and experienced staff, who often seek better opportunities in other destinations.

3.10 Addressing the Economic Challenges

To address the economic challenges facing tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region, the following strategies could be implemented:

- **Investing in infrastructure development:** Upgrading the region's infrastructure, including roads, accommodation, and recreational facilities, to improve the tourist experience and increase competitiveness.
- **Improving access to markets:** Enhancing air connectivity and implementing effective marketing strategies to increase access to international markets.
- **Reducing operating costs:** Implementing measures to reduce energy, water, and labor costs, such as investing in renewable energy and improving operational efficiency.
- **Developing niche tourism products:** Developing niche tourism products, such as cultural tourism and adventure tourism, to diversify the region's tourism offerings and reduce seasonality.
- **Enhancing human resource development:** Providing training and development opportunities for tourism staff to improve skills and retention.
- **Increasing financial resources:** Exploring alternative funding sources, such as public-private partnerships and crowdfunding, to support tourism development and marketing.

3.11 Environmental Impacts of Tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region

Tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region can have significant environmental impacts, including:

- **Soil erosion:** The construction of tourism infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, can lead to soil erosion and landslides.
- **Deforestation:** The demand for firewood and timber for tourism infrastructure can lead to deforestation and habitat loss.
- **Water pollution:** The disposal of waste and wastewater from tourism activities can pollute water sources and harm aquatic life.
- **Loss of biodiversity:** The introduction of non-native species and the disruption of natural habitats can lead to the loss of biodiversity.
- **Climate change:** The carbon emissions from tourism activities, such as transportation and energy consumption, contribute to climate change.

3.12 Conservation Efforts in the Matopos Mountainous Region

To mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism, conservation efforts are underway in the Matopos Mountainous Region, including:

- **Protected areas:** The Matopos National Park and the Matopos Hills World Heritage Site provide protected areas for conservation and tourism.
- **Sustainable tourism practices:** Many tourism operators in the region are adopting sustainable tourism practices, such as using renewable energy, reducing waste, and promoting environmentally-friendly activities.
- **Community-based conservation:** Local communities are involved in conservation efforts, including the management of protected areas and the promotion of sustainable land-use practices.
- **Environmental education:** Environmental education programs are being implemented to raise

awareness among tourists and local communities about the importance of conservation and sustainable tourism practices.

- **Research and monitoring:** Research and monitoring programs are being conducted to better understand the environmental impacts of tourism and to develop effective conservation strategies.

3.13 Challenges and Opportunities for Conservation

Despite the conservation efforts underway, there are still challenges and opportunities for conservation in the Matopos Mountainous Region, including:

- **Limited resources:** Conservation efforts are often limited by a lack of resources, including funding, personnel, and infrastructure.
- **Conflicting interests:** There may be conflicting interests between conservation and tourism development, which can make it challenging to balance the two.
- **Climate change:** Climate change poses a significant threat to conservation efforts, as it can alter ecosystems and disrupt the distribution of species.
- **Community engagement:** Community engagement and participation are critical for effective conservation, but can be challenging to achieve.
- **Opportunities for sustainable tourism:** The Matopos Mountainous Region offers opportunities for sustainable tourism development, which can support conservation efforts and provide economic benefits for local communities.

3.14 Conservation and Sustainable Tourism

To support conservation efforts and promote sustainable tourism in the Matopos Mountainous Region, the following recommendations are made:

- **Develop sustainable tourism policies:** Develop policies and guidelines that promote sustainable tourism practices and support conservation efforts.
- **Increase community engagement:** Increase community engagement and participation in conservation efforts and sustainable tourism development.
- **Provide environmental education:** Provide environmental education programs for tourists and local communities to raise awareness about the importance of conservation and sustainable tourism practices.
- **Support conservation efforts:** Support conservation efforts through funding, personnel, and infrastructure.
- **Promote sustainable land-use practices:** Promote sustainable land-use practices, such as agroforestry and permaculture, to reduce the impact of tourism on the environment.

3.15 Sustainable Tourism Development at Matopos

Sustainable tourism development at Matopos requires a holistic approach that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of stakeholders. The following strategies can be implemented to promote sustainable tourism development at Matopos:

- **Community-based tourism:** Community-based tourism initiatives can be developed to involve local communities in tourism planning, management, and benefits. This approach can help to ensure that tourism benefits are shared equitably among stakeholders (Manyara & Jones, 2007).

- **Environmental conservation:** Environmental conservation efforts can be strengthened to protect the unique natural and cultural heritage of Matopos. This can include initiatives such as habitat restoration, wildlife conservation, and sustainable land-use practices (Mbaiwa, 2005).
- **Tourism infrastructure development:** Tourism infrastructure development can be planned and implemented sustainably, taking into account the environmental and social impacts of tourism. This can include the development of eco-lodges, camping facilities, and recreational infrastructure (UNWTO, 2019).
- **Tourism marketing and promotion:** Tourism marketing and promotion efforts can be strengthened to promote Matopos as a sustainable tourism destination. This can include initiatives such as destination branding, marketing campaigns, and social media promotion (ZTA, 2020).
- **Stakeholder engagement and participation:** Stakeholder engagement and participation can be strengthened to ensure that all stakeholders, including local communities, tourism operators, and government agencies, are involved in tourism planning and decision-making (Butler, 1999).

3.16 Benefits of Sustainable Tourism Development at Matopos

The benefits of sustainable tourism development at Matopos include:

- **Economic benefits:** Sustainable tourism development can generate economic benefits for local communities, including income from tourism-related activities and job creation (Manyara & Jones, 2007).
- **Environmental conservation:** Sustainable tourism development can help to conserve the unique natural and cultural heritage of Matopos, including its biodiversity and cultural sites (Mbaiwa, 2005).
- **Social benefits:** Sustainable tourism development can help to promote social benefits, including community development, cultural exchange, and social cohesion (Butler, 1999).
- **Improved governance:** Sustainable tourism development can help to improve governance, including transparency, accountability, and participation in decision-making (UNWTO, 2019).

3.17 Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism Development at Matopos

The challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development at Matopos include:

- **Limited resources:** Limited resources, including funding, personnel, and infrastructure, can hinder sustainable tourism development at Matopos (ZTA, 2020).
- **Climate change:** Climate change can pose a significant threat to sustainable tourism development at Matopos, including impacts on biodiversity, water resources, and infrastructure (IPCC, 2018).
- **Community engagement:** Community engagement and participation can be challenging, particularly in areas with limited access to education and information (Manyara & Jones, 2007).
- **Opportunities for innovation:** Sustainable tourism development at Matopos can provide opportunities for innovation, including the development of new tourism products, services, and experiences (UNWTO, 2019).

4. Methodology:

This qualitative study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region of Zimbabwe. The methodology was designed to gather comprehensive and nuanced data, incorporating multiple stakeholders' perspectives and experiences. This study used a

qualitative research approach through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The study involved a review of existing literature on tourism development in the Matopos region, as well as field research involving interviews and observations. The study also involved an analysis of secondary data, including tourism statistics and economic data.

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design, focusing on the Matopos mountainous region as a unique and bounded system (Yin, 2014). This design allowed for in-depth exploration of the research questions and phenomena.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 stakeholders, including:

- Local community members (n = 10)
- Tourism operators and entrepreneurs (n = 8)
- Government officials and policymakers (n = 5)
- Conservationists and environmentalists (n = 5)
- Tourists (n = 2)

Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview guide was designed to explore themes related to the sustainability of tourism, economic benefits, environmental impacts, and cultural concerns.

Observations

Participant observations were conducted at various tourist attractions and community-based tourism initiatives in the Matopos region. These observations provided valuable insights into the daily operations, tourist behaviour, and community interactions.

Document Analysis

Relevant documents, including policy reports, tourism master plans, and community-based tourism projects, were analysed to provide context and background information on the tourism industry in the Matopos region.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, code, and categorize themes and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was facilitated by the use of NVivo software.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select participants knowledgeable about the Matopos region's tourism industry. Snowball sampling was also employed to identify additional participants through referrals from initial participants.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants were provided with information sheets and consent forms, which were signed before data collection.

Limitations

This study had several limitations, including:

- Limited sample size

- Focus on a specific region, which may not be representative of the entire country
- Potential biases in data collection and analysis

Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity, the study employed:

- Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and document analysis)
- Member checking to verify the accuracy of findings
- Peer debriefing to discuss and refine the analysis

By employing a mixed-methods approach and adhering to rigorous methodological standards, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region.

Sampling Strategy: A Comprehensive Approach

This study employed a combination of sampling strategies to select participants who are knowledgeable about the tourism industry in the Matopos region. The sampling strategy was designed to ensure that the sample is representative of the population and that the data collected is rich, detailed, and relevant to the research questions.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame consisted of stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry in the Matopos region. This included:

- Local community members
- Tourism operators and entrepreneurs
- Government officials and policymakers
- Conservationists and environmentalists
- Tourists

Sampling Techniques

The following sampling techniques were used to select participants:

- **Purposive Sampling:** This technique was used to select participants who are knowledgeable about the tourism industry in the Matopos region. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who are information-rich and can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002).
- **Snowball Sampling:** This technique was used to identify additional participants through referrals from initial participants. Snowball sampling is useful when the population is difficult to access or when the researcher wants to recruit participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).
- **Convenience Sampling:** This technique was used to select tourists who were visiting the Matopos region during the data collection period. Convenience sampling is useful when the researcher wants to collect data quickly and efficiently (Etikan, 2016).

Sample Size

The sample size for this study was determined using the saturation principle, which suggests that data

collection should continue until no new information emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on this principle, the sample size for this study was determined to be 30 participants.

Sampling Bias

To minimize sampling bias, the researcher used a combination of sampling techniques and ensured that the sample was representative of the population. The researcher also used techniques such as data triangulation and member checking to verify the accuracy of the data (Denzin, 1978).

5. Findings

The Matopos mountainous region in Zimbabwe is a significant source of livelihood for local citizens, with tourism being a major economic activity. This study assesses the sustainability of tourism in the region and its impact on the local economy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders, including tour operators, local business owners, community leaders, and government officials.

Theme 1: Economic Benefits of Tourism

- **Job creation:** Tourism was cited as a significant source of employment for local citizens, with many working as tour guides, hotel staff, and in related services.
- **Income generation:** Local businesses, such as lodges, restaurants, and curio shops, benefit from tourism, generating income for owners and employees.
- **Infrastructure development:** Tourism has led to the development of infrastructure, including roads, hotels, and other facilities, which benefit both tourists and locals.

Theme 2: Environmental Sustainability

- **Conservation efforts:** The Matopos National Park is a protected area, and tourism has contributed to conservation efforts, such as anti-poaching initiatives and habitat preservation.
- **Waste management:** However, some respondents noted that waste management remains a challenge, with inadequate disposal of waste and litter.
- **Over-tourism:** There were concerns about over-tourism, which can lead to erosion, soil degradation, and disturbance of wildlife habitats.

Theme 3: Cultural Heritage and Community Engagement

- **Cultural preservation:** Tourism has helped preserve the cultural heritage of the Matopos region, with many tourists visiting historical sites and learning about local traditions.
- **Community engagement:** Local communities are engaged in tourism activities, such as traditional dancing and craft-making, which helps promote cultural exchange and understanding.
- **Fair distribution of benefits:** However, some respondents noted that the benefits of tourism are not always fairly distributed, with some communities feeling left out of the economic benefits.

Theme 4: Challenges and Future Directions

- **Infrastructure development:** Respondents noted that infrastructure development, such as road maintenance and upgrading of facilities, is needed to support the growth of tourism.
- **Marketing and promotion:** There is a need for more effective marketing and promotion of the Matopos region as a tourist destination.
- **Sustainable tourism practices:** Respondents emphasized the need for sustainable tourism practices, such as responsible waste management and respect for local cultures and environments.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region of

Zimbabwe, both as a source of livelihood and as a means of promoting economic development. However, the study also identifies challenges and areas for improvement, including the need for sustainable tourism practices, fair distribution of benefits, and effective marketing and promotion.

6. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study on the sustainability of Matopos mountainous region tourism as a source of livelihood for local citizens in Zimbabwe. The section assesses the economic benefits and challenges of tourism development in the region, highlighting the impact on local communities and the environment.

6.1 Economic Benefits of Tourism Development

The study revealed that tourism development in Matopos has contributed significantly to the local economy. According to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (2020), tourism generated approximately \$1.2 billion in revenue for the country in 2019, with a significant portion coming from natural attractions like Matopos. The region's unique cultural and natural heritage attracts tourists, creating opportunities for local businesses, such as lodges, tour operators, and craft shops.

6.2 Local communities have benefited from tourism through:

- **Job creation:** Tourism has created employment opportunities for local people, both directly and indirectly, in sectors such as hospitality, guiding, and craft production (Manyena, 2017).
- **Income generation:** Tourism has provided a source of income for local entrepreneurs, enabling them to invest in their businesses and improve their livelihoods (Mtapuri, 2015).
- **Infrastructure development:** Tourism has driven infrastructure development in the region, including the construction of roads, accommodation facilities, and recreational amenities (Zimbabwe National Tourism Policy, 2017).

6.3 Job Creation in Matopos Mountainous Region Tourism

Job creation is a crucial aspect of tourism development in the Matopos mountainous region. The tourism industry has the potential to generate employment opportunities for local communities, contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth.

Types of Jobs Created

Direct Employment: Direct employment in the tourism industry includes jobs in hotels, lodges, tour operators, and restaurants. These jobs range from management and administration to hospitality and guiding services.

Indirect Employment: Indirect employment opportunities arise from tourism-related activities, such as:

- Craft production and sales
- Agricultural production to supply tourism establishments
- Transportation services
- Construction and maintenance of tourism infrastructure

Self-Employment: Tourism development also enables self-employment opportunities, such as:

- Small-scale entrepreneurship (e.g., craft vendors, tour guides)
- Home-based tourism enterprises (e.g., bed-and-breakfast establishments)

Job Creation Statistics

According to a study by Manyena (2017), tourism development in Matopos has created:

- **Formal employment:** 1,500 jobs in hotels, lodges, and tour operators
- **Informal employment:** 3,000 jobs in craft production, sales, and other tourism-related activities
- **Self-employment:** 1,000 small-scale entrepreneurs and home-based tourism enterprises

Benefits of Job Creation

Job creation in the tourism industry has several benefits for local communities:

- **Income generation:** Tourism employment provides a source of income for local people, improving their livelihoods.
- **Poverty reduction:** Job creation contributes to poverty reduction by providing employment opportunities for vulnerable groups.
- **Skills development:** Tourism employment enables skills development and capacity building for local communities.

6.4 Challenges Facing Tourism Development

Despite the economic benefits, the study identified several challenges facing tourism development in Matopos:

- **Environmental degradation:** The increasing number of tourists has put pressure on the region's natural resources, leading to environmental degradation, such as soil erosion, litter, and habitat destruction (Gukurume, 2018).
- **Cultural commodification:** The commercialization of local culture has raised concerns about the erosion of traditional values and practices (Chidakwa, 2019).
- **Limited local participation:** The study found that local communities have limited participation in tourism decision-making processes, resulting in a lack of control over the benefits and costs of tourism development (Mutana, 2018).
- **Inadequate infrastructure:** The region's infrastructure, such as roads and accommodation facilities, requires upgrading to support the growing tourism industry (Zimbabwe National Tourism Policy, 2017).

6.5 Sustainability Assessment

The study assessed the sustainability of tourism development in Matopos using the following indicators:

- **Economic sustainability:** The study found that tourism has contributed to the local economy, but the benefits are not evenly distributed among local communities.
- **Environmental sustainability:** The region's natural resources are under threat from environmental degradation, highlighting the need for sustainable tourism practices.
- **Social sustainability:** The study revealed that local communities have limited participation in tourism decision-making processes, which can lead to social and cultural impacts.

The study concludes that tourism development in Matopos has the potential to contribute to the economic development of local citizens, but it requires a sustainable approach that balances economic, environmental, and social considerations. To achieve sustainable tourism development, stakeholders

must work together to address the challenges facing the industry, including environmental degradation, cultural commodification, limited local participation, and inadequate infrastructure.

6.6 Challenges

Despite the benefits, job creation in Matopos tourism faces challenges:

- **Seasonality:** Tourism is a seasonal industry, resulting in fluctuating employment opportunities.
- **Limited skills:** Local communities may lack the necessary skills to access employment opportunities.
- **Competition:** The tourism industry is competitive, and local businesses may struggle to compete with external operators.

To enhance job creation in Matopos tourism:

- **Training and capacity building:** Provide training and capacity-building programs to enhance local skills.
- **Support local entrepreneurship:** Encourage and support local entrepreneurship and small-scale tourism enterprises.
- **Diversify tourism products:** Diversify tourism products and services to reduce seasonality and increase employment opportunities.

6.7 Environmental Degradation and Cultural Commodification in Matopos Mountainous Region Tourism

The Matopos mountainous region in Zimbabwe is a unique and fragile ecosystem that is home to diverse flora and fauna, as well as a rich cultural heritage. However, the increasing popularity of tourism in the region has raised concerns about environmental degradation and cultural commodification.

Environmental Degradation

The tourism industry in Matopos has contributed to environmental degradation in several ways:

- **Soil erosion:** The increased foot traffic and construction of tourism infrastructure have led to soil erosion and degradation of the natural landscape.
- **Litter and pollution:** The influx of tourists has resulted in increased litter and pollution, threatening the region's natural beauty and wildlife.
- **Habitat destruction:** The development of tourism infrastructure, such as lodges and roads, has led to habitat destruction and fragmentation, threatening the region's biodiversity.
- **Water pollution:** The increased demand for water from tourism establishments has led to water pollution and degradation of water quality.

Cultural Commodification

The tourism industry in Matopos has also contributed to cultural commodification:

- **Commercialization of traditional practices:** The commercialization of traditional practices and cultural events has led to the erosion of their cultural significance and authenticity.
- **Exploitation of local resources:** The exploitation of local resources, such as traditional crafts and music, for tourism purposes has led to the loss of cultural heritage.
- **Disrespect for local customs:** The influx of tourists has led to a lack of respect for local customs and traditions, causing cultural tensions and conflicts.

- **Loss of cultural identity:** The commercialization of local culture has led to the loss of cultural identity and autonomy for local communities.

6.8 Impacts on Local Communities

The environmental degradation and cultural commodification resulting from tourism development in Matopos have had significant impacts on local communities:

- **Loss of livelihoods:** The degradation of the environment and cultural heritage has threatened the livelihoods of local communities, who depend on these resources for their survival.
- **Cultural disempowerment:** The commercialization of local culture has led to cultural disempowerment; as local communities lose control over their cultural heritage.
- **Social impacts:** The influx of tourists has led to social impacts, such as increased crime, prostitution, and substance abuse.

To mitigate the negative impacts of environmental degradation and cultural commodification in Matopos tourism:

- **Implement sustainable tourism practices:** Implement sustainable tourism practices, such as eco-tourism and community-based tourism, to reduce the environmental impact of tourism.
- **Develop cultural heritage management plans:** Develop cultural heritage management plans to protect and preserve local cultural heritage.
- **Support local entrepreneurship:** Support local entrepreneurship and small-scale tourism enterprises to promote cultural authenticity and community benefits.
- **Educate tourists:** Educate tourists about local customs and traditions to promote cultural respect and awareness.

7. Conclusions

The Matopos mountainous region in Zimbabwe is a significant source of livelihood for local citizens, with tourism playing a crucial role in the economic development of the area. The assessment of the sustainability of tourism in the region reveals both opportunities and challenges.

7.1 Opportunities

- **Unique cultural and natural heritage:** The Matopos region boasts a rich cultural and natural heritage, including the Matopos Hills, the Matobo National Park, and the ancient rock art.
- **Growing tourism industry:** The tourism industry in the region is growing, with an increasing number of visitors attracted to the area's natural beauty and cultural significance.
- **Job creation and income generation:** Tourism has created jobs and generated income for local citizens, contributing to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods.

7.2 Challenges

- **Over-reliance on tourism:** The local economy is heavily reliant on tourism, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in the industry.
- **Limited infrastructure and services:** The region's infrastructure and services, such as accommodation, transportation, and amenities, are limited, hindering the growth of tourism.
- **Environmental degradation:** The increasing number of tourists has put pressure on the environment,

leading to degradation and erosion of the natural habitats.

- **Cultural exploitation:** The commercialization of cultural heritage sites has raised concerns about cultural exploitation and the loss of traditional practices.

8. Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability of tourism in the Matopos mountainous region, the following recommendations are made:

8.1 Short-term recommendations

- **Conduct a thorough environmental impact assessment:** To identify areas of high conservation value and develop strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism on the environment.
- **Develop a tourism master plan:** To guide the development of tourism in the region, ensuring that it is sustainable, responsible, and benefits local citizens.
- **Improve infrastructure and services:** To enhance the visitor experience and increase the region's competitiveness as a tourist destination.

8.2 Medium-term recommendations

- **Diversify the local economy:** To reduce the reliance on tourism and promote other economic activities, such as agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.
- **Develop community-based tourism initiatives:** To ensure that local citizens benefit directly from tourism and have a greater sense of ownership and control.
- **Establish a tourism levy:** To generate revenue for conservation efforts, community development projects, and tourism infrastructure development.

8.3 Long-term recommendations

- **Develop a comprehensive conservation plan:** To protect the region's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.
- **Promote sustainable tourism practices:** To encourage tourists to adopt environmentally friendly and culturally sensitive behaviours.
- **Foster partnerships and collaborations:** To bring together stakeholders from government, private sector, and civil society to promote sustainable tourism development in the region.

8.4 Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were also made:

- **Develop sustainable tourism policies:** The Zimbabwean government should develop policies that promote sustainable tourism practices, such as eco-tourism and community-based tourism.
- **Enhance local participation:** Local communities should be involved in tourism decision-making processes to ensure that they benefit from tourism development.
- **Invest in infrastructure development:** The government and private sector should invest in upgrading the region's infrastructure to support the growing tourism industry.
- **Promote environmental conservation:** Stakeholders should promote environmental conservation practices, such as waste management and habitat protection, to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism.

- **Encourage community participation:** Encourage community participation in tourism planning, management, and benefits to ensure that local communities benefit from sustainable tourism development.
- **Promote sustainable tourism practices:** Promote sustainable tourism practices, including energy-efficient systems, waste management, and conservation of natural resources, to reduce the environmental impacts of tourism.
- **Develop innovative tourism products:** Develop innovative tourism products, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism, to promote the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.
- **Establish partnerships with stakeholders:** Establish partnerships with stakeholders, including local communities, tourism operators, and government agencies, to promote sustainable tourism development and management.
- **Monitor and evaluate the impacts of tourism:** Monitor and assess the impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and local communities to ensure that sustainable tourism development is achieved.

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