



5

EFFECTS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION: A GROUNDED THEORY

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Abstract

Tourism has been accredited as a significant sector by the Namibian government because it is one of the highest income earners and ranks third after mining and agriculture. This research paper explores the key determinants of poverty in the Northern region of Namibia (Kunene and Zambezi) and the effects of rural tourism development on poverty alleviation. The research adopted grounded theory and phenomenological approaches and data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with various tourism stakeholders in the two regions. The research findings reveal the importance of all stakeholders in identifying the causes of poverty in each region/constituency before implementing poverty alleviation strategies. This study, therefore, concludes that providing the same tourism strategies to different geographical locations does not work, because some communities are extremely deprived. This research, therefore, recommends a flexible framework which takes a pragmatic approach to move away from the “one size fits all” approach.

Keywords: rural tourism development, poverty alleviation, pro-poor tourism, Namibia, grounded theory.

INTRODUCTION

Namibia has been categorised as an upper-middle income country and it also has vast tourism products. The tourism industry was declared a priority sector due to its potential to generate employment, reduce poverty and contribute to economic growth (Jenkins, 2000). In 2019, Namibia’s tourism sector contributed 10.3% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and created 114,600 jobs (WTTC, 2020). The employment numbers are expected to rise to 186,000 jobs in 2025 (WTTC, 2015). Croes and Vanegas (2008) emphasised that tourism has the potential to alleviate poverty hence it should have a direct or indirect influence on the lives of the local people.

Nearly 75% of the world’s population live in rural areas (Chaudhry & Gupta, 2010; Holland et al., 2003). More than half (57%) of Namibians live in rural areas (Population and Housing Census, 2011). Namibia’s poverty rates are highest in the rural areas (37%) compared to urban areas (15%) and all the poorest regions are in the northern parts of Namibia.

(Namibia Planning Commission [NPC], 2015). Although poverty in Namibia as a whole has been decreasing [from 28.7% in 2010 to 17.4% in 2016] (World Bank, 2020). Northern regions such as Kavango, Oshikoto, Zambezi, Kunene and Ohangwena are the poorest with more than one-third of the population being classified as poor (Republic of Namibia, 2015).

This research paper focuses on the two Northern regions in Namibia (Kunene and Zambezi). These two regions have world-renowned tourism resources such as Etosha National Park, yet the two regions have been classified as the poorest regions in the country. Poverty rates in the studied regions are above the national poverty rate (26,9%) whilst the Zambezi region had the highest increment in the poverty rate of 7.2% (Republic of Namibia, 2016). These poverty rates are estimated to increase from 17.4% in 2016 to 18.9% in 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020a). Considering the fact that Namibia is a small country with a population



estimated at 2.4 million (NSA, 2018) these figures indicate that poverty is prevalent in the country.

In Namibia, there is limited, research on the effects of rural tourism development on poverty alleviation. Various studies have focused on the impact of tourism development on economic growth (Bilen et al., 2017; Croes & Vanegas, 2008; Ekanayake & Long, 2012; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2013; Saayman et al., 2012). However, these studies did not utilise two regions to investigate the effects of rural tourism development on poverty alleviation. Although rural tourism development has been promoted by many developing countries to encourage economic growth, there is a dearth of research that focuses on rural tourism development. This research paper, therefore, fills this gap by focusing on rural tourism development. The study aims to establish whether rural tourism development in Namibia alleviates poverty in the Northern region of Namibia where poverty rates are extremely higher than in the rest of the country.

The definition of poverty has also been debated by various researchers (Alcock, 2006; Croes, 2014; McCulloch et al., 2001; Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Holden, 2013; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Mitchell and Ashley (2010) state that it is important to first understand who the poor are before analysing the effects of tourism on the poor and poverty alleviation. Pleumarom (2012) states that it is imperative for any tourism research to establish the causes of poverty as a precondition in any tourism research. There is also limited research that explores the views/voices of poor people directly (Holden et al., 2011; Pleumarom, 2012; Schiller, 2008; Stronza, 2008). In Namibia, various research has been conducted on poverty alleviation, however, most of the research focused on policymaking (Janis, 2011; Kavita & Saarinen, 2016:79). Other researchers (Muchapondwa & Stage, 2013; Snyman, 2012; Lapeyre, 2010; Nicanor, 2001; Novelli & Hellwig, 2011) exclude the views of the

local people and have not explored the causes of poverty specifically in two different regions as is the case in this research.

Therefore, the uniqueness of this research is that it utilises the people's views/voices to develop a framework that will enable rural tourism development to alleviate poverty. It is one of the first attempts to develop a framework that focuses on the "how" than "what" the stakeholders should be doing to reduce poverty. Hence, the developed framework will be used to provide recommendations on the strategies that alleviate poverty in the northern region of Namibia.

The study provides practical and theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge. Firstly, it adopts two methodological approaches, phenomenological approach, and grounded theory, to explore the opinions and experiences of various stakeholders. Secondly, from a practical standpoint, the research developed a conceptual framework that amalgamates rural tourism development, causes of poverty and poverty alleviation. In Namibia, there is a lack of research seeking to develop a conceptual framework linking rural tourism development, causes of poverty and poverty alleviation based on the views of the research participants. It is expected that the framework will influence governments to review their policies and strategies for poverty alleviation. It will also allow communication throughout the whole process of rural tourism development and encourage the active participation of all tourism stakeholders.

Instead of developing countries such as Namibia emphasising economic growth to alleviate poverty, there is a need for an adaptable approach to addressing the causes of poverty and this requires the involvement of all stakeholders in decision making. Based on the above analysis, the research question that ought to be addressed is: *Does rural tourism development alleviate poverty in the northern region of Namibia?*



The research paper provides a review of literature on the concept of poverty, the causes of poverty and the effects of tourism on the poor. An outline of the research methods adopted in this research will be presented in the subsequent section and the discussion of results will be presented after. This study concludes that rural tourism development in Namibia has the potential to alleviate poverty, however, the participants have contradicting views as to who should be considered as poor; this has influenced other community members (who should not be viewed as poor) to benefit from rural tourism initiatives. To implement strategies that effectively alleviate poverty in the studied regions, the determinants of poverty must be addressed in the various communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism has the potential to significantly alleviate poverty in rural areas and most developing countries rely on tourism for the growth of their economies (Croes & Vanegas, 2008; Manzoor et al., 2019; Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). Tourism ranks first in many developing countries, yet poverty remains a critical issue that needs to be seriously addressed. Although poverty is an international subject that has attracted a lot of attention from researchers, nevertheless, partial attention has been provided to the causes of poverty and the approaches on how to determine it (Pleumarom, 2012).

Countries define poverty differently therefore, providing dependable contrasts among countries can be impossible (World Bank, 2022). It is therefore important to identify and understand who should be regarded as poor first before analysing the effects of tourism on the poor and poverty alleviation. It is also imperative that the poverty concept and definition is theoretically robust and suitable to the society in which it is being applied. Croes (2014) defines poverty as a lack of basic needs such

as hunger, lack of shelter and medical facilities whilst the world bank (2000, p.1) described it as “a situation where an individual lacks command over commodities that are deemed essential to realise a reasonable standard of living”. Furthermore, Alcock (2006) classifies poverty into two kinds; absolute poverty where an individual’s basic needs (such as food, shelter and clothes) are not included, and relative poverty where the person is regarded as poor when he/she is in an undoubtedly disadvantaged situation (financially or socially) compared to other people in the same community. Consequently, poverty can be viewed as a prescriptive concept that demonstrates an objectionable situation where individuals become disadvantaged and disregarded.

Giampiccoli et al. (2015) mention that poverty is related to inequality and the dispersal of income between households is also becoming more unequal compared to decades ago. The definition of inequality has also been disputed and Todaro and Smith, (2011, p.208) defined it as “an unfair distribution of income across a country which is globally measured by the Gini coefficient that varies from 0 (absolute inequality) to 1 (high degree of inequality) and by the income shares percentile of households”. Research on the relationship between growth, inequality and poverty showed that poverty and inequality have diverse characteristics in income distribution, nonetheless, inequality influences growth through poverty (Marrero & Serven, 2018).

Poverty in Namibia is related to inequality as the wealthiest who constitute 10% of the population, own more than half of the economy (UNDP, 2016). Barely 9.1% of the population in Namibia are categorised as middle class and the country is regarded as one of the most unequal countries in the world with 19.7% of the population living on less than US\$1.90 per day in 2015 whilst 42.9% live below the US\$3.10 per day poverty line (World Bank, 2015; World Bank, 2020b). Although poverty rates in Namibia reduced to



17.4% in 2016, this number increased to 18.9% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020a).

The sources of poverty differ from country to country (Suntikul et al., 2009) and from a Sub-Saharan African perspective, Obadan (1997) provided a wide-ranging list of the determinants of poverty. The list includes environmental degradation, lack of employment opportunities and lack of physical assets like land and capital. Jauch (2012) points out that poverty in Namibia is more prevalent in rural areas, for example in 2006 the average household income for rural areas was N\$6,139 whilst in urban areas it was N\$17,898 per year. This clearly indicates the existence of regional inequalities. The impact of tourism has been critically debated among researchers and numerous methods have been used to establish whether tourism development has any impact on poverty alleviation. To examine the role of tourism on poverty alleviation and its impact on the livelihoods of communities, the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) was used in a number of studies including that of Ming Su et al. (2019) where SLA was adopted in a study on tea tourism. Laeis and Lemke (2016) also utilised the same approach and confirmed that SLA enables a suitable analysis of the interaction of various stakeholders in tourism.

Luvanga and Shitundu (2003) also adopted SLA in researching the contribution of tourism to poverty alleviation and indicated that tourism generates opportunities for local people and alleviates poverty if there are strong linkages at the national and local levels. Whilst, Lapeyre (2011) examined the contribution of community-based tourism businesses to poverty alleviation in Namibia utilising the same approach, it was found out that the tourism income received encouraged linkages within the area. However, Mutana et al. (2013) contend that for poverty alleviation to be attained, the poor need to be supported so that they are able to manage tourism

businesses and create linkages with tourism initiatives.

For SLA to be effectively implemented, it is important to include the local people in decision making and this could be achieved through delegating tourism rights to the community, offering government incentives or ensuring that planning by private entrepreneurs is responsive to local needs (Ashley et al., 2000). The Pro-Poor Tourism approach (PPT) has also been adopted by the tourism sector to study the benefits it provides to the local communities and to reduce the impacts of poverty. Nicanor (2001) explored the effectiveness of the PPT strategies of (NACOBTA) in Namibia and concluded that the poor tend to benefit from tourism in the short term (in terms of income), but livelihood impacts are difficult to quantify since the poor, donors and NGOs do not pay much attention to them.

In Botswana, Manwa and Manwa (2014) studied the opinions of stakeholders on the opportunities unlocked for the poor through the opening up of forest reserves. The researchers analysed the prospects of tourism for poverty alleviation using the PPT approach. The research concluded that opening up the forest reserves will provide both short and medium-term benefits, however, to guarantee sustainability there is a need for continuous enhancement of tourism strategies. Correspondingly, Truong et al. (2014) researched tourism and poverty alleviation using the PPT approach and concluded that poor people's views must be valued so that the approach to alleviating poverty can be successful. Furthermore, PPT should be people-centred, and encourage local participation and bottom-up enterprises for it to benefit low-income groups (Truong et al., 2014; Phommavong, 2011).

Conversely, Halim (2014) utilised the Pro-Poor Value Chain Analysis (VCA) to study the impact of tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation and concluded that rapid economic growth in Malaysia



influenced new types of poverty and unskilled workforces. This is in agreement with Gartner's (2008) interpretation that the impact of tourism on poor people should take into account the socio-cultural and environmental impacts as well, instead of solely focusing on economic growth. Saayman et al. (2012) studied the impact of tourism on poverty alleviation in South Africa utilising the Applied General Equilibrium (AGE) model and indicated that the poor derive very little benefit in the short term from additional tourism inflows. In a related study, Nicanor (2001) reached the same conclusion. Therefore, it is unclear whether tourism can reduce poverty.

Muchapondwa and Stage (2013) assessed the degree of poverty reduction in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana and the economic impact of tourism. The study concluded that the poor appear to receive insignificant benefits from tourism irrespective of the emphasis on CBT in national tourism policies. The study utilised Social Accounting Matrices (SAMs) and highlighted the lack of economic statistics on tourism in Namibia that will allow easy assessment of the actual economic impacts of tourism. This also presents challenges in analysing the impacts of tourism at a provincial level as the country does not currently compile SAMs or input-output data. The country does not also provide data on expenditure patterns of tourists for different regions.

Henceforth, Saayman et al. (2012) propose that future research should explore poverty alleviation at a regional level to analyse which region benefits more from tourism. Poverty reduction has been Namibia's priority over the years, and it has created a lot of interest among researchers. A study by Janis (2011) on Namibian tourism policies and local tourism enterprise policy knowledge, indicated that to reduce poverty in Namibia, the government ought to pay attention to who should benefit from tourism growth and how. The research suggests that there is a

need for more research on the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation. Thus, this study analyses the situation in the Kunene and Zambezi regions to find out whether the development of rural tourism has an influence on poverty alleviation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Areas

According to the World Bank (2020a) Poverty in Namibia has been decreasing from 28.7% in 2010 to 17.4% in 2016 yet the level of poverty in the rural northern region of Namibia remained significantly high with more than a third of the population in the regions classified as poor (Republic of Namibia, 2015). The Zambezi region is one of the poorest regions in Namibia which had a 7.2% increase in poverty while the Kunene region had a 2.1% decline in poverty, which is quite marginal. Poverty in Namibia has increased since 2015, reaching 64% in 2021 (Nakamura, 2021). These poverty rates are also projected to increase in 2022 due to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020a).

Namibia has 86 registered conservancies with the Kunene and Zambezi regions having the highest number of 38 and 15 conservancies respectively in the country (NACSO, 2017). This provides an opportunity for the tourism industry to contribute to poverty reduction. The Kunene region has the highest bed-occupancy rate of 46.7% (MET, 2017). However, the highest rates of unemployment are experienced in the northern rural region of Namibia with more than 50% of the population in poverty (Republic of Namibia, 2015). Zambezi's unemployment rate increased from 31% in 2014 to 48% in 2016, which is the second highest unemployment rate in Namibia (Nakashole, 2018), whilst the Kunene region has the highest unemployment rate of 52.2% (Namibia Labour Force Survey, 2016). Therefore, it can be



concluded that these two regions have the highest unemployment rates in the country. This is against the background that these regions have a wealth of

tourism resources that could be used as a tool for poverty alleviation as indicated in the Vision 2030, NDP3 and Tourism Policy of 2008 (MET, 2008)

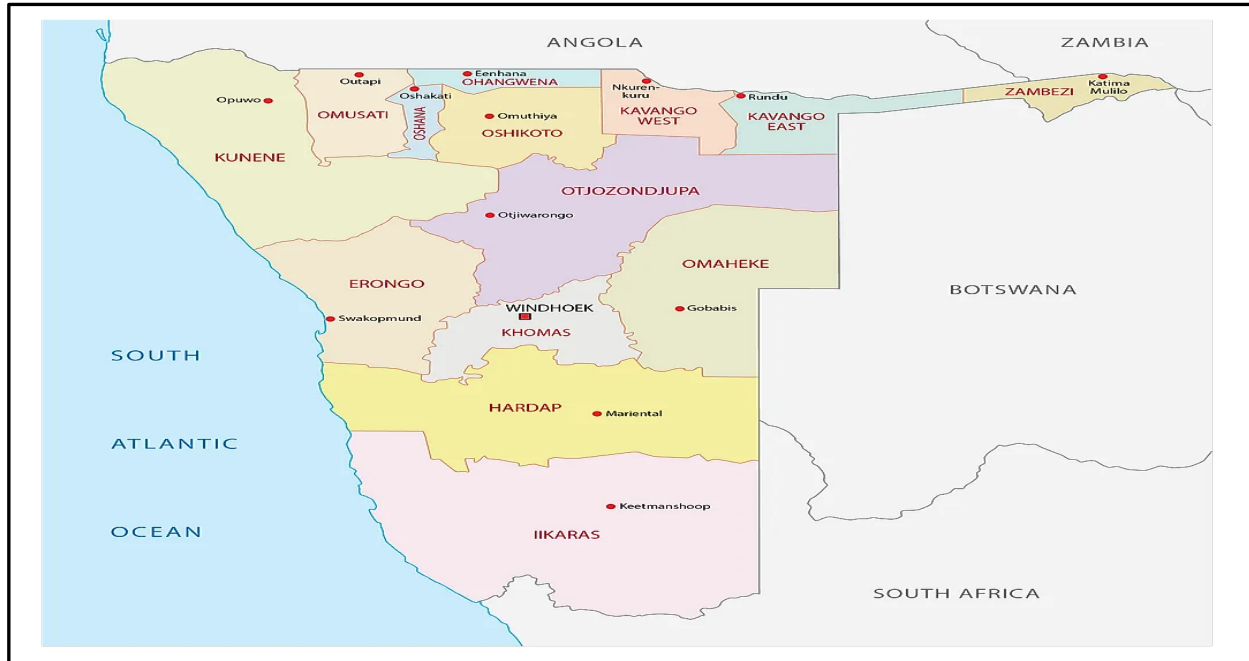


Figure 1: Map Showing the Namibian Regions and Constituencies

Source: www.worldatlas.com/maps/namibia

The qualitative research approach based on grounded theory and descriptive phenomenology designs was adopted. Grounded theory was first adopted with the focus on the development of theory grounded on the data in the field (Charmaz, 2006; Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017) whilst the phenomenology approach was adopted in order to have a clear understanding of the meaning of people's lived experiences. It aimed to identify the phenomena through the perceptions of the players in a situation (Creswell, 2013). This allowed information to be produced from the perspectives of research participants.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed for data collection. Three semi-structured interview guides were developed: the first was for the government officials and non-governmental organisations, the second was for the

local community and the third was for other tourism stakeholders including private businesses such as lodges, community-based tourism initiatives and craft centres. To understand the level of knowledge and experiences of local community members in relation to tourism and poverty alleviation, focus group discussions were also conducted. A maximum of eight community members were included in the focus group discussions and participants were divided into groups of six to eight community members. The research participants were varied, thus applying different methodological approaches was plausible. The research utilised a purposive sampling approach to select participants for the interviews. A purposive sampling includes selecting participants based on particular features or attributes they possess (Patton, 2002; Brotherton, 2008).



The research participants included government organisations and representatives of NGOs in Windhoek. These were purposively selected based on the industry knowledge they had acquired. The government participants selected were directly involved in designing the rural tourism development policies and strategies, whilst the representatives of NGOs directly worked with rural communities in the study regions and the tourism establishments. Some of the NGOs in the Kunene and Zambezi regions were suggested by the NGO representatives in Windhoek. The NGO representatives in Windhoek provided the interviewer with the contacts of NGO representatives in the study regions and three NGO representatives in the Zambezi region provided the interviewer with two contacts of government officials in the same region. Thus, snowball sampling was also utilised. In addition, the convenience sampling method was used in selecting tourism establishments such as hotels, lodges and craft centres.

The focus groups were purposively selected; the interviewer targeted rural communities with more tourism activities and high poverty rates. This research method was ideal for this study because both the Kunene and Zambezi regions cover a large area where human settlements are scattered. However, two communities in the Zambezi region were selected according to their availability. The research began with six broad questions which were grouped into three themes and data collection was conducted in three phases. The first phase included a review of literature however, data was not extensively evaluated prior to the data collection process. Documents such as the Namibia Tourism Policy (2008), Namibia's National Development Plans (1-5), Vision 2030, and tourism statistical reports were reviewed. The second phase was a pre-data collection visitation phase to the research areas which included piloting the interviews and identifying the communities to be included in the study. In the third phase, primary data were collected,

this included in-depth interviews with government organisations, NGO representatives and managers of tourism businesses. Focus group discussions were also conducted at this phase. Data was translated and coded continuously due to the grounded theory methodological approach adopted.

In all cases, interviews were halted once knowledge saturation was achieved and follow-up interviews were conducted. These were interviews which were conducted to confirm what would have emerged from the patterns or themes. The views and experiences of the research participants were then utilised to develop a theory. The data collection process was a continuous process until the research reached theoretical saturation.

Kunene region has a population of 87,000 people (Population and Housing Census, 2011) and it is divided into six constituencies. Six focus group interviews were conducted in five of the constituencies. Also, out of the 71 registered tourism establishments including lodges, hotels and campsites, and craft centres in the Kunene region (NTB, 2017), eight in-depth interviews were conducted with the managers and owners of the tourism establishments. Out of the 38 registered conservancies (NACSO, 2017), four in-depth interviews were conducted with the conservancy managers. In addition, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with managers of Community Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs). Two NGO representatives were also interviewed in the Kunene region.

The Zambezi region, comprising six constituencies, has a population of approximately 91,000 (Zambezi Population and Housing Census, 2014). Out of the six constituencies, five focus group interviews were conducted in five constituencies. Out of the 15 registered conservancies in the region (NACSO, 2017), three in-depth interviews were conducted with conservancy managers. Also, out of the 21 tourism establishments such as hotels, lodges,



and camps (NTB, 2017), managers of eight tourism establishments were interviewed. Two government officials and three NGO representatives were also interviewed in the same region. The study also included government officials and NGO representatives from Windhoek because that is where the head offices for rural tourism development were located. Hence, three government officials and three NGO representatives were interviewed in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia.

Content analysis was used to identify common themes. The study identified comparable statements that were linked to the research question. Due to the grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2006), open coding was employed. The researcher was responsible for coding and this process assisted in engaging with the material and this was a continuous process throughout the research. To analyse the data, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed; however, some interviews were first translated into English, and then transcribed. A research diary, memos, and coding were utilised during the data collection and analysis phase. The data was placed into several categories and any new information that emerged was incorporated into the categories. Any new information/statements that emerged were coded and placed under the categories. Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software was also used to structure and organise the data. The use of Nvivo was to complement personal coding which was the main coding method used. It offers the advantage of being an automated process, it, therefore, provided a way of ensuring the quality of the data coding process. Nvivo was also used to save time and compare any information that might have been missed or overlooked.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The PPT approach was utilised to establish whether tourism has an impact on alleviating poverty

in Namibia. The discussions reflect on the participants' responses by analysing the recurring themes and patterns. This section examines the causes of poverty, the impacts of tourism and the PPT strategies. It also evaluates the relationship between rural tourism development, poverty alleviation, the causes of poverty and PPT strategies. Ultimately, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

What impact does rural tourism development have on alleviating poverty? To what extent does rural tourism development benefit the local community?

The Concept of Poverty

To critically analyse the impacts of tourism in the two regions, this research revealed some themes which help to explore how rural tourism development impacts poverty in the Northern region of Namibia based on the grounded theory approach. Further themes on poverty and causes of poverty emerged and these provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena. Understanding the causes of poverty in different regions could help improve the interventions provided by the government, NGOs and tourism establishments. It could also have an impact on how poverty alleviation methods are chosen, thus the themes identified contribute to the final theoretical framework. These themes are discussed below.

Working Definition of Poverty

The concept of poverty had different meanings to different people in all three different settings rendering it difficult to define. This was because the participants' views on poverty were diverse, this aspect was debated throughout the interviews. The government and NGOs for both regions did not view the people in their regions as poor, they also indicated that this issue always comes up when it comes to the distribution of benefits. Thus,



it is important for the government to provide a plausible definition of poverty that is understood by all stakeholders. Most government officials indicated that *some people who are viewed as poor should not be considered as poor*, highlighting the divergent nature of views. Furthermore, they all agreed that money should not be utilised as a measure of poverty.

One member of a focus group in Kunene stated that *poverty is when you are always at the bottom of the food chain*. One community member added that *people see us as drunkards, so we are always the last ones to hear of anything*. Hence, the issue of poverty prompted a debate because other community members referred to poverty as the lack of money, recognition, health facilities, employment opportunities as well as the way people dress. Some communities seemed to define poverty in terms of the number of livestock one owns, for example, if everyone has ten goats then a person with one goat is poor. This view was in agreement with the opinion of a Chief who quizzed: *how can you sleep hungry when you have your livestock?* The chief emphasised that the system is flawed such that some community members take advantage of it.

Unlike the Kunene region, most of the communities in the Zambezi region had access to good schools nearby with the exception of one community located in one of the national parks. Members of this community indicated that they lacked health facilities, education, income and empowerment. According to Croes (2014), these attributes define poverty. Members of this same community highlighted that: *even if some people have goats, you still need money to pay for the upkeep of your children at these boarding houses; they say it's free but it's really not*. This community shared the same view with communities in the Kunene region confirming that the dimensions of poverty appear to be similar in different settings. In one community, most of the community members were elderly and relied on their

grandchildren to cook and fetch water for them. The community did not have any healthcare facility nearby to provide for their medical needs. It seemed they had accepted that poverty was part of their life. The absence of health care facilities in a community whose populace is elderly makes them more vulnerable. According to Sisson (2001, cited in Chang, 2011) and OECD (2001), such a vulnerable community is considered poor.

One tourism establishment in the Zambezi region however indicated that the people in the Zambezi are not supposed to be poor because they have all the resources such as fertile land, rivers, and cattle. Thus, this participant also viewed poverty in terms of material resources. Managers of other tourism establishments in the same region argued that people in the local communities are not poor, one participant emphasized that *it is more of an advantage to be labelled poor in this country because you get more benefits*. This agrees with the views of Janis (2012) who indicated that most cultures and villages are utilising poverty as a tourist attraction. Hence, if rural communities use the income from tourism to improve their livelihoods, they might lose their attractiveness and this will affect their culture. These views clearly indicate that there is a lack of a clear definition of poverty and a lack of clarity on who should be regarded as poor. The lack of common ground on poverty impedes efforts to address poverty through rural tourism development. The local communities understood poverty as a lived experience but were not very clear on the definition. Due to their level of education, this group of participants lacked eloquence in providing a working definition of poverty confirming Croes' (2014) and Holden's (2013) sentiments that poverty also manifests in lack of education among other things. The results of this research prove that poverty is a multidimensional issue which varies from destination to destination as evidenced by how it was defined by participants.



OECD (2001) also places emphasis on using both fiscal and non-fiscal terms in defining poverty.

It is important to find common ground on the working definition of poverty. As it stands, the policy formulators and policy implementers view poverty using an external lens while the local communities who have lived experiences of poverty use an internal lens. Consequently, these disparities in viewpoints are making it difficult for efforts on poverty alleviation to take effect. This is compounded by the fact that the driving force behind the agenda of poverty alleviation does not see the importance of alleviating poverty in the way local communities appreciate it.

Barriers to Poverty Alleviation

This research found that the causes of poverty in Namibia varied from community to community. This presents challenges in implementing strategies

and understanding the phenomena. This research found that the causes of poverty in Namibia were also political, thus, the benefits system needs to be revisited. All these form barriers to how poverty can be alleviated thus there is a need to address them. The results on the causes of poverty in Namibia were diverse. The viewpoints of the government officials in Windhoek, Kunene and Zambezi regions varied, these are summarised in Table 1. Addressing these common causes of poverty will have a positive impact on poverty alleviation. Some unique causes peculiar to certain communities were identified. These were alcoholism, drought and lack of health facilities. These causes could be a result of the unique demography and geographical location of the communities. Therefore, addressing these causes would require a focused approach.

Table 1: Barriers to Poverty Alleviation from the Perspective of Different Stakeholders

Government officials and NGO representatives		
Policies are based on the old system	Poverty measurement tool is unclear	Discriminatory
<i>Lack of empowerment</i>	Lack of basic needs	Political
Lack of financial support and capital	<i>Blaming the Government</i>	Marginalised
Laziness	Lack of funding	<i>Cultural beliefs</i>
	<i>Lack of skills (Education)</i>	
Tourism establishments in both regions		
<i>Lack of education</i>	Alcoholism	<i>Lack of empowerment</i>
Lack of employment opportunities	<i>Cultural beliefs</i>	Laziness
Colonial rule	Drought	<i>Lack of skills</i>
<i>Blaming the government</i>	Corruption	
Table 1 continued		
Local communities in both regions		
Colonialism	<i>Lack of educational facilities (Education)</i>	Marginalised
Social exclusion	Lack of employment opportunities	Lack of health facilities
Favouritism	Inequalities	<i>Cultural beliefs</i>
Lack of voice (Empowerment)	<i>Lack of skills</i>	Lack of recognition



Blaming the government

 Corruption

This research confirmed that inequality is a significant barrier. It was found that poverty in the Kunene region was mainly caused by relative poverty which is associated with inequality. The participants viewed themselves as poor because they were in a disadvantaged situation (financially or socially) in comparison to other people in the same community (Alcock, 2006; Thobias, 2007). This was quite evident in communities composed of people from different tribes. It is therefore important to embrace diversity in an inclusive way to foster community cohesion and promote one-mindedness. This concurs with Paniagua and Moyano (2007) who concluded that developing tourism in rural areas and deprived communities entails issues of inclusion and exclusion, inequalities, and conflicts amongst social groups.

Marginalisation

Government officials, local communities and some tourism establishments recognised marginalisation as a barrier to poverty alleviation. In particular, the participants in the Zambezi region indicated that they were poor because they were marginalised. In this region, it was indicated that civil war which emanated from the region had caused poverty to persist in the region. The issues of corruption, inequality and marginalisation are interconnected, and this explains the incidental finding on corruption which only emerged in the Zambezi region. The issue of corruption was cited by participants throughout the Zambezi region, in contrast to the generally favourable Corruption Perception Index (CPI) that the country has. The following statements from participants illustrate how they felt about corruption:

You see these people are all related, you complain about people in the community who are

poaching to the Ministry, they won't do anything because that is his brother. We cannot complain about the noises from the shebeens because that's his brother". "The indunas can choose whether they like you or not, if the induna doesn't like you, you have no chance in the business, so you have to make sure you get along with the indunas.

The tourism activities available varied from community to community, as well as from constituency to constituency. Some communities in the Zambezi region did not regard tourism as a sector that could help alleviate poverty. The communities were not aware of the government and NGOs' involvement in community development. This highlights the importance of involving the poor in tourism interventions. In this regard, this research agrees with Holden et al. (2011); Pleumarom (2012) and Schilcher (2007) who indicated that PPT strategies do not include the views/voices of poor people.

Measurement of poverty

Measurement of poverty emerged as a barrier to poverty alleviation due to socio-cultural differences that were noticeable in the two regions studied. Most people in the Kunene region are nomads and they do not have permanent homes. Some do not believe in slaughtering their cows for monetary benefits thus making it difficult to use livestock to improve their livelihood. Though cattle are regarded as a sign of wealth and pride, this asset cannot be liquidated. Conversely, the Himba communities did not view themselves as poor, they indicated that their culture is more important than money. They indicated that the



money they get from tourists and from the owner of the village is enough to cover their basic needs. The lack of a consensus on who should be regarded as poor and how to measure poverty impacts poverty reduction. Thus, based on these views, poverty in Namibia can neither be defined in monetary terms alone nor in terms of available assets alone. A case in point is the Zambezi region where some people are pastoralists who rely on livestock, some families own hundreds of cattle and land. Hence, in such areas where farming is practised, poverty should be measured differently.

Blame culture

The government officials and NGOs in Windhoek and both regions suggested that the issue of laziness had an influence on the persistence of poverty in the regions. This could be viewed as cultural poverty where one is blamed for being poor (Freeman, 1998; Moore, 2012; Silva & Athukorala, 1996). Cultural poverty is therefore difficult to address. Freeman (1998) stated that it is unfair to blame poor people for their poverty because poor people lack resources and opportunities. The private sector blames the local community for causing disruptions that affect tourism in the Zambezi region whilst the local community blames the government for restricting them from activities such as fishing and hunting. This relationship creates a hostile environment which is a disincentive for cooperation between the same stakeholders who are meant to work together towards one goal of alleviating poverty.

There was also a lack of trust amongst participants as they blamed each other for causing negative environmental impacts that consequently impact the development of rural tourism. This lack of trust goes back to the colonial rule, the Indunas who owned the land refused to release their land to make way for tourism, because they felt that their land was being taken by the white minority. Government

officials indicated that the blame culture was also evident within the government departments. Some participants blamed other departments for ineffective policy implementation. This rampant culture of blame could be addressed if expectations for each other are effectively managed.

Provision of basic infrastructure

In some areas of the Kunene region such as Outjo and Kamanjab where there were good roads, and good sanitation, the local community benefitted from employment. Other areas which were further from the main roads had limited employment and other opportunities. Also, areas with viable tourism products such as those communities close to Etosha indicated that their source of income was tourism. In the Kunene region, the main cause of poverty is a lack of education due to a lack of schools, this affected the employment prospects of the people. Developing basic infrastructure such as roads will facilitate accessibility to the rural areas, and increase tourist arrivals thus contributing to poverty alleviation. The people who were working in the tourism industry had basic high school qualifications, thus those without good education could not get the opportunity to work in the tourism industry. Hence, rural tourism development in the Kunene region has not been able to tackle the issues of poverty because of the low levels of education. However, IMF (2013) indicated that there is no evidence to show that education can assist in the reduction of poverty.

The Impacts of Tourism Development

This research found that tourism in rural areas offers poor people opportunities, however, instead of focusing on only the economic impacts of tourism, this research also explored the socio-cultural impacts and environmental impacts and identified the following themes:



Income generation

Income generation was highlighted as an important theme by all the stakeholders in both regions. The research however found that opportunities were dependent on factors such as availability of tourism products/resources, size of the population within communities, educational levels, the level of support from NGOs and attitudes of the local communities towards tourism initiatives. According to Spenceley et al. (2009), the impact of tourism on the poor can be viewed in terms of income generation, and improvement of people's livelihoods. The results of this study confirmed this notion.

Another unique finding that emerged from a particular community was the impact of rural tourism on livelihoods. In response to the question as to whether rural tourism supported local communities to generate income, the participants in Outjo highlighted that their livelihoods were positively impacted. This was attributed to the development of tourism in the region. However, this was mainly linked to the availability of infrastructure within that community.

For those in employment, income generation resonated throughout the regions as a positive impact. Some of the participants from both regions indicated that they had been employed in conservancies for a long time and had been able to buy basic products. They indicated that tourism had changed their lives. The representatives of NGOs pointed out that some communities had been able to make huge profits through tourism initiatives. This is in agreement with Hwang et al. (2012) who indicated that community-based actions play a pivotal role in long-term tourism development. This research, however, observed that those who benefitted more from tourism were those who worked in the tourism industry over a long period of time (i.e. 5-10 years). This research also found that those with skills such as handcrafting benefitted from tourism sales but people who were selling crafts directly to the tourists benefitted more, they indicated

that selling their crafts to craft centres gave them reduced profits as they were offered 60% of the sales. Therefore, in this case, the private sector benefited more. The local people do not have the power to negotiate for better prices. This is in line with Janis's (2012) conclusion that the poor do not have the power to negotiate for better wages.

In the Zambezi region, the research found that quite a lot of the communities did not solely depend on tourism as the main source of income or livelihood. This research, therefore, agrees with the above sentiment because the communities visited relied on other economic activities such as farming, fishing, and trading. Thus, most people in the communities did not view tourism as providing enough benefits to them. In comparison to the Kunene region, the economic impacts of tourism in the Zambezi region were minimal. Most tourism establishments including joint ventures employed foreigners, particularly in management roles, thus negatively impacting the local community as the foreigners might not spend their income within the local community. This is also linked to leakages because most tourism establishments did not buy their products from the local communities. One manager from the Zambezi region claimed that: *I have seen people's lives changed; we have people who started as cleaners and moved to being tour guides. These are people who had nothing to do, now they can feed their families.*

Attitudes toward the impacts of rural tourism development

Just like the working definitions of poverty and rural tourism, the responses captured by the researcher showed differences in attitudes toward rural tourism development. This lack of harmony in the attitude of participants toward rural tourism development can be an impediment to the realisation of the benefits of tourism development and



consequently poverty alleviation. Moore (2012) and Sawhill (2003) state that poverty cannot be reduced unless poor people change their attitudes and governments design policies that offer support to poor people. Kasic et al. (2017) who studied residents' attitudes towards the social, economic and environmental impacts and the benefits of rural tourism activities in Serbia concluded that environmental impacts are hardly viewed as negative.

Contrary to Kasic et al's. (2017) conclusion, this study argues that the environmental impacts are viewed as negative if people are not informed about the benefits. The attitudes of community members toward tourism interventions also influence their views on environmental issues. In the Zambezi region, the private sector blamed the local community for causing disruptions that affect tourism whilst the local community blamed the government for restricting them from carrying out activities such as fishing and hunting. These disagreements are because of differing attitudes. Furthermore, responses from all the participants were dependent on their attitudes towards rural tourism interventions. This highlights the importance of ensuring that all the stakeholders are involved in rural tourism development. The causes of poverty such as marginalisation can influence people's cooperation and support tourism interventions.

Effects of Rural Tourism Development on Poverty Alleviation

The effects of rural tourism development are important, and this research found that there was a consensus on their importance to poverty alleviation. There were however differences in opinion as to how well rural tourism development impacts poverty alleviation. In this research, capacity building and empowerment emanated as the most significant activities for ensuring that optimum benefits are derived from rural tourism development. These and

other themes identified form the basis for the conceptual framework.

Capacity building

Across both regions, capacity building came out strongly as a vehicle for poverty alleviation. The participants felt strongly that capacity building efforts would considerably increase the impact of rural tourism development on poverty alleviation. However, upon probing whether they felt capacitated, the views were not consistent with the passion shown by participants in responding to the question about its importance. Based on the views expressed by managers of tourism establishments, their contribution is limited to paying taxes and tourism levies. Snyman (2012) concludes that the private sector has a role to play regarding education, skills transfer and training. This viewpoint, however, has not been evident in the findings of this research.

Besides employment, a few tourism establishments have provided training to their employees and ensured that they possess employable skills. Tourism development and upgrading of the skills of employees are linked as the latter offers an opportunity for local people to acquire new skills making them more employable and better candidates for promotion. According to Spenceley et al. (2009), new skills such as technical skills can also be transferred to other sectors. Participants in the focus groups, however, argued that the skills they get will not help them to get jobs elsewhere.

Participants from the government and NGOs insisted that the communities were not well skilled to run the conservancies, citing lack of skills and lack of commitment as the reasons why some conservancies had closed down. This sentiment agrees with NACOBTA's (2002) research which indicated that the region's tourism potential has been affected by mismanagement of funds and poor planning. One representative from an NGO stated that:



The problem is of quality and service providing for example sometimes you help them set up something and when you come back you will find the place falling apart. So, you have to continuously support them. So, to solve some of these problems what we do especially if it's a good area with a lot of tourism; we link them with the private sector, but the problem is many people haven't grasped the concept of tourism. Sometimes it will be a leaking tap and because of lack of expertise to fix it will be a problem. Tourists want good quality and when they go there, they want to take a shower and there is no water. Even the private sector they might go there to help but there will be no one there. It becomes difficult to help [sic].

Empowerment

Scheyvens (2011) states that PPT strategies should concentrate on capacity building for the poor, empowerment and support for labour rights. The PPT strategies should enable the poor to have more control over tourism activities in their communities (Scheyvens, 2011). The participants from NGOs indicated that they work closely with conservancies to give them guidance on how to negotiate with the private sector. They also provide training on how to run the conservancies. The participants stated that if a private company/owner intends to invest in tourism in a conservancy, they have to seek permission from the conservancy because the conservancies have tourism and hunting rights. However, in a situation where there are no conservancies, they have to go to the traditional authorities for the rights over the land. Thus, the role of the NGOs is to ensure that the process goes on smoothly and that the community is protected. The participants indicated that they also enter into joint ventures to ensure that they do not breach the agreement with the conservancies.

The local community does not fully support tourism strategies implemented by the government such as joint ventures because they are not empowered to make any decisions. This finding contrasts with that of Lapeyre (2011) who found that tourism empowered the local community to contribute to decision making and improved their skills. This research found that the empowerment of the local communities varied from one community to another. In some communities with various tribes, the involvement of the local community was based on the tribe one belonged to. Thus, other participants indicated that the interventions are not worth pursuing as they have caused conflicts amongst the locals.

The participants indicated that they are not empowered to make decisions, hence the tourism development strategies do not reduce poverty in their community as a few individuals are benefitting. One participant highlighted that:

But some stakeholders think empowerment means having the youths owning the lodges themselves. But to us how should they own or manage the lodges when they don't know how to get people to the lodges. So, there are still fights on how we should empower people.

There were three elements related to empowerment that emerged from this theme which help to explore how empowering local communities could help improve rural tourism development and poverty alleviation. These are education and training, funding and benefits-sharing.

Education and training

The government of Namibia introduced the "Education for all" initiative which allowed children to go to school until the age of sixteen (Jauch, 2015). Despite the introduction of this initiative, a lot of communities still do not have educational facilities. On the contrary, those who were working in the conservancies and other lodges had good educational



qualifications. The lack of educated people within the communities meant that tourism establishments had no choice but to employ people from outside the regions. Local communities in both regions indicated that the people who are benefitting from rural tourism development are those from outside their regions. They also indicated the lack of opportunities due to a lack of educational facilities and skills; this makes a case for increasing capacity-building efforts.

This research found that very limited training opportunities were made available to a few individuals in the local communities by various NGOs. The uptake for training opportunities was poor because the targeted audience had no formal education with some unable to write.

Funding

The NGOs are responsible for supporting the communities in sourcing funds for the conservancies, however, according to this research, the NGOs have been facing challenges over the years. One participant stated:

Even the development bank does not even understand tourism. Even if you have a nice enterprise in the rural areas you cannot get collateral; you cannot borrow against it. Maybe if the business has a good reputation, but it's very difficult. We tried with one lodge and although we succeeded, it took us years to achieve that. Even small businesses – there is no way they can get a loan. Due to the land one cannot borrow money because the land does not belong to them. You cannot borrow against your piece of land. Maybe there is a need to change the policies.

Thus, this research found that the development of rural tourism in the Kunene and Zambezi region relies heavily on donor funding. This finding is consistent with Mowforth and Munt's (2003) conclusion that relying on donor funding does

not reduce poverty; it rather aggravates it. The participants indicated that the economic crisis has impacted the growth of the conservancies with some areas waiting for years to get funding. Most participants stated that the policies favour joint ventures and this has been presenting developmental challenges.

Benefits sharing

The focus group members indicated that they are not involved in the formulation of any of the tourism strategies whilst some stated that they just attend meetings for food and socialisation, otherwise their voices are not heard. They stated that decisions are already made by the committee members. Conversely, participants from the NGOs stated that when it comes to benefits distribution, the community members are involved in the process. However, they indicated that it had always been a challenge because of the size of the member groups. One participant stated that some conservancies had 4,000 members, hence taking everyone's opinion was impossible because they never agree on the benefits. In some communities, there were 8,000 members in one conservancy. This is in line with the assertion by Novelli and Gebhardt (2007) that analysing CBT in Namibia is quite complex due to the number of stakeholders involved in the decision-making process.

This research found that conservancies can be successful if they have the support of government and NGOs, however, they fail to include the views of the local communities. This has resulted in some conflicts, particularly regarding the issue of benefits sharing. The local communities in both regions indicated that the development of their community is controlled by the government. Thus, this has negatively impacted their attitude towards the interventions. For the PPT approach to benefit low-income groups it should be people-centred, promote



local participation, and adopt a bottom-up approach (Phommavong, 2011; Truong et al., 2014).

This research found that interventions to alleviate poverty in rural areas adopt a top-down approach as it is driven by the government and NGOs,

and the participation of community members varies from community to community. However, adopting a bottom-up approach would require the communities to be well educated and equipped with the right skills.

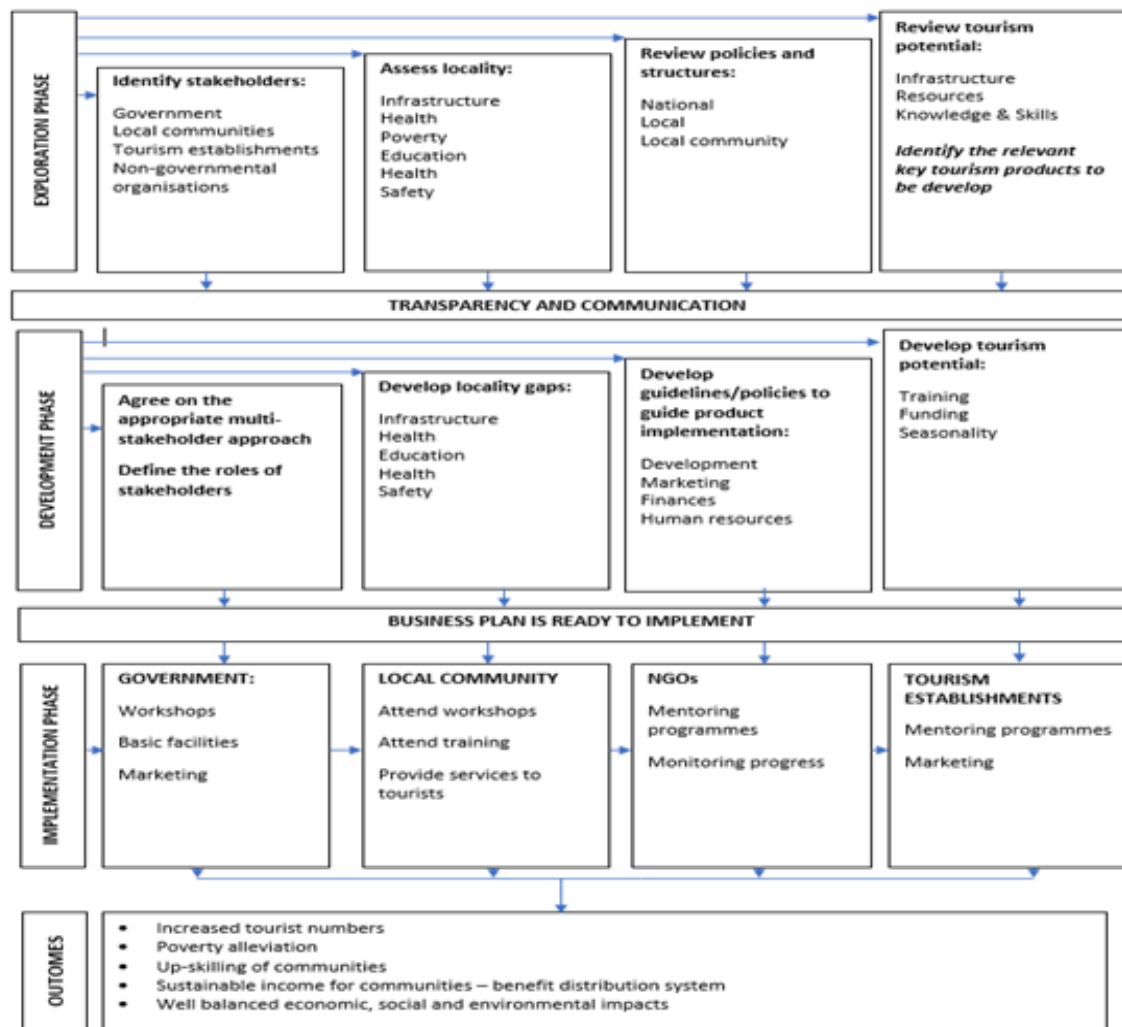


Figure 1: A Framework for Rural Tourism Development and Alleviation of Poverty: A Regional Perspective

Source: Author's compilation

Based on the results, the study provides a framework which takes a pragmatic approach and departs from the “one size fits all” approach. The framework encourages stakeholder involvement from the exploration phase until the designed strategies have been achieved. It is adaptable to different settings and focuses on the “how” than “what” the stakeholders should be doing to reduce poverty. This was made possible by carefully listening to different

stakeholders, in particular, the local communities and analysing their responses (see Figure 1).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to analyse the effects of rural tourism development on poverty alleviation in the northern region of Namibia. The study found that although the benefits are minimal, rural tourism development has the potential to



alleviate poverty. However, the effect of tourism development on poverty alleviation varied, depending on the size of the constituency and the tourism initiatives available. In the Kunene region, some conservancies had 8,000 members and a few people were employed in the conservancies; benefits were limited to the few people who worked in the conservancy. The conservancies did not have schools, health-care facilities and good housing facilities. Thus, the percentage of people benefitting from tourism was not large enough to conclude that tourism development has had an impact on poverty alleviation. This was the issue in many conservancies, where the effect of tourism on poverty alleviation was limited to a few people who work in the conservancies. Utilising the PPT approach, this research also found that the benefits of tourism were higher in communities where there were low levels of poverty as well as good tourism products and activities.

The results of this research support Janis' (2012) assertion that tourism is not likely to address the prevailing circumstances behind poverty in rural areas such as low educational levels. This is another factor that accounts for the growing poverty in the northern region of Namibia. Therefore, for rural tourism to alleviate poverty, the government and other stakeholders need to first focus on understanding who should be regarded as "poor" before analysing the effects of tourism on the poor and poverty alleviation. This same sentiment was echoed by Mitchell and Ashley (2010). This research found that the lack of a clear definition led to other groups who otherwise should not be categorised as poor, benefiting from the government's benefits system. The government and other stakeholders should therefore identify the causes of poverty in each region/constituency before implementing strategies to alleviate poverty. This research found that the causes of poverty varied, thus there is a need to vary rural development strategies.

However, these causes of poverty should be addressed first before exploring the benefits to be derived by the poor.

This research, therefore, concludes that unless the local communities are empowered, the rural tourism and poverty concept clearly defined, barriers to poverty alleviation removed, and policies that support the development of rural tourism and poverty alleviation implemented, the impact of rural tourism development will remain minimal. Relying on tourism employment alone as a way of alleviating poverty is not sustainable because those who are not educated or without any skills will occupy low paid jobs which do not significantly help in reducing poverty. Capacity building, therefore, needs to be focused on tourism as well as other non-tourism related income generation activities. The northern regions have been developing rural tourism through

joint ventures, thus, there is a need for the communities to have good negotiation skills, and financial management skills to run the enterprises. Thus, for tourism to impact poverty alleviation the communities should be equipped with the right skills, to empower them to be able to run the tourism ventures.

This study, therefore, recommends the above framework (Figure 1) which offers solutions that focus on poverty alleviation by amalgamating rural tourism development, causes of poverty and poverty alleviation. Instead of developing countries such as Namibia emphasising economic growth to alleviate poverty, there is the need for an adaptable approach to addressing the causes of poverty with the involvement of all stakeholders in decision making.

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