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# Stakeholder Expectations Influence the Success of Rural Tourism Development: A Tale of Three Stakeholders

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the stakeholder perceptions on the development of rural tourism in Namibia. The stakeholders include Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local communities and tourism establishments. It focuses on two northern regions of Namibia. Kunene region has the largest number of conservancies and Zambezi region is considered the richest region in terms of natural diversity. The research paper utilises descriptive phenomenological principles. Consequently, the approach helped in understanding the rural tourism concept from the stakeholders' point of view and examine their contribution to the development of rural tourism. The main finding is that the influence of rural tourism development will remain minimal unless all the stakeholders understand the concept of rural tourism and are involved in the development of rural tourism strategies. Hence, the paper reinforces the significance of encouraging active participation of all stakeholders involved in the rural tourism development initiatives.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism development, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), Namibia, stakeholder involvement

## 1. Introduction

According to Croes and Vanegas, (2008) growth of the tourism industry should directly or indirectly influence the lives of the local communities, particularly rural tourism, because it has the potential to alleviate poverty. 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. As a result, this paper aims to analyse how stakeholders influence the success of rural tourism development by carefully considering their views and experiences on rural tourism development. In essence, the opinions and experiences of the stakeholders involved in rural tourism development interventions were utilised to emphasise the importance promoting the rural tourism concept.

Research on rural tourism development (Ashley, 2000; Janis, 2014; Kavita & Saarinen, 2016; Asa et al., 2022) in Namibia excludes the views and perceptions of local communities. Therefore, this research includes the views of the local communities. This is beneficial to Namibia's policy makers and other stakeholders to understand rural tourism development from a Namibian perspective. It will also aid in developing strategies that provide benefits to the communities.

The findings indicate that rural tourism in Namibia has the potential to develop, however, the contrasting views hinder its success. The research also found that the stakeholders have different understanding of what constitutes rural tourism. Without a clear understanding of the concept, it is difficult to understand the opportunities presented by rural tourism development.

## 2. Rural Tourism Development

Tourism offers significant benefits to local communities; however, rural tourism has not yet attained much attention in comparison to other types of tourism. The fact that many poor people (75%) live in rural areas (Castañeda et al., 2018) makes it imperative to utilise rural tourism as a vehicle for rural regeneration. Jaafar et al. (2015) highlight that tourism in the rural areas has been overlooked by rural economists. Kavita and Saarinen (2016:79) indicate that governments and regions are acknowledging the importance of tourism in rural areas due

to its contribution to socio-economic development and employment creation.

The interest of utilising tourism as a tool for regional economic development has grown dramatically over the past decades. Therefore, rural tourism has been viewed as one of the most viable development strategies for rural communities (Marzuki et al., 2010) In general, governments view tourism as an avenue for rural revitalisation. Among other factors, Todaro and Smith (2011) state that enhancing the quality of life of the community by improving infrastructure is an indication of economic development. However, according to WTTC (2019) the sub-Saharan Africa has the least developed infrastructure in the world; therefore, tourist numbers grow at a slower pace. This indicates that infrastructure development influences tourism numbers. Thus, it is imperative for destinations to invest in updating existing infrastructure as this improves accessibility which in turn attracts more tourism businesses. Morgan and Pritchard (2006) highlight the importance of infrastructure development in alleviating poverty albeit in developed countries such as New Zealand. This sentiment was also later supported by Seetanah et al. (2009) who concluded that improved infrastructure results in reduced levels of poverty thereby confirming the existence of a positive correlation between developed infrastructures and its impact on poverty alleviation.

Nguyen and Nguyen (2013) studied the contribution of tourism to economic growth at a provincial level and found that tourism influenced economic growth in Thua Thien Hue province. Their research study also highlighted the importance of improving government policies for the economic growth to have more impact at a provincial level. Furthermore, they added that infrastructure such as transport network should be developed. Mandić et al. (2018) explored the relationship between tourism infrastructure, tourism development and recreational facilities in Croatia and conclude that the development of infrastructure and recreational facilities is determined by laws and regulations of the government. They further clarify that there is a considerable connection between the stage of the tourism development and the number of arrivals, overnights and state of the infrastructure, tourism infrastructure and recreational facilities.

Although varied features of what constitute a rural area have been critically analysed, it is complex to provide a concise definition of rural tourism. Gopal et al. (2008) argued that it is difficult to find features which are common to all the countries. Lane (1994) proposed that rural tourism can only be defined at a local level and differs from nation to nation; it can also be identified by its location, characteristics and economy. However, it must consist of transport, marketing and information systems which are situated outside the cities (Gherasim & Gherasim, 2017). Darău et al. (2010) highlighted that rural tourism has different meanings, for example in Slovenia rural tourism is also farm tourism where tourists live with the farmers and experience their daily farm routine, whilst in Greece rural tourism means accommodation in traditionally furnished rooms. Therefore, rural tourism can be viewed as a product to be utilised for promoting a destination (Amir et al., 2015). In developing countries, rural tourism has been pursued largely for the betterment of livelihoods of rural people. Nagaraju and Chandrashekara (2014) define rural tourism as any type of tourism that presents the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations with the purpose of supporting the local community economically and socially.

### *2.1 Rural Tourism Development in Namibia*

The tourism industry in Namibia began in the 1960s, however, it was restricted to guest farms and private landowners only, who were permitted to exploit wildlife, register as game farmers and breed varied wildlife species that tourists could then pay to view or hunt (Samuelsson & Stage, 2007). In addition, wildlife in communal lands belonged to the government, clearly indicating that the local community could not benefit from tourism and therefore were not motivated to look after wildlife (Damm, 2008).

Soon after the independence of Namibia in 1990, the new government acknowledged tourism as a significant industry; it ranked fourth after mining, agriculture and fisheries. Today the tourism sector in Namibia is one of the highest income earners in the country, ranking third after mining and agriculture (MET, 2016). In 2017, the tourism industry of Namibia directly contributed nearly N$5 million (2,9%) to GDP and this figure is anticipated to double (N$10,1 million) by 2028 (WTTC, 2017). This is a growth rate of 3,6% per year within the next ten years (WTTC, 2017), whilst in 2019, the industry contributed N$28,610 million (2,2%) to GDP and 114 600 jobs (direct and indirect) (WTTC, 2019).

The tourism industry in Namibia is also regarded as the largest foreign exchange earner, where in 2013 foreign tourist arrivals constituted the largest number (1 374 602), which increased by 74 163 from 2012 tourist arrivals (TSR, 2013). In 2014, international tourist arrivals totalled 1 477 593 which increased by 3% in 2015 (UNW, 2015). The foreign exchange earnings are primarily received from African countries with Angola dominating, followed by South Africa and Zambia (MET, 2016). The African market constitutes up to over one half of foreign arrivals to the country and Germany remains at the top for the European market (MET, 2016).

Infrastructure such as an airport promoted an increase in the number of tourist arrivals. However, in 2020, the international tourist arrivals declined by 22% due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNCTAD, 2020:1).

Rural tourism development in Namibia is linked to Community Based Tourism (CBT) and it is supported by the government because of the benefits it presents to the local community (Keane, 2009). Emphasis has been placed on community benefits, involvement and empowerment. The local communities tend to have a positive attitude towards tourism development if they view the development as providing benefits such as improved standard of living (Jaafar, 2013:). CBT development is available in poor and rich countries and it is mainly introduced in countries where inequality is high, and trust and civic participation are low (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Lancee & Van de Werfhorst, 2011). It was established for the purpose of educating the local people so that they will be able to equip themselves and involve them in decision making (Catley, 1999).

It is vital that the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and any other organisations collaborate with the local community to improve the social, cultural and economic conditions in communities. Thus, it should not be viewed as a profit-making initiative but aid as a way of breaking a dependency syndrome. Sin and Minca (2014) view CBT as the new way of providing a solution to bottom up tourism development. Nonetheless, Ellis and Sheridan (2014) argue that CBT does not present solutions to a bottom up approach, but positive results can be attained if applied effectively. Academics and different organisations agree that somehow CBT should empower its participants, however, arguments among researchers remain as to whether CBT can empower the local community (Sin & Minca, 2014). Scheyvens (2002) emphasises that the success of CBT initiatives is rarely achieved without the engagement of external sources such as NGOs, international conservation organisations or tour operators.

To develop rural areas, various policies were developed. Tourism policies such as the communal area conservancy legislation (1996) presented rural Namibians with new opportunities and gave communities a chance to use the natural resources. To conserve their wildlife resources, the communal area residents are offered incentives. The communities were presented with an opportunity to manage and sustainably use their wildlife through live game sales, meat harvesting and trophy hunting (Damm, 2008). Also, the Nature Conservation Amendment Act (1996) allowed the community members to set up conservancies, with the purpose of supporting the government's aim of protecting natural resources and sustainably managing them.

The National Tourism Growth and Development Strategy (NTGDS) was developed in 2016. Its aim was to increase the number of tourist arrivals to generate more jobs for Namibians. The strategy focuses on economic transformation and social empowerment which will be achieved by providing tangible and financial support to small- and medium-sized businesses, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) businesses and their associates and increasing opportunities for rural tourism initiatives (MET, 2016). The National Tourism Investment Profile and Promotion Strategy (NTIPPS) (2016-2026) was also developed to provide a support framework that increases business opportunities for rural enterprises. It also aims to create a favourable environment for investors and to reduce transaction costs to allow the private sector to invest in the tourism industry (MET, 2016). The Ministry of Environment and Tourism (2008) also formulated the National Policy on Tourism with the aim of providing a framework for the organisation of tourism resources.

## 3. Methodology

This research study adopted a phenomenological approach, with the purpose to have a clear understanding of the meaning of people's lived experiences as it aims to identify the phenomena through the perceptions of various players in a situation. This allowed information to be produced from the research participants' perspectives. The research participants included Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local communities and tourism establishments. The tourism establishments included managers and/or owners of craft centres, conservancies, tour operators, hotels and guest lodges. This study focuses on the two northern regions of Namibia, namely Kunene region and the Zambezi region.

Primary data was collected between July 2018 to February 2019. This research study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. Three different semi-structured research guides were designed: one for the government officials and non-governmental organisations, one for the local community engagements and one for the other tourism stakeholders (private businesses such as lodges, community-based tourism initiatives, craft centres). The government officials and NGO representatives were based in both Windhoek (Capital city of Namibia) and the study areas. The other respondents (tourism establishments and local community) were based in Kunene and the Zambezi region.

The purpose of interviewing government officials and NGOs in Windhoek was to establish participants' understanding, views and opinions on the influence on rural tourism development. Interviews in Kunene region

started with two NGO representatives, tourism establishments such as two hotels, two craft centres, six lodges and three conservancies. Four focus group discussions with the local communities were also conducted at this stage. Themes started to emerge; therefore, more in-depth interviews and two more focus group discussions were conducted. Interviews with NGO representatives and focus group interviews were conducted until saturation. This stage took three months (August 2018 to mid-October 2018).

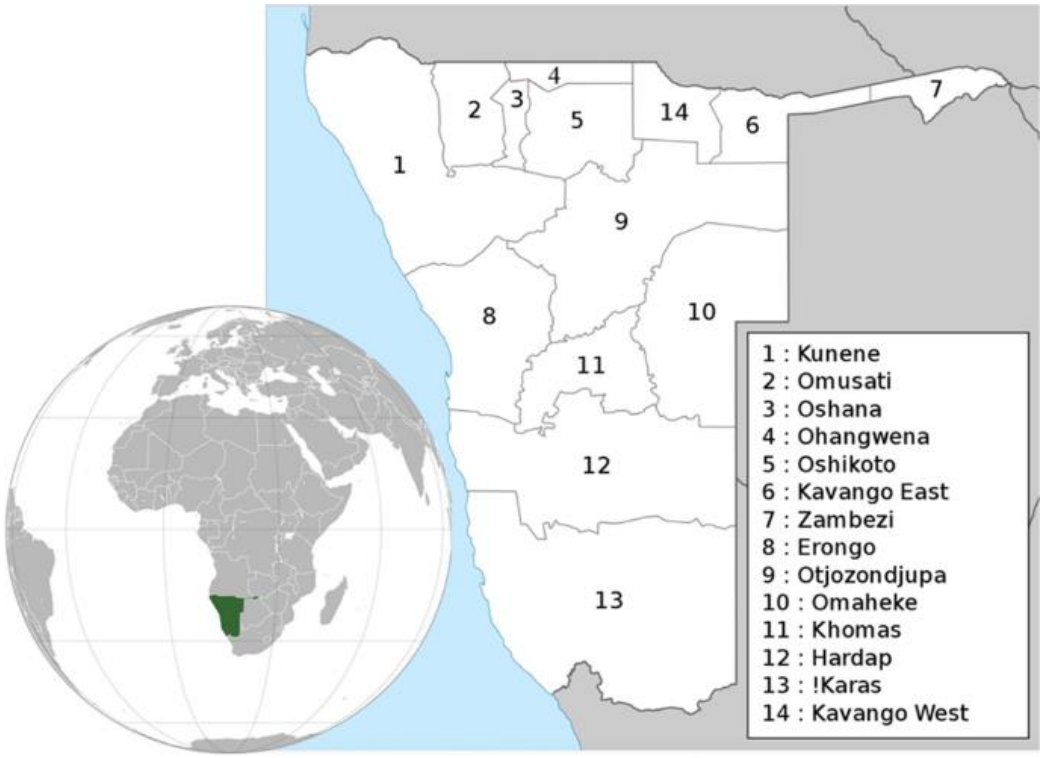


Figure 1. Map of Namibia showing the study regions (Kunene (1) and Zambezi (7))

Source: Boer et al. (2022)

In-depth interviews were conducted with three NGOs and two government officials in the Zambezi region. Interviews with tourism establishments were conducted with managers/business owners of one hotel, three lodges, one campsite, two craft centres, and four conservancies. Three focus group discussions were conducted. In all cases interviews were halted once knowledge saturation was achieved. Follow-up interviews were conducted. These were interviews which were conducted to confirm what would have emerged from the patterns or themes. However, if the research stops providing new information, then the research would have reached theoretical saturation. The primary data collected at each stage was purely qualitative data. This data was compared with secondary data already gathered and any new information acquired was updated throughout the process.

The views and opinions of the research participants were composed through non-probability sampling approach. The research participants were selected based on the characteristics they possessed for four groups of stakeholders namely government officials, participants from NGO's, tourism businesses and community members from the selected regions. The participants selected had to be involved in rural tourism development initiatives and planning. The government organisations and NGO representatives in Windhoek were purposefully selected based on industry knowledge they acquired (purposive sampling). The government participants selected were directly involved in designing the rural tourism development policies and strategies, whilst the NGOs directly worked with rural communities in the study regions and the tourism establishments. This allows the use of own judgement in selecting participants and it also provides the best possible information so as to answer the research question and meet the objectives of the study (Saunders et al., 2007).

Some of the NGOs in the Kunene region and Zambezi region were suggested by the NGO representatives in Windhoek. The NGO representatives in Windhoek provided the interviewer with the contacts of the NGO representatives in the study regions and two NGO representatives in the Zambezi region provided the interviewer

with two contacts of government officials in the same region. Therefore, snowball sampling was also utilised. Tourism establishments such as hotels, lodges and craft centres were selected according to their availability (convenience sampling). The tourism establishments were approached in person and invited to take part in the interview. This research method was ideal for this study because both regions (Kunene and Zambezi) cover a large area and human settlements are scattered. This research explored the views of local people in Kunene and Zambezi region to determine their understanding of rural tourism and their involvement in rural tourism through focus groups. The focus groups were conducted with a maximum of eight community members. The interview guides developed for the focus groups were also semi-structured and held in the community of residence. The interview guide for the local communities was structured, slightly different from the ones used for government officials and NGO representatives, and tourism establishments. This paper therefore focuses on three stakeholders namely the Government and NGOs, tourism establishments and the local community as indicated in Table 1. This research study used thematic analysis to identify common themes.

Table 1. List of study participants

| Research participants | Research methods | Sampling method | Number of interviews | Follow up interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Government organisations | In-depth interviews | Purposive | 5 | 3 |
| NGO representatives | In-depth interviews | Purposive<br>Snowball | 8 | - |
| Tourism establishments: Hotels | In-depths interviews | Purposive | 3 | 1 |
| Lodges and campsites | In-depths interviews | Convenience | 10 | 3 |
| Craft centres | In-depths interviews | Convenience<br>Purposive<br>Snowball | 4 | - |
| CBTs | In-depths interviews | Purposive<br>Convenience | 7 | 2 |
| Local communities | Focus group discussions | Convenience<br>Purposive | 11 | 2 |
| Informal interviews | Interviews | Convenience | 21 | - |

## 4. Findings

In terms of rural tourism development in Namibia, the views of the participants varied. This was mainly because there was a varied understanding of what should be viewed as rural tourism. The themes that developed from the analysis of rural tourism development revolves around a definition for rural tourism, legislation, infrastructure and growth.

### *4.1 Rural Tourism Concept: A Namibian Perspective*

The concept of rural tourism in Namibia provided contradicting view. All the government respondents based in Windhoek had vast knowledge of what constitutes rural tourism. The participants indicated that rural tourism development should economically and socially benefit the local communities. One participant highlighted the issue of culture and language as rural tourism where he stated that *"we cannot talk about rural tourism without emphasising on our culture".* Hence, culture has a significant role to play in rural tourism as it reflects people's lives. Whilst another participant who collaborates government officials, other NGOs highlighted that rural tourism in Namibia is not viewed as rural tourism but as community-based tourism. The participant added that it is tourism that should focus on improving the livelihoods of communities.

The government officials and NGOs in both regions indicated an understanding of what constitutes rural tourism in Namibia. In their definitions they indicated that rural tourism included a lot of aspects such as lodges, people selling crafts and tourists pictures. From the interviews with the tourism establishments in Kunene region it was clear that some only had a vague understanding of what rural tourism is. One participant in Opuwo stated that it is tourism outside big towns like Windhoek whereas another participant in Kamanjab indicated that it is tourism in small villages. However, the tourism establishments in Kunene region seemed to agree that rural tourism is a

government initiative.

Despite rural tourism in Namibia being extensively promoted in the region, some of the local communities did not understand what constitutes rural tourism. One focus group stated that *"we just see tourists pass through here in their buses and cars, but they don't stop here".* Whilst other focus groups mentioned that it is tourism that is supported by the government for the local community to benefit.

In Zambezi region, the tourism establishments in the Zambezi region seemed to be well informed about rural tourism. The participants highlighted that rural tourism should benefit the local people meaning that the establishments should be run by the local people, ultimately it should enhance their life. On the other hand, one participant stressed that it is *"where the tourists are far away from all the noises of the city, away from everything so that they can enjoy nature".* The other tourism establishments indicated that rural tourism is tourism that promotes the development of rural areas. Others emphasised that rural tourism is when tourists visit areas which are deprived. The local communities also echoed the same sentiments as the tourist establishments. However, one participant mentioned that "*rural tourism includes activities like hunting and fishing; those things you cannot do in towns.* All the focus group participants agreed that those activities should be run by the local community.

*4.2 Perceptions on the Effects of Rural Tourism Development*

According to the government officials and NGO representatives in Windhoek, Kunene and the Zambezi regions, the local communities benefit from rural tourism initiatives through employment. The participants also linked the development of tourism in Namibia with the number of people employed in the industry.

Other tourism establishments highlighted that the Northern region of Namibia will continue to receive international tourists because of the tourist products such as Etosha. The number of tourism organisations in the country have also increased having an influence on infrastructure improvement such as airports and trunk roads. The development of Hosea Kutako airport was given as an example of how tourism has influenced the increase in the number of tourist arrivals. They also compared the number of people employed in the tourism industry to other industries such as agriculture.

The results of this research indicated that tourism development in Namibia has been viewed in terms of economic growth. However, other government officials indicated that tourism in both regions only developed in the first ten years of independence. The view on rural tourism development from the government officials in Windhoek and those in the research study areas differed. The government officials in Windhoek had a pessimistic view towards the initiatives whilst the government officials outside Windhoek were quite optimistic. The varying opinions presents challenges in the development of rural tourism.

Half of the government officials agreed that a lot of people directly and indirectly depend on rural tourism. Other participants stated that it is vital to analyse what people have beyond employment and scrutinise factors such as infrastructure, security and whether the tourism policies are being regularly reviewed.

Tourism establishments in constituencies such as Kamanjab, Outjo, Opuwo and Khorixas stated that they totally rely on tourism. The tourism ventures in both regions are predominately owned by the private sector who employ a large number of people from the community. The local communities for both regions offered varied views. This research study found that the responses of the local community participants towards rural tourism was dependent on the view of the participants towards the government. This agrees with one of the government officials who stated that:

*"You will find out that rural areas are deprived, in some areas, there is absolutely nothing happening there, the government is not funding these projects. The politicians have lost touch with their own people".*

In Zambezi region, the local communities revealed that the tourism industry employs a lot of foreigners from Zambia. The same view was mentioned in Kunene region particularly with reference to management roles. However, most employees benefit from tourism through direct employment. Some community members who work in the tourism industry in Kunene region highlighted that tourism enables them to support their families. In the same constituency, the tour guides stated that the industry does not pay enough to live on. They highlighted the issue of seasonality, low pay and leakages. Most of the tour operators were from different regions and different countries. Thus, the benefits of tourism in that region leaks out to other regions and countries.

The community members employed by the private sector often fill low-skilled vacancies such as cleaners, waiter/tresses and security guards. This is due to the lack of skills as highlighted. This view was highlighted by most focus groups. CBTs in both regions offer opportunities for the local communities, it however employs very few members from the community. The local communities in both regions also directly benefit from tourism by

selling crafts to the local craft shops. Other tourist establishments such as lodges also directly sell the crafts to their tourists. NGOs offer projects such as mopane leaf collection which benefit the poor people in the Kunene region. The CBTs earn direct income from hunting and fishing. The local people also earn money through conducting village walks and tours. Both regions can directly benefit from tourism and some constituencies have indirectly benefitted from tourism through linkages.

Government organisations noted that the private sector which is owned by the white minority has strong links with each other and they prefer to buy local products from elsewhere rather than supporting local entrepreneurs. However, in Kamanjab and Katima Mulilo the private sector buys their fresh produce from the local community. The participants however, mentioned that the inconsistency and unreliability of the local products is a major concern, thus most tourism businesses prefer to buy their products from South Africa. One participant stated that:

*"My business needs good quality fresh vegetables every day. In this area finding someone who can supply that is impossible, so I buy my vegetables from someone I trust that will not let me down."*

This view was highlighted throughout the Kunene region. Some participants stated that the constituent will not survive without the tourism sector; they emphasised that more than half of the people in the community work in the tourism industry. The increase of tourism in constituencies such as Outjo, Opuwo and Katima Mulilo has influenced growth of other sectors such as retail, construction and other services such as electricity. Hence, most of the employees spend their income within the constituency. Employees who work at conservancies highlighted that it is expensive to go to other cities to buy groceries and clothes and they spend their income in their region. Some craft centres and campsites pay part of their profits to conservancies and these will be used for the development of the community. This includes building of schools, clinics and churches.

Dynamic effects were mostly identified in some communities, especially in the Zambezi region. The CBTs distribute their benefits on an annual basis, some communities, have used their profits to build and improve schools, electrification of the conservancy and boreholes. One conservancy emphasised that it aims to improve the livelihood of the community through infrastructure.

Most of the tourism establishments support the local schools in monetary terms and donations of material to improve the local schools. One participant highlighted that the impact of tourism on rural people should not be measured only in food and money but in terms of how it is changing their lives in terms of ownership. The issue of benefit distribution was debated in most communities and they felt that they were not involved in the decision making of how the profits should be distributed. The issue of empowerment was also debated by the NGO representatives and other government officials, as some feel that the communities are not equipped to run the enterprises without the government or private sector involvement. The rural communities, however, stressed that the involvement of the private sector or joint ventures indicated that the land is still owned by the old rulers. One Induna stated that "*I own the land and I don't think I should be told what to do with my land. I have to make sure that my people have enough land before I give it away for anything else."* Some viewed cash as a real benefit whilst some preferred infrastructure development and capacity building. One participant emphasised that the conservancy will not distribute any cash because there is a lot that is needed to be done in the community. Therefore, there is need to review the benefit distribution system for the local community to view tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation.

The community's attitude towards tourism interventions also has an effect on the way they view environmental issues. In Zambezi region, the private sector blames the local community for causing disruptions that affect tourism whilst the local community blames the government for restricting them from activities such as fishing and hunting. These disagreements are as a result of differing attitudes. Furthermore, responses from all the participants were also dependent on their attitudes towards rural tourism interventions. This highlights the importance of ensuring that all the stakeholders are involved in rural tourism development.

A variety of policies on tourism (policy on promotion of CBT 1995, National Tourism Policy for Namibia 2008, NDP1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) are in place but the research confirmed that their implementation is not robust enough. Government respondents were aware of the policies but did not share a well-defined process on how these are implemented, instead they focused on the need to review policies. Most NGOs echoed that more still needs to be done in terms of implementation. A case in point is the policy on promotion of rural development which has been part of the NDPs since 1996 (NDP1). To this date promotion of rural development is still on the agenda. Lack of policy implementation was also evident in the local communities. The local communities regarding poaching as an acceptable way of livelihood despite the presence of legislation on nature conversation (Nature Conservation Act 1996; Environment Management Act 2007). Most focus groups could not agree on the need to conserve natural resources with some citing that the natural resources are of their cultural heritage. This highlights the lack

of awareness on relevant legislation and more needs to be done to ensure effective policy implementation. Furthermore, the ineffective policy implementation has had a knock-on effect on the attitude of local communities towards the policies. Previous research (Janis 2012, Nyakunu & Rogerson, 2014; Aghajanian et al., 2020) on tourism policies indicate the lack of implementation. This was also confirmed in this research; it is therefore imperative to explore further the reasons why implementation is not successful. Emphasis should therefore shift from policy review and be concentrated on effectively implementing current policies.

*4.3 The Stakeholders' Views on Their Involvement on Rural Tourism Development*

This research found that the government and NGOs are the main contributors of rural tourism development in Namibia. The involvement of other stakeholders was observed to be limited and this was confirmed by all stakeholders that were interviewed. This finding was also similar across the two regions. The government participants indicated that they are responsible for policy making, however, they all stated that the current policies needed to be reviewed.

One government participant stated that:

*"There are so many things involved with a lot of players. So, our role is just to advise because so many communities do not know how to go about it; they do not have the skills, so we have to advise them on what to do. We don't work alone in this; we work with a range of partners. There are a lot of players involved with different expertise so it's a more collaborative effort between stakeholders so we may not know certain things in a certain area, so we call people for other people's opinion, who have the expertise to advise."*

Other participants indicated that the private sector does not contribute to rural tourism development initiatives because they are more concerned with profits. This view was evident in Kunene region where most of the tourism establishments indicated that they pay taxes and tourism levy, therefore they do not see the need to go beyond that. This was also supported by some government officials and conservancy managers who stated that there is no reason for the private sector to contribute towards the strategies. Although the sector, particularly lodges, employ a lot of people from the local community, the government officials seem to view the tourism strategies as a government initiative. Thus, this research found that if the other stakeholders are not satisfied with strategies, their support is limited. This was quite evident in both regions as the tourism enterprises mentioned that the government should use the levies, they pay to develop the rural areas, particularly educating people and other facilities such as sanitation. One tourism participant indicated that:

*"We have been working very hard as all the tourism businesses to make sure that our region is developing, we pay our taxes and the government is not doing anything. We have our own magazine now to market our region, what is NTB doing.*

Effort on stakeholder involvement should be focused on defining roles of engagement among stakeholders as this help to clarify responsibilities. The local community does not fully support the strategies because they are not empowered to make any decisions. This research found that the empowerment of the local communities varied from community to community. In communities with various tribes, the involvement of the local community was based on the tribe one belongs 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 benefit a few individuals. Most NGOs and government officials highlighted that the youth should be involved in rural tourism development however they could not agree on the approaches of empowering them.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

It was quite clear that the results on the definition of rural tourism differed. The government and NGOs provided different definitions of rural tourism, however, they seemed to all agree that it should benefit the local community. The two regions' local communities provided varied definitions as well, with other communities not understanding what rural tourism is, although they could give examples of rural tourism. This view agrees with Lane's (1994) statement that rural tourism differs from nation to nation and in this circumstance, it varied from region to region, constituent to constituent and from community to community.

The participant groups differed in the way they defined rural tourism. Without a clear understanding of the concept, it is difficult to understand the opportunities presented by rural tourism development. There were varied views on what constitutes rural tourism from the government officials with most arguing that the politicians do not understand the concept. This statement is in line with Rogerson, (2002) who highlights the importance of local governments' appreciation of the role of tourism prior to utilising it as a tool for local economic development.

The concept of rural tourism has been overtly debated with researchers indicating that rural tourism is complex, and it has different meanings and is implemented for different reasons (Darău et al., 2010; Gopal et al., 2008; Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007). It can therefore be defined at a local level and can also be identified by its location and characteristics (Lane, 1994). Thus, based on the views of the participants, it is plausible to view rural tourism in Namibia as any type of tourism that is conducted outside cities and towns (rural areas); it should benefit the local community. Instead of solely focusing on CBTs, other types of tourism should be considered to include tourism which presents the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations with the sole aim of supporting the local community economically and socially (Lane, 1994; Nagaraju & Chandrashekara, 2014; Sharpley, 1996).

This research unearthed various viewpoints on whether tourism is contributing to infrastructure development and economic growth. Most government officials and NGOs highlighted an increase in infrastructure development and economic growth as a result of tourism. Local communities, however, did not concur with this viewpoint as they do not see the evidence of this in their vicinity. However, private tourism establishments in Kunene region indicated that rural tourism development has not been fully explored because the government focuses mainly on developing Etosha and a few conservancies (CBTs) in the region. CBTs in Namibia mainly focuses on conservancies whilst other types of rural tourism are not fully incorporated into the government's strategies to develop rural tourism.

Tourism in the rural areas (Kunene and Zambezi) is dominated by the private hotels, lodges, craft centres and other tourism related activities and yet in the implementation of the rural tourism strategies, the involvement of the stakeholders is quite limited. Hence, from the researcher's point of view, rural tourism in Namibia is a government initiative which is aimed at benefitting the local community particularly poor people in rural areas. However, the local people seem to lack adequate knowledge of the concept's benefits. This was based on the lack of involvement in the tourism initiatives and lack of viable tourism initiatives that support local people in some constituencies. Thus, this research found that the three groups (Government organisations and NGOs, tourism establishments and the local community) had conflicting views of the development of rural tourism. This suggests rural tourism in Namibia could be developing, however, the contrasting views could hinder its success. Providing benefits to the local communities is challenging if the views of organisations which support the rural tourism strategy are contradictory. The issues such as the lack of involvement in the development strategies have also impacted on the way the local community view the development of rural tourism. There is lack of effective communication amongst the stakeholders, lack of trust and the lack of interest in rural tourism development. For rural tourism development to positively impact on local communities, all the above-mentioned issues should be addressed.

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