A missed opportunity: Community participation in tourism in South Africa

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Abstract

This policy brief assesses community participation in the tourism industry of South Africa. It is aimed at assisting policy-makers, government and various bodies that play a pivotal role in the development of tourism. It is the view of this policy brief that participation of communities in tourism can be enhanced through the development of pro-poor livelihood strategies in areas where tourism can thrive with good infrastructure and an understanding of the expectations of the tourists as well as financial and human capital for the poor to be involved. The policy brief will also unpack some of the factors concerning community participation in tourism in the country. This is because community participation in South Africa has been a missed opportunity for communities and there are many factors that may be attributed to it.

Introduction and background

The tourism industry in South Africa (SA) has grown considerably since the country’s first democratic elections in 1994. After the 2009 elections, President Jacob Zuma’s government has made significant changes in the government ministries, including the establishment of a stand-alone Ministry of Tourism, which indicates that the tourism industry itself has grown in stature and is being taken seriously by government. Tourism is widely acknowledged as a key economic sector that has the potential to contribute to national, regional and local development and, more specifically, serve as a mechanism to promote poverty alleviation and pro-poor development within a particular locality.

In 2011, the tourism sector worldwide supported 258 million direct, indirect and induced employment opportunities, just under 9% of the global workforce. Of these, 100 million were direct jobs, which means that every single employment opportunity in the direct tourism economy supports another 1.6 indirect jobs. During 2008/9 global economic downturn, tourism also played a critical anti-cyclical role in support of SA’s...
economy and contributed significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), foreign exchange earnings, and poverty reduction. In SA and the rest of the world, tourism remains one of the fastest-growing economic sectors, with huge potential for future job creation and social inclusion.\textsuperscript{5} SA’s tourism industry has also managed to build on the momentum achieved during the record-breaking 2010 World Cup by growing a further 3.3\% and attracting over 8.3 million international tourists.\textsuperscript{6}

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) asserts that tourism, one of the world’s job creators and a lead export sector, especially for developing countries, can play a significant role in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).\textsuperscript{7} One of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS)’s critical success factors for sustainable competitiveness is to address community participation and beneficiation as an underlying and cross-cutting strategy priority.\textsuperscript{8} Mazibuko\textsuperscript{9} defines community participation as an active process by which beneficiary client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhance their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish.

Gunn\textsuperscript{10} advocates the involvement of local community groups in order to achieve development outcomes which would benefit both local communities and visitors alike. Community participation in the tourism planning process is advocated as a way of implementing sustainable tourism. This approach of community participation has long been advocated as an integral part of sustainable tourism development.\textsuperscript{11} The concept of equitable community participation in the decision-making process of tourism planning is increasingly viewed as being central to the success of sustainable tourism development initiatives. Nowadays, tourism is increasingly becoming an important economic sector in many developing countries such as SA.\textsuperscript{12} For host communities, participation and empowerment are essential objectives in any tourism initiative that seeks to address issues of poverty.\textsuperscript{13}

Community participation is viewed as a means of challenging the prevailing tourism development paradigm which typically sees the tourism infrastructure of the developing world controlled by the powerful multinational of the developed nations. Community participation in tourism development in SA forms an integral part of the government objectives \textit{inter alia} to, build a world-class tourism industry and to integrate historically disadvantaged people into the mainstream industry.\textsuperscript{14} The 1996 White Paper on tourism and tourism in Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) document signal the need for a collaborative
approach within which tourism should be led by the government and driven by the private sector, and be community-based and labour conscious. It has become a common element in many development initiatives, such as community-based programmes, which assume participatory methods and has been promoted by development organisations, among them the World Bank, to address the inefficiency of highly centralised development approaches particularly in the developing world. In other words community participation in tourism could also be described as responsible tourism. Responsible tourism is defined as tourism management strategy in which the tourism sector and tourists take responsibility to protect and conserve the natural environment, respect and conserve local cultures and ways of life, and contribute to stronger local economies and a better quality for local people. Responsible tourism is also about enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life, through increased socio-economic benefits and an improved environment.

Community participation in tourism in SA: a missed opportunity

Community participation in tourism in SA can be described as a “missed opportunity”. The tourism industry in the country has been woefully protected – from foreign competition (limited international investment in tourism facilities), demanding, long-stay tourists (limited flow of international visitors) and itself (suppliers cater to a largely homogeneous and predictable clientele i.e. the easily identifiable needs of the privileged class). As such, the potential of the tourism industry to spawn entrepreneurship, to create new service (e.g. local entertainment, handicrafts, etc.), to drive other sectors of the economy, to strengthen rural communities, to generate foreign exchange and to create employment has not been realised.

Tourism activities have been happening, however, the main issue was that host communities have been excluded previously. There are a number of reasons attributed to this exclusion. For instance, apartheid had an adverse impact in community participation as the system was meant to benefit the White population only. The 1996 Tourism White Paper claims that many communities and previously neglected groups particularly those in rural areas that have not actively participated in the tourism industry, possess significant tourism resources. It was foreseen that the communities would play a pivotal role in developing rural tourism. Women, in particular, play a pivotal role in the development responsible tourism in rural areas.
Following the elections of 1994, SA government endorsed community-based initiatives as part of post-apartheid tourism planning. As a result all three spheres of government (national, provincial and local) across the country supported a number of tourism development initiatives and strategy documents that focus on community participation especially in rural areas. For instance, National Heritage and Cultural Tourism strategy, Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa, National Rural Tourism Strategy, Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy 2012-2020 just to mention a few. These strategies are part of government’s commitment (in conjunction with private and various communities at large) to tourism development. Even though the aforementioned strategies are not solely focusing on community involvement, it is important to note that all of them are emphasising that responsible tourism could be achieved through allowing community members to be part and parcel of tourism development.

**Community participation as a promoter of pro-poor tourism**

Community participation in tourism expands the livelihood opportunities for the poor by ensuring that the barriers to their participation are removed. The concept of community-based tourism overlaps with pro-poor tourism, its main aim is to involve local people in the tourism initiatives. Supporters of pro-poor tourism argue that some of the most successful examples of tourism being pursued by governments in the developing world, with the aim of maximising local benefits, occur in those countries that actively support community involvement in tourism. Scholars believe that there is a correlation between community participation and pro-poor tourism (PPT) hence there is a need to unpack this. PPT interventions aim to increase the net benefits for the poor from tourism, and ensure that tourism growth contributes to poverty reduction. PPT is not a specific product or sector of tourism, but an approach. Its strategies aim to unlock opportunities for the poor whether for economic gain, other livelihoods benefits, or participation. The PPT approach focuses on strategies that enhance benefits to the poor, and aims to unlock opportunities for the poor. Tourism’s potential for being pro-poor lies in four main areas:

- Tourism is a diverse industry which increases the scope for wider participation, including the participation of the informal sector;
- The customer comes to the product, which provides considerable opportunities for linkages (e.g. souvenir selling);
• Tourism is highly dependent upon natural capital (e.g. wildlife, culture etc.), which are assets that the poor may have access to, even in the absence of financial resources; and

• Tourism can be more labour intensive than such industries as manufacturing. In comparison to other modern sectors, a higher proportion of tourism benefits (e.g. jobs, informal trade opportunities) go to women.

A wide range of actions are needed to increase benefits to the poor from tourism. These go well beyond simply promoting community participation, although work at grass-roots level to develop enterprises and local capacity is one key component. One of the critical issues in tourism everywhere in developing countries is how to extend the benefits to the poor and to local communities. Donors and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have initiated, with mixed success, many community-based projects to try establishing linkages to traditional tourism.

**Typologies of community participation in the tourism industry**

Before delving into the critical issues of community participation it is important to discuss its typologies. Tosun cited in Zhang developed a typology to fit the situation of the tourism industry. The typology contained three types of community involvement: spontaneous participation, induced participation, and coercive participation. Below is the description of the three models of community involvement:

**Spontaneous participation** is a bottom-up process with full empowerment of community members in the tourism decision-making process. In this mode, community members have full authority in tourism planning through direct participation. In general, this is a relatively ideal mode for a community to be involved in tourism development.

**Induced participation** is the most common mode adopted by governments, especially those in developing countries. This kind of involvement is top-down, passive and indirect. In this mode, powerful interest groups such as government bodies and international tour operators dominate the tourism planning and management. Community members are consulted for their opinions regarding tourism development, but their concerns are not necessarily solved.
Coercive participation is the most manipulated and contrived approach to involve community in tourism development. In this mode, the power holders rarely consult locals for opinions regarding tourism issues. In some case, they would only consult local leaders and satisfy only the basic needs of locals. Community members do not necessarily share benefits from tourism in this mode. The reason for utilising this mode is to avoid any potential social risk raised by opposition from communities. Therefore, this process is superficial and manipulated by power holders to serve their interest. This type of involvement enables power holders to prioritise tourism development rather than the benefits of local communities.\(^{27}\)

Of the three typologies that are outlined above, I believe that the one that is good is spontaneous participation because community members have full managerial authority and responsibility.

Barriers to community participation in tourism

There have been a number of inter-related barriers that prevent effective local communities’ involvement and participation in the tourism industry. The overall outcome of such barriers is often the communities’ limited enthusiasm towards the industry thereby resulting in little benefits that trickle down to the grassroots, the local community. Tosun identified a wide range of obstacles to community participation in the context of developing countries.\(^{28}\) These obstacles are categorised into operational, cultural and structural limitations. Those categorised as operational limitations include the centralisation of public administration of tourism development, lack of co-ordination between involved parties and lack of information made available to the local people of the tourist destination as attributed to, but not limited to, insufficient data and poor dissemination of information.

Under these conditions, low public involvement in the tourism development process is obvious as people are not well-informed. Those categorised as structural impediments include institutional, power structure, legislative, and economic systems. They mostly impact negatively on the emergence and implementation of the participatory tourism development approach. Whereas those identified as cultural limitations include limited capacity of the poor to effectively handle development.\(^{29}\) The fact that the majority of people in developing countries struggle to meet their basic and felt needs and that mere survival occupies all their time and consumes their energy, implies that getting closely involved in issues of community concern such as community participation in the tourism development process which often demands time and energy, may
be a luxury that they cannot afford. On the other side of the coin, apathy and a low level of awareness in the local community is generally accepted. While a low level of interest in taking part in matters beyond their immediate family domain (apathy) can be partly attributed to many years or centuries of exclusion from socio-cultural, economic and political affairs that impact their dignity, a low level of awareness of such issues stops the poor from demanding that their needs be accommodated by the institutions which serve them. The table below gives a breakdown of the limitations to participation:

**Table 1.1: Limitations to participation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational limitations</th>
<th>Centralisation of public administration</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of co-ordination</td>
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<td>Lack of information</td>
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<td>Structural limitations</td>
<td>Attitudes of professionals</td>
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<td>Lack of expertise</td>
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<td>Elite domination</td>
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<td>Lack of appropriate legal system</td>
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<td>Lack of trained human resources</td>
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<td>Relatively high cost of community participation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of financial resources</td>
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<td>Cultural limitations</td>
<td>Limited capacity of poor people</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Apathy and low level of awareness in the local community</td>
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**Source:** adapted from Giampiccoli (2010: 78)
Conclusion and recommendations

There are various ways through which communities can be involved in the tourism industry so as to attract their support and participation which in turn enhance development of the industry. Community participation is a crucial determinant to ensure that the benefits local communities get from tourism are guaranteed, and their lifestyles and values are respected.

If SA wants to improve the economic wellbeing of previously disadvantaged communities, it has to ensure that initiatives of putting the community participation are intensively driven. As aforementioned, tourism in the country has been a ‘missed opportunity’ it is high time for government to ensure that there are community-driven tourism campaigns in order to better the lives of people. Tourism is known as one of the largest employers in SA so it is always wise to sustain tourism-driven campaigns, programmes, and initiatives.

Therefore, the policy brief proposes the following mechanisms:

- SA government precisely the National Department of Tourism (NDT) in collaboration with its partners must create a policy framework that will encourage for profit private investment, and that, in combination with regulatory frameworks, will ensure good economic returns and linkages with other sectors;

- To be sustainable, tourism requires an open dialogue between government, private sector, civil society and local communities to ensure consensual decisions and the generation of economic benefits for a broad spectrum of the population;[32]

- One approach to ensure that local communities can overcome the barriers of community participation and ultimately participate actively in tourism development is to empower them i.e. capacity building programmes

- Inform community members about the importance of tourism; and

- Efforts are also needed on marketing, employment opportunities, linkages with the established private sector, policy and regulation, and participation in decision-making. This involves working across levels and stakeholders
Notes and References

2 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
20 Ibid.


23 Ibid.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.