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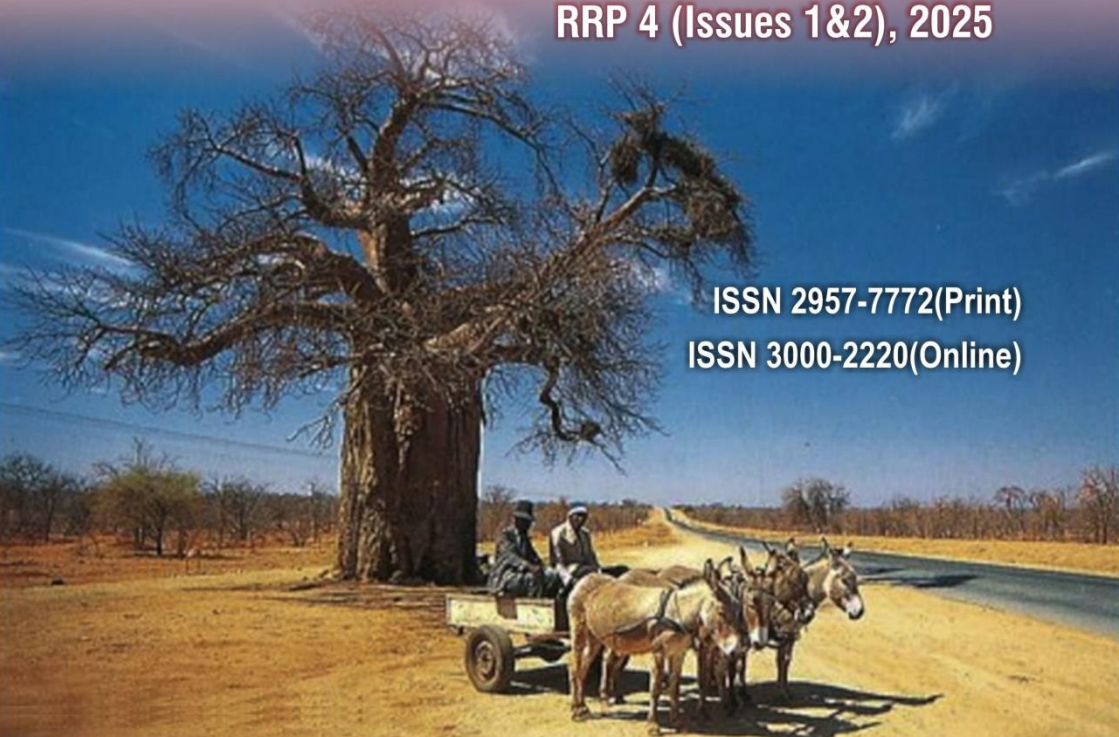

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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis is* to provide a forum for disaster risk mitigation, adaptation and preparedness.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers, economists, among others whose focus is that of rural resilience.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

As much as the urban territory is increasing by each day, the rural economy, especially in many developing countries, still retains a great proportion of the extractive and accommodation industry. Retaining some space as rural remains critical given the sectors role in providing ecosystem services to both wildlife and humanity. In this light, rural resilience as practice beckons for critical studies especially in the face of the ever-threatening extreme weather events and climate change that then impact on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the rural communities. Review of Rural Resilience Praxis (RRRP) comes in as a platform for critical engagement by scholars, practitioners and leaders as they seek to debate and proffer solutions of the rural sector and trying to champion the philosophy of the right to be rural. The issue of conviviality between the different constituencies of the sectors, compiled with the competing challenges of improving rural spaces while also making the conservation and preservation debates matter is the hallmark of this platform of criticality. The journal is produced bi-annually.

Guidelines for Authors for the Review of Rural Resilience Praxis

Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

Manuscript Submission: Articles submitted to the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* are reviewed using the double-blind peer review system. The author's name(s) must not be included in the main text or running heads and footers.

A total number of words: 5000-7000 words and set in 12-point font size width with 1.5 line spacing.
Language: British/UK English
Title: must capture the gist and scope of the article
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Italicise *et al.*, *ibid.,* words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several authors confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and in ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.,* 2012).

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Rural Responsible Tourism in Zimbabwe: Challenges, Options and Impacts

DOROTHY MONICA FUNGAI ZENGENI[1] AND BLESSING MUCHENJE[2]

Abstract

The article provides insights into rural responsible tourism (RRT), focusing mainly on challenges, options and impacts to understand the principles governing rural tourism development in Zimbabwe. The study is motivated by the continual request for heritage-based tourism activities and attractions in the rural areas. As a result, this article proposes a Rural Responsible Tourism Framework to present the implementation process. A qualitative research approach was used to collect data from purposively selected case studies, namely Nzvimbo Village in Chiweshe in the Mazowe District of Mashonaland Central Province and Kore-kore Village in Makonde District of Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe. Data were collected using a focus group guide developed in line with the research objectives. Findings of the study indicate that though challenges to develop RRT exist, there is great potential for the government to tap into the tourism business to create opportunities for empowering the rural people. This initiative helps to manage and reduce rural-urban migration resulting in the betterment of undeveloped and marginalised communities. The study, therefore, recommends that there be a holistic approach in the implementation process of the findings with all stakeholders, including the government, through its regulatory bodies playing a part in the implementation process.

Keywords: *responsible rural development, rural tourism, heritage-based development, tourist activities and attractions*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is recognised as the largest and fastest-expanding industry in the world. This is because of its dynamic nature as it covers urban and rural environments as tourist destinations. Owing to the unbridled demand from growing markets, travel and tourism have a promising future. In Zimbabwe, tourism is regarded as a low-hanging fruit owing to its unlimited opportunities and possibilities to produce return-on-investments quickly (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2024). Tourism can be consumptive, where activities such as hunting and fishing are practised and non-consumptive, where responsible activities are done, yet responsible tourism is the best practice. Sariskumar *et al.* (2018) define responsible tourism as holidays that care about local communities and culture as well as wildlife conservation and the environment. The term 'responsible tourism' depicts a thought that is fully based on awareness the tourist carries with them, while they are on a destination. Sariskumar *et al.* (*ibid.*) believe that responsible tourism is not limited only with tourists, but with each and every stakeholder of the entire community, society and environment. The idea of inclusive development considers social and cultural advancement, environmental preservation and sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism comes with the use of heritage-based products which are goods and services derived from a community's cultural heritage, traditions and history. These products usually reflect the unique characteristics, skills and knowledge of a particular people. Tourism utilises free natural, cultural and heritage resources that do not need extensive infrastructure support (Pattiyagedara *et al.*, 2023). One of these ideas is responsible tourism that is still in development. Scholars in the tourism field have given the idea of responsible tourism an abundance of attention since many tourists are concerned with ethical practices that involve a tourist's location with responsible products (Matthew, 2017).

According to Zhou (2018), the tourism sector contributes over $500 million to the national economy; supports in excess of 200 000 employees directly; favours massive infrastructural developments; supports conservation of resources; and spruces the image of the country. Zhou (*ibid.*) further argues that Zimbabwe is well resourced with a tapestry of tourism resources whose economic potential has not yet been realised. The country boasts of a

hospitable people and intact tourist attraction centres with a relatively good global appeal, which is a sound base to develop a robust tourism industry that can drastically change the economic landscape and fortunes of the country in a short space of time. In Zimbabwe, tourism has been placed at number 3 after agriculture and mining for some years, but in 2024, the industry was sitting at number 1 and contributed more than 12% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (ZTA 2024).

Despite the persisting popularity of sun, sea and sand holidays at full-service hotels, there is a rising trend of getting away from cities, as more people seek tranquillity and unique travel experiences (Burcu *et al.*, 2024). The share of rural tourism, as a truly authentic and raw way to travel, is increasing day by day in sector. That means tourism businesses need to redefine themselves in accordance with the emerging needs and peculiarities of this niche market (Yang, 2021). Despite the fact that rural tourism basically depends on unique natural resources and cultural heritage of the destinations, the importance of protection and sustainability of these values are often overlooked. Contribution of tourism to most rural areas in terms of economy and living conditions is undeniable. Tourism, in partnership with local communities, has managed to bring economic prosperity to remote areas such as Binga and Mahenye in Zimbabwe (Zhou, 2018). This follows Bojnec (2010) who argues that, as agricultural systems decline, tourism may offer rural people an alternative to unemployment or migration to urban areas. However, if the resources are not protected properly, sustainability of the local businesses is not probable, especially when there is sudden popularity, usually gained due to social media influence. A flock of tourists to a destination usually results in unprepared businesses of hospitality, either in terms of lodging or catering.

The major objective that guided this study is to explore the challenges, options and impact of RRT. This is achieved through the following sub-objectives:

1. To establish the challenges, options and impacts of RRT.
2. To evaluate stakeholder contribution to rural tourism development.
3. To recommend implementable framework for rural tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism has brought long-term changes in the community's values, beliefs and cultural practices as community members' involvement in tourism activities becomes critical in preserving their traditional culture (Dorobantu and Nistoreanu, 2012). Sharing the same sentiments, Pololikashvili (2024) asserts that,

> "tourism is a vital tool for inclusion, empowering rural communities to protect and value their rich cultural heritage while driving sustainable development,".

United Nations Tourism initiated and launched Best Tourism Villages in 2021 to advance tourism's role in rural areas, preserving landscapes, cultural diversity, local values and culinary traditions. The Best Tourism Villages (BTV) Network grows every year and with the announcement of its 75 new members, 254 villages are now part of the largest community of rural destinations in the world (*ibid.*)). The criterion for choosing the best tourism villages is based on the good Cultural and Natural Resources, Promotion and Conservation of Cultural Resources, Economic Sustainability, Social Sustainability and Environmental Sustainability, among other variables.

This rural tourism initiative is important as it provides employment opportunities, increases local prosperity, conserves the environment, preserves cultural assets and, in turn, ensures greater benefits for tourism stakeholders (McAreavey and McDonagh, 2010). Therefore, active involvement and participation of the local community in the rural tourism development process are prerequisites for achieving sustainability and improving the community's overall welfare in the nation.

Though RRT is viewed as a type of tourism that has more inclination to the community by scholars, it has challenges associated with its development and implementation in most developing countries. The realisation of tourism opportunities is hindered by a variety of challenges identified in literature. The UN Commission on Natural Resources categorised these challenges into seven distinguishable groups (UN Tourism, 2023).

Infrastructure, population and the economy, coupled with governance and financial mechanisms, are identified as the most pressing issues for rural

tourism development. A UN Tourism representative highlights that infrastructure related challenges are ranked the highest, with deficiencies in road, ports, airports and other infrastructure hindering access to rural areas. These deficiencies make it more difficult for tourists to reach their preferred destinations. Problems with digital connectivity are also seen as an obstacle to the development of rural tourism. According to the Eurobarometer (2021), in today's business environment, an online presence is a must, since online booking channels are the most popular means of organising trips among travellers. Another common challenge found by UN Tourism is the shortage of adequate managerial skill to deliver the expected service in the rural areas. It is the solution of the above challenges that will enable a successful rural tourism enjoyment.

Tourism, regardless of its enormous advantages, can also be a source of negative externalities for local communities, the economy and the environment. Existing literature suggests that intensified tourism might negatively affect communal cultural identity and frustrate fauna and flora. It might also hamper local people's access to public services and facilities. Such effects have more impact in regions with significantly underdeveloped infrastructure, connectivity, or public transport. The impact of tourism is classified in literature as socio-cultural, economic and environmental. Economic impact covers monetary benefits and costs due to development, while environmental impact includes alterations to environmental components such as water, air, earth, vegetation and wildlife, besides the architectural structure. Socio-cultural impact, on the other hand, encompasses effects on the local value systems, behavioural patterns, structure of the community, living standards and lifestyles (Lovelock and Lovelock, 2013).

The negative impacts of tourism to the rural environment are categorised into three major types that are detrimental to the local environment, local economy and the local society and culture. The first impact is environmental impact that results from poor planning in tourism development and implementation which affects the flora and fauna when visitors are allowed to harvest and practise consumptive tourism. Furthermore, killing of wild animals for leisure and the cutting down of trees for energy, together with pollution resulting from limited supporting systems within the community and poor waste

management systems, are also listed as a negative environmental impact. Yılmaz, Bozkurt and Taskin (2005) list the factors that cause environmental pollution as rapid population growth, irregular urbanisation, industrialisation and tourism all, if not controlled, cause overconsumption of natural resources.

Economic impacts are identified as second. These include variables like increases in the prices for basic commodities due to high demand by tourists, economic leakages due to importation of unavailable goods that might be required by the tourists, local government highly concentrating on developing tourism related products, leaving communities to suffer and increase in property price resulting in locals failing to purchase their own. Seasonality of tourism demand leading to seasonal economic benefits and communities as transit zones where tourist just pass through and do not spend much money in that community, are also listed among the economic impacts.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural impacts concern the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behaviour, family relationships, collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expression, traditional ceremonies and community organisation at a tourist destination (Pizam, 1984). Negative social-cultural impacts basically emanate from failure to manage tourist inflows, resulting into many tourists flocking the village and disrupting the way of life in the community. Moreso, conflicts may arise between the tourists and the community due to cultural differences.

However, regardless of the above impacts, tourism can provide some improvements and changes in quality of life, the social structure and social organisation of local society, family relationships and lifestyles, or even improve education, develop a tolerant environment and drive progress in women's rights. In a rural setup, tourism can help to improve leisure-time activities and recreational benefits, develop awareness of historical and cultural values, leading to foreign language learning, creating new professions and bringing about the emergence of new social institutions (Akova and Atsiz, 2019).

To continue enjoying the benefits accrued from RRT, there are options that can be taken ranging from managing the destination carrying capacity,

implementation of sustainable tourism development measures, proper developmental plans to avoid cases of poor planning, re-planting of trees and discouraging consumptive tourism. In addition, there is need for training skilled manpower to manage the rural tourism ventures, doing educational campaigns to both the tourists and the community so that there is mutual respect of cultures and values. Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2023) advocate for governments to develop and maintain environmental policies for societies to increase awareness and sensitivity about environmental sustainability and resuscitation of Community Based Tourism (CBT). This approach emphasises the active participation of local communities in developing and managing tourism activities (Shafieisabet and Haratifard, 2020; Sapkota *et al.*, 2024). CBT empowers communities by involving them in decision-making processes and ensuring that economic benefits stay within the community while preserving local cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the article is achieved through the use of the qualitative research methodology and a case study research design. A hybrid of both desk and field research is used. The field research entailed holding focus group discussions with the two selected communities, Kore-kore Village in Makonde District and Nzvimbo Village in Chiweshe, Mazowe District, using unstructured questions to allow for a vast exploration of the ideas from the respondents. The participants for the focus groups were purposively selected elders in the villages who had knowledge of their communal heritage-based products and a direct link to the development of rural tourism in the villages. The Kore-kore Village focus group comprised 24 community members (i.e., 8 female and 16 male elders) and 2 Tourism and Hospitality industry practitioners for policy and strategic management issues, making them 26 in total and the discussion took one hour. At Nzvimbo Village, the focus group had 13 villagers (i.e., 5 female and 8 male elders), and 2 officers from Kwedu Experience Pvt Ltd who are practitioners in rural tourism and one official from the Tourism and Hospitality industry, a total of 16 and the discussion took 40 minutes. The research followed the ethical procedure for data collection from participants by getting permission from the local authorities and assuring confidentiality of the sensitive data. The desk research involved

carrying out extensive research with the aim of getting a full appreciation of RRT from the international, regional and local perspectives. The literature yielded useful information that helped to get a full understanding of the origins of the RRT.

FINDINGS

Four tables provide evidence addressing all the three study objectives. The findings from the focus group discussions show that the respondents provided answers to all the questions that were asked.

Table 1: *Challenges, Impact and Options on Rural Responsible Tourism and their related objectives of the study at Kore-kore Village*

Challenges in rural areas - Kore-kore Village	**26**	**149**
Infrastructure development	17	29
Governance	5	12
Financial challenges	21	35
Digital connectivity	23	21
Skilled manpower	13	27
Industry knowledge	19	25
Impact on rural areas - Kore-kore Village	**26**	**187**
Cultural dilution	14	21
Deforestation	14	19
Increased cost of living	10	19
Land pressure	17	20
Improved life	19	27
Better income	21	33
Cultural exchange	13	15
Employment	22	33
Options - Kore-kore Village	**26**	**83**
Afforestation	15	19
Agricultural projects	22	23
Tourism education awareness	18	20
Training in tourism	17	21

Table 2: *Challenges, Impact and Options on Rural Responsible Tourism and their related objectives of the study at Nzvimbo Village*

Challenges in rural areas - Nzvimbo Village	**16**	**117**
Infrastructure development	14	22
Governance	3	6
Financial challenges	13	29
Digital connectivity	9	12
Skilled manpower	7	21
Industry knowledge	10	27
Impact on rural areas-Nzvimbo Village	**16**	**135**
Cultural dilution	11	19
Deforestation	9	13
Increased cost of living	13	15
Land pressure	7	13
Improved life	10	17
Better income	13	24
Cultural exchange	7	13
Employment	13	21
Options - Nzvimbo Village	**16**	**59**
Afforestation	7	13
Agricultural projects	11	18
Tourism education awareness	9	14
Training in tourism	10	17

Table 3: *Stakeholders' Contribution on Rural Responsible Tourism development and their related objectives of the study*

Stakeholders' contribution - Kore-kore Village	**26**	**119**
Financial contribution	7	14
Labour	20	41
Ideas and skills	17	36
Land	12	28
Stakeholders' contribution - Nzvimbo Village	**16**	**93**
Financial contribution	5	12
Labour	12	33
Ideas and skills	9	29
Land	9	19

Table 4: *Development of a Framework on Rural Responsible Tourism development and their related objectives of the study*

Stakeholders' contribution - Kore-kore Village	**26**	**81**
Develop the framework	7	21
Develop a constitution	17	31
No idea	15	29
Stakeholders' contribution - Kore-kore Village	**16**	**60**
Develop the framework	4	18
Develop a constitution	9	27
No idea	3	15

Objective 1 on the challenges, impact and options for rural tourism from Kore-kore and Nzvimbo Villages, is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. On the challenges faced by rural communities, findings show that in both villages financial challenges were mentioned by the majority of respondents, with 21 out of 26 from Kore-kore Village saying it 35 times, while at Nzvimbo Village 13 of the 16 respondents highlighted it 29 times. The second highest challenge was poor infrastructural development cited by 17 out of the 26 respondents from Kore-kore Village who mentioned it 29, times while the same challenge was mentioned by 14 of the 16 respondents 22 times at Nzvimbo Village. The least challenge at both villages was governance with 5 out of 26 mentioning it 12 times at Kore-kore Village and 3 out of 16 at Nzvimbo Village highlighting it 6 times.

On the impact of tourism in rural areas, better income was mentioned by 21 of the 26 Kore-kore respondents in 33 references, and employment by 22 of the 26 respondents in 33 references again. At Nzvimbo Village, better income was cited by 13 of the 16 respondents 24 times and employment by 13 of the 16 respondents 21 times. The least impact from both case studies were cultural exchange and land pressure.

Findings on the options for rural tourism development were measured against afforestation, agricultural projects, tourism education awareness and training

in tourism. At Kore-kore Village, the major option was agricultural projects with 22 of the 26 respondents mentioning it in 23 references, followed by tourism education awareness mentioned by 18 of the 26 respondents in 20 references. At Nzvimbo Village, 11 of the 16 respondents opted for agricultural projects in 18 references, while the second option was training in tourism, cited by 10 of the 16 respondents in 17 references.

Objective 2 on stakeholders' contribution on RRT development, in both case studies, labour had the highest with 20 of the 26 respondents from Kore-kore Village mentioning it 41 times, while 12 of the 16 respondents in Nzvimbo Village cited it 33 times. The second contribution in both case studies are ideas and skills. The least was, of course, the financial contribution.

Objective 3 on the development of a framework on RRT development was measured against developing a framework, developing a constitution and no idea. The highest suggestion was on the development of a constitution, mentioned by 17 of the 26 Kore-kore respondents in 31 references, and by 9 of the 16 respondents at Nzvimbo Village in 27 references. The development of a framework was second in both case studies, while those with no idea were the least.

ANALYSIS

Literature has strongly proved tourism to have the potential to transform societies through stimulating local economic development, reducing inequalities, addressing depopulation and empowering local communities (UN Commission for Natural Resources, 2023). However, this study's findings indicate that the majority of rural community members believe in agriculture as their main source of income, while tourism is their second option as shown in the results Tables 1 and 2. Though scholars like Dorobantu *et al.* (2012) argue that, as agricultural systems decline, tourism may offer rural people an alternative to unemployment or migration to urban areas, there is still the perception that agriculture is the best way of positively changing rural people's lives. The reasons mentioned to support this option were financial

and infrastructural development challenges that are common in most rural areas in Zimbabwe. The respondents in both case studies felt that tourism, being an international business venture, requires some high-level expertise in the services to be offered which include good internet connectivity and skilled manpower who have excellent tourism knowledge, among other expectations. These services lack, or have not, reached the standard level, according to the interviewees who were skeptical. As mentioned by Eurobarometer (2021), in today's business environment, an online presence is a must, since online booking channels are the most popular means of organising trips among travellers. Indeed, efficient modern technological usage is limited or lacks in most remote rural areas in Zimbabwe in terms of techno-savvy and internet connectivity, hence communities are more comfortable in agricultural activities, their traditional industry.

Besides the above challenges, the villagers also mentioned the fear of cultural dilution, deforestation, increased cost of living, land pressure, cultural exchange from tourism, in their responses. Cultural dilution was the most feared impact among the negative impacts, followed by increased cost of living, deforestation and, lastly, land pressure. Tourism utilises free natural, cultural and heritage resources as attractions (Ekpah, 2021). Therefore, failure to balance the resources' use among the stakeholders gives rise to conflicts. One of the respondents at Kore-kore Village expressed his fear for cultural dilution by mentioning that,

> We want to preserve our culture as much as possible because we have realised that it is slowly becoming extinct due to the intercultural exchange from visitors. We have resorted to invite all young boys and girls in our community for some cultural education at least once a month to emphasise on our Kore-kore culture and pass it to this generation.

Another respondent from Nzvimbo Village was much worried about increases in the cost of living due to the presence of tourists if they are to come in their community. He said that,

> As villagers, we are used to get cheap agricultural products from our local market, but we fear that visitors will bid for higher prices which we cannot afford for our living.

This xenophobic behaviour is common when people are introduced to a new living style, hence it is not strange. Proper natural and cultural resource management is required to balance all interested parties' expectations.

On a positive note, there is hope for RRT as the findings reveal the excitement of the communities about the impact of tourism on better income generation and employment creation. These two impacts got highest responses and references from the two villages under study. The excitement was also supported by of the respondents' need to get tourism education awareness and tourism training. This means RRT is a welcome option of business venture for rural communities to augment the declining agricultural productivity due climatic changes which have affected the Southern African region of late. In addition, rural tourism is gaining popularity as a vital tool for inclusion, empowering rural communities to protect and value their rich cultural heritage, while driving sustainable development (Pololikashvili, 2024). The United Nations Tourism's Best Tourism Villages initiative does not only recognise the remarkable achievements of these villages, but also highlights the transformative power of tourism in the rural areas. The aim of UN Tourism is to advance tourism's role in rural areas by preserving, *inter alia,* landscapes, cultural diversity, local values and culinary traditions.

The respondents in both case studies also advocated for the development of a community-based tourism constitution and a framework to guide them on how best they can successfully implement the business idea for their benefit. However, some had no idea at all on these two instruments which then brings the need to educate the people on them.

To support the viability of rural tourism in Makonde District where Kore-kore Village is situated, there is already a Kore-kore homestead setup and a family who are custodians of this culture, the community members offer traditional medicinal herbs for sale to the visitors, there is Chidzuwi mythical pool and caves, a beautiful scenery view and borehole water. The community members are very much willing to be trained as cultural and nature guides.

Plate 1: *Kore-kore Village Focus Group members*

Plate 2: *Kore-kore Culture Greetings*

At Kore-kore Village, the research identified the training needs in culinary arts, product packaging, financial management, tour guiding, customer services, security management and brochure development. The village targets are mainly the domestic market from schools, families, organisations and international visitors on transit to and from Kariba Resort.

In Mazowe District where Nzvimbo Village is situated, there potential already identified by Kwedu Experience Pvt Ltd rural tourism developers. The place has a vast dam which can be used for aquatic activities and projects like fishing and market gardening, to provide fresh farm produces for the visitors. There is also a mountain for mountain hiking and sightseeing. One of the major activities at Nzvimbo Village is Village Head of the Day'. This is where visitors are instructed to act as a village head for the day and do a mock court case just like the headman. There are also homestays for visitor accommodation. Village tours can also be done in the company of village tour guides.

Plate 3: *Nzvimbo Village Focus Group members*

Plate 4: *Nzvimbo dam site*

Plate 5: *A sample hut for homestay*

From the two case studies, attractions are found in rural tourism setups which include water bodies, local cuisine, , beverages, wild fruits and herbs, local culture and traditions, local crafts, sightseeing, historical buildings, agricultural activities, and community activities.

DISCUSSION

Unlike other forms of consumptive tourism, RRT aims to minimise the negative economic, social and environmental impacts by enhancing the well-being of the host community and improving working conditions, making a positive contribution to the conservation of natural, cultural and heritage diversity. This offers more enjoyable opportunities and experiences for visitors by building meaningful relationships with the local communities and understanding local culture and environmental value. Furthermore, responsible tourism provides opportunities of inclusion and access by all people in the community, including women and other vulnerable people (The European Union and the Committee of the Regions, 2024).

When asked how this phenomenon was being implemented in the two rural areas, the responses highlighted the inclusion of women and youth in the community projects, while much of the leadership was done by men. This approach, in turn, reduces rural-urban migration and fosters growth in the community development (European Commission, 2021). Furthermore, conservation and protection of the natural resources was also mentioned in the discussion. For example, the protection and conservation of Kore-kore culture and village setup shows that the culture is protected for next generations. This promotes pride and confidence in the local culture and way of life. Protection of the environment through afforestation was also identified. At Nzvimbo Village, the community is fostering environmental protection through indigenous tree planting. The community has started a nursery for indigenous trees. All these efforts are meant to enhance the attractiveness of the rural areas' attractiveness for both domestic and international visitors.

While the respondents had high morale about RRT, their major concern was on limited accessibility to their places due to poor infrastructure development and internet connectivity. For example, at Nzvimbo Village, where Kwedu Experience Pvt Ltd is spearheading for rural tourism development, the road

network to tour the village is very bad, especially during the rainy season. On the same note, one infrastructural challenge is the unavailability of overnight visitor accommodation. Shortage of eating places is also another infrastructural challenge discovered in these two villages. At Kore-kore Village, food is served from the homestead, while at Nzvimbo Village, some selected families take turns to prepare food for the visitors. This is not advisable for a destination image and accountability in cases of any food poisoning.

Considering the zeal of the communities and the infancy of this RRT in Zimbabwe, the government can take this as an opportunity to implement proper standards through a properly constituted instrument, rural tourism development through the rural development councils and private investors. At Kore-kore Village there is already an involvement of Makonde Rural District Council since the launch of this project by the then Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry in 2017. At Nzvimbo Village, the concept is still in its infancy with Kwedu Experience Pvt Ltd taking the lead.

In both case studies, the fear of commodification of their nature and culture was raised as continual narration of their culture to different visitors can result in the communities losing its meaning and devaluing it. Proper guidelines on how to use this resource sustainably are recommended. Turning of rural landscapes into tourism destinations aids in the conservation of the natural environment and the protection of the biodiversity. While tourism development is a noble option for economic development, there is the possibility of unfair participation and distribution of benefits among community beneficiaries which needs to be addressed through a proper framework. RRT is meant to benefit the majority rural members equitably or else the concept loses its purpose. The traditional top-down approach to tourism development must be replaced by the bottom-up approach where decisions are made from the grassroots to ensure community involvement to strengthen business ownership.

THE RURAL RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FRAMEWORK

To address most of the identified challenges for rural tourism development and effective inclusion of community members, a framework has been

suggested as presented in Figure 1. The RRT framework comprises three main aspects, which are, first, challenges faced in most rural community development initiatives such as poor infrastructural development and poor accessibility, nature and cultural resources, and unfair distribution of benefits, and others. The second aspect are the economic, socio-cultural and political impacts that cause conflicts and hinder progress. Thirdly, are options to counter the challenges and negative impacts such as managing destination carrying capacity, proper planning, human capital training and educational campaigns, among others. When the three major aspects are dealt with, they lead to recommendations for proper implementation of the community-based tourism through collective community engagement, re-alignment of policies, setting up of funding structures and prioritisation of tourism as a source of income generation in rural areas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural Responsible Tourism has emerged as a vital tool for rural communities' development. The significance of RRT was confirmed together with its challenges, options and impacts. Tourism has been understood from literature as a great contributor to community development. The current study adds three more challenges to the seven that were identified in literature and these include unfair distribution of benefits, host community not being fully empowered to take control of the development process and lack of tourism awareness.

From the discussion of the findings, the following recommendations are profiled to sustain the development of RRT and minimise challenges so that options and impacts can be turned positive.

The study strongly recommends collective engagement with the civil society to speed up areas that might need quick development in the rural projects, especially in infrastructure development. The Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry must strengthen its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the rural communities to monitor rural development so that the funds that would have been committed are used effectively. Considering that Zimbabwe is advocating for more rural tourism initiatives, it is, therefore, recommended that there be an approved standard guideline for

RRT projects. Since there are difficulties and red tape involved in registering businesses, this research recommends that rural communities be given a waiver in some procedures that might delay implementation of projects. This can be done through re-alignment of policy frameworks.

Having discussed the conclusions and recommendations, the study proposes an implementation framework for the effective implementation of RRT as reviewed in literature and the current study as presented in Figure 1.

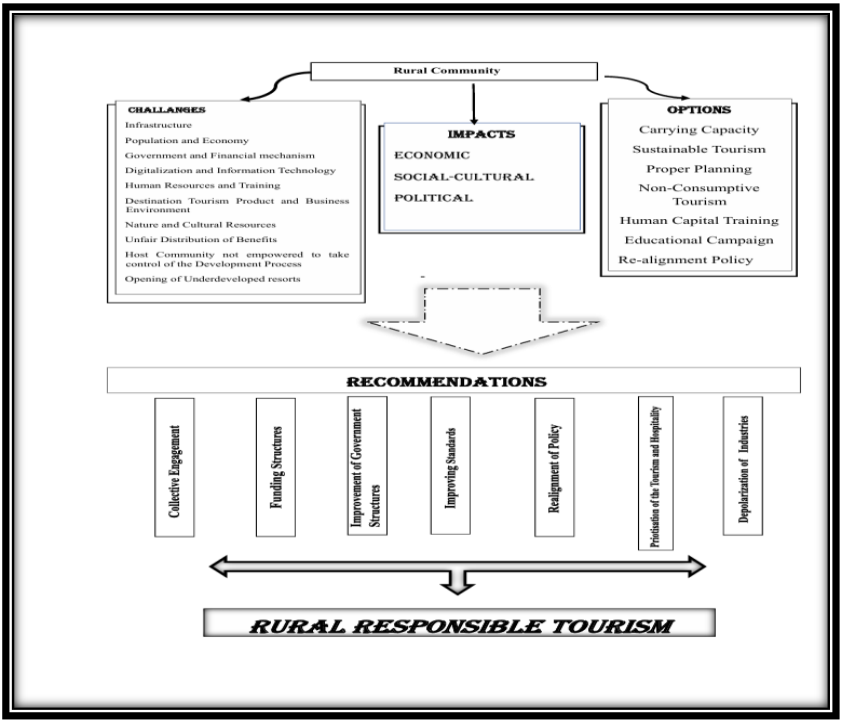

Figure 1: *The Rural Responsible Tourism Framework* (Authors, 2025)

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