



# Tourism Planning of Zimbabwe for 1980-2018: A Critical Assessment

Dr. Shepherd Nyaruwata

University of Zimbabwe. Harare, Zimbabwe

\*Corresponding author: [scnyaruwata@gmail.com](mailto:scnyaruwata@gmail.com)

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## Research Article

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to assess how far the government of Zimbabwe's tourism policies and strategies have affected the development of the tourism and hospitality sector.

**Methods:** The study was based on a review of the literature on tourism development in Zimbabwe. A range of peer-reviewed papers, reports from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), reports from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), and those of the Ministry of Environment, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry were consulted. The information offered a clear picture of how far the government had contributed to influencing the development of the tourism and hospitality industry during the period.

**Results:** The results of the study showed that for the period up to 2000 the government played only a facilitating role in the development of the sector. The results further showed that the government took a more proactive role in planning the development of the industry only when the persistent negative image of the country threatened the collapse of the sector.

**Implications:** It is recommended that the country effectively implements the National Tourism Master Plan and the National Tourism Sector Strategy which were launched in 2016 and 2018 respectively. A constant review of the National Tourism Sector Strategy will ensure an effective response to the global and national macro-economic, social and political changes that will occur during the plan period.

**Keywords:** Tourism planning, development, Master Plan, Zimbabwe.

### 1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is a multifaceted sector whose growth is impacted by a range of other economic sectors in a destination. Some countries, for example, France, Portugal, and Cuba, have felt the need to actively plan the development of the sector (Jenkins, 2000; Lopez and Soares, 2015; Duffy and Kline, 2018). However, other countries, for instance, Sweden, the United States of America, and Nigeria have taken a *laissez-faire* approach in the development of the sector (Jenkins, 2000; Platzer, 2014; Esu, 2015). In Zimbabwe, the government's approach to tourism planning has been ambiguous since its independence in 1980.

Destinations undertake tourism planning in order to address a number of contradictions that are an integral part of the development of the tourism and hospitality sector. The issues that governments attempt to address through planning include among others:

- the inherent conflicts between stakeholders;
- balancing the short-term interest of the private sector and long term national interest;
- environmental considerations and the need to ensure the sustainability of the sector;
- integrating tourism into overall national economic development;
- providing a guiding framework for the development of the sector;
- creating a balance between supply and demand; and
- establishing a benchmark for monitoring policy and plan implementation.

The destinations that do not undertake an active role in tourism planning depend on market forces in shaping up the nature and characteristics of their tourism industry (Baud-Bovy and Lawson, 1977 *cited by* Andriotis, 2000 p.66) In a number of cases these are countries that have highly diversified economies and hence tourism is not a core sector, for example, the United States of America and Nigeria (Platzer 2014; Esu 2015).

Most developing countries have taken an active role in planning the development of their tourism industries. Examples include countries in Africa; Kenya, Ghana, Botswana, and Mauritius; those in Asia; Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines; and those in Latin America; Brazil, Ecuador, and Columbia (Dieke, 2000; Inskeep, 1991; UNWTO 2000-2017). A range of policies, strategic plans, and master plans have been implemented in these countries with the aim of establishing the tourism sector.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of planning in general and tourism planning in particular has been defined in a wide range of ways depending on the theoretical orientation of the author. According to Inskeep (1991 p.21), planning is "managing and envisaging today for a better tomorrow". Similarly, Murphy (1985 p. 63) postulates that planning is mainly concerned with anticipating and regulating change in a given system with a view of promoting orderly and sustainable development. Meanwhile, Getz (1987 p.14) defined tourism planning as "a process, based on research and evaluation, which seeks to optimize the potential contribution of tourism to the human welfare and environmental quality".

The prevailing political and socio-economic environments in different countries have led to the establishment of a variety of tourism planning approaches. These include among others:

- the systems approach;
- the comprehensive approach;
- the integrated approach;
- environmental and sustainability approach;
- the community approach; and
- the continuous and flexible approach.

The systems approach entails taking into consideration a variety of elements that impact the industry. These include inputs-tourism supply and demand, external factors-political environment and economic issues, internal factors-institutional frameworks, financial resources,

and human resources and outputs-customer satisfaction and product competitiveness. All these factors are analyzed in detail before a tourism plan for the destination is adopted and implemented. A comprehensive approach is similar to the system approach, the only major difference being that it is a more practical hands-on approach that does not resort to an in-depth theoretical consideration.

The integrated approach attempts to link the tourism sector to the other sectors of the economy. It aims at positioning the tourism sector in the overall development agenda of the country or region. For example, it takes into consideration the impact that tourism growth will have on agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and transport industries in any given area of the country. It further emphasizes the spatial impacts of tourism in relation to a number of aspects of the country's economy, for example, conflict for land between rural communities and tourism investors.

The environmental and sustainability approach focuses on the need to ensure that tourism development does not lead to the degradation of natural and cultural tourism attractions of the country. The approach is rooted in the current global focus on sustainable development which is defined by the United World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015 p.7) as Tourism that takes account of the current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and host communities. The approach is currently reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were adopted by the United Nations in 2017 for the period to 2030.

The community approach to tourism planning focuses on the need to effectively consult communities who would be affected by tourism development in their area be it urban or rural. The approach highlights the need for stakeholder buy-in on any tourism development that is being planned. A number of developing countries, (Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Tanzania) have adopted this approach when undertaking community-based tourism programs in their rural areas.

The continuous and flexible approach is commonly adopted by countries that have a long history of prioritizing the tourism sector in their economic development agenda, for example, France, Greece, Kenya, and Mauritius (Jenkins, 2000). These countries have put in place a series of five-year tourism strategic development plans which are constantly reviewed and adjusted in line with local and internal political and economic developments.

Countries that have adopted different approaches to their tourism development normally come up with specific objectives and targets that are to be achieved in a given timeline. Further, these countries often come up with specific policy pronouncements and frameworks that are meant to guide how tourism is to develop in the country (Airey, 2007).

### **3. Methodology**

The study employed a desk research approach. Published information on tourism planning was through scholarly textbooks and journals. Data was also obtained from publications of international organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The researcher made extensive use of the internet in order to capture current scholarly on the issue of tourism planning. Past and current

publications (annual reports, policy papers, and consultancy reports) of the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (MECTHI) Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and Tourism (ZTA) and Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ) were accessed to get an insight into government policy thrust on tourism since 1980.

#### 4. Findings

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 the tourism sector was insignificant with only 79000 international tourists have been recorded in 1979 (Nyaruwata, 1984 p.220). The settler regime that governed the country had paid limited attention to the sector and hence there were no concrete plans for its development nor were there any specific policies and strategic plans to guide the development of the sector (Nhema, 1982). The settler regime had adopted a purely *laissez-faire* approach to the development of the sector. The tourism industry was left in the hands of the private sector. The government focused on ensuring that product standards were maintained through carrying out annual inspections and grading of tourist products in the country (Zimbabwe National Tourist Board 1981, annual report).

The first meaningful policy initiative that the government took during the early years of independence was the creation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism in 1982. The ministry's responsibilities covered the environment which was managed by the Natural Resources Board (NRB), forestry, which was managed by the Forestry Commission, wildlife, which was managed by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management and tourism which was managed by the Zimbabwe Tourist Board (ZTB).

The changes that occurred in 1982 were informed by the realization that the tourism sector was based on the country's natural resources. It was thought prudent to house the sector together with wildlife and natural resources so that the economic benefits of the country's natural resources could easily be demonstrated. The combination of the subsectors also assisted the government in justifying the natural resources conservation programs it embarked on as it was able to link the economic benefits of tourism to sound natural resources conservation programs. The policies and programs that the government subsequently implemented to address issues of natural resource conservation stemmed from the historical protectionist ethic which focused on the protection of natural resources as a public good (Child, 1995).

However, it is important to note that the institutional changes that were implemented were not accompanied by a clearly articulated policy guideline or a strategic plan to indicate the envisaged trajectory that the authorities wished the sector to follow. The only pronouncement that the government made was that it advocated for "a low volume, high spending tourism" which would be in line with the fragile ecosystem in which it was based. These views were expressed in public by senior ministry officials and the different Ministers who were at the helm of the ministry for the period to 1999. There was however no official policy document that was published in which this approach to tourism development in the country was articulated.

The other milestone in the development of tourism in the country was the amendment of the 1975 Tourism Act through the promulgation of the Development of Tourism Amendment Act 1984. The Amendment Act provided for the formation of Zimbabwe Tourist Development Corporation

(ZTDC), which was a parastatal (GoZ, 1984). The corporation was charged with commercial and non-commercial functions. The non-commercial functions of the organization included the following:

- planning the overall development of the tourism sector in the country;
- marketing and promotion of the country internally and externally;
- coordinating human capital development in the country;
- undertaking market and product research; and
- coordinating the provision of financial assistance to the private sector.

The commercial functions of the corporation involved the following:

- managing government-owned hotels and the conference center (Harare International Conference Centre-HICC);
- managing the government-owned tour operating company-Rainbow tours and travel and;
- identifying potential areas of investment by the government in the tourism industry.

The final institutional change occurred in 1996 with the establishment of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) through the Tourism Act Chapter 14:20 of 1996. The ZTA, therefore, replaced ZTDC as the new national tourism organization of the country.

The Rainbow Tourism Group which operated the commercial holdings of government in the sector was privatized with the government retaining a substantial shareholding in the company. The three national tourism organizations (ZTB, ZTDC, and ZTA) that had been responsible for guiding tourism development in the country all produced and implemented a variety of marketing plans with different degrees of success. They all endeavored to ensure the maintenance of good product quality through undertaking annual grading and registration of tourism products in the country (ZTB/ZTDC/ ZTA annual reports, 1983-2018).

The development of the tourism and hospitality industry in Zimbabwe was therefore for a long time dominated by a lack of a national integrated physical tourism plan. Product development in different areas of the country was guided by the physical plans of local authorities, for example, those of city council in urban areas and those of district councils in rural areas. Product development was further driven by market demand whereby local and international investors identified a need or an opportunity in the market and then approached the national or the local government for authority to undertake the development of a specific product. For instance, the development of white-water rafting on the Zambezi River was the initiative of an American company, Sobek Travel, which commenced its tours in 1981 (ZTB, 1983) after having convinced the government that this was a sound adventure activity that had a growing global market.

## **5. Discussion**

The challenges that have been brought about by a lack of integrated tourism planning include among others the following:

- unsustainable community-based projects, most of which were donor-driven;
- oversupply of products in key resorts, for example, cruise boats congestion on Zambezi River in Victoria Falls;
- corruption in issuing of product licenses, for instance, hunting and houseboat licenses;

- the marginalization of communities in the sharing of wildlife CBT benefits;
- lack of effective tourism development in areas that have minimal tourist attractions; and
- lack of strategic approach to the development of human capital for the sector.

The government's position of focussing on supervision of the industry and marketing of the destination resulted in a situation where it was unable to assume a leadership role in-terms both geographical spread of the tourism business in the country as well as in coming up with creative and innovative ideas to grow the industry. It can be argued that the upward trend in international tourist arrivals to the country for the period 1980 to 1999 was a result of the marketing and promotional strategies that were implemented by the national tourist organizations of the period. It can, however, be equally argued that the trend of tourist arrivals was a result of political and economic developments that occurred within the country and those that occurred at the global level. For example, the 1983 disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands resulted in a dramatic decline of tourist arrivals from 313000 in 1981 to 230000 in 1983 (ZTA, 2012). Similarly, the implementation of the land reform program of 2000 resulted in negative publicity for the country. Tourist arrivals dropped from the 1999 figure of 2.2 million to 1.9 million in 2000 (ZTA, 2012). Figure 1 shows tourist arrival trends for the period 1980-1999.

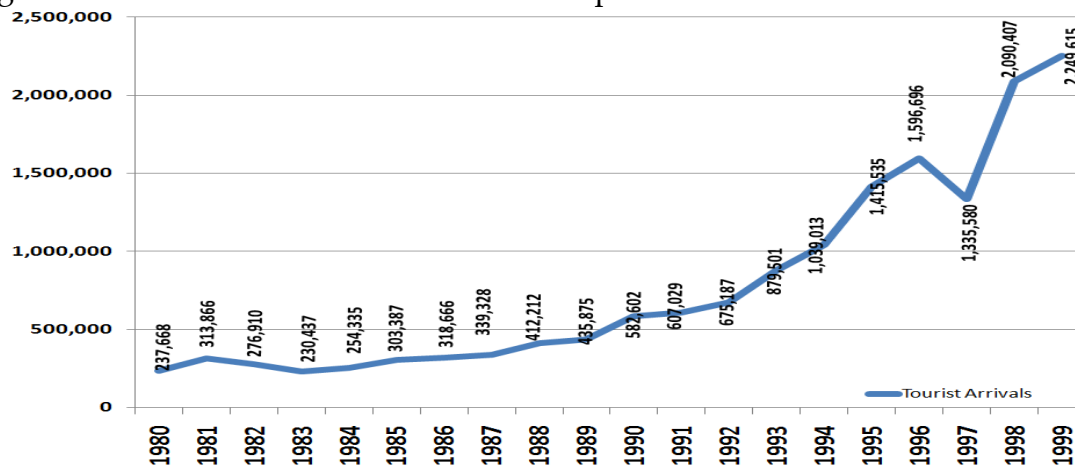


Figure 1: Tourist arrivals to Zimbabwe, 1980-1999

Sources: ZTA

The major negative outcomes of the *laissez-faire* approach to tourism and hospitality development have been the over-concentration of development of tourism in the Victoria Falls resort at the disadvantage of other areas of the country like Masvingo, Kariba, and the Eastern highlands regions. In essence, the approach has created a tourism oasis centered on Victoria Falls with the rest of the country save for Harare, becoming a tourism desert. The government for a long time was fully sold into the private sector notion of focussing development of tourism in the Victoria Falls resort. This resulted in a situation whereby the government's own conferences have gradually been migrated from Harare and Bulawayo to Victoria Falls despite the availability of adequate conference capacities in these towns, especially in Harare.

The *laissez-faire* approach further led to lack of properly articulated manpower development plan for the sector. The Ministry of tourism continued to support the developments that were occurring at the hotel and tourism school in Bulawayo without coming up with a plan that linked the growth that was occurring in the sector with the manpower demands in the future including

the skills mix that were needed. When the main tertiary institutions in the country commenced offering tourism degrees the line ministry again had very limited input. The courses offered by these institutions were dictated by the skills base of the lecturers and some inputs from the private sector. The government was a mere benevolent observer of these developments.

In summary, tourism development in Zimbabwe to 2009 was guided through Acts of parliament, policy pronouncement, and statutory instruments. These legal frameworks offered limited opportunities for meaningful inputs from stakeholders that are impacted by the development of the sector. The fragmented approach to tourism development has made joint planning across the sector difficult and has negatively affected its sustainable growth. The minimum involvement of the stakeholders in policy formulation affecting the overall development of the sector. It resulted in a lack of a common vision of how the sector should be developed in the future.

The Zimbabwean approach to tourism and hospitality development differs a great deal from that of countries like South Africa, Mauritius, and Kenya where the governments have over the years offered a plethora of incentives to the private sector either to locate in specific parts of the country or to develop new products (Gov. of SA, 2016; Gov. of M, 2011 and Gov. of K, 2016).

The government took a more proactive approach to the development of the tourism industry after the establishment of a stand-alone Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry in 2009. A tourism policy (The National Tourism Policy) was adopted and published in 2014 after extensive stakeholder consultation. The policy document addressed a number of issues with regard to how the sector should develop. For example one of the guiding principles to tourism development was stated as follows: (National Tourism Policy, p. 15)

"Tourism in Zimbabwe is a government-led, private sector driven and community welfare-oriented". The document also addressed the following:

- economic policy objectives;
- cultural policy objectives;
- social policy objectives;
- environmental policy objectives; and
- institutional policy objectives.

Further, the document articulated how the government envisaged the future of tourism development with regard to issues like land use, product diversification, product quality and standards, human resource development, and tourism investment (NTP p.19-22). Finally, the document outlined how the tourism industry through the line ministry would cooperate with key publics that directly and indirectly impact on the well-being of the sector. The policy document, for the first time in the history of the country, set out broad parameters along which the industry would develop.

In 2015 the government took a step further in its attempt to adopt an integrated approach to tourism development. It commissioned a study to develop a National Tourism Master Plan (NTMP) which would among other things, identify priority tourism development zones as well as potential tourism projects within the country's ten provinces. The study was completed in 2016 and NTMP was launched in 2018 in Masvingo. The vision of the National Tourism Master Plan is stated as follows : ( NTMP p.7)

**“To develop an inclusive, robust and vibrant Tourism Economy, with Zimbabwe ranking into the top five direct competitor destinations in the SADC region by the year 2025”.**

The national tourism master plan covers a wide range of areas that affect tourism development in the country. These include; human resource development, development of accommodation, product diversification, marketing and promotion, institutional frameworks, community participation, and development and improvement of transport systems. The most important outcome of the NTMP is that it has provided the government, the private sector, and local communities with a common vision on the long-term development of the sector.

The plan among other things organized the country into specific geographic areas for tourism development. The areas identified were as follows: (NTMP Summary p.6)

**Tourism product clusters:** These are concentrations of existing or potential tourist products in and around major cities and towns.

**Tourism development zones (TDZ):** These are broad areas of tourism activities and investment where a range of developments can be undertaken. Development in these areas may take the form of new products or expansion on existing products. The TDZ gives guidance to the government in the development of integrated tourism activities in the different parts of the country. They further assist in deepening the value chain linkages that are common within the tourism sector.

**Tourism corridors:** These are portions of the national transport system that are strategically earmarked for the internal movement of both domestic and international tourists. The tourist clusters and the tourism development zones are connected to the tourism corridors. Whilst a number of these corridors are in excellent conditions for the movement of tourists a majority of them are in a state that is not conducive for the movement of tourists around the country. Figure 2 in appendix 1 shows the spatial distribution of the tourism clusters, the TDZs, and the tourism corridors.



**Figure 2: Tourism development zones within the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe**

Source: NTMP 2016.

The government's new approach to tourism development in the country was buttressed by the development of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) in 2018. The sector strategy which covers the period 2018-2030 focuses on the implementation of activities that are hoped will rekindle the growth of the sector. The strategy was developed after extensive stakeholder consultations. It, therefore, reflects what the majority of stakeholders in the industry and those linked to it hope to achieve during the strategy period. The vision of the strategy is stated as follows: (NTSS p. 8)

**“To achieve a sustainable tourism industry, offering distinctive and inclusive visitor experiences in a unique, innovative and sustainable manner”**

The national tourism sector strategy is anchored on eight pillar/themes which are outlined as follows:

- Environmental Sustainability;
- Destination Management;
- Product Development;
- Effective Marketing;
- Facilitation and Access;
- Information Communication Technology (ICT);
- Human Capital Development; and
- Policy and Governance.

The document further outlines in some detail a range of targets that are to be achieved for the period. Table 1 shows the estimates on the various targets that the sector aims at achieving for the period 2018 to 2030.

**Table 1: Annual forecasted targets**

Indicator	Tourism arrivals (Million )	Tourism arrivals category share (%)			Tourism export receipts (US\$ billions)	Contribution to GDP (US\$ billions )	Contribution to employment ('000')	Contribution to capital investment (US\$ millions)	The average length of stay (nights)	Available bed capacity (thousands)	Average Hotel Bed Occupancy Rates (%)
		Overseas	Regional	Domestic							
Annual Growth rate	10.7%				16.1%	11.2%	10.1%	13.2%		6.0%	7.0%
2017	2.4	14	86	0	1	2.5	200	500	4	12,772	48
2018	2.7	14	83	3	1.2	2.8	220	566	4	13,538	27
2019	2.9	15	79	6	1.3	3.1	242	641	5	14,351	29
2020	3.3	15	76	9	1.6	3.4	267	725	6	15,212	31
2021	3.6	16	73	11	1.8	3.8	294	821	6	16,124	33
2022	4.0	17	70	13	2.1	4.3	324	929	7	17,092	35
2023	4.4	20	66	14	2.4	4.7	356	1,052	7	18,117	38
2024	4.9	22	63	15	2.8	5.3	392	1,191	8	19,204	40
2025	5.4	24	60	16	3.3	5.8	432	1,348	8	20,357	43
2026	6.0	27	56	17	3.8	6.5	475	1,526	9	21,578	46
2027	6.6	30	52	18	4.4	7.2	523	1,728	9	22,873	49
2028	7.3	34	47	19	5.2	8.0	576	1,956	10	24,245	53
2029	8.1	37	43	20	6.0	8.9	635	2,214	10	25,700	56
2030	9	40	40	20	7.0	10	700	2.5	11	27,000	75

Sources: NTSS (GoZ) 2018

For example, it is forecast that the country will receive a total of 4.0 million tourist arrivals in 2022 which will generate a total of \$US2.1 billion in foreign currency.

The establishment of the tourism policy in 2014, the development of the national tourism master plan in 2016, and the adoption of the National Tourism Sector Strategy in 2018 has created a sound foundation for the development of a sustainable tourism sector in the country. What remains to be managed is the political environment in the country. Tourism is a sensitive sector that thrives well in an environment that is politically stable and peaceful.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been argued that the Zimbabwean government adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to tourism development for the period 1980-1999. It was further indicated that the government switched to an integrated approach to tourism development after the adoption of the tourism policy in 2014. It was finally shown that there is now a common vision of how the tourism industry should develop in the future. The common vision is a result of stakeholder participation in recent years in the development of the country's National Tourist Master Plan and the National Tourism Sector Strategy. Based on the review of the government policy, the following recommendations can be of use for the development of tourism in Zimbabwe:

- The Ministry of Environment, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry ensures the implementation of the NTSS action plans which all stakeholders agreed to when the strategy was launched in early 2019.
- The Ministry of Environment, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry commences engaging provincial stakeholders with a view of implementing the plans that have been agreed to within the framework of the National Tourism Master Plan.
- The Ministry of Environment, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry organizes a tourism investment conference that will showcase the potential tourism investment projects that the different provinces of the country have identified which are contained in the NTMP.

## 7. Limitations and directions for further study

The study was based on the literature review and documentary analysis. The methodology did not enable the researcher to get insights from a range of stakeholders on how the *laissez-faire* approach of the government affected the development of the sector in general and their businesses in particular. A detailed study should therefore be undertaken which will entail engaging the various stakeholders in the tourism industry and those that are linked to the multifaceted tourism value chain. This will assist the country in improving its planning of the sector and hence ensure its long term sustainability.

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**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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