

Development And Management Of Ecotourism Small Business Enterprises: North West Province, South Africa

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Abstract— One of the best ways to address unemployment is to leverage the employment creation potential of small businesses and to promote small business development. Despite support from organisations in the South African public sector there are constraints and obstacles hindering the growth of small business, particularly businesses owned by previously disadvantaged groups in the ecotourism and wildlife sector. This might be as a result of (1) stringent government policy, (2) inadequate business and management skills of owners/general managers, and (3) low levels of knowledge with regards to ecotourism. This study provides recommendations to policy makers within government enabling the development of strategies that can provide assistance to small business enterprises, and provide a suitable environment for entrepreneurs to establish and develop their businesses. A focus group interview was undertaken with a homogeneous group of ecotourism entrepreneurs to explore their perception, feelings and ideas about the subject. The aim of this paper was to determine the challenges hindering small business enterprises to establish and develop their enterprises in the ecotourism and wildlife sector, given that the growth and sustainable performance of these business entities could serve as an important contributor to the economic development of the North West province of South Africa.

Keywords-small businesses; Ecotourism; Business Management;

I. INTRODUCTION

Small business enterprises (SBEs) are recognised worldwide as engines of growth and development, as resolved by Gill and Biger (2012). The development of small businesses in any country is never a smooth and fast process, as was established some time ago by Gerding (1999) and still valid today as there are pitfalls and restraints within the business environment that adversely affect the development of SBEs. It is the duty of policy makers to learn from previous practices and develop strategies that can be utilised to address such challenges. Mallane (2004) warned that the small business sector in South Africa has to deal with many obstacles and the agencies responsible for its development have encountered numerous challenges to date, and as a result, those enterprises

have not been able to adequately develop into a large number of small businesses.

Ecotourism as a tourism market, as affirmed by Fennel (2015), is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of tourism on a world-wide scale and this type of tourism does have close ties with rural tourism. It is estimated that ecotourism is increasing by 25 to 30 percent a year (UNWTO, 2012) and most tourism forecasters predict ecotourism to grow even faster over the coming years because it is driven by consumer concerns over environmental and climate changes (Ketema, 2015; Jamrozy&Lawonk, 2017).

The primary objective of this paper was to determine the business management support required to enable small business enterprises participation in the ecotourism and wildlife sector. The secondary objectives are as follows:

- To determine the SBEs level of knowledge concerning the ecotourism sector.
- To indicate the SBEs' level of participation in the ecotourism sector.
- To obtain comments from respondents that can inform government policy on the development of SBEs in ecotourism sector.

Presented here are the objectives of the paper based on SBE development and management in the ecotourism sector, North West province, South Africa.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability in the ecotourism sector requires a more holistic framework, with SBE development at its core. SBEs' sustainable operation is characterised by certain fundamental aspects of entrepreneurial activities that focus primarily on personal initiative and skills to create business opportunities in the ecotourism sector while taking into account the environment, cultural values and societal goals (Elkington, 1998; Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007). Businesses are started for many different reasons, as reported

by Wijewardena *et al.* (2008) and Blackburn (2013). SBEs are managed by owners, in particular SBEs, with various aspirations and abilities, they have vastly different internal organisational characteristics, and are located in a range of sectors and locations. For the purpose of this paper the focus is on the ecotourism sector.

Small business enterprises – SBEs are increasingly seen as playing an important role in the economies of many countries. Thus, governments throughout the world focus on the development of the small business sector to promote economic growth, as per by Olawale and Garwe (2010) and Gill and Biger (2012). SBEs, as assessed by Robson (2001) and Gill and Biger (2012), play an integral role in specifically the Canadian economy. In 2011, SBEs employed six out of every ten working Canadians, as determined by Gill and Biger (2012). The prominence given to the role of SBEs in the UK economy has been renewed following a period of decline in the 1950s and 1960s (Stanworth & Purdy, 2003). SBEs, as indicated by Blackburn *et al.* (2013), account for 99.9 percent of all enterprises in the UK economy, a percentage that is reflected worldwide.

In developing countries such as Sub-Saharan Africa, entrepreneurship is often seen as one of the solutions for economic development through job creation in the private sector, particularly in countries where there are resource-constrain situations (Brush & VanderWerf, 1992; Vermeire & Bruton, 2016). It is noteworthy that a large number of these entrepreneurs, as reported by Eresia-Eke (2016), fall within the category of SBEs. SBEs are renowned for their contributions they make towards enhancing productivity and employment and this seems to have made them an important feature of the economic landscape, particularly in Africa (Nguyen & Luu, 2013; Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Pinho & Sampaio de Sa, 2014; Eyana *et al.*, 2018).

In South Africa, Government, as commented by Laubscher (2006), Lighthelm (2008) and Perks (2010), placed significant importance on the promotion and development of the SBE sector, as it can serve as strategy that can bring along long-term solutions for the same challenges confronting the country, such as low economic growth. The South African National Planning Commission's National Development Plan (NDP) indicates that it is expect that SBEs will play an important role in South Africa over the next 20 years (National Planning Commission, 2012). This is substantiated by the fact that the 1995 White Paper outlines a policy framework in providing an enabling environment for SBEdevelopment in South Africa, as well as the instating of a Minister of Small Business Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu in 2014, to oversee the development and growth of SBEs (Department Trade and Industry (DTI), 2010; Derbyshire, 2016). Despite the significant support programmes implemented by the South African government to promote the development and growth of SBEs (Mbeki, 2009), the demise rates of small businesses seem to be on the rise. According to Brink *et al.* (2003) and Lighthelm (2011), 75 percent of new SBEs created fail within two years of operation. Adcorp (2012) estimated that around 440 000 small

businesses have closed shop in the preceding five years in South Africa. In 2013, Rob Davies, the Minister of Trade and Industry, revealed in a statement that one out of seven SBEs started in the country will be out of trade in the first seven years of trade (Kgosana, 2013). In the subsequent year, Lindiwe Zulu, Minister of Small Business Development, remarked that enterprises with fewer than 20 employees have only a nine percent chance of surviving 10 years from the initial time of trade (Zwane, 2014). In addition, the number of new small business start-ups is at an all-time low, as indicated by Fatoki (2012) and Sutton (2015).

Sha (2006) notes that given this high failure rate, it becomes vital to research the factors that are required to enable SBEs to survive and grow. According to Tung and Aycan (2008), Petrus (2009) and Naqvi (2011), failure factors of SBEs include poor management competencies. Small business management is critical for the survival and well-being of SBEs of all types. The Minister of Trade and Industry and Small Business Development were in mutual agreement that they believed that failure is attributed to lack of business management skills, as mentioned by Derbyshire (2016).

The recent introduction of a comprehensive programme introduced by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), as clarified by Matsila (2018), is geared towards the transformation of the ecotourism and wildlife economy to encourage more participation amongst previously disadvantaged individuals (PDI) owned business enterprises, in this specific sector. The sector faces several challenges preventing growth and transformation happening at a faster rate, as reflected in Table 1.

The identification of barriers and constraints could enable policy makers to formulate and implement strategies that can assist SBEs establish and develop their businesses in the ecotourism and wildlife sector.

Ecotourism – Fennel (2015) attests that in 1950 the top five travel destinations (in Europe and the Americas) held 71 per cent of the travel market, but by 2002, they held only 35 percent. Yeoman *et al.* (2006) ascribed this to an increasing desire to visit new places, which in turn has been stimulated by an emergence of newly accessible destinations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. It is important to identify some of the iconic ecotourism destinations in developed and developing countries, such as (1) polar bear watching in Churchill, Canada, (2) the Serengeti Plain, Tanzania, and (3) the Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) and the Kruger National Park, South Africa. Low impact nature tourism contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation or indirectly by providing revenue, sufficient for local people to value, and therefore protect their wildlife heritage as a source of income, as described by Fennel (2015).

Ecotourism, as compiled by Hawkins (2004) and Jaafar and Maideen (2012), unlocks new business opportunities for tourism SBEs as the ecotourism sector enables the diversification and expansion of operations. Ecotourism is seen as a tool to empower indigenous communities in an area

Table 1: Challenges preventing growth and transformation in the ecotourism and wildlife sector

Barriers to transformation	Risk of future growth stagnation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient access, ownership and inefficient utilization of land. • Lack of infrastructure development support for entrepreneurs. • Lack of access to 'start-up' game. • Lack of organized governance amongst community and emerging entrepreneurs. • Lack of technical skills, oversight, business support and effective business and partnership models. • Lack of access to finance and incentives for transformation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient government endorsement for hunting as a tourism activity. • Untapped black consumer potential. • Insufficient societal value given to wildlife resources and understanding of the sustainable use concept. • Insufficient awareness and capitalization of the value of mixed wildlife/livestock interfaces. • Insufficient mechanism addressing and containing risks and threats to the ecological resource base in further growing the biodiversity economy.

Source: Department of Environmental Affairs (2018)

(Scheyvens&Mornsen, 2008). Many ecotourism sites, such as national parks and protected areas, are located in remote areas which have rich ecological and biological diversity and indigenous cultures, as explained by Hawkins and Lamoureux (2001). Ross and Wall (1999) and Chapman (2003) indicated that ecotourism's goal is to achieve conservation and community development through the provision of economic and social incentives to local communities for their well-being. Home stay is a new idea for accommodation in the tourism industry. It is a potential economic activity that is popular with tourists who desire to know and interact with local people, cultural attractions, social cohesion, natural resources and ecosystems (Bhuiyanet al., 2011). To enlarge accommodation capacity, home stay operators built two or three additional rooms in their yards for tourists (Gu&Wong, 2010). Home-stays are prime examples of ecotourism activities creating business opportunities for local communities. It enables improving, enhancing and promoting a local community, as well as including the economic, social and cultural aspects with sustainable existence as well (Chaiyatornet al., 2010).

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has adopted a vision and aspiration to create an inclusive, sustainable and responsive wildlife economy that grows at 10% per annum in support of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, while providing a foundation for the social well-being and maintaining of the ecological resource base. One of the department's strategic objective is the transformation of the ecotourism and wildlife sector by targeting 4000 previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) existing SBEs to be trained and supported to facilitate their participation in this sector (DEA, 2018). The wildlife sector has been increasing consistently faster than the general economy, contributing R3 Billion to the GDP of South Africa in 2014.

The South African government is committed to creating a prosperous and equitable society which is in harmony with natural resources and protecting the rich biodiversity and heritage of and for all citizens. South Africa, according to Fennel (2015), has long been a global leader in biodiversity conservation and wildlife management, and has in place a first-rate network of protected areas, making it an international ecotourism destination of choice. DEA (2018) mentions that at

least 11.4% of the land in the country is under conservation or protection, with South Africa being home to a number of world renowned national and provincial parks and nature reserves. While many wildlife and ecotourism businesses in South Africa are well established and profitable, there is a considerable number of PDI owned small businesses and communities that are not benefitting from this sector. The ecotourism and wildlife sector comprises of three sub-sectors. The first sub-sector is wildlife ranching – this involves the breeding and sale of game (wild animals such as buffalos, springbok, zebras). As provided by Jaafar and Maideen (2012), due to the lack of updated information and taking into account that approximately 20% of the game sold at game auctions with a turnover of the game breeding segment of the wildlife industry estimated at R10 billion. This excludes revenue from secondary activities such as fencing, maintenance and veterinary services. This is followed by the second sub-sector called ecotourism and wildlife – this comprise of activities such as wildlife viewing, camping, hiking, hunting and adventure. The third and last sub-sector is called wildlife products – consisting of various saleable products such as game meat, horns, hides, feathers, eggs, medicine, curios, shoes, clothing, furniture, jewellery, handbags and fashion accessories, of which game meat is the biggest. The following section elaborates on the business management skills needed to establish and sustain the performance of a business in a given sector

Business management – There are also different forms of business management, for example: corporate management, global management, and SBE. These three forms of management are similar in many ways and their definitions can be used to describe the size and capabilities of particular formations. SBE management basically deals with the management of small enterprises with lower resources and capacity. For example, a slightly less capital base compared to big businesses, as this enables big businesses to attract and retain skilled human resource, and furthermore enables large businesses to acquire assets and capabilities that provide for the effective and efficient operation of businesses, such as the ability to undertake costly research and development (Kagiso, 2018).

SBE management is a process of selecting the best alternative to optimize the utilization of enterprise's resources in order to deliver a product or service (Rue &Byars, 2005). The basic tasks of management have been identified by several authors as: planning, organizing, leading, motivating and controlling (Rue &Byars, 2005; Van Rensburg et al., 2008). Individuals managing a SBE should be able to apply these tasks and these tasks are explicated as follows:

- Planning – this indicates the enterprise objectives and deciding on a strategy that will best lead to the achievement thereof (Rue &Byars, 2005; Strydom et al., 2011; Griffin, 2014).
- Organisingentails the establishment of how activities and resources are to be grouped, as well as granting rights and resources to individuals within the enterprise that are necessary to carry out assigned activities (Rue &Byars, 2005; Horn, 2009; Strydom et al., 2011).
- Leading – this is referred to as a process advancing the interest of an enterprise by motivating individuals and creating an environment that allows individuals to best achieve their goals and ultimately that of the enterprise (Rue &Byars, 2005; Botha et al., 2007; Van Rensburg et al., 2008).
- Control – this refers to the monitoring of an enterprise's progression in the process of striving towards its goals, namely a process of making sure that the enterprise's activities go ahead as planned (Rue &Byars, 2005; Strydom et al., 2011).

However, not everyone is capable or possess the ability to perform these enterprise management tasks since proper skills can only be obtained through training, education and practice (Horn, 2009; Derbyshire, 2016).

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A focus group interview was used to collect data from ecotourism SBEs in the North West province (NWP) of South Africa. Focus group interviewing is one of the valuable tools for collecting qualitative data. Focus groups, as indicated by Cohen and Manion (2007), are more than just a number of individual interviews. The element of synergy and interaction between group members play a significant role in generating data. As explained by Dilshad and Latif (2013), a focus group is a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics and a focus discussion is on a given issue or topic. As pointed out by Krueger and Casey (2000), another important consideration is the number of respondents to be invited for discussion. Although it is generally accepted that between six and eight participants are sufficient, some studies have reported as few as four participants, analysed by Nyumba et al. (2017). The focus group interviewed consisted of eight small business owners in the tour operator industry who are affiliated members of the Greater Pilanesberg Tour Operator Association (GPTOA), situated in the Pilanesberg National Park (PNP), NWP. There are twenty two members to this association and this equals a 36% participation which is regarded as representative. The participants have in-depth knowledge of

PNP as an ecotourism destination and create tour packages comprising of the PNP and other surrounding attractions in the region. The interview session was conveniently organised at the game trackers office situated at Sun City, a premier vacation destination in the NWP and the purpose was to explore small business owners' attitude and perceptions, feelings and ideas on how government can provide business support to enable them as ecotourism enterprises to get involved and participate in the ecotourism sector, specifically to participate in the economic mainstream of the development of PNP, as mentioned by Denscombe (2007). An interview guide with a set of key discussion point was developed to guide the focus group session. The session commenced by asking general questions such as: the small business owners level of knowledge or understanding concerning ecotourism and tourist groups that visit the Pilanesberg area with following attractions (1) Sun City, (2) Mphebatho Cultural Museum, (3) PNP, (4) Moruleng stadium, (5) Moruleng Shopping Mall, (6) Predator World, and (7) others. For the purpose of this paper, detailed information was obtained from the small business owners on what their thinking and views are on how government can provide business management support to facilitate their involvement and participation in the economic activities associated with the Pilanesberg National Park. Note-taking and tape recording during the focus group session were used for capturing the verbatim discussions.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three themes emerged as the data was dissected and grouped into themes. The three themes are: (1) knowledge and understanding of ecotourism; (2) level of participation in the ecotourism sector; and lastly, (3) policy views. Furthermore, as suggested by Krueger (1994), instead of just referring to numbers and frequencies of comments, it is important to also consider the use of qualifiers such as: "the prevalent feeling was that", "a few participants strongly felt" or even "most participants agreed".

(1) Knowledge and understanding of ecotourism

The discussion, "has ecotourism created direct business opportunities and employment for the community?"

Tourist volume most participants agreed that "...this tourism destination attracts a high volume of tourists" and "there is a high number oftourists that visit Sun City for leisure and business events and about eighty percent of that number visit PNP for game drives and other activities, as it is adjacent to Sun City...". Probing was used and resulted in most participants agreeing that the PNP attracts both domestic and international market segments with a slightly higher number of domestic tourists. One participant remarked that "There is about a 70/30 tourist fraction with domestic tourist being the highest" and the reason being that theinternational market is slightly seasonal and the domestic market visit thedestination throughout the year. A few participants strongly felt that "...the numbers might surprisingly be contentious. However, the international market on average have higher spending patterns and a longer period of stay compared to the

domestic market...” About ecotourism creating business and employment opportunities, most participants agreed that ‘small business enterprises are not involved in the mainstream of the economy of the PNP’, they further mentioned that they are responsible for bringing tourists from major cities, such as Johannesburg and Pretoria, and international tourists from the OR Tambo International Airport. However, they would like to grow and expand their businesses through participating in the mainstream ecotourism activities such as: game drives, hiking, safari lodges and others. A prevalent feeling was that the backbone of creating a thriving economy was dependent on the sustainable operations of SBEs that provides quality service to clients and is creating employment opportunities for the local community. Most of the participants agreed on the importance of creating a price strategy that will charge different prices to different market segments of tourists, that is charging the international market an entrance fee inclusive of a levy fee to subsidise local economic development. “Many local markets have never gained access to PNP to view its tourism attractions, let alone been employed...”.

The discussion point concerning the role of small tourism business enterprises in the development of ecotourism lured responses and all of the focus group members agreed that they “play a significant role in the development of sustainable ecotourism development, as we provide services through transporting a range of clientele to the PNP and the safari lodges.” A few participants strongly felt that as part of social investment, they “create employment for local people and have internship programs that assist the unemployed graduate to gain practical experience and gain skills that can be applied in future.” Furthermore, a prevalent feeling was that they engage in conservation education as they go to local community secondary schools and inform learners about the importance of conserving environmental resources and the preservation of their heritage and culture, such as “involving communities through education could assist in curbing the scourge of rhino poaching...” and all focus group members agreed.

(2) Level of participation in ecotourism sector

To a discussion on how can government provide business support to SBEs to enable their participation in the ecotourism sector, the tour operators indicated that they are critical in bringing tourists to the PNP to ensure sustainable business performance, because their services are critical to the tourism performance of the park. Most participants from the focus group strongly emphasised that “their businesses would like to be involved and participate in the economic activities associated with the park.” However, the general perception was that “the playing field was not levelled for all stakeholders involved...”. The focus group further mentioned that as stakeholders within the community-group, their requests and needs to participate in the economic activities are not acted upon and other stakeholders, such as the Community Property Association (CPAs) who own part of the land in the PNP and foreign businesses who own and manage safari lodges benefit largely from the economic development. “...Government should have clear policy on how to regulate the development

of SBEs in this sector...” and all the participants (one hundred percent) agreed.

Responses to the discussion point of what the training and development needs of SBEs in this sector are, the following responses were obtained: the focus group participants agreed on the importance and the need to be educated on the technical skills of ecotourism activities, such as the use of fire-arms for game viewing, hunting, game relocation, and so on as well as “there are barriers to entry into the sector as small business enterprises do not have capital, equipment and skills to participate in the sector...” and all participants strongly felt that they as stakeholders have to be involved and participate in the sector. However, they not only need technical training but also business management skills, information, financial assistance, and mentorship to be productive and sustainable.

(3) Policy views

To the discussion on government policy and regulations facilitating SBEs to get involved and participate in the ecotourism sector, the responses were as follows.

All the participants strongly agreed with the statement that government policy serves as a barrier against their involvement and participation in this sector, in particular, participating in the economic development of the PNP. “...tour operators would like to expand their business offerings and invest in purchasing of overland game trucks but we have no information and knowledge with regards to regulations and policy about game vehicles.” All participants indicated that “PNP management only allows the established foreign private businesses and CPAs priority to operate inside the park.” All the participants agreed that they have tried to schedule meetings with the management of the PNP to gain knowledge and understanding on game drives in the park. “As primary stakeholders of the PNP, the policy is not in favour of tour operators and on several occasions we have tried to arrange a meeting with management to no success”, and this was confirmed by all participants. Policy provides a framework for the management of tourism in the park but the management of the PNP do not consult and involve small ecotourism business enterprises in the formulation and implementation of policy. “There are black-owned businesses who operate in the hospitality industry in community villages that would like to diversify and enter the ecotourism sector by owning low-end safari lodges. However, the uncertainty in policy serves as an impediment to participate in the sector. Government should enable an environment whereby they create a clause within policy that facilitates business-to-business partnership between foreign businesses and small business as this is an important element for sustainable tourism development in the park and a few participants emphasised the importance of being consulted and involved in decision making process that informs policy and regulations.

V. DISCUSSION

The support for small business development and management in the ecotourism sector is essential as they can

certainly contribute towards a thriving local economy that produces products and services to tourists, be facilitators for innovation, and create employment for local communities.

Government business management support initiatives will be key to the involvement and participation of small business enterprises in the ecotourism sector. The following are the support initiatives required that may be followed to support SBE development through the ecotourism sector:

Training and education: As established by Tisdell (2003) and Angelkova et al. (2012), one of the possible benefits of government development and management of small businesses through ecotourism or wildlife-based tourism is that the socio-economic development in a destination could exceed the cost of development. Small business development should commence with the education and training of SBEs about the economic opportunities associated with the sector. Building knowledge amongst SBEs will enable them to make informed decision when entering and participating in the sector.

Consultation and involvement: the consultation and involvement of SBEs in the decision making process with regard to ecotourism development and policy setting is essential. The bottom-up approach will assist government to incorporate the needs and desires of not only SBEs but of other stakeholder groups with the purpose of developing a sustainable ecotourism sector, specifically in the PNP.

Business information and advice: NWG and other public entities such as Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) should establish a collaborative partnership to provide support to SBEs by providing business information and advice on the sector, for example: start-up advice and support, equipment needed, marketing information, and advice on accessing new markets.

Financial assistance: All business require financial resources, specifically SBEs as they require start-up capital to enter and participate in the sector. Additionally, SBEs require financial resources to purchase equipment and invest in technology to enable their participation and growth in the sector. As reviewed by Herrington et al. (2009) and Olawale and Garwe (2010), a lack of financial support is the second most reported contributor of SBEs development and failure in the sector, after education and training in South Africa. The NWG in partnership with other public entities such as SEDA and SEFA should provide financial support to qualifying ecotourism SBEs to enable their participation in the ecotourism sector.

Business mentorship: Government ought to establish a mentorship program to provide SBEs with the opportunity to gain experience, enhance their skills and get enlightened about the fundamentals and practices of ecotourism. SBEs should learn from foreign private business what the best business model and practices to succeed in the sector. Furthermore, NWG should benchmark their practices and policy on how to

empower SBEs through the ecotourism sector by identifying and analysing other ecotourism destination practices and policy setting, such as that of the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga and others.

VI. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper was on the barriers that hinder the entry and participation of SBEs in the ecotourism sector within NWP in South Africa with the prospective of contributing towards the economic development of the region through creating jobs for the community and selling tourism products and services to both tourists and the host community. The focus group session was composed of tour operators who are members of the Greater Pilanesberg Tour Operator Association (GPTOA) operating in the Pilanesberg National Park (PNP), NWP. The three themes emerging from the data include (1) knowledge and understanding of ecotourism, (2) level of participation in the ecotourism sector, and lastly (3) policy views. Overall, the focus group members' insight and feelings concerning their participation in the PNP was that they had no information or knowledge concerning the regulations and policy for game vehicle trucks and other related matters. Furthermore, government adopted top-down approach in their decision-making and this approach is inadequate because SBEs needs and desires were not incorporated into policy setting.

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