

## Linking Higher Education to Perceived Benefits of Agro-Tourism for Sustainable Development in Rural Zambia

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### Abstract

**Background:** This paper highlights an integrated review comprising an analytical search of literature in agro-tourism. It addresses the question of conceptualizing agriculture and tourism as one sector that can contribute to sustainable development in rural areas in Zambia. The paper primarily raises concerns relating to how higher education can contribute to realizing the integration of agriculture and tourism as a means to foster sustainable development of rural areas. It delves into the research questions: What is agro-tourism? How can agro-tourism benefit communities in rural areas in Zambia? What factors influence agro-tourism? What is the involvement of higher education in fostering agro-tourism?

**Methods:** A systematic integrative review of the literature to inform higher education future practice and research in agro-tourism was conducted. Electronic databases were searched in July 2020 to September 2021 to collect required data. Inclusion criteria entailed only those articles which focused on the benefits and challenges of agro-tourism. Selection criteria for literature included studies of any design, quantitative or qualitative as well as review of articles.

**Results:** Our results reveals that agro-tourism contribute to maintaining the natural environment by encouraging activities such as on-farm bird watching and orchard tours. Further, natural and heritage preservation are cited as some of the benefits accrued from agro-tourism and agri-tourism alike. Results further indicate traceable nation-wide tangible heritage, which include buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts, and other physical resources considered worthy of preservation for the future. There is a gulf between higher education institutions' drive in agro-tourism and practice. Thus, findings suggest that higher education institutions should play a leading role in fostering the uptake of agro-tourism in the country.

**Conclusion:** Its evident that, that agro-tourism is at the interface of agriculture and tourism as such it can benefit both sectors of development sustainably. Though agro-tourism is still in its infancy it has shown a promising trajectory owing to its use in education, entertainment and sports among others. The authors contend that high education is instrumental in harnessing the potential of agro-tourism and its ability to transform the economy of Zambia.

**Key words:** *Agro-tourism, Benefits, Challenges, Sustainable Development, Zambia.*

## **Introduction**

Zambia needs to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and implement the Seventh National Development Plan, to be realised through feasible urban and rural development indicators. To realise this, higher education is one of the sectors that contribute significantly to the realization of these goals and plans. Engaging in productive and constructive ventures can yield transformative results. Prime among the drivers of sustainable development is agro-tourism. It is one of the drivers of sustainable development. It focuses on making rural areas become viable economic resources by transforming them into agricultural and tourism destinations and subsequently increased interest in rurality on a global scale. What is interesting is that it also emphasizes the need for more agro-tourism studies that will be capable of providing valuable guidelines for agro-tourism providers, tourists, and destination managers.

There is need to develop rural areas and make them attractive necessitates. This, in the long run, improves periphery sectors like infrastructure and services provision in general. Such efforts make rural living appealing. Rural areas in Zambia are characterized by underdevelopment, in most cases with farming as a principal economic activity. Apart from agriculture, there are other ways which can be explored and contribute to developing rural areas to acceptable levels. Tourism has potential for invigorated exploitation, which in turn can change rural life for the better. Petrović et al. (2017) describe the ability of tourism to finding solutions to problem faced in rural communities by stimulating their interest and positively contributing to sustainable development. Implementing a sound tourism development in rural areas could provide sustainable future for these vulnerable regions dependent on agricultural production (Dimitrovski, Leković and Joukes, 2019). Inherent in some rural areas are geographical features, historical sites and cultural heritage which can serve as tourist attractions. It is these qualities that rural areas are endowed with that provide bases for recreation. Notwithstanding the above, tourism evolves and can take on other developments.

Agro-tourism is one of the involving development products which is linked to the rural environment (Horng & Tsai, 2012). It entails exploitation of tourism aspects that are aligned to agriculture. It is referred to as “agriturismo” in Italy, “sleeping in the straw” in Switzerland, “farm stays” in New Zealand, and “farm holidays” in England. Agri-tourism is well established throughout Europe and in many other countries (Rilla, 1999a). It maximizes the use of farm setting and environment with local hospitality to increase income and welfare of the farming population. The agriculture sector is associated to improvement of tourism. It is one of the developmental sectors liable to take tourism performance to a higher level. This explains why agri-tourism is defined as an activity that offers opportunities to visitors to visit agricultural villages and to understand cultures. For example, in Malaysia it provides social-economic benefits for local communities (Shubi, 2007). Agro-tourism is a combination of agricultural and tourism activities intended to offer recreation and education experiences to visitors and serves as a source of income (Tiraieyari, 2012). Further taking Malaysia as a case in point, agri-tourism is developing as a form of agricultural diversification among local communities there. It can take many forms, including farm stays, bed and breakfast, pick-your-own produce, agricultural festivals, and farm tours for adults and children (McGehee, 2007).

## **Methodology**

### **Study Design**

In this study, a systematic integrative review of the literature to inform higher education future practice and research in agro-tourism was conducted. Electronic databases were searched in July 2020 to September 2021 to collect required data. Setting and population comprised agro-tourism activities in terms of benefits and challenges in any setting. Selection criteria for literature included studies of any design, quantitative or qualitative as well as review of articles (Banda, et. al., 2017; Kasonde-Ng'andu, 2013). A review of literature was conducted to collect a set of relevant articles that met the specific inclusion criteria. A systematic plan was devised for data collection and the method

of collection clearly described and accurately documented (Randolph, 2009). Electronic data base searches resulted into obtaining literature in agro-tourism and related topics. Other methods used included hand searching references of articles that were either included or excluded. A narrative method was used to synthesize data collected from reviewed literature. Results yielded 52 articles which met the criteria described herein and prescribed as required.

### **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**

Each article title and abstract was reviewed to determine inclusion criteria, if an article could not be eliminated by reading the abstract; the article was reviewed in further detail. The first criterion established was to include articles on agro-tourism indicating associated benefits and challenges. Only peer-reviewed journals were accessed to ensure quality and accuracy. All articles published up to the year 2020 on agro-tourism were targeted and included in the database.

### **Search Terms**

Terms used for searching literature included the following: agro-tourism, agri-tourism, potential benefits: Economic, social economic, environmental sustainable development, poverty alleviation, challenges, recreating farms, impact of agro-tourism. Supplemental search methods included references of several review articles and studies that did not meet inclusion criteria were hand-searched.

Extraction of data and its quality were assured by reading the articles more than once. After selecting the articles, a comprehensive understanding of the articles was attained by reading each several times to identify themes relating to benefits and challenges in agro-tourism. Notably, some of the articles included: Potential of agri-tourism in revitalizing rural communities: Some empirical results by Lan and Hanh (2020); The impact of agro-tourism on the local community (A case study of Sơn Islet, Cần Thơ City, Vietnam) by Ammirato and Felicetti, (2013); Agri-tourism: Structured literature review and bibliometric analysis Sourav

Rauniyar, Maya Kant Awasthi, Sanjeev Kapoor and Ashok Mishra (2021); Sriyadi, and Istiyanti (2021) Agritourism Development Model Based on Local Wisdom in Karangtengah Village Imogiri Bantul DIY.

This review reflects data as contained in the published articles studied. These articles varied in terms of location of authors. The authors were from America, Europe, Asia and Africa. This creates an opportunity to identify common themes related to health care professional engagement focusing on perceptions of agro-tourism as the phenomenon of interest across diverse settings.

Data from articles was synthesized and analysed. Emerging concepts were discussed after which identification of themes and subthemes related to benefits and challenges was done.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section is segmented into thematic areas covering various topical issues uncovered in the study. The subtitles are a consensus of the issues that emerged during data collection and continuously transcribed and categorised as data evolved. They include: Agro-tourism, higher education, potential benefits: Economic, social economic, environmental sustainable development, poverty alleviation, challenges, recreating farms, impact of agro-tourism.

Evident in the synthesis of contents of articles in agro-tourism were perceived benefits and challenges. There were more themes related to benefits than challenges.

### **Agro-Tourism**

Agro-tourism has the potential to raise people's consciousness with regard to sustainable development. These findings are consistent with those by Hamzah et al. (2011) who explain that agro-tourism paves way for tourists to reach remote rural areas and contribute to adding value by paying for available goods and services. Agro-tourism provides an opportunity for farmers to promote local products to tourists who in turn show appreciation by paying for the goods and services offered. Agro-tourism provides tourists the rarest

opportunity to visit farms research centres, offers an opportunity for relaxation and peaceful retreat away from home. Some of the activities that agro-tourism offers include including homestay, sport-fishing, floating chalet, fish barbecue plazas, river edging, fireflies seeking expeditions, picnics and village tours (Hamzah et al., 2011). Accrued benefits from agro-tourism related to aspects of social, economy, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, environmental sustainability and food production. Economical and sociocultural benefits were identified.

### **Higher Education**

Education is closely linked to agro-tourism. This because knowledge and skills are required to design destinations that are attractive to visitors. There is need for understanding dynamics of environments in terms of their functionality so that appropriate segments of development are applied. According to Winkle and Bueddefeld (2020) agri-tourism is an effective way to promote sustainable agricultural practices and agricultural literacy. As such, agri-tourism is an increasingly important way for the general public to learn about agricultural practices, issues, and concepts. However, while agro-tourism supports learning, it is the extent to which it is organized that is a source of concern. This calls for a well-designed curriculum that can facilitate meaningful learning. Higher learning institutions are supposed to get involved and contribute to organizing effective learning programmes in agro-tourism. Winkle and Bueddefield (2020) advocates for deeper and more complex forms of learning are possible when intentionally linking agri-tourism experiences to agricultural literacy goals.

### **Social Benefits**

Community empowerment was linked to agro-tourism in terms of contributing attainment of higher levels of development than was case the before. Agro-tourism fosters a sense of pride and confidence. Quality of life and standard of living improve among community members due to a strong purchasing power as a result of diversified and intensified economic activities inherit in agro-tourism. Agro-tourism was noted to provide an

opportunity for people from different cultural backgrounds to interact. It also provides an opportunity for visitors to come into direct contact with local community to experience the area and to appreciate local products, services and landscape (Tiraieyari, 2012). Cultural transformation through exchange of ideas on how things are perceived by people from different regions. It intensifies recognition of cultural practices which promote community's identity. Intensification of cultural activities accords young people to, learn and appreciate their tradition and customs. Furthermore, agro-tourism strengthens community institution, socialization and networking. Agro-tourism has the capacity to improve social empowerment system by strengthening community members' social ties, and develop their social skills and relationships. Socially people are exposed to various skills and knowledge in agriculture and tourism which are shared among themselves through interaction. Increasing income of local community, diversifying and intensifying economic activities are some of the accrued benefits derived from agro-tourism. Rural tourism is basically a means of solving social problems of the village and supporting farmers (Sriyadi and Insinyati (2020). provide job opportunities and alleviating poverty. Due to activities involved in agro-tourism, labour force is required. Preparation of pieces of land for farming and tourism requires engaging some people to do the work. This means that jobs in farming and tourism are created in the process of achieving agro-tourism. Adom, Alimov and Gouthami (2021) promotes the diversification of agricultural lands and farms for agri-tourism has remained a golden option for farmers to generate additional income aside from their usual farming activities. Furthermore, Djamaludin, (2013) notes varying farm operation and offering some kind of services and agro-touristic goods to visitors and finally improving farmers' income/salaries.

Yadav (n.d.) notes that agro-tourism increases harmony amongst the rural and urban communities as well as revitalisation of the body and the mind of tourists. Agro-tourism reconnects visitors from urban areas to rural lifestyles. It provides people with an opportunity to

experience life in rural areas in an enjoyable manner. Hadiwijoyo (2012) adds on that agro-tourism is a form of sustainable tourism that allows travellers to connect closely to the local community they visit. As people move from one place to another, they tend to share their experiences with others. Usually those who host tourism events get more exposure to new things than visitors. It also increases awareness and learning about the local way of life for tourists (Nurlaela, 2021). In this way, agrotourism creates means for knowledge and skills exchange which are beneficial to development, socially and economically. Agro-tourism can be used as a means for preservation and promotion of traditional knowledge and wisdom of rural communities (Yadav, n.d.).

### **Economic Benefits**

Agro-tourism has significant impacts on local community in terms of revenue and employment. It can contribute to rural development by generating new jobs and new value added. Custom specific activities can be added to the destination tourism sites which provides cultural identity. The effort to empower local communities is by involving them in a variety of tourism development activities including agrotourism management. This done by inclusion of other services and goods to the tourism package which appeal to visitors. Provision of facilities for food which visitors can eat while on site adds to the value destinations. Agro-tourism is identified as one of the ways for diversifying economic activity. Increased income for local community members through added resources. This could emanate from development of agriculture. Intensification of economic activities due to agro-tourism intervention improve the local economy. Gusti (2007) reports that initiating tourism related business has a trickle-down effect on community members. This is because it results in development and improvement of local products which serve as tourist attractions such as agricultural products, souvenirs or handicrafts and establishment of accommodation for visitors. Agro-tourism is perceived as a reliable source for extra income generation (Tiraieyari, 2012; Tiraieyari, 2012). Agro-tourism has a positive effect on the demand for local products, intensify regional marketing

efforts and widen markets linkages and networking. Consequently, money making activities will be boosted thereby generating profits for the community. Skilled and unskilled people have access to employment opportunities. For example, development of tourism business requires human resource while at the same time other people will empowered by getting involved in popularizing traditional products such as curios. Agro-tourism is seen as an alternative means to generate income.

Agro-tourism creates economic activities that increase revenue and marketing opportunities thereby improving quality of life for farmers and other community members (Schilling, Sullivan, & Komar, 2012; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Diversification of the economy of rural areas of the country. Creation of jobs to increase the income of rural communities of the country (Yadav, n.d.).

### **Poverty Alleviation**

Agro-tourism has the ability to intensify and diversify economic activities which can contribute to decreasing poverty levels among community members. Poverty alleviation can be achieved if agro-tourism is linked to creation of employment among community members. This is because of the intensification and diversification of economic opportunities people are availed with. Agro-tourism can initiate development of infrastructure such as roads, health centres, markets and other amenities required for creation of a conducive environment worthy appealing to tourists, locally and internationally. Agro-tourism accords a wider employment opportunity to local people is certain (Yanget al., 2010).

### **Sustainable Development**

Community members have their purchasing power strengthened which contributes to sustainable development through their involvement in income generation. Granau and Koffman (2008) furthermore justified that in terms of social development. Agro-tourism activities can be a tool for the preservation of cultural identity, to further develop the local societies and to offer a fair allocation of resources. Conversely, Granau and

Koffman (2008) also stressed that agro-tourism doubtlessly will develop people's positive attitude towards environment preservation. Farmers who venture in agro-tourism are accorded a chance to expand and diversify their agricultural products and related industry. The main purposes behind agro-tourism are sustainable rural development (Tiraieyari, 2012). Agro-tourism is perceived to be a tool of expanding farm operations; increasing awareness of local agricultural products; using farm based products in an innovative way; improving farm income (Tiraieyari, 2012).

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Agro-tourism has not only provided a supplementary income and new employment opportunities to the rural community, but it has also increased the conservation of the environment and appreciation of minority cultures and rural lifestyle. Agro-tourism is one of the means used for preserving natural resources. Community members tend to develop positive attitudes towards their immediate environment and other surrounding areas because of accrued benefits that are accrued due to tourism. It is this way that agro-tourism is perceived as a catalyst for change towards management of environments. Anthopolou (2000) and Mpolomoka (2021) observe that authorities and the community get inspired to preserve the environment more than before and will create environmental awareness among members. Agro-tourism can help to preserve natural, historical and cultural resources of communities. Qingwen (2021) describes agri-cultural heritage as a compound that integrates characteristics of natural, cultural and intangible cultural heritage, and a typical social-economic-natural complex ecosystem composed of economic, biological, technological, and cultural and landscape components. They have profound historical accumulation and rich and plentiful cultural diversity and have the value of cultural inheritance in social organization, spirit, religious belief and arts. Finally, the unique landscapes are formed in the long-term human-nature interaction. Such practices contribute to maintaining the authenticity of the environment and keeping it fascinating. In agreement Sijlbing (2010) noted that sustainable tourism activities

offer a solution for environmental sustainability. Thus agro-tourism has the ability to transform potential rural tourism environments into desirable destinations worthy visiting. Improvement of the agriculture in rural areas contributes to not only sustaining the environment, but also avoiding depopulating the areas by engaging people in constructive activities. Increasing appreciation of the importance of conserving agricultural land uses (Tiraieyari, 2012).

Agro-tourism contributes to maintaining the natural environment by encouraging activities such as on-farm bird watching, orchard tours. Natural and heritage preservation is cited as one of the benefits accrued from agri-tourism. Tangible heritage, which includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts, and other physical resources considered worthy of preservation for the future (Mpolomoka, 2021; UNESCO, 2013; Banda and Mpolomoka, et al 2018), are an important component of the rural landscape and the agri-tourism appeal. Burrows, Fennell, Redlin, and Verschoor (2007) suggested that agro-tourism operations in low-populated rural areas partner with local artists and cultural providers (e.g. galleries) to strengthen the tourism appeal of their town and entice urban visitors. Barbieri (2013) found that agro-tourism farms do contribute significantly to preservation of heritage. Natural heritage provides visitors with a variety of cultural experiences like those related to rural heritage. Subsequently, farmers are supposed to benefit from preservation of rural cultural heritage by allowing visitations to their farm sites for people to see and appreciate the antique tools used in farming and other related items. Heritage endowment is an associated value to agro-tourism (LaPan, Barbieri (2013).It provides a fresh perspective to the visitors towards mother-nature and offers them with both pleasure and leisure (Yadav, n.d.). Agro-tourism provides visitors with a peaceful and natural surrounding close with pristine nature. For example, white sandy beaches and the rows of pine trees providing perfect shades for the tourists to relax and enjoy the sea breeze and breath taking seaside view. Additionally, nature's beauty and serenity as well as tradition and culture of the local people appeal to the tourists.

## **Food Production**

It was noted that visitors to various farming blocks, training institutions, pleasure resorts, historical sites and tourist attractions get the unique opportunity to meet farmers and learn the process of food production (Mwansa, 2015; Yadav, n.d.). Moreover, agro-tourism provides visitors a closer look at the rural life and a taste of local delicious food.

## **Challenges**

Challenges were identified in studies analysed and include: lack and inadequate support to farming families operating tourism enterprises (Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute, 2015). General lack of interest of the present educated generation towards the agro-tourism and agriculture sectors. The main reason for such apathy towards the agricultural sector seems to be due to a lack of social recognition and respect in the society and lack of financial incentives as well.

This study reviewed literature on agro-tourism in terms of perceived benefits and challenges. While agro-tourism started a long time ago in America, it is a new phenomenon in some parts of the world of which Africa is part. The perceived benefits accrued from engaging in agro-tourism outweigh the challenges. This is because some of these challenges can be addressed by proper mobilization of resources which includes education to foster change of attitude and behaviour towards initiating and sustaining ag-tourism. It is evident from the benefits noted that agro-tourism can be a means to developing rural areas. Higher education has a role to play in promoting agro-tourism through engaging in rural activities that initiate development.

## **Conclusion**

This review focused on understanding benefits accrued from agro-tourism and challenges therein. Literature reviewed reveals that agro-tourism is at the interface of agriculture and tourism as such it can benefit both sectors of development sustainably. It further showed that agro-tourism is still in its infancy in Zambia, but

on a promising trajectory owing to the so far evident uses in education, entertainment and sporting among others.

The authors herein contend that high education in its effort to contribute to the development of this country must realise that agro-tourism can be harnessed to transform the rural economy of the country. It can solve the issues of rural unemployment, consistent neglect of the agriculture sector and urban migration.

Results indicate traceable nation-wide tangible heritage, which include buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts, and other physical resources considered worthy of preservation for the future. There is a gulf between higher education institutions' drive in agro-tourism and practice. Thus, findings suggest that higher education institutions should play a leading role in fostering the uptake of agro-tourism in the country.

## **Limitations**

This paper itself has its limitations as it was designed as a desktop critical analysis rather than a study that has respondents and collects their viewpoints and analyses them. However, its findings provide insight into a research that should make site visitations of the seemingly upcoming agro-tourist enterprises in Zambia. Such a viewpoint is espoused by Theofanidis, Dimitrios, & Fountouki, Antigoni. (2019:161) who contend that in order to optimise a study from contemplation to completion, a valid self-reflective exercise during all research stages should be exercised.

## **Availability of data and materials**

The data used and analysed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## **Abbreviations**

None

## **Appendices**

None

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### **Acknowledgement**

The authors wish to thank Dr. Selina Banda for initiating the idea of this research

### **Funding**

No funding was received for us to conduct this study from any public or private institution including individuals.

### **Authors Contributions:**

Dr Selina Banda coordinated the entire research process, while Dr Luchembe Musonda, Dr Daniel Lupiya Mpolomoka and Margaret Pansho collected, analysed and refined the drafted manuscript. Dr Daniel Lupiya Mpolomoka and Dr Luchembe Musonda were also skilful in editing, type setting and ensuring grammar and the writing style was consistent throughout the article. We, the authors, further wish to state that we all reviewed the manuscript to ensure that the content contained therein is correct before finally submitting it to the Journal.

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### **Ethical declarations**

All participants who participated in the study consented before proceeding with responding to the questions. Nonetheless, this study did not require any ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board.

### **Consent for publications**

No images, individual details or videos for clients' data are part of this paper.

### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### **Declaration of interests**

Not applicable

### **Submission declaration and verification**

We declare that this paper has not been submitted to any Journal besides this one.

### **Use of inclusive language**

Not applicable