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Views and Perceptions of Residents on Township Tourism Development: Empirical Evidence from Epworth, Highfields and Mbare

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Abstract:

Township tourism to a certain degree has been in existence in Zimbabwe since the attainment of independence from colonial rule in 1980. It has however not been well organized to become meaningful and sustainable for the benefit of ordinary local residents. In the 1980's it was in the form of Harare City tours that included such areas as Mbare and Mupedzanhamo Markets in Mbare high density suburb as well as the balancing rocks in Epworth high density township. The selection and inclusion of some houses in the high density suburb of Highfields, that were formerly occupied by liberation war heroes and nationalists and turning them into tourist facilities can therefore not be said to be the beginning of township tourism in Zimbabwe. This paper suggests that, the direction taken by authorities in October 2012 did not take into account all the aspects of pro-poor tourism development nor did it respect all the necessary steps towards the enhancement of responsible and sustainable community development. The research conducted in the township of Highfields found out that over 90% of the locals were unable to appreciate how they could effectively benefit from this initiative. The research also identified some knowledge gaps resulting from lack of effective sensitization and buy-in from the local communities. Researchers recommend some steps that could be considered to strengthen the foundation laid and to ensure acceptability and sustenance of tourism activities in the community. The study contributes to the fundamental issues of sustainable tourism development and recommends best practices that accommodate responsible township tourism in developing nations.

Keywords: Township, tourism and sustainable development

1. Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a research which sought to establish the attitudes and perceptions of residents of three high density suburbs in Zimbabwe with regards to the concept of township tourism. The targeted suburbs of Highfields, Epworth and Mbare are amongst the oldest urban communities established by the colonial regime to accommodate black people before the country's attainment of independence. Township tourism involves the packaging of tours by tourists into townships and high density suburbs for the purposes of appreciating urban lifestyles and connecting with ordinary people in the city (Dondolo, 2002). It is quite popular in South Africa, India, Brazil and Jamaica. Though it has often been criticised for catalysing the hybridisation of cultures and proliferation of unacceptable practices such as drug abuse (Odede, 2010), it is known to bring numerous advantages for members of the community. The benefits of this form of tourism include employment creation, infrastructure development and improvement residents' quality of life. The objective of this study was to establish the way in which the drive to promote township tourism in Zimbabwe, officially launched in October 2012 has been received by host communities. The perceptions of residents and their views and recommendations for the sustainable development of tourism initiatives in their communities were collected and analysed, leading to conclusions and recommendations. Using a structured questionnaire and key informant interviews in the targeted communities, the researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data, which were analysed concurrently.

1.1. Background to the study

After years of neglect, township tourism has of late become the subject of debate in Zimbabwe. This debate and inspiration from the need to preserve the heritage of the founding fathers of the nation Zimbabwe, led to the historic launch of township tourism initiatives

in October 2013. The main focus of the launch was the transformation of the former houses of liberation war icons such as President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, the late Herbert Chitepo, the late Leopold Takawira, the late Enos Nkala among other liberation war luminaries, into tourist attractions. The leaders who sacrificed their lives and engaged in political action which led to the liberation of the country from the colonial rule of Britain, occupy a significant part of the history of Zimbabwe. The houses are located in Highfields, a high density suburb in Harare. The launch of township tourism was meant to be the beginning of protracted development of township tourism initiatives around the country. The research was inspired by media reports criticising this move, as well as commentaries from stakeholders indicating that the people of Highfields were not ready to accept it (www.thestandard.co.zw, 04/11/12), (www.thezimbabwean.com, 07/11/12). The researchers sought to verify the true facts from the grassroots, with the objective of arriving at conclusions and recommendations informed by empirical research.

The development of township tourism across the world is often spearheaded and supported by governments and national tourism organisations. This is normally done out of the need to diversify tourism product ranges and to enhance already existing attractions by providing tourists with an opportunity to mix with host communities and connect with their culture. Townships, which are located close to city centres, provide a different and interesting environment for tourists visiting the major cities or those who are in transit to major tourist attractions around the country. This form of tourism tends to originate from top-down decisions which are often made without any involvement of host communities. The arrival of tourists in the community then comes as a shock to residents who sometimes are not familiar with the benefits of this concept. In some cases little or no benefits accrue to community members, leading to hostility and indifference from local people. In light of these problems associated with this form of tourism, the research sought to gather information on the community's perceptions and views with regards to township tourism development in Highfields, Epworth and Mbare suburbs in Harare.

1.2. Research objectives

- To establish the views and perceptions of residents on the concept of township tourism.
- To identify knowledge gaps that exist regarding Government sponsored township tourism initiatives.
- To assess the benefits and value addition of township tourism to the local residents.
- To gather ideas and recommendations for sustainable township tourism development.

1.3. Research questions

- What are the views and perceptions of community members with regards to township tourism?
- To what extent are residents familiar with the concept of township tourism?
- Are residents benefiting from township tourism activities?
- In what ways could stakeholders ensure the sustainability of township tourism initiatives?

2. Literature Review

Township or slum tourism came into being in the metropolises of several developing countries and emerging nations dating back to the mid-1990s (Rofles, 2009). In different countries other terms have become more common to better describe the localised forms of slum tourism. The most famous terms are of course *favela tourism* in Brazil slums, "Ashwa'iyyatt", in Egypt, and *township tourism* in South Africa (Frenzel and Koens, 2012). The Global economic meltdown and a decline in traditional manufacturing activities have led cities to turn to tourism as one element of strategies for economic regeneration and local economic development (Law, 1996; Beauregard, 1998; Telfer, 2002). Township or slum tourism originally focused on the slums of London and Manhattan in the 19th Century, slum tourism is now becoming increasingly prominent in developing nations, including India, Brazil, Kenya and Indonesia (Rofles, 2009). A study conducted by a 2010 study by the University of Pennsylvania showed that tourists in Mumbai's Dharavi slum were motivated primarily by curiosity, as opposed to several competing push factors such as social comparison, entertainment, education, or self-actualization. In South Africa township tours started with visits to the township of Soweto (South Western Township of Johannesburg) in the early 1990s. The post-Apartheid era has seen the development of a robust and vibrant township tourism product that competes well with world leading destinations in Brazil, India and USA).

In 2006 it is estimated that at least 300 000 tourists undertook township tours in Cape Town. It is anticipated that the benefits from this type of tourism will help improve the well-being of the local residents through the creation of jobs, infrastructure development and income from various exchanges for services consumed by the tourists. Township tourism would ordinarily expose tourists to local dwellings, cultural shows, UN developed historic sites and most important a close interaction with the local populace. Nevertheless there are negative views because of what is perceived as commercialization of poverty as a tourist commodity characterized by voyeurism and exploitation (Meschank 2010). Nevertheless studies by (Rofles 2009; Freire-Medeiros 2007, 2009) acknowledge tour promoters' impetus and efforts in counteracting the negative image of slum tourism by painting a better image of the tours.

Township tourism benefits to local communities continue to be viewed with suspicion because there is not much to see for it in terms of economic improvement or welfare of the participating communities (Goudie et al. 1999, pp. 27-28). Kennedy Odede wrote in the New York Times Op-Ed section slum tourism "turns poverty into entertainment, something that can be momentarily experienced and then escaped from." The researchers nevertheless opine that township tourism could become a formidable source of income and jobs for the disadvantaged members of the society (Rofles, 2009 & Meschank 2009).

3. Research Methodology

In this study the researchers applied both the qualitative and quantitative approaches with the objective of ensuring a holistic approach to the study of the situation on the ground. Quantitative research was also selected to enable objective and verifiable measurement of the variables under consideration. There are two distinct advantages of using this approach. First is that the results are statistically reliable. And the second advantage being that, the results are projectable to the population. In selecting the appropriate methodology for this study, the benefits and shortcomings of the different methodologies were taken into consideration.

3.1. Population

The relevant population for this research study was all residents from the three high density suburbs of Highfields, Epworth and Mbare. The size of the population is quite dynamic it could be estimated to be between 500,000 to 700 000 people. In this study the respondents that were targeted were from the age of 18 and above to ensure that mature and appropriate answers were obtained.

3.2. Sampling

Sampling remains the core of research and data collection. Sampling methods are divided into two main categories, one being probability also known as random sampling and the other called non-probability sampling. In line with quantitative research selected for this study, probability sampling was used as it enhances statistical analysis. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed in Highfields and 200 of them were found to be completed and useable. The researchers also conducted 36 key informant interviews in Mbare and 32 in Epworth using simple random sampling. This enabled the comparative analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings from the three suburbs.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data went through some comprehensive data analysis including the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS).

3.4. Limitations

Limitations to the study included time and budgetary constraints. However, to weaken the strength of these limitations, the researchers systematically used the resources efficiently and time management effectively.

4. Research Findings

The tables and figures below present findings of the research as extracted from the questionnaires distributed to a total of 200 residents of Highfields suburb as well as the interviews conducted in Epworth and Mbare.

4.1. Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

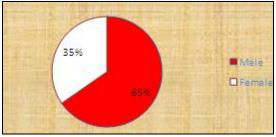


Figure 1: Gender of respondents

The trend indicated in fig 1 above shows that there were more men than women who took part in the study. This should not be viewed as an indication that there are more men than women in Highfields suburb. From experiences during the data gathering process men were more willing to take part possibly owing to cultural influences or empowerment issues. In the average African community the man is viewed as the one responsible for all things technical and any form of communication with outsiders. In some families women and girls can only speak to strangers when they have permission from the men while in some communities women are not empowered to make decisions or to have an opinion of their own. It is however a fact that these trends differ from one community to another one family to another and depending on the status of women.

4.2. Respondents' Age Range



Figure 2: Age range

The random sample used in this study was comprised of respondents of varied age groups with the 21-30 year agegroup at 25% while the elderly ranging 51 years and above at 12 %. Most of the questionnaires were fillied in by respondents at shopping centres and public gatherings though some were filled in at home. Due to this fact responents were mainly from the economically active groups of the community who engaged in entrepreneurial activities owere leaving for work or arriving from the city.

4.3. Respondents' Qualifications



Figure 3: Highest qualifications

The respondents' level of education is presented in figure 3.

4.4. Duration of Stay in Highfields

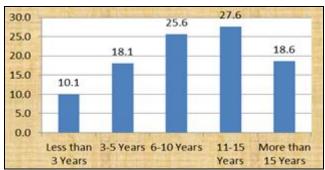


Figure 4: Years living in Highfields

To further understand the nature of the sample and to establish whether it was representative enough the researchers gathered information about the length of time they have lived in Highfields. The move sought to avoid using data collected from people who have no knowledge of the things happening in the suburb. Fig 4 presents the distribution across respondents.

4.5. Respondents' Familiarity with Township Tourism

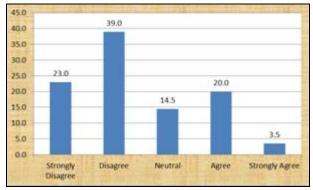


Figure 5: Familiarity with township tourism

62% of the respondents profess ignorance of the concept of township tourism while 14.5% were neutral. Even in the interviews conducted in Mbare and Epworth indications were that people have lost touch with the concept. This is so even in Highfields where a high profile launch was organised by the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry in 2013. Such findings should make stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector ask themselves where the missing link is

4.6. Respondents' Perception of Township Tourism

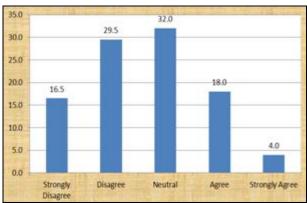


Figure 6: Perceptions on Township tourism development

On whether the development of township tourism is a welcome concept in Highfields 46% of respondents were in the negative while 32% were neutral. This was also confirmed in the interviews conducted in the two other suburbs where township tourism was once vibrant. What needs to be established is whether this form of tourism has had negative impacts in these communities or there are other reasons for the negative responses.

4.7. Consultation of Respondents prior to Launch of Township Tourism

V	We were consulted before the launch of township tourism by the Government						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
Valid	Strongly Disagree	117	58.5	58.5	58.5		
	Disagree	62	31.0	31.0	89.5		
	Neutral	17	8.5	8.5	98.0		
	Agree	4	2.0	2.0	100.0		
	Total	200	100.0	100.0			

Table 1

This question was specifically targeted at the people of Highfields where township tourism was launched by Government. The response pattern shows that 89.5% responded negatively to this statement. 8.5% were neutral while 2% agreed. This must be a clear message to tourism planners in Zimbabwe coming from communities at grassroots level.

4.8. Township Tourism Benefits at Personal Level

I am benefiting from township tourism activities here in Highfields						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	126	63.0	63.0	63.0	
	Disagree	60	30.0	30.0	93.0	
	Neutral	10	5.0	5.0	98.0	
	Agree	3	1.5	1.5	99.5	
	Strongly Agree	1	.5	.5	100.0	
	Total	200	100.0	100.0		

Table 2

93% of the respondents expressed that they were not benefiting from township tourism, quite significant percentage. The remaining percentage shows that the amount of township tourism activities in Highfields is very low or almost insignificant. Responses from Epworth and Mbare showed the same trend in view of the fact that tourism activities are no longer well-coordinated in these areas.

4.9. Benefits at Community Level

Others are benefiting from tourism initiatives here in Highfields						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	21	10.5	10.5	10.5	
	Disagree	46	23.0	23.0	33.5	
	Neutral	67	33.5	33.5	67.0	
	Agree	57	28.5	28.5	95.5	
	Strongly Agree	9	4.5	4.5	100.0	
	Total	200	100.0	100.0		

Table 3

The distribution of responses here shows that 33% of the respondents think there are some people who are benefiting from Township tourism in Highfields. We however need to take note of the fact that the way the concept was launched and the accompanying pomp and fanfare as well as coverage on radio and television could easily make one think that there are people who are benefiting somewhere. In the interviews there was confusion on the definition of township tourism thus resulting in answers that did not point to one specific trend. In Epworth for example tourism activities have for some time concentrated on the balancing rocks while there has been little or no contact between tourists and community members.

4.10. Need for Community Education on Township Tourism

Tourism authorities need to inform us about the concept of township tourism						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5	
	Disagree	2	1.0	1.0	1.5	
	Neutral	10	5.0	5.0	6.5	
	Agree	92	46.0	46.0	52.5	
	Strongly Agree	95	47.5	47.5	100.0	
	Total	200	100.0	100.0		

Table 4

93.5% of respondents were positive that authorities need to inform them about the concept. This points to the need for sensitisation and education on the part of community members before initiatives get rolled out. In Epworth and Mbare respondents professed ignorance of consultations or involvement of community members in the development of initiatives.

4.11. Readiness for the Establishment of Township Tourism Facilities

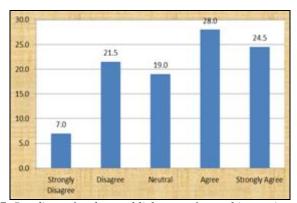


Figure 7: Readiness for the establishment of township tourism facilities

From the responses it would appear people are ready for the establishment of township tourism facilities in their communities. The trend was similar in Epworth and Mbare as evidenced by explanations during interviews. It is a fact that the communities see any form of development as a potential for a variety of opportunities for the people.

4.12. Respondents' Appreciation of the Importance and value of Township Tourism

Wed	We do not appreciate the importance and value of community based tourism						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
Valid	Strongly Disagree	13	6.5	6.5	6.5		
	Disagree	43	21.5	21.5	28.0		
	Neutral	34	17.0	17.0	45.0		
	Agree	31	15.5	15.5	60.5		
	Strongly Agree	79	39.5	39.5	100.0		
	Total	200	100.0	100.0			

Table 5

55% of the respondents were in the positive while17% were neutral which indicates the need for sensitisation of communities. Respondents who are educated and who follow the news could have accounted for the 28% who indicated that they appreciate this form of tourism.

4.13. Need for Authorities to Invest More into Tourism Infrastructure.

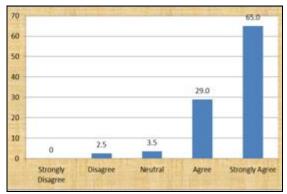


Figure 8: Need for Authorities to Invest More into Tourism Infrastructure

From the observations made during the research process and the time township tourism was launched it was evident that there was serious need for investment in infrastructure to support tourism activities in Highfields. This explains the 65% that strongly agree and the 29% that agree with this statement. Roads and other social amenities need attention while an information office might be necessary.

4.14. Adequacy of Infrastructure to Support Tourism Activities in the Community

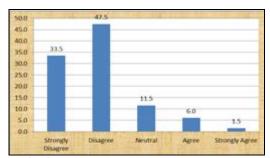


Figure 9: Adequacy of Infrastructure to Support Tourism Activities in the Community

The response rate is consistent with observations and outcomes from the interviews conducted in Highfields, Epworth and Mbare. The need for infrastructure to support the township tourism initiatives launched cannot be overemphasised considering the sewage and water problems in the three suburbs of Epworth, Mbare and Highfields.

4.15. Township Tourism and the Invasion of One's Privacy

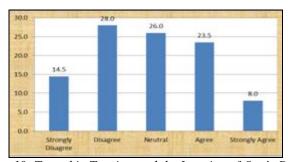


Figure 10: Township Tourism and the Invasion of One's Privacy

The response rate to this question shows that the majority of respondents did not agree with this assertion. The 26% who were neutral could mean all sorts of things but the findings here generally show that the majority of respondents did not view township tourism in this light. Interviews in Mbare and Epworth also showed the same trend. The result could also owe to the fact that no meaningful tourism has been taking place in these areas lately meaning that responses were motivated by opinions rather than experience.

4.16. Township Tourism and Cultural Norms

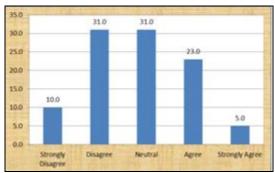


Figure 11: Township Tourism Conflicts with Cultural Norms.

The response rate here shows that 31% disagreed with this statement while 10% strongly disagreed, 31% were neutral making 72% of respondents who do not subscribe to this view. This could mean that respondents are generally comfortable with the concept of township tourism and do not have serious issues with the concept with regards to cultural norms and beliefs.

4.17. Township Tourism and Showcasing Poverty

Introduction of tourism activities here is like showcasing poverty to the whole world						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	4.0	4.0	4.0	
	Disagree	25	12.5	12.5	16.5	
	Neutral	40	20.0	20.0	36.5	
	Agree	96	48.0	48.0	84.5	
	Strongly Agree	31	15.5	15.5	100.0	
	Total	200	100.0	100.0		

Table 6

63.5 of respondents are in agreement with this statement possibly owing to the lifestyles of the respondents. As the researchers entered the communities they were greeted with a variety of lifestyles, some of which exhibited serious poverty and lack. The way children were dressed and the belongings some families had in their houses showed that the majority of families in the three suburbs are struggling to make ends meet. This could explain the pattern of responses to this statement.

4.18. Tourism Activities and Poverty Alleviation in the Community

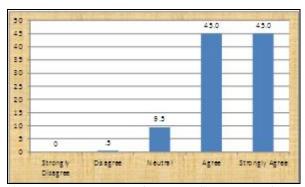


Figure 12: Tourism activities and poverty alleviation in the community

Residents of the three communities expressed high hopes and expectations with regards to township tourism development. In the interviews a wide range of scenarios were predicted once tourism activities became functional and effective. 90% of the respondents in Highfields agreed that this form of tourism has the potential of helping alleviate poverty in the community. Where tourism is well coordinated and organised it is true that economic benefits can accrue to the host communities.

4.19. Tourism Initiatives and Employment Creation

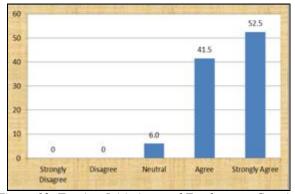


Figure 13: Tourism Initiatives and Employment Creation

Apart from the 6% who were neutal the rest of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. It is a fact that tourism, being a labour intensive industry would create employment opportunities for members of the host communities. Findings from the interviews contain similar sentiments from the residents of Mbare and Epworth though in some cases epectations sounded quite unrealistic.

These were the findings of the research as extracted from the questionnaires and interview guides used for data collection. The next component of this paper seeks to analyse the data and draw conclusions and recommendations that could assist stakeholders in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate in general how the concept of township tourism was perceived by the local residents of Highfields, Mbare and Epworth high density suburbs in Harare.

From the findings, the concept of township tourism in Zimbabwe is indeed still a dream in as far as the population of those living in townships is concerned. In line with this survey which was conducted in Harare in March 2014 in the high density suburbs of Highfields, Mbare and Epworth, 85% of the respondents had no idea of this concept. From respondents that were interviewed and those who answered questions from questionnaires, developing township tourism in Zimbabwe was not supported by infrastructure development and relevant community involvement. This was contrary to the impression portrayed at the time of the launch which seemed to point to the availability of resources and buy-in from the host communities.

In light of the dynamic nature of populations in high density suburbs the residents of the targeted areas seemed to find the concept of township tourism fairly new and were not clear about how best they could invest or benefit from such business initiatives in order to earn a living. In Mbare for example, tourism activities were not of much significance to the general public apart from the few that had direct contact with tourists who bought souvenirs from them at the Market. While visitations to the balancing rocks at Epworth and tours of the Mbare market place and its surroundings used to be conducted years ago, not many people were aware such activities ever took place.

The findings of the study were that the majority of those in areas where township tourism was seen to have some potential needed accurate information about the concept. Therefore tourism authorities have a major responsibility to educate and sensitise the local residents on the aspects of this brand of tourism if initiatives by the Ministry are to bear any fruits.

The findings revealed that not enough groundwork and stakeholder consultation had been conducted prior to the launch of Township Tourism in Highfields. From the interviews conducted, stakeholders doubted the seriousness of the authorities and even sounded like they viewed the whole process as a political gimmick that would not stand the test of time. Though respondents expressed high hopes with regards to the potential benefits of tourism in the community questions were still raised on whether the authorities would act in accordance with their promises.

6. Recommendations

While a good number of countries have made tremendous strides in the development of meaningful and sustainable township tourism, Zimbabwe has a few challenges that require overcoming in order for the nation to realize the goals and objectives township tourism.

To begin with, the necessary infrastructure required to embark on a mission to establish the basis for sustainable township tourism does not exist in any township in Zimbabwe. Just how residents in the various towns in the country would be in a position to make a living out of township tourism at the present state they are in is unimaginable.

Furthermore, to a certain degree, tourism in Zimbabwe is still generally regarded by the locals as a preserve for foreigners and those that are rich. And culturally, there are a number of issues that are unacceptable by the Zimbabwean way of doing things. As shown by the study, there is an element of an imposition of township tourism to the locals by the national authorities since most of the residents are unfamiliar with the concept.

Therefore, a buy-in process would be necessary for the community to conceptualize the whole phenomenon of township tourism. The most effective methods to achieve this will be through seminars, workshops and training programmes where all grey areas about this concept could be ironed out to ensure that, conceptually people are talking from the same platform. A fully appraised community could be in a position to embrace the concept and aspects of township tourism positively.

Mindful of the fore mentioned reasons, it is therefore recommended that, the country needs the following approach if it wishes to meaningfully establish township tourism in Zimbabwe.

- Start selling the concept to the residents most of whom seem not to understand the whole idea of this kind of tourism.
- Ensure that local people have an appreciation of how best the benefits to accrue from tourism of this nature are to be realized.
- Provide adequate information to community members to enable them to understand the levels of investment needed for one to participate meaningfully in the various sub-sectors of township tourism.
- Encourage the development of such products that are viewed as important to attract visitors to specific areas where township tourism has been found to be appropriate and needs to be promoted.
- Develop the kind of township tourism that would allow the community to maintain its sense of pride in its culture and traditions even if substantially, changes are to occur in the way of life.
- Develop the necessary infrastructure that supports the establishment of township tourism in a user friendly manner and in line with environmental best practices.
- Create the necessary brand of tourism in the community that ensures a multiplier effect to enhance and provide appropriate opportunities for employment and business for a wide range of people in the various communities.

After taking into consideration the findings from the quantitative research and the qualitative key informant interviews conducted in the targeted areas it can be concluded that tourism authorities in Zimbabwe needed to approach the re-launch of township tourism following the fundamentals of sustainable tourism development. Township tourism is indeed a phenomenon that calls for careful planning, organisation and effective implementation to ensure success is realized. Most importantly, it requires constant monitoring, as well as evaluation if stakeholders are to reap the desired benefits. Researchers recommend the adoption of meaningful involvement of host communities and a wide range of stakeholders, amongst other ownership building strategies. Such an approach would help enhance sustainability and continuity, given that all stakeholders would collectively own the processes and the diverse benefits and results of township tourism initiatives.

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