Economic Recovery and Strategic Transformation Planning for Tourism in Botswana

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Abstract. Tourism remains one of Botswana’s most important services industry responsible for export and vital for employment and poverty reduction. Tourism in Botswana is currently highly based around the country’s natural resources although it stands as having the potential to grow beyond this by diversification facilitated for by Tourism product development. The success of this industry in Botswana can be attributed to the low volume, high value, nature-based tourism in national parks and game reserves taking place mostly in the north of this country. Globally, Tourism development is increasingly being viewed as an important tool for promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty amongst others. While Tourism is a multi-sector industry, it is not an industry that is immune to rapid decline due to the effects of global pandemics and other events. In the year 2020 this is proving to be true in the case of not only Botswana’s economic development and progression, but the Covid-19 pandemic is negatively affecting global tourism to date. This paper addresses strategic interventions to be explored through tourism education for the revival and recovery of Tourism in Botswana.

Keywords: Tourism development · Strategic recovery planning · Tourism education

1 Introduction

Globally, Tourism development is increasingly being viewed as an important tool for promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty amongst others [13]. Although statistics may vary due to variables being analyzed in this research, over the last few decades, tourism has grown to become one of the most dynamic and fastest growing economic sectors in the world [7]. In 2002 it was reported to be the largest industry in the world, with receipts totaling to about US$474 billion in 2003 [3]. Moreover, it has been known to be a labor-intensive industry, employing directly an estimated 74 million people around the world as of 2003 [6]. Consistent with global trends, in Botswana tourism has been growing substantially over the years. Between 1994 and 2000, the number of recorded holiday arrivals in the country grew by an average of 8.5% per year [8]. Since 2015 tourist arrivals have been estimated to have possibly grown to 1,874,000 international tourist arrivals and in 2018 predicted to a further 2,847,000 international tourist arrivals [3]. This rapid expansion in tourism stands as
having a considerable potential to contribute toward Botswana’s much needed economic diversification therefore assisting the country to move away from dependence on diamond mining [10]. Currently Diamond Mining has been argued to form between 65% and 75% of exports of the country, therefore accounting for about 30% of GDP in the country [8]. In this way, Botswana has been argued to be one of the world’s fastest growing economies over the past 50 years. This rapid growth has allowed the country to move from being among the poorest to upper middle income status therefore, pulling the majority of the population out of poverty [16]. Embracing social, economic and environmental impacts in order to remain sustainable, Tourism is a multi-sector industry, however, it is not an industry that is immune to rapid decline due to the effects of global pandemics and other events. In the year 2020 this is proving to be true in the case of not only Botswana’s economic development and progression, but the Covid 19 pandemic is negatively affecting global tourism to date.

2 Review of Tourism in Botswana

Tourism remains one of Botswana’s most important services industry responsible for export and vital for employment and poverty reduction [15]. Tourism in Botswana is currently highly based around the country’s natural resources although it stands as having the potential to grow beyond this by diversification facilitated for by Tourism product development [9]. The success of this industry in Botswana can be attributed to the low volume, high value, nature-based tourism in national parks and game reserves taking place mostly in the north of this country [3]. The need for diversification outside of the UNESCO-listed Okavango Delta and Chobe areas where this nature-based tourism occurs should be well understood with the background that further growth of the industry may be limited by serious weaknesses in the structure of competitiveness and access to opportunities for the indigenous Botswana citizen [11]. According to World bank [16], Botswana’s competitiveness has slipped in recent years, with its global ranking at 95th of 140 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) therefore now being well behind peers. Among the main issues barriers to growth in tourism include Skills, particularly lack of specialized tourism training and difficulties in bringing in skilled labor for advancement of this industry. While the number of training institutions offering hospitality/tourism has increased in past years specific knowledge gaps as well as core skills remain insufficient these embrace business management, problem solving, customer service, and tourism-related technology [16]. Other issues have included Air travel connections where no direct, long haul connections are available in the country and regional connections are costly. Travel Visa requirements have been said to affect the growing tourism supply markets, from countries such as China and India who are not automatically on the visa exemption list of this country, this being argued to often leading to significant delays in arrivals that sometimes end as cancellations. In the case of conservation endeavors Botswana has long been praised for its strong wildlife conservation efforts, but important challenges in the industry still exist. Decreasing wildlife numbers due to drought, habitat loss, and increased poaching although managed significantly stand as a challenge in the country. Policy challenges and approaches to
tourism management seem to also work somewhat against the product and geographical diversification of the tourism sector, this affecting some poor communities from a livelihood perspective [12].

3 Tourism Development Planning in Botswana

Researchers have pointed out that Tourism was not a priority sector in Botswana until the formulation of regulatory and legislative frameworks in the early 1990s therefore claiming that the industry is still not fully developed at present [12]. The Tourism Policy (1990) preceded the regulatory Tourism Act (1992) which sets procedures for licensing, regulation of tourism enterprise categories. These two legal frameworks advocated for a high value/low volume approach to tourism development which has been in existence ever since. The Tourism Regulations (1996) sets the license and training levy fees as well as requirements for grading of tourism establishments which were later driven by the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO) after its establishment [9]. At present the Draft Revised Tourism policy (2018) and the Botswana Tourism Master Plan (2000) stand as documents which set future goals for the development of tourism [9]. Tourism product diversification, citizen participation, public/private partnerships and ecological/economic sustainability are identified to be given priority in driving tourism development in this research in this way. Although this structured approach may be viewed at face value as a straight forward means of not only improving the industry but it is important to improving the shortcomings of the industry.

4 The Impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on Tourism in Botswana

Declared a pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that a novel coronavirus known as COVD 19 is the cause of a respiratory illness which was reported to the WHO on 31 December 2019 [17] Since the outbreak of this illness, it has spread rapidly affecting most countries in the world with fatalities and associated unrest and uncertainty worldwide. According to World Tourism Organization [17] the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill, and tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors. Similarly, on September 11, 2001, when hijacked aircrafts were used as terrorist weapons of destruction in the United States resulted in a rapid decline in the Tourism industry this therefore suggesting that travel and tourism are not only vulnerable to violent events such as terrorism, political unrest, and military conflicts [8] but not to disease pandemics. The year 2020 is experiencing a drastic decline in tourism globally due to the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this industry globally [1]. Together with the rest of the world, Botswana is currently faced with preparing comprehensive tourism recovery plans as well as to re-think the tourism sector for effective resuscitation of this industry. This paper based on a desktop study approach, therefore recommends the development of a Tourism and hospitality recovery and strategic transformational plan
in order to revive Tourism in the country. The paper places emphasis on the notion that development of Tourism cannot be optimal if it is not undertaken as a partnership that engages all of the stakeholders concerned. As Botswana has been overly reliant on Diamond mining, although diversification in the mining sector offers potential to support external and fiscal balances in the country, one may conclude that it is not the solution only to sustainable poverty reduction due to its limited job creation potential. Instead, what is required is the development of a more competitive, outward-oriented private sector, particularly in creating among others employment. While Botswana is praised for its management of resource wealth, it is apparent that the high levels of investment by government (in health, education, and infrastructure) are not delivering desired outcomes, making it increasingly difficult to meet the objectives of growth, diversification, and poverty elimination [12]. However, the tourism industry in Botswana has facilitated a number of opportunities for local communities and has contributed to the country’s economic diversification, therefore moving away from the above mentioned dependence on Diamond Mining [15]. The tourism industry in Botswana has been criticized for being exclusively nature based therefore lacking inclusiveness for the average indigenous Botswana citizen to take part in Tourism enterprises therefor calling for a major course correction. This paper therefore views the COVID-19 pandemic as not only a challenge but an opportunity for the country to address other festering problems within the tourism industry that need deeper solutions that will render exponential results through the recovery of this industry in Botswana.

UNWTO has made a strong statement in an initiative dubbed “Stay home today. Travel tomorrow” The containment of the pandemic stands as a main priority while tourism has come to a halt through complying with all measures taken to curb this outbreak. Nevertheless, The pandemic being a double edged sward, currently the recovery strategy or restarting of the industry in Botswana is addressing this above mentioned issue in an overdue but necessary change that will not only restart the industry but also allow it to be more inclusive for those who previously could not participate in the low volume high value Nature based tourism. This exclusive Nature tourism environment has been observed by many as not seeming to have generated commensurate benefits for the economy and its population as the years have gone by. Existence of limited linkages between this sector and other sectors has led to high economic leakages from the sector among others. Possibly, COVID-19 has only exacerbated the need to address these existing problems in the industry that needed sustainable solutions by taking the powers that be back to the blackboard. Botswana is currently following the Botswana Tourism Organization Tourism Industry Covid-19 Guidelines as a Toolkit assisting and enabling the transition from lockdown to full operation of tourism businesses. The country is also following a UNWTO approach towards recovery that is guided by the recommendations of managing the crisis and mitigating the impact, providing stimulus and accelerating recovery as well as Preparing for tomorrow. Recently the new The Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) guidelines were announced in July, 2020 and they currently stand as an opportunity for the average Botswana citizen to stand a chance of running a successful business. Social media observations have revealed that underlying structural disabilities that indigenous Batswana have had will still prevail however. While the tourism sector being one of the most hard-hit, and this has tremendous implications for
economies worldwide: to date, tourism represents 30% of the world’s exports of services (US$ 1.5 trillion) and up to 45% of the total export of services in developing countries [1]. While the ultimate size of the ultimate impact of this pandemic, millions of livelihoods all over the world are at risk and threatens to roll back the progress made in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) immensely. As a result of this the revival of this industry is crucial for ensuring that the impact of Covid 19 is reduced as strategically as possible for future growth of the industry and restoring the livelihoods of those who are dependent on tourism. The UNWTO [1] has indicated that in the past tourism has also shown a strong resilience to adapt, innovate and recuperate from adversity with particular emphasis on areas of consumer confidence, entrepreneurship, women and youth employment to technological innovation. This paper therefore aims to identify areas for improvement of this industry and further opportunities for tourism product development in Botswana.

5 Strategic Management for Recovery

It is apparent that Tourism provides both, economic and non-economic benefits to any given country [5] The economic benefits of tourism at national economy level is often associated with creation of new jobs, decrease in the levels of unemployment, stimulation of production of products and services to be consumed by tourists and others [4]. Non-economic benefits of tourism, on the other hand, include facilitation of cultural exchanges, contribution to the levels of knowledge as well as through facilitation of communication [4] Within Business Management, strategy can be defined as determining basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, as well as the adopting of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals [2]. Strategic planning in this paper is explained as the process involved for developing approaches to reach a defined objective, the objective in this instance being to recover Botswana’s Tourism industry following the impacts of Covid 19. This Study therefore identifies three general principles of planning for tourism recovery in Botswana, namely, anticipation, regulation and monitoring. Anticipation involves making projections about the future state of the tourism on the basis of relevant secondary and primary data. Regulation, on the other hand, is closely associated with the levels of regulation of tourist and affiliated organisations in direct and indirect manners. The importance of monitoring relates to the collection of relevant data with the aims of analysing the performance of the tourism industry [5].

5.1 The Following Objectives Have Been Identified for This Study

a) To establish the extent in which diversification has been achieved in Botswana despite challenges encountered

b) To establish ways in which a tourism strategic management framework can be established for tourism recovery from Covid 19 in Botswana.
5.2 Research Questions

This study was led by the following research questions:

a) To what has tourism diversification been achieved in Botswana despite challenges encountered in the past few years?

b) Which ways can tourism strategic management framework be established for tourism recovery from Covid 19 in Botswana?

6 Research Methods

6.1 Data Collection

Observation: The researcher observed research subjects for an appropriate amount of time that depended on emerging issues and subject under investigation. This including observing and analyzing Social media information, News reports as well as laws and acts concerning tourism recovery local and globally.

Archival research will include literature that may be kept deposited in official or private libraries or archives including publications and annual reports and/or brochures concerning Tourism Development and recovery planning.

7 Findings and Tentative Recommendations

Botswana is currently following a UNWTO influenced strategic approach towards industry recovery that is guided by the recommendations of managing the crisis and mitigating the impact, providing stimulus and accelerating recovery as well as preparing for tomorrow. This approach is aligned with the definition of Strategic planning for tourism according to [5]. Recently the new guidelines were announced as an opportunity for the average Motswana to stand a chance of running a successful business by The Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA). This organization was established by the Government of the Republic of Botswana to provide financial and technical support for business development with a view to promote viable and sustainable citizen owned business enterprises. Although [11] argues that there are underlying structural disabilities that indigenous Batswana have still prevail, thus far Botswana is, firstly managing the Covid 19 crisis through a toolkit and secondly, providing stimulus with the intention to accelerate recovery. It is unclear on how the country is preparing for tomorrow to insure sustainability of interventions that have been put in place for the industry to recover. We can see from the recovery of the September 11, 2001 attacks and 2008 global recession that tourism has shown us a strong resilience to adapt, innovate and recuperate from adversity. In order to rapidly transform this industry in Botswana into a much-needed source of income for all stakeholders alike, as part of preparing for tomorrow education service providers should focus on strengthening the curriculum in order to restore and improve consumer confidence, grow entrepreneurship, encourage women and youth employment as well
as embrace technological innovation. The need to satisfy both academic and the industry stakeholders does have special implications for the delivery of tourism education. The special implications include a deeper understanding of the industry. With intensified tourism education that is based on transferrable skills, the industry performance can be enhanced as its practitioners will be knowledgeable therefore ensuring the sustainability of not only reviving the industry but also diversifying the tourism project moving away from only nature based tourism as the backbone of tourism in Botswana.

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