Ecotourism governance in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review

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Abstract

Ecotourism is gaining traction as a veritable approach to biodiversity conservation and livelihood sustenance in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The success of this approach rests in part, on the governance architecture of most states in SSA. However, empirical evidence on this subject is fragmented. This shades possibilities to frame conceptual and methodological questions to advance ecotourism governance literature. This study undertakes a review of the literature on ecotourism governance in SSA, using the PROFOR governance assessment framework as analytical lens. Content analysis, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to analyse 54 published empirical articles on ecotourism governance. The results indicated that studies conducted in Southern Africa (38%) and East Africa (30%) account for close to 70% of the literature on ecotourism governance in SSA. Participation was the most studied ecotourism governance principle (96%), while efficiency was the least (15%). Kruskal-Wallis test statistic showed no significant variation in the study of ecotourism governance principles in the different sub regions of SSA. Methodologically, most of the studies have either employed qualitative (50%) or quantitative (33%) approaches, with few studies employing mixed methods (17%). Future studies need to prioritize mixed-method approaches to study principles such as efficiency and equity in the analysis of ecotourism governance. Equally more empirical research studies should be undertaken in the West and Central Africa sub-regions in order to paint a better picture of the state of ecotourism governance across sub-Saharan Africa in general.

1. Introduction

Tourism is amongst the fastest growing sector in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and a key area propelling socioeconomic development (Backman and Munanura 2017). In 2018, the tourism sector accounted for 6.7 per cent of employment and about 8.5 per cent of GDP (WTTC 2019). Different forms of tourism can be identified across the globe. Some of which are nature, cultural, sport, religious, health and adventure tourism. In the second half of the 1980s, ecotourism emerged as a new form of tourism (from nature and cultural tourism) that could contribute efficiently to environmental protection and support economic growth of different stakeholders (Stroznja et al 2019, Wondirad et al 2017, Harilal and Tichaawa 2020, Forje et al 2021).

The concept of ecotourism emerged when the degradation of the word’s rainforest pressured the International Development Bank and the World Bank to pause the granting of loans to mass tourism enterprises and only reinitiated loans in 1990 under the banner of ecotourism (Honey 2008). The first definition of ecotourism in literature was developed by Ceballos-Lascurain in the year 1987 (Cheia 2013, Anandaraj 2015). According to Ceballos-Lascurain, ecotourism relates to the practice of moving to natural areas that are relatively undisturbed, with the intention to study, admire and enjoy the scenery, its wild plants and animals, including existing cultural aspects (Ceballos-Lascurain 2006). This definition was criticized for focusing more on nature travel with emphasis on education and the development of sustainable tourism products and activities (Drumm and Moore 2005). Today, there is a growing volume of ecotourism
ecotourism governance in SSA. Amongst these factors are poor skills in leadership, inadequate capacity of local 
leaders in the tourism sector connected with the operation of the tourism system; business sector connected with 
the operation of the tourism system; governments, at different levels and in different capacities; civil society living 
in the inbound tourism communities; and 
institutions. This involves multi-sectorial and multi-actor interactions. It comprises the mechanisms and 
processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests; mediate their differences and exercise their legal 
rights and obligations. It relates to the rules, institutions and practices that determine the limits and provide incentives 
for individual organizations and firms. Governance, thus include social, political and economic dimensions that operate 
at every level of human enterprise, be it at household, village, municipality, nation, region or globe (UNDP 2004). 
To the Commission of the European Communities (2001), governance is sculptured as a set of rules, processes 
and behaviour that impart the way in which powers are implemented, particularly with regard to the principles of 
openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. To Graham et al (2003), it is a process of arriving 
at key decisions by deciding those implicated and means of accountability in a society or organization. Kishor and 
Kenneth (2012), developed six principles of good governance to be used in assessing and monitoring forest 
governance initiatives. Amongst which are accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness or equity, participation 
and transparency. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has proposed five principles to 
assess good governance in protected areas. They include: legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability 
and fairness/rights (Borrini-Feyerabend et al 2013).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2008), advanced the very first definition of tourism 
governance to imply ‘the process of managing tourist destinations through synergistic and coordinated efforts by 
governments, at different levels and in different capacities; civil society living in the inbound tourism communities; and 
the business sector connected with the operation of the tourism system’. In the direction of ecotourism, there is generally 
limited literature on ecotourism governance in the world at large and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular (Pasape et al 
2015, Antonio dos Anjos and Kennell 2019). Backman and Munanura (2017), advanced factors which are constraining 
ecotourism governance in SSA. Amongst these factors are poor skills in leadership, inadequate capacity of local 
stakeholders, non-involvement of different actors and short life cycles of ecotourism projects. In SSA just like in Latin 
America and Asia, poor governance in (eco)tourism results in the collapse of tourism projects in rural communities 
when donors stop funding. Poor governance is often as a result of cumbersome and complex ineffective management 
structures, imposition of formal (democratic and secular) institutions on communities with functional traditional 
institutions and the absence of participation by the local population (Mitchell and Muckosy 2008).

Good governance is today considered to be the driver of success in all sectors of life. The contemporary concept 
of governance has emerged over the past four decades (since 1980) in the field of social sciences, and is today a prevalent 
and broadly used concept amongst social scientists from different disciplines, such as public administration, 
economy, political sciences, management, law, and sociology (Rocha Menocal 2011, Pasape et al 2015). Despite the 
crucial role of governance, there is yet an incomprensive knowledge base regarding what (eco)tourism governance 
is and what it is not. As a consequence, governance is hardly taken into consideration as a topical issue in sustainable 
tourism literature in general and ecotourism in particular across the globe (Antonio dos Anjos and Kennell 2019). 
Duran (2013), justified by explaining that, studies related to governance in the tourism sector are recent and 
incipient, with the very first and important document that treats issues of tourism governance to the best of our 
knowledge being that which was produced in 2008, in connection with the International Seminar on Governance in 
Tourism in the Americas. In SSA, some studies have construed ecotourism governance as a policy requirement for 
successful ecotourism development (Laudati 2010, Harilal et al 2018) while others are considering governance from 
the perspective of community participation in ecotourism benefit sharing (Adiyia et al 2015, Moswete and 
Thapa 2015, Nyirenda et al 2017, Nutsugbodo and Mensah 2020). However, despite the growing traction gained by 
ecotourism, knowledge gaps exist with regards to how ecotourism governance is conceptualized as well as the
methodological considerations in the study of ecotourism governance so far. The knowledge fragmentation contributes to the stalled progress in ecotourism research and development. For instance, the UNWTO (2018) world tourism barometer, Africa as the second to the last global tourism destination, as she was able to receive just 5.1% of the global tourism arrivals. Such fragmentation and gaps in (eco)tourism governance research opens a new research paradigm in ecotourism in SSA that needs to be filled (Pasape et al 2015).

To advance conceptual and methodological learning on ecotourism governance in SSA, this paper adopts the Program on Forests (PROFOR) analytical framework to: (1) Examine the state-of-the-art on the conceptualization of ecotourism governance, (2) discuss the yet-to-be-addressed conceptual issues linked to ecotourism governance, and (3) examine the methods which have (not) been prioritized in the study of ecotourism governance. The results would potentially orientate future empirical investigations on the subject, including the consideration of novel methodological approaches.

2. Analytical framework: PROFOR governance assessment framework

The PROFOR/FAO governance framework (Kishor and Kenneth 2012) (figure 1) which captures key elements that affect forest governance, has been developed to adequately assess natural resources governance, with ecotourism governance inclusive. This framework is selected for the study because of its simplistic and comprehensive nature, drawn from a broad base of other internationally developed governance assessment frames. Also, it is practical, and can be used by non-experts in governance diagnostics. Considering the multi-actor nature of ecotourism, the framework is considered quite flexible and could appeal to a wide range of demand and supply-side actors in the field of ecotourism. Furthermore, the framework can be applied at different scales (micro, meso and macro) for the evaluation of governance. Although it has not been used in ecotourism literature, it provides a comprehensive assessment for the evaluation and orientation of governance research in the field of natural resource at large and ecotourism in particular.

![Figure 1. The PROFOR analytical framework for ecotourism governance. Modified from Kimengsi et al (2022).](image-url)
Preference is given to this frame over the frame for tourism assessment proposed by Duran (2013), because it goes above the institutional and government trajectories of observation as proposed by the UNWTO to a generalized context, taking into consideration non-state actors like the communities, local and international organizations. The PROFOR framework captures six principles that can be used to assess and monitor good governance. Amongst these principles are accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness or equity, participation and transparency. Following Kimengsi and Bhusal (2021) and Kimengsi et al (2022), we modified the framework by focusing on accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, equity, participation, transparency, and conflict management as key principles affecting the pillars (policies, planning and implementation) of governance in ecotourism in SSA.

In the context of this study, accountability is used to refer to the possibility of ecotourism actors to render accounts to different stakeholders, and the ability of such actors to be open enough to report on tasks, benefits and challenges linked to the sector. The stakeholders are considered to be the different institutions involved and the local population. Effectiveness is mirrored from the angle of ecotourism being able to achieve the intended goals for which it is developed. Efficiency on the other hand is considered as all efforts put in place to reduce waste in the development and the implementation of ecotourism projects. The principle of participation focuses on ensuring that the opinion of all stakeholders matter in the framing of policies, planning and implementation of ecotourism projects, with emphasis on community participation. Transparency in this study is viewed from the perspective of making available in a timely manner, relevant information on ecotourism transactions. The added principle (Conflict management) looks at the mechanism put in place in the development and implementation of ecotourism projects, for the handling of the different conflicts that may arise between and amongst stakeholders so as to ensure the effectiveness of the project. These principles orientated the review of literature and discussions.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

The data set generated for this study was collected through a systematic review process. We searched for published articles on topics directly related to ecotourism governance in SSA. In order to identify scientific articles for the study, keywords searches were performed through Google Scholar. The keywords search included both the research topic (Ecotourism governance in SSA) and word combinations that incorporated the different ecotourism governance principles that were considered for the study. These keywords containing the principles included (1) Participation and ecotourism and SSA; (2) Ecotourism and accountability and SSA; (3) Ecotourism transparency and SSA (4) Ecotourism and efficiency and SSA; (5) Ecotourism and equity and SSA (6) Ecotourism and conflict management and SSA. The search of sub-themes with a focus on ecotourism governance principle was because most of the articles analysed specific themes in relation to the governance principles. The search was limited to articles spanning the last 20 years (2002–2021). All articles collected for the study were those that were written strictly in English. In the data set, data redundancy or duplication was checked manually by examining the names of the authors, titles of articles and year of publications. In cases of repetition, the articles were de-duplicated before proceeding to analysis. For any article to be considered suitable for inclusion into the set for analysis; it must be an article from any of the countries or sub regions within SSA, it must be a scientific article published in a scientific journal and must capture any of the ecotourism governance principle expounded in the analytical frame.

3.2. Data analysis

A mixed method of analysis was used for this study. In terms of qualitative analysis, content analysis was employed (Krippendorff 2004). Content analysis was applied to excerpt information based on the modified PROFOR frame (figure 1) applied in this study (Kishor and Kenneth 2012). The data collection process respected the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion criteria as proposed by Moher et al (2009) (figure 2). In total, 54 empirical articles were retained for analysis. The data collected were entered into Micro Soft Excel 2011, from which, graphs, charts and percentages for the study were generated. In addition, the data in excel were exported to SPSS version 2019 from which, inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis test), was computed (at 95% confidence level) to analyse the degree of variation in the studies of ecotourism governance principles across the different sub-regions in SSA. This test was selected because of the non-homogenous nature of the cases that were considered for the study.
4. Results and discussion

4.1. Ecotourism governance across different sub-regions in SSA

Empirical research papers were scouted from four sub-regions of SSA. The analysis indicated that two sub-regions (Southern Africa and East Africa) are relatively far ahead in the study of ecotourism governance in SSA (figure 3). The West and Central African sub-regions are relatively behind with respect to ecotourism governance. Over all, the entire African continent is very limited in terms of studies that directly capture ecotourism governance. From the analysis, the Southern African sub-region accounts for 20 cases of all the articles that were reviewed, with South Africa taking the lead with 7 of the publications.

On the other hand, the Central African sub-region had just 7 empirical publications on ecotourism governance, out of which 6 were coming from a single country (Cameroon). For the East African sub-region, the country with more studies reflecting ecotourism governance was Ethiopia with a total of 8 cases. In the West African sub-region, Ghana was the country at the apex with 9 publications capturing ecotourism governance. Ghana was also overall the country in SSA with the most studied cases of Ecotourism governance. The results affirm the level of ecotourism development in sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, with the sector more...
developed in the Southern and East African countries. According to Duran (2013), East and Southern Africa accounted for 79% of all tourist arrivals in SSA, with the Central African sub-region recording the lowest arrivals (5%). Southern Africa for instance is a well-known ecotourism destination, with nature based tourism dominating for visitors from the global North, visiting with the intention of viewing the 'Big Five' game species as well as to savour the rich culture and heritage of the area (Giddy and Webb 2016). The level of development of ecotourism across SSA probably has affected tourism research in general and ecotourism governance study in particular within the area. Scanty (eco)tourism research has been reported for the Central African sub-region, accounting for the trend in the governance discourse within this part of SSA (Harilal et al 2018, Kimengsi et al 2019, Forje et al 2020a, 2021). There is also the possibility that the limited publications from the West and Central African sub-regions may be due to the fact that articles included in this study were strictly those written in the English language as opposed to the French speaking nature of most countries in the area. Unfortunately, based on the data base consulted, the articles were generally published in the English language, such as those of Elsevier and Taylor and Francis publishing houses. Although articles published in other languages were not considered, the current articles used in the study, provide significant representation and give useful insights into the current scenarios as most articles are generally published in the English language. Furthermore, as ecotourism seems to be at its infancy in these sub-regions, interest towards research on ecotourism has hardly been prioritized.

4.2. Evolution in ecotourism governance studies in sub-Saharan Africa from 2002 to 2021

From the cumulative analysis of studies on ecotourism governance in SSA based on five year intervals, it was noticed that there is largely an increasing trend in publications on tourism governance from 2002–2021. The period 2017–2021 had the highest number of published articles in SSA in relation to ecotourism governance, while the period from 2007–2011 registered the lowest number of studies on issues of ecotourism governance in SSA (figure 4). This could be attributed to rising interests linked to several international processes such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, this period coincided with the period when international actors and NGOs sought to introduce interventions aimed at promoting ecotourism in parts of SSA, with a focus on advancing governance.

![Figure 4. Evolution of ecotourism governance literature in SSA from 2002–2021.](image)

The trend in ecotourism governance research is a reflection of the fact that ecotourism governance has often been under looked and not prioritized as a sector that needs effective governance (Scott and Marzano 2015, Harilal et al 2018). In some instances, little attention is given within government for its coordination. The increasing trend as from 2011 to 2021 is an indication of the paradigm shift regarding (eco)tourism governance in SSA (Backman and Munanura 2015, Mbiawa 2015, Boakye 2017). The trend is also a reflection of adherence and consistency towards the 'White paper’ of tourism approved by the UNWTO General Assembly in 2011, which states that (eco)tourism governance, in the case of national as well as local destinations, is worthy of special attention (Duran 2013).

4.3. Governance principles researched on within the ecotourism sector in SSA

Different governance principles are integrated in ecotourism governance research across Africa (figure 5). Among these, participation (96%) is the most investigated principle while equity and efficiency (15%) are not very recurrent as governance principles examined in ecotourism governance research in SSA. In line with participation, a further analysis shows that a quasi-totality of the review (i.e. 96.2%) treated aspects of
participation in ecotourism governance with a focus on local community participation. In the sub-region of Southern Africa, it has been observed that, the absence of genuine participation by the local population has resulted in lack of trust in the government for the development of proper (eco)tourism governance in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Siakwah et al 2019). In East Africa, Wondirad (2017), unveils a plethora of factors constraining community participation in the ecotourism sector in Southern Ethiopia. Amongst these factors are; unawareness, inadequate entrepreneurial skills, low community organization initiatives, poor networking, absence of effective collaboration with other ecotourism stakeholders and absence of a veritable benefit sharing mechanism. Similar constraining factors have been raised by Eshum and Tichaawa (2019), in Ghana within the sub-region of West Africa. They noted that the majority of the local population had low educational levels and limited entrepreneurial training to enable them to benefit from ecotourism business either directly like individuals or indirectly through community initiatives. In the Central African sub-region, poor community participation has been blamed on illusive ecotourism development policies, limited benefit sharing for local communities, incongruous management which does not encourage inclusiveness of stakeholders especially the local population and limited aptitude of the local population to contribute at high level ecotourism programmes (Harilal and Tichaawa 2020, Kimengsi et al 2019, Forje et al 2021).

The remaining 3.8% of the reviews focused on aspects of NGOs participation. For instance, Pellis et al (2015), found out that the participation of NGOs in ecotourism development in Kenya did not only contribute to the pertinence of landscape governance, local livelihoods and sustainable management of biodiversity, but has provided a platform for the on-going experimentation of conservation tourism in Kenya. In line with NGOs participation, it has also been noted that multinational NGOs are participating in fostering Neoliberalism in Africa through the development of ecotourism. This is by connecting ecotourism and local communities via donor funding as a way to boost conservation principles and improve quality living situations of the population (Kline and Slocum 2015). The results also indicate that, 92.5% of participation in ecotourism activities is passive, unequal and ineffective.

In terms of equity and efficiency which were the least studied principles, the main issues addressed in the domain of equity was inequity in the distribution of benefits from ecotourism projects. Teshome et al (2021) and Forje et al (2020a), bring out cases of inequitable allocation of benefits from tourism to the different stakeholders, with the local population receiving the least of the benefits. Inequitable distribution of benefits is also recurrent with males benefiting more than females (Kimengsi et al 2019, Forje et al 2021). Furthermore, regarding efficiency, some of the studies identified the causes of inefficiency in the governance of ecotourism, amongst which are the limited involvement of locals and their participation in ecotourism development (Harilal and Tichaawa 2020), while other studies proposed the plausible way forward for ecotourism governance to be more efficient such as public-private partnerships (Sama and Molua 2019, Forje et al 2020b).

Based on the governance principles studied per sub-region, it was found that in southern Africa, the governance principles most studied were participation, conflict management and effectiveness, with 33%, 22% and 12%, respectively, while the least studied governance principles were equity and efficiency with 8% and 5%, respectively (figure 6). Within SSA, participation has been greatly expounded upon, with the different authors expressing need for improvements and more involvement of the local population (Sebola and Fourie 2006, Nyirenda et al 2017, Mudzengi et al 2020).
Although a good number of cases from the Southern African sub-region examined conflict management, the focus was mostly on how ecotourism can play a double-edge role of mitigating conflicts and reconciling the conflicting goals of biodiversity conservation and ensuring local livelihood especially around protected areas. This is the case with the Masoala National Park in Madagascar where it is believed that, the development of ecotourism in the area can contribute in mitigating conflict between the local population and the park management through the education of locals on the importance of conservation and the roles of park workers, which is a strategy to reinforce park staff’s community visibility and credibility (Ormsby and Mannle 2006). Studies in the Southern African sub-region also consider ecotourism’s effectiveness as limping. For instance, Zanamwe et al. (2018), states that, the ineffectiveness of ecotourism in Zimbabwe is due to the centralized system of ecotourism management in the area. The study recommends a more effective funding of ecotourism projects as well as effective participation of all stakeholders to ensure that ecotourism contributes to its conservation goals. The few studies that examined the principles of efficiency and equity in ecotourism studies in Southern Africa are largely superficial and descriptive, with most studies coaxing stakeholders to embrace and improve on these principles (Snyman 2014). For east Africa, the most studied governance principles were participation, effectiveness and transparency, with 35%, 17% and 15%, respectively of the studies, while the least studied governance principles were equity and efficiency with 5% and 3%, respectively. In East Africa, studies on the governance principles of participation and effectiveness were in consonant with the results obtained in Southern Africa, with different studies considering these principles as weak, expressing the need for their improvement (Asmamaw and Verma 2013, Pasape et al. 2013, Teshome et al. 2020). Despite the relatively high number of studies on transparency as an ecotourism principle in the East African sub-region, transparency is considered to be insufficiently implemented. This is the case in Tanzania where Pasape et al. (2015), singles out inadequate transparency amongst other governance principles for jeopardizing the sustainability of the ecotourism sector of the country. Results from studies on the principles of equity and efficiency in the East African sub-region also corroborated findings from Southern Africa, with advocacy for amelioration (Wondirad et al. 2019, Teshome et al. 2021). Studies in West Africa covered the governance principles of participation, conflict management, transparency and equity, with 44%, 16%, 12% and 12%, respectively. The least studied governance principles were accountability and efficiency with 4% and 4%, respectively of the studies. Within this sub-region, participation of the local population is considered to be tokenistic, with all the studies appealing and recommending for a more meaningful participation. This situation is best illustrated in cases from Ghana were the results are showing inadequate or passive participation of the local communities in the development and implementation of ecotourism (Eshun and Tichaawa 2019), with suggestions for ecotourism developers to develop and implement policies that can ensure meaningful participation (Cobbinah et al. 2017, Eshun and Tichaawa 2020). Studies in the West African sub-region and SSA at large examine conflict management from different facets. Some studies like Agyeman et al. (2019) and Eshun and Tichaawa (2020) focused on the root causes of conflicts related to ecotourism development and implementation and suggest conflict management strategies. Mensah (2017), focused more on participation as a prerequisite to ecotourism conflict management.
with local populations found around biodiversity conservation areas. All the studies on conflict management within the West African sub-region also considered conflict management strategies to be less effective and recommended the need for conflicts in ecotourism to be appropriately handled if ecotourism must attain its objectives (Asuik and Nchok 2018). Although many studies in the different sub-regions of SSA consider transparency to be weak (Pasape et al 2015, Agyeman et al 2019, Forje et al 2020a), Boakye (2017), observed that improved transparency in the practice of ecotourism (from decision making process through implementation and clear benefit sharing) in the Mesomagoro in the eastern peripheries of the Kakum National Park in Ghana had encouraged all actors and the local communities to be engaged in the development of ecotourism in the area. In West Africa, the cases that treated accountability observed that poor accountability was affecting ecotourism, with focus mainly on tourism in protected areas. For instance, Agyeman et al (2019), noticed that, ecotourism as a strategy has not greatly reduced poverty in the local communities in and around protected areas in Ghana because of lack of accountability. They further explained that, the absence of accountability has resulted in high rate of corruption and mismanagement, reducing the benefits that different individuals in the communities are obtaining as well as affecting development projects in the different communities. The West African sub-region had a similar trend in the study of efficiency to those of Southern Africa and East Africa as just a single study (4%) focused on issues related to efficiency. In all there is call for efficiency to be improved upon (Agyeman et al 2019). In Central Africa, the most studied governance principles were participation, conflict management and transparency, with 35%, 20% and 15% of the studies, respectively. Effectiveness and accountability (5% and 5%, respectively) were the least studied governance principles. In terms of participation different cases have shown that local participation in ecotourism processes from decision making to implementation are low (Kimengsi et al 2019, Harilal and Tichaawa 2020, Forje et al 2020b), with recommendations for the development of policies that enhance veritable local participation (Kimengsi et al 2019, Forje et al 2021). The trend for conflict management in the Central African sub-region was similar to those of Southern Africa and West Africa in terms of the number of cases studied (20%). Aspects of conflicts and conflict management studied in the different cases within the Central Africa sub-region are mostly the root causes of conflicts between the different tourism actors that have stifled tourism development (Harilal et al 2018, Sama and Molua 2019), with many cases suggesting that the management strategies are less desirable (Sama and Molua 2019, Forje et al 2020a, Forje et al 2021). Harilal and Tichaawa (2020), go beyond the general view of conflict management in the Central African sub-region of SSA to explain that, the Anglophone palaver that has metamorphosed into an arm conflict is greatly affecting ecotourism development in the Mount Cameroon National Park as well as other ecotourism sites in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. As a consequence, a multi-stakeholder conflict management strategy is required to arrest the situation so as to ensure tourism development in the area. The Central African sub-region accounted for the highest number of cases that studied transparency in the SSA. Unfortunately all the studies decry poor transparency in the governance of ecotourism. For instance, Harilal et al (2018), explained that poor transparency in the (eco)tourism sector can easily be captured from the International Corruption Perception Index, that has in the past ranked Cameroon as one of the world’s most corrupt countries, creating a negative image for the (eco)tourism industry in the country, an industry whose success is largely based on positive perceptions from potential investors and tourists. Despite the fact that effectiveness and accountability were the least studied cases in SSA, the findings were in line with the poor accountability and effectiveness captured in literature from the other sub-regions in SSA. For instance, Kimengsi et al (2019), criticizes the strong endogenous cultural institutions that have hindered the effective participation of women in a wide range of ecotourism promotion activities in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, thus affecting benefits from ecotourism activities as well as perturbing ecotourism from attaining its objectives.

In the field of ecotourism, community involvement and participation is an inherent component (Harilal and Tichaawa 2020), with local community participation viewed as a strategy for sustainable development, by harnessing opportunities to generate income and for the empowerment of the community members at the global scale (Butcher 2011, Kline and Slocum 2015, Kimengsi et al 2019, Eshun and Tichaawa 2020). For this reason, many studies across SSA consider this principle as a measuring rod of ecotourism performance in terms of involving local actors in decision making and benefit sharing in particular (Schmidt and Uriely 2018, Eshun and Tichaawa 2019). This most likely justifies why participation is the most studied ecotourism governance principle in the different sub-regions of SSA (West Africa—44%, East Africa—35%, Central Africa—35% and Southern Africa—33%).

Despite the relatively high rate of studies in participation as a governance principle, many authors have decried the passive and ineffective participation by the local communities in SSA (Butcher 2011, Asmanaw and Verma 2013, Bello Lovelock and Carr 2016, Nutsugbodo and Mensah 2020). The passive and ineffective participation of local community members in ecotourism across SSA is indicative of its poor implementation as a principle of ecotourism governance. The poor participation of community members in ecotourism processes has been blamed on poor criteria used in selecting representatives from the community for ecotourism activities (Siakwah et al 2019, Teshome et al 2021), limited benefit sharing (Ondicho 2012, Sabuhoro et al 2017), low educational level for the majority of the...
community members (Pasape et al. 2015, Kimengsi et al. 2019), centralised decision making processes
(Duffy 2006a, 2006b, Harilal et al. 2018) and limited employment opportunities (Ormsby and Mannle 2006, Forje et al. 2021, Teshome et al. 2021). Inequality in ecotourism participation across SSA has been highlighted in several studies with a greater tendency towards the male sex dominating in ecotourism participation (Amati 2013, Kimengsi et al. 2019, Nutsugbodo and Mensah 2020, Forje et al. 2020a). For example, in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, Kimengsi et al. (2019), reported that between 33%–38% of women are less likely to choose high valued ecotourism activities as well as wood craft activities due to their low level of education and endoginastic institutional barriers. In the same direction, Boonzaaier (2012), brings out female marginalisation in the Masebe Nature Reserve of South Africa by explaining that, ecotourism development in the area ignores women’s want for fuel wood and thatch. Such tendency is largely linked to cultural systems across SSA with some outdoor activities considered as taboo for women and other activities like tour guides, porters and trackers considered to be activities more suitable for men (Forje et al. 2020b). Cobbinah et al. (2017), advanced a contrary view by highlighting that ecotourism in the Kakum conservation area of Ghana has empowered the women by creating different jobs as well as bringing them in the circle of critical decision making processes. Findings from the study indicate that a community-based ecotourism activity (traditional bamboo orchestral) provided employment to about 25 women and men in the community with some of the women playing in the orchestral as well as those who have been trained as cooks who are working in the restaurant. Furthermore, the result underscores the fact that, the involvement of women in the decision making process at the community level has contributed to reducing incidence of gender discrimination in the community, enhanced respect of women and improved the well-being for women in the community.

Although for the entire SSA, equity (8%) and efficiency (5%) are observed to be the least studied governance principles in the region, it is worth noting that in terms of sub-regional observation, this pattern is not totally respected. Apart from southern Africa and East Africa that respect the afore-mentioned pattern, this is not the case in the West and Central African sub-regions. For instance, in the Central African sub-region, effectiveness and accountability, (5%) respectively, are the least studied principle, while accountability is amongst the least studied principles in West Africa. The findings are quite surprising as parts of West and Central Africa seem to have several issues linked to accountability in natural resource governance, with ecotourism governance included. This might have resulted from the scantiness in empirical data that could be used for the evaluation of accountability in the different project sites. It may also be as a result of the fortress approach in ecotourism development as well as centralization in the management of ecotourism projects, with those involved in the project management for ecotourism development more covetous in nature. The limited study of equity and efficiency as governance principles across SSA is justified by the fact that, the bulk of the articles that were included for this study were from Southern Africa (37%) and from East Africa (30%).

Irrespective of the principle examined, the convergence point has been the call for the improvement in multiple governance parameters, indicating that the scenario in SSA is poor and unable to attain the desired outcome. In Southern Africa, poor implementation of governance principles has been blamed on inefficient funding operations by the local authorities and poor implementation of ecotourism related projects, including the expression of the need for improvement (Schoemann 2002, Snyman 2014). In the Central, East and West African sub- regions, inefficient management is hampering the development and implementation of ecotourism, with calls for improvement in efficiency through public–private partnerships of different stakeholders so as to derive more benefits (Novelli et al. 2006, Wondirad et al. 2019, Sama and Molua 2019, Harilal and Tichaawa 2020, Forje et al. 2021). The Kruskal–Wallis test statistic was used to assess the degree of variation in ecotourism governance principles studied across the different sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa (table 1).

From the mean ranks of the test statistic, it was found that the Central African sub-region is leading as far as studies tackling ecotourism governance principles like participation (mean rank = 11.50), conflict management (mean rank = 12.00), transparency (mean rank = 11.50), equity (mean rank = 12.00) and efficiency (mean rank = 14.50) are concerned. Southern Africa on its part took the lead as far as studies tackling governance principles such as effectiveness (mean rank = 8.83) and accountability (mean rank = 9.57) are concerned.

The lead by the Central African sub-region may be likened to the fact that, a cross section of the studies are quite recent (from 2017 to 2021) and many persons have gained insights on the relative importance of good governance for the betterment of the ecotourism sector. On the other hand, a good number of studies that have been considered from the Southern and East African sub-regions, correspond to the period between 2002 and 2015, when the concept of governance in (eco)tourism was still at its early stage. In addition, the leading position by the Central African sub-region may be due to the growing concern on natural resource governance within the Congo Basin (Nago and Ongolo 2021, Kimengsi and Balgah 2021).

The Chi-square statistic of the Kruskal–Wallis test showed that no significant variation existed between the ecotourism governance principles across the different sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa (table 2). The Chi-
Table 1. Kruskal-Wallis test statistic showing mean ranks in ecotourism governance principles across different sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa.

| Ecotourism governance principle | Sub-region    | No. of countries | No. of studies | Mean rank |
|--------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Participation                  | Southern Africa | 7                | 17             | 8.00      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 10             | 7.10      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 10             | 8.50      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 7              | 11.50     |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 44             |           |
| Conflict management            | Southern Africa | 7                | 13             | 8.00      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 4              | 6.80      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 3              | 9.00      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 4              | 12.00     |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 24             |           |
| Effectiveness                  | Southern Africa | 7                | 6              | 8.93      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 6              | 8.00      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 2              | 7.50      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 1              | 2.50      |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 15             |           |
| Transparency                   | Southern Africa | 7                | 5              | 8.43      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 2              | 6.70      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 3              | 8.00      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 1              | 11.50     |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 11             |           |
| Accountability                 | Southern Africa | 7                | 5              | 9.57      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 4              | 8.20      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 1              | 4.75      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 0              | 4.75      |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 10             |           |
| Equity                         | Southern Africa | 7                | 5              | 8.43      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 1              | 6.20      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 3              | 9.00      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 2              | 12.00     |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 11             |           |
| Efficiency                     | Southern Africa | 7                | 3              | 9.07      |
|                                | East Africa    | 5                | 1              | 7.00      |
|                                | West Africa    | 2                | 0              | 3.50      |
|                                | Central Africa | 1                | 2              | 14.50     |
| Total                          |               | 15               | 6              |           |

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis test showing degree of variation in reviewed ecotourism governance principles in different sub-regions across sub-Saharan Africa.

|                      | Participation | Conflict management | Effectiveness | Transparency | Accountability | Equity | Efficiency |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|--------|------------|
| Chi-Square           | .865          | 1.367               | 2.016         | 1.205        | 3.694          | 1.948  | 5.731      |
| df                   | 3             | 3                   | 3             | 3            | 3              | 3      | 3          |
| Asymp. Sig.          | .834          | .713                | .569          | .752         | .296           | .583   | .125       |

square statistics for the different ecotourism governance principles i.e. participation ($X^2 = 0.865, p > 0.05$), conflict management ($X^2 = 1.367, p > 0.05$), effectiveness ($X^2 = 2.016, p > 0.05$), transparency ($X^2 = 1.205, p > 0.05$), accountability ($X^2 = 3.694, p > 0.05$), equity ($X^2 = 1.948, p > 0.05$) and efficiency ($X^2 = 5.731, p > 0.05$), showed that, ecotourism governance principles that were captured from the different reviews across different sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa are more or less the same.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test statistic indicate that there is scanty literature on ecotourism governance across SSA. It is also indicative that the coverage of governance principles across SSA is poor and needs to be improved upon in subsequent studies. All across SSA, different cases have highlighted inadequate accountability (Ondicho 2012, Pasape et al 2015, Siakwah et al 2019, Agyeman et al 2019, Mbaiwa 2015, Mudzengi et al 2020) as a drawback to the advancement of the ecotourism sector. There is also the problem of lack of transparency in the ecotourism development and the implementation phase between and amongst stakeholders (Adeleke and Nzama 2013, Kline and Slocum 2015, Osman et al 2018, Muzirambi and Mears 2018). Furthermore, ecotourism development in SSA does not foster equity in the participation of the
different actors as well as in the benefit sharing mechanism (Siakwah et al 2019, Forje et al 2020a) with the bulk of the projects being ineffectively implemented and managed (Ormsby and Mannle 2006, Mudzengi et al 2020, Teshome et al 2020). Such poor governance in the ecotourism sector is further exacerbated by unresolved conflicts amongst belligerent factions as examined in the foregoing (Eshun and Tichaawa 2020).

4.4. Methodological consideration for the study

From the different cases across SSA, it was revealed that, three different methods were exploited by the study (qualitative approach, quantitative and the mixed approach). From the analysis, the qualitative approach was the most used approach with 50% of the cases, followed by the quantitative approach with 33% of cases, while the mixed approach was the least method used with just 16% of cases (figure 7).

The high proportion of studies making use of the qualitative method may be indicative that the majority of researchers in ecotourism governance related studies are more comfortable with the qualitative method than quantitative and mixed. However, for a more comprehensive and holistic study of ecotourism governance in SSA, the mixed method of research should be valorised. In terms of methods used when evaluated at sub-regional levels, the East and Southern African sub-regions had the greatest number of studies with the mixed research method, (33.3%) respectively, followed by the West African sub-region with 22.2%. The Central African sub-region was the least with just 11.2%. For the quantitative approach, the East African sub-region was ahead with 38.9% of studies using the method. This was immediately followed by the Southern African and the Central African sub-regions with 22.2% of studies respectively. Only 16.6% of studies from the West African sub-region made use of quantitative methods. For the qualitative method, Southern Africa is dominating with 44.4% of the studies, followed by the East African sub-region with 33.3%, West Africa with 18.6% and finally the Central African sub-region with just 03.7%. The high level of use of the mixed method in the East and Southern African sub-regions and the low level in the West and Central African sub-regions, corroborate the picture of governance literature from the different sub-regions. The relatively high number of studies from the Central African sub-region making use of quantitative analysis i.e. (22.2%) is also indicative that this is the main method employed in governance studies in the sub-region. In the case of the qualitative research method, the results are indicative that Southern Africa is far ahead (44.4%), thus indicative that the bulk of the governance studies from the Southern African sub-region have employed this method. The trend in the qualitative approach is also a reflection of the number of governance studies considered in the review across SSA.

5. Limitations of the review

Like all scientific endeavours, this work had some limitations worth mentioning. First, the study focused on empirical literature addressing issues of ecotourism governance published between 2002 and 2021, implying studies published before 2002 were completely left out. Although we sought to examine the state-of-the-art
scenario as far as ecotourism governance in SSA is concerned, we duly acknowledge that some vital information relevant to the study must have been lost in the process. Equally, our search for key terms relevant to the study was done mainly on Google Scholar, implying that empirical literature not found on this platform was not retrieved for the study. In addition, the language of search was strictly English, which unintentionally left out empirical literature published in other languages such as French, Arabic, Portuguese and Spanish. However, it is important to remark that most scientific papers are published in the English language, so the margin of error is minimal. In future, empirical studies should consider consulting country-specific publications in which these languages feature. Finally, in-depth review of the different governance principles was not done, which must have affected the findings in one way or the other. We duly acknowledge that these limitations did strain the findings of the paper to an extent. However, we think that the paper is technically sound and scientific rigorous enough and paints an up-to-date picture of the state of ecotourism governance across SSA in general and different sub-regions in SSA in particular.

6. Synthesis and future research agenda

This study examines 54 cases of ecotourism governance in SSA by focusing on six key principles of good governance as proposed in the analytical frame. The key findings indicate that there are limited studies in SSA focusing on ecotourism governance principles, with the different principles considered to be poorly implemented. Southern Africa and East Africa are leading in the study of ecotourism governance in SSA, while West Africa and Central Africa are relatively behind. With growing emphasis on the study of ecotourism governance in Eastern and Southern Africa, it is plausible to indicate that further research avenues should prioritize study sites in West and Central Africa, to provide a more comprehensive overview on the state of knowledge regarding ecotourism governance in SSA.

Participation is the most studied principle while efficiency is the least. From inferential statistics, it was observed that there is no variation in the study of governance principles across the sub-regions of SSA. Although participation appeared as the most studied ecotourism governance principle (96%), studies that effectively capture the level of participation are few, suggesting that this principle still needs to be analysed alongside other principles. With efficiency and equity standing as the least analysed principles, (15%) respectively, it is germane to conclude that the limited benefits derived from the sector could be attributed to the limited knowledge on how to efficiently management ecotourism resources, and augment benefits as well as inequality in the involvement of different actors and gender in the development and benefits from ecotourism. These principles therefore need to be further analysed.

Although the evolution of ecotourism governance principles in SSA shows an increasing trend, the main yet to be addressed conceptual issue is the absence of a methodological frame for assessing governance principles affecting ecotourism development in the SSA in a holistic manner. There is thus a need for the development of an assessment tool for ecotourism governance principles that will permit a more homogenous weighting of the governance principles in studies carried out across SSA. The fragmented studies on ecotourism governance principles in SSA most likely are as a result of this shortcoming that needs to be addressed. Methodologically, most of the studies have either employed qualitative (50%) or quantitative analysis (33%), with few studies employing mixed methods of analysis (17%). Future studies need to prioritize mixed-methods approaches to study principles such as efficiency and equity in the analysis of ecotourism governance. There is equally a need for more empirical evidence from ecotourism governance studies, with a focus on the different principles in a holistic manner as well as a harmonized system for evaluating the different governance principles across SSA.

Data availability statement

All data that support the findings of this study are included within the article (and any supplementary files).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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