

TITLE OF PRESENTATION: Reviving Old Traditions and Integrating Whole Communities through Tourism in Zimbabwe, The Case of Last Destination

In Zimbabwe, tourism is one of the fastest growing industries accounting for 6.5 % of the GDP, 10-12% of foreign currency flows and 12.5% of the formal employment at its peak in 1998¹. Recently, there has been great emphasis on the role that “community based tourism” can play in the social and economic development of Zimbabwe as well as assisting in the conservation of biological diversity. Community based tourism (CBT) has been proposed, tried out and, in many areas, adopted as a means of enhancing the management of natural resources on the one hand and contributing to rural incomes on the other.

The role of CBT in these areas has strongly been acknowledged and a lot of investment in recent years has gone into the sector with the intention of boosting these benefits. As the industry grows another key role for tourism in Zimbabwe has slowly emerged i.e. the role of bringing together communities that live in situations characterized by high potential of breaking social network. Such situations include pressure on natural resources resulting in acute resource scarcity, economic hardships, invasion by foreign cultures, and many other social dimensions. Community tourism involves whole communities in planning and decision making, in designing the products and services offered and in how benefits should be equally distributed.

As the CBT industry develops, diversifying products in the process, an unintended revival of old traditions and cultures has occurred. These traditions and cultures used to promote strong cohesion among communities, as it required/promoted collaboration, respect for each other, social acceptance of unfamiliar practices such as traditional healing, cleansing, rain making ceremonies, special burials etc and involvement of the poor and disadvantaged in the society.

Community cultural tourism in Zimbabwe is a case in point as exemplified by the Last Destination in Mutoko, Mudzi District Zimbabwe. Established in 1985, the facility popularly known as Binga Village has played a major role in bringing back cohesion, mutual respect and enhanced social network in a community that otherwise was disintegrating due to hunger and poverty, resource scarcity triggered by drought and land pressure, influence of foreign cultures, and to some extent, political differences.

The paper discusses the elements that have the potential to disintegrate communities at local level and how community tourism of this nature has played a key role in promoting peace through resuscitating old practices. Improving resource endowment, providing local traditional solutions to hunger and poverty, providing alternative livelihood options, incorporating the poor and the disadvantaged in the community, respecting and acknowledging other cultures, being apolitical and nurturing different views are some of the means discussed. It also discusses the various ways in which CBT has potential to bring peace on a larger scale.

The paper concludes that old traditions and cultures are key to maintaining today’s strong social networks particularly among rural communities. And, when incorporated into modern sustainable development interventions such as CBT, can bring about multiplier effects required for human peace and development.

Anne Chishawa Madzara
Networks and Tourism Section Manager
Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE)
10 Lawson Avenue Milton Park
Harare
Zimbabwe
263 4 275461/794333/ 264 91 233452
263 4 790470
annie@safire.co.zw
www.afireweb.org