

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

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—Abstract—

The leading global discourse amongst development partners for the past three years has been predominantly dominated by Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 set new global development thinking and an ambitious target for the global scene run up to 2030. Tourism, as one of the central industries to global development, proclaimed 2017 as a year of Sustainable Tourism to rally the tourism industry towards the common global agenda in a manner that tackles the global challenges. There has been an acknowledgement that even though Agenda 2030 does not put tourism at the forefront of addressing the SDGs, the industry can help address most if not all the SDGs. This qualitative research paper makes use of various selected case studies selected from the southern African region chosen randomly to highlight how tourism can assist in meeting SDGs. Drawing lessons from various cases, which include a review of the tourism organisation's annual reports and SDG Voluntary National Review Reports, highlights that in most developed and developing countries tourism has been identified as a remedy for achieving SDGs. The study found that given the nature and scope of the industry, tourism has a critical interest in the meeting of SDGs as an environmentally sensitive industry. The research argues that for tourism to be an effective vehicle for achieving SDGs, there is a need for a collaborative approach that includes various stakeholders, including academics, as the issue of SDGs is not well understood amongst tourism stakeholders, which reduces the impetus and attainment of the global goals. Such collaborative effort

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in the spirit of leaving no one behind will propel the industry on a sustainable path.

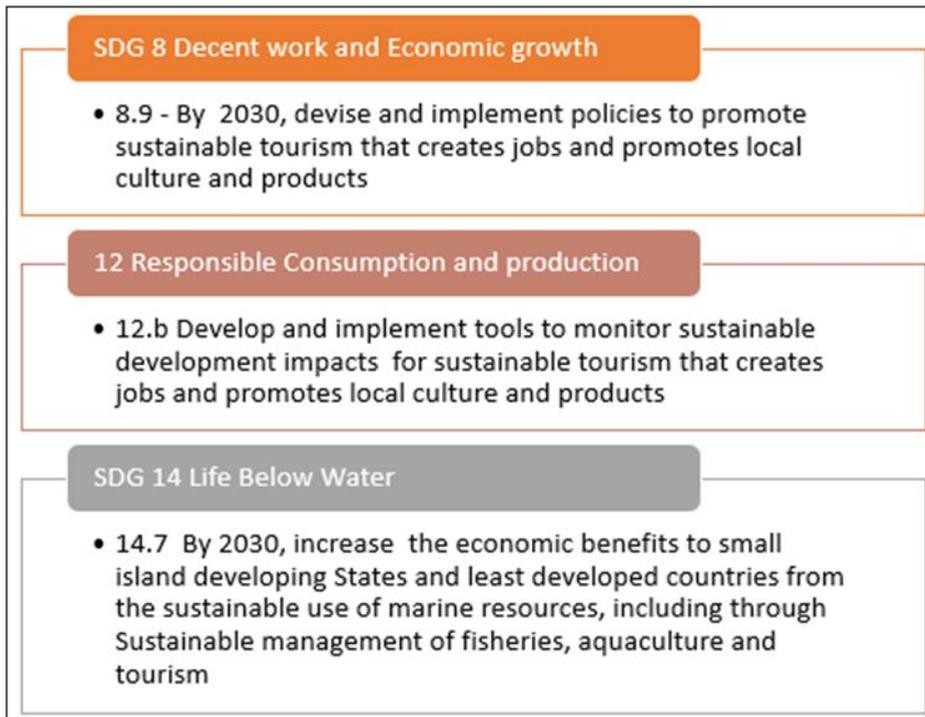
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1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2017 was proclaimed a year of Sustainable Development by the World Tourism Organization to rally the tourism industry and role players to consider tourism as a tool to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nearly four years after the adoption of SDGs in 2015 and two years post the year of Sustainable Tourism there has been very little work done to demonstrate how the tourism sector is and can embrace the SDGs to ensure a more sustainable tourism future. The United Nations had initially identified three areas where tourism could play a leading role, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Tourism and Agenda 2030 positioning



Source: Author

There has been very little progress made in generating the literature by tourism geographers on tourism and SDGs. In that regard, the first dedicated academic conference on SDGs only was conducted in January 2019 for the year's post-adoption of the SDGs. As a consequence, there is very little scholarly material generated thus far to inform tourism role players on the role of tourism in achieving the SDGs. This presents problems for Africa where, according to Siakwah *et al.* (2019), "sustainable tourism governance frameworks have not comprehensively inculcated trust, justice, social capital, power and participation." It is equally sad given that there are only 11 years left to meet the 169 SDG targets set to be attained by the year 2030. Tourism presents enormous potential to address most of the targeted 17 global goals. Due to the enormity of the work that has to be covered by 2030 and the importance attached to the fulfilment of the SDGs, there have been growing calls from leading academics for the tourism industry to take urgent steps to tackle and embrace the SDGs (Scheyvens, 2018; Hall, 2019).

Customisation of SDGs by the tourism sector is a moral and ethical imperative that cannot be avoided, as it will lead to questioning some of the practices and activities in the tourism industry. It also allows the tourism industry to self-introspect in a world that is suffering from challenges, some of which are a result of tourism activities such as global warming, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality, gender discrimination and all the challenges that are associated with mass tourism especially in some western countries. Mass tourism, for example, has been blamed for damage to and loss of authenticity for cultural heritage (Frey, 2019). In another study, Moon (2018), highlights that mass tourism was leading to several problems despite the economic gains such as putting a strain on energy and water resources and a host of both air- and land pollution challenges.

In order to ensure sustainability within the tourism sector, Boluk *et al.* (2017) called for a critical thinking system approach within the tourism system that is global. They further pointed out there was a need for learnings from multiple world views that are devoid of the current capitalistic world view to mirror a broader approach to sustainable development in the tourism industry as idealised by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. With regards to Africa and its customisation of SDGs within the tourism industry, Siakwah *et al.* (2019) indicate that from Zimbabwean and South African perspectives there were challenges to integrating tourism within the SDG framework due to governance and political misalignment of policies.

The academic contribution in terms of the literature has often been muted in terms of research contribution in tourism geography and other critical global debates. Africa can ill afford to be left behind in this critical debate given the ramifications of such lack of a voice in a global discourse, which is critical as Africa stands to lose if it fails to fully participate in the adoption of SDGs. Frey and George (2012) argue that even though there was a buzz around the world on the issue of responsibility and sustainability within the tourism sector, in South Africa there was very little evidence of responsible and sustainable tourism adoption by the tourism sector. A similar claim was also put forward by Siakwah *et al.* (2019), who observed that the sector was mostly untransformed with little benefit to the host communities. The tourism industry in South Africa and by extension Southern Africa, where South African owned companies dominate the tourism space, has been blamed for being too white and exclusionary to black tourism actors with demand for transformation to ensure the spread of economic benefits and reduction of inequality between the rich and the poor (Rogerson, 2004; Adinolfi *et al.* 2018; Mofokeng *et al.*, 2018). Failure to embrace sustainability is highly problematic, given the tourism industry's contribution to the environmental and socio-economic development of Africa. According to Dube and Nhamo (2018), tourism has a central role in economies of many developing countries, especially in Africa; hence, any challenges facing the sector need to be resolved to avoid Africa missing the opportunities that present themselves through the integration of SDGs.

Any relevant research amongst tourism geographers must, therefore, embrace the global agenda of the SDGs and by default, this will also speak to climate change, which is addressed by the Paris Agreement. The need for sustainability can never be overemphasised in the tourism industry, given the reliance on the environment and recent challenges the industry has witnessed due to mass tourism. Mass tourism has triggered anti-tourism sentiments in some parts of the world, which are partly blamed for the tourism industry's failure to achieve sustainability (Seraphin *et al.*, 2018). In South Africa, the flocking of most urbanites to coastal beaches has often resulted in racial flares as competition for space along the country's pristine coastal beaches heats up during the summer season. Dube and Nhamo (2019) highlight the huge carbon footprint that drives climate change that is left behind by tourists during their visit to resorts using aircraft and other carbon-intensive modes of transport, while other scholars have noted the negative impact of tourism on the environment through land pollution and general environmental degradation at the hands of tourism development (Zhang & Gao,

2016; Gössling & Peeters, 2015). This study, therefore, seeks to highlight how tourism can positively respond to SDGs, regardless of challenges on the ground, by looking at various case studies and in the process highlighting areas for tourism research and focus.

2. METHODOLOGY

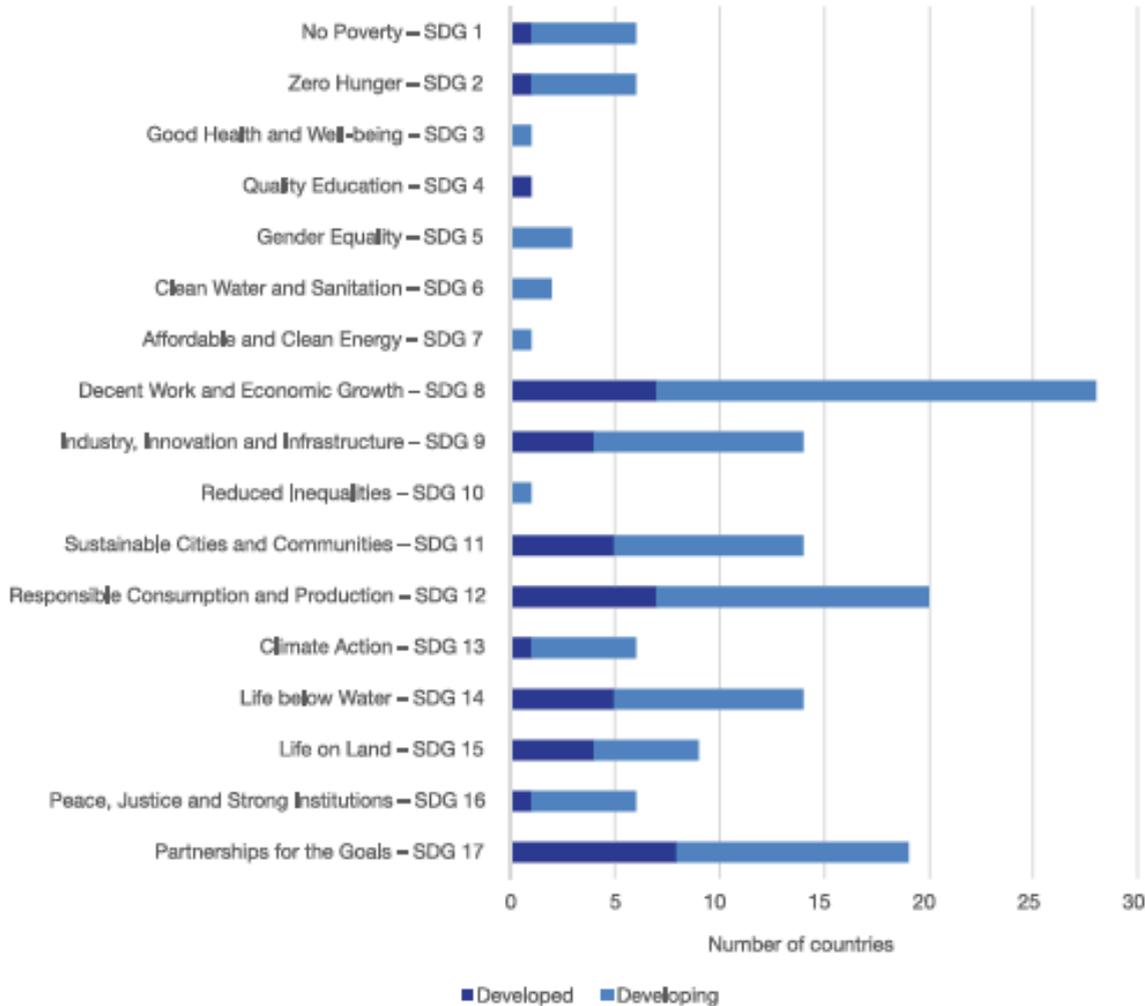
Multiple case studies were evaluated using primary and secondary data analysis of relevant authoritative records such as UN Voluntary National Reviews reports, tourism company reports and the relevant literature from the SADC region. Cases were drawn from mainly Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa where tourism is a critical economic driver. Case studies were drawn from tourism players such as lessons from the aviation industry, hospitality, conservation and other tourism role players in the tourism industry who come from the public and private sector. Random convenient sampling technique was used to profile success stories that can be used as learning points for SDGs customisation by tourism players from both the private and public sector. The choice of data gathering technique was informed by geographic proximity to the researcher, availability of data from the sample and cost implications. In this study, examples are drawn from learned practices from major tourism companies and parastatals that operate in the region and beyond. Content and thematic analyses were utilised to respond to the research questions of how the tourism industry in Africa can customise and embrace SDGs to ensure sustainable development within the sector.

3. RESULTS

Drawing lessons from various case studies across the tourism sector, the study shows that in as much as there are only three SDGs where tourism was directly mentioned in the Agenda 2030 document, there have been spirited efforts to present tourism as a potential solution to almost all the 17 SDGs. This makes tourism a strong partner with requisite tools that can be used to achieve sustainable development, especially in the global south, where sustainable development options are limited. This study noted that 41 countries that had submitted their Voluntary National Reviews, amongst them African countries, had identified tourism as a tool to address all the 17 SDGs and not just three as initially conceptualised in the Agenda 2030 document. The research shows that the most popular goals countries could relate to as a response for tourism in relation to SDGs include the ones that were initially identified in the Agenda 2030 document. Interestingly, countries, both developed and developing, noted the

importance of tourism in response to SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 17 – Partnership for Goals whose popularity amongst countries was third in the league of countries as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of countries mentioning tourism in relation to SDGs in their voluntary national reviews



Source: UNWTO and UNDP (2017)

Regardless of the contribution of tourism to climate change and the potential for climate change to disrupt tourism, hence the need for the sector to respond to SDG 13, the study found that only seven countries identified tourism as a partner for climate action in line with the Paris Agreement. The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing industries globally and so is its carbon footprint, which is expected to grow on an exponential path in the foreseeable future, particularly the aviation industry, as the demand for transport grows with the growth in the tourism sector and globalisation (Dube & Nhamo, 2019).

Academics and governments across the world have often argued that tourism is a vehicle that can be used in fighting poverty, inequality and gender discrimination. Judging by the national voluntary review reports, most governments did not seem to see tourism as a weapon to fight poverty – SDG 1, climate change – SDG 13, inequality – SDG 10 and gender equality – SDG 5 among others as can be seen in Figure 2. This is concerning as this call for tourism players to now justify the claims that have been repeated over the years that tourism is a tool for fighting poverty and inequality (Scheyvens, 2007; Sharpley & Naidoo, 2010) as government perceptions seem to be at variance with this particular claim. Siakwah *et al.* (2019) point out that there was “need for collaboration between governments, institutions, international actors, CSOs and locals to promote governance based on justice, inclusion, trust, and equitable power relations” to make tourism properly sustainable in the eyes of communities. Although several countries acknowledged the role of tourism in creating jobs, the perception amongst the countries that submitted their voluntary reviews is that such jobs do not necessarily address the challenges of poverty, inequality and gender in balance. The call is, therefore, for scholars to interrogate this view further.

Besides looking at reports from UNWTO and UNDP, the study looked at the role that is being undertaken by various tourism players such as parastatals, international safari companies, players in the aviation industry and other tourism role players where lessons for the industry can be drawn. In line with the findings above, it was noted that various tourism role players were undertaking several projects that respond to most of the 17 global goals, with some companies having already starting to report on chosen SDGs in their annual reports. Table 1 highlights some of the projects that are being undertaken by various tourism sectors and subsectors to address some of the SDGs and highlight some examples of success stories.

Table 1: Examples of some projects that address the SDG by the tourism industry in southern Africa

SDG	Project/Action taken and successes
 <p>1: NO POVERTY</p>	<p>Several tourism establishments pay decent salaries that are above set minimum wage salaries and support local suppliers of produce and other materials used at establishments most do this through the adoption of approaches such as Fair-Trade Tourism</p> <p>The CAMPFIRE Programme in Zimbabwe is a typical example of how tourism can be used as a vehicle to fight extreme poverty</p>
 <p>2: ZERO HUNGER</p>	<p>Reduce food waste at all tourism establishments; where possible promote local production by producing their vegetable gardens and other foodstuffs where possible. Hotel Verde, Cape Town, produces its vegetable for guest meals.</p> <p>Some tourism companies such as Kruger in Mpumalanga have farms and plantations that produce vegetables and fruits for sale</p>
 <p>3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	<p>Hospitality sector can assist in promoting healthy living by ensuring availability and delivery of healthy meals and gym facilities or promote healthy living such as cycling and gym by guests as is the case at Hotel Verde Cape Town Airport</p>
 <p>4: QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	<p>Some tourism organisations are seriously involved in the building of schools and partnering communities in early childhood education development as is the case with &Beyond at their Munamba enterprise in Mozambique and Phinda in KwaZulu Natal.</p> <p>Some tourism companies are involved in serious research in collaboration with universities and research institutes to research that matters, for example, Grootbos private nature reserve is involved in fynbos research, &Beyond is involved in maritime ocean research and Wilderness Safaris is involved in Responsible Tourism Research working with education institutions. All these institutions are also involved in research in endangered species and restoration.</p>
 <p>5: GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<p>Employment of women to higher positions in the hospitality sector through dedicated efforts that are aimed at increasing women participation in the tourism industry.</p> <p>Tourism establishments in South Africa employ women in the majority as part of their workforce, as is the case in most</p>

SDG	Project/Action taken and successes
 <p>6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<p>establishments.</p> <p>Construction of water purification and bottling facilities cases includes efforts by & Beyond.</p> <p>Most establishments across the region have adopted water-saving and water-efficient bathrooms.</p> <p>Rehabilitation of wetlands efforts by Hotel Verde Cape Town Airport.</p>
 <p>7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>	<p>Pioneering of tourism companies in green energy through the use of solar energy with a number of tourism establishments reducing their dependence on electricity from the grid. A number of establishments are running on 100% clean energy examples include Somalisa Camp in Hwange National Park World Travel Awards winner 2019 and other properties owned by African Bush camps in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana; several properties owned by & Beyond, Wilderness Safaris.</p> <p>The aviation industry is making efforts to invest in Sustainable Aviation Fuels, in particular, the Solaris Project in Limpopo where South African Airways is a partner.</p> <p>Most tourism establishments use gas for their cooking with 80% of establishments in Victoria Falls using gas for cooking.</p> <p>ACSA is making significant strides to get some of their airports to run solar energy. Kimberly Airport, for example, is installed with a capacity to deliver 927 000 kilowatt-hours per year, George Airport 750Kw solar facility to oversee that 42% of the power used at the airport is renewable, The Upington Airport has a solar project designed to deliver 1 040 500 kilowatt-hours of power a year to meet the operational needs of the airport.</p>
 <p>8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<p>Employment of locals by many leading tour operators in a region that is suffering high levels of unemployment examples of good practice at Hotel Verde Cape Town scooping South Africa Best Employer Brand Awards 2019.</p> <p>Substantial infrastructural development by tourism companies with a ripple effect on other economic sectors.</p>
 <p>9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<p>The tourism industry is making strides to innovate and in the design of infrastructure that is necessary for tourism development such as innovation in hotel designs and embracing of green building technology. Examples include the Hotel</p>

SDG	Project/Action taken and successes
	<p>Verde Cape Town Airport is a 6-star rated building by Green Building Council of South Africa and rated a Silver LEED by the US Green Building Council due to its innovative design as a smart building.</p> <p>Several shopping malls are going green and running on solar with a number of them accredited by Green Building Council of South Africa.</p>
 <p>10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<p>Tourism transformation programmes and various entrepreneurial capacity building programmes aimed at the tourism industry are critical in assisting in reducing inequalities, e.g. the South African Department Tourism, BBEEE and Tourism Score Card.</p> <p>SANParks had a dedicated programme to offer contracts to local communities in the projects they are running.</p> <p>Expanded Public Works Programme in National Parks to help in various conservation works as a measure to reduce extreme poverty and inequality.</p>
 <p>11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p>11.4 calls for the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites the promotion of visits to museums and various monuments and funds from tourism activities such as the tourism levies are critical in the protection of natural and cultural heritage sites, e.g. the role of South African Heritage Resource Agency.</p>
 <p>12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	<p>Several efforts underway to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry through the consumption of local products used in hotels such as the use of local artifacts.</p> <p>Most hotels involved in the waste separation, waste reduction initiatives, e.g. Hotel Verde Cape Town Airport reports a 98% reuse and 2% to landfill on waste with a 0% to landfill target.</p> <p>Wild Horizon, a company operating in Victoria Falls assists in the town cleaning.</p>
 <p>13: CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p>Investment in energy and water-saving equipment by various tourism establishments, green buildings leading examples includes efforts by SANParks, Zimbabwe National Parks to reduce the park's carbon footprint, through activities such as the use of solar energy in national parks for water pumping and their accommodation establishments.</p> <p>Lead in climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building.</p>

SDG	Project/Action taken and successes
	<p>In the aviation industry, the use of sustainable aviation fuels, utilisation of continuous descent on approach and retrofitting of aircrafts.</p> <p>SAA had projects in place to supply geysers to households as a measure of carbon offsets.</p> <p>Selling of carbon credits to travellers by aviation players</p> <p>The Green Tourism Incentive Programme by the National Department of Tourism and IDC in South Africa.</p> <p>14 Tourism establishments in Victoria Falls had enrolled in the Green Tourism Initiative under the auspices of Green Tourism organisation.</p>
 <p>14: LIFE BELOW WATER</p>	<p>Zero plastic movement amongst tourism companies, &Beyond reports that it had gotten rid of plastic in most of its establishment similar efforts were being made by several hotels and restaurants where plastic straws were being eliminated to reduce the impact of ocean plastic pollution.</p> <p>Some tourism companies are partnering government agencies to ensure the protection of ocean marine life and assist in beach clean-up campaigns in a bid to protect marine life, e.g. &Beyond Pemba project under Oceans without borders.</p>
 <p>15: LIFE ON LAND</p>	<p>Regional, national parks and conservation groups involved in tourism assist in the protection and conservation of flora and fauna. There is also a lot of reclamation and restoration work that is being conducted by tourism role players to ensure sustainability.</p> <p>Protection of endangered species SANParks, Various Zoos, National Botanical gardens, Nature Reserves, Biospheres</p> <p>The aviation industry, including airports, was at the forefront of fighting anti-poaching and illegal trafficking of wildlife.</p> <p>Installation of a bird radar system at King Shaka International Airport to reduce the impact of aviation on birdlife other airports had similar measures in place.</p>
 <p>16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p>Most tourism establishments have embraced tourism for all.</p> <p>Cultural museums can play an important role in promoting peace and justice, e.g. the Apartheid Museum in South Africa, Hector Peterson Memorial, The Constitutional Hill,</p>

SDG	Project/Action taken and successes
 <p>17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</p>	<p>Zimbabwe’s National Heroes Acre and Robin Island.</p> <p>Tourism players have proved to be critical collaborators for various SDGs as funders, especially in rural setups where tourism companies are partners for development, social and environmental activities.</p>

Source: Author

Given the vast resource and influence, the tourism industry has the potential to build on the successes made during the Millennium Development Goals to influence the adoption of SDGs by society by raising issues that are affecting the global village. This research highlights critical examples of how various tourism sectors, subsectors and role players can act as a catalyst for the promotion of SDGs in the tourism industry. An analysis of data shows that in as much as there is a build-up and coalescing around thematic areas there is little understanding of what the SDGs are by several industry players, which hamper the tackling and progress towards achievement of the global goals. It is the study’s view that more can be achieved through the popularisation of these goals, probably with government and academic leadership, to ensure that no one is left behind. This can be done through workshopping of tourism industry players, which can pave the way for increased tackling of SDGs and identification of collaborations on the industry to industry and industry to government partnership. Another avenue that needs to be explored in this regard is to include SDGs in the curriculum of tourism-related courses to ensure that there is a common understanding and vision with regards to global goals. The understanding of SDGs amongst academics and researchers, therefore, becomes critical and the call for a responsive curriculum in this regard can never be overemphasised.

The successful adoption of SDGs by the tourism community will ensure the success of the tourism industry, hence addressing of SDGs by the sector is central to the continued growth of the sector. Tourism is a particularly sensitive industry that is vulnerable to climate change, which the sector must address under SDG 13. Climate change threatens tourism resorts infrastructure, (Dube & Nhamo, 2018) and flora and fauna, which are the pillars of tourism in southern Africa. It is commendable, therefore, to see various efforts that are being undertaken by the sector to address climate change. Climate change and human population growth are also seen as major threats to biodiversity under life on land and marine life (IPCC, 2018; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and

Ecosystem Services, 2019), which are addressed under SDG 15 and 14 respectively. The efforts by the tourism industry to respond to these goals are critical in as much as they protect ecosystems in national parks and for the protection of coastal tourism.

Tourism has been considered a resource-intensive industry, which often results in pollution and environmental degradation (Deraman et al., 2017; Dube & Nhamo, 2019). The efforts by the tourism industry have to address such concerns, which are critical as they assist in addressing the challenges faced by the global village, as failure to address consumption patterns by the industry threatens global sustainability under SDG 12. The industry, therefore, has to embrace sustainable consumptive patterns to ensure sustainability. Africa is in a unique position as the industry is still growing, hence an opportunity to innovate and embrace responsible tourism practices. The adoption of green technology under SDG 7 and SDG 9 by the industry is imperative as the industry grows. There is, therefore, a need to learn from examples provided for in Table 1. Addressing SDG 12 has a ripple effect of addressing other SDGs by default such as SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 15 and other related goals such as ensuring good health and well being (SDG 3) through pollution reduction.

4. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper finds several areas where tourism is providing leadership in tackling SDGs regardless of the challenges of lack of adequate knowledge in that space. Significant effort has been made by the tourism sector, for example, in climate change action SDG 13, in addressing the goals and targets under life on land SDG 15 life on land and SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy among other areas where tourism is taking leadership. The paper provides an opportunity for the opening of debate space, which paves the way for industry-wide adoption of the SDGs. The study finds that there is an important role that academia can play in shaping the debate. There are chances that some tourism players might miss an opportunity to tackle the SDGs given the time frame left to reach 2030. Therefore, the urgency in customisation of SDGs is imperative and to ensure everyone is on board there might be a need for each player to customise as many SDGs as they can to draw benefits that go hand-in-hand with the adoption of the global goals. There is also need for African researchers to research the role of various tourism enterprises on a goal-to-goal basis to provide learning and a platform that forms the basis for global evaluation of how African tourism has customised the SDGs.

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