4 TOURISM CERTIFICATION FOR PROMOTING TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY IN THE VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE

Cleopas Njerekai[1], Farai Utete[2], Vitalis Basera[3]*

Abstract

This paper examines and ranks sustainable tourism certification concerns raised by managers of the pilot certified facilities in Zimbabwe. In the broader context, these concerns could be the reasons for the low uptake of these schemes in the country and on the continent. An email questionnaire with a three-item Likert scale and follow-up telephone interviews with 13 pilot test eco-certified facilities in the country were undertaken to collect the data. The results were thematically analysed. A ranked analysis of the concerns revealed a low uptake level of the scheme and the exclusion of guests in the certification process was the most important concern. Thirteen concerns were raised to corroborate previously raised concerns. It is recommended that there should be concerted efforts towards addressing the issue of low adoption levels of this tool both at the country and continental levels.

INTRODUCTION

The assurance and provision of quality products and services are at the centre of every tourism business (Park & Joeng, 2019). Today, this dimension is increasingly taking a sustainable and climate-smart angle following numerous calls by the United Nations World Tourism Organisations (UNWTO) to ensure that all tourism and hospitality operations are sustainably undertaken (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). Sustainable Tourism Certification (STC), also referred to as eco-rating or eco-certification is one of the key tools for ensuring sustainability in tourism operations in many countries today. However, of late, this tool has become highly controversial perhaps due to the numerous challenges encountered during its implementation. These challenges have stirred several critical debates and issues on its implementation and its effectiveness as a sustainable tourism development tool (Bendell & Font, 2004). These issues and challenges could also be the reasons for the low uptake of these schemes, especially in Africa, with less than 9 out of the 54 countries having adopted eco-certification (Spenceley, 2018).

Since these schemes are implemented in different contexts, it is critical to discuss these schemes in the contexts in which they are implemented in order to develop tailor-made and home-grown strategies and solutions for them. Ever since the pilot certification in Zimbabwe in 2016, no new tourism organisation has been certified. Others failed to get recertified despite the drive by the authorities to encourage sustainable tourism development in Zimbabwe. This paper, therefore, discusses the concerns raised during the piloting of a sustainable tourism certified programme in facilities in Zimbabwe. A ranking of the concerns was undertaken so that the resolutions to these concerns could also be undertaken in order of priority.

1.   *Midlands State University, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Gweru, Zimbabwe.*
2.   *Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 55 Samora Machel Avenue, Harare, Zimbabwe.*
3.   *Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Mutare, Zimbabwe, Email:* vitalisbasera@yahoo.com

Eco-certification Efforts in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the Government's documented efforts to eco-certify tourism operations started in October 2014 through the ZTA-UK tourism program with Green Tourism UK, a UK-based Company which specialises in Green Tourism Certification programmes. Green Tourism UK is a non-profit organisation established in 1997 whose mission is to encourage and enable people to make sustainable choices that reduce their impact on the planet. It started in Scotland, and they have grown to over 2,000 members across the UK, Ireland, Italy, Canada and Zimbabwe, making it the world's largest sustainable certification program. It has had over 20 years of caring for people, places and the planet in general (ILO, 2010).

The country's green certification initiative was in line with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)`s drive towards sustainable development. The principal elements on which the eco-certification system was based included energy efficiency (heating and lighting), biodiversity and nature conservation, community involvement, procurement, waste management, water conservation and many more aspects. The first Green Tourism Awards Ceremony in Zimbabwe was held in Victoria Falls on the 2nd of March in 2016 with the accreditation of 13 facilities (7 lodges, 2 hotels and 4 camps). The Global Tourism Certification Program (GTCP) criteria were adopted and adapted to take account of the local social, environmental and economic situation in the country. These facilities were only in Matebeleland North and more specifically in the Victoria Falls Hwange area. Out of these facilities, one facility was awarded a Gold label, seven got bronze and five got Silver awards. Each of the facilities was issued with a certificate, logo and plaque for use in their marketing activities and on their websites. The facilities were also expected to enjoy full Green Tourism UK Membership benefits and

promotion. In coming up with the ZTA-UK Green Certification Programme, several workshops involving tourism operators and other key stakeholders were held.

Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) established minimum green tourism standards using the Green Tourism UK concept, to help operators reduce operational costs, support the local economy and community, enhance guests' experiences, help combat climate change and meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Green Tourism UK is now working in partnership with other local partners, Environment Africa and a locally-based Green Tourism Advisor to adapt their global standards for tourism to Zimbabwe and the wider KAZA region. These included resource efficiency, local purchasing, waste reduction, water and energy conservation, support for community projects, avoiding the use of damaging chemicals, staff training and welfare and the conservation of natural and cultural assets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecolabelling and Eco-certification in the Tourism Industry

Ecolabelling and eco-certification in the tourism industry refer to the voluntary process and practice of awarding an identifiable logo or certificate to any tourism organisation for achieving a certain level of pre-discussed and agreed standards of sustainable tourism development over a set period of time (Cerqua, 2018). The awarded logos or certificates demonstrate the environmental credentials of any organisation to other industry operators and customers. It is therefore a self-regulatory sustainable development tool intended to encourage tourism organisations to conduct their businesses in environmentally friendly and sustainable ways (Mechiret, 2011). For such schemes, tourism organisations voluntarily participate with the expectation that some benefits will accrue to them as

a result of adopting such practices and paraphernalia. If an organisation fails to meet its benchmarked and agreed standards, the sanction is typically a withdrawal of the right to use the logo and the consequent loss of any advantage that it confers (Jarvis, Weelen, & Simcock, 2010).
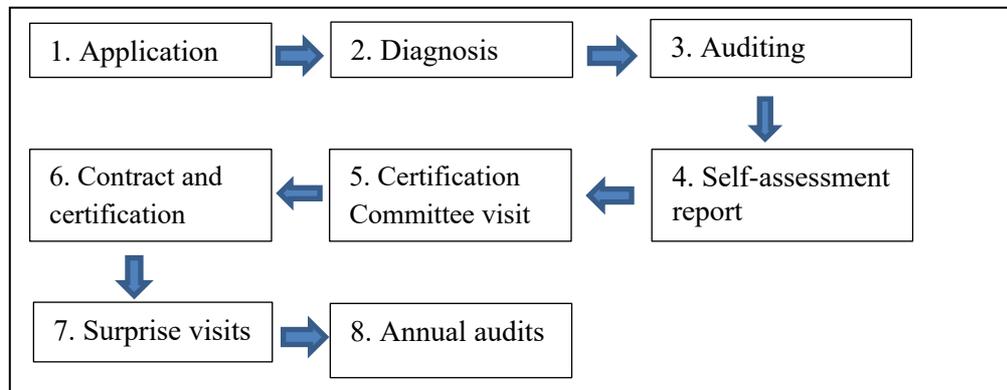
Figure 1: The General Sustainable Eco-certification Process

Source: Author's Compilation

Overall, STC can be described as the process of assuring modern day hospitality operators and consumers that the assessed company has met a certain set of minimum standards. Generally, eco-certification follows an eight-step process (Figure 1). These are application, diagnosis, auditing, contract and certification, certification committee visit, self-assessment report, surprise visits and annual audits. The origins of certification can be traced to the manufacturing industry, where there are greater, direct and measurable environmental impacts, as well as clearer operating systems and larger organisations (Tribe, Font, Griffiths, Vickery & Yale 2000).

The Adoption Levels of Eco-Rating Schemes Worldwide

Today, there are more than 160 eco-labels for tourism and hospitality establishments worldwide (Bocker, 2021). Many of these were developed in the mid-eighties and some of them were mainly developed in the nineties (Tribe, Font, Griffiths, Vickery, & Yale, 2000). In the United Kingdom alone, voluntary tourism certification schemes have developed largely within the hospitality sector, mostly due to these organisations being more easily defined and therefore standardised (Bendell & Font, 2004). Some of the larger certification schemes worldwide include Green Globe 21, a global benchmarking and certification programme for travel and tourism; Green Key, an international eco-label for leisure that operates in more than sixteen countries; and the Certificate for Sustainable Tourism, a programme to encourage environmental practice in hotels in Costa Rica. Additional schemes include Eco-tourism Kenya, Ecotourism Australia and many more. Most of the certification schemes vary in application, region, complexity, price and more. However, most include to a greater extent a focus on energy, water, waste, community engagement, heritage and biodiversity conservation, sustainable procurement, accountability and human resource practices, architecture and design. However, some incorporate all these aspects. A study by International Tourism Partnership (2016) revealed that out of 130,000 hotels studied, only 6.2% of them were green certified.

The Expected Benefits of Eco-Certification as a Sustainable Tourism Development Tool

The expected benefits of eco-rating schemes

can be viewed from four perspectives, namely the operator, the destination, the tourist and the host community as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: A Summary of the Perceived Benefits of Tourism Eco-Certification Schemes

Operator benefits	Tourist destination benefits	Visitor/tourist benefits	Host community benefits
Flexibility	Control, evaluation and standardisation of sustainable environmental practices	Cost effective in the long run	More physical, social and economic benefits and less negative physical social and economic impacts
Feeling of ownership of the scheme	Improved destination image	Safe activity environment	Safe activity environment
Unlimited scope	Destination marketing tool	Education	Hosts learn new ways of doing things
Proceed at an agreed pace	Controlled changes to the destination	Memorable experiences	Controlled changes to the destination
Room for more rapid changes and innovation	More innovative products and services	More innovative products and services	More innovative products and services
Cost-saving	More expenditure by visitors	More products and services at the same price	More expenditure by tourists

At the operator level, existing literature attest to the fact that several benefits have accrued to tourism organisations that have adopted and implemented these green schemes. According to Spenceley and Bien (2018), the tourism industry uses certification and the logo awarded to the green practising company as 'trademarks' to communicate the environmental credentials of a company. The hope is that customers will develop positive attitudes towards their products or services. The image enhancement effect of eco-rating schemes is demonstrated in several writings from the early 2000s to today, notably by Sasidharani, Sikaraya and Kerstetter (2002), Klein, and Rogers (2018) and Spenceley and Bien (2018).

STC is expected to curb tourism's negative environmental impacts on the natural resource base of tourism destinations by encouraging tourism enterprises to attain high environmental standards (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). These schemes educate tourists on the impacts of their actions and decisions, thereby prompting them to act in favour of the environment through their purchasing decisions (UNWTO, 2015). Also, Klein and Dodds (2017) noted that these schemes also develop standards for environmentally friendly tourism products and services. Eco-certification schemes such as Green Globe 21 also lead to improved environmental performance in the travel and tourism industry. Graci

and Dodds (2008) noted that these schemes also aid in fulfilling and practising sustainable tourism. UNEP and UNWTO, certification programmes can possibly help to promote and ensure environmental compliance in less economically developed countries, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America where tourism is expanding rapidly but government regulations may be weak (UNEP, 2005). However, a lot of debate has taken place over the potential and merits of certification as a tool for attaining these principles (Mbaiwa, 2011).

With eco-rating schemes, the contribution of tourism activities to sustainable environmental, and socio-economic development of host societies will be more evident, more measurable and more accountable (Jarvis, Weelen & Simcock, 2010). Furthermore, the level of awareness on sustainability issues will be stronger in the host society if the greater majority of tourism organisations at the destinations are certified. The widespread use of ecolabels and certification systems in the tourism industry helps to generate increased environmental awareness among both tourists and host societies and could result in more caring attitudes with respect to the natural and built environments (Cerqua, 2018). Eco-certification enables governments to adopt a flexible approach to monitoring tourism operations, permitting organisations to proceed at a pace they feel most comfortable with while encouraging them to develop innovative approaches to environmental and socio-cultural improvements (Haliouiand & Schmidt, 2016).

The other potential is giving tourism companies greater scope for making environmental and social improvements by exploiting opportunities specific to their individual circumstances, rather than governments having to control and inspect companies in order to check their compliance with general, industry-wide regulations (Jarvis, Weelen, & Simcock, 2010). Eco-certification also allows part of the costs of implementing and monitoring environmental protection measures to be transferred to the industry itself, thereby reducing the financial burden of regulation on the taxpayer (Haliouiand & Schmidt, 2016). National programmes of tourism certification can also enhance the recognition of tourism in the country, national competitiveness and image enhancement in international markets. The potential adoption of a privately run industry certification by public land management agencies illustrates that certification programmes can be used as instruments of government policy as well as mechanisms for consumer choice (Bendell & Font, 2004). Eco-rating and eco-certification can also enable tourism businesses to market their products more effective and improve their public images among consumers, business partners and the host communities. At the same time, engaging in voluntary certification can help companies to signal their specific commitment to environmental, social and even economic improvements, which may in turn help to defer the need for future direct regulation by governments (Klein, Dodds, & Rogers, 2018).

Pursuing sound environmental management strategies prompted by eco-certification can generate substantial cost savings for a company. Chan (2008) reported that the installation of an Energy Management System (EMS) provides 20-45% energy savings. In a guestroom, automatically turning the high-velocity air conditioning, lighting and other devices down or off in the absence of a guest, and also adjusting settings in unsold rooms which would be vacant by default. Also, participation in certification programmes can provide better access to modern techniques, technology and know-how (Hu, 2012). In addition, effective environmental management can help to protect the environmental and cultural assets upon which the tourism industry depends for its continued prosperity. All these advantages of the certification system can benefit consumers by providing them with more information and guidance

for their decisions on travel choices, as well as assurances for product and service quality (Cerqua, 2018). Participation in eco-certification can also help tourism organisations gain recognition from other assessing bodies.

In general, green certification programmes have been recognised as instruments or mechanisms for achieving sustainable tourism (Suratman & Hamzah, 2008). The major aim of green certification which is to ensure environmental and social sustainability in tourism and tourism-related industries has assisted in controlling the destruction of natural resources, especially in host destinations like resort towns like Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe (ZTA, 2016). The role and potential of certification should be extended as it does not only benefit the tourism industry, but also the government, host communities and tourists.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was adopted for the study. A questionnaire with a three-item Likert scale was developed to collect data on the extent to which existing concerns gleaned from existing literature bothered the respondents and then follow up telephone interviews were undertaken to collect further information. The questions were on uptake of eco-certification, guest involvement, guest experience, return on investment, voluntary, incentives for certification, certification period, the interest of destination marketing organisations and marketing tools in relation to eco-certification.

A questionnaire with a three-item Likert scale was used in order to rank the concerns of facility

operators regarding eco-certification. The questionnaires were e-mailed to the 13 respondents selected for the pilot test by the Green Tourism UK team and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) in 2016. The 13 facilities accredited for the Green Tourism UK certification were selected for the study in order to get their concerns after five years of accreditation during which some had lost the certification and no new tourism facilities had been certified from 2016 to 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant travel restrictions necessitated the collection of data through telephone interviews and email questionnaires. All the selected study units were located in and around the Victoria Falls area which is the country's prime tourist destination. The study respondents were the owners, General Managers or Operations Managers of the selected facilities. The responses collected were thematically analysed along the lines of the concerns gleaned from existing literature. No meaningful statistical analysis could be carried out since the data was mainly categorical and qualitative.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The managers of the facilities were experienced and had worked for the tourism facilities for more than three years. The tourism facilities are among the hotels, lodges and safari registered with the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. The concerns that were gleaned from existing literature and for which managers and owners of certified establishments indicated the extent to which they were concerned, are summarised in Figure 2. These are discussed in more detail in this section.

Sustainable certification concerns by certified facilities in Zimbabwe
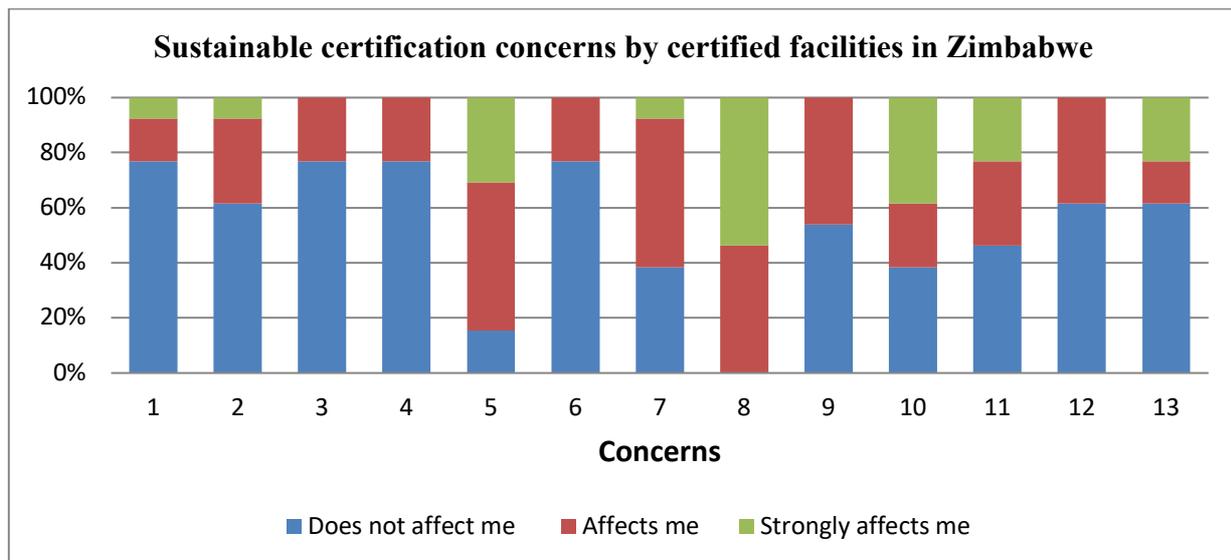
Key to the concerns		
1. Its just a marketing tool	4. No guarantee of competitive advantage	7. Compromises guest experiences
2. Inadequate green tourist demand	5. No guest consultation	8. Low uptake of scheme
3. Wide array of certification programme	6. ZTA conflict of interest	9. Return on ivestment long term
10. Fact that its voluntary	13. No home grown certification	
11. No other incentive for certification		
12. Re-certification (2 yrs) too short		

Figure 2: Summary of the Concerns Raised by Certified Facilities in Zimbabwe

STC as a Marketing Tool

It was observed that 77% of the respondents were not bothered by the fact that the green certification programme for the country could have been adopted as a destination marketing tool by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA). A manager had this to say on this matter;

> *When these programmes were initially developed elsewhere, especially in the UK and the USA, the main goal was to ensure that tourism organisations operate sustainably and that they provide climate-smart products and services. For Africa, the continent seems to have taken a 'me too' and marketing approach to the whole idea but this is not currently a problem and should actually be commended.*

Another respondent had this to say on this matter;

> *The ZTA embarked on this certification programme as an international advertising campaign and also to meet its strategic issue of Zimbabwe attaining a green destination status by 2025. However, this was not worrying us.*

This comment concurs with observations by Klein et al. (2018) who discovered that the Blue Flag certification system was perceived more as a tourism promotional tool rather than an environmental management or protection tool in the Great Lakes region. This finding is contrary to findings by Haliouiand & Schmdt (2016) who found out that the marketing benefits of the Tunisian ecolabel were negligible.

Financing of the STC Programme

All the respondents and participants in the certification programme were grateful that they were not asked to directly pay anything for the certification, except for the accommodation and meal expenses of the certifying team. Therefore, only indirect expenses

related to the implementation of sustainable practices were incurred by the organisations. For these costs, 38% of the respondents wondered if there was an adequate clientele base for self-sustenance of STC activities for tourism organisations in Africa since it was based on the assumption that there is demand for green labels.

These organisations, therefore, expected some form of assurance from the certifying team in this regard. The remainder of the respondents (62%), viewed the costs as the opportunity cost of the enhanced image and competitive advantage the organisations expected to enjoy in future. Existing literature on the costs of certification schemes indicates that these depend on the developer and owner of the certifying scheme. As noted by Bendell and Font (2004) certification schemes can be developed by the government, private organisations and NGOs. The costs, therefore, vary accordingly and there is no standard as noted by Petrevska and Deleva (2014). In relation to the adequacy of the clientele base, Karlson and Dolnicar (2016) in their study of eco-certification for Iceland discovered that eco-labelling did not have a big impact on general tourist demand and that only a niche market influenced by eco-labelling existed. This market could hardly sustain the expenses of certification. This market needs to be grown.

A Wide Array of Certification Schemes

Further, 77% of the respondents were not worried about the existence of a wide array of certification schemes worldwide. One of the respondents in the remaining 23% who were bothered posed a barrage of questions to the researcher as follows;

Who should set standards for STC programmes? Which STC programmes are suitable for Zimbabwe and Africa? Who sets the standards? Whose standards and to what levels should these standards be pursued by tourism organisations in the country? What criteria should be used to select STC programmes for the country and the continent? As it is now, I have heard that there is a Global Sustainable Tourism Certification and should the continent not formulate its own African Tourism Certification programme? If this were to be developed, to what extent would there be unilateral or mutual recognition of such a continental certification scheme? What are the possibilities that such a scheme will also be adopted by countries in the global North?

These questions are pertinent and need urgent attention to enhance the adoption levels of certification programmes in the country and the continent. Several authors have raised the issue of diversity of certification schemes and the lack of a standard certifying scheme. As aptly captured by Buckley (2002:76);

Ecolabels in tourism are common but are uncoordinated. They can be established by individual companies, industry associations, voluntary organisations and government agencies. They also range in scale from single villages to worldwide, from single activities to entire destinations; and they include voluntary, codes, awards, accreditation and certification schemes. (Buckley, 2002:76).

This, therefore, explains why, in total there are over 150 STC programmes worldwide today (Kraus, 2016; Jarvis, Weelen, & Simcock 2010).

Guarantee that Certified Facilities Would Perform Better than Non-Certified Faculties

Again, 77 % of the respondents were not worried about whether there was a guarantee or not that an environmentally certified facility would perform better than those without certification, as it was obviously possible that some uncertified facilities could actually perform better than them. Respondents were quite aware that there were some organisations which did not want to be certified for one reason or another. In this regard, some tourism organisations may not want to pursue certification where a national tourism organisation is involved and where the organisation feels that the certification is being undertaken to gain political mileage or as a destination marketing tool. In relation to the existing literature, Graci and Dodds (2008), noted that there were very limited studies to support the business case for eco-certification and implementation of friendly environmental practices by hotels. Therefore, through their study of Canadian hotels, they provided numerous cases demonstrating that going green was necessary for an economically viable and efficiently run hotel.

Lack of Guest Consultation in the STC Processes

This was the second most significant concern of managers and owners of certified facilities in the country as 85% of the respondents indicated that it bothered them. Existing literature concurs with this finding. As an example, Karlson and Dolnicar (2016) note that in most STC programmes to date, the most important actor in tourism, the tourist, is not consulted. Most researchers' opinion is that in the development of STC programmes, the tourist must be involved at all levels. This is because some of the STC recommendations affect them. They are also expected to implement some of the practices such as linen reuse programmes (Bruns-Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, the tourist is an idealist or active supporter of sustainability principles. They therefore should be given a chance to test all experiences against sustainability issues and voice their opinions – a practice that has hardly been adopted so far. Manaktola (2010) notes that little has been done to inform tourists about the existence of certification programmes, their content and their importance and yet the Mohonk Agreement on Global Certification clearly states that the development of a certification scheme should be a participatory, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral process (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2010).

In a study of SCT programmes in Greece and the USA, Choi, Parsa, Sigala, and Putrevu (2009) recommended that tourists should be considered the most important stakeholders and should participate in these programmes because to date, most tourists do not know what eco-certification is. The evidence indicates that many of these ecolabelling programmes have not been very effective in publicising their programmes to consumers. Most STCPs are invisible to the guest at whom such programmes are targeted. Even if the efforts at promoting tourism eco-labelling were considerable, there is a major weakness – the continuing lack of consumer recognition, which reduces the incentive for tourism companies to become involved in such schemes and thus leads to another problem of lacklustre corporate participation as noted earlier by Fairweather et al., (2005).

Possible Conflict of Interest by the ZTA

It was observed that 77% of the certified facilities had no problem with the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority taking a leading role in the country's green certification programme. However, they highlighted the need to co-opt the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe (HAZ), the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ) and local government administrative councils. The remaining 23%

indicated that they would rather engage a recognised and credible private player to do the certification without the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority being involved. They felt that the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority was merely supposed to coordinate the activities of green certification rather than conducting the certification by itself. A perusal of existing literature from the year 2000 to date revealed that the question of who should play the leading role in the sustainable certification of tourism organisations has received very limited attention.

Effect on Guest Experiences

A significant number of respondents (62%) were concerned that some sustainability criteria for certification such as linen change, in-room waste separation and many more had the potential to compromise guest experiences and yet guests were not being consulted. The 38% who were not bothered believed that their guests would finally benefit from the hotels' endeavours to green their operations. In a study by Ratner and Losifov (2017) on the perspectives of Russians on ecohotel services in 2017, the majority of respondents showed interest in eco-hotel services but rather preferred to stay there if the price and the overall quality of their stay remained the same (Ratner & Losifov, 2017).

Low-Level Uptake of the Country's Sustainable Certification Programme

The low level of participation in SCPs by tourism businesses baffled all the respondents and it was the most significant concern. Respondents wondered why many tourism organisations in the country and the continent were not eco-certified. In relation to the existing literature, Spenceley (2016), noted that only a very small proportion of all hotels in Africa were certified (less than 3.%) and that these were patchily distributed across the continent. She attributed the low uptake to several factors including

the proliferation of ecolabels, their geographically and topically specialised character, the low profile of most funding and certification bodies and all the concerns raised in this paper. This problem was not peculiar to Africa but also noticeable on a world scale. Ratner and Losifov (2017) also noted that the environmental labelling of hotels and other accommodation facilities is not yet widespread. Baltescu (2017) in his studies on uptake levels in Romania, noted that the reduced number of eco-certified accommodation units in the country was an element which showed, on the one hand, the reluctance of owners to introduce environmental management practices and specific green marketing tools. On the other hand, the lack of tourists' interest to consume green accommodation services.

Return on Investment and other Certification Incentives

More than half (54%) of the respondents wondered whether there was an adequate return on investment after certification. Those who raised this concern were mostly worried that the benefits of eco-certification were quite imperceptible. Aside from the accolades, certificates and other green-related paraphernalia, there were no other significant benefits to entice other organisations to be certified. The organisations wanted concrete and tangible evidence from Africa to prove these benefits. Aside from these criticisms (46%) of the respondents were content with the expected benefits of certification. They cited other advantages like businesses becoming more environmental-conscious, protecting sensitive environmental areas, reducing water usage and improving waste management. Their expressions are supported by Cerqua (2018) in a study in West England where it was discovered that the award of a Blue Flag only positively affected the flow of only domestic tourists.

Absence of a Homegrown Certification Scheme and the Voluntary Nature of the Scheme

Also, 62% of the respondents were in support of a home-grown sustainable eco-certification programme. The respondents suggested that the government makes the certification a compulsory statutory requirement for every tourism organisation in the country. In this case, the green certification criteria could be incorporated into the current ZTA Statutory Instrument 128 of 2005 for standards and grading. The respondents indicated that this document urgently needed review as it had outlived its usefulness (16 years) and was currently one of the oldest standards and grading instruments in the SADC region.

Re-certification Period

It was also noted that 62% of the respondents were satisfied with the two-year re-certification term proposed by the ZTA. The remaining 38% advocated for an annual re-certification to keep track of changing trends in the industry and also to avoid costly lapses in the greening of their operations. Their sentiments are also echoed by Nowakowsk (2012) in his studies of Costa Rica where hotel owners and managers complained of failure by the responsible authorities to frequently audit hotels to verify compliance. Overall, Table 2 summarises the concerns raised by managers and owners of certified facilities in Zimbabwe, ranked in order of their significance.

These ranked concerns in Table 2 indicate how these concerns should be addressed in order of priority to enhance participation in green certification by tourism establishments in the country. In general, each concern raised clearly indicates what needs to be done to enhance the adoption of sustainable certification programmes by tourism businesses.

Table 2: Ranked Concerns on Sustainable Eco-certification in Zimbabwe

Certification concern	Rank
Low uptake of scheme	1
No guest consultation	2
Compromises guest experiences	3
Imperceptible return on investment	4
That it is voluntary	5
No other incentive for certification	6
Re-certification period (2 years)	7
No home grown certification	8
Inadequate green tourist demand	9
Wide array of certification programmes	10
No guarantee of competitive advantage	10
ZTA conflict of interest	10
It is just a marketing tool	13

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that sustainable tourism certification programmes in Zimbabwe, Africa and the world at large are affected by a number of concerns as reviewed by the operators in Victoria Falls. Thirteen concerns were raised and were in corroboration with previously raised concerns by other authors which are; low uptake of the scheme, no guest consultation, compromises guest experiences, imperceptible return on investment, that it's voluntary, no other incentive for certification, re-certification period, ZTA conflict of interest and it is just a marketing tool. The most significant concern ranked number one was the low uptake of the scheme by tourism and hospitality operators whilst the least concern was that the STC as just a marketing tool.

The paper recommends an all stakeholder inclusive approach to encourage STC in the hospitality industry and to avoid the imposition of the ecolabels by the authorities. The government can offer incentives to industry players that adopt STC which can include reduced taxes levies and annual registration fees. There is a need to develop STC locally in Africa that reflects developments in the tourism and hospitality industry on the continent instead of implanting western models that are not compatible with the local business environment. The study considered 13 tourism facilities that were certified in Victoria by Green Tourism UK, generalising the result to the whole nation and continent at large might be a challenge since the facilities were from one resort town and only certified by one organisation. In future, there is a need to investigate many tourism facilities from other towns and regions outside Zimbabwe against a number of certifying organisations and take into account the best model of STC programmes that can be developed for African countries.

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