

The Prospects and Challenges of Developing Sustainable Agritourism in the Southeast Lowveld of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Underpinned by the sustainable tourism concept, this study examines the prospects and challenges of developing sustainable agritourism in the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe. The central question is whether there is potential for agritourism development around commercial agro-sugar enterprising farms in the southeast lowveld. Despite immense socio-economic spin-offs associated with agritourism, resources in the southeast lowveld remain underutilized for tourism purposes. No empirical study has exclusively examined the sustainable development of agritourism in the southeast lowveld context. The study objectives were to: (i) examine the prospects of developing sustainable agritourism in the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe; (ii) analyse the challenges that constrain agritourism development; and (iii) unpack agritourism resources available in the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe. A qualitative approach in which the findings of a questionnaire survey administered among tourism stakeholders at multiple sites encompassing Hippo Valley, Mkwazine, Mwenezana, Mpapa and Triangle were thematically analysed revealed a wide range of farmland resources such as citrus plantations, sugarcane farms and milling plants, lucerne and cattle-ranching farms capable of supporting agritourism. Farm owners were willing to incorporate agritourism in their agricultural ventures. Furthermore, the study confirmed bright prospects for developing sustainable agritourism in the southeast lowveld anchored on a blend of large expanses of sugarcane and citrus plantations, strategically placed close to the Gonarezhou national park, Great Zimbabwe monuments and Tugwi-Mukosi dam. There could be tourism business overflow to Chiredzi, Mkwazine and Hippo Valley sugar estates and Mwenezana citrus plantations through agritourism tours. However, access issues, limited overnight accommodation facilities, mosquito infestation and uncertainty over the current land tenure system were identified as notable constraints. Developing sustainable agritourism in the southeast lowveld resonates with the broad Zimbabwean tourism operators' desire to explore other forms of tourism in line with changing global tourism market trends, which continue to gravitate towards unspoilt farm tourism. The study highlights the inadequacies of the current Zimbabwean tourism development policies, which do not seem to give prominence to other forms of tourism, especially agritourism in fringe areas. The study informs policy makers on the potential of

agritourism and helps in crafting a sustainable agritourism framework at the micro-level. The findings lack external validity so future research could replicate the study in other geographical contexts to corroborate findings.

Keywords: Sustainable agritourism, Prospects and challenges, Non-mega tourist zones, Southeast lowveld, Adventure agri-tours