

THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATING SMALL-SCALE FARMERS ON AGRITOURISM ADOPTION: A RECIPE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The agriculture industry is experiencing tremendous challenges across the globe due to various factors. These factors include globalisation, falling commodity prices, free-trade promotions, over supply of goods and services, changes in subsidy policies, environmental changes, climate change, low-income elasticities in commodity markets and over-reliance on raw products. This has resulted in the hopelessness of the agriculture industry leaving farmers seeking to explore the viability of alternative economic strategies in an effort to preserve and maintain the productivity of their family lands. Zimbabwe as an agro-based economy, with agriculture contributing substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is not spared by the scourge. Irrespective of the different challenges bedeviling farmers, they still need to remain viable. One key strategy that will be a panacea to this quagmire is the amalgamation of agriculture and tourism sectors under the concept of agritourism. This paper is a conceptual discussion which argues for the education of farmers on the concept of agritourism and its benefits. This is critical and necessary for economic development in Zimbabwe. The discussion positions education as an important ingredient for the adoption and success of agritourism. All the countries that are currently benefiting from agritourism used education as a way of imparting skills, knowledge and improving attitudes and perceptions among farmers.

Key words: agritourism; economic development; education; small-scale farmers.

JEL Clasification: O13, Q13

Introduction

The agriculture industry is experiencing tremendous challenges across the globe due to various factors. These factors include globalisation, falling commodity prices, free-trade promotions, over supply of goods and services, changes in subsidy policies, environmental changes, climate change, low-income elasticities in commodity markets and over-reliance on

raw products. This has resulted in the hopelessness of the agriculture industry leaving farmers seeking to explore the viability of alternative economic strategies in an effort to preserve and maintain the productivity of their family lands. This paradigm shift paves way for the transformation of the agriculture sector which has been traditionally viewed as an industry for the poor living in

rural areas, who mainly engage in it for the purposes of survival. Diversification of farm enterprises has become a strategy for small farms to remain viable especially in the face of high risks affecting the agricultural industry across the globe. Pressure is mounting on farmers who have traditionally relied on farming for survival, to diversify their enterprise in order to remain competitive and viable. The predicament is mainly affecting populations in developing countries which have been heavily relying upon agriculture for survival.

Zimbabwe as an agro-based economy, with agriculture contributing substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is not spared by the scourge. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), agriculture contributes approximately 17% to the country's GDP, providing employment and income to approximately 60-70% of the population and accounting for nearly 30.4% of the country's foreign currency earnings (Runganga, Njoroge and Mishi, 2022). In 2000, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) which was designed into two models. Model 1 was meant to depopulate overcrowded areas by resettling people in acquired farmlands while model 2 was designed to establish small to medium sized commercial farms operated by black indigenous farmers (ibid). Sadly, between 2002 and 2003 agricultural production fell by 25% (Mabaye, 2005, cited in Runganga et al., 2022). According to the National Agricultural Policy Framework of 2018 to 2030, Zimbabwe's declining contribution of agriculture to GDP has not been accompanied by increases in agricultural labour productivity or increases in the manufacturing sector respectively. Additionally, the value added per worker

in the agriculture sector, a proxy for labour productivity, has continuously been declining; a sign of a failing sector.

On the other hand, tourism used to be the fastest growing economic sector in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. According to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), the sector grew from 20% to 40% between 1980 and 1999 and contributed 8% to the country's GDP (Chikuta, 2016). However, the sector started declining when the country embarked on the FTLRP in the early 2000. According to Baipai, Chikuta, Gandiwa & Mutanga (2022), the average tourism growth rate decreased from 17.5% prior to the year 2000 to 5.9% between 2010 and 2017. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic later in 2020 exacerbated the situation which seriously restricted the movement and interaction of people. The pandemic resulted in the decline of tourist arrivals from 2 294 259 in 2019 to 639 356 in 2020 (ibid). The economic restrictions imposed upon the country, the Covid-19 pandemic together with other economic, social and environmental factors continue to affect the performance of the tourism sector in Zimbabwe to a greater extent. As such, it is becoming necessary for players in the industry to seek other alternative diversification strategies so as to safeguard their investments.

However, farmers, especially those operating on small scale farms, still need to remain viable despite the aforementioned challenges. Farming-related diversification strategies have to be developed for the continual economic empowerment of these key stakeholders. As such, the amalgamation of agriculture and tourism sectors under the concept of agritourism, is regarded as one of the strategies which can be adopted by farmers to maintain their investments on their farms. Against this background, this

paper is a conceptual discussion which argues for the adoption of agritourism in Zimbabwe. This may only be achievable through the education of farmers on the concept of agritourism and its resulting benefits.

Overview of agritourism

Agritourism is also referred to as farm tourism, rural-tourism or eco-tourism. The agritourism concept or practice started in Europe's Alpine Mountain farms in the 19th century as the growing railway network allowed tourists to travel to them from the expanding industrial urban regions to the north (Jin, Wu, Zhang & He, 2021). The concept started when families visited farming relatives as a way of escaping from the city hustles, and experience the farming activities. The widespread use of automobiles in the 1920s made visiting places more popular (Demirezen, 2020). The need by folks to escape stresses of the Great Depression and World War II resulted in the rural creation gaining interest again in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Demirezen (2020), during 1960s and 1970s these demands for rural recreation led to a widespread interest in horseback riding, farm petting, farm zoos and farm nostalgia. It is also believed that there are also benefits in the form of improved mental and physical well-being due to the restorative and curative powers of nature accessed through rural tourism (Sims, 2009; Kumar, 2020). Therefore, farm vacations, bed and breakfast and commercial farm tours grew to popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, and by 2010, an increased interest in food production and organic practices brought travellers out to till the land.

Agritourism is a small-scale entrepreneurship or an innovative family-run business initiative organised in rural

settings and focused on the provision of a complex cluster of services, aimed at offering memorable rural experiences in order to satisfy the natural and socio-cultural needs of customers (Villalobps, 2020). Specifically, Arroya et al. (2013); Carpio et al. (2008) and Sonnino (2004) all cited in Villalobps (2020) broadly define agritourism as a strategic approach used for overcoming economic decline in rural areas and for relevant use of land-based resources with the purpose of preserving peripheral territories and having a favourable socio-economic impact in terms of generating alternative income, creating additional employment opportunities and reducing depopulation caused by migration to urban areas. In other words, it is a range of agriculture-related tourist activities performed on farms or other agricultural environments for leisure, entertainment, or education purposes (Jin et al., 2021).

In other words, Parker et al. (2019) cited in Lak and Khairabadi (2022) describe agritourism as an economic activity on a farm to entertain visitors, generating income for the owner on a micro-economic level and contributing to the country's GDP on a macro-economic level. It involves economic, social and cultural aspects thus contributing substantially to the improvement of the economic development of people who embraces it. It is identified as an important strategy that can augment agricultural development through diversification of farming activities and offering opportunities to rest, relax, enjoy and study about farming for the tourists. Polukhina, Sheresheva, Efremova, Suranova, Agalakova & Antonov-Ovseenko, (2021) describe rural tourism as an engine for economic development and a contributor to rural residents' quality of life.

Agritourism as a catalyst for economic development

According to the World Bank (2018), 736 million people around the world are living under extreme poverty. The majority of these are resident in rural areas and depend on farming. Economic development is the most powerful tool for reducing poverty and improving the quality of life in many developing countries. It is one of the key concepts which countries need to achieve in dealing with the economic, social, environmental and political challenges bedevilling modern society. Broadly defined, it is the structural transformation of an economy by introducing more mechanised and updated technologies to increase labour productivity, employment, incomes and standard of living of the population. The concept has to be accompanied by improvements in infrastructure, as well as social, political and institutional factors to facilitate transformation of the economy.

The concept of economic development is founded upon the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development whose main aim is to end poverty in all forms among member states. By endorsing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in 2015, the world community reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development. The concept is important for any nation because it is a process of development in which economic and other policies are designed to bring about development which is economically, socially and ecologically sustainable. It is people, job and nature oriented thus gives highest priority to poverty reduction, productive employment, social integration and environmental regeneration. Thus,

through this Agenda, the 193 member states (Zimbabwe included), pledged to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, and to do so in partnership and peace.

Countries are expected to implement strategies for economic development based on their individual situations. Agritourism as a strategy for economic development is becoming popular with many countries. For instance, the Allied Market Research in 2021 published that agritourism practice could result in a USD\$62.98 billion market globally by 2027 judging from tourists' desire to visit agricultural related sites (Tugade, Vergara and Balcita, 2021). The study further estimated an international agritourism market with a composite annual growth rate of 13.4% from 2021 to 2027.

In the United States of America, according to census conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA NASS) in 2017, agritourism sales nearly doubled between 2007 to 2017, from \$567 to \$949 million in nominal dollars (Schmidt, Tian, Goetz, Hollas & Chase, 2023). Only 28 575 farms reported such activity in 2017, and although this was a 22% increase from 2007, they represent less than 1.5% of all farms. The Michigan State is a case of reference as far as agritourism practice in the United States of America is concerned. In 2012 it was estimated that the gross revenue from agritourism in Michigan grew to USD\$434 million, 64% of which was realised from a combination of farm markets, orchards and vineyards/wineries (Jin et al., 2021).

In addition, as observed by Jin et al. (2021), the taxes realised from all agritourism activities in that State rose to USD\$ 13.7 million with 4000 fulltime jobs

being created and providing work to 28 000 part-time employees in the same year. According to Chikuta (2016), in the United States of America, the Travel Industry Association of America (TIAA) in 2004 reported that 87 million individuals had taken a trip to an agritourism destination between 1999 and 2003. Though, according to USDA-National Agricultural Statistics service - Census of Agriculture, the number of agritourism operators decreased from 802 to 754 between the years 2012 and 2017, the gross revenue increased from USD\$19 million to USD\$ 21 million (Jin et al., 2021). The decline could be attributed to intensification of competition and a slowing economy, thus agritourism activities were at risk for shutdowns and bankruptcy and were inclined to merge with each other.

In China, agritourism first developed from the simple practice of visiting agricultural farms for sightseeing and then grew to include vacation experience tourism in the 1980s (Zhao, Xue, Gengi, Xu & Meline, 2022). The concept is mainly characterised by exploring agricultural production, processing and sales where customers experience folkways and enjoyable feeling from agricultural activities (ibid). Between 2010 and 2019 the total registered number of agritourism-related enterprises increased from 26000 to 216 000 in the country. In 2019 alone, 3.2 billion tourists participated in agritourism, generating an operating revenue of more than 850 billion yuan in 2019 (Lv, 2020). Thus, agritourism is helping the development of agricultural resources, improving the local infrastructure and increasing income for rural communities in the country.

It is interesting to note that approximately 10% of all agricultural land on the planet is concentrated in Russia (Polukhina et al,

2021). As such, agritourism in the country is on a growing trajectory. According to Provotorina, Kazmina, Petrenko & Ekinil (2020), currently there are about 4500 rural tourist accommodation facilities in Russia which include 3 500 rural guest houses and about 1000 agritourist farms. Other rural tourist sites such as craft houses, craft and trade workshops, rural museums of traditional life, country routes, places of interest and interactive programmes among others add up to 10000. Regions of Russia depend on their unique nature, rich cultural and material heritage and traditions of the rural population and are successfully implementing projects in the field of rural tourism.

For example, in the Rostov region, there are about 1000 accommodation facilities, a significant part of those, about 700, being urban. Thus, rural accommodation facilities of various types in the region account for about 300 units, with an average capacity of 15 rooms and an average cost of accommodation per night of 1900 rubles. The total number of rooms in rural hotels is 1700 rooms and there are more than 5000 beds. Therefore, the tourism sector which of course includes agritourism, has significantly enhanced the country's economic development and thus has been able to bust the economic sanctions which were imposed on it in 2014.

In Africa, the concept of agritourism is relatively new and only few countries have embraced it. According to Zvavahera and Chigora (2023), South Africa, Morocco, Kenya and Tanzania are some of the few African countries which have successfully adopted the concept of agritourism. This is despite the fact that the concept has a potential to grow in the continent due to diversity in agricultural landscapes and rich natural resources. Prevalent

agritourism activities in these countries include farm tours, agricultural festivals, wine tours, cooking classes and eco-lodges. Agritourism has a potential to help many African countries to diversify their economies, enhance rural development and increase farmer income (Rogerson and Rodgers, 2014). However, due to different economic, political, social and environmental factors, the rate of adoption of agritourism in African countries differs.

In Morocco, agritourism is still a growing industry which is able to attract both domestic and foreign visitors. Due to the country's unique agricultural environment and traditional farming methods, it is becoming a desirable location of agritourism. Some of the agritourism activities prevalent in Morocco include visiting to organic farms, hands-on-experience with traditional farming techniques, taking part in harvest events and education on regional agricultural products. Agritourists can also interact with farmers, visit rural areas and fully experience the country's agricultural legacy. Main agritourism areas in Morocco include the lush plains of the Saiss region, the palm trees in the Draa valley, the wineries in the Meknes and the olive groves in the Rif Mountains (Khalil, 2009). After seeing the potential of the industry, the government of Morocco encouraged its growth. As a result, agritourism is being promoted, rural infrastructure is being improved, and training and capacity building of farmers and local communities have been implemented as initiatives.

In Tanzania, agritourism growth is promising. The country offers a rich agricultural landscape which allows agritourists to experience local farming and the way of life in rural areas. In Tanzania, agritourism activities typically focuses on excursions to coffee and tea

plantations, spice farms, fruit orchards and vegetable farms (Zvavahera and Chigora, 2023). Agritourists also get a chance to participate in harvesting, processing and tasting of agricultural activities. Major agritourism attraction centres in Tanzania include the coffee fields in the Arusha and Kilimanjaro regions, the spice farms in Zanzibar and the agricultural districts in the southern highlands such as Iringa and Mbeya. The Tanzanian government has recognised the potentiality of agritourism in advancing rural development, boosting the tourism industry and improving the standard of living of local communities (Magigi and Ramadhani, 2013). This has resulted in farmers being trained in hospitality and tourism-related activities, formation of farmers and tour operators associations and the development of local infrastructure.

Agritourism in South Africa was developed around the 1950s when farmers focused mainly on ostrich farming. The support from the private sector on agritourism activities in the country complemented the rapid growth of the concept where it is currently contributing substantially to the GDP. Presently, some of the agritourism activities taking place in South Africa include photography, farm stays, trekking, animal viewing and hunting (van Zyl and van der Merwe, 2021). The government of South Africa supports agritourism industry through bank loans thus farmers commit their time on it and treat it like a business rather than a side project, and have a working knowledge of the market. As such, agritourism has been able to improve the standard of living of farmers, generate employment and enhance the financial income of farmers involved in it.

In Zimbabwe, despite it being an agro-based economy and having a number of

farms that can be transformed and promoted as agritourism destinations, the concept has not been fully embraced. Agritourism has not gained popularity among farmers in the country regardless of the availability of land and other resources that are lying idle in the countryside. Different researchers have identified a number of factors that have affected the adoption of agritourism by farmers in Zimbabwe. According to Guvamombe (2019) cited in Baipai et al (2023), there has been no deliberate effort to promote farmers in Zimbabwe to venture into agritourism. Lack of capacity-building programmes has been another drawback on few farmers who attempted to venture into it (Chikuta, 2016; Baipai et al, 2023). On the other end, the absence of a framework to guide successful agritourism development in the country has been identified as one of the major drawbacks to the adoption of the concept.

The necessity of education in engendering viable and sustainable agritourism

Education of farmers is central to the philosophy of agritourism. The weaknesses of the development of agritourism are mainly a result of an ineffective system of professional development of service providers coupled with other factors. It is important for small-scale farmers to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for the practice of agritourism in their areas. For the success of the agritourism industry, knowledge is necessary in many areas such as organisation, management and marketing, among others (Mahmoodi, Roman and Prus, 2022).

The development of agritourism services requires systematic improvement of

knowledge and skills by current and potential rural service providers. The topics of training and courses should focus on such issues as accommodation and feeding of guests, legal aspects of running agritourism, marketing of agritourism services, greening of agritourism farms, social and property insurance, interpersonal communication, issues of using cultural heritage and the success and possibilities of using national and aid funds for investment and training needs in agritourism. While there are many factors to consider before establishing an agritourism enterprise, possession of knowledge and skills for the business by potential operators is of paramount importance. Other factors which include marketing, quality control and management follow taking advantage of education and training.

According to Magdato and Bacongus (2021), Philippines recognised the importance of agritourism to the national economy. As such, the country has undertaken various initiatives to further develop the industry. Among other programmes of promoting agritourism in the country, the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Training Institute (DA-ATI) have been mandated to conduct training programmes for the farmers to adopt the concept. As a result, Philippines is one of the countries boasting of an economy performing well due to the contribution of agritourism.

In the United States of America, agritourism is considered as a relatively novel research and extension area and funding is provided for its development. Between 2006 and 2020, United States department of agriculture (USDA)'s National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) funded 11 projects with a total value of close to \$2.56 million mainly in

research and extension. In Vermont, a non-profit organisation, Vermont Farms Association was established to provide educational opportunities about agritourism to the public. The association is mandated to ensure farm insurance and compliance with safety and regulations through training.

These requirements set a standard that led to the development of Vermont's agritourism reputation as an authentic, educational and safe experience for visitors (Schmidt et al., 2022). The collaboration between the University of Vermont Extension and Vermont Farms' Association continued as the organisations partnered to offer training on marketing and resource management to farmers involved in agritourism business. This resulted in other states in the country getting interested in the agritourism concept. After adopting the Vermont system of training farmers on agritourism activities, California is now one of the counties with leading agritourism players in the United States of America.

In an exploratory study on agritourism development in Nova Scotia, in North Carolina, United States of America, Yeboah, Owens, Bynum & Okafor, (2017) identified education and training as one of the critical issues for the successful development of agritourism. In the same study, there was consensus among the stakeholders that for farmers to be able to define the products they offer and be able to communicate this to potential visitors, education and training was necessary. Similarly, Bagi and Recder (2012) cited in Yeboah et al. (2017) conducted a national survey to investigate factors affecting farmers in the United States of America's participation in agritourism and concluded that lack of education was one of the factors militating against farmers participating in agritourism.

One of the important factors determining the development of agritourism is the quality of the services and goods provided. According to Mahmoodi et al. (2022), systematic collection and analysis of tourists' opinions may be an important component in improving the quality of services provided and improving market competitiveness. In this regard, farmers can obtain such assistance and support in the form of training from agricultural advisory institutions and representatives of agritourism associations.

Educating farmers on agritourism also involves the impartation of marketing skills which is one of the critical success factors in enhancing the agritourism industry. This helps in the determination of the sufficiency of demand for the proposed agritourism venue, products and services. Villalobps (2020) argued that marketing-related barriers have hampered the growth of agritourism. For instance, in Oklahoma State in the United States of America, research by King and Settle (2020) cited in Miller, Settle, King & Kisling (2023) revealed that agricultural operations were underutilising Facebook. Agritourism operations with original posts about the business have more likes than pages with business information alone, and pages with active, paid Facebook marketing have more likes than those with no promoted posts.

Educational interventions needed for imparting agritourism knowledge to farmers include training programmes related to the technologies used on the farm which include natural farming technologies. Educating farmers on technology use also assist in understanding its use as it forms the basis for other agritourism activities which include marketing, communication and quality control. Therefore, the role of education in agritourism is critical in the

development of knowledge, perceptions and attitudes about agricultural innovations. As such, education on agritourism is important as it is a package which includes all elements necessary for the successful practice of the concept.

Conclusion

This paper is a conceptual discussion which argued for the necessity of educating small-scale farmers on the adoption of agritourism. This is critical and necessary for economic development in Zimbabwe. In the discussion above, it emerged that education is important for the adoption of agritourism in any country. All the countries that are currently benefiting from agritourism used education as a way of imparting skills, knowledge and improving attitudes and perceptions among farmers. All the other important elements of agritourism practice such as marketing, operations, management and quality control depend on education. As such, given the abundance of natural resources in the form of arable land, sunlight, underground water, forests, mountains, rivers and wildlife, Zimbabwe has the potential to leverage on education and become a potential destination for viable and sustainable agritourism.

Guidance for future research

The paper is a conceptual discussion. Future researchers may conduct an empirical study on the role of education in improving agritourism. Both quantitative and qualitative studies will be necessary so as to compare the results. Further studies may also be conducted to ascertain the reasons why the adoption of agritourism is slow in developing countries such as Zimbabwe.

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