

Editors Note

That Africa has embraced sustainable tourism is no longer in question. Almost every destination in Africa has a representative agency for ecotourism or sustainable tourism. There is a plethora of eco-certification schemes for tourism in Africa as well as several eco-awards and a growing number of professionals in this field. Twenty years ago, it was inconceivable to think about a sustainable tourism consultancy in Africa. In the last decade, dialogue in tourism events has been dominated by sustainable tourism speak. Perhaps what remains in contention is whether Africa has embraced sustainable tourism as a sign of accountability, commitment or from necessity. As the practice and interpretation of the concept evolves, so have been the dialogues in Africa. From debate on legitimacy of sustainable tourism discussions in Africa given that tourism in the continent is yet to reach optimal levels; optimal meaning European or North America levels, to dialogues on patronage through partnership models, supply chain domination, need for an African definition of sustainable and place of technology. This book is about this and many other debates. So, what is behind the debates?

Notably, global events have and continue to shape sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa. From the 1992 Agenda 21 for Sustainable Travel and Tourism Industry, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, UN 2002 year of Ecotourism, 2015 Millennium Development Goals, to the 2017 UN Sustainable Development Goals, there are links to evolution of sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa and these events. This despite distinct differences in products, production and consumption patterns of tourism between the north and south. It has been argued that conceptualization of sustainability as a human development philosophy based on shared human values, liquefies all boundaries, therefore differences in location, products, production and consumption patterns would not limit its application. This argument has not discouraged debates on whether there can be an African model of sustainable tourism.

Africa's first comprehensive continent-wide dialogue on sustainable tourism was hosted by Kenya in 1997. The theme was "Ecotourism at a Crossroads – Charting the Way Forward." Presentations by key speakers focused on need for local communities in tourism destinations to benefit from tourism, respect for community livelihoods and their cultures, and protection and conservation of natural resources that support tourism. Ecotourism was defined as travel to natural areas that protects the environment, respects local cultures and benefits local communities. The crossroads conference ended with a call for tourism to be accountable to communities and the environment through "good tourism" certification. Key takeaways from this conference of eco-certification, community respect and benefit, travel to natural areas (rustic tourism) would shape dialogue in sustainable tourism in Africa for a decade. Five years earlier, at the Earth Summit, in 1992, the world had committed to a development model with futuristic outlook. There was a commitment to have the interest of future generations in today's development. The Kenya conference, like

the Earth Summit, focused on the future of places where tourists go and consideration of people in those destinations.

The limiting definition of ecotourism to a travel model influenced the practice and dialogue in sustainable tourism in Africa for decades. From the mid-1990s, there was a shift to rustic lodges, bucket showers, eco-toilets and less emphasis on quality of service. Lodges began to employ untrained local staff without much investment in their skills. A look at eco-certification schemes developed in the 1990s until the mid-2000s reveals emphasis on these elements as best practices. It also marked the emergence of corporate tourism foundations to support community development in destinations. In equal measure, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals saw a shift towards clean energy, recycling, waste management and rise of community-based tourism models to promote inclusion of communities in tourism and address poverty in destinations. It also heralded a strong focus on women in tourism because of the need to end discrimination against women, introducing issues of rights in sustainable tourism. The source of the influence notwithstanding, sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa focused on eco-labels, energy saving, water saving, community engagement, high value experiences, awards and conservation for a long time. The emphasis on certification was so strong that several European based sustainable tourism certification schemes launched in Africa and continue to eat into the market share of local and regional certification schemes. Fair Trade Tourism, one of Africa oldest eco-certification schemes, covering eight countries, is on the brink of collapse as global brands carve into their markets. This has raised concerns that sustainable tourism is a patronizing concept aimed at dictating and limiting tourism growth in Africa. Overtourism and commitment to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions are cited as some examples for patronage which fuel dialogues on illegitimacy or premature introduction of sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa.

Because sustainability in general is interdisciplinary in nature, it is characterized by shifts in practice and focus, as has been evident in the evolution of sustainable tourism in Africa. Globally sustainable tourism remains contentious in many fronts. This is partially the reason why eco certification labels continue to grow geographically, numerically and in conceptualization. The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) signalled a new chapter in sustainable interpretation globally. The 17 Goals broaden the agenda by embracing issues that are relevant for humanity irrespective place and industry. Further, the targets make it feasible to take action and report on progress. It may be too soon to capture the influence of the SDGs on sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa in this publication, but the dedicated focus on SDG 8, SDG 12 and SDG 14 by tourism, has opened new discussions on sustainable tourism in Africa.

These designated SDGs for tourism have not escaped scrutiny in sustainable tourism dialogues in Africa. For example, SDG 8, on decent work for all is perceived as an upfront to a sector that employs many unskilled workers. It is interpreted as

an opportunity to import labor into rural areas and deny local people jobs. On the other hand, SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production is perceived as a means to create markets for “green” products from outside Africa, further deepening the current imbalance of trade.

Jointly, events, industry responses, global trends and lessons from practice around the world and from interactions have merged to create Africa’s sustainable tourism landscape. This landscape dominates research, literature, support and investments in sustainable tourism in Africa.

First, sustainable tourism landscape is defined by formation of distinct membership organizations serving the interest of “good tourism” operators. In Kenya, this interest is served by Ecotourism Kenya since 1996. In Tanzania it is served by Responsible Tourism Tanzania and South Africa by Fair Trade tourism. These exclusive organizations have contributed to dialogues of exclusion and elitism of sustainable tourism.

Second, because of borrowing from the west, particularly early green labels like Green Globe, the landscape is defined by certification labels. As mentioned, several European labels are collaborating with, merging or taking over sustainable tourism certification in Africa. Closely associated with these labels are hefty label use fees, which are prohibitive for many operators in Africa. This has fuelled dialogues of elitism, because the fee locks out many potential early adopters. Instead, scepticism by micro, small, and medium enterprises owned by indigenous people persists. The South African Fair Trade Tourism label has made considerable progress in including community-based tourism and small enterprises in their model.

Third, sustainable tourism is perceived as a set of practices that businesses can add onto their operations and qualify for a label, if not charge a premium price for their products. It is not perceived as a business management model. This perception has had impact on policy and destination development and promotion strategies. Even destinations with long term awareness of sustainable tourism, like Kenya, are still struggling to define sustainable tourism in policy and provide guidelines for development that outline sustainable tourism practice. In 2020, Kenya banned the use of single use plastic water bottles in national parks. This is perhaps the only policy directive that supports sustainable tourism. Yet the directive was not anchored in policy for tourism development in conservation areas. It was reactive and not strategic.

Fourth, sustainable tourism practices are largely linked to wise resource use, conservation, charitable support for social services like water, education and healthcare and, local employment, support for tourism dependent community enterprises local art and craft and culture. This engagement has often raised questions of impact and value, with arguments that tourism businesses are deriving more benefits from efforts than the community and environment.

Fifth, despite destinations using sustainable tourism in various documents, both promotional and regulatory, there are no roles aligned to sustainable tourism in public sector. Few countries have clearly defined sustainable tourism policies, raising

questions of African governments commitment to sustainable tourism. Many sustainable tourism associations are struggling, forcing them to seek patronizing partnerships.

No doubt, the broad nature of the SDGs is reshaping sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa. Barriers between sustainable tourism and other disciplines are being flattened and speak of patronage is being reshaped with partnerships and collaborations. Novel, authoritative Pan African sustainable tourism organizations are emerging to articulate and define sustainable tourism in the continent and advocate for alternative approach to sustainable tourism that demystify traditional thinking. One such organization, is Sustainable Travel & Tourism Agenda (STTA). For STTA, sustainable tourism is a quality management system that is conscious to global human development values. This approach fits well with the SDGs.

The effects of this approach are evident in this book. Today issues of peace, inclusion, equality, decent work and more have found their way into these dialogues. The 22 chapters of this book demonstrate the diversity and richness of sustainable tourism in Africa. Consequently, it can be argued that Africa is the next big frontier for sustainable tourism dialogues as stories of new possibilities.

This book is about opening the spaces for sustainable tourism dialogue in Africa by sharing this with as many readers as possible, demonstrating that it is not a niche segment of tourism but a management model that challenges all actors to deliver. Thus, sustainable tourism dialogues in Africa are stories of new possibilities in tourism policy, product development, planning and community engagement, to unlock growth potential of tourism in the continent.

Judy Kepher-Gona and Lucy Atieno