1
ECOTOURISM AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Anna Spenceley and Andrew Rylance

Introduction

In 2015, governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The agenda established a global framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and remedy climate change. Building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets were agreed. Tourism has been included within the targets for Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 14 on life below water. However, tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the goals (UNWTO, 2015).

During 2017, a review was undertaken of 64 countries’ Voluntary National Reviews of the SDGs, and corporate social responsibility activities of 60 tourism companies (UNWTO, 2017). The findings included that SDGs 8, 12, and 17 have the strongest links with tourism, but that there are few linking SDGs 3, 4, 7, and 10 with the sector. Furthermore, challenges relate to irresponsible consumption and production, and poor management of resources related to SDGs 12, 14, and 11. Key findings included that policymakers should encourage and support the tourism private sector, and that active engagement and coherent dialogue are required to optimise progress. For the private sector, internalisation of the SDGs relates to their drive towards competitiveness and profitability, rather than philanthropy. Therefore, more inclusive and sustainable business models need to relate to core business activities.

Goal 1: No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

In 2013, it was estimated that 10.7% of the world’s population lived on less than USD$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2016a,b). However, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and it manifests where people have inadequate income, a lack of access to education, poor health, insecurity, low self-confidence, a sense of powerlessness, and where there is an absence of rights (Sen, 1999).

Bennett, Ashley, and Roe (1999) suggested that the tourism sector had the potential to contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries, because the market comes to the
producers, inter-sectoral linkages can be created, it is labour intensive (particularly for women, youth, and people with low-skills), can take place in marginal areas; and it has fewer barriers to entry than manufacturing or other export activities. There has been extensive research on ‘pro-poor tourism’ (e.g., Ashley, Roe, & Goodwin, 2001; Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2001; Ashley & Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell & Ashley 2009; Mitchell 2009; Spenceley & Meyer, 2016), addressing the opportunity to harness markets for poverty reduction, and tools for doing so. In 2015, tourism generated an estimated USD$1.5 trillion in export earnings (UNWTO, 2017). Scheyvens (2009) estimated that approximately 40% of all international tourist arrivals accrue to developing countries, and so tourism can be a significant foreign exchange earner. Some of the poorest regions of the world are rich cultural and natural assets, which offer great potential as ecotourism attractions.

Ecotourism can provide a mechanism to re-distribute wealth from the rich to the poor, because as tourists travel they spend money on travel, accommodation, excursions, food, drinks and shopping (Spenceley & Meyer, 2015). For example, Pafuri Camp, a luxury ecotourism lodge in South Africa, employs around 52 permanent staff members, and 94% of them are from the local Makuleke community. Employees from the community receive approximately USD$298,000 in wages and related benefits annually, collectively, which makes a substantial impact in the local economy, and contributes to poverty reduction (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

**Goal 2: Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture**

Tourism can catalyse sustainable agriculture by promoting the production and supplies to hotels and restaurants, and also through sales of local products to tourists. For example, agro-tourism can generate additional income for farmers while providing rich and educational tourism experiences (UNWTO & UNDP [United Nations World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Development Programme], 2017). Agriculture and the harvesting of natural resources continues to remain a predominant livelihood opportunity for poor communities working in rural areas, accounting for 55% of employment in developing countries and is the main source of income for the rural poor (Schiere & Kater, 2001). A review of 49 tropical-protected areas showed that they are becoming isolated as deforestation takes place around their boundaries and therefore effective management needs to address the wider local socio-economic developmental issues (Naughton-Treves, Holland, & Brandon, 2005). Diversification strategies are important for poor communities to reduce their dependence and associated risks on a single income stream, such as farming (Ashley, Mdoe, & Reynolds, 2002).

Marine-protected areas used by tourists and fishers provide different opportunities to reduce hunger. For example, small community-managed marine protected can provide (a) a refuge for breeding and nursing populations of fish to support the local subsistence fishing industry, and (b) provide areas for non-consumptive marine tourism (e.g., whale shark viewing and manta ray diving), which provide job opportunities for local people. Such a system is being developed by a luxury ecotourism company, andBeyond, in collaboration with local communities and authorities in Tanzania and Mozambique (Braack & Mearns, 2017). At this destination, efforts have been made to tackle overfishing and the killing of endangered marine species, protect reefs and endangered species, and also build capacity among local communities—regarding the management of local fishing stocks and responsible community fishing practices (Braack & Mearns, 2017).
Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

There is increasing scientific evidence of the health benefits of protected areas, and ‘Healthy Parks Healthy People’ was one of the core themes of the IUCN 2014 World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia (Spenceley, 2017). Visitation to areas of high biodiversity can be a tool in preventative medicine, and provide health benefits caused by certain lifestyle problems, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety (Sparkes & Woods, 2009). In Australia, Parks Victoria formed a partnership with two major players in Australia’s health care delivery system, Medibank Australia and the National Heart Foundation. This includes providing health care professionals the option to prescribe physical activity in protected areas as a proactive disease prevention approach, 2017. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of visitation to natural areas has been heightened as a means to relieve the stress of lockdowns (Spenceley, 2021; Spenceley et al, 2021).

Promoting sport tourism is an increasing area of interest for protected areas as both a means of generating revenue to finance conservation efforts as well as demonstrating the wider social contribution of biodiversity to local communities. An excellent example comes from the cross-border tourism adventure products established in southern African transfrontier conservation areas, including the Tour de Tuli (a cross-border mountain biking event), Desert Knights (a cross-border canoe and mountain biking event), and Wildruns (cross-border trail runs) (Spenceley, 2018a).

Corporate social responsibility initiatives by ecotourism operators, working in areas of high biodiversity, and philanthropic efforts, also often contribute towards public health improvements. Reviews of philanthropic efforts demonstrate that tourism enterprises often use their corporate social responsibility funds to support the development of rural clinics, hospitals, or provide them with vital equipment. For example, the Africa Foundation is an organisation that channels donations from andBeyond’s guests and donors into social initiatives in communities neighbouring their lodges, such as Phinda Game Reserve in South Africa. Over more than two decades, donations have supported health initiatives in communities neighboring Phinda such as construction of a clinic at Mduku, and refurbishment of another, a series of HIV/AIDS awareness workshops, improved water provision, and a school permaculture project (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

Goal 4: Quality education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

A skillful workforce is crucial in order to provide quality hospitality and experiences to tourists. The tourism sector provides professional development and training opportunities for direct and indirect jobs for youth, women, and those with special needs (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). An example comes from !Xaus Lodge, in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Conservation Area. One of the lodge’s cleaning staff, Melissa Mienies, joined the lodge soon after it opened and developed a special interest in guiding. Supported by the lodge managers, she taught herself key information (despite having failed her secondary school exams). !Xaus Lodge supported her with a distance-learning course, and she qualified as a guide. She was the first female nature guide in the Kgalagadi who was a member of the local community (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

Ecotourism also provides opportunities for environmental education of tourists, and of local community members and youth. For example, the ecotourism operator Wilderness Safaris has an NGO called Children in the Wilderness (CITW), which since 2005 has organised an annual
international cycling event within the Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area called the Tour de Tuli. Between 2005 and 2017, donations from 3770 cyclists participating in the tour raised over USD$1.7 million. At the end of 2016, these funds had been used for over 5600 children to attend a CITW environmental awareness camp at a Wilderness Safaris lodge, for 6000 children to participate in an Eco-Club programme, as well as training over 200 Eco-mentors in six southern African countries (Spenceley, 2017).

**Goal 5: Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

Research from the World Bank has found that women lag behind men in nearly all measures of economic opportunity in the world (World Bank, 2016a,b) and that the inequalities are most stark in low-income countries (Twining-Ward & Zhou, 2017). However, tourism can empower women, particularly through the provision of direct jobs and income-generation from small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in tourism and hospitality-related enterprises (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). Characteristics of the tourism sector that may explain the strong representation of women in tourism than other sectors include (1) a lower emphasis on formal education and training, greater emphasis on personal and hospitality skills, higher availability of part time and work-from-home options, and an option for entrepreneurship that does not require substantial start-up investment (Twining-Ward & Zhou, 2017).

In some countries, tourism has almost twice as many women employers as other sectors, and in a global study, the ILO has found that women make up between 60 and 70% of hotel labour force (ILO (International Labour Organisation), 2010). Despite this level of representation, they are generally paid 10–15% less than their male equivalents (UNWTO & UN Women, 2010). Women tend to dominate lower-paid jobs, such as clerical and cleaning roles, and are under-represented in higher-paid roles, such as tour guides, chefs, and particularly in management and decision-making positions (Twining-Ward & Zhou, 2017). The World Bank proposes for main strategic thrusts to improve the empowerment of women in tourism, namely (1) improving human development, (2) removing constraints for more and better jobs, (3) removing barriers to women’s ownership of and control over assets, and (4) enhancing women’s voice and agency (World Bank, 2016a,b).

Some examples of gender equality in ecotourism facilities include in Wolwedans collection of camps and lodges in the NamibRand Nature Reserve of Namibia. These lodges have a 50% female employment, and the same ratio of male-to-female employment is also illustrated at Simien Lodge in Ethiopia (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019). There are other examples of women’s groups supporting ecotourism facilities, such as the Umoja Women’s Cooperative. The cooperative was given training by the Ruzizi Tented Lodge in Rwanda, including with training on tailoring and basket weaving in 2015. This helped them to generated sales of USD$1,700, including through the Akagera Park’s curio shop (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019). However, some ecotourism facilities have encountered challenging in retaining female staff. For example, at Anvil Bay lodge in Mozambique, there are attrition rates following maternity leave, or migration to South Africa (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

**Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

Tourism investment requirement for providing utilities can play a critical role in achieving water access and security, as well as hygiene and sanitation for all. The efficient use of water
in tourism, pollution control and technology efficiency can be key to safeguarding water (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

As an example of ecotourism investment improving water access and security, comes from a community-owned facility managed by a private operator, Covane Lodge in Mozambique. One of the main challenges that the Canhane community have is a lack of access to water. As part of a donor-funded infrastructure re-investment program from the Government of Mozambique’s Mozbio project, a pipeline and pump system was installed from the Masingir dam to the community. To ensure sustainability, a community maintenance fund was established, so that people pay for use of the water (World Bank, 2014). Such initiatives can substantially improve the quality of life for the poor in dry areas, particularly for women, livestock owners, and farmers.

**Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all**

Tourism can accelerate the shift towards increased use of renewable energy, and by promoting investments in clean energy sources, the sector can help to reduce greenhouse gases, mitigate climate change, and contribute to access of energy for all (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

While designing tourism infrastructure to integrate low energy use, and installing renewable energy technologies is easiest at the outset, some facilities decide to retrofit their operations to make them more energy efficient. For example, the ecotourism operation of Mombo camp in the Okavango Delta of Botswana switched from diesel generators to 100% solar energy in May 2012, following a capital investment of approximately USD$860,000. It was predicted that this change would lead to 93% reduction in carbon emissions from the camp, which previously relied on a diesel generate for energy. This meant that the lodge would emit only 22 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents during the year, compared to an estimated 287 tonnes during their 2012 financial year (Wilderness Holdings, 2014). In Ethiopia, Bale Mountain Lodge is 100% ecofriendly with power coming from its own 25 Kw micro-hydro power plant, biodegradable waste is processed through its bio-gas system to provide cooking gas, and firewood is sourced from sustainable plantations outside the national park (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

**Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth; full and productive employment; and decent work for all**

Tourism in protected areas represents one of the economic opportunities that can both help achieve the joint objectives of sustainable livelihood development of local communities and biodiversity conservation. Globally, tourism in 2015 accounted for 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP), 7% of global trade, and 1 in 10 jobs (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). The flow of money from this sector provides opportunities for tourists to act as conduits to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. For example, when travellers visit developing countries they spend money on transport, accommodation, excursions, shopping, and on food and drink. Much of this money can be captured by local poor people if they are able to supply the products and services that tourists need, or by being employed in tourism businesses (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012).

At a national level, the U.S. Parks Service estimates that its protected area system contributed to creating 251,600 jobs, USD$9.34 billion in labour income, and USD$16.5 billion in value addition to the national economy in 2012 (Cui, Mahoney, & Herbowicz 2013).
At the local level, reports indicate that the benefits accrued by employees and host communities from tourism vary widely between enterprises and destinations, dependent on the institutional structures, partnership arrangements, and business viability of a particular venture (Dedeke, 2017; Spenceley, 2008). Emerton and Tessema (2001) argue that the livelihood benefits from tourism are not always sufficient to make up for the costs of living with wildlife, particularly when the costs and benefits are unequally distributed between people. Arguably, the greater livelihood benefits that are obtained, the more widely that wildlife in protected areas is appreciated and conserved by local people (Arntzen et al., 2003). It is often argued in the literature that tourism in conservation areas employs a large number of expatriates and limits employment of local people to menial jobs (e.g., Mbaiwa, 2003, 2005; Barber & Pittaway, 2000). However, Snyman and Spenceley’s (2019) case studies of ecotourism facilities in Africa consistently illustrate more local people being employed than expatriate, and that they are empowered to fulfil management roles. Here the enterprises reviewed employed 1592 people, and at least 1216 (76%) of these came from local communities. Furthermore, collectively, the tourism businesses spent USD$8.5 million in 2017 on wages for local people.

Goal 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation

Tourism development relies on good public and private infrastructure, and the sector can influence public policy for improvements that attract tourists, foreign investment (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017), while also supporting local communities.

Impact management approaches have been reviewed extensively by Buckley (2004, 2009, 2011, 2012), and can differ greatly in scale. Technologies for sewage and wastewater treatment, for example, may range from small-scale composting toilets for low-visitation infrastructure in warm, moist climates, to multi-stage industrial sewage treatment systems with artificial wetland and ponds, appropriate for infrastructure with high visitor volumes. Furthermore, there are numerous publications on sustainable design, and best practices in ecotourism infrastructure. For example, The International Finance Corporation’s “Ecolodges: exploring opportunities for sustainable business” (IFC, 2005) provides background on the ecolodge marketplace (including what tourists are looking for), the business case and financial viability issues, and an overview of the potential positive and negative impacts on the environment and local communities.

Goal 10: Reduced inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Tourism can be a powerful tool for reducing inequalities if it engages local populations and all key stakeholders in its development, and can also contribute to urban renewal and rural development by giving people the opportunity to prosper in their place of origin (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). In low- and middle-income countries, tourism can generate substantial foreign exchange. Estimates suggest that tourism can contribute up to 40% of GDP in less developed countries compared to 10% of GDP in more economically advanced countries (Sofield, De Lacy, Lipman, & Daughety, 2004).

Tourism has the potential to negatively impact on communities from social, environmental, and economic perspectives (Ashley et al., 2000; Diaz, 2001; Koea, 1977). As a result, tourism has often been promoted as an opportunity to both achieve livelihood diversification and poverty reduction, but also acknowledging that tourism can generate negative impacts for the poor, such as displacement, inflation of prices of local products, and increased competition with which local community businesses may not be able to compete (Roe & Urquhart, 2002).
example, a survey of 17 marine-protected areas (MPAs) in Thailand identified that local communities believed to receive negligible benefits for tourism livelihoods (Bennett and Dearden, 2014). It is therefore important to consider the negative influences of tourism (or lack of benefits) alongside the positive benefits.

**Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable**

Over recent decades, population sizes in urban areas have boomed and are expected to continue to grow by 61% by 2030. It is predicted that the volume of people living in cities will rise to 5 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2012). The growth of the tourism sector can provide employment opportunities for these bulging populations. Tourism can help to advance urban infrastructure and accessibility, promote regeneration, and preserve cultural and natural heritage, assets on which tourism depends. Furthermore, investment in green infrastructure (more efficient transport, reduced air pollution) should result in smarter and greener cities for not only residents but also tourists (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

In rural areas, ecotourism can contribute towards making rural communities safe, resilient, and sustainable. For example, philanthropic efforts by ecotourism facilities (e.g., andBeyond’s Africa Foundation, Wilderness Safaris’ Children in the Wilderness and Wilderness Wildlife Trust, and the Singita Community Development Trust) have generated substantial impacts in rural areas over long periods of time, particularly in the realms of education, health, and small business development (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

**Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

The tourism sector can adopt sustainable consumption and production modes, and so accelerate the shift towards sustainability (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). The UNWTO-led 10 Year Framework Program on Sustainable Consumption and Production’s Sustainable Tourism Program aims to catalyse change in tourism, and promote transformation for sustainability (UNEP, n.d.).

For example, a program on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia encourages tourism companies (e.g., accommodation providers, tour operators) working in protected areas to operate sustainably. The Marine Park Authority preferentially promotes operators that are independently certified by recognised environmental certification schemes, such as EarthCheck and Ecotourism Australia (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority [GBRMPA], 2018). Furthermore, protected area managers in Australia reward and encourage tour operators to become certified through longer licenses, exclusive access to sensitive sites, and promotional opportunities (R. Hillman, chief executive, Ecotourism Australia, pers. comm., 11 April 2016). However, the level of uptake of certification in the tourism sector is low. A study undertaken in Africa established that only around 3% of hotels had been independently established as operating sustainably (Spenceley, 2016). So, clearly, more needs to be done to mainstream monitoring and reporting of responsible consumption and production in the tourism sector.
Goal 13: Climate action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Tourism contributes to and is affected by climate change. By reducing its carbon footprint in the transport and accommodation sector, tourism can benefit from low carbon growth and help tackle one of the most pressing challenges of our time (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

The World Economic Forum suggests a series of options that the tourism industry could apply to mitigate GHG emissions that relate to land and air transport, water transport, and accommodation. For example, specific actions that tourism enterprises can undertake include hotel refurbishment to support the highest degree of energy-efficient heating, cooling, lighting, and building technology through incentives for energy-efficient investments or mandatory energy efficiency certificates (Chiesa & Gautam, 2009).

Energy saving options for ecotourism facilities include establishing environmental management systems, reducing energy use, using only renewable energy, reusing materials (e.g., packaging), recycling waste, using local food (with lower transport impacts), and constructing low-carbon buildings from recycled materials with high levels of insulation (Simpson, Gössling, Scott, Hall, & Gladin, 2008). The ecotourism company Wilderness Safaris reduced its carbon emissions per bednight by 11% between 2014 and 2018. By December 2017, 12 Wilderness camps that were totally powered by solar panels were producing 4740 kWh per day of usable energy. A further 24 camps had solar/battery-inverter hybrid systems. The company also had 861 solar geysers or solar thermodynamic geysers which reduce their reliance on diesel generators or electricity, and saving a total of 3444 kWh per day (Wilderness Holdings, 2018).

Goal 14: Life below water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

Since the 1960s there has been a 10-fold increase in the number of Protected Areas (PAs) (Bishop et al., 2006). In 2016, there were 202,467 terrestrial and inland water PAs recorded in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), covering 14.7% (19.8 million km²) of the world’s extent of ecosystems (excluding Antarctica) (UNEP–WCMC & IUCN [United Nations Environment Programme–World Conservation Monitoring Centre & International Union for Conservation of Nature], 2016).

Coastal and maritime tourism rely on healthy marine ecosystems, and tourism development must help conserve and preserve fragile marine ecosystems and serve as a vehicle to promote a blue economy, contributing to the sustainable use of marine resources (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). For example, research in Guam found that asking diving tourists to watch their buoyancy, and avoid touching coral reefs led to a 75% reduction in accidental contacts with the reefs, so reducing damage to these highly sensitive systems (Williams & Raymundo, 2017). In coastal areas, ecotourism facilities must ensure safe solid and liquid waste disposal, and improve the collection, safe disposal, and recycling of waste.

As an example, Chumbe Island is an ecolodge in Tanzania, based within a marine park. Their work is characterised by a high regard for the natural, social, and cultural environment, and the lodge has received a series of prestigious awards (Olearnik & Barwicka, 2019). Since its establishment, the Reef Sanctuary has become one of the most pristine coral reefs in the region, with over 470 fish species and 200 species of hard coral, 90% of all recorded in East Africa. In 2005, researchers interviewed artisanal fishers, 94% confirmed the so-called spillover effect of the Reef Sanctuary by reporting increased yields in the vicinity (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).
Goal 15: Life on land: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests

Rich biodiversity and natural heritage are often the main reasons why tourists visit a destination. Tourism can play a major role if sustainably managed in fragile zones, not only in conserving and preserving biodiversity, but also in generating revenue as an alternative livelihood to local communities (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

The ecotourism facility Nkwichi Lodge in Mozambique, created a 120,000-hectare new community conservation area that coordinated efforts of 16 communities to help regulate land use, and in particular, to stop hunting. At Phinda Private Reserve in South Africa, andBeyond restored cattle farming and exotic tree species farmlands, and re-stocked it with 15,000 head of game. In Rwanda, Bisate Lodge has established an extensive reforestation programme. Using seed and other material gathered only from outside the park, an indigenous tree nursery was established and more than 15,000 trees were planted between 2015 and 2017. A small permanent staff oversees the nursery and day-to-day planting, while up to 20 community members are also regularly employed on a casual basis to assist with reforestation during peak planting times. Trees have also been donated to reforest other areas around Volcanoes National Park (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all; and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

As tourism revolves around billions of encounters between people of diverse cultural backgrounds, the sector can foster multicultural and inter-faith tolerance and understanding, laying the foundation for more peaceful societies. Tourism, which benefits and engages local communities, can also consolidate peace in post-conflict societies (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) are described as relatively large areas encompassing one or more protected areas which straddle frontiers between one or more countries (World Bank, 1996), and are sometimes called ‘peace parks’. By contrast to national parks, TFCAs have the potential to conserve a greater diversity of species within larger geographical areas and to promote cooperative wildlife management between countries (World Wildlife Fund, 1999). TFCAs may also improve opportunities for tourism, by allowing visitors to disperse over greater areas and obtain better quality experiences (Singh, 1999). In southern Africa, there have been extensive initiatives to establish transboundary tourism that support inclusive approaches to tourism across international borders. These include the development of guidelines for tourism concession in TFCAs (Spenceley, 2014) and also for cross-border tourism products (Spenceley, 2018a). These tools seek to establish transparent and well-governed processes for tourism investment in protected areas that benefit conservation and host communities.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Due to its cross-sectoral nature, tourism has the ability to strengthen private/public partnerships and engage multiple stakeholders—international, national, regional, and local—to work together to achieve the SDGs and other common goals (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).
In protected areas that are attractive to tourists, and which present a commercially viable opportunity, authorities have been able to establish tourism concessions, or public private partnerships. These can be used by protected area authorities to spread the commercial risk associated with high value capital investment for infrastructure (e.g., luxury lodges, restaurants). In some instances, these partnerships can contribute meaningful revenue to protected area budgets, which in turn contribute towards funding for conservation management (Spenceley, Snyman, & Eagles, 2017). Funding for tourism partnerships, including joint ventures between private operators and rural communities, can be sourced from development banks, aid agencies, impact investment vehicles, NGOs, government grants, and private investment (Snyman & Spenceley, 2019).

In Australia, the Great Barrier Reef Authority has a partnership with tour operators to collect a marine conservation fee (an Environmental Management Charge). This fee was used to help finance conservation of the MPA. Although when introduced, the fee faced some controversy, following a decade of use and adaptation, the fee was well established and widely accepted (Skeat & Skeat, 2007).

Moving forward

This chapter has shown clearly that ecotourism can contribute to all of the SDGs, with individual ecologues, and ecotourism companies, making substantial contributions at the local level. However, if there were a sufficient data set, it would be of value to systematically calculate the total contribution of ecotourism to each SDG. Compiling such a synthesis would be a massive undertaking though.

Recommendations from the UNWTO on improving achievement of the SDGs include to strengthen cooperation, and multi-stakeholder partnerships; design and implement incentives and smart subsidies; raise awareness of business opportunities created by the SDGs; and align development cooperation programs with the needs and priorities of developing countries, and also share experiences, good practices and lessons learned (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). If such actions could be taken by all ecotourism operations globally, then this form of tourism could demonstrate its substantial contribution to sustainable development.

Note


References


Ecotourism and Sustainable Development Goals


21


