



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF LIVINGSTONE TOWN IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE OF ZAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the impact of Covid 19 epidemic and how it affected the social-economic development of Livingstone town which is the tourist capital of Zambia in the Southern Province of Zambia. This pandemic COVID-19 has given rise to in global trials, economic and healthcare crises, and modelled spillover impacts on the global industries, including tourism and travel that is the major contributor to the growth of the tourism industry worldwide and Livingstone town. The tourism and relaxation industry has stumble upon the COVID-19 tourism the hospitality industry were the hardest-hit and lies among the most impaired global industries. The freedom and internal tourism point out a steep decline amounting to trillion US dollars, which computed more than 50% revenue losses. The paper explores the impact, results and settings of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has changed the livelihood of people in the tourism and hospitality industry. The findings of the study provide insights in regaining the tourism industry's operational activities and offer helpful suggestions to government officials, scholars, and tourism firms to reinvest in the tourism industry to set it back to a normal position.

Key words: Tourism, Hospitality industry, impact, Pandemic, Epidemic and Social economic development

Introduction

The first case of lethal Coronavirus (COVID-19) was reported in Wuhan, Hubei, China on December 31, 2019. The lethal virus was transmitted to the whole world-giving rise to uncertain and unstable situation (WHO, 2020). As a result of the pandemic spreading across the sphere, Livingstone District in Zambia also became an epic centre. The COVID-19 viral disease called the coronavirus 2019 pandemic instigated by a fatal infection of the respiratory system. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared an outbreak of the COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern in January and a global pandemic in March 2020 (IPA, 2020). As of March 15, 2021, this pandemic had infected more than 119 million people, of which more than 2.66 million individuals died from the lethal infectious disease. It made this fatal virus one of the deadliest pandemics in human history (IPA, 2020). The symptoms of the coronavirus virus infection vary widely, from non to most lethal and life-threatening diseases (Cripps, 2021). When people approach each other, the virus is mainly transmitted through the air. It leaves the infected person breathing, coughing, sneezing, or talking and entering another person through their mouth, nose, or eyes. It can also spread through contaminated surfaces (ICA, 2020).

Individuals remain infected from the virus for up to two weeks and may spread the virus even if there are no symptoms among infected people (Geda, 2019).

In order to alleviate the effects of this pandemic, the government of the Republic of Zambia pronounced the first lockdown on March 18, 2020 and successively the lockdown was protracted in some district based on the severity of COVID-19 cases. This resulted many schools, colleges, universities and businesses to completely shut down, the stern measure were proclaimed for conducting business activities in selected subdivisions. Tourism sector in Livingstone was not exempted from this guideline. However, the break out of COVID-19 pandemic had experienced a substantial socio-economic impact around the world. This has seriously affected many business ventures including tourism and hospitality industry which is one of the hardest hit by the COVID-19 worldwide. According to World Health Organisation (2020), explains that, areas like hotels, bars, air travel, restaurants and tourism-related services were among the crucial top five services that were greatly hit during the disaster of COVID-19. Hotels and restaurants were affected by the virus by around 85% followed by other travel and tourism-related services by around 64% (IPA, 2020).

The COVID-19 infection rates in Zambia, Livingstone district moved from imported cases to community transmission. As a result of the number of measures the government took, Zambia witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, especially in Livingstone whose economy was heavily dependent on tourism. A number of hotels and lodges were closed, including the mighty Victoria Falls and the Livingstone Museum. This did not only affected the workforce who were laid off, but also families who were supplying food stuffs such as vegetables and poultry products to these hotels, lodges and restaurants. This problem trickled down through the value chains, affecting other industries such as schools, colleges, universities and those that produced raw materials for animal feeds and other food stuff traded to help support children's academic progression.

During the lockdown all schools, hotels, lodges and people were prevented by social distancing from visiting their privileged friends and distance relatives living within town. The pandemic had since allowed the emergence of psychological fears and suspicions of one another such that moving from one another has become an impossibility leading to the resurgence. The COVID 19 pandemic had worsened the tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone district. A comparative analysis to other countries around the world, Livingstone tourism and hospitality

industry was proved to have extremely been affected economically and socially as a result of COVID-19 pandemic (Times of Zambia News Paper, 2020). The pandemic had caused direct losses to majority people of Livingstone who relied their income from the tourism sector (WHO, 2020). The revenues from hotels, like Avan, Protea and Royal Livingstone lodge had reduced by 65% and hotel occupancy rates declined by 51.1% (Daily mail News Paper, 2020). Tourism industry in Livingstone continued to struggle and encountered the hot restrictions in hotels, safari lodges, guesthouses, travel reservation agents, tour guides, safari and game management operators, restaurants, cafe, and other tourism-related services. The continuous ban on the flight industry with restricted flight operational at the national and international level has made the tragic impact on allied business activities of the tourism industry.

The pandemic had socio-economic impacted on Livingstone tourism which resulted in more unemployment, reduced consumer purchasing power, and low-income generation (Time of Zambia, 2020). Furthermore, the economic and social impact was staggering the owners on the survival of their business. The owners were stressed about future of their business activities as tourism was on the brink of downfall (Ngwira & Muinguzi, 2011). Though, the Zambian government took several resourcefulness to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the tourism industry by offering monetary and nonmonetary support to the business owners to sustain and survive their business. The government through Ministry of Tourism guaranteed to provide a relief package for business owners, encouraged banks to invest in the tourism sector, restructured loans schemes for hotel investors, grants, incentives, facilities, introducing new financing policies (WHO, 2020). The results of this research will support the government to boost the on tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone which is a tourist capital of Zambia.

In Zambia, Livingstone town was one the district to have been greatly affected by this pandemic because of being at the heart of tourism. Tourism in Livingstone plays a critical role as a strategic pillar of the economy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). The tourism and hospitality industry plays a vital role in socio-economic activities and customer satisfaction, but it has also become the most vulnerable industry member (Nwafor, 2011). The propinquity to the Zambezi River and the mighty Victoria Falls has led Livingstone to come to be a base for travelers from all over the world wanting to explore this Wonder of the World (McLachlan & Binns, 2014). There are several Adventure Companies offering River boarding, White water rafting, Canoeing, Horse riding trails, Abseiling, as well as Boat cruises, Walks with lions, Elephant back safaris, Quad bikes riding, Kayaking and tours to the Victoria Falls, Mukuni

Cultural Village and the places of interest in Livingstone. Many tour companies and lodges offer a booking agency service in Livingstone to help make your stay as easy and enjoyable as possible (UNCTA, 2020). Tourist can fly directly into Livingstone via Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula airport in Livingstone. Europe region is the major contributor to the international travel and tourism industry of Livingstone and presents one trip out of two by making up a 50% share of worldwide tourism. Tourism in European countries makes up nearly 48% of the entire outbound travel and tourism activities internationally (Ministry of Tourism, 2015). The leisure industry is one of the main components of the global service industry. Travel and tourism provide a substantial contribution to business operations and ultimately contribute to the worldwide economy (Meyer, 2013). The travel and tourism sector is an economic driver to the destination district. Since late December 2019, the advent of the present pandemic COVID-19 has developed unprecedented global health crises, social emergencies, and profound adverse consequences on the social and economic development of Livingstone (Osakwe, 2021).

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of COVID 19 on the socio-economic development of Livingstone district.
2. To establish the negative effect of COVID 19 to the hospitality industry in Livingstone.
3. To recommend strategies that can help to improve on the impact of COVID 19 on the economic development of Livingstone district.

Methodology

The study employed a case study design and used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data was generated through a check list developed by the researcher to find out on the figures of workers per institution, before and at the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic. This enabled the researcher to generate statistical data. Qualitative data was collected from secondary sources of information. These are journal articles observations and interviews which the researcher conducted with some workers working for different lodges and hotels. Data was analysed thematically by generating some themes from the discussions and Microsoft excel was used to generate statistical figures to show the extent of the impact of COVID 19 on the hospitality industry in Livingstone district of Zambia. The variance in the figures helped to justify the negative impact of the pandemic on the social economic development of Livingstone district.

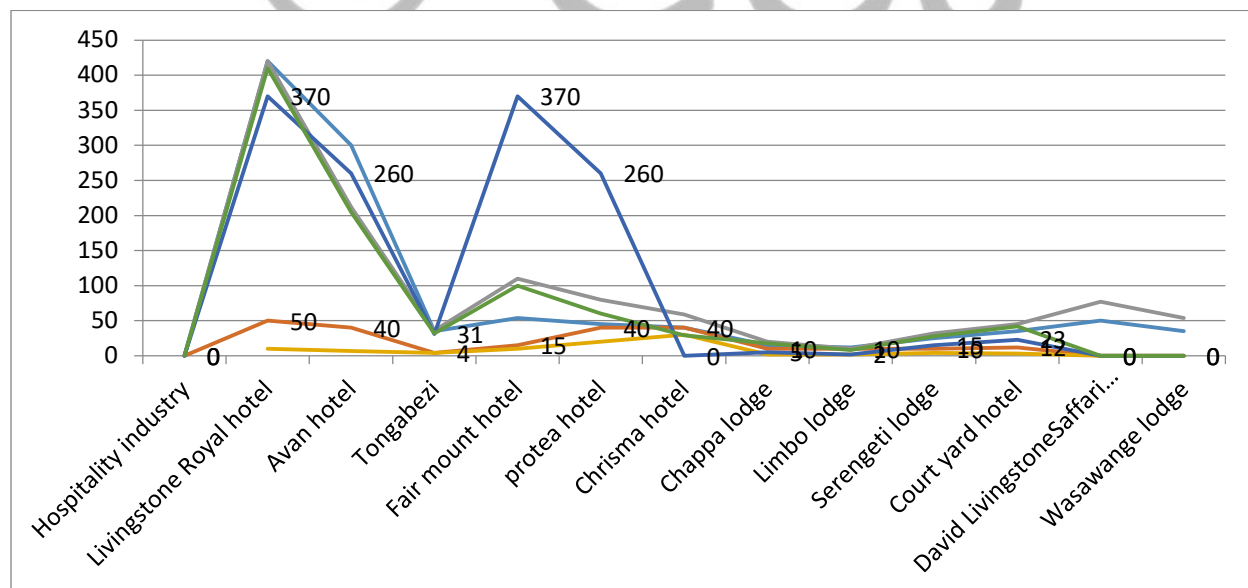
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The theme present the findings of the study and these were results conducted from oral interviews to the local people who were linked to tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone town, Southern province of Zambia. The key informant who were interviewed which includes, hotel worker, tour guides, clearing agents, taxi drivers and air traffic controllers etc. However, oral interviews from the hotel workers indicated that the main activities of Livingstone town is known internationally as a tourist capital of Zambia and COVID-19 has resulted in enormous financial losses and caused health and economic crises in the livelihood of people who are majority employed by the private sector such as hotels, safari lodges, clearing and forwarding companies and pleasure resorts etc. It was reviewed that when the lock down was pronounced on in March 2020, many workers from the private sector were only allowed to be working on shifts and later put on half salaries. Many failed to meet on their basic needs such as paying rental, sending children to school and paying hospital bills. This made families to relocate from medium cost residential areas such as Dambwa North, Dambwa Central, Ellen Brittle, Highlands and shifted to low cost area (shanty compounds) such as Linda, Ngwenya, Libuyu, Marota, Moolite, Maloan and Sawmill. Those that lost their jobs completely failed to pay rentals relocated to their home villages. These private sector could not maintain their workers on payroll as a result of loss of business and laid them off from duties.

It was revealed that the pandemics unpleasantly also impact tourist and their mental wellbeing of majority population. As a result, the number of both local and international tourist in January 2020 to January 2021 dropped their planned tour for Livingstone (COMESA, 2020). This was as a result of fearing the disease infection, as it looks impossible to avoid transmission of the virus during travel. Above and beyond, tourists travel increases infection risk to other air passengers in the absence of effective vaccines (Meyer, 2018). Travelers play a significant role in transferring viruses, epidemics, outbreaks, or pandemics between local communities' destinations which Livingstone was one of the epicenter. From 2019, the entire district of Livingstone has also been facing crisis communication in the media. The adverse consequences of the COVID-19 on the travel and leisure industry resulted in novel viral disease appurtenance. Infectious viruses are highly contagious, mutate rapidly and increase mortality rate (Osakwe, 2021). Travel and tourism is the significant contributors to a leading sector for job creation, socio-economic and cultural development in Livingstone (Ngwira, Musinguzi, 2011).

It was also mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic in Livingstone resulted in challenges of, socio-economic and healthcare crises, and posed spillover impacts on tourism and travel which is the major contributor to the service industry. It has massively affected the business firms' such lodges, hotels, bars, restaurants to have sustainable performance. The most popular hotels and lodge are Avan, Faremount, Protea, Eliba Apartment, Royal Livingstone Lodge, Thorn Tree, Royal Chundu, Tongabezi, Cross Roads, Golden Days Lodge, and these have maintained their business despite the hit of pandemic with few workers laid off. Those that lost business and closed are Wasawange, Court yard, Zambezi Way Lodge, Sunset etc. Majority of these surviving hotels and safari lodges are operating below standards. These private sector role has become critical to take innovative decisions to revive economic performance (Mbaiwa, 2005). The tourism industry in Livingstone has experienced COVID-19 tourism impacts the most hardest-hits. This industry falls among the most vulnerable industries. The relaxation, travel, and inbound tourism activities designated a sudden drop causing trillion US dollars losses that made up 50% plus loss in revenues to the government and private sector (COMESA, 2020). Below is the illustration to show the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic to the hospitality industry and its spillover effect on the social economic status of the local people, working for the industry.

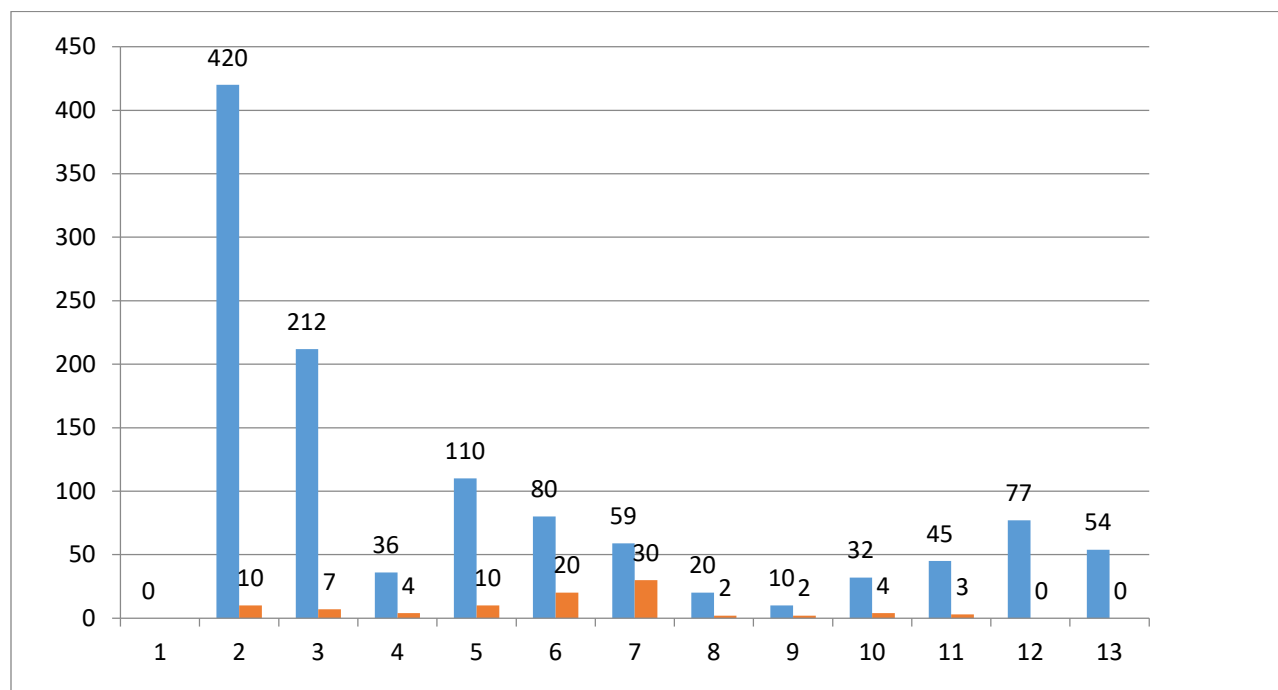
Figure1: Number of workers before COVID 19 and at the peak of COVID 19



The figure above shows the negative impact of COVID 19 to the hospitality industry in Livingstone. There is a sharp decrease on the number of worker. The bottom line illustrates the situation under the peak of COVID 19, translating in the low number of workers who used to

report for work in various lodges and hotels within Livingstone. This picture entails that most workers were either laid off or put on forced leave due to low income levels as a result of few tourists accessing the facilities. The figure is generated to highlight on the comparative aspect of figures on the workers per facility before COVID 19 and after the peak of COVID both local and internationally.

Figure 2: Difference in clients at lodges and hotels in Livingstone before Covid 19 and at the peak of Covid 19.



Source: Field data

Out of the 12 hospitality industries sampled, the number of clients (Tourists), accessing the facilities reduced drastically, meaning that the proprietors of the facilities could not sustain the big numbers of their work force and hence most workers lost their jobs. To the worst extent, some lodges could not survive the impact of COVID 19 on their business and hence had to close such as Wasawange, Livingstone Safari lodge and SPA and Courtyard. The reduction of tourists resulted into loss of income to sustain the business and those facilities that remained afloat, had to reduce on the labor force. This laying off of some workers impacted negatively on the social and economic welfare of most people in Livingstone, whose daily income depends on the tourism and hospitality industry.

The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted socio-economic activities in Livingstone and constitutes a significant shock to tourism development. In the wake of comprehensive economic recovery evidenced by the loosening of lockdowns and commencement of complete internal air travels, there is a need for concerted policies that would increase tourist arrivals, broaden clean energy use and ensure economic and environmental sustainability (Lusaka Times, 2021). The pandemic has pretentious energy consumption patterns and impacted tourism to rethink innovation for sustainable recovery strategies. The pandemic has influenced stock markets and caused inflation in Livingstone (Osakwe, 2021).

The pandemic has also effected government's budgets for expenditures in all the ministries and a result of loss of revenue more in the Ministry of Tourism. Inbound travel and tourism activities profoundly impact communities with their positive effects on the arrivals of international tourists' interfere with residents of destinations societies' social, cultural, and socio-economic growth and prosperity (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). The virus's outbreak has impacted travel and tourism activities and caused international travel collapse since mid-March 2020. The arrivals of international tourists showed a sharp decline of from January to May 2020, and dropped drastically by June 2020 (Osakwe, 2021).

The pandemic's appearance is still sweeping and various regions and borders have closed with all kinds of travel restrictions to combat the virus transmission. Livingstone town is bordering Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia and immediately a lock down was pronounced on the 18th March 2020 all these boarders were closed. From that time when boarders were closed the economy of the town has changed and boarders are now operating below expected level because people who were in cross boarder business have changed their business hence loss of revenue to the government (UNCTAD, 2020).

The pandemic also brought social stigma and mental health issues. Social stigma determines a negative linkage between persons or groups who share specific features and particular diseases It explains that local communities are labeled, discriminated and treated in particular ways because people consider them transmitters of infectious disease and pandemic. This behavior has led to negative social behaviors and affect people, family members, relatives, friends, and patients' caregivers. Individuals with infections but have other features can also suffer social stigmatization in the appearance of the pandemic COVID-19 is leading social stigma in the communities of Livingstone. People of various socio-economic backgrounds, religious and racial

identification have caused some problems to Chinese people with increasing discrimination. This behavior has also affected tourists' minds from the Chinese community. The pandemic has also affected marital life through domestic violence. Religiosity levels among people have helped to maintain marital satisfaction. The coronavirus infection disease has proved to be more dangerous to elderly and diabetic patients. Women with mental health issues also face severe stress due to the emergence of the deadliest disease (ICA, 2020).

It was reported by business proprietors that COVID-19 pandemic break out had great socio-economic impact and the results exposed that approximately all businesses applied and followed safety measures such as Steady office sanitization; providing hand sanitizer, gloves, and masks. This was to prevent the spread of coronavirus among the workers at a work place. The steps taken to promote their businesses was designing new packages, entering new markets, advertising for more offers and discounts, implementing online marketing strategy through social media as well as digital marketing, reducing sales prices and reducing national labor expenses, connecting with new partners abroad, and opening up more markets, were mostly highlighted by participants.

DISCUSSION

This paper explains that tourism hospitality industry has been extremely affected in Livingstone Southern Province of Zambia by the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings affirmed to the undesirable economic and social impact on the tourism and hospitality industry of Livingstone town. The study revealed that economic impact of a worldwide pandemic on the tourism economy has relentlessly affected the various project and developments. In Livingstone, COVID-19 has harshly affected the financial situation of tourism and hospitality companies. It was also established that the hotel and lodges received withdrawal requests for future bookings at the national as well as at the global level. The contemporary COVID-19 outbreak has not only affected the present booking but has made a huge impact on future bookings. The customers demand for tourism package has also declined, as companies have not received many inquiries from domestic or international visitors. The reason can be stated that the announcement of the closure of the border several times by the Zambian government (The Mast Newspaper, 2020). The cancelation of events has severely affected the tourism and hospitality businesses, as they were not able to attract tourist for making travel plans to the country. In Livingstone, many tourism and hospitality businesses had seen a huge financial loss of business from April, 2020 to June,

2021. As a result of huge financial loss, they perceived that their business was going to be permanently shut down within 6–12 months. To avoid the permanent closure period, many hotels and safari lodges decided to lay off staff temporarily, reduced the wages for themselves and staff, scale back on services and products. Due to uncertainty over economic conditions, the companies found it difficult to cover fixed and variable business costs. The hotels and safari lodges found it difficult to manage their business with limited funds and this affected their expansion plans. Apart from financial losses and reduction in demand, companies had faced several challenges. The companies had faced many other difficulties in delivering products and services to maintain their customers. It was a big challenge for the tourism industry to acquire the necessary materials and services for managing the inventory and developing new products. Additionally, due to government restrictions over the limited percentage of staff to attend at the workplace; hotels and safari lodges had huge difficulty in fulfilling the requirements and providing services to the customers. A number of researchers have published the similar findings with respect to different countries. Like Mbaiwa (2003) explains that, Okavango Delta bars and restaurants had to shut down immediately after the lock down and majority have not revived back. Majority of these businesses have not brought back their company's employees to pre-pandemic levels.).

On the other hand, the economic impact, this paper also exposes that the socio-economic impact on the tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone. The pandemic COVID-19 eruption had made a significant social impact on business owners of the tourism and hospitality industry. Some research have examined the social impact on various parameters like; depression, loss of freedom, suicidal tendency, feeling of anger, uncertainty about the spread of the disease, feeling of vulnerability, difficulty in concentrating, nervousness, monotony, anxiety, prickliness, agitation, sense of lonesomeness, apprehension, and fears (Mbaiwa, 2003). As alluded in this study, most of the bossiness owners felt irritated, anxious and stressed about getting affected due to the visits made by customers or employees of the company during the COVID-19 outbreak. Though, most of the companies have followed the safety measures like sanitization of the office; providing hand sanitizer, gloves, and masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus among the staff and customers. It was difficult to adjust psychologically to a new normal in the business, such as wearing, continuous washing of hands, masks, hand gloves, social distancing, and desire to visit friends. The fear of COVID-19 also made them felt like closing the hotels and safari lodges for short-term job and sit at home until COVID-19 ends. To avoid this situation, the Zambian government allowed hotels and safari lodges to run their business while following the standard

operating procedure. This guidance had allowed the business proprietors to control the spread of coronavirus and continue the business. However, many proprietors were stressed over the future plan as they might have to reduce some more workforce and cut salary due to the loss that occurred by in the COVID-19. Furthermore, owners felt that their relationship with their staff had got affected as they were asked to work on reduced salary and given notice for termination of services for the future. Hence, it can be concluded that the impact of the pandemic was very high on owners of the tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone the tourist capital of Zambia. The business proprietors took the counseling services to deal with fear of COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that, COVID-19 outbreak has unfavorably affected the economic and social development of the tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone the tourist capital of Zambia. It can be argued that the economic impact looked at a financial losses created in various businesses, customer demand, logistics and distribution channels, supplier's relationship, and employees' turnover. These losses were encountered as a result of withdrawal of bookings as a result of border closure, indefinite postponement of sports, business, and cultural events. This greatly affected future bookings because hotels and safari lodges in Livingstone had not received many request for information from foreign and domestic tourists. As a result of trivial losses, the tourism business proprietors in Livingstone had feared that their business might be permanently shut down, as it was difficult to manage fixed and variable business costs. Hotels, bars and restaurants, had used alternatives to survive in this critical situation like temporarily lay off staff, reduced salaries for themselves and staff, reduction in services and products. The eruption of COVID-19 had a huge impact on the community of Livingstone which mainly depends on the tourism and hospitality industry. The lockdown had not only affected the business proprietors financially but also had left them psychologically drained, the symptoms of depression, apprehensions, anger, boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, loneliness appears prominently among them. In spite of all the safety measures being in place, owners found it difficult to adjust psychologically to a new normal.

While the outbreak of COVID-19 affected all facets of business, the owners remained optimistic about the potential opportunities and restructure their operation plan to sustain in the present and future scenario. While COVID 19 outbreak had adversely affected tourism industry in all aspects, the proprietors were optimistic about the future. They improvised their strategies,

incurred investments in digital platforms, and conducted their business online. In order to avert this situation, an aggressive digital media marketing strategies were strategized to attract customers at the national and international level. Business proprietors proclaimed special offers and special discounts for the existing customer to make future travel bookings. Some hotels and lodges amalgamated with other companies for cross-promotion to communicate with local and international people through virtual tourism events. Other tourism companies were still looking forward for government support to sustain their business during the and after COVID-19 crisis.

Recommendations

The study suggest that COVID-19 pandemic has affected the tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone district and the Zambian government must take some serious initiatives in order to open the tourism industry. This will attract tourist at the national and global level. This study suggest to stakeholders and decision-makers to enhance tourism and hospitality industry in Livingstone. The recommendations include; flexible travel documents rules and regulations, increase the number of flights to European countries, provide bailout packages to the tourism and aviation industry, and promote tourism at national and international level by providing lucrative offers to the tourists, propaganda of strict compliance with health and safety measures. Other recommendations includes, promoting cultural and business events, provide special offers for low to mid-budget travelers, establish direct airline connectivity, encourage the business owners to provide leave travel concession to their employees, and finally provide support to the Zambian business holders and special facility for local residents. Additionally, in order to resuscitate the tourism and hospitality industry, the Zambian government should familiarize the practices adopted by enterprises integrated in foreign countries. Comparable, to other countries have modernized their business for the post-COVID-19 world by making scientific progression. Hotels should start using robots on the frontline for room services, housekeeping deliveries, arrangements of food and beverages, in-room dining, delivering housekeeping items, dispensing facemasks, and for sanitizing in order to protect guests and employees. These advanced self-service and biometrics will make contactless facilities from the booking of a hotel to exit from the hotel will reduce the COVID-19 risks. The above tendencies will be benefitting tourism and hospitality industries and likely to have a progressive impact. Efforts in the right direction will make Livingstone as one of the popular destinations among tourists; it will not only boost the industry but will have a cascading positive impact on the whole economy of Zambia. Given limited fiscal resources, it may be advisable for the policy response in Zambia to focus on effective public health measures at the borders and providing regulatory relief, particularly with

regard to flexibility in the application of labour regulations and licensing requirements for firms in the tourism sector. There is urgency for the Zambian government to engage the sector in view of having a better understanding of some of these pressing challenges and determining how best to address them in the short, medium and long term so that the sector can be revamped and reclaim its initial role as a contributor to the national treasurer..

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