

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

*“Understanding that the world does not belong to any one nation or generation, and sharing a spirit of utmost urgency, we dedicate ourselves to undertake bold action to cherish and protect the environment of our planetary home”  
(Gore, 1993, p. xx).*

### 1.1 Background

“Africa south of the Zambezi encompasses an amazing diversity of natural wonders within a relatively small area. A third of the sub-continent is thirstrand. Parts are true desert. There are also lush tropical and temperate forests, high mountain grasslands and soaring snow-capped peaks. Lagoons and estuarine lakes fret the coastline. Deep inland, once great lakes have become vast salt flats blistering in the sun, and rivers that flowed into them are now silent, sand-choked valleys. Elsewhere, mighty rivers carve gaping canyons through mountain ranges, thunder over stupendous waterfalls and dissipate in swamp wonderlands. These are places of pilgrimage, continually drawing people to marvel at the glories of nature, reflect on the events of inconceivable distant ages and meditate upon their own place in nature and time” (Wannenburgh, 1987, p. 9).

The many natural wonders in southern Africa are the result of wide-ranging climatic conditions, diverse soil types and geological events that have shaped the sub-continent into a broad range of contrasting landscapes. These landscapes are home to one of the world’s most diverse botanical and zoological regions, of which many species are found nowhere else on earth. As natural attractions, they serve as important draw-cards for tourists to southern Africa and are conserved through various kinds of protected areas in order to ensure their long-term conservation. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected areas “are areas of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means” (IUCN, 2009). Protected areas should be managed in a responsible manner to make sure that natural and cultural attractions may be enjoyed by present and future generations (Hugo, Viljoen & Meeuwis, 1997; Pullin, 2002).

In sharp contrast to this natural abundance, political, economic and social inequalities have resulted in high poverty rates, high levels of illiteracy and unemployment and distorted patterns of resource use. Poor people increasingly see protected areas as land that is being conserved for wealthy foreign visitors and the elite. Local inhabitants in close proximity to protected areas feel excluded and alienated from access to resources on which they have been dependent for their survival (Grossman & Holden, 2003).

Economic opportunities and benefits must accrue to those people who share geographic proximity with protected areas, that is, those who represent local interests rather than purely national and international interests (Whelan, 1991; Fennell, 2003). As early as 1980, the World Conservation Strategy emphasized the importance of linking protected area management with

the economic activities of local communities (IUCN, 1980). Tourism is seen as a potential solution to ensure the long-term protection of natural resources and as a means of satisfying the needs of the poor communities in close proximity to protected areas (Magome, 2003; Magakgala, 2003). Community-based ecotourism (CBE) focuses on initiatives that are not only environmentally sensitive, but which aim to “ensure that community members have a high degree of control over the activities taking place, and a significant proportion of the benefits accrue to them” (Scheyvens, 1999, p. 246).

CBE initiatives have several advantages. Among other things, they promise employment and income to local communities as well as much-needed foreign exchange to national governments, while allowing the continued existence of the natural resource base. In fact, CBE cannot survive unless the resource on which it is based is protected. CBE can empower local communities, giving them a sense of pride in their natural resources and control over their communities’ development. CBE therefore has the potential to maximize economic benefits, while minimizing environmental costs (Kiss, 2004).

It is therefore evident that CBE in pristine environments can only be successful if it is sustainably managed. However, the needs of the host population must also be met in terms of improved living standards in both the short and the long term. CBE has to pay special attention to the needs, concerns and welfare of the local host community (Scheyvens, 1999). Projects that focus on generating economic benefits without effectively encouraging local participation in the identification, design, implementation or evaluation of development activities are less likely to provide widespread community benefits (Cernea, 1991).

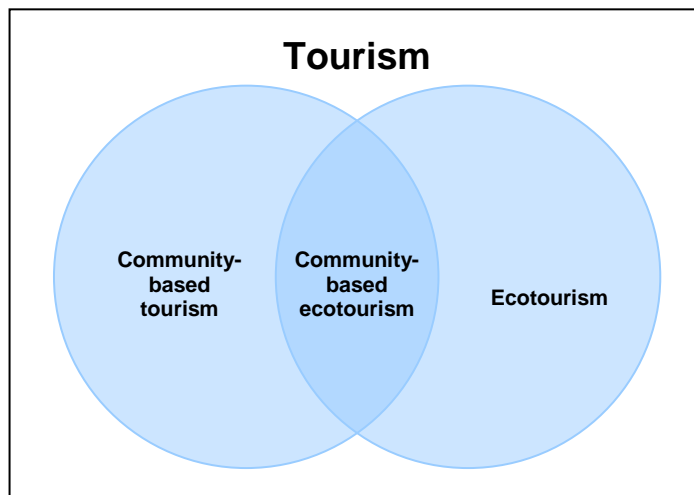
CBE should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a means towards empowering poor communities to take control over their land and resources, to tap their potential and to acquire the skills necessary for their own development. If the present status of CBE is better understood, the lessons learnt may be applied to other areas in order to ensure a peaceful, mutually beneficial coexistence between the poor rural communities and conservation areas. This study will investigate the sustainability of CBE ventures in southern Africa. Sustainability in terms of this study is defined as **“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”** (adapted from WCED, 1987, p. 43).

## **1.2 Research problem, question and aim**

In southern Africa a large number of community-based tourism (CBT) ventures have been established in close proximity to national parks and protected areas. Some of these ventures appear to be successful, leading to significant economic returns and community benefits, thereby ensuring the long-term existence of the conservation areas. Other ventures are not as successful and struggle to survive economically, often leading to increased resource utilization

pressure on conservation areas and threatening the biodiversity of such areas. CBT ventures can only contribute to communities' wellbeing if they are sustainable in the long term. Given the varying successes of CBT ventures it is imperative to establish the "sustainability" of CBT ventures in order to improve their management.

Within the context of tourism and ecotourism the concepts CBT and CBE require clarification to differentiate between these two tourism types (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1:** Community-based ecotourism in context

CBT is an approach to tourism in which often poor and marginalized (either urban or rural) "local residents are active participants as land-managers/users, entrepreneurs, employees, decision-makers and conservators. ... The aim is for residents to have a say in decisions over tourism development in their area and work with other stakeholders to develop opportunities for employment, enterprise, skill development, and other improvements in local livelihoods. Some actions, such as participation in planning, may be done by communities acting collectively and some, such as enterprise development, by local individuals and families" (Ashley, 1999, p. 2).

The International Ecotourism Society (2007a) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people". CBE therefore "implies that the community has substantial control and involvement in the ecotourism project and that the majority of the benefits remain in the community" (Epler Wood, 2002, p. 41). CBE is clearly a specific type of ecotourism in which the community approach to tourism is followed. CBE may, however, also be seen as a specific subtype of CBT. As far as can be ascertained, the sustainability of CBE ventures in southern Africa have not been investigated and no baseline for the comparison of sustainability exists. The focus of the study therefore falls on investigating the sustainability of a specific type of community-based tourism, namely community-based ecotourism (CBE) in a southern African context. This study will also provide baseline data for future comparison.

Research question:

**How can the sustainability of community-based ecotourism ventures be monitored to provide performance indicators to aid effective management?**

In light of the above discussions the following research aim arose:

**The aim of this study is to develop a framework to monitor the sustainability of community-based ecotourism ventures in southern Africa and to test its applicability in a field setting.**

In order to answer the research question and achieve the aim of the study the following objectives were addressed in this study:

- 1 To compile an inventory of community-based tourism ventures in southern Africa
- 2 To define community-based ecotourism and establish which community-based tourism ventures may be categorized as community-based ecotourism
- 3 To classify and select representative community-based ecotourism ventures for further investigation
- 4 To construct an evaluation framework for monitoring the sustainability of community-based ecotourism through identifying appropriate performance indicators under three broad categories (social, economic, environmental)
- 5 To measure the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the selected case studies using the constructed evaluation framework
- 6 To compare the sustainability of the investigated case studies thereby providing baseline data for effective management
- 7 To review the utility of the constructed evaluation framework

The first three objectives relate to the selection of the specific CBE ventures that will serve as the case studies to test the evaluation framework. Objectives 4 to 7 address the construction, testing, evaluation and review of the evaluation framework for measuring the sustainability of CBE ventures.

### **1.3 Research design and methodology**

The specific methodological approach used in this study was the case study approach. The aim was to provide an analysis of the context and processes of the representative case studies that were researched. According to Finn, Elliot-White and Walton (2000, p. 81) case studies “provide a richness and uniqueness in data” by “exploring issues in depth and in context”. Mouton (2001,

p. 149) defines case study research as being “studies that are usually qualitative in nature and that aim to provide an in-depth description of a small number (less than 50) of cases.” In the selection and analysis of the case studies for this research, Henning (2004), Stake (2000) and Yin (1993, 1994 & 2009) have been used as guidelines.

The first phase of the study, namely the compilation of an inventory of CBT ventures, was fulfilled through the collection of secondary data. The inventory of CBT ventures was spatially referenced to facilitate a spatial refinement of possible cases that might be investigated. A series of telephonic interviews were then conducted with the resultant cases to determine which of the CBT ventures might be categorized as CBE ventures. The resultant CBE ventures were then classified into types and representative case studies selected for further investigation.

The sustainability of the representative case studies was established by applying an evaluation framework employing a number of sustainability indicators. This multi-method approach combines formal interviews and questionnaires, informal discussions, water quality analysis, global positioning systems and participant observations. This approach facilitated triangulation, providing verification of findings and the richness of detail needed in the explanation of the cases being investigated.

The final phase of the investigation comprised a cross-case analysis of the findings as well as a review of the utility of the constructed evaluation framework. A synthesis, conclusion and recommendations were also included.

A detailed description of the methodology that was used is discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **1.4 Organization of the investigation**

This introductory chapter presents a brief background to the view that tourism, and more particularly community-based ecotourism, is seen as a solution to both the long-term protection of conservation areas and a means of satisfying the needs of poor rural communities through the stimulation of rural development. The research problem which is subsequently outlined indicates the importance of establishing the sustainability of community-based ecotourism ventures. The aim and objectives of the study, as well as the main methodological approach followed, are presented.

Chapter 2 provides a review of theoretical debates and defines the core concepts that are essential for the investigation of the aim and objectives of this study.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approaches mentioned in Chapter 1 in greater detail and describes the process and results of the selection of the case studies for further investigation.

In Chapter 4 the results of the telephonic interviews with CBE ventures are discussed.

Chapter 5 explains the construction of the evaluation framework for the investigation of the sustainability of the selected cases, including the selected sustainability indicators.

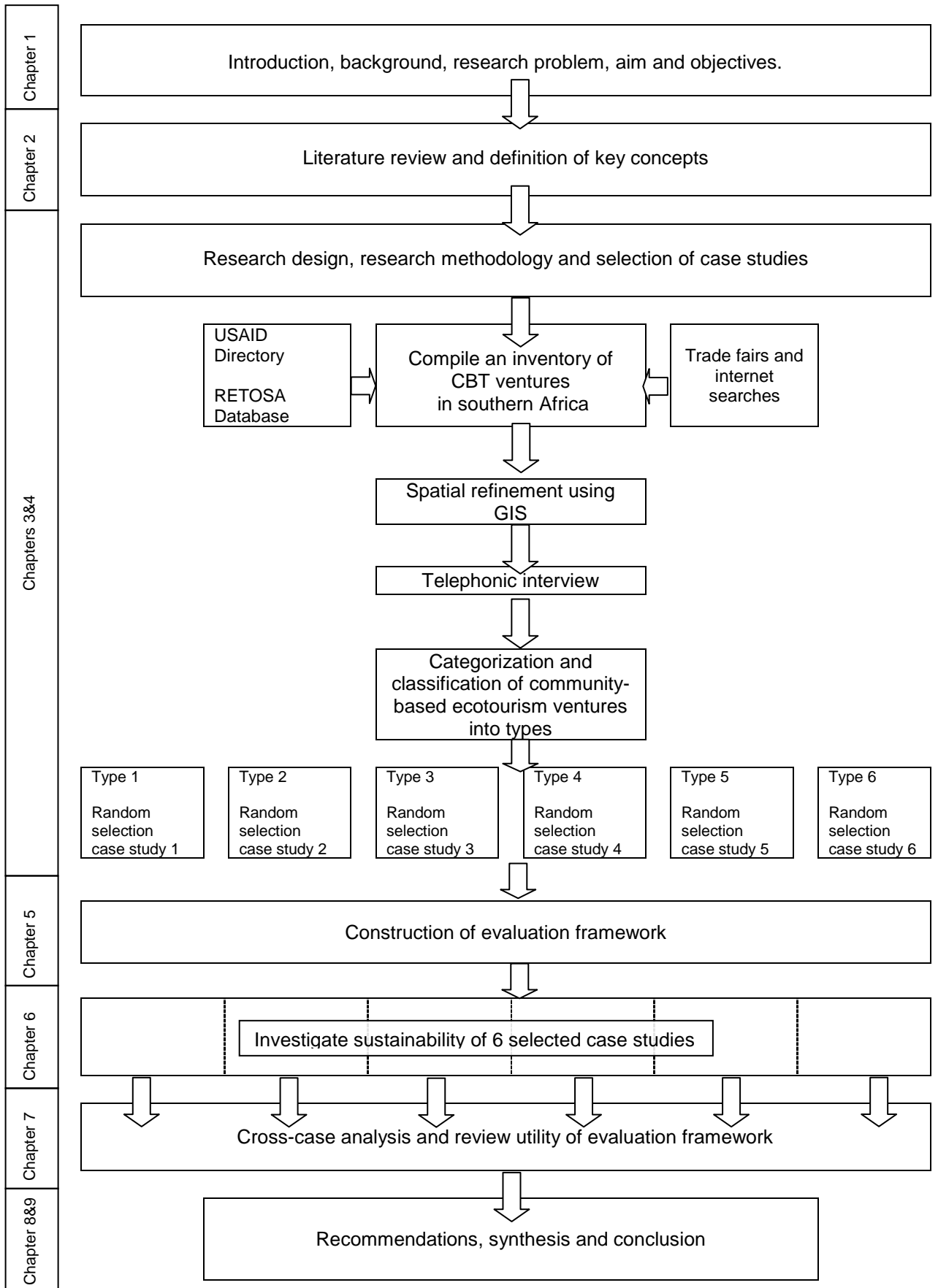
Chapter 6 presents the findings of the investigation into the sustainability of the selected case studies using the constructed evaluation framework.

Chapter 7 provides a cross-case analysis of the findings of the investigations into the sustainability of representative CBE ventures and assesses the evaluation framework.

Chapter 8 provides recommendations for improving the sustainability performance specific of case studies.

Finally, Chapter 9 reviews the major findings of the research, provides a synthesis of the study and identifies limitations of the research. Recommendations and areas for further study are made.

The research process and chapter breakdown are given in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2:** Illustration of research process and breakdown of chapters