Abstract:

Rural communities are currently under a lot of pressure to meet their current needs amidst barriers to development. Such barriers include lack of infrastructure which hinder them from having access to transportation to markets and also lack of accommodation or restaurants or might have a limited few. This has been one of the major reasons why many rural communities are not able to contribute or participate actively in the blue economy through use of wild aquatic resources, aquaculture, or in some cases coastal tourism. Local economic development is central to rural areas, and by using opportunities such as harvested or cultivated aquatic resources as well as seafood tourism in rural communities can be seen as a viable strategy.

The South African coastline stretches across thousands of kilometres and is rich in cultural and environmental heritage. South Africa, however, has not yet reached the full potential of its marine resources, it still remains underdeveloped. This has subsequently let to the development of a Blue Economy strategy which is aimed at appreciating the value of the national assets together with establishing how it can contribute to livelihoods as well as the economy.

South Africa’s National Development Plan has identified the ocean economy as one of the drivers to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by the year 2030. Operation Phakisa on the other hand focuses on unlocking South Africa’s oceans which is believed can contribute immensely to the country’s GDP and both direct and indirect jobs. Two of the six key focus areas of Operation Phakisa are aquaculture together with coastal and marine tourism.

There has also been an increase in the number of countries that have declared to use their resources in participating and making full use of the blue economy. This they believe shall play a role in improving the lives of their nations and in particular those poor and impoverished coastal communities. These communities still face a number of issues which include poverty, lack of employment, reduced food security, migration of people to developed areas in search for a better life. The overall aim of the study, therefore, is to contribute towards the exploration, expansion and inclusion of rural communities with access to aquatic living resources to the blue economy study therefore aims at looking at exploring the of the use of aquatic living resources with seafood tourism as drivers of local economic development in rural communities. Thus, a muti-disciplinary approach to development which encompasses use of aquatic resources by all communities with access, aquaculture and seafood tourism as a sustainable development strategy for rural communities shall be explored.

The aim of the study includes, developing the term “aquatourism” and its exploration as a viable and workable catalyst for local economic development and improved life for all. This study therefore sets out to investigate and establish how coastal and inland rural communities can capitalize on food production, food harvesting, and seafood tourism as increasing the value-chain locally and ultimately nationally. The development of the term “Aquaculture” shall also encompass investigating the use of aquaculture in rural communities, opportunities and challenges associated with it. This shall be achieved through an intensive literature review which will include investigating methods and models for local economic development using low technological and technical aquaculture systems which have been successful and can be applied in other rural contexts by the community members. The study also seeks to investigate the challenges and opportunities associated with seafood tourism and aquaculture together with investigating ways in which the two sectors can coexist harmoniously, enabling both industries to compliment and benefit from each other and thus both contributing towards local economic development without competing.
The study plans to take on a qualitative approach. Use of experts in the field to develop the term “Aquatourism” as well as online and paper-based questionnaires. A robust and extensive review of literature will also be utilised to gather information of rural aquaculture and seafood tourism.

“Aquatourism”, is a concept which will be defined, developed, tested and discussed in detail in the development of the thesis. The definition of aquatourism, so far is, in the thesis is “the use of aquatic living resources in touristic activities to achieve local economic development”. The aquatic organisms may be fished, harvested and/or farmed in aquaculture surroundings. A prerequisite is that the resources should be accessible and controlled by the local communities.

Aquatourism seeks to take on an integrated approach to achieving local economic development that is sustainable by using two mechanisms namely, combining community-based aquatic seafood harvesting and production aquaculture and with seafood tourism. Aquatourism aims to increase the potential for rural communities to capitalize on seafood production and seafood tourism along the whole value-chain “from water to plate”. It seeks to open and include aquatic resources as well as tourism industry related business clusters, industries that have gained momentum for creating employment over the years.

Using community’s knowledge and understanding of the aquatic environment and its living resources, traditional cooking methods and local food culture, story-telling one of the central elements of seafood tourism. Aquatourism becomes a way to connect tourists with the local culture. In aquatourism, the tourists can take part in various activities such as catching or harvesting of local fish, shellfish or seaweeds in their natural environment, or visits to aquaculture installations, where they can learn about the biology, ecology and sustainability aspects of the aquatic organisms, the local environment, production methods and culinary aspects as well as local traditions. The tourists can further be involved in the preparation of the seafood and tastings and furthermore, seafood festivals, fairs and other events can attract tourists to certain regions and rural communities. Aquatourism therefore, connects to all aspects of the seafood tourism sector as a driver of business development as tourists target rural areas for full local experience. Aquatourism can also connect to eco-tourism and becomes a learning experience for tourists.

This industry would also seek create a platform for local communities to own, manage and run these community projects and related business clusters, building resilience and contributing towards employment, poverty alleviation, food security, enhanced livelihoods as well as contributing towards the local economy. The involvement and inclusion of all stakeholders forms an integral part of sustainable development particularly the blue economy, and it shall also be centre of aquatourism.

A literature study conducted, investigated the challenges and opportunities of seafood tourism and its contributions to local economic development. It further investigated the opportunities and challenges of the use of aquaculture in seafood tourism. The study has found that seafood tourism can be a catalyst to sustainable development through the use of marine resources, in a manner that is sustainable to both the industry as well as towards the marine environment, destination development as well as local economy. Seafood tourism with its incorporation with aquaculture shows a bright future in terms of the sustainable use of resources whilst meeting local economic needs. The two industries can contribute towards reducing poverty, lack of employment, migration of people to developed areas in search for a better life and contribute towards food and nutrition security. The two industries however are associated with a number of conflicts which include space to operate, pollution as well as environmental degradation but can also benefit/ complement each other. Effective spatial
planning and use of aquaculture systems that can work with tourism are some of the mechanisms used to accommodate both of them and to enable them to improve the lives of those making use of them.