

The Legal Framework on Sustainable Tourism: A Comparative Analysis between Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles

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ABSTRACT

The world is witnessing a rise in the number of international tourists travelling which is mainly caused by the fall in travelling costs and higher living standards. However, this has caused numerous negative impacts on the economy, the environment and the society. In the context of Mauritius, tourism has always been seen as among its key pillars that sustain its economy and helped it to flourish. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to assess the efficiency, robustness and accuracy of the legal framework on sustainable tourism in Mauritius in dealing with new emerging challenges. To achieve the research objective, the black letter research method was adopted to collect secondary data by analysing the related laws on tourism in the context of sustainability and a comparative analysis with some other countries' rules on the researched topic was conducted. The countries selected for the comparison are the Maldives and Seychelles. It is observed that although there is a legal framework for tourism that is currently in place, there are still gaps in the laws that make it challenging for tourism businesses to operate sustainably. Among other issues relating to the environment and the economy, the socio-economic aspect has been neglected.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Tourism, Laws on Sustainable Tourism, Tourists and the Law, Human Rights and Tourism, Environment and Tourism.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 July 2023 Accepted 03 June 2024

1. Introduction

Travel, which is the mother of all tourist interest has made several impacts on the aspects of the society over the years. One of the most used definitions for tourism is the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) which defines tourism as, “a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or other purposes” (UNWTO, 2023). Moreover, the UNWTO notes that in the 1950s, there was a number of international tourists travelling and over the years this number has increased significantly and became 1.5 billion by 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The rise in these number is mainly caused by the fall in travelling costs and more people are having higher standards of living (Zhang, 2020). However, this has also caused several negative impacts on the economy, the environment and the society. This had led to the emergence to a new form of tourism known as sustainable tourism which is the opposite of the mass tourism. According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), sustainable tourism refers to “the sustainable practices of tourism in the industry by acknowledging all the impacts of tourism, both positive and negative and aims to minimize the negative ones in the economy, environment and socio cultural” (GSTC, 2023).

In fact, rules, legislations and policies are important to drive sustainability practices with the view of respecting, protecting and progressively realizing human rights for all, future and the current human kind (Brown, 1995). To this effect, sustainable tourism laws take into account the element of sustainability when regulating touristic activities. This includes the establishment of proper mechanisms in the form of best practices as well as an appropriate monitoring system which is accompanied by sanctions and punishment. Unfortunately, there is no legislation which defines sustainable tourism in its contextual terms but some countries like South Africa has included “sustainable development” in Section 24 of its Constitution entitled “environmental right” (South African Constitution, 1996). Consequently, sustainable tourism is envisaged as two distinct independent spheres of rights being environment and human rights. As such, it is uncommon to find sustainable tourism laws in one single piece of legislation but rather, they are spread in various branches of law which are interlinked to environment and human rights protection such as travel law, administrative law, consumer protection among others.

In the context of Mauritius, an island destination, tourism has always been seen as among its key pillars that sustain its economy and helped it to flourish. For example, tourism contributed 8% GDP in year 2019 (Statistics Mauritius, 2019) and according to the Ministry of Tourism, tourist arrival increased at a rate of 9% each year and it has analysed that the tourism sector is expecting a rebound in tourist arrival after the covid pandemic and a revival growth of 6.7% has been seen in 2022 and a further growth of 4% is expected in 2023 (Export Enterprises, 2022). In fact, successive governments have successfully made the tourism industry meet international standards and in this way more tourists are attracted and to come in the island each year. Additionally, Mauritius has a well-structured tourism legal framework which englobes various aspects of the sector. Laws and policies set out in acts, regulations, guidelines are well drafted in order to ensure positive impact of tourism. Briefly it comprises the Tourism Authority Act 2006, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority Act 1996, Tourism Employee Welfare Fund, amongst others. However, sustainable tourism which is a more complex type of tourism requires some specific amendments in existing laws to be able to cope with the new challenges specifically within the environmental and socio-economic aspect of tourism. In this context, sustainability encompasses triple bottom line that is it englobes the economy, society and environment also known as the 3 Ps that is Profit, People and Planet (Gbejewoh et al., 2021). In a nutshell, sustainable tourism has recently been observed to go beyond the environmental perspective and to take other factors into account as well (Neto, 2003).

Job creation prospects entailed by the tourism industry does definitely impact positively on the local population not only in terms of financial stability but also there may have good effect on the preservation of local cultures, conservation of heritage and hence leading to a better standard of living for the population. Nevertheless, despite all these positive impacts, sustainable tourism development does have some challenges which they face. The problem also concerns the economy and social aspect and goes beyond only the environmental problems. Concerning the economy, it has been noticed that there has been leakage of foreign currency of the investors outside the island (Chummun & Mathithibane, 2020) and this is a serious problem to address as it may result in closure of local businesses and impacting on the socio-eco-

conomic progress of the country. Additionally, Section 9 of the Mauritian Constitution which is considered as the supreme law of the country and deals with the protection of property have been breached as there has been restricted access to some beaches to civilians as a result of hotel construction and these two examples are only the tip of the iceberg and the problem is more serious. As such, the efficiency of the laws regulating sustainable tourism needs to be reviewed and reinforced in relation to socio-economic, and environmental aspect in order to better cope with the new challenges so as to prevent a bad image of Mauritius on an international level.

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to assess the efficiency, robustness and accuracy of the legal framework on sustainable tourism in Mauritius in dealing with new emerging challenges. To achieve this research objective, the black letter research method will be adopted to collect secondary data by analysing the related laws on sustainable tourism and a comparative analysis with some other countries' rules on the subject will be conducted. A desk-based approach and content analysis will be used to collect this information. The countries selected for the comparison are the Maldives and Seychelles since these are both Small Islands Developing States similar to Mauritius that focus on the tourism industry for survival to a great extent and also, they are considered to be direct competitors of Mauritius as per the Strategic Plan Report 2018-2021 published by the Ministry of Tourism (Government of Mauritius, 2018). The comparison is made on the basis of best approaches designed by each country to achieve sustainable development with a particular focus on the protection of environment and human rights. While the black letter method seeks to investigate how tourism laws in each country are protecting environmental and human rights, the functioning of the relevant laws is compared in terms of their establishment, monitoring modalities and sanctions. The aim behind this comparative analysis is to suggest recommendations for the Mauritian stakeholders to enhance and promote sustainable tourism practices in the country which may result in a competitive advantage at the global level.

At present, this study is amongst the first academic writings on sustainable tourism laws in the context of Mauritius and it is being carried out with the aim of combining a large amount of empirical, theoretical, and factual information that can be of use to various stakeholders and not only to academics. While the first section of the paper has introduced the background of the research, the objectives, the research methods to be adopted and the originality of this study, the other parts of the paper are structured as follows: Section 2 will discuss the various studies conducted by several distinct scholars that have considered sustainable tourism practices in line with the triple bottom line 3Ps' approaches in the context of Mauritius. Section 3 will assess the relevant Mauritian laws on tourism while Section 4 will compare the related laws on tourism relating to sustainability in Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles. Section 5 will suggest recommendations for the Mauritian stakeholders and the final Section 6 will conclude the research.

2. Literature Review

This section of the research critically analyses the various research works conducted by scholars in the context of sustainable tourism in Mauritius, and then to showcase how this existing study differs from the already existing studies.

In particular, Ternel (2016) researched on the various sustainable tourism opportunities for Mauritius. The objectives were to identify sustainable practices in the country, and to analyse the priority sustainability areas which need to be addressed and a qualitative technique was applied in order to identify areas for improvement in the tourism sector. As a result, the researcher found that although the Mauritian government has already established some strategies in place in order to combat climate change, these were not sufficient to educate and raise awareness among the local population, other tourism stakeholders and visitors. Moreover, she mentioned the debate of La Cambuse hotel development project which faced numerous criticisms whereby the site where they wanted to construct the hotel was a natural area used for the reproduction of turtles. To this effect, members of "Platform Sov Nou Laplaz" which is a non-governmental organization stated that this kind of project represents a danger for the ecosystem (Business Mega, 2015). Therefore, Ternel (2016) firmly believes that environmental factors must be taken into consideration in order to better prepare an enhanced policy and law for sustainable tourism development.

Apart from environmental considerations, Beebeejaun (2017) emphasized on the effectiveness of the legal framework regulating sustainable tourism in Mauritius and the focus was also axed on human rights. The research objectives of the study were mainly to analyse the relation between tourism and these two aspects relating to sustainability. Also, the research aim was to analyse how policy makers can solve the problem of climate change through sustainable tourism. The second part was mainly about the human rights situation of the local population and suggestion of international recommendation has been put forward in order for Mauritius to adopt. The research comprised of socio legal analysis and also black letter approach was used whereby there has been the analysis of the main legislation governing human rights and environment. Concerning the environmental part, the researched found that measures have been taken by the Ministry of Tourism to help protect the environment such as the implementation of the Environment Impact Assessment to monitor the effect of the project on the environment. However, the researcher also found that there are still some negative impacts of tourism on the environment such as pollution, the depletion of natural resources, global warming which could later result in more alarming situations. In order to better tackle these problems, Beebeejaun (2017) advocated that the Tourism Authority Act of Mauritius must be amended by establishing a specific ecotourism committee which will cater only for better management of Mauritius as a sustainable tourism island. It can comprise mainly of tourism stakeholder's representatives, academics and NGOs and their main role will to promote eco-system tourism and can help establishing policy for the well management of the tourism sector. In order for this specific section to work, the local population will have to be aware of the problem affecting the environment and do their best on their behalf to avoid pollution and protect the nature.

Additionally, one early study conducted by Prayag et al. (2010) analysed hotel development in Mauritius and its impact on sustainable tourism. For the methodology, the researcher used questionnaire to measure hoteliers' attitudes in relation to tourism sustainability. The findings demonstrate that hoteliers were not aware that hotel development can have negative impact on the environment but they disagreed that hotel development has a negative impact on the society and according to them, the development only benefits the society in terms of job creation and infrastructure development. This gap is not uncommon as the policy makers generally view sustainable tourism as the protection of physical environment only. Moreover, the research found that only the beachcomber hotel at that time adopted the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). At that time, CSR was purely voluntary although this concept is becoming more popular nowadays as each company must compulsorily contribute 2% of its chargeable income to a CSR fund (MRA, 2020). Also, Prayag et al. (2010) found that hoteliers on average agreed that hotel development should contribute to environmental sustainability, and have positive economic, social and cultural impacts. They were not entirely convinced that there were negative cultural and economic impacts, and they disagreed that there were negative social impacts.

Along similar lines, Seetanah (2019) explored the role of tourism in poverty alleviation in Mauritius by using time series analysis and empirical research as methodology. The aim of the research involved to supplement the literature in respect of the relationship between tourism and poverty reduction which will be useful to develop policy in this sector. There has been analysis and explanation on the concept of tourism and the positive economic impact it created. The recommendation and conclusion part demonstrated that employment and education level is the most important factor in poverty alleviation and concerning tourism development it has been found that the government must implement policies in order to align economic and budgetary incentives with social cost in order promote investment in this sector such as building of hotels, restaurants amongst others. As tourism is directly related to the informal economy whereby the poor are more likely engaged, this should more developed and in this way attracting international tourists. An aggressive approach of marketing destination must be adopted and in this way the country will get more foreign spending and lots of economic benefits such as poverty alleviation and a better standard of living of the local citizens.

Accordingly, the above-mentioned scholars' observations and analysis made it abundantly clear that there are gaps in the law governing sustainable tourism in Mauritius, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated numerous amendments. Additionally, although many academics have written on the topic of sustainable tourism, very few have examined the legal framework that governs it in Mauritius which is spread in various pieces of legislation. In the following sections of this paper,

a critical analysis of the Mauritian Tourism Authority Act (2006) and other pertinent laws will be done in order to get a deeper examination of the research topic.

3. Legal Framework on Tourism in Mauritius

The legal system of Mauritius is a hybrid one consisting of the UK common law practices and the French civil code. Concerning tourism laws in the country, they are mainly inspired from international conventions but some of their provisions have been amended to adapt to the Mauritian context. These are elaborated hereunder.

3.1 Tourism Authority Act (2006)

In fact, the Tourism Authority Act (2006) is the main act responsible for the promotion of sustainable tourism in the country. Main duties involve control over licensees and make sure that all tourism organisations are abiding to the given standards. The Act contains a well-established plan covering aspects of the triple bottom line which are crucial to make Mauritius as a sustainable destination. Section 5 of the Act elaborates on its objectives and include the promotion sustainable development of tourism industry, encouraging activities in tourism industry to be done in a responsible manner, implementing tourism policies and develop coordination between private and public sector in the industry.

Section 6 and 7 of the Act respectively elaborates on the functions and powers of the Tourism Authority. It is mentioned that the authority has function to give and regulate license for tourist enterprises and pleasure crafts. However, if the organisations do not abide to the standards set by the regulatory bodies, the Tourism Authority has the power to revoke the license given. Other functions include the management and development of tourism sites, setting standards, policies and guidelines and lastly taking measures to protect the customers.

Additionally, great emphasis is put on complaints mechanisms under Section 24 of the Act. It is provided that any person who is unsatisfied with the services he/she got with, the licensees can make a complaint to the Tourism Authority and investigation must take place. This section is important for the promotion of sustainable tourism development as the licensees will set strategies in place in order to always abide by the policies and standards set in a way to get a good reputation and this will benefit the industry as a whole.

Another crucial legal component is Section 26 which deals with the licensing. This is related to Section 6 and it mentions that every enterprise must obtain authorisation before operating their tourism business and failure to abide to this will result to fines of more than MUR200,000 (USD4510) and accompanied by a 5 years imprisonment term. This can be seen in the case of *Police V Pedre Jean Steve Wasley (2013)*, whereby accused was found guilty as he embarked passengers outside of embarkation point and breached Section 26 of the Tourism Authority Act. Also, Section 33 stipulates that every licensee shall keep records of 5 years after the completion of the transaction and this is fundamental concerning the inspection and the transparency of the transactions.

For water sports such as pleasure crafts, Section 40 mentions that the authority must keep a proper register for pleasure crafts. And by virtue of Section 47, there can be refusal of registers if the pleasure craft does not abide by the laws and regulations of Mauritius and where the commissioner of police does not give proper authorisation.

3.2 Beach Authority Act (2002)

Moreover, the Beach Authority Act (2002) is used for the sound development of sustainable tourism in Mauritius. It was developed in 2002 and ensure the proper control of public beaches as one of the main features that attracts tourists in the island (Beach Authority, 2023). The mission of this Act is to make the locals and tourists to fully enjoy the amenities available to them on public beaches and it also takes into consideration the social and environmental aspect of sustainability. The functions are by virtue of Section 5 of the Act which concerns the implementation of projects associated with the conservation and protection of public beaches and also regulate the activities which takes place on the beaches. A board must also

be set up with representatives from different ministries in order to take important decisions concerning the policies and development of public beaches. Several projects have already been implemented by the authority in accordance with the Beach Authority Act 2002, such as the establishment of informative panels and the upgrading of several public beaches with the implementation of mini kiosk to avoid pollution. The authorities also work in accordance with the Use of Public Beach Operations Regulations (2004) and Beach Traders License Regulations (2004) for the proper development and use of public beaches. However even with these Acts, there are still some issues which need to be tackle. This will be analysed at the end of this chapter.

3.3 Environment Protection Act (2002)

Additionally, the Environment Protection Act (2002) is a fundamental legislation used to demonstrate that the local authorities are ensuring the protection of the environment with the development of the tourism sector in the island which again demonstrate the concept of sustainability. The main purpose of this Act is to set policies for the protection of the environment and sanctions are imposed when contravening these laws. Section 18(2) of the Environment Protection Act elaborates on the application of licence for the Environmental Impact Assessment which is a tool used to evaluate the impact of tourism development on the environment (OGL, 2022). In order to predict the environmental impact for the potential tourism development such as hotel construction, several governmental authorities' authorisations are needed such as approval from the Central Electricity Board, Central Water Authority, Road development authority, police department amongst others. Yet, an in-dept assessment is not needed when granting license for other tourism activities (Beebeejaun, 2017). Other strategies are adopted each year by the government in order to reduce negative environmental impact. This includes the 10-year policy and strategy developed by the Ministry of solid waste, environment and climate change. The Masterplan puts forward a new mindset and include several regulations and other programs such as the coastal rehabilitation of eroded sites (UNEP, 2023). In this way, all activities including tourism development will be more controlled and this will help reduce environmental problems.

3.4 Wildlife and National Parks Act (1994)

The Wildlife and National Parks Act (1994) must also be analysed as it also has direct impact on the environmental impact of tourism in the island. It has been established mainly for the protection of the flora and fauna in Mauritius. According to Section 3 of the Act, there shall be the setting up of an advisory council which is made up of a chairperson, representative several Ministries including representative of the Ministry of Tourism and other qualified members in order to advise the minister on any matter relating to the national parks and wildlife. In this way, those areas will be properly developed and sanctions will be taken if tourism activities cause a threat to the areas and thus sustainability will be maintained.

3.5 Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act (2002)

Concerning the economic aspect of sustainable tourism, the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act (2002) can be taken into consideration. The establishment of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund is by virtue of Section 3 of the Act and its main purpose is to provide social and economic welfare to employees of tourism organisations. Section 15 and 16 stipulates that funds are received in the form of grants from the government and also from the contribution of tourism enterprises. In this way, positive economic impacts of tourism can be achieved as locals will get jobs and a better standard of living as this Welfare fund can help them in the construction of their houses for example among other benefits.

3.6 Critical Analysis

Even though several tourism institutions are doing their best to be more sustainable in their activities, based on an early study carried out by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), it has been mentioned that Mauritius failed to implement some sustainable tourism in certain ways. This can be seen in cases where there has been violation of property rights of local people by some private companies in order to build hotels and

other tourism infrastructure which has been approved by the government (Beebeejaun, 2017). Moreover, locals have also protested because of the privatisation of public beaches and according to Dr Nunkoo, a lecturer at the University of Mauritius, this kind of tourism development targeting beaches can be a challenge of ensuring sustainability (Fakun, 2018). Furthermore, in a report issued by the European Commission (2023), it is stated that the procedures and granting of Environmental impact Assessment by the Tourism Authority to issue licences lack transparency and accountability. This shows a communication barrier between the government and the private sector which needs to ameliorate for the benefit of sustainable tourism development (Europa, 2021).

In the past few years, even the media has illustrated a rise concerning tourist aggression in the country. A more recent case is seen in an article published by Defi media whereby two tourists were attacked near the public beach of Bel-Ombre and they would be presented in court few days after (Defi Media, 2023). This insecurity impacts adversely on the social aspect of sustainability of tourism in the country especially given that there is a high positive relationship between the number of tourists arrivals and the number of theft and violence cases. It is therefore imperative for the Ministry of Tourism to take the necessary actions to prevent these incidents from happening. In another article published by Defi Media in 2017, it is seen that the cases of robbery and other forms of violence such as rape is increasing and proper measures should be taken in order to restore the reputation of Mauritius as an island destination and remove the image of Mauritius as a dangerous destination as portrayed in the case of Michaela Mc Areavey (Jad-doo, 2017). Consequently, it becomes relevant to assess the legal and regulatory measures undertaken by some other countries to suggest policy recommendations to the Mauritian stakeholders in order to ensure sustainable tourism, which the following section will elaborate on.

4. Sustainable Tourism Laws in Other Countries

According to the Strategic Plan Report 2018-2021 published by the Ministry of Tourism (Government of Mauritius, 2018), the main competing island destinations of Mauritius are Maldives, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. For the purpose of this research, the relevant tourism laws and regulations relating to sustainable tourism in Seychelles and Maldives will be used to conduct the comparison with that of Mauritius encompassing the various aspects of sustainable tourism and its legislation, the environment, human rights and tourism employee welfare. The main highlights of each countries' policies on the subject are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Laws and Policies on Sustainable Tourism in Other Countries

	Mauritius	Maldives	Seychelles
Sustainable Tourism	- Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019 - Tourism Authority Act (2007) Section 5	- Tourism Master Plan 2023 - 2027	- Sustainable Tourism Label - Seychelles Tourism Board Act (2012) Section 5
Legislation Governing Tourism	- Tourism Authority Act (2007)	- Maldives Tourism Act (1999)	- Seychelles Tourism Development Act (2019)
Human Rights	- Constitution (1968) - Human rights Act (1998) - Combating of Trafficking Acts 2009	- Human Rights Commission Act 2006	- Constitution of Seychelles - Independent National Human Rights Commission
Environment	- Environment Protection Act 2002 - Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 1998 - Coastal Zone Management Act 2015 - Solid waste Management Division - Hotel Classification Regulation - Tourism Authority Dolphin and Whale Watching Regulations 2012	- Maldives Protection and Preservation Act (1993) - Environmental Impact Assessment (2007) - Waste Management Act (2022)	- Seychelles Environment Protection Act (2012)
Employee Welfare for Tourism Employees	- Tourism Employee Welfare Fund Act 2002		

Source: Own Elaboration

As illustrated in Table 1 above, in Mauritius, the concept of sustainable tourism is mentioned in the Tourism Authority Act 2006 by virtue of its Section 5 and the objective is to promote sustainable tourism development of the island. Moreover, the Act is the main provision concerning the regulation and laws of tourism in the country and include section on licensing and sanctions among others. This part has already been analysed in the previous chapter and now the focus will be on the Mauritian standard on sustainable tourism: MS 165:2019. It covers important aspects such as sustainability issues in the country, socio-economic benefit of tourism, environmental impact of tourism and most importantly the different strategies used to improve Mauritius as a sustainable island destination. It highlights that there must be the continuous improvement and sanctions must be taken rapidly when breach the laws happen (Foondun, 2019). The standard is approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council as Mauritius met most of the criteria of a sustainable tourism island destination (Switch Africa, 2020). This can be a marketing tool to attract more tourist and also, the project has been created in order to help small and medium sized enterprises in the tourism sector to improve their sustainability (Switch Africa, 2020).

The main legislation governing tourism in the Maldives is the Maldives Tourism Act (1999) focusing on development zone for tourism as mentioned in its Section 4, licensing of tourism activities and sanctions if not abiding to the laws but here it can be noted that no aspect of sustainability is mentioned. However, In the Tourism Master Plan 2023 – 2027, the Maldives Ministry of Tourism mentioned implementation of strategies and he hopes that Maldives will finally be classified as a sustainable tourism island (Ministry of Tourism Maldives, 2023). The plan includes that for Maldives to be more sustainable, there should be the continuous improvement through a coordinated approach among the stakeholders. One strategy is the sustainable growth whereby the tax regimes shall be modified and discussed with the stakeholders. A green tax which is transparent must be included on all tourism products and make tourists aware of it. This tax requires all visitors staying in hotels and other tourist accommodations to pay USD6 per day as a compensation for any loss caused to the nature. In this way, the island can get a competitive advantage and stakeholders will be coordinated to attain the same objective.

For Seychelles island, the Seychelles Tourism Development Act (2019) is used to regulate tourism activities and it includes licencing requirements and sanctions same as the 2 other islands. Part III of the Act concerns the grading system of accommodations in the tourism industry. The concept of sustainable tourism is however not mentioned in this Act, but it is present by virtue of Section 5 of the Seychelles Tourism Board Act (2012) whereby the main function of the Tourism Board is to promote sustainable development of tourism and improving its contribution to the economy of the country. Also, there is the Sustainable Tourism Label which is used in order to encourage tourism enterprises to adopt more sustainable practices and those who meet all the criteria are certainly rewarded. In this way the tourism enterprises will have a competitive advantage and this will benefit the whole industry in terms of sustainability.

However, it is important to note that both the Sustainable Tourism Label in Seychelles and the Standard of Sustainable Tourism in Mauritius are voluntary programs and part of it can be mandatory in a way that all the tourism enterprises take it into consideration.

4.1 Analysis of Human Rights and Employee Welfare for Tourism Employees

The Constitution (1968) in Mauritius is the supreme law and has provisions concerning the rights of the citizens. According to Chapter 2, the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms are mentioned. This encompasses the rights of all individuals and avoid any form of discrimination according to race, place of origin, colour, sex, privacy among others. There is also the protection against forced labour according to Section 6 of the Mauritian Constitution. Section 11 elaborates on freedom of conscience and subsection (5)(b) put more emphasis on the right to observe and practise any religion belief as in a democratic society. This section was seen in the case of Soolekha, a lady who was forced to remove her 'tikka' at her workplace which is hotel 'The residence, Belle-Mare'. According to an article published by L'Express, the case breached Article 4 of the Employment Act and is also unconstitutional (Luckoo, 2018).

Section 7 of the Constitution of Mauritius elaborates on the protection of inhuman treatment. However, according to the recent trends seen in the media, there has been a rise in cases of abuse of tourists in the form of theft, aggression and other forms of violence like moral intimidation. Therefore, amendments may be made to reinforce the sanctions and punishment if laws have been breached and also there can

be educational programs to stop these activities. These can be done in coordination with the Protection of Human Rights Act (1998), whereby according to its Section 3, there is the establishment of a commission that deals with loopholes in law and sanctions.

In the case of Maldives, Although, it signed several international human rights treaties, the 2021 report on human rights stated that there are still many more instances of employer abuses and unsafe living conditions even though the island is covered by the Human Rights Commission act of 2006, which is used to protect citizens' rights in general (U.S. Dept of State, 2021).

Immigrant mistreatment cases are quite prevalent on the island. Although tourists may perceive Maldives as a beautiful place, immigrants who are taken advantage of on a regular basis do not have the same point-of-view. The Human-Rights Watch report (2023) indicates that migrants make up one-third of the population, with the tourism sector employing the majority of them. However, a member of the Maldives Parliament was accused of engaging in human trafficking, prompting protests from the workforce who had gone months without being paid. The bill to combat human trafficking in accordance with United Nations protocol is still pending, and there is still exploitation going on, which indicates that the Government is moving very slowly to address the issue (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Similar to Mauritius, the Seychelles island has a constitution that protects individual rights. It also has an independent national Human Rights Commission that deals with defending residents' rights and enforcing the law. To protect its workers, the nation has ratified numerous conventions. For instance, the conventions on Occupational Safety and Health (2005) and Employment Discrimination (1999), among others. However, according to statistics, there are now more human rights breaches occurring in the country than ever before and the relevant authorities must find new strategies to deal with the problem (Association for Rights, Information and Democracy, 2019).

As a summary of the section on human rights protection in the tourism sector, it can be observed that Mauritius has an advantage over the other two destinations since it has signed various agreements pertaining to the protection of human rights and also has a thoroughly written constitution in force. We also have a significant edge over the Maldives because of Mauritius Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009), which is used to prevent issues regarding human trafficking and protect the victims in compliance with United Nations norms. However, given the rise in violence against tourists, it is imperative that some other legislation tailored to the tourism sector are amended.

The Tourism Employee Welfare Fund Act (2002) which is mentioned earlier in this paper, gives Mauritius an advantage over both nations in terms of employee welfare for those working in the tourism industry in a way that more people are encouraged to work in the tourism industry and deliver a good service leading to positive economic impact of tourism. For the other islands, there are no explicit laws governing the wellbeing of tourism workers and this can lead to other negative socio-economic impact of tourism such as lower standard of living, poverty and theft. They have legislation for protection of workers in general and not specific to the tourism industry as Mauritius. As such, this aspect must be considered.

4.2 Analysis of the Environment Protection Legislations

In Mauritius there is the Environment Protection Act (2002), Fisheries and Marine Resources Act (1998), Coastal Zone Management Act (2015), Solid Waste Management Division, Hotel Classification Regulation, and Tourism Authority Dolphin and Whale Watching Regulations (2012) which are used to protect the environment regarding tourism activities and development. The Environment Protection Act has already been analysed in the previous part of this paper and the other legislations are quite useful to complement it. However, the challenge here is the fast changing of the climate due to global warming. The Environment Impact Assessment is used to monitor hotels and integrated resort construction and the concept of climate change has been mentioned in the 'Maurice Ile Durable' program. However, with the increasing number of tourists in the island like for instance, statistics are expecting 1.4 million tourists arriving by the end of 2023, the main legislation that is the Tourism Authority Act should cater for a part on climate change and measures to deal with the fast-changing problem (MauritiusNow, 2023). Thus, this would be specific to the tourism sector and stakeholders will know how to deal with the situation.

One notable case is that of MV Wakashio in 2020 which questioned the environmental laws of the country as to the extent to which it can protect the marine ecosystem from oil spills as it was one of the

biggest oil spills that the country experienced involving the destruction of biodiversity and ecological systems. Part 5 of the Environmental Protection Act (2002) concerns spills and environmental emergency and also include the liabilities that the owner of the pollutant have to pay. This part elaborates mainly about the compensation and liability of the damages caused. Section 31 of this Act provides more details about the clean-up procedures but there is not enough emphasis on how to prevent such incident from taking place avoiding ecological disasters. Despite the quick response to that emergency, the effect of the oil spill has gone beyond the ocean and this incident left its legacy for years as stated by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020). It is also important to note that this incident has negatively impacted the socio-economy of the country as many people depend on the sea to work and this could have increased poverty in the country. Therefore, as prevention is better than cure, the environmental laws can be amended in a way to prevent these incidents from happening.

Waste management for hotels has also recently been in the headlines. In a research published by the UK Essays (2018), it is stated that an unspecified number of illegal dumps exist in the island because lack of proper structure, supervision and regulatory framework. Legislation for general waste management is the Environment Protection Regulation (2001) and Solid Waste Management Division which forms part of the Environment Protection Act 2002, but it can be noted that there is no specific framework that caters for specific disposal of waste generated by the tourism industry. This need to be considered in order to promote Mauritius as a sustainable tourism destination.

Eco-tourism is another concept that allow a destination to be more sustainable. It is defined as a responsible way to travel to natural areas that protect the environment and improve socio-economic aspect of the destination according to the International Ecotourism Society (1991). In Mauritius, there is no law which explicitly regulates eco-tourism but there are standards provided in the Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019, that are related to ecotourism such as the conservation of the biodiversity and ecosystems, improving socio-economic development among others and in such a way, all the stakeholders can adopt these principles. Nevertheless, these standards are not binding but are only voluntarily complied with when a tourist operator would like to be recognised for its contribution towards sustainable development. An example here can be the Veranda Hotels which has been awarded a Green Key Certification recognised internationally in 2023. The hotel carries an eco-label and makes all its effort to reduce water and energy consumption, use of renewable energy, waste prevention among others. Moreover, an audit is carried each year to analyse the progress made in this respect and find ways to ameliorate. To encourage eco-tourism, it is suggested that the Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019 be made compulsory on all tourist operators by codifying these standards in a separate piece of legislation and more specifically focusing on the establishment policies coupled with a proper monitoring and compliance function.

Maldives islands has the Maldives Protection and Preservation Act (1993) which is used and also the Environmental Impact Assessment. The laws in this country should be reinforced concerning environment as due to rise in sea level, the island may be submerged in the coming years. Similarly, in the case of the airport expansion of Fainu Island, Maldives in 2018, the citizens protested on the streets and petition was sent to the Ministry of Tourism as such big projects involve the destruction of the environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Assessment was performed which led to the rejection of the project. This shows this assessment together with the Maldives Tourism Act (1999) are good mechanisms to make Maldives a sustainable destination.

Additionally, as per Section 2 of the Protection and Preservation Act in Maldives, all stakeholders must abide to the environmental policies set by the relevant ministries. In the case of Dhigufaru Island Resort in Maldives, it has been seen that the hotel dumped rubbish on a nearby inhabited island which caused pollution (Maldives Independent, 2018). Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, reinforced their sanctions in cases where tourism activities caused negative impact to the environment. In this way, in order to get a positive image, some other tourism enterprises would act sustainably and abide to the tourism laws in the country.

However, careless tourism developments often cause negative effects on the environment and society as a whole. The government has focused more on attracting foreigners but forgets the negative impact on local citizens. In this respect, the Observer Research Foundation (2023) mentioned the fact that the

Minister of Environment pressured the Maldives Environmental Protection Agency to allow the expansion of the airport, even though an environmental impact assessment found that the project would remove natural resources such as mangroves where locals lived. Therefore, it can be seen that there is no transparency between the minister and other stakeholders.

For Seychelles island, there is the Seychelles Environment protection Act (2012) which is used its main function is the preservation of the environment and combatting environmental pollution. However, according to the National Report of Seychelles (2012), the country faced environment challenges because of the climate change and the laws must be reinforced to tackle this problem (Government of Seychelles, 2012).

Coral reefs destruction has always been a challenge to the small islands in the Indian ocean specially Seychelles and this is due to overfishing and lots of development concerning the tourism activities. Consequently, in 2021, a National Coral Reef Policy has been developed and implemented by the Seychelles Government for the conservation, protection of the coral reefs around the island. With these 13 policies strategic and transparent plan, all the stakeholders would find ways to protect the coral reefs as it would benefit the environment and local citizens (Seychelles News Agency, 2023). However, there are no specific sanctions if the stakeholders do not abide to those policies.

Solid waste management is another problem faced by the tourism industry in Seychelles same as Maldives island. With the growing the number of tourists in the island, there are less disposal facilities which often leads to several types of pollution. It has been a challenge because of lack of funding, high transport cost and shortage of land. In order to deal with the situation, a strategic plan 2018-2023 has been implemented and the goal is to manage wastes in a sustainable way to benefit the integrity of the environment and improve quality of life. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the plan is for the overall island but there is not a specific one for the tourism industry.

As a summary, it can be deduced that Mauritius' environmental rules in the tourism sector need to be revised to reflect how the environment is changing as a result of global warming in order to preserve the current environment for use by future generations. The issue of managing solid waste exists on each of the three islands and needs to be resolved. Moreover, Mauritius implementation of eco-tourism strategies, will significantly aid in achieving sustainable tourism, the island enjoys an edge, but there is still room for improvement such as implementation of more severe sanctions for breach of laws.

5. Recommendations

This part of the research seeks to suggest some recommendations based on the comparative study conducted to address issues related to human rights and the environment in the context of the tourism sector.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Maldives Tourism Master Plan 2023 – 2027 intends to establish a green tax to be payable by tourists and visitors at a fixed sum per day. This money will then be used to finance action plans to restore, reduce or eliminate any damage caused to the environment as a consequence of mass tourists' arrivals. It is suggested that the Mauritian government considers the adoption of a green tourism tax since this will boost governmental revenue while simultaneously provides a means for recovery from environmental damage.

Additionally, similar to the approaches undertaken by Seychelles and Maldives, the civil society and other stakeholders may be involved when taking decisions regarding tourism development in the country. This will create a sense of belonging to the local community and there will be the generation of more ideas on how to improve the existing laws of tourism in the country. Moreover, Social Impact Assessment can be introduced in tourism development projects like the Seychelles did in several instances. Furthermore, some sections of the Tourism Authority Act need to be amended to better cater for the protection of tourists and apply more severe sanctions for breaching these sections. This will help reduce the number of tourist aggression cases happening in the island. Therefore, tourists will feel more protected and spread positive word of mouth for the island.

Another notable recommendation that will bring an eco-friendlier tourism in the country is the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution of Mauritius, which is the supreme law of the country.

Both Maldives and Seychelles have the protection of environment embedded in their constitutions and it is high time for Mauritius to follow same. Indeed, environment and human rights form part of the same womb and should be considered in parallel in projects that have an impact on both aspects.

Lastly, collaboration with other countries may also be effectuated to develop tourism in a sustainable way. Mauritius forms part of the vanilla island group with partnership with 6 other islands for the promotion and marketing of the island. The Ministry of Tourism can join other groups and conventions and adopt new ways to be more sustainable. Moreover, the Ministry officers can benchmark Mauritius sustainable tourism development strategies and laws with that of other island destination in order to adopt the best practices and implement it in the context of Mauritius.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, sustainability plays an important role for the development of tourism in Mauritius. In this paper, the laws surrounding the tourism sector in the context of sustainability in the island have been analysed. The importance of environmental and human rights protection in this paper was also examined and it is observed that although there is a legal framework for tourism that is currently in place, there are still gaps in the laws that make it challenging for tourism businesses to operate sustainably. Among other issues relating to the environment and the economy, the socio-economic aspect has been neglected.

The comparative study conducted in this paper reveals some of the action plans which Mauritius can inspire from both Seychelles and Maldives so as to promote sustainability in the tourism sector. Among these suggestions are the implementation of a green tax, the conduct of social impact assessments for all tourism projects, the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution of Mauritius and international concerted efforts and collaboration for an eco-friendlier tourism sector. In this way, Mauritius will be able to gain a competitive advantage by building upon its existing strengths and educate all the relevant stakeholders in order to cement its position as the leading sustainable tourism destination and secure its place as a global tourism player.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to be declared for the research conducted in this paper.

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