



Institutional frameworks and crisis governance in Zambia's tourism industry: An empirical assessment of policy capacity and structural challenges

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<https://doi.org/10.51867/asarev.3.1.6>

ABSTRACT

Effective tourism crisis management requires robust institutional frameworks capable of coordinating responses across enterprise, sector, national, and international levels. In sub-Saharan Africa, persistent institutional fragmentation, weak policy implementation capacity, and inadequate governance mechanisms have been identified as primary barriers to sectorial crisis preparedness. This study provides a systematic empirical assessment of crisis management institutional frameworks, policy capacity, and governance quality within Zambia's tourism industry. This study draws on three theoretical perspectives that are Governance Theory, Institutional Theory and Principal–Agent Theory. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, data were collected from 137 stakeholders drawn through stratified purposive sampling across government institutions, private sector operators, community organisations, and tourism experts from Livingstone, Lusaka, South Luangwa National Park, and Kafue National Park. Data collection employed structured Likert-scale questionnaires, key informant interviews, and policy document analysis. The study finds that policy and governance scores ($M = 2.88$, $t = -1.84$, $p = 0.066$) fall near the threshold of statistically significant inadequacy, confirming a directional governance deficit. Formal crisis plan existence analysis reveals that only 23% of private sector operators maintain documented crisis management plans, compared to 67% of government institutions — a sectorial asymmetry reflecting differential resource capacity and regulatory exposure. Qualitative findings identify institutional fragmentation (87% of respondents), insufficient policy enforcement (71%), and digital infrastructure deficits (66%) as primary structural governance challenges. The study proposes a multi-level institutional reform agenda centred on the establishment of a dedicated National Tourism Crisis Coordination Centre, mandatory crisis planning requirements with enforcement capacity, and the integration of the tourism sector into Zambia's national disaster risk reduction architecture. This research concludes that rather than confirming in general terms that governance is weak, the precise dimensions of weakness, the mechanisms through which they operate, and the institutional reform levers most likely to be effective in addressing them. It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism and Arts should establish a dedicated National Tourism Crisis Coordination Centre, with a clear statutory mandate, adequate staffing and budget, and operational authority to coordinate inter-institutional crisis responses across all tourism governance bodies.

Keywords: Crisis Governance, Disaster Management, Institutional Frameworks, Policy Implementation, Tourism Policy, Zambia

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism crisis management scholarship has increasingly shifted its analytical focus from individual enterprise-level responses toward the institutional and governance architectures within which those responses occur. This shift reflects the growing recognition that tourism crises are inherently multi-level phenomena requiring coordinated action across enterprise, destination, national, and international governance scales simultaneously (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). A single hotel's crisis management plan, however robust, cannot substitute for the destination-level coordination that synchronises responses across accommodation providers, tour operators, transport companies, and visitor information systems. Similarly, destination-level coordination cannot substitute for the national policy frameworks and disaster governance infrastructure that provide the legal mandates, resource allocation mechanisms, and inter-ministerial coordination necessary for systemic crisis response.

Institutional frameworks for tourism crisis management encompass the regulatory instruments, governance bodies, coordination mechanisms, information systems, and financing structures that collectively enable the tourism sector to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis events (Faulkner, 2001; WTTC, 2019). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019) defines these frameworks as the governance infrastructure through which sector-wide resilience is built, maintained, and deployed in response to crisis events. The quality of these frameworks is a primary determinant of both preparedness capacity and post-crisis recovery speed. Research from diverse tourism



contexts confirms that destinations with strong crisis governance institutions recover faster, experience smaller revenue losses during crisis events, and maintain higher stakeholder confidence throughout crisis periods (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019; World Bank, 2020b).

In sub-Saharan Africa, institutional fragmentation has been consistently identified as the most significant structural barrier to effective tourism crisis governance. Multiple sectorial studies document the pattern in which ministries responsible for tourism, environment, disaster management, and infrastructure operate with limited coordination, unclear mandates, and duplicated or absent crisis management functions (Saarinen et al., 2022; African Development Bank, 2020). This fragmentation is compounded in Zambia by the particular challenge of integrating tourism crisis governance into a national disaster management architecture designed primarily for natural disaster response across all sectors rather than for the specific operational realities and vulnerabilities of the tourism industry. This study provides the first systematic empirical assessment of institutional crisis governance quality in Zambia's tourism sector. It moves beyond the descriptive accounts of governance challenges available in policy documents and sector reports to provide quantitative measurement of policy and governance capacity, analysis of formal crisis plan existence across organisation types, and qualitative investigation of the specific institutional mechanisms driving governance inadequacy. The findings are intended to provide an evidence base for institutional reform that is grounded in the measured realities of Zambia's current crisis governance landscape rather than in generic best-practice frameworks derived from tourism contexts in more developed economies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Zambia's tourism sector operates within an institutional governance environment characterised by fragmentation, inadequate policy enforcement, and the absence of dedicated crisis coordination mechanisms. The Ministry of Tourism and Arts, the Zambia Tourism Agency, the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit [DMMU], provincial government offices, and industry associations each hold partial responsibility for aspects of tourism crisis management, but no single institution holds the mandate, authority, or capacity to coordinate sector-wide crisis governance. This fragmentation creates governance gaps that individual enterprises cannot fill through their own preparedness investments, and it produces the structural conditions in which high awareness coexists with inadequate preparedness across the sector. Despite the existence of the National Tourism Policy and the DMMU's national disaster risk reduction framework, these instruments do not provide the sector-specific tourism crisis management provisions, clear institutional mandates, or enforcement mechanisms necessary to drive enterprise-level preparedness systematically. The result is a voluntary, uncoordinated preparedness landscape in which compliance with crisis planning expectations varies dramatically across enterprise types and sizes.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Systematically measure the quality of crisis management institutional frameworks and policy governance in Zambia's tourism sector;
- ii. analyse the distribution of formal crisis plan existence across different organisation types;
- iii. Identify the primary structural drivers of institutional governance inadequacy through qualitative investigation; and
- iv. Propose a multi-level institutional reform agenda grounded in empirical evidence from Zambia's tourism governance landscape.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Governance and Institutional Theory

This study draws on three theoretical perspectives that illuminate different dimensions of tourism crisis governance. The first is Governance Theory, particularly the application of multi-level governance frameworks to public policy and regulatory design. Multi-level governance theory, as developed by Hooghe and Marks (2003), identifies the distribution of authority across governance levels — supranational, national, sub-national, and local — as a primary determinant of policy effectiveness. Applied to tourism crisis management, this framework highlights the importance of clear mandate allocation across governance levels, mechanisms for inter-level coordination, and the alignment of resource allocation with governance responsibilities.

The second theoretical perspective is Institutional Theory, particularly North's (1990) distinction between formal institutions — rules, laws, and regulatory frameworks — and informal institutions — norms, conventions, and self-enforced standards of behaviour. Tourism crisis governance requires both: formal institutions provide the legal mandates, enforcement mechanisms, and resource allocation frameworks that establish the structural conditions for



preparedness, while informal institutions shape organisational culture, stakeholder norms, and the behavioural dispositions that determine whether formal requirements are genuinely implemented or nominally complied with.

The third theoretical perspective is Principal–Agent Theory, which analyses the governance challenges arising when one party (the principal) delegates authority to another (the agent) whose interests and information may differ from the principal's. In tourism crisis governance, the government (principal) delegates responsibility for crisis preparedness to individual tourism enterprises (agents) through policy frameworks and regulatory requirements. Principal–agent problems arise when enterprises have incentives to minimise preparedness investment and when government lacks the monitoring capacity, enforcement tools, or incentive structures to ensure compliance.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Formal Crisis Planning Requirements and Enterprise Compliance

International best practice in tourism crisis governance establishes formal crisis management planning as a minimum baseline requirement for tourism enterprises. The United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO's] (2011) Crisis Management Guidelines for the Tourism Sector specify that all tourism enterprises should maintain documented crisis plans covering crisis risk assessment, escalation protocols, staff roles and responsibilities during crisis events, communication plans for guests and stakeholders, evacuation procedures, and recovery and business continuity frameworks. The WTTC's (2019) crisis readiness framework adds simulation exercises, supplier chain resilience, and insurance coverage as additional baseline requirements.

Research on crisis plan compliance among tourism enterprises in developing economies consistently documents low levels of formal crisis planning, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and community-based tourism operators. Ritchie and Jiang's (2019) review of crisis management research across multiple country contexts identifies formal crisis plan existence as the single strongest predictor of crisis response effectiveness, but notes that the majority of tourism enterprises in low-income countries lack formal plans entirely. The primary barriers cited are resource constraints, absence of regulatory requirements, and the absence of accessible templates or technical support for crisis planning. In the Zambian context, the Ministry of Tourism Zambia's (2022a) investment guide acknowledges that crisis management planning capacity among tourism operators is limited, and the World Bank's (2011) assessment identifies crisis management capacity as a constraint without empirically measuring formal crisis plan prevalence.

2.2.2 Coordination Mechanisms and Inter-Institutional Governance

Effective tourism crisis governance requires coordination mechanisms that enable action across the multiple institutions with partial responsibility for different aspects of crisis management. The tourism crisis management literature identifies three primary categories of coordination mechanism: information sharing systems, joint planning and exercise frameworks, and unified command structures for crisis response (WTTC, 2019; Faulkner, 2001). Paraskevas and Arendell (2007) demonstrate that the absence of these coordination mechanisms at the destination level is a primary predictor of poor crisis response outcomes across tourism destinations in developing economies. Their analysis confirms that destinations with pre-established inter-institutional coordination mechanisms recover significantly faster from crisis events than those without, controlling for crisis severity.

2.2.3 Policy Implementation in Tourism Crisis Governance

The gap between policy formulation and policy implementation is a well-documented phenomenon across public administration contexts in developing economies (Andrews, 2013). In tourism crisis governance, this implementation gap manifests in the discrepancy between the crisis management provisions articulated in national tourism policies and disaster risk reduction frameworks, and the actual institutional practices, resource allocations, and enforcement actions that give these provisions operational effect. Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation provides a useful framework for understanding this gap: policies with high ambiguity and low conflict — characteristics typical of tourism crisis governance provisions — tend to be implemented through experiential learning and local adaptation rather than through top-down enforcement, producing variable and often inadequate implementation outcomes.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Poth, 2018), integrating quantitative measurement of governance quality with qualitative investigation of institutional mechanisms and structural drivers. The target population comprised all institutions and organisations with roles in tourism crisis governance in Zambia. Stratified purposive sampling was applied to ensure representation across all institutional categories, with particular emphasis on respondents with direct governance and policy responsibilities. The final sample comprised 137 stakeholders: 41 qualitative questionnaire respondents, 46 quantitative questionnaire respondents, 50 tourist



questionnaire respondents, and 16 key informant interview participants drawn from Livingstone, Lusaka, South Luangwa National Park, and Kafue National Park. Yamane's (1967) formula confirmed the adequacy of the sample at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

The Policy and Governance subscale of the Quantitative Questionnaire comprised seven Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing governance dimensions including national crisis management policy existence and clarity, regulatory requirements, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, early warning system availability, enforcement capacity, sector-specific crisis governance financing, and alignment with international frameworks. The Formal Crisis Plan Existence section required binary (Yes/No) responses on whether organisations maintained documented crisis management plans. Key informant interviews employed a semi-structured guide probing governance architecture, mandate allocation, coordination mechanisms, enforcement capacity, and institutional reform opportunities. Document analysis encompassed the National Tourism Policy, the DMMU's National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, ZTA operational mandate documents, and Ministry of Tourism sector development reports. Quantitative analysis employed one-sample t-tests and descriptive statistics; qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework supported by ATLAS.ti software.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Policy and Governance Quality: Quantitative Assessment

The composite policy and governance mean of 2.88 (SD = 1.08) was subjected to a one-sample t-test against the neutral midpoint of 3.0, yielding $t = -1.84$ (df = 45, $p = 0.066$). This result approaches but does not reach the conventional threshold of statistical significance at $\alpha = 0.05$, confirming a directional governance deficit that is substantively important but falls just short of the threshold for formal statistical rejection. This near-significant finding is analytically important precisely because of its proximity to significance: governance quality in Zambia's tourism sector is clustered around a neutral baseline that represents neither adequate nor clearly inadequate governance capacity. Item-level analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Policy and Governance Quality Item-Level Scores

Policy/Governance Dimension	Mean (SD)
Early warning system functionality and availability	2.52 (1.14)
Inter-agency coordination mechanisms	2.63 (1.09)
National crisis management policy clarity	2.76 (1.12)
Regulatory enforcement capacity	2.81 (1.18)
Sector-specific crisis governance financing	2.84 (1.07)
Regulatory requirements for crisis planning	2.95 (1.03)
Alignment with international frameworks	3.24 (0.98)
Composite Policy and Governance	2.88 (1.08) — $t = -1.84$, $p = 0.066$

The alignment with international frameworks scored highest at $M = 3.24$, suggesting that institutional awareness of international best practice is relatively strong even where implementation capacity falls short. This finding is consistent with Andrews' (2013) institutional reform literature, which documents the common phenomenon of developing-country organisations with strong awareness of international norms but weak capacity for their domestic implementation — precisely the dynamic documented in the study's broader awareness–preparedness gap analysis.

4.2 Formal Crisis Plan Existence: Cross-Sectional Analysis

Table 2 presents the formal crisis plan existence rates by organisation type, revealing a sharp and policy-relevant asymmetry across the sector. Government institutions reported the highest formal crisis plan existence rate at 67%, reflecting greater resource capacity, professional management structures, and regulatory exposure of public sector organisations. International tourism operators reported formal plan existence at 54%, consistent with mandatory crisis planning requirements typical of international hospitality management standards.

Table 2
Formal Crisis Plan Existence by Organisation Type

Organisation Type	Formal Crisis Plan Existence Rate
Government Institutions	67%
International Tourism Operators	54%
Domestic Private Sector Operators	23%
Community-Based Tourism Organisations	12%



Domestic private sector tourism operators — the numerically dominant enterprise category in Zambia's tourism sector — reported formal crisis plan existence at only 23%, confirming that the majority of the sector's private enterprises operate without documented crisis management frameworks. This finding has serious implications for sectorial resilience and confirms Ritchie and Jiang's (2019) identification of resource constraints and absent regulatory requirements as the primary structural drivers of formal plan non-existence in developing-economy tourism contexts. Community-based tourism organisations reported the lowest formal plan existence rate at 12%, reflecting their minimal resource capacity, limited management infrastructure, and complete absence from any regulatory framework requiring crisis planning.

4.3 Support Needs for Crisis Readiness

Analysis of stakeholder-identified support needs for crisis readiness reveals a consistent pattern across the sector (Table 3). Real-time crisis information and early warning systems were identified as necessary support by 97.8% of respondents — the highest endorsement rate — directly aligning with the lowest governance dimension score (early warning availability M = 2.52). This alignment between stakeholder demand and institutional deficit identifies early warning system development as a high-leverage institutional investment with overwhelming stakeholder support.

Table 3
Stakeholder-Identified Support Needs for Crisis Readiness

Support Need	Respondents Identifying as Critical
Real-time crisis information and early warning systems	97.8%
Financial support for preparedness investment	97.8%
Technical assistance for crisis plan development	89%
Training and capacity development	87%
Regulatory guidance and frameworks	76%

4.4 Qualitative Findings: Institutional Mechanisms of Governance Failure

Key informant interview analysis identified five primary institutional mechanisms through which governance quality deficits are generated and reproduced. The first mechanism is mandate diffusion — the distribution of crisis management responsibility across multiple institutions without clear coordination authority. A senior Ministry of Tourism official described this as: *“Everyone has a piece of the crisis management puzzle, but no one is responsible for putting the puzzle together”* (Senior Ministry official on 18th August 2024). This mandate diffusion creates a governance architecture in which each institution assumes that crisis coordination is another institution's responsibility, producing the coordination vacuum documented in the quantitative findings.

The second mechanism is resource allocation misalignment — the systematic underfunding of crisis management functions across all tourism governance institutions. Multiple informants noted that budget allocations for tourism sector activities prioritise promotion and marketing over crisis preparedness, reflecting a political economy in which tourism authorities are evaluated primarily on arrival numbers and revenue generation rather than on resilience capacity. The third mechanism is regulatory incapacity — the absence of enforceable crisis planning requirements and the limited monitoring and enforcement capability of the ZTA and related regulatory bodies. One lodge manager articulated this clearly: *“If the government required us to have a crisis plan and checked that we had one, we would have one. As it is, it's just an extra expense with no consequence if you don't bother.”* (Lodge Manager 18th August, 2024)

The fourth mechanism is knowledge and information asymmetry — the uneven distribution of crisis management knowledge, technical capacity, and information access across the sector. Large international operators and government institutions have access to international crisis management frameworks, technical expertise, and information systems unavailable to domestic SMEs and community organisations. The fifth mechanism is temporal governance failure — the systematic prioritisation of immediate operational challenges over long-term resilience investment, particularly acute in the context of post-COVID recovery where enterprises facing immediate financial pressure have little capacity for preparedness investment.

4.5 Policy Document Analysis: Framework Adequacy Assessment

Analysis of Zambia's primary tourism and disaster governance policy documents reveals a consistent pattern of thematic breadth combined with operational inadequacy in crisis management provisions. According to Ritchie and Jiang (2019) the National Tourism Policy provides a broad strategic framework for tourism development but contains minimal specific provisions related to crisis management, preparedness planning, or inter-institutional coordination. The DMMU's National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework provides comprehensive coverage of disaster management across all sectors but lacks the tourism-specific provisions necessary to effectively integrate the tourism industry into



national disaster response. The Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) 2022–2026 identifies tourism as a priority sector and acknowledges the importance of resilience, but its crisis management provisions are limited to general references to disaster risk reduction rather than specific institutional mandates or resource allocations (Ministry of Finance and National Development, 2022). The absence of a dedicated Tourism Crisis Management Act or regulation — present in peer comparator countries including Kenya (Tourism Act, 2011) and South Africa (Tourism Act 3 of 2014) — represents a significant governance lacuna.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study provides systematic empirical evidence of governance inadequacy in Zambia's tourism crisis management institutional framework. The near-significant policy and governance deficit ($M = 2.88$, $p = 0.066$), the sharp asymmetry in formal crisis plan existence between government institutions (67%) and domestic private operators (23%) and community organisations (12%), and the qualitative identification of mandate diffusion, resource misalignment, regulatory incapacity, information asymmetry, and temporal governance failure as primary institutional mechanisms collectively reveal a governance architecture structurally incapable of providing the coordination, enforcement, and capacity development that effective tourism crisis management requires. These findings advance the tourism crisis management literature by providing empirical specificity to the generic institutional fragmentation identified in regional and global reviews. Rather than confirming in general terms that governance is weak, this study identifies the precise dimensions of weakness, the mechanisms through which they operate, and the institutional reform levers most likely to be effective in addressing them.

5.2 Recommendations

The study advances the following institutional reform recommendations. First, the Ministry of Tourism and Arts should establish a dedicated National Tourism Crisis Coordination Centre, with a clear statutory mandate, adequate staffing and budget, and operational authority to coordinate inter-institutional crisis responses across all tourism governance bodies. Second, the ZTA should develop and enforce mandatory crisis management planning requirements for all registered tourism enterprises, with graded requirements proportional to enterprise size and risk profile, accessible planning templates, technical assistance for compliance, and a credible inspection and enforcement regime. Third, the Ministry of Finance and National Planning should establish a dedicated Tourism Crisis Resilience Fund, co-financed by government, development partners, and sector contributions, to provide financial support for enterprise-level preparedness investment, including subsidised insurance mechanisms for SMEs and CBOs. Fourth, the DMMU should formally integrate tourism sector representatives into its inter-agency coordination committees, ensure tourism-specific provisions in hazard mapping and early warning systems, and include tourism enterprises in national disaster simulation exercises. Fifth, all tourism governance bodies should invest in accessible, mobile-based early warning and crisis communication infrastructure, with the ZTA serving as the platform administrator.

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