

Assessing Nature Conservation and Tourism Development Effectiveness towards Local Economic Development in South Africa: Nuanced by the Perceptions of Local Communities?

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Abstract: Tourism development around protected areas is perceived a major development opportunity for rural sub-Saharan Africa. This study was conducted in South Africa to investigate how local communities living around a nature reserve, uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park (a World Heritage Site) in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, evaluate the effectiveness of nature conservation and tourism development towards their local economy. Quantitative data were collected using a structured respondent-completed questionnaire from simple-randomly selected respondents. Descriptive and bivariate data analyses yielded information used to address research objective. Local community members who were surveyed declare that the 'development strategy' seems to be the main issue adversely affecting community participation in conservation practices and tourism development around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. It is therefore recommended that nature conservation and tourism development strategies in rural South Africa align with the sustainable rural development critical success factors outlined in this paper. This will support optimising local economic development successes, especially in rural sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Natural resource management; local community; local participation; tourism development; sub-Saharan Africa.

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1. Introduction

Much recent studies which focus on community-based natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa advocate for sustainable management of natural resources, and for such management to use accepted governance best

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practices regarding local stakeholders' involvement, decentralised powers to local actors, capability-building, and fair allocation of resources (such as Dell'Angelo et al., 2016; Diawuo & Issifu, 2015; Dyer et al., 2014; Ezeuduji, 2017; Ezeuduji, 2015; Jugmohan et al., 2016; Kamoto et al., 2013; Measham & Lumbasi, 2013; Mueller et al., 2015; Musavengane & Simatele, 2016; Rid, Ezeuduji, & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014; Thondhlana et al., 2015). They mostly assume that local communities will welcome natural resource management as a vehicle to spur on their socio-economic development. This study will enquire the effectiveness of nature conservation and tourism development towards a local economy. It can be argued that local perceptions towards nature conservation and tourism development in their area could be positive, sceptic or negative. Local perceptions, based on literature, will suggest conclusions and recommendations toward this development. Tourism as well as general natural resource management, may not always bring the benefits that the local communities expect (Nkwanyana et al., 2016; Mdiniso et al., 2017). Hence, local communities' active involvement is usually desired in tourism or natural resource management.

Ezeuduji and Rid (2011) posit that motivation for locals' active involvement in tourism are critical to successfully integrate local communities into their tourism development. Akama and Kieti (2007, pp. 746 – 747) outline some of the ways in which tourism can significantly contribute to sustainable rural development in developing nations to include: (1) creation of clear opportunities for local employment; (2) supporting collaboration among local actors, namely private and public sectors, non-governmental organisations, and local population; (3) enhancing socio-cultural impacts of tourism; (4) allowing local community access to services and infrastructure provided for tourists; (5) enabling local population participation; and (6) fostering continuous institutional capacity-building to support locals' active participation. Ezeuduji and Rid (2011, p. 190) label Akama and Kieti's (2007) first, third and fourth critical success factors as "desired outcomes", and the second, fifth and sixth factors as the "enablers" to achieve "the desired outcomes". It is therefore expected that when these factors are in place, local communities will view tourism development positively and be spurred to participate positively in this development.

Moreover, Ezeuduji (2017) suggests that addressing risks and contingencies inherent in local communities' involvement in rural development in sub-Saharan Africa does involve regular reviews of local communities' strengths and weaknesses and external threats and opportunities. This evaluation will identify local communities' knowledge, capabilities, and sources of leverage they require to embark on local development. Delgado-Serrano et al. (2015, 2016) argue that many local communities who are collectively managing common pool resources lack the context-specific knowledge and skills that are needed for such management. In this situation, capability-building, community empowerment and participation skills are

needed to overcome these obstacles. Thus, Howard (2017) recommends community skills' development regarding participatory rural governance and negotiated accountability that assist natural resource management.

This study is aimed at enquiring the effectiveness of nature conservation and tourism development towards a local economy, using local communities living around a nature reserve, uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park (a World Heritage Site) in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, as the respondents. It therefore means that the results of this study will be applicable to the area of study, and cannot be generalised nationally or internationally. The pointers for the sustainable management of natural resources and governance best practices relating to context-specific knowledge and local capacity, local communities' involvement in policy formulation, planning and management, and fair allocation of resources (Mdiniso et al., 2017), are explored in this research. This paper is significant in elucidating specific ways of optimising nature conservation and tourism development strategies to support participatory governance in natural resource management.

The nature reserve, uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, covering about 240,000 hectares, is situated in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, offering scenic beauty, hiking, fishing, swimming, rock climbing, mountain biking, horse riding, boating, bird watching and relaxed atmosphere. It is declared a World Heritage Site for rock art and endemic flora in the year 2000, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Nature Reserve-South Africa, 2017). Respondents for this study are recruited from local communities living close to uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park.

2. Literature Review

Nzama (2009), in South Africa, argue that conservation of natural resources and tourism development are perceived as drivers of regional economic development within communities living around protected areas, such as uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. Other researchers in South Africa, such as Jugmohan et al. (2016) posit that community-based tourism provides opportunity for rural communities to develop their natural and cultural heritage into tourism activities, to their own benefit. They argue (Jugmohan et al.) that mass tourism does not offer such opportunity. Communities may decide to offer services such as arts and crafts, tourist guiding, traditional performances, local cuisine, etc. to tourists who are likely to demand these. Saayman and Ferreira (2009) posit that the establishment of protected areas which has been focussed on nature conservation, has now encompassed economic sustainability and local community upliftment.

However, some researchers, especially those in developing nations, unearthed tensions that may exist between local communities and protected areas' managers.

Brousse-James (2009), at uMlalazi Nature Reserve in South Africa, uncovered poor relationships and unresolved problems between conservation agencies and communities living close to the protected area. Sebola (2006) spoke about the history of conflict between the local communities and managers of protected areas in South African wildlife landscape. These tensions arose mostly from unresolved traditional ownership and difficult cross-cultural communication (Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2013), and can lead to hostile attitudes towards conservation agencies (Fu et al., 2004; Hamilton et al., 2000; Jim & Xu, 2002), conflicts that can jeopardise protection policies, and the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation in protected areas (Lane, 2001).

Research evidence suggests that local communities will more likely commit themselves to conservation strategies if their knowledge and opinions are incorporated into conservation decision-making process (Fu et al., 2004; Gelcich, et al., 2005; Mascia, 2003; Pretty & Smith, 2004). Evidence from Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and its surrounds in South Africa reveal that collaborative governance, with its practical appeal, can be limited by ‘lack of participation in decision-making, information dissemination, transparency, trust and accountability, power relations, divergent interests and unequal access to natural resources’ (Thondhlana et al., 2015, p. 121). These can result in difficulties, in the enforcement of conservation policies (Chape et al., 2008; Fu et al., 2004; Ramutsindela, 2007).

Involvement of local communities in natural resource management can be achieved by carefully creating the desire for the local communities to become partners of conservation management and changing local attitude through active participation (Tosun, 2001). When communities have a high degree of control or ownership of the resources and activities (such as tourism) around their protected areas, they will likely develop a positive attitude towards conservation management (Brooks, 2005). This will ensure that they receive a significant share of the economic benefits of tourism, such as direct revenues and employment, upgraded infrastructures, environment and housing standards (Stronza, 2007; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). Baquiano (2016) in Philippines, discussed the use of social representations theory to effect social change. It is therefore important to know how local community members understand natural resource management and how interventions and policies can be designed and implemented to foster sustainable natural resource management. Discussions with different groups in the local communities can help to address concerns regarding natural resource management. However, Vuola and Pyhälä (2016) in Madagascar, revealed that attempts were made by conservation authorities to involve local communities in nature conservation and local development processes, but these attempts were met with local scepticism, reinforcing existing power-play and inequalities within local communities. Tang and Zhao (2011) and Fischer (2003) reported that in natural

resource management, local communities do tend to focus more on their short-term interests and mostly neglect strategic environmental issues.

These difficulties notwithstanding, some authors have cited how good practices in community-based natural resource management can be promoted. Dell'Angelo et al. (2016) advised that local stakeholders' involvement, capacity-building, decentralised powers to local actors, equitable allocation of resources, are good practices. Dyer et al. (2014, p. 144) elaborated on defining 'community' at an early stage and delineating target participants; choosing methods for representative community engagement; employing a trustworthy project manager among the participants; clearly stating aims and objectives of the project with communities at the beginning; two-way communications and community access to all locally-based project staff at all times; and being flexible and adaptable in project design, as successful strategies in natural resource management. Musavengane and Simatele (2016) posit that building strong social capital towards successful collaborative resource management projects, hinges on local participation, adequate transparency, reciprocity and effective communication. Howard (2017) recommends the development of community skills in participatory rural governance and properly negotiated accountability that support natural resource management, as good practices in community-based natural resource management.

3. Research Method and Design

This research was conducted between July and December 2016. It assessed local community's perceptions of nature conservation and tourism development effectiveness towards local economic development. It targeted local communities living around a nature reserve, uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Individual responses of community members were required to eliminate bias due to group pressure. The study was more exploratory and descriptive, than conclusive and explanatory. Method of gathering quantified responses from respondents seem more logical in this research, than method of gathering qualitative responses (Veal, 2011). The researchers therefore employed structured questionnaire survey, using respondent-completion approach, of simple-randomly selected local community members living around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, to gather data for subsequent analyses. 250 community members were surveyed, but 202 questionnaires received were usable for descriptive and bivariate analyses, to address research objective. Variables introduced in the questionnaire were categorical and ordinal in nature, emanating from previous studies cited in literature review.

For data analyses, frequencies of responses were first determined, followed by Pearson Chi-Square tests. IBM's SPSS software (IBM Corporation, 2016), was

employed for data analyses. Pearson Chi-Square tests identified relationships between respondents' profile and other questionnaire's categorical statements. (Ezeuduji et al., 2016a, b; Veal, 2011; Zondo & Ezeuduji, 2015). Statistical tests were performed at 95% confidence interval.

4. Results and Discussion

Results in Table 1 reveal that female respondents were somewhat in the majority, with the population being fairly young (about 70% of the respondents are under the age of 35). The population is mostly Black and many are single (owing to the average age of the sample), with close to 80% having secondary or tertiary education. Unemployment is quite high in the population (about 41%), hence majority have very low income level (about 70% do not earn more than R5000 /\$385 per month – at the time this paper was written, \$1 is about R13).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (N = 202)

Profile of respondents		
Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Female	54.5
	Male	45.5
Age group	15 – 24 years old	50.5
	25 – 34 years old	19.8
	35 – 44 years old	16.8
	45 – 54 years old	6.9
	55 – 64 years old	4.0
	65 + years old	2.0
Cultural group	Black	83.1
	White	12.9
	Indian	1.0
	Coloured	3.0
Marital status	Married	24.8
	Single	72.2
	Widowed	2.0
	Divorced	1.0
Highest level of education attained	No formal education	11.9
	Primary level	5.9
	Secondary level	47.5
	Tertiary level	30.7
	Other	4.0
Employment	Employed	59.4
	Unemployed	40.6
Income level per month	Less than R1000 per month	41.6
	R1001 - R5000	25.0
	R5001 - R10000	14.6
	R10001 - R15000	4.2
	R15001 +	14.6

Table 2 shows some interesting results that need to be highlighted. In as much as more than 86% of the sample understand the meaning of conservation and its importance towards local economic development, and 56% of the respondents agree that their community is participating in nature resource management; however 32% stated that the economic rewards of conservation are not being received by the community, and close to 40% of them declared that the community is not satisfied with tourism development. 28% of respondents declared that community is not consulted regarding tourism development; and about 26% stated that tourism development does not contribute to infrastructural development in their locality. 42% of the respondents are not aware of successful conservation practices in their area, and about 44% of them are not aware of successful tourism practices in their area. Responses to statements were compared with the respondents' profile and the results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Conservation statements compared with respondents' profile (N = 202)

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)	Compared with respondents' profile ^a
Meaning of conservation				
Do you understand the meaning of conservation?	86.1	9.9	4.0	***more males agree, ***age group 25–54 agree most, ** Secondary and Tertiary level education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
Is conservation important for your local area?	88.2	5.9	5.9	NS
Community involvement in conservation				
Is your community participating?	56.0	28.0	16.0	*more females agree, **age group 45–54 agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income level up to R5000 per month agree most.
Are you aware of conservation practices that contribute to community development in your area?	53.5	35.6	10.9	*more males agree, *more White population agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 disagree most.
Community is satisfied with tourism development	44.0	39.6	16.4	**more males agree, **age group 25–54 agree most, *employed individuals agree more, *income level less than R1000 disagree most.

Qualities of infrastructure and services have improved	53.5	33.3	13.1	*married population agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
Nature reserve has impacted positively on community	51.0	25.0	24.0	*more Coloured agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, ***no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 disagree most.
Economic rewards received by the community	53.0	32.0	15.0	**age group 15–24 agree most, *secondary level education agree most.
Conservation practices be implemented for the benefit of all	71.0	16.0	13.0	*more Blacks agree than other races, * married population agree most, *employed individuals agree more.
I perceive visitors' experiences satisfactory	56.0	26.0	18.0	**age group 35–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 disagree most.
Nature reserves contribute adequately to community tourism	53.7	26.3	20.0	***age group 45–54 agree most, **married population agree more than others, **employed individuals agree more.
Community views of tourism activities				
Employment opportunities will support poverty reduction	84.0	11.0	5.0	**more males agree, ***more Blacks agree than other races, * singles population agree most, **tertiary level education agree most, *unemployed individuals agree more.
Community is consulted regarding tourism development	52.0	28.0	20.0	*more White population agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, ***income level less than R1000 agree most.
Community is aware of economic benefits of tourism	44.0	25.0	31.0	*more females agree, *more Blacks agree than other races, ***income level less than R1000 agree most.
Tourism contributes to job creation and employment	84.0	8.0	8.0	*more males agree, **employed individuals agree more.

Community is aware of potential negative impacts of tourism on environment	45.0	31.0	24.0	*more females agree, *more Whites agree than other races, *age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, *no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 disagree most.
Tourism development contribute to infrastructural development	59.6	26.3	14.1	*more Whites agree than other races, *employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 agree most.
Implementation of conservation and tourism practices				
I am aware of successful tourism practices in my area	36.4	44.4	19.2	*more Whites agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, **employed individuals agree more, *income level less than R1000 disagree most.
I am aware of successful conservation practices in my area	25.0	42.0	33.0	***age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
I am aware of successful conservation practices outside my area	21.2	23.2	55.6	*age group 25–34 agree most, * singles population agree most, **tertiary level education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
Do you think more intervention strategies are needed for conservation, tourism planning and development in your area?	63.4	17.8	18.8	**more Blacks agree than other races, ***age group 25–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, *no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, **income level less than R5000 agree most.

^aPearson Chi-Square test significance. NS, no significant results. *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; ***, $p < 0.000$.

Local community members were then asked to evaluate conservation practices and tourism development effectiveness in their communities. The results in Table 3 relay some good news for conservation agencies and tourism stakeholders around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. About 75% of local community members declare

they understand the idea behind the conservation of natural resources and about 78% of them believe that local communities benefit from nature reserves. 71% of respondents believe that conservation is beneficial to tourism, and about 84% of them declare that tourism growth has brought business opportunities. However, close to 34% of them disagree that local communities are involved in policies' formulation, 25% disclose that harvesting of natural resources is not well managed in their area, 25% declare that related tourism benefits are not available in their area, and about 26% of the respondents stated that tourism development has not improved their area. These results support previous findings that tourism and natural resource management may not always bring the benefits that the local communities expect (Nkwanyana et al., 2016; Mdiniso et al., 2017).

It seems however from these results that the “development strategy” is the main issue affecting community participation in conservation practices and tourism development around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. This statement is evidenced by the 30% of the respondents who reason that strategies have not been successfully implemented. Akama and Kieti (2007), in the introduction section of this paper, provided “enablers” that will support local communities to view tourism development positively and be spurred towards active participation.

Table 3. Respondents' evaluation of conservation practices and tourism development effectiveness ^a (N = 202)

Statements	Strongly agree or Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree or Strongly disagree (%)	Compared with respondents' profile ^b
Local communities are involved in policies' formulation	51.5	14.9	33.6	*more Whites agree than other races, ***age group 15–24 disagree most, ** married population agree most, ***no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
The conservation of natural resources is well understood	75.2	9.9	14.9	***age group 15–24 disagree most, ***tertiary education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, ***income

				level less than R5000 agree most.
Tourism growth has brought business opportunities	84.2	4.0	11.8	*age group 45–54 agree most, **tertiary education agree most, ***income level less than R1000 agree most.
Local communities benefit from nature reserves	78.2	6.9	14.9	*age group 45–54 agree most, * married population agree most, **no formal education agree most, **income level less than R5000 agree most.
Local people participate adequately in tourism activities	60.4	22.8	16.8	*more males agree, ** married population agree most, *employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R5000 agree most.
Community conservation has improved recently	60.4	16.8	22.8	**more males agree, *more Blacks agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, *tertiary education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, *income level less than R5000 agree most.
Related tourism benefits are available in my area	57.4	17.6	25.0	**more males agree, **more Whites agree than other races, *age group 45–54 agree most, ** married population agree most, **no formal

				education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
Local participation in planning and management is satisfactory	63.3	13.9	22.8	*more females agree, **more Blacks agree than other races, *age group 55–64 agree most, *no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.
Tourism development has improved my area	60.4	13.8	25.8	**more Whites agree than other races, ***age group 35–64 agree most, *married population agree most, *no formal education agree most, ***employed individuals agree more, *income level less than R1000 agree most.
Strategies have been successfully implemented	50.0	20.0	30.0	*more Coloured agree than other races, **age group 25–34 agree most, *married population agree most, *no formal education agree most, **employed individuals agree more, ***income level less than R1000 agree most.
The harvesting of natural resources is well managed in my area	48.5	26.3	25.2	*more Whites agree than other races, **age group 45–54 agree most, **married population agree most,

				***employed individuals agree more, *income level higher than R15000 agree most.
Conservation is beneficial to tourism	71.0	11.0	18.0	**more Whites agree than other races, * married population agree most, ***employed individuals agree more.

Notes: aQuestionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, strongly agree; 2, tend to agree; 3, neutral; 4, tend to disagree; 5, strongly disagree
bPearson Chi-Square test significance. *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; ***, $p < 0.000$.

From the results in Table 3, community members tend to perceive nature conservation more favourably than tourism development. It may be argued that they want more from tourism development, which they perceive is where more economic benefits will accrue from. Differences in responses among local community groups are also shown in Table 3.

5. Conclusions

Majority of the local community members assert that tourism growth, due to nature conservation, has brought business opportunities around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. Community members perceive nature conservation more favourably than tourism development. They want more from tourism development, which they perceive is where more economic benefits will accrue from. Local community members therefore, call for more direct local involvement in conservation and tourism development, which will enable them to enjoy more direct tourism benefits and improvements in their area. From the study results, the 'development strategy' seems to be the main issue affecting community participation in conservation practices and tourism development around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, as a significant sample size put forward that development strategies have not been successfully implemented. It can then be further concluded that local community members are still doubtful that nature conservation and tourism development are solving their local economic development problems. It is therefore recommended that nature conservation and tourism development strategies in rural South Africa align with the sustainable rural development critical success factors outlined in the introductory part of this paper. The "enablers" and the "desired outcomes", when in

place, will enable local communities to view tourism development positively and be spurred towards active participation in this development.

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