

Assessment of Community Participation in Ecotourism and Conservation at Hhuhuwe-Umfolozi Park, South Africa

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Abstract

Community involvement emerges as a key element of both sustainable tourism and ecotourism and is generally agreed to include public participation in decision-making and residents' receipt of benefits from tourism. HUP communities have suffered a great neglect economically in the past and it's the most impoverished region in KZN. This study aimed at evaluating the participation of community residents in ecotourism and conservation activities at HUP; review benefits received by residents from park and determine the existence of conflicts between residents and park management. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the selection of respondents. Structured questionnaire containing a 5-point likert scale were used to measure issues relating to the objectives of the study. Many respondents indicated that active participation between community residents and park management. Ecotourism and conservation projects are largely determined by the park system as residents are yet to be fully integrated into the planning process. Major cause of conflict is restriction of residents from access to wildlife resources in the park. The park system needs to improve her relationship with communities.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Conservation, Participation, Community residents, Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park, Benefits

1. Introduction

South Africa's natural resources form the basis of the tourism industry, attracting millions of local eco-tourists every year. One of the largest conservation and ecotourism providers in South Africa is South African National Park (Myburgh and Saayman, 2002). SANParks is the leading conservation organization in South Africa and also the largest provider of ecotourism experience in the country. Khan (2009) explained that SANP is informed by a new conception of conservation that is radically different from the one generated during the country's colonial and apartheid past. The new vision centers on the inclusion rather than the exclusion of people and on linking conservation to human needs. South Africa is now committed to promote a different concept of conservation, linked to issue of development and human needs (Khan, 2009). He further explained that the concept is to build a harmonious relationship between people and parks.

Ecotourism has become one of the world's major economic sectors with the capability to play a significant role in the sustainable development of natural areas (Powell and Ham, 2008). They also explained that the appeal of ecotourism as a conservation and development tool derives from the related benefits and perception that is feasible alternative to the more conventional and destructive mass tourism form of tourism development. For ecotourism and conservation policies to be successful in protected areas the attitudes and level of participation of community residents play a major role. Host community participation in tourism businesses is one of the important indicators for sustainable tourism

The general attitudes of community residents towards tourism can be improved by both tangible and intangible benefits that these populations receive from involving directly in decision-making processes. Stakeholder involvement in the tourism development is a critical factor of success, yet there are many local communities being excluded or mainly minimally involved in the planning and management of natural resources in protected areas. According to Rastegar (2010), there are different levels of people in community which need different levers for motivation and satisfaction which should be identified. Negative attitude towards ecotourism and conservation in protected areas often arise from poor relationship between residents and management and also inequity in the distribution of benefits derived from these ventures.

The study took place at HUP which is the oldest protected area in Africa. In 1985 the area was formally proclaimed by the British Colonial Government along with sections of the Great St. Lucia Wetland Park. The park falls in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa and lies some 20Km northwest of Mtubatuba, at the junction of the coastal plain and the foothills of the KwaZulu-Natal interior. The total extent of the protected area is 94,984 ha. HUP is in three sections as explained in Table 1.

HUP is an area where wildlife conservation has been practiced for well over a hundred years and presently a repository of biodiversity of international significance, including the largest population of white Rhino (Foggin and Munster, 2000). HUP significance extends to the regional, national and international levels. It encompasses natural, cultural, ecological, wilderness, out recreation and eco-cultural tourism values.

HUP lies in a region which is marginalized with respect to its geographical location and rate of government expenditure. The region which has suffered a great neglect in the past has a population of approximately 2 million people, growing at approximately 2.5 per cent per annum, and it's the most impoverished region in KZN, with 75 per cent in poverty (EKZN, 2011). In excess of 80 per cent of the inhabitants in these areas are economically inactive; in excess of 12 per cent earn less than R12, 000 per annum. HUP is a significant employer with 268 state funded posts and 136 posts associated with the provision of tourism, and contributes more than R7.5 million to the local economy in wages alone (EKZN, 2011). According to Figure 1, HUP is surrounded by ten Tribal Authorities which are the HUP neighbours.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- Identify the demographics of community residents bordering HUP
- Evaluate the participation of community residents in ecotourism and conservation activities at HUP
- Review benefits received by community residents from park
- Determine the causes of conflicts between residents and park management

1.2 Hypothesis of the study

H₀: There is no relationship between respondents' gender and their participation in ecotourism/conservation.

2.0 Literature Review

In many countries, ecotourism means a travel mainly to natural destinations, especially in remote areas which are under environmental protection at the international, national, regional or private level (Honey, 2008). Ecotourism forms part of the sustainable tourism paradigm and although both have attracted numerous attention, little progress has been made in the tourism industry to implement their objectives (de Witt, *et al*, 2011). Ecotourism's definition was paraphrased by Diamantis (2004) as travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals. Also Fennel (2008) explained that ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented.

According to Chiutsi *et al* (2011), ecotourism theory suggests that economic development and natural resources conservation are compatible goals. They stated that ecotourism has centered on conservation, education, ethics, sustainability impacts and local benefits as the main variables. Ecotourism is at the convergence of conservation and tourism and is widely recognized as the most likely vehicle for achieving both conservation and some level of development (i.e income and employment) simultaneously (Hoon, 2004 & Swatuk, 2005). Although ecotourism might mean different things to different people, it is generally accepted that it should have low impacts on nature, with a goal of benefiting both conservation and the well-being of local communities (Kiss, 2004). According to He *et al* (2008), ecotourism is widely promoted as a conservation tool and actually practiced in protected areas worldwide. Weaver (2006) also emphasized that an increasing number of destinations and businesses are aggressively pursuing ecotourism as a specialized part of their sustainable tourism development strategies.

Theoretically, support for conservation from the various types of stakeholder inside and outside protected areas is maximized if stakeholders benefit proportionally to the opportunity cost they bear. The disproportional benefit distribution among stakeholders can erode their support for or lead to the failure of ecotourism and conservation. Proponents of ecotourism for conservation often advocate that the benefits would spur support for conservation from local communities (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001).

According to Murphy and Murphy (2006), once tourists arrive at the community's door, there are three general objectives that most residents will consider. First and foremost they will view tourism as a business and want to see a return to individuals and the community. Community involvement emerges as a key element of both sustainable tourism and ecotourism and is generally agreed to include at least two aspects: public participation in decision-making (i.e some degree control over out-comes and natural resource utilization) and residents' receipt of benefits from tourism (Schenyvens, 2002; Timothy, 2002), as the support of local communities is often required for sustainable development of ecotourism (Ezebilo *et al*, 2010). It was explained by Schenyvens (2002) that ecotourism brings lasting economic gains to local community. Weaver (2008) explained that ecotourism is tourism which includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development, operation and

contributes to their well-being. He further stated that the idea of meaningful community involvement is largely understood as an integral component of sustaining the tourism sector through conservation and generating economic benefits to local people.

Advocates of national parks often claim that income from ecotourism will supplement the livelihoods of individuals who reside in the vicinity of a park. Cash earned is shared between many households in the community; and there are visible signs of improvements from the cash that is earned. Tidsell (2003) summarises the possible economic benefits and costs of ecotourism at a community level. He stressed that benefits include increased and more regular employment and income, greater diversification and opportunities for locally controlled ecotourism related businesses.

3.0 Methodology

The data for the study were obtained through a survey of the communities surrounding HUP. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the selection of respondents. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique to select 5 out of the 10 communities bordering the park which are Abesempenbeni, Zungu, Obhuka, Mhlana and Mpukonyoni. The second stage consisted of proportional allocation of 150 copies of questionnaires to respondents from the 5 communities (that is 30 respondents from each community). In the third stage, respondents from each community were sampled through stratified random sampling technique which ensured segments representing different social groups (hunters, traders, farmers, cattle rearers, unemployed) of the population were represented. In all 108 copies of questionnaires (72%) were retrieved from the communities. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five sections made of: socio-demographic characteristics, participation of residents in ecotourism and conservation activities, residents' attitude towards tourists-local interaction, assessment of benefits received from park and identification of conflicts between park and residents.

The questionnaire contained a 5-point likert scale to measure issues relating residents' participation in ecotourism/conservation and attitude towards factors being measured. Five research assistants who speak both English and Zulu were used in administering the questionnaire. The questionnaire was written both in English and Zulu languages.

The data collected for this study were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics used are the frequency and percentages while the inferential statistics is chi-square.

4.0 : Results and Discussion

The findings and discussion are presented according to the set objectives and hypothesis.

4.1: Demographics of Residents in the Communities

Result (as shown Table 1) revealing majority of respondents (58.3%) being females could be indication that females participate more in ecotourism and conservation ventures in HUP than males. It could also be because many women in South Africa maintain life in homes through daily food supply and payment of education fees for their kids, while some men abdicate their responsibilities (http://wikipedia.org/wiki/women_in_south_africa). Expectedly almost all the respondents (96.2%) were black as HUP is surrounded by predominantly Zulus who are blacks. High population of youths was recorded in the communities as majority was between ages 18 and 44 with many having less than secondary education. This indicates high level of illiteracy in the communities, and this could lead to restiveness and conflicts especially when the youths are not fully occupied. Many of the respondents (48.5%) agreed that residents were employed by the park. This is in line with the findings of Fogin and Munster (2000), who explained that HUP is a significant employer of labour as it contributes more than R7.5 million to the local economy in wages alone. The low level of income per month by majority of the respondents (less than R5000 per month) could be as a result of the prevailing poverty in the area as stated by EKZN (2011) and low level of education. The prominent occupations among residents apart from those employed by the park system were art and craft making and farming. The products of these two occupations could easily be integrated into park system as opportunities for marketing could be provided. The result revealing that very few of the respondents were hunters, suggesting that there would be less pressure on the fauna population in the park.

4.2: Participation of Community Residents in Ecotourism and Conservation Activities

It is important to have knowledge about the value which local communities attach to ecotourism development projects. This will help park managers with regards to decisions concerning how to package an ecotourism project to benefit more individuals in local communities.

Results from Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents (65.7%) agreed that residents participate in ecotourism and conservation ventures, although nature of activities is largely determined by the park system as residents are yet to be fully integrated into planning of projects. Few of the respondents (18.7%) were of the

opinion that locals decide the nature of ecotourism and conservation ventures, while about fourteen percent agreed that locals decide the profit sharing formula. Although a lot of entrepreneurship opportunities are provided by HUP to the local people, very little true ownership was being instilled in the residents, as about a third of the respondents agreed to joint ownership of ecotourism and conservation ventures by residents and park system. Local people are yet to be fully involved into park and management program for proper integration of local community needs and lifestyle. Decisions on nature of ecotourism and conservation businesses and profit sharing formula are largely determined by the park system. However the high percentage of uneducated residents could influence the mode of participation in ecotourism and conservation ventures.

4.3: Benefits Received by Community Residents from Park

Results from Table 4 reveal that about a third of the respondents were of the opinion that locals were given priority for job in the park. This might have resulted from low educational background of the majority of the residents as shown in Table 2, and as such many might not be employable by the park. Many of the community residents (48.1%) were not of the opinion that ecotourism and conservation program in HUP help to build traditional skills of residents. This is in line with the result on Table 3 which shows that local people's life styles are yet to be fully integrated to the ecotourism and conservation program. Also there is indication that the park system is yet to integrate many locals to the system as many of the respondents (49.1%) were of the opinion that residents were restricted access to park resources. There is evidence that the park system attempted to empower community members as much as possible as some respondents (34.2%) believed residents were given opportunities to market their local products in the park, although opinion of majority of respondents (55.5%) revealed that distribution of revenue from ecotourism and conservation ventures was yet to be in a very transparent and fair manner. Many of the respondents (32.6%) agreed that income of locals had increased through ecotourism and conservation businesses, and this is in line with the assertion of KZN (2011) that HUP contributes immensely to local wages and economy. HUP was also adjudged to offer some community services to community residents through HIV/AIDS education and improvement of linking roads to communities.

4.4: Causes of Conflict between Residents and Park Management

Table 5 shows that there is evidence from the opinion of about forty-seven percent of the respondents that access of residents to park wildlife resources and recreational resources is curtailed to some extent as free access could endanger conservation agendas, and this might be one of the causes of conflict. Conflict between residents and park management could sometimes indicate inequality in the ownership, and in the flow of benefits from ecotourism and conservation ventures to community residents. In the case of HUP, conflicts could be as a result of some of the residents who were yet to receive benefits accrued to them through conservation and ecotourism ventures despite the efforts of the park to improve the economic status of residents. About a third of the respondents were of the opinion that crime is in the increase in the communities through ecotourism and conservation programs, also about forty two percent agreed or strongly agreed that opinion of locals are not taken into consideration when taking decision on ecotourism and conservation projects.

4.5: Hypothesis

The hypothesis is divided into three as follows:

- (a) H_0 : There is no relationship between respondents' gender and their participation in ecotourism/conservation businesses.
- (b) H_0 : There is no relationship between respondents' gender and who decides the nature of ecotourism and conservation businesses
- © H_0 : There is no relationship between respondents' gender and park-residents profit sharing formula

Results from Table 6 show the chi-square test statistic values as stated below:

The chi-square test statistic value is 5.664 with an association significant level of 0.059 greater than the alpha level of significance of 0.05. The result is not significant and the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between community participation in ecotourism/conservation businesses and gender cannot be rejected. The result shows that there is no statistical difference between community participation in ecotourism/conservation and gender. In other word, there is no association between community residents' participation in ecotourism/conservation and their gender.

The chi-square test value is 13.838 with an association significant level of 0.001 less than 0.05. The result is significant and the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between respondents' gender and who decides the

nature of ecotourism and conservation businesses can be rejected. There is therefore an association between who decides nature of ecotourism and conservation businesses and their gender.

The chi-square test value is 13.646 with an association significant level of 0.001 which is also less than 0.05. The result is significant and the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between respondents' gender and park-residents profit sharing formula can be rejected. There is an association between park-residents profit sharing formula and gender.

5.0: Conclusion

It is important to have knowledge about the value which local communities attach to ecotourism development projects. This will help park managers with regards to decisions concerning how to package an ecotourism project to benefit more individuals in local communities. Community participation in ecotourism and conservation projects is evident as many of the respondents indicated through residents' various activities in the park.

Ecotourism and conservation projects are largely determined by the park system as residents are yet to be fully integrated into the planning of projects. Park system attempts to empower some of the community members as much as possible by giving them opportunities to sell their products in the park. Income of some residents has also increased to some extent through conservation and ecotourism projects. The park management would need to make distribution of revenue more transparent and fair to community residents.

At the community level, ecotourism may generate increased revenues, provide more infrastructures such as roads and electricity or proceeds from ecotourism may be directed to community projects such as school construction and health clinics, but this has to be clearly identified and specified in its development. Additionally it has to be made clear to these local communities that these benefits may be offset by interference in their daily lives and resultant cultural changes.

Causes of conflicts between residents and park system include restriction of residents to access to wildlife resources and recreational facilities in the park. Also opinion of all the locals are yet to be fully integrated to ecotourism planning and conservation projects. Tourism conflicts are costly in terms of lack of trust, financial overruns, project delays and lost opportunities and the support of local communities is often required for sustainable development of ecotourism and conservation ventures.

The chi-square test shows that there is an association between who decides nature of ecotourism and conservation projects and the gender of the residents. Also there is an association between park-residents' profit sharing and gender. There is however no association between residents' participation in ecotourism and conservation ventures and their gender

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Table 1: Sections of Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park

Section	Size (ha)	Percentage (%)	Year of Proclamation
HGR	25,663	26.98	1895
IGR	47,753	50.27	1895
TCR	21,598	22.73	1989

Note: HGR – Hluhluwe Game Reserve

IGR -- Imfolozi Game Reserve

TCR --- The Corridor Reserve

Source: HIP Management Plan (2011)

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender: Male	45	41.7
Female	63	58.3
Age: 18-24	26	24.0
25-34	34	31.5
35-44	22	20.4
45-54	12	11.1
55-65	8	7.4
65 and above	6	5.6
Level of Education :		
No Education at all	13	12.3
Primary Education	17	16.0
Secondary Education	59	54.7
College/Vocational	14	13.2
University Education	4	3.8
Marital Status: Single	71	66
Married	28	25.5
Widowed	7	6.6
Divorced	2	1.9
Race: Black	104	96.2
Indian	4	3.8
Occupation: Arts & Craft	15	13.6
Trading	7	6.8
Farming	23	21.4
Rearing	3	2.9
Hunting	5	4.9

Government	2	1.9
Worker		
Employed in the	52	48.5
Park		
Income Per Month:		
	84	78.1
R100-5000		
	9	8
R5001-10000		
	2	2
R1001-20000		
	4	4
R20001-40000		
	9	8
R40001-50000		
Above 50000	Nil	

N= 108

Table 3: Participation of Communities in Ecotourism and Conservation Business

Variable	Community participate in Ecotourism/conservation Planning (%)	Local people joint owners of ecotourism/conservation venture (%)
Yes	65.7	30.6
No	27.8	30.6
Not Sure	6.5	31.5
Variable	Who decides Nature of Ecotourism and Conservation Businesses	Who decides profit sharing formula
Local People	18.7	14.1
Park Management	36.3	23.5
Not sure	45.1	62.4

N= 108

Table 4: Benefits received by communities from park

Benefits	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<i>Community receive priority in jobs</i>	19.4	25.0	22.2	20.4	13.0
<i>Traditional skills of local people built</i>	18.5	29.6	14.8	26.8	10.2
<i>Local people have access to park resources</i>	17.6	31.5	23.1	14.8	12.0
<i>Opportunity to sell local product available in park</i>	22.2	17.6	25.9	24.0	10.2
<i>Revenue distributed to locals in fair and transparent manner</i>	18.5	37.0	25.0	14.8	4.6
<i>Income increase through assisting small businesses</i>	18.5	27.8	21.3	23.1	9.3
<i>Provision of equipment for schools and clinics</i>	31.3	16.7	10.2	30.6	11.1
<i>HIV/AIDS education to youths and adults</i>	21.3	10.2	12.0	39.0	18.5
<i>Improvement of linking roads to communities</i>	18.5	15.7	18.5	25.0	22.2

N= 108 *Results are in percentages

Table 5: Causes of Conflicts between Communities and Park

Relationship	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Tourists do not respect culture	22.2	28.7	26.9	12.0	10.1
Locals are not allowed to access wildlife	19.4	18.5	15.7	35.2	12.0
Locals are not allowed to use recreational facilities	16.7	23.1	17.6	27.8	14.8
Opinion of locals not taken in decision making	13.9	23.1	21.3	24.1	17.6
No benefits for locals from ecotourism and conservation ventures	20.4	22.2	16.7	26.9	13.6
Increased crime in communities through ecotourism	26.9	28.7	13.9	16.7	13.9
Inadequate communication between park and residents	35.2	28.7	13.8	12.0	11.0

N= 108 *Results are in percentages

Table 6: Chi-square Result on Gender & Ecotourism/Conservation Participation

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Community participation in ecotourism/ conservation planning	5.664	2	0.059
Decision on nature of business	13.838	2	0.001
Decision on profit sharing	13.646	2	0.001

* Significant at 5%

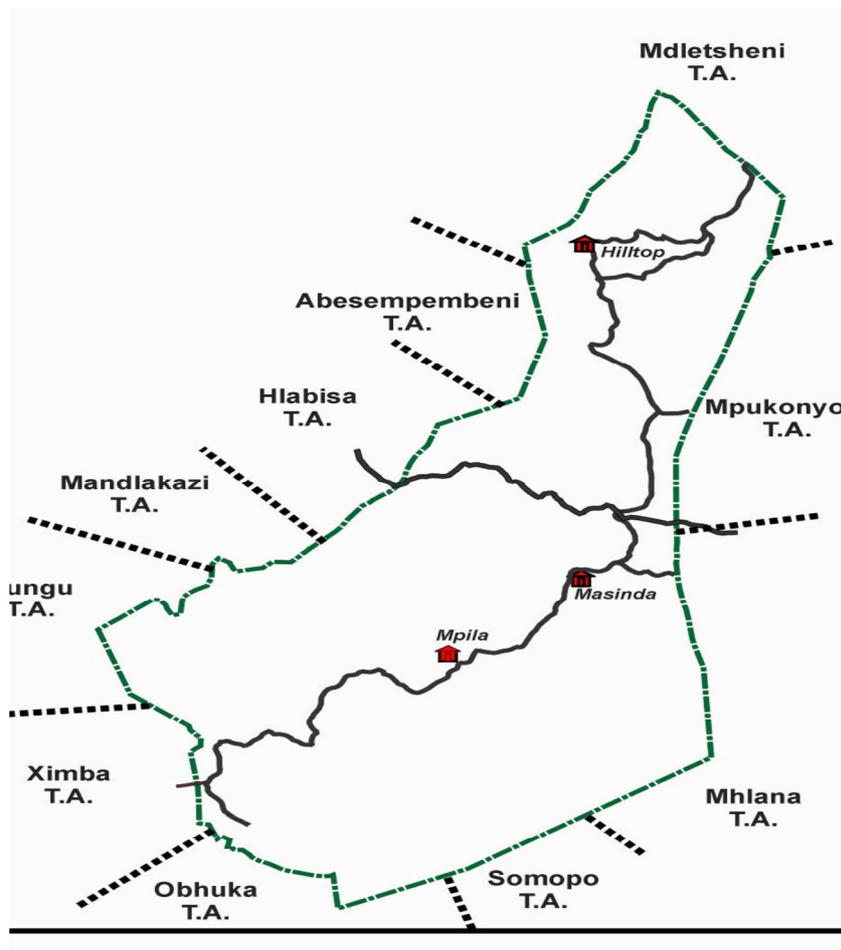


Fig 1: Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park - Neighbours

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