

TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION, LIVELIHOODS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM- A REVIEW OF COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF THE GREAT LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA (GLTFCA)

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Abstract

The study examines community perceptions about the utility of the Great Limpopo transfrontier tourist destination in developing livelihoods and facilitating community participation in the tourism industry. The study indicates that the level of community satisfaction with the Transfrontier initiative is at its lowest since its inception. The community perception of the economic value of the GLTFCA to both household and community level was rated lowly. The findings confirm that as households become more satisfied with the performance of GLTFCA they are more likely to participate in tourism related activities. It is also observed that an increase in perceived GLTFCA economic value to households increases the participation of the community in sustainable conservation and tourism. What it all adds up to is that to improve the overall rating of the GLTFCA by the community there is need to increase community participation in tourism enterprise through partnerships with both the private and public sector. There is need for the GLTFCA management to engage in activities that improve livelihoods sustainability as these will increase the perceived economic value of GLTFCA at household level.

Keywords: Transfrontier tourist destination, transfrontier conservation area, sustainability, community participation

Introduction

The conservation of natural resources and biodiversity is increasingly becoming a matter of global concern with transboundary management of wildlife resources gaining special attention (Bhatasara et al., 2013). Transboundary natural resource management is a process of cooperation across national boundaries that aim to enhance the management of shared or adjacent natural resources to the benefit of all parties in the area (IUCN, 2002; Duffy, 2006; Ali, 2007; Chimhowu, Manjengwa, and Feresu, 2010). As early as 1932, the first international peace park was established between Canada and the United States to commemorate the respective countries' natural and cultural links (IUCN, 2002; Ali, 2007). It has been noted that around the world, more than 130 transfrontier arrangements have been established, including some 400 protected areas in 98 countries thereby representing nearly 10% of the World's total protected area network (Zbicz and Green, 1997). Southern Africa has also witnessed its member countries merging their interests on transboundary conservation efforts giving birth to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park between Botswana and South Africa, the Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation Area between Swaziland and Mozambique and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park involving Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe (IUCN, 2004). This drive towards transfrontiers has facilitated the

creation of significant opportunities for international collaboration and fostering understanding and peaceful cooperation (Hamilton et al., 1996). It has further been noted that in Southern Africa as in many other global transboundary arrangements the local people are an integral component of parks and protected areas (Dutton and Archer, 2004). It was therefore the intention of this study, to get the understanding of communities about how the transfrontier initiatives have transformed community livelihoods, bearing in mind that for a long time in Southern Africa conservation initiatives have tended to exclude the local communities (Gandiwa, 2012, Bhatasara, 2013; Dutton and Archer 2004). Critical areas of enquiry were centred on whether the Great Limpopo transfrontier conservation area had provided the rural people within the transboundary environment with a real means of subsistence and livelihoods transformation.

In as much as transfrontier conservation areas could be panacea to achieve sustainable development through protecting southern Africa's fragile environments and generating the much needed funds to improve the lives of the rural poor, the transfrontier initiatives are littered with implementation pitfalls. Previous research into the transfrontier initiatives in southern Africa have noted serious governance complexities leading to the needs of the poor being sacrificed (Bhatasara et al., 2013). As these highly political projects take shape, conservation and development policy progressively shifts from the national to global arenas and the local communities most affected by TFCA formation tend to disappear from view (Andersson et al, 2013). In transfrontier studies conducted in TFCAs in northern Gonarezhou National Park (GNP), Gandiwa, 2013 has observed an escalation of the human-wildlife conflict with the promulgation of transboundary conservation programmes. Notable is that human-wildlife conflict are particularly evident near protected areas where human and wildlife requirements tend to overlap. These conflicts can be manifested through various forms, including carnivores attacking and killing livestock or humans, decimation of crops and disease exchange between livestock and wildlife, and carcass poisoning (Thirgood et al. 2005, Madden, 2008). The severity of the human-wildlife conflict could be downplayed if the affected communities receive direct benefits and compensation from their conservation efforts. The researcher hypothesizes that community participation in the lucrative tourism industry in the Great Limpopo transfrontier conservation area could lead to sustainable conservation and communities' development.

The flagship transfrontier tourism destination, which was the focus of this study, is the Great Limpopo transfrontier tourism destination, encompassing Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) in south east low veld in Zimbabwe, Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa and Limpopo National Park (LNP) in Mozambique. It is one of the largest transfrontier tourism destinations encompassing vast wilderness areas in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This conservation area is considered to have great capacity for biodiversity conservation and opportunities for sustainable tourism while also providing employment opportunities for poor people in the developing countries. It can be noted that the creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA) has preserved large areas of aesthetically valuable landscapes across sub-Saharan Africa, which now form the cornerstone for the tourism industry and an important ecological resource base (Andersson *et al*, 2012). However there is also a growing concern that the transfrontier conservation area has been converted into administrative conservation management units (Saarinen, 2013). The purpose of this research was therefore to establish the extent to which the GLTFCA has fulfilled its development objectives, particularly focusing on the communities affected by the creation of the GLTFA. The aim is to establish the local community perception of the value of the GLTFCA to their household and community respectively. This is important to establish, as it relates to how the communities will cooperate and participate in GLTFCA programmes to enhance its overall sustainability.

Transfrontier conservation and sustainable tourism

Transfrontier initiatives in Southern Africa have a number of objectives which include, “developing frameworks and strategies whereby communities can participate in, and tangibly benefit from the management and sustainable use of natural resources that occur within the Transfrontier Park (Peace Parks Foundation, 2006). The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA) claimed its social legitimacy on the justification that local communities living in or close to the conservation area will participate and benefit economically through tourism (Spiereburg et al, 2008). One of the motivations for the GLTFCA is the potential to derive revenue through nature based tourism. Arguably, the creation of the GLTFCA has helped to expand the wilderness areas for tourism development. However indications on the ground and multi-disciplinary examinations of how the GLTFCA has fared on the communities tourism development front leaves a lot of question marks about the effectiveness of transfrontier arrangements in promoting tourism development and regional economic integration of all involved.(Mabunda 2004, Spenceley 2006, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority 2010, Muboko, 2011). On the contrary most of researches on the GLTFCA have unearthed increasing human-wildlife conflict (Muboko, 2011), and sidelining of local communities in most the GLTFCA developmental programmes (Gandiwaet al, 2013). The establishment of transfrontier conservation programmes in southern Africa are coming against a background of the success of Community Based Natural Resource Management Programmes (CBNRM). CBNRM was a popular policy tool that advanced the role of local communities and people in natural resource management (Saarinen, 2013). Under the CBNRM model, the communities were considered as able to manage the resources they are depended on and had direct control over the uses and benefits of wildlife resources. In Zimbabwe many projects were sustained through the CBNRM and Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (Campfire) (Chiutsi et al, 2011). Similarly in Botswana, the CBNRM model was used as a good example that successfully promoted ecotourism development in the country and local communities had come together to form trusts to oversee activities such as photographic safaris from which they were able to realise benefits attributable to tourism(Chipfuva and Saarinen ,2011)

Admittedly the successes of the previous resource management models like CBNRM were observed to differ significantly across countries and even from community to community (Arntzen et al, 2003). These variations were attributed to lack of capacity by local communities, lack of knowledge about tourism industry dynamics and serious governance problems which resulted in inequitable distribution of tourism income (Chiutsi and Mudzengi, 2012).

Methodological Issues Involved

The study was mainly a mixed methods study exploiting both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study was an empirical investigation of the Sengwe community in south east low veld Zimbabwe and is part of the GLTFCA. The Sengwe community is adjacent to the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP), which is a major transfrontier park and an important tourist attraction. The Sengwe community is geographically located at the centre of GLTFCA and is mainly referred to as the Sengwe corridor. The proximity of the Sengwe community to the GLTP leads to the assumption that the local people there would have some experience with tourism and its impacts. Therefore issues of livelihoods sustainability through tourism entrepreneurship and conservation are quite relevant to this community. Three wards mainly ward 13, 14 and 15 were purposively sampled due to their proximity to the GLTP and previous participation in Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). The campfire history is largely lauded as a positive turning point in the conservation and rural development discourse in Zimbabwe.

One methodologically useful aspect of conducting this research using a case study approach was the opportunity to integrate participant observation, documentary analysis and interviews with key stakeholders in the community. This multi-faceted approach allowed the use and triangulation of multiple sources of data and enabled the researcher to present objective evaluations of transfrontier initiatives with respect to community participation and economic contribution of the GLTFCA to livelihoods. Triangulation allows a combination of data collection techniques on the same study area. Saunders *et al.* (2007) argues that through triangulation the researcher improves the quality of the research by getting and seeing data from different perspectives. The methodology used to gather information for this study included semi-structured interviews and literature review from secondary sources. The residents answered open-ended and closed interview questions about their household and community level perceptions of the utility of the GLTFCA in sustaining livelihoods.

Results

The study reveals that community level perceptions of the utility of the GLTFCA in sustaining livelihoods and its economic value to the transboundary community is negative. The low rating of the GLTFCA was noted as significant from both a household and community level perspective. The key drivers of this negative perception are mainly poor governance of the GLTFCA programmes, lack of direct economic benefits to household and community level, threats of livelihood displacement, restricted access to natural resources and lack of clear guidelines for community participation in transfrontier tourism enterprises. Community participation in tourism business is generally viewed as critical for communities to support conservation initiatives in the GLTFCA. As such we run a regression model as shown in Table 1 to determine key drivers for communities to undertake Community Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs).

Table 1: Key drivers of community participation in tourism enterprise

Key drivers/determinants	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t	Beta
Resident time in transboundary area	0.002606	.0015107	1.73	0.087	0.127396
Satisfaction level	0.039221	.0213927	1.83	0.069	0.150585
Impact of GLTFCA to community	-0.01838	.0263351	-0.70	0.486	-0.0609
Community involvement	0.020607	.0225712	0.91	0.363	0.075615
GLTFCA economic value	0.220944	.0671725	3.29	0.001	0.303533
Cash from cultural exhibitions	0.126206	.0589232	2.14	0.034	0.183297
Cash from community displays	-0.04467	.0661674	-0.68	0.501	-0.06174
Harvesting medicines	0.012441	.0802781	0.15	0.877	0.017195
Harvesting wild fruits	-0.03679	.1282468	-0.29	0.775	-0.04526
Harvesting wild vegetables	-0.14995	.1166818	-1.29	0.201	-0.18015
Harvesting fish	0.049306	.0971438	0.51	0.613	0.059955
Harvesting insects	-0.0783	.0861215	-0.91	0.365	-0.0994
Harvesting wild trophy	0.002393	.0634388	0.04	0.97	0.003095
_constant	-0.0411	.1346809	-0.31	0.761	.

Using the correlation procedure a number of social, economic and demographic variable were tested for relationship with household participation in CBTEs. Variables that emerged to be significantly related to household participation in CBTEs were then included in the regression model to find if they can explain variation in household participation in CBTEs. The model results presented above showed that at 90% confident level resident time in transboundary community, level of satisfaction with GLTFCA, perception of GLTFCA

economic value to household, getting cash from cultural exhibitions were the causes of households to undertake CBTEs.

An increase in the resident time for household heads leads households to participate in tourism business. Also as household become more satisfied with the performance of GLTFCA they are more likely to participate in tourism business enterprise. Model results also show that an increase in perceived GLTFCA economic value to households increases the participation of households in tourism business. It also improves the perception of households about the utility of the transfrontier initiative. In addition when households get cash income from cultural exhibitions they tend to then undertake tourism business. What it all adds up to is that to increase community participation in tourism enterprise there is need to ensure permanency of residence, engage in activities that increase the perceived economic value of GLTFCA and involve households in cultural exhibitions. Activities that increase community level of satisfaction of the performance of GLTFCA should be undertaken as a way of encouraging households to participate in different tourism businesses.

The study further reveals that the dominant livelihood sustainability strategies for households have remained predominantly crop farming and livestock rearing as compared to tourism. These findings contradict the earlier assertions and recent literature on transboundary resource management which indicated a paradigm shift towards tourism as a key livelihood and poverty alleviation strategy in transboundary areas (Peace Parks, 2006). The local communities have not received benefits from transboundary tourism and therefore are likely to continue to engage in household level activities which bring them direct benefits like crop farming and livestock rearing. Communities also pointed out livelihood displacement as a major threat to them, as wildlife has continued to be a menace to crops, livestock and people. Lack of compensation against wildlife induced losses has also contributed to the negative perception of the GLTFCA by the local communities, thereby diminishing the utility the GLTFCA to the residents.

Conclusion

The study examined community perceptions about the utility of the Great Limpopo transfrontier tourist destination in developing livelihoods and facilitating community participation in the tourism industry. The study indicates that the level of community satisfaction with the transfrontier is at its lowest since its inception. The community perception of the economic value of the GLTFCA to both household and community level was rated lowly. The findings confirm that as households become more satisfied with the performance of GLTFCA they are more likely to participate in tourism related activities. It is also observed that an increase in perceived GLTFCA economic value to households increases the participation of the community in sustainable conservation and tourism. What it all adds up to is that to improve the overall rating of the GLTFCA by the community there is need to increase community participation in tourism enterprise through partnerships with both the private and public sector. There is need for the GLTFCA management to improve governance and engage in activities that increase the perceived economic value of GLTFCA at household level. The three countries involved in the transfrontier initiative need to formulate an integrated framework for community involvement in transfrontier activities. There is need for improved information dissemination about transfrontier opportunities and challenges to the affected communities. The negative perception needs to be managed so that communities do not continuously feel sidelined from the opportunities associated with transboundary resources.

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