

## Rural Communities' Perspectives on the Influence of Tourism on Poverty and Development

Michael Chambwe\* 

*Tourism Research in Economics, Environs and Society (TREES), North-West University, Mmabatho, South Africa, Email, [michaelchambwe@gmail.com](mailto:michaelchambwe@gmail.com)*

Andrea Saayman 

*Tourism Research in Economics, Environs and Society (TREES), North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, Email, [andrea.saayman@nwu.ac.za](mailto:andrea.saayman@nwu.ac.za)*

Pierre Andre Viviers 

*Tourism Research in Economics, Environs and Society (TREES), North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, Email: [pierreandre.viviers@nwu.ac.za](mailto:pierreandre.viviers@nwu.ac.za)*

*\*Corresponding Author*

**How to cite this article:** Chambwe, M., Saayman, A. & Viviers, P.A. (2023). Rural Communities' Perspectives on the Influence of Tourism on Poverty and Development. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 12(3):1011-1026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.413>

### Abstract

Tourism is often promoted in Africa for its potential to inspire sustainable development and reduce poverty in rural areas, which host some of the most pristine natural attractions in the world. This research provides insights into the perceived influence of tourism on communities surrounding conservation areas and puts forward recommendations to improve tourism's potential in poverty reduction and development in rural communities. The location of the study is the uKhahlamba Drakensburg Park (UDP), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The study uses a mixed-method approach where 326 questionnaires were administered to households of three communities around the UDP, and five interviews were held with the UDPs' community liaison officers and traditional community leaders. The results show residents are indifferent towards tourism, have low participation in tourism, and threaten the sustainability of tourism. This study recommends reimagined approaches that centre around developing and implementing community-based tourism structures within the area that will stimulate equitable development.

**Keywords:** Poverty alleviation; socio-economic impact; sustainable tourism development; uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park; community development

### Introduction

Poverty is one of the momentous global challenges faced by humanity today, particularly among the most vulnerable people living in rural areas (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2017; Yao et al., 2020). Accordingly, the 2030 target for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 10 (reduce inequalities), will essentially be contingent upon the strides made in rural socioeconomic development (Ndabeni, 2019). As propounded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2016), rural development involves availing of opportunities and developing socioeconomic activities that improve the general livelihoods of rural inhabitants.

Traditionally, subsistence agriculture has been the mainstay of rural economies, accounting for the more significant percentage of available income opportunities. However, with dwindling income being registered from agricultural activities in rural areas (Lane & Katzenholz, 2015), hopes for rural development and poverty alleviation have been pinned on other sectors, such as tourism. The development and growth of tourism in poverty-stricken

nations, more so in rural communities, have long given credence to the potential that tourism possesses as a tool for poverty alleviation (Chok et al., 2007; Núñez-Lara et al., 2022). Since rural communities of developing economies are endowed with the much-sought resources of tourism (such as landscapes, wildlife, and cultural experiences), not only does tourism presents itself as a viable development tool upon which poverty in communities can be curtailed, but also as a means of diversifying the local economy (Barkauskas et al., 2015; Chok et al., 2007; Yao et al., 2020).

Tourism's ability to transform the socioeconomic outlook of societies through the generation of revenue, creation of employment, and infrastructure development, among others, has long been heralded (Mlungu & Kwizera, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is an industry proven to uplift previously disadvantaged communities (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012; Mogomotsi et al., 2018; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015; Warouw et al., 2018). However, studies by Bello et al. (2018), Mowforth and Munt (2016), and Scholtz (2014) indicate that how tourism is planned and managed can have diverse impacts on the communities where it takes place, and these impacts can either be positive or negative.

Mnisi and Ramoroka (2020) point out that the communities surrounding protected nature areas remain underdeveloped and side-lined regardless of the efforts undertaken to transform their livelihoods for the better. In the same light, Zhu et al. (2021) insist that many rural communities that have traditionally relied on agriculture for subsistence, which have transformed to tourism destinations as a medium for poverty eradication, are faced with challenges that continue to negate sustainable development values. This causes Mnisi and Ramoroka (2020) to conclude that despite the SDGs, these rural communities still grapple with a myriad of socioeconomic problems, such as hunger, poor quality of education, gender inequality, and low levels of income, which hamper their levels of development.

According to Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) and Reisinger (2009), the significant effects of socio-economic transformation on society due to tourism activities are mostly related to the quality of life experienced by the community members. Whether the socio-economic impacts are real (tangible) or perceived (intangible), they must be understood to foster the communities' continued support for the industry (Scholtz, 2014; Scholtz & Slabbert, 2018). Not only is it essential to ascertain the social and economic impacts of tourism, but also to understand the views of these communities on tourism participation and sustainability to establish support and sustainable development of the communities.

This research aims to contribute towards the debate and evidence on the perceived impact of tourism in rural areas on the lives of marginalised communities surrounding major nature-based tourism products in Africa. It provides a critical view of participating in and implementing tourism practices, especially concerning poverty reduction and sustainable community development. To achieve this, the paper uses a triangular mixed-method design where the views of community members are further explained through in-depth interviews with community leaders and liaison officers. Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature on tourism's impact on rural marginalised communities and derives recommendations for community-based tourism structures to stimulate development.

## **Literature review**

### ***Theoretical background***

This study makes use of two theoretical models for its theoretical footing. These are Arnstein's 1969 ladder of citizen participation and Pretty's 1995 typology of participation. These models are chosen for their prominence in explaining the various forms of involvement by communities in enterprises such as tourism. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation consists of a hypothetical ladder that has 8 rungs split into three main categories: (i) non-participation

(manipulation and therapy); (ii) degrees of tokenism (informing, consultation, and appeasement); and (iii) citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control) (Mendonca et al., 2014). Community influence, control, and power increase with each rung of the ladder. The top of the ladder represents an ideal situation where the community is in control.

Similarly, Pretty's typology of participation, which appeals greatly to enforcers of participatory approaches, identifies 8 different forms of the way communities are involved in development initiatives (Cornwall, 2008). These are manipulative participation, passive participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilisation (Pretty, 1995). This model suggests that for self-mobilisation to be attained, external parties should admit they do not know everything and cede control to locals who are equally competent. Pretty's typology of participation helps identify factors which affect the development of tourism initiatives in local communities and makes clear that the motivations of those that determine participation approaches are significant.

### *Context*

The United Nations (UN, 2017) contend that poverty is characterised by a deficiency in areas such as income, food, and medication, exacerbated by discrimination, social exclusion, and restricted access to basic services. Compared to more affluent communities, poorer rural communities in pristine nature areas are more likely to look towards protected areas, like national parks, for socioeconomic benefits such as jobs and income (Saayman et al., 2019). This has led to natural-area socioeconomic studies, which focus on community elements such as employment, income, and perceived benefits (Saayman & Saayman, 2006), and their contribution to the general quality of life in the surrounding communities (Van der Merwe et al., 2009).

With the contentious link between tourism and poverty reduction having been established in the preceding section of this paper, Feng et al. (2018) are of the view that there is a need for the creation of interventionist strategies that create various opportunities that can stimulate sustainable tourism development and reduce poverty. Taking a leaf from the suggestions given by Ndabeni (2019) on the sustainable development of agriculture and small to medium-enterprise sectors in rural communities, tourism is likely to succeed in poverty alleviation if regional and local conditions determine its development.

This implies creating opportunities that are easily linked to empirical realities; building on initiatives by local people; insistence on self-reliance and the use of local resources, solutions, and labour; and stimulating demand for knowledge that builds on capacities (Global CHE Network, 2019; Lachapelle & Austin, 2014; Ndabeni, 2019). In the same breath, Chok et al. (2007) put forward principles that should be followed when instituting sustainable pro-poor tourism initiatives. These include the participation of locals in the decision-making process; planning that encompasses all aspects of the locals' livelihoods; adoption of diverse, flexible, and wide-ranging strategies; distribution of benefits; commercial feasibility; and continuous learning and development. Scholars have voiced their concerns about the poor implementation of tourism sustainability practices that aim to curtail communities' poverty. Bello et al. (2018) state that implementing community participation and involvement in tourism activities faces mammoth challenges in developing countries. Núñez-Lara et al. (2022) add that while it can be argued that there has been a surge in the creation of mechanisms that align with tourism sustainability in poor developing countries and regions, where there is much reliance on their natural resources for subsistence, the same cannot be said about the adoption and success in the implementation of such strategies. Similarly, Mowforth and Munt (2016) also believe that

community participation in tourism communities is a principle that is easy to promote yet very difficult to implement.

The implementation challenges have been identified as centralisation of public administration and poor coordination; poverty and apathy; unfair distribution of tourism benefits; human-wildlife conflicts; lack of trained human resources in tourism planning; inadequate information and financial resources; and low levels of education for locals (Akamani et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2022; Bello et al., 2018; Dragouni & Fouseki, 2018; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Kala & Bagri, 2018; Velnisa Paimin et al., 2014).

Therefore, poverty alleviation in rural areas has better chances of success when community members actively and meaningfully engage in tourism. Bello et al. (2018), Ghaderi et al. (2022), Gohori and van der Merwe (2022) and Kunasekaran et al. (2022) contend that raising public awareness, capacity building, creating linkages, creation and use of appropriate local community-based organisations, use of appropriate community participation methods, and decentralisation and coordination of local organisations are prerequisites for full and active community participation. The implementation of these proffered strategies will go a long way in advancing the ideals of long-term sustainable development and better community participation and involvement in tourism (Scholtz, 2014). However, the extent to which tourism impacts communities varies and depends on the rate of the change brought in by tourism development, the willingness of the community to embrace such change, and the dynamics of the community in question.

### **Study area**

The uKhahlamba Drakensburg Park (UDP), founded in 1903 and designated World Heritage Site status in 2007, has formed part of the transboundary Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site since 2013. It stretches for over 1 000km from the southwest to the northeast and is located between the borders of the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) Province of South Africa and Lesotho (DAC, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The study focuses on the rural communities of Bonjaneni, Kokwane, and Engodini that surround the main rest camps of the northern and central sections of the UDP. Tourism is only second to agriculture and is a key economic driver in these communities (Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife, 2018). The main rest camps in the vicinity are Royal Natal, Cathedral Peak, and Injisuthi. Bonjaneni community is located next to the entrance of Royal Natal, Kokwane is adjacent to Cathedral Peak, and Engodini is close to the entrance of Injisuthi. Figure 1 below depicts the map of the park.

The focus on the communities next to these camps was inspired by the magnitude of tourism activity in the northern and central sections of the UDP, compared to the southern part. As Table 1 shows and according to Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife (2018), the north and central UDP account for 88.2% of the total number of chalets, 85.31% of the total number of beds, and 83% of all the camping sites in the park. Notwithstanding the UDP's status as one of the essential tourism products and mountain destinations in South Africa, the following selected socio-economic demographics presented by Wazimap (2021) suggest that poor communities surround the park. Regarding household structure, 36% of the population in Bonjaneni live in traditional structures (mostly mud houses), while 59% dwell in house (standard) structures. The traditional house structure accounts for 68% of the population in Kokwane, whereas the standard house structure has 16%. In Engodini, 47% of the people live in traditional structures, while 39% live in standard house structures.



Figure 1: A map of uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park  
 Source: Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife (2018)

Wazimap (2021) further reveals the following statistics for the study area. The gender of household heads for Bonjaneni, Kokwane and Engodini is 58% female, 42% male; 49% female, 51% male; and 47% female, 53% male, respectively. At least 97% of all the households in all the communities earn less than R150 000 a year, while at most, only 3% earn more than R150 000. The employed stand at 19%, 5% and 10% for Bonjaneni, Kokwane and Engodini, respectively. At least 19% of the population across all communities have completed secondary school, 75% have some secondary education, and only 1% have tertiary education.

Table 1: uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park Camps

Camp name	North/Central/ South	Number of chalets	Number of beds	Hiking hut	Camping sites
Royal-Natal - Thendele, Mahai, Rugged Glen	N	29	94	0	99
Didima (Cathedral Peak)	C	65	138	0	0
Monks Cowl	C	0	0	0	30
Injisuthi	C	20	78	0	120
Giant's Castle	C	43	108	(8 capacity)	0
Highmoor	S	0	0	0	7
Kamberg	S	6	14	0	0
Lotheni	S	15	58	0	14
Umkhomazi	S	0	0	0	0
Vergelegen	S	0	0	0	0
Cobham	S	0	0	(30 capacity)	20
Garden Castle	S	0	0	(30 capacity)	10
Bushman's nek	S	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>178</b>	<b>490</b>		<b>300</b>
North		29	94		99
Central		128	324		150
South		21	72		51
North		16.29%	19.18%		33.00%
Central		71.91%	66.12%		50.00%
		<b>88.20%</b>	<b>85.31%</b>		<b>83.00%</b>

Source: Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife (2018)

## **Methodology**

A mixed-method approach was utilised to attain the objectives of the study. The study used a concurrent triangulation design where quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analysed separately before the results were compared. A mixed method approach was adopted to capture all-encompassing views from the community members on one hand and from the community leaders and UDP community liaison officers on the other. Quantitatively, a questionnaire was developed and administered to residents of the three identified communities based on the findings of literature and previous studies. Qualitatively, five interviews were held: three with the community traditional leaders (chiefs), and two with the UDP community liaison officers responsible for the northern and central areas of the park.

### ***Quantitative approach***

The communities of Bonjaneni, Kokwane, and Engodini, together with the UDP, formed the sampling frame of this research. As alluded to in the preceding section, the communities were chosen based on the magnitude of tourism attracted by the park. Since households were targeted, the number of households in each community determined the sample size. Using Raosoft (2022) as the sample calculator, out of a total of 762 households, 256 was determined to be the minimum recommended sample size. With prudence, 326 questionnaires were gathered. Data were then captured using the 2016 version of Microsoft Excel and version 28 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

For its quantitative analyses, the study used descriptive statistics and inferential analysis such as ANOVA, the Cronbach alpha statistic, and the Cramer's V effect size. ANOVA was used to compare the variances between the means of the different community datasets, the Cronbach alpha statistic was used to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the collected data, and the Cramer' V effect size was used to measure the association of categorised fields of data.

Trained fieldworkers from the community were utilised to administer the questionnaires in their respective communities. The questionnaire was translated to isiZulu, the primary language used in the area and used a 'community friendly' three-point Likert scale with smiley faces for ease of interpretation. The questionnaire had 39 questions which were divided into three sections. Section A sought to ascertain the demographic and socio-economic status of the respondents, such as their gender, age, level of education, language spoken, occupation, marital status, income levels, size of households, and years lived in their communities. Closed-list questions were mainly used.

Section B sought to establish the socio-economic impact of the UDP on the communities. It had different questions under four subsections, i.e., positive economic impact, negative economic impact, positive social impact, and negative social impact. All questions in this section were graded using a three-point Likert scale where 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, and 3 = agree. Section C, which used open and closed questions and a three-point Likert scale, measured community involvement and participation in tourism-related activities and their barriers.

### ***Qualitative approach***

An interview guide was developed and used for the study's qualitative approach. Interviews were conducted to corroborate the findings of the community survey. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted that obtained information from the key informants, namely the two UDP liaison officers (responsible for the northern and central sections of the UDP where much tourism abounds) and the three community leaders of the three communities under study. These five participants were the only ones who could provide the information that was sought. The

three interviews with the community leaders were conducted in English using a translator, since the interviewer was not conversant in the local language, isiZulu. The questions on the interview guide sought the respondents' views on issues such as their organisations' roles, mandate, and policies in supporting local communities; community participation in tourism; communities' capacity in the ownership and management of tourism initiatives; challenges they see communities grapple with in the running of local projects; the potential, sustainability, and competence of locally run tourism ventures, to mention only a few.

The interviews were digitally recorded, supplemented by taking notes, which, according to Nieuwenhuis (2019), helps review answers and ask further questions at the end of the interview. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim. For qualitative analysis, the study adopted thematic content analysis and a deductive approach, which, according to Sunday (2018), is ideal when qualitative inquiry is a minor constituent of a more extensive quantitative study. After the transcribing was completed, the researchers had to familiarise themselves with the data which involved going through the notes and text. Data was then coded by highlighting phrases and sentences and labelling them according to their content. From the labels generated in coding, patterns emerged that then helped generate themes. The themes were then reviewed before they could be named.

## Results

### *Community household social and economic demographics*

Table 2 presents the social and economic demographics of the surveyed communities. As seen below, the sample has slightly more male-headed households at 54% than females at 46%. Most household heads are between the ages of 18 and 64. IsiZulu is the predominant language of all the communities. It can also be seen that 60% of the household dwellings are standard houses, with 40% being traditional hut structures. Most households have access to electricity. However, the same cannot be said about access to running water, with only 12% of the households having access. Almost all the households earn a combined annual household income of less than R140 000. The results also show high levels of unemployment, with the unemployed accounting for 72.3%. Over 57% of the sample have secondary education or less, whereas 35% have matric and only 7.7% have tertiary qualifications. Subsistence agriculture and remittances from family members account for more than 56% of household income. The sample correlates well with the community descriptives from Wazimap, giving confidence that the sample is representative of the communities around the UDP.

Table 2. Sample community household characteristics

Characteristic	Sample distribution
Gender of household head	46% Female; 54% Male
Age of household head	87.6% are between 18-64; 12.4% are 65+
Language	100% isiZulu
Type of household dwelling	40% Traditional house; 60% Standard house
Access to utilities	Running water 12%; Electricity 93.3
Annual household income	93.3% <R140 000
Employment	72.3% Unemployed; 28% Employed
Education	57.3% Secondary or less; 35% Matric; 7.7% Tertiary
The primary source of household income	Remittances from family members 30.1%; Subsistence agriculture 26.5%; Other 33.4%

### *Communities' main economic activity*

Interview participants bemoaned the lack of employment opportunities in their communities. Subsistence agriculture was the main economic activity revealed, together with tourism. Temporary employment when there are community projects such as road construction was also mentioned. Government projects and grants were also mentioned as the key economic help

given to the communities. One of the participants said that, because of the UDP's World Heritage Status, its abundant deposits of coal could not be mined as this would violate the park's status. Below is an excerpt of the responses given:

*There are no factories here. There are no farms. There is only subsistence farming and tourism. If it was not for the World Heritage Status this place has, we could be mining the vast coal deposits in our area.*

### **Community support for the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park's existence**

The interview responses show that participants feel the communities support the park's existence and benefit significantly from it. It was suggested that the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is the first government structure the communities see, contributing to the community's expectation of various forms of help and grants from the park. This expectation, coupled with the benefits they get, generates community support for the Park's existence:

*They support the park's existence because they benefit from the park ... because of job opportunities, and it also supports their livelihoods. They support the park because it conserves our wildlife for future generations.*

### **Community perceptions on UDP's impact on local economy and society**

As specified in the methodology section of this paper, to ascertain the survey participants' views on and perceptions of the UDP's impact on the local economy and society, a three-point Likert scale (where 1 = disagree; 2 = neutral; and 3 = agree) was used to rate statements that were categorised into positive social, negative social, positive economic, and negative economic sections. To determine the one-dimensionality, coherence, and internal consistency of the data, Cronbach's alpha was used. Table 3 reveals that all alpha values surpass 0.75, showing a robust consistency in the measurement of the fundamental construct. A look at the average mean responses for all the communities indicates a higher rating of the negative elements by the communities as opposed to the positive aspects. Furthermore, the results show distinct statistical differences in the perceptions among the different communities.

The positive social impact factor had six statements that participants were asked to score. The statements read: Because of tourism and the UDP, the image of my community has improved; community pride has improved; roads and public facilities are better maintained; everyday lifestyles for community members have improved; there is improved quality of life; I'm satisfied personally. The factor's average mean value of the scores was 1.79. The reliability coefficient was 0.849, while the inter-item correlation was 0.365. Using the average mean score of 1.79, which is closest to 2, it can be stressed that the community residents are somewhat indifferent to the positive social impact the UDP has had on their livelihoods. The highest average score in this category was registered on the statement "community pride has increased", which was 1.97. The lowest average mean of 1.60 was recorded on the statement "roads and public facilities are better maintained".

The negative social impact factor, which also had six statements against which respondents graded, registered an average score mean value of 1.94. The statements were: Because of the UDP, community cohesion has decreased; vandalism of property and sites has increased; social conflicts between residents and tourists have increased; exploitation of locals has increased; cultural traditions are fading; crime rate has increased. This factor had a reliability coefficient of 0.758 and an inter-item correlation of 0.43. Judging by the average mean score value of 1.94, which was the second highest of the four factors, it can also be noted that residents of these communities are indifferent to the negative social impact the UDP has





on their communities. The highest average score in this category was registered on the statement “crime rate has increased”, which was 2.12. The lowest average mean of 1.72 was recorded in the statement, “social conflicts between residents and tourists have increased”.

At 1.64, the positive economic impact factor recorded the lowest average mean value of scores. The factor had a reliability coefficient and inter-item values of 0.782 and 0.656, respectively. This factor had loadings from the following six statements: Because of the UDP, employment opportunities have increased; business opportunities have increased; standards of living have improved; turnover for local businesses have improved; public funding for my community activities has increased; traditional handicrafts are now being recovered. At face value, the average mean score of 1.64 indicates an indifferent feeling by the community towards the UDP’s positive economic impact on their society. On a relative scale, in comparison with other factors’ average mean scores, the community does not see economic benefits of the UDP in their communities. The highest average score in this category was registered on the statement “traditional handicrafts are now being recovered”, which was 2.12. The lowest average mean of 1.47 was jointly recorded on the statements “public funding for community activities has increased” and “business opportunities have increased”.

The negative economic impact factor had the highest average mean score of 2.29. The factor also had a reliability coefficient value of 0.833 and an inter-item correlation value of 0.282. The factor consists of the following statements: Because of the UDP, prices of goods and services have increased; property prices have increased; cost of living has increased; only a small number of people are benefiting. Bearing in mind that this factor had the highest average mean score of 2.29, one is tempted to conclude that, on a relative scale, residents agree that the UDP has had a negative economic impact on their society. However, looking at the average score value of 2.29’s nearest whole number, namely 2, signifies an indifferent feeling the community has toward the negative economic impact the UDP has on its society. The highest average score in this category was registered on the statement “cost of living has increased”, which was 2.40. The lowest average mean of 2.12 was recorded on the statement “property prices have increased”.

Table 3. Perceived community impact of tourism

	Positive social	Negative social	Positive economic	Negative economic
All communities	1.79	1.94	1.64	2.29
Kokwane	1.85	2.00	1.63	2.24
Engodini	1.56**	1.89	1.53*	2.01**
Bonjaneni	1.93	1.93	1.74	2.53
Reliability coefficient	.849	.758	.782	.833

\*\* = significant different from both other communities; \* significant different from 1 community

Interview respondents feel the UDP is doing all it can to support the communities. Still, their efforts are insignificant because of resource constraints, the large size of the communities and the high poverty levels. Examples of developmental efforts cited were the employment of locals, particularly for jobs in the park that do not require skilled labour:

*I wouldn't say that I am satisfied, but I can say that Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is doing all it can to support the community and play a relevant role. It's just that because the community is so huge and the neighbouring communities are also poor, you'll find that whatever role we try to play, it becomes a drop in the ocean because of the state of poverty in the area.*

It is interesting to note that, from the lens of the community liaison officers, the UDP’s efforts towards community development are less likely to be noticeable because the

communities under study are exposed to extreme poverty levels. This viewpoint agrees with the responses from the community, where they view the impact of the park on their socio-economic life as mostly insignificant.

### ***Community involvement in tourism activities***

Participants were further asked yes/no questions to establish their involvement in tourism activities in and around the UDP. As Table 4 below shows, the responses overwhelmingly expose the minor involvement of community residents in tourism activities (such as employment, supply of services, or participation in park community projects) in and around the park. The respondents further reveal their lack of knowledge and skills within the tourism industry.

Table 4. Responses to selected tourism involvement questions

	Yes %	No %
<b>Does anyone in your household work at the UDP?</b>	4.6	95.4
<b>Do you or anyone in your household supply any tourism-related services to the park?</b>	4	96
<b>Have you been involved in any community projects that UDP offers?</b>	2.5	97.5
<b>Do you know of any community project(s) that the UDP offers?</b>	2.5	97.5
<b>Do you have any knowledge/skills, or experience within the tourism industry?</b>	9.2	90.8

The study also established the community’s perceptions of tourism in their localities. A three-point scale (where 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, and 3 = agree) was also used to rate the participants’ responses to the given statements. Scores of less than the median 2 were regarded as negative (disagreeing), while scores above the median 2 were regarded as positive (agreeing). The extent of disagreeing would increase as the scores near 1, while the extent of agreeing would increase as the scores moved closer to 3. The average responses for the communities are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Community perceptions on local tourism

	Mean
<b>Participate in tourism-related problems</b>	1.62
<b>Local community encouraged to be involved in tourism</b>	1.94
<b>Incentives in place for local community tourism</b>	1.80
<b>The community has its tourist attractions</b>	1.95
<b>The community benefits a lot from tourism</b>	1.60
<b>Informed about tourism development</b>	1.54

The mean scores in the table above show that all the variable items were negatively rated. Interestingly, the “informed about tourism development” variable scored the lowest mean score of 1.54. The highest mean score, 1.95, which had the least disagreeing extent, was registered by the statement “community has own tourism attractions”. In summary, to varying degrees, the community does not agree that they are actively involved or informed about tourism. The community feels that they are neither encouraged to participate in various tourism activities (including decision-making) nor that there are benefits that accrue to their collective communities because of tourism in their vicinities.

### ***Sustainability of local participation in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park’s activities***

There is a difference in terms of responses from the interview participants. Some suggest that there is no local community participation in the Park’s tourism ventures except for occasional unskilled employment. Others provide a mixed response by indicating that there are both sustainable involvement initiatives and some unsustainable ones in the communities.

The making and selling of crafts by women close to the Royal Natal entrance and around the park is regarded as one of the sustainable participation initiatives by local communities in tourism activities. After probing, the tour guiding business by locals was also added to the list of sustainable tourism practices by locals in the park. They are considered sustainable because they will likely exist for as long as tourism and tourists are in the area. Interestingly, a local company's provision of security services at one of the rest camp entrances is identified as an unsustainable practice because it is only awarded on a five-year term after a tender process. There is no guarantee that the security company will be there beyond their current term. While there is general contentment and good feelings about the park, the participants felt that the UDP could do more to assist the locals to participate in park activities, particularly employing locals in the park. One respondent expressed his satisfaction with the participation of locals in tourism around the park. He mentions the availability of the Community Levy Fund, which was responsible for constructing a community-run bakery in his community. Below are excerpts from the responses given:

*We are happy about the existence of the Community Levy Fund from the park. People are free to apply for funds to start businesses.*

*No, because most of our community people are not working and are not benefitting from the park.*

From the responses, one can quickly note the community residents' dependence on the park for employment and various other opportunities.

## **Discussion**

This study has brought forward the perceptions of communities surrounding the UDP regarding tourism and its influence on development and poverty. The results paint a gloomy picture where the UDP and tourism have had little impact on community development and curtailment of poverty. The communities' participation and involvement in tourism are nowhere near the ideal levels as propounded by the latter stages of both Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation and Pretty's typology of participation (Mendonca et al., 2014; Pretty, 1995), which are citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control) and self-mobilisation, respectively.

Further, there are yawning gaps in terms of compliance with the principles of sustainability and pro-poor tourism as propounded by Chok et al. (2007), Lachapelle and Austin (2014), Ndabeni (2019), among others, in the literature section of this paper. While community members (albeit few) are somewhat engaged in tourism activities, primarily as low-level employees, and craft sellers, they need to be incorporated into structures that make it possible to participate meaningfully in tourism and for capacity-building to take place. Setting up of deliberate community-based tourism organisations within these communities will ensure participation in local tourism planning and decision-making processes and encompassing of local livelihoods in the coining and adoption of strategies, ensuring fair distribution of benefits, reaching for commercial viability, and encouraging continuous learning and development. While the communities directly access tourists through craft selling, the UDP dictates selling within the park borders. Through setting up community-based tourism organisations, local communities will be able to, through representation, create linkages with tourists and the tourism industry at large (Latip et al., 2018, Mogomotsi et al., 2018). This will provide the communities with a coherent lobby to ensure the advancement of their development agenda. Such structure will also ensure the use of appropriate community participation methods as dictated by the communities.

The development of the craft centre and a bakery in one of the communities aligns with the suggestion by Ndabeni (2019) that their local and regional conditions must determine the development of communities, implying building on what communities already know (such as crafting) and have (resources and skills) to eliminate poverty. However, this can be broadened to develop other initiatives that reflect other local realities, such as agriculture, indigenous knowledge, traditional arts and cuisine, and local culture. All these should tick the boxes of commercial viability to avoid a situation where project initiatives crumble, as is the case with the bakery.

There is also a narrow focus on availing jobs and project funds to the communities as the cure to community development. While this is commendable, a holistic livelihood approach is needed to address all the communities' economic, social, and environmental concerns. Furthermore, there needs to be more public awareness of developmental initiatives in place. Only some members of the communities, for example, are aware of the community levy fund at their disposal from the UDP. Similarly, the actions for change to be implemented should be communicated. The community-based tourism organisations will allow for better communication mechanisms that will enable smooth flow of information.

The study notes suppressed public awareness, education, and capacitation in tourism within the communities. As Dragouni and Fouseki (2018) put it, there is a need for all tourism stakeholders to acquire a basic understanding of tourism development issues. This will bring about knowledge and enlighten the community on the process and role of tourism, its benefits, and its costs. Accordingly, the involvement of community-based organisations will help in the fair distribution of costs and benefits of tourism and will also comply with sustainability practices. Communities need to be educated, trained and skilled not only in tourism matters, but also in self-determination and self-reliance. Tourism development agencies, relevant government authorities, nature area management and related stakeholders also require capacitation to advance pertinent sustainable development agendas in rural communities.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to provide insights into the perceived influence of tourism on communities surrounding conservation areas and to provide recommendations to improve tourism's poverty reduction and development in rural communities. This study highlights the general indifference of the communities of Bonjaneni, Kokwane, and Engodini towards the impact of tourism because of the UDP on their livelihoods. Extreme poverty levels in the communities make the UDP community development efforts unnoticeable. Communities are not informed about tourism development and are less likely to be involved in tourism activities or solving tourism-related problems. Since tourism thrives when there is support and stakeholder buy-in from the communities, this must change for the better.

The study recommends setting up community-based tourism organisations within these communities that will foster advanced forms of community participation in tourism activities, which has been proven to bring about more socio-economic development to tourism communities. There is a need for strong local government coordination to facilitate tourism development that leads to a reduction in poverty by expanding business and employment opportunities, promoting participation, and pro-poor partnerships with the private sector. The study recommends that local tourism communities set the tone for the development agenda and be at the centre of development initiatives.

This research makes theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study adds to the literature debate on the limitations of rural community participation in tourism and the importance of community-based tourism organisations in rural places surrounding nature areas. The paper also highlights the limitations of conservation authorities in their community

development agenda. On the practice front, the paper puts forward ways in which the government, through the conservation authorities, may improve on their community engagement and development efforts. The study also advances recommendations on community-based tourism strategies and their alignment with sustainability practices. Understanding the perceptions of locals helps in the coining of pragmatic community-based tourism strategies influenced by the respective communities' circumstances, as such strategies are most likely to be acceptable, sustainable, and successful. Since this study is limited by its focus on one geographical area, future research can replicate this study in other rural areas surrounding conservation areas in the country (South Africa) and other similar low-income economies in the region.

## References

- Akamani, K., Wilson, P.I. & Hall, T.E. (2015). Barriers to Collaborative Forest Management and Implications for Building the Resilience of Forest-Dependent Communities in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 151, 11-21.
- Barkauskas, V., Barkauskienė, K. & Jasinskas, E. (2015). Analysis of Macro Environmental Factors Influencing the Development of Rural Tourism: Lithuanian Case. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 213,167-172.
- Bello, F.G., Lovelock, B. & Carr, N. (2018). Enhancing Community Participation in Tourism Planning Associated with Protected Areas in Developing Countries: Lessons from Malawi. *Tourism & Hospitality Research*, 18(3), 309-320.
- Chok, S., Macbeth, J. & Warren, C. (2007). Tourism As a Tool for Poverty Alleviation: A Critical Analysis of 'Pro-Poor Tourism' and Implications for Sustainability. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10(2-3), 144-165.
- Cornwall, A. 2008. Unpacking 'Participation': Models, Meanings and Practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283.
- DAC. (2020). *Ukhahlamba*. Available at <http://www.dac.gov.za/content/ukhahlamba> [Retrieved 7 February 2021].
- Dragouni, M. & Fouseki, K. (2018). Drivers of Community Participation in Heritage Tourism Planning: An Empirical Investigation. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 13(3), 237-256.
- Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife. (2018). *Fees & Charges 2018-2019* [Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Reservations Office, Cascades: Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). (2017). *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Requires Investing in Rural Areas*. FAO Agricultural Development Economics. Policy brief. Rome, Italy: FAO.
- Feng, N., Wei, F., Gu, D. & Zhang, K.H. (2018). Innovating Rural Tourism Targeting Poverty Alleviation Through a Multi-Industries Integration Network: The Case of Zhuanshui Village, Anhui Province, China. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 10(7)
- Ghaderi, Z., Shahabi, E., Fennell, D. & Khoshkam, M. (2022). Increasing Community Environmental Awareness, Participation in Conservation, and Livelihood Enhancement Through Tourism. *Local Environment*, 27(5), 605-621.
- Global CHE Network. (2019). *Building Community Ownership*. Available at [https://www.chenetwork.org/files\\_pdf/short\\_term/TA090\\_Short\\_Term\\_Trips\\_that\\_Build\\_Community\\_Ownership.pdf](https://www.chenetwork.org/files_pdf/short_term/TA090_Short_Term_Trips_that_Build_Community_Ownership.pdf) [Retrieved 12 June 2019].

- Goeldner, C.R. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (2012). *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*. 12th. New Jersey: Wiley.
- Gohori, O. & van der Merwe, P. (2022). Limitations to Community Participation in Tourism from Local People's Perspectives: Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. *Development Southern Africa*, 39(6), 841-855.
- Hatipoglu, B., Alvarez, M.D. & Ertuna, B. (2016). Barriers to Stakeholder Involvement in the Planning of Sustainable Tourism: The Case of the Thrace Region In Turkey. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 111(2), 306-317.
- Kala, D. & Bagri, S.C. (2018). Barriers to Local Community Participation in Tourism Development: Evidence from Mountainous State Uttarakhand, India. *Tourism (Zagreb)*, 66(3), 318-333.
- Kunasekaran, P., Mostafa Rasoolimanesh, S., Wang, M., Ragavan, N.A. & Hamid, Z.A. (2022). Enhancing Local Community Participation Towards Heritage Tourism in Taiping, Malaysia: Application of the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) Model. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 17(4), 465-484.
- Lachapelle, P.R. & Austin, E.K. (2014). Community Participation. In: Michalos, A.C., ed. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1073-1078.
- Ma, X.L., Yang, L., Wang, R. & Dai, M.L. (2022). Community Participation in Tourism Employment: A Phased Evolution Model. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, DOI 10.1177/10963480221095722
- Mendonca, A., Cunha, A. & Chakrabarti, R. (2014). *Natural Resources, Sustainability and Humanity: A Comprehensive View*. London: Springer.
- Mlungu, F. & Kwizera, A.S. (2020). Assessment of the Socio-Economic Impacts of Tourism on Three Rural Communities Neighbouring Addo Elephant National Park, Eastern Cape, South Africa. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 9(1), 1-19.
- Mnisi, P. & Ramoroka, T. (2020). Sustainable Community Development: A Review on the Socio-economic Status of Communities Practicing Ecotourism in South Africa. *International Journal of Economics and Finance Studies*, 12(2), 505-519.
- Mogomotsi, G.E.J., Mogomotsi, P.K., Gondo, R. & Madigele, T.J. (2018). Community Participation in Cultural Heritage and Environmental Policy Formulation in Botswana. *Chinese Journal of Population Resources & Environment*, 16(2), 171-189.
- Mowforth, M. & Munt, I. (2016). *Tourism and Sustainability: Development, Globalisation and New Tourism in the Third World*. 4<sup>th</sup>. Oxon: Routledge.
- Mubanga, K.H. & Umar, B.B. (2016). "Tourism is for Foreigners": Resident Views About Community Participation in Zambia's Tourist Capital. *Tourism Culture & Communication*, 16(1/2), 75-89.
- Ndabeni, L.L. (2019). Innovation and Dynamics of Rural Economic Development. In: Jacobs, P.T. (Ed). *Equitable Rural Socioeconomic Change*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 219-229.
- Núñez-Lara, E., Beltrán-Ramírez, V.H., Laffon-Leal, S.M. & Martínez-Fernández, C.N. (2022). An Indicator-Based Evaluation of Sustainability in a Coastal Region of

- Southern Mexico Transitioning from Traditional Activities to Tourism. *Environmental Development*, 42, DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2022.100700
- Paddison, B. & Biggins, R. (2017). Advocating Community Integrated Destination Marketing Planning in Heritage Destinations: The Case of York. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(9/10), 835-857.
- Palmer, N.J. & Chuamuangphan, N. (2018). Governance and Local Participation in Ecotourism: Community-Level Ecotourism Stakeholders in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 17(3), 320-337.
- Pretty, J.N. (1995). Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture. *World Development*, 23(8), 1247-1263.
- Raosoft. (2022). *Sample Size Calculator*. Available at <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html> [Retrieved 18 November 2022].
- Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International Tourism: Cultures and behaviour*. Maryland Heights, MI: Elsevier.
- Saayman, M. & Saayman, A. (2006). Creating a Framework to Assess the Economic Contribution of National Parks in South Africa: The Case Study of Addo Elephant National Park. *Tourism Economics*, 12(4), 619-633.
- Saayman, M., Saayman, A. & Ferreira, M. (2009). The Socio-Economic Impact of the Karoo National Park. *Koedoe*, 51(1), 148-158.
- Saayman, M., Rossouw, R. & Saayman, A. (2019). To What Extent Does Conservation Benefit Local Communities? In: Jacobs, P.T. (Ed). *Equitable Rural Socioeconomic Change*. Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council Publishers, 159-178.
- Scholtz, M. (2014). *A Critical Assessment of the Social Impacts of Tourism in Selected South African Communities*. Potchefstroom, South Africa: North-West University. (Theses).
- Scholtz, M. & Slabbert, E. (2018). A Remodelled Approach to Measuring the Social Impact of Tourism in a Developing Country. *Development Southern Africa*, 35(6), 743-759.
- Sharpley, P.R. & Telfer, D.J. (2015). *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues*. Bristol, Buffalo: Channel View Publications.
- Sunday, C.E. (2018). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Cape Town, South Africa: University of Western Cape.
- Tosun, C. (2007). Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries. In: Huybers, T. (Ed). *Tourism in Developing Countries*. Cheltenham, UK: Springer, 547-567.
- UN. (2017). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. New York, USA: UNESCO. 2020. *Maloti-Drakensberg Park: Description*. Available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/985> [Retrieved 7 February 2023].
- Van der Merwe, L., Saayman, M. & Saayman, A. (2009). The Socio-Economic Impact of the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK). *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences*, 3(1), 69-86.
- Vel'nisa Paimin, N.F., Modilih, S., Mogindol, S.H., Johnny, C. & Thamburaj, J.A. (2014). Community Participation and Barriers in Rural Tourism: A Case Study in Kiulu, Sabah. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 12(1), 1-7.



- Wang, W., Qiao, J., Cheng, J., Sun, Y. & He, W. (2019). Research on the Impact of Economic Development of Tourism Industry Based on Low Carbon Mode. *International Journal of Low Carbon Technologies*, 14(2), 241-246.
- Warouw, F.F., Langitan, F.W. & Alamsyah, A.T. (2018). Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism Model in Manado Coastal Area. In.: Institute of Physics Publishing.
- Wazimap. (2021). *Community Survey 2016*. Available at <https://wazimap.co.za/profiles/district-DC23-uthukela/> [Retrieved 2 November 2022].
- Yao, Y., Sun, J., Tian, Y., Zheng, C. & Liu, J. (2020). Alleviating Water Scarcity And Poverty In Drylands Through Telecouplings: Vegetable Trade And Tourism In Northwest China. *Science of the Total Environment*, 741, 140387
- Zhu, J., Yuan, X., Yuan, X., Liu, S., Guan, B., Sun, J. & Chen, H. (2021). Evaluating the Sustainability of Rural Complex Ecosystems During the Development of Traditional Farming Villages Into Tourism Destinations: A Diachronic Emergy Approach. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 86, 473-484.