

## Wildlife Use Versus Local Gain: The Reciprocity of Conservation and Wildlife Tourism in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

This study examined wildlife use versus local community gain in Protected Areas of Victoria Falls – Zimbabwe. Specifically, the study explored the reciprocity of conservation and wildlife tourism in Victoria Falls to determine the cost-benefit of Human Wild Coexistence within conservation goals and local communities' welfare paradigms. To fulfil the key objective, the study gathered data from 365 local residents, which was supplemented with interviews from key resource persons. The study found that host communities in PAs are substantially still marginalised, and this exclusionary approach has resulted in increased local residents' negative attitudes towards conservation tourism, making them (locals) to view tourism as insignificant in their local economy mainstreams. Nonetheless, conservation tourism has the potential to develop sustainably in PAs if there are transparency, accountability and renewed cooperation among all the tourism stakeholders who are involved in the decision-making processes. Concepts that provide new directions for public policy for inclusive participation, environmental justice and sustainability are highly contested in the study.

**Keywords:** Sustainable conservation tourism, cost-versus-gain, Human–wildlife coexistence, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

### Introduction

The viability of wildlife economy as the foundation for opportunities to unlock investments and stir local economies in Africa has become a bone of contention in the academic circles. It is now well established in academic literature and in broad international policy frameworks that wildlife conservation initiatives, Protected Areas (PAs) in particular, have become decisive in poverty alleviation agendas (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), 2008; Lockie, 2015; Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015a/b; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2019). Blackie and Sowa (2019) underscore that the wildlife conservation principle has an interesting position in conservation strategy, discourse, and practice. However, despite such realities, wildlife use and local community gain are generally believed to be asymmetrical, with such asymmetries leading to modern frictions and Human-Wildlife Conflicts (HWCs) between host communities, wild game and conservation agents. In any case, it must be noted that sustainable tourism development and conservation in PAs can only be achieved through balanced connotations, and wildlife receptivity to humanity (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019). The increased need for human development and security has ushered in a society in which wildlife is reduced by man to a resource that is merely exploited by local community, while such negative tendencies have reinforced strained relationships between communities in PAs, wildlife and conservation agents (Blackie & Sowa, 2019). As such, non-symbiotic wildlife use and local gains could be a point of reference when establishing Root-Causes Analysis (RCA) of modern HWCs.



In Zimbabwe, the concept of wildlife use versus local gain in PAs is firmly predetermined and shaped by a broad range and components of tourism and the environment (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019). The prevailing economic inconsistencies, escorted with involved systems have meant that the perception towards wildlife has swiftly faded in several ways to the point of human-wildlife hostility, and also between the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ views on wildlife and nature (Thomassen, Linnell & Skogen, 2011). Political volatility and irrational land reforms in certain wildlife areas have been ascribed to growth in HWCs (Bel, Murwira, Mukamuri, Czudek, Taylor & Grange, 2011). Such conflicts could be the point of polarisation within host communities, which arguably frustrate goals for conservation due to irrational dependence between people and wildlife. One may argue that, whenever there is no clear-cut reciprocity of conservation, wildlife tourism, and host communities, conflicts among host communities, wildlife and conservation agents are unavoidable.

Wildlife use versus local gain reflects imbalanced relationships in several communities within PAs. In Zimbabwe, the manner in which wildlife is used as an instrument to elevate the living standards for locals is observed as irrational to ecological balance by conservationists (Muboko & Murindagomo, 2014). Wildlife (wild game) is protected by conservation groups even after causing serious damages in communities is seen as a threat to host communities (Muboko & Murindagomo, 2014). Such human-wildlife contrasts result in HWCs. Davies (2016) places emphasis on the dire need to establish wildlife use versus local gain to ensure that host communities and conservation groups can reach a point of compromise in PAs. In a bid to strike a balance in the systems of HWC, Lockie (2015) argues that modern environmental concerns symbolise institutional products and discourses, meaning, human beings are products of the ecological changes, and they actively contribute to the ecosystem practices which result in environmental concerns.

Adams, Aveling, Brockington, Dickson, Elliott, Hutton, Roe, Vira and Wolmer (2004:1146) highlight that, “there is a sharp debate about the social impacts of conservation programs and the success of community-based approaches to conservation”. The leading challenge to conservation in Zimbabwe is arguably the insufficiency of innovative methods to protect the remarkable natural legacy, as well as wildlife use versus local gain (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019). There is a need to deliberate strategies which will not only ensure the long-term viability of species and ecosystems which are politically and economically acceptable to local communities and governments but strategies which will enforce human-wildlife symbiosis. In the wake of a depressed economic environment, the tourism sector, wildlife tourism in particular, has remained a bright light in Zimbabwe (Zibanai, 2018). Natural resources conservation including wildlife conservation represents a social system or mosaic whose survival is dependent on a balance of both anthropogenic and ecological sound decision making (Blackie & Sowa, 2019).

The success of any community-based wildlife conservation initiative would be contingent on ensuring that communities derive benefits from conservation and sustainable management of the resources (De Villiers, 2008). “A better understanding of people, conservationists and wildlife interact, influence, and shape one another allows to improve the ability to conserve the areas’ biodiversity while maximising benefits, or at least minimising costs, to the populations living in and around PAs, who are often amongst the most marginalised groups in society” (Holmes, 2013:72). Conservation success is often founded on local support for conservation which is intensively influenced by perceptions of the impacts that are experienced by local communities and opinions of management and governance (Bennetta & Dearden, 2014). Against this background, the current study examines wildlife use versus local community gain in Protected Areas of Victoria Falls – Zimbabwe.



## Literature review

Wildlife use and local community gain can be conferred in the economics of wildlife conservation in PAs. Arguably, sustainable HWC can be explained in a cost-benefit analysis on role players (host communities, wild game and conservation agencies) in the PAs. Imperatively, an important conservation success creates social wellbeing through economic growth and job creation (Child, Musengezi, Parent & Child, 2012). A significant fraction of wildlife in Zimbabwe is managed as a common pool resource by host communities (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019; Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), 2015). In Zimbabwe's PAs, several challenges threaten conservation efforts and human-wildlife symbiosis, thus hindering tourism in bringing about development that might improve the welfare of poor rural communities participating in wildlife conservation (Ntuli, 2015). Nonetheless, understanding the origin of HWC can perhaps help in establishing grounds to enforce human-wildlife symbiosis in PAs, which may spill over to sustainable coexistence.

Tourism and HWC are phenomena with a long tradition, which can be traced back to the dawn of humanity (Ariya & Momanyi, 2015; Benka, 2012). However, paradigm shifts in human development and transformation, as epitomised by acute resource base extinction, is a profound reason for the modernisation of HWCs across societies (Distefano, 2005). Madden and McQuinn (2015) stipulate that ongoing conflicts between people and wild animals in coexisting communities have become part of the problems impeding wildlife use and local gain. For a long time now, HWCs in Zimbabwe has become a long-standing challenge which all proponents of tourism development have to deal with, if they are to achieve wildlife welfare and host community gain, in HWC (Dhlamini, 2016).

Wildlife-based tourism, which has become a major tourism activity, is increasingly becoming a reliable economic activity in several PAs (Stone, 2013). Arguably, residents juxtaposed to PAs often disproportionately ensure the costs of conservation, but they may also gain from being part of the PAs community. The extent to which local communities benefit or incur costs as a result of residing adjacent to PAs is of interest to conservationists and policy-makers (Matseketsa, Chibememe, Muboko, Gandiwa & Takarinda, 2018). According to Wolmer (2004), wildlife and conservation tourism results in the enhanced conservation of the natural resource base, which also increases revenue generation by non-consumptive means for the local residents, and at the regional and national level. Tourism and recreation can also provide highly valued PA benefits. PAs receive millions of annual visitors, and, for some PAs, the fees that are levied for entry and participating in recreational activities tend to generate substantial revenues (Peterson & Franks, 2005).

Many PAs attract tourists (McCool & Spenceley, 2014), with the demand for wildlife tourism coming from a wide range of visitors, both domestic and foreign (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2010). The above is typically considered to subsidy local residents because it results in revenues that can serve to ignite the local economies (Mbaiwa, 2008). If PAs are well-managed, conservation tourism can be used to improve the standards of living for host communities concerned, as it serves to attract tourists, who, in visiting the area, tend to spend and enhance the host economies. For instance, the yearly attraction of the Point Pelee National Park in Canada is over 200 000 visitors and birdwatchers, from which the country raises millions of dollars of additional revenue into the local economy (Dudley & Stolton, 2009). In Caprivi Game Park, Namibia, areas around the national park are fully dependent on the jobs that are created by wildlife conservation reserves and tourism (Collomb, 2009). Such positive contributions are imperative for human development, and, therefore, sustainable conservation tourism must be a priority in areas with game nature reserves (Mbaiwa, 2008).



Nonetheless, tourism was seen to encourage a mutual tolerance between man and wild animal (Madden, 2008). The pre-colonial communities and wildlife were characterised by a high degree of tolerance and by the minimal manifestation of tension (Distefano, 2005). Kideghesho (2006) attributes the minimisation of conflict in precolonial traditional societies to four factors. Firstly, the traditional rules decreed, and rules that governed the sustainable utilisation of wildlife were socially tolerable to all society members. Secondly, people tended, by and large, to be loyal to the local institutions that enforced such guiding principles. Thirdly, resource supplies were high, more than the demand was, which precipitated competition. Lastly, low human population levels and substandard technology had comparatively limited effects on the wildlife populations and habitats in discussion. The advent of novel structures of management and institutions under the colonial systems arguably brought an end to the phase (Ekdahl, 2012; Hockings, 2007). A drastic shift from traditional to modern economies, a massive revolution in technology, a diurnal radical change in the climate, and a change in land use are, arguably, among the factors marking the transition from coexistence to conflict. The impact was further manifested in the field of tourism, in various ways (Hockings, 2007).

Quite obvious, conflicts among residents, conservation agents and wild animals are the key hindrances to efficient wildlife use and local community gain (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2017; Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019). HWCs brings about adverse victim-related consequences for tourism in Zimbabwe. These conflicts which occur between people and wildlife take three main forms. First, wild animals cause damage to humans, crops, and livestock (Maponga, 2016). The main cause of such damage is the elephants that normally raid the crops like maize, and which sometimes injure or kill people (Mzembi, 2016). In some parts of the country (Zimbabwe), the crop damage caused by wildlife is observed as a major problem facing the farmers, as conservation and development efforts are undermined and threatened (Gratwicke & Stapelkamp, 2006). In Zimbabwean's Zambezi Heartland, elephants are estimated to be accountable for up to three-quarters of all crops damaged wild game (Maponga, 2016). However, other 'problem animals' include lions, and baboons (Madden, 2008). The main problem is wild animals prevailing in the area, including the habitual crop raiders (i.e. elephant and buffalo), the livestock predators (i.e. lion, leopard, hyena, and jackal) and the potential man-eaters (i.e. lion) (ZTA, 2015). Secondly, although it is unlawful to kill the wild game, people sometimes do so, in some cases to protect themselves or their crops, and, in other cases, for food, and to sell the meat (Gratwicke & Stapelkamp, 2006). Thirdly, there are conflicts over land use, with the crops, the livestock, and the wild animals competing for land use of the district's limited land resources (Conyers, 2002).

Reciprocally supportive relations between the host communities and the PAs in proximity are crucial to the long-term accomplishment of management and conservation efforts. However, the literature has demonstrated that HWCs have destroyed the global ecology, disintegrated societies, divided community members and interest groups on varying interests and priorities in relation to conservation, resulted in the extinction of certain species, and, most importantly, separated people and wildlife from sharing their traditional habitat. Mudimba and Tichaawa (2019) and Conyers (2002) maintain that, in contemporary ages, successful conservation agencies have singled out HWCs as a substantial danger to the realization of African Conservation Initiatives (ACIs). Understandably, where wildlife is seen as a threat not only to livelihoods but also to life and limb, the local communities may be hostile towards conservation, complicating the situation for the authorities (Gratwicke & Stapelkamp, 2006).

The need to tie biodiversity conservation to tourism and human well-being has, arguably, exposed many destinations to trying to eradicate HWCs. This is a result of an overlooked fact: wildlife conservation can contradict with the desire for human well-being,



and, consequently, tourism (Moyana, 2014). In addition, the interaction between people and wild animals are characteristically intricate, encompassing a range of stakeholders in tourism stakeholders (McCool & Spenceley, 2014). The natural complexity of the situation pertaining to HWCs, the mass of role-players involved, and the history, social, and political roots of the conflict all subsidize to such challenges (Mawonde, 2018). As a result, HWCs, in their totality, are frequently neither completely comprehended nor valued, even by those who are next to the matter, not to mention the individuals and institutes who might, from a distance, be able to inspire the programmes aimed at addressing the conflict, but who do not have to deal with the conflict on a daily basis (Moyana, 2014). In Zimbabwe, human beings and wild animals usually live in close vicinity, and wide-ranging wild game does not necessarily stay inside the PAs (Gratwicke & Stapelkamp, 2006). As such, wildlife protectionists are entitled to forge a symbiotic solution for solving the challenge of coexistence (Thomassen et al., 2011).

### **Study site and methodology**

Victoria Falls was selected as the PAs representative study site due to two principal domains - its wildlife economic power in Zimbabwe, and for methodological reasons. The Countrymeters (2015) estimated the population of Victoria Falls to be at 35 761. Victoria Falls is a town which forms part of the Matabeleland province, in the western part of Zimbabwe, along the southern bank of the Zambezi River (ZTA, 2015). The falls represent the largest single curtain of falling water in the world, and they are complemented with exquisite views of the rain forest which has a never ending spray of the falls (Gratwicke & Stapelkamp, 2006). The town boasts a unique ecosystem – offering a paradise to both flora and fauna lovers. Victoria Falls is particularly home to a range of wildlife. The town contains various nature reserves - making it a community for both people and wildlife (ZTA, 2015). On that note, Zibanai (2018) underscores that HWC should offer the basis for economic growth to improve host community livelihood in PAs. However, such coexistence has tended to be relatively subjective due to local community's inability to satisfactorily gain from HWC. For a long time now, the imbalances in wildlife use versus local gain in Zimbabwe's PAs justifies the long-standing HWCs in Zimbabwean societies (Mzembi, 2016). Mudimba and Tichaawa (2019) argue that, in Zimbabwe's PAs, wildlife economy usually benefits, leaving the majority in discontent state.

In order to achieve the study objectives, a questionnaire procedure was implemented to collect the required data from the local residents. A mixed-method technique was utilised to collect data to generate objective results. Interviews were specifically adopted as “they enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001:01). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to probe certain key information from the specific local authority representatives and conservation groups. These key informants consisted of the game rangers falling under the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA), the City Council (CC), the ZTA representatives, and the national park managers.

In the summer of 2019, a group of trained fieldworkers used a simple random sampling method to gather data using a questionnaire survey. A total of 365 household adult representatives were targeted in Victoria Falls. Using a purposive sampling procedure, face-to-face interviews were also carried out with 10 key resource personnel. The questionnaires were pretested to ensure their suitability and trustworthiness as an instrument for data collection. To ensure content validity, the questionnaires used were in line with preceding works of several scholarly experts (Distefano, 2005; Taylor, 2009; Sterba, 2012; Esmail, 2014), who had piloted parallel studies elsewhere, on target respondents whose profiles were narrowly similar. The key variables in the survey were the socio-demographic profile, and their cognisance of, the respondents towards wildlife use versus local gain in the reciprocity of conservation and



wildlife tourism in their community. According to key informants, the main variables stood out as the possible solutions to existing imbalances with regards to wildlife use and local gains in Victoria Falls. The thematic presentation was employed on qualitative data analysis, while the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to draw the frequencies, and to make extrapolations, from the household survey. The questionnaire survey showed that males respondents (63%) dominated females (37.0%), with an average age of 35 years. Of the respondents, 13% have indicated to have completed primary schooling, while 10.2% were in possession of a certificate or diploma. The economic rank of the majority of the respondents was designated as below general level. Approximately 58.8% of the respondents indicated that tourism is not important in their areas despite the majority (37.3%) showing willingness to coexist with wildlife in PAs and conservation zones.

## Results and discussions

### *The importance of wildlife to tourism in Victoria Falls*

To determine the sustainability of wildlife and conservation tourism in HWC, the importance of wildlife to tourism in Victoria Falls was examined. Generally, the trend of reciprocity of HWC in PAs can be examined with the extent to which locals gain from coexistence (Distefano, 2005). Research findings show that most respondents (58.8%) viewed wildlife as not being important to tourism, while 37.8% of participants noting that wildlife's contribution to tourism was average. Only 3.3% of the respondents indicated that wildlife was important to tourism. The outcome of the majority (58.8%) of the respondents denouncing the significance of wildlife to tourism was generally surprising. In Africa, wildlife watching contribute a massive 80% of the total yearly sales of trips to Africa, and the number of sales is believed to be greatly increasing (World Tourism Organisation (WTO), 2014). Tourism is the largest employer in Victoria Falls, with wildlife and conservation tourism contributing more than half of the jobs emanating from the tourism industry (Mzembi, 2016).

Such a contrary finding could be a result of a range of issues. In human-wildlife coexisting communities, people tend to view wildlife as important only if wild animals do not present an adverse impact on anthropogenic activities (Madden, 2008). In Zimbabwe, rarely a day passes without a case being reported of wild animal(s) attacking people or livestock, disturbing the peaceful HWC (Mawonde, 2018). The above alone could, in the residents' opinions, discount the significance of wildlife to tourism. In addition, the above could also reflect the passive local residents' participation in tourism. When the importance of people's participation is overlooked in wildlife programmes, decision-making and ecological planning, those concerned tend to develop a negative attitude towards wildlife (Matseketsa et al., 2018). Mills (2000) affirms that harbouring a negative attitude towards wildlife results in intolerance, which disqualifies the significance of wildlife as being key to tourism, especially in societies where the ordinary person tends to lack awareness of the significance of wildlife to tourism (Madden & McQuinn, 2015). The best strategy for empowering the local residents is through valuing their input into all conservation activities taking place in any given community (Distefano, 2005).

The neutral respondents (37.8%) could imply local residents' inability to understand the manner in which they can gain from PAs and conservation zones. Again, this is a gap between the local residents and conservation tourism. HWC has a history that is as old as human civilisation, yet the modern resistance to wildlife in certain societies is a suggestion of little or no effort being used to involve people in the tourism and wildlife structures (Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 2009a). Most contemporary societies tend to oppose wildlife in PAs as they don't understand how they could benefit from HWC (Madden & McQuinn, 2015). Working in partnership with the local government, conservation representatives and,



most importantly, the communities concerned, should help to create human awareness and tolerance towards wildlife, because a tolerant group of local residents can view wildlife as being important both to tourism and to their own lives (Gandiwa, 2012). The least respondents (3.3%) indicating the importance of wildlife to tourism is perhaps a testament of levels of awareness, attitude and perception through which very few people appreciate wildlife as a crucial tourism component. When wildlife presents a problem to the host communities, human beings tend to ignore its economic contribution to their lives and tend to fail to see its significance in relation to tourism economics (Madden, 2008). An interdisciplinary approach must, therefore, be adopted, with it demonstrating the usefulness of combining ecological and social data to highlight conservation priorities in wildlife conservation, and of framing wildlife conservation efforts in a social-ecological context in PAs.

### ***The willingness of residents to share the community with wildlife***

The majority (86.5%) of respondents indicated that they are willing to continue sharing the community with wildlife. Such results are quite puzzling, especially given the fact that the majority (58.8%) of the respondents indicated that wildlife was not important to tourism in their area. Anyhow, such a result serves to support a range of scholarly claims. In tourism perspectives, the economic value of wildlife in Africa is outstanding (Conyers, 2002; Rosell & Llimona, 2012). The core value of wild animals, and their varied contributions to sustainable development and human well-being, including its environmental, socio-economic, scientific, learning, cultural, and aesthetic aspects, are diverse, with such core values being equally important to the local economy (WTO, 2014). The economic value of tourism can be explained in terms of the economic impacts of tourism on the host community. The impacts are induced through tourism expenditures, job creation, the positive and negative external influences, tax revenues and other public charges (entrance fees), the foreign exchange earnings, and the multiplier effects in its entirety (Rogerson & Visser, 2011; WTO, 2014).

However, the minority (13.5%) indicated to be unwilling to share the community with wildlife. The above could suggest the implications of how inequality, in terms of the opportunity distribution of employment in the tourism sector, has divided the people's perceptions in certain human-wildlife coexisting societies. Addition, the unwillingness of community members to share the environment with wild game could be due to the reactive actions taken by residents following the damages caused on the environmental, economic and social structures by wildlife activities (Western, Waithaka & Kamanga, 2015). WTO (2014) proclaims that, when wildlife activities are in direct conflict with anthropogenic activities, host communities are likely to disapprove HWC. In many parts of Africa, wildlife is no longer preferred as a community companion, as it threatens the ecological integrity of entire ecosystems, including their biodiversity and ecosystem functions, especially when human happiness is compromised by inroads on the systems (Rogerson & Visser, 2011). When people suffer various serious implications HWC, they cease to tolerate the presence of wildlife, and neither do they view wildlife as a fundamental economic tourism driver (Taylor & Knight, 2003; Gandiwa, 2012).

### ***The extent to which local residents are involved in conservation tourism in PAs***

The extent to which host communities are involved in conservation tourism was investigated to generate an idea of the extent to which such communities could be committed to support, and benefit from conservation tourism, in their localities. Browne-Núñez and Jonker (2008) declare that most African destinations are riddled with exclusionary approaches that do not consider involving the local people in conservation activities, hence the above could be a significant reason for the various unsuccessful attempts made in terms of conservation tourism



efforts on the continent. The results showed that the majority (71.7%) of the respondents stated that the community was passively involved, followed by those who indicated that the community was actively involved (24.6%), in tourism. The smallest percentage of respondents (3.7%) pointed out that the community was involved in a laissez-faire manner.

With the majority (71.7%) of the respondents indicating that they were passively involved in tourism in Victoria Falls, such a result supports a hypothetical perception held by several scholars in relation to conservation tourism, in terms of the local peoples' relationships in both the underdeveloped and the developing contexts. Conyers (2002) holds that the administration of conservation tourism has become so political that tourism has become subservient to the taking of politically authoritative decisions, which has served to denature the local communities' initiatives. Ekdahl (2012) concedes that the above-mentioned kind of stigmatisation is self-explanatory as to why several communities are in constant conflict with the conservation agents. In Zimbabwe, Katongomara (2018) underscores that the key participants in wildlife conservation, policy formulation, and decision-making are a privileged few, who endorse everything in from a political perspective. In Kenya, the main cause of HWCs is embedded in the extremely reduced role that the local people are afforded in conservation tourism (MacFie, 2003). Communities need to be actively engaged through empowering people and strengthening their voices, rights and ownership/stewardship over the wildlife (Madden, 2008). A passively involved community is an enemy of wildlife-conservation-tourism, whereas a duly involved community is subservient to conservation tourism goals (Collomb, 2009).

The actively involved local residents, who indicated the second-most noted type of involvement, constituted 24.6% of the respondents' total amount. As expected, research findings show that number of involved people was way less than was the percentage of those involved, which is very characteristic of tourism in many underdeveloped and developing destinations. Despite the considerable fraction who indicated being involved in tourism in Victoria Falls (24.6%), Conyers (2002) argues that tourism in the PAs is extremely centralised in Zimbabwe, with the rural masses being excluded from various means of participation in tourism. Even if involvement takes in half the population, the condition would not be ideal, because it would simply mean that the other half is not partaking (Metcalf, 2005). However, local community involvement in wildlife management and conservation in PAs could be interpreted and practised in several different ways. Involvement has increasingly been seen as an instrument for realizing the voluntary compliance of people within PA schemes, and as not more than a public relations exercise, in which the local people have become passive actors in wildlife management (Mackenzie, 2012). Local residents' involvement must be viewed and regarded as a right, not just a way by which by project related goals can be achieved. Martin (2005) underscores that the participation process must comprise interdisciplinary processes which aim to implement different perspectives through structured learning methodologies, as well as problem-solving techniques. Holding such a stance could reduce the negative perceptions among the affected communities, thus enriching people's minds in relation to the goals of sustainable conservation tourism in Zimbabwe.

The smallest percentage (3.7%) of respondents indicated their involvement as being not sure, amounting to a neutral stance. When the local residents' involvement is either neutral or below average, the situation is not ideal for representing the voice of the host communities (Bennetta & Dearden, 2014; Wolmer, 2004; Moyo & Tichaawa, 2017). The stakeholders in the prototypes of the national and local government, the conservation agencies and other groups committed to the effective and considerate management of the PAs must advance the host communities' involvement to garner full support from the local coexisting communities (Marzano & Dandy, 2012).





### ***Residents' perceived costs and gains of sharing the community with wildlife***

Research outcomes have frequently suggested that the mitigations to HWCs often conceal a diversity of underlying problems linked to diverse epistemologies, history, and identity variances which are beyond the competencies of natural scientists to resolve (Jones *et al.*, 2018). From a tourism economy perspective, the respondents in Victoria Falls were probed for their views on the cost-benefit aspect in relation to HWC. The following open-ended question was posed to the respondents surveyed in the current study, so as to determine the impacts of living with wildlife: “In your opinion, how can living with wild animals be either costly or beneficial”? Using the thematic technique, the responses were regarded, for purposes of triangulation, in the current study. Firstly, the residents were requested to indicate how HWC was costly to their lives and economies.

Host communities pay for wildlife conservation through the wildlife-induced costs, while the benefits they collect are marginal (Benka, 2012). According to Kideghesho (2006), this is so because local residents barely offset the direct wildlife-induced costs, nor compete with returns from alternate, yet, ecologically destructive land uses. Considerable HWC benefits are realised by the other stakeholders who do not necessarily bear the costs of living with wildlife (Baldus, 2004). In relation to the costs that are associated with sharing the community with wildlife in Victoria Falls, a community leader echoed that:

Wild animals (lions) have become a menace to our societies. They prey on our goats and cattle. We people have also lost the freedom to walk at night. It would even make sense to eliminate them from the mainstreams of the local economy if they continue disturbing our peace.

Another respondent, a tour guide stated:

Elephants and buffalos have turned from being a component of tourism attraction to a hazard. They are our greatest enemies, especially when they invade our crop fields, they just expose us to untold poverty.

A respondent described the nuisance behaviours of baboons thus: “they are a nuisance, wild animals, to associate with. Whenever seen carrying bread or food in your hand, they come after you”. The cost implications from wildlife conservation tourism and HWC require a multipronged approach for positive lasting impacts. HWC and associated HWCs are a socio-political problem (Lindsay *et al.*, 2017). To start with, the current national policy on compensation for HWCs in Zimbabwe does not exist, and the government believes that the levels at which compensation is required is just too much (ZTA, 2015). Without either compensation schemes or a broad regulatory framework, Maponga (2016) suggests the need to impose a strong policy to safeguard human interests on the conservation spectra. Holmes (2013) detected the necessity to assimilate the management of HWCs into the widened scope of the objectives of conservation tourism, rather than focussing on only indirectly connected policies from the viewpoint of enabling efficient, and more broadly beneficial towards the solutions. Policies on natural resources need review so as to reduce the knock-off effects which intensify existing conflicts while focussing on the prospects to implement a win all solutions to minimise the implications of such problems through the management of HWCs integration. Furthermore, units of institutional and decision-making made on policies affecting hosting communities in Pas must be reviewed to ensure that both wildlife and human welfare is catered for. According to Madden and McQuinn (2015), in spite of the difficulties encountered in dealing with HWCs, and with the cost complications thereof, there is a need for reforms at



national levels which permeates economic profits form ecotourism and wildlife-based enterprises for rural masses.

The benefits which the host communities accrue in relation to HWC and tourism carry much weight economically in African societies. According to Muboko and Murindagomo (2014), conservation tourism has remained a powerful means of attracting foreign tourists in return for jobs being made available to the locals. Despite the damage that they can cause for their host communities, the presence of wildlife promotes job creation for several communities in the southern hemisphere (Ekdahl, 2012). In light of the above accreditation of conservation tourism benefits, the current study sought to ascertain the benefits accrued by the human–wildlife coexisting host communities in the study area. Using an open-ended question, the residents were probed of their views regarding the perceived benefits accrued by living with wildlife in one’s community. A community member noted:

Wild animals are the reason why settlement expansion is constant in Victoria Falls. Wildlife in the town attracts tourists from all over the world, and local businesses gain support from tourists who form [the] business customer base.

Another community member said: “Conservation areas or PAs provide opportunities for locals. In this regard, wildlife becomes a very crucial component of the Victoria Falls economy.”

The success of conservation tourism lies in the manner in which the benefits of the niche industry are sustainably utilised to the benefit of the local citizenry. Approximately 1.1 billion people across the globe rely on PAs for their survival, with the PAs income providing a substantial portion of the total household income (Newmark & Hough, 2000). Ntuli (2015) holds that the effects of tourism are positive when the citizens who own resources used in tourism development are afforded benefits in the name of tourism in their locality. However, many African societies that are privileged with the presence of wildlife do not maximise the benefits of HWC. The lack of supportive national institutions clearly defined and simple roles undermine any opportunity success among residents in Zimbabwe’s human-wildlife coexisting communities (Mucheru, 2017). Technically feasible and socially appropriate options need the support of the national policy for the gleaning of host communities’ benefits in their respective areas (Collomb, 2009). The tourism policy in Zimbabwe must ensure that the benefits accrued from conservation tourism must be fairly trickled down to the residents in the host communities (Paris, 2006). The policy could outline the local employment aspects, how to deal with wildlife to minimise the costs of problem animals and work on any other negative elements that could turn existing gains into costs.

### **Implications**

The implications of the study are diverse. Firstly, the study seeks to promote reciprocal HWC for sustainable tourism development in the human–wildlife coexisting communities in Zimbabwe. The most visible issue is the exclusionary effect of the host community from planning for local tourism development and conservation. The weakest link between the tourism-governing bodies and communities in Southern Africa is manifested in planning activities that the national bodies design without involving the locals (Rogerson & Visser, 2011; Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2017). When locals are not involved in the planning for tourism, they are likely to oppose the set tourism goals, thus hampering the sustainable development of tourism at any given destination. In Zimbabwe, a wide gap exists between conservation authorities and the locals, in terms of planning for the future of conservation tourism in the PAs (Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2019). The ZTA must organise the future of conservation tourism in consultation with the local communities. Participatory planning should balance the economic,



environmental and social benefits of conservation tourism, especially in societies where the majority do not benefit from conservation activities. A holistic planning process should be undertaken in terms of a decentralised approach involving and benefiting the local citizenry towards sustainable tourism development.

In terms of the strategy, the authority–local community nexus participation must be continuum-based in terms of the involvement level in influencing the processes of decision-making with regards to conservation tourism programmes and their implementation. This submits that participatory management must be institutionalised so as to counteract the general belief that several PAs are likely to flop unless the local residents are directly and actively involved in conservation effort approaches to merge differences between the host communities' and the PAs' needs. In most cases, wildlife conservation in Zimbabwe must be a reflection of a win-win relationship consisting of local resident participation and benefits. Given that wildlife affects the lives of locals through both the damage it causes to crops and the benefits related to it (Gandiwa, 2012), the benefits granted to communities can be emphasised through their involvement and participation in tourism activities. The strategy could be strengthened through sound coordination between the local and national government to further promote and strengthen coexisting willingness in HWC (Tichaawa & Moyo, 2019). Above would, further, call for partnerships among the aforementioned role-players, in such a manner as to provide economic benefits to the communities, to draw and retain the tourists, as well as to encourage entrepreneurial conservation tourism enterprises.

The ZPWMA must promote Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) that involve the local voices in areas of land-use planning, preventative management measures, and the raising of awareness through the educating of locals regarding the benefits of conservation tourism. Through education (ecotourism education) and other means of spreading awareness in dealing with conservation costs, it is critical that the ZPWMA understand the behaviours of the local people towards conservation plans for wildlife class of High Conservation Value (HCV) to be successful. The implications drawn from emerging interdisciplinary approaches must encourage collaboration to develop a relatively integrated approach towards understanding human–wildlife relations.

The local community marginalisation must be well addressed and benefits must be transparently shared across members of host communities. To make benefits of tourism accessible to the affected stakeholders, there is a necessity to improve above the language of multipliers, by means of identifying the specific benefits for such communities (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2019). If claims are made about tourism, the local communities must facilitate their access to the markets of tourism through building on and complementing, the already prevailing strategies of livelihoods. The above must be done with an eye to equity, hence there is a prerequisite to identify which poor local residents have benefited from conservation tourism, and how much did they benefit. The above would need reliable accountancy, unlike mere economics, to report on the exact poverty-related effects of conservation tourism initiatives that are believed to contribute to poverty reduction. The sharing of benefits with the poor by those who benefit therefrom would help to generate interest in such tourism, and behaving according to the principle of equity would make conservation and wildlife important to all members of the community. The above would, further, cultivate a sense of community well-being and indigeneity.

## Conclusions

The present research study examined wildlife use versus local gain by exploring the reciprocity of conservation and wildlife tourism in Zimbabwe. The universal aim of the study was to advocate for an atmosphere which is permissible to local community gains and interests in



HWC, depriving costs associated with HWCs, while promoting wildlife welfare. Inclusively, this seeks to accumulate sustainable development in wildlife and conservation tourism. Sustainable conservation tourism could be achieved when the proponents of conservation successfully forge an alliance between human goals and wildlife welfare. The WTO (2014) proclaims that the fundamental worth of wildlife and its several influences to viable development and human well-being in the frames of ecology, genetics, society, economics, science, education, culture, recreation, and aesthetics – are diverse, and possibly more than if not equally important as, the economic worth involved. Nonetheless, Metcalfe (2005) highlights that the distribution of public benefits to individuals remains a key challenge facing the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe. Such difficulties can be relatively addressed through enforcing and ensuring the effective formulation and implementation of decentralised conservation tourism management strategies and policies. Finally, local residents may virtually require to tolerate wildlife, but it is much prudent for the tourism policy to ensure that the gains generated in PAs are, by any means, within host communities' reach.

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