

Prospects and Challenges of Community-Based Tourism as a Livelihood Diversification Strategy at Sehlabathebe National Park in Lesotho

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to examine the prospects and challenges of community based tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy for people living adjacent to the Sehlabathebe National Park in Lesotho. The main objective was to explore how rural communities living close to the World Heritage Site shift and diversify their livelihoods from farm to non-farm activities in order to sustain their livelihoods. This study adopted a mixed method approach. Data was collected through surveys (286) and in-depth key informant interviews (11). The results show that local communities support the use of tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy to provide off-farm entrepreneurial opportunities. The greatest challenge is that local communities are often pushed into marginal lands, with harsh climatic conditions resulting in the disruption of local fabric and their economies. The study concludes that the establishment of Sehlabathebe National Park has not significantly improved the status quo of the community. Therefore, local communities should be given opportunities to sell their products and services to tourists and work in partnership with park authorities in conserving the park resources. The paper contributes to the current discourses on the use of community based tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy in rural areas.

Keywords: Tourism, livelihoods, diversification, participation, World Heritage Site

Introduction

The ability for protected areas to improve the livelihood of adjoining communities remains a source of increasing controversy (Arowosafe & Emmanuel, 2017). Communities living next to the park face a number of challenges. For instance, Abachebsa (2017) asserts that the establishment of national parks makes the livelihoods and well-being of communities more vulnerable especially when the park management adopts a protectionist strategy which further perpetuates poverty. The exclusion of local communities from the management of the park makes the implementation of conservation policies difficult. Protected areas are perceived globally as threats to livelihoods, but on the other hand, tourism revenues generated by the protected areas have the potential to enhance livelihoods (Moshi, 2016; Wang, Liu, Kozak, Jin & Innes, 2018). The major challenge facing the management of parks is the increasing human population living close to national parks. Hence, population growth can lead to overexploitation, degradation of resources and loss of habitats due to the demand for agricultural land, land for grazing and an increase in human settlement.

The locals depend almost entirely on the park resources for food and income. Since there are limited alternative forms of livelihood near the park (Wuleka, Ernest & Oscar, 2013), due to poverty human encroachment into the park can lead to a number of problems (Welteji & Zerihun, 2018). The current provisions on the establishment of a World Heritage Site do not provide for a comprehensive participatory model to improve the quality of life for local communities. The denial of local communities to benefit from their heritage site is a violation of indigenous human rights and incompatible with UNESCO'S vision (Disko, Tugendhat & Garcia-Alix, 2014; Vargas, 2018). Communities are often alienated, marginalised and the power of choosing what is valuable and worth conserving has been ceded to heritage authorities stationed (Haanpaa, Puolamaki & Karhunen, 2018). Hence, there is a feeling amongst communities that they are exposed to the 'zoo syndrome,' which disassociate them from their own heritage. The purpose of this article is to examine the prospects and challenges of community-based tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy for people living adjacent to the Sehlabathebe National Park in Lesotho. The main objectives are; to explore how rural communities living close to the World Heritage Site shift and diversity their livelihoods from farm to non-farm activities in order to sustain their livelihoods; to assess the prospects and benefits to the community resulting from Sehlabathebe National Park as World Heritage site; to discuss the challenges faced by the local people in using Sehlabathebe National Park to sustain their livelihoods; to examine the community's perceptions and expectations of Sehlabathebe National Park as a World Heritage Site. This paper will discuss the theoretical framework, the literature review and the methodology. The findings will be presented and discussed followed by the implications and conclusion.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framing of this paper is based on the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Weber's Theory of Substantive and Formal Rationality (WTSFR). The use of SET emanates from the need to examine meanings and machinations associated with distinct group interactions. For instance, the SET was developed by Emerson (1962) and is concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation and thus provides a framework for understanding tourism relationships, interactions and transactions (Moyle, Croy & Weiler, 2010). Tourism scholars have adopted SET to frame a two-way interaction between tourists and hosts given its emphasis on sociality and communication (Boley & McGehee, 2014). SET has also been used to examine the perception of local communities on tourism development. Under such circumstances, residents are inclined to interact with tourists when they perceive that the benefits of tourism outweigh its costs (Choi & Murray, 2010). Therefore, residents are more likely to support tourism development in their local area if its perceived benefit to the community. Consequently, SET places emphasis on the explanation emanating from the relationships and equate these to financial transactions. Recently there has been some criticism of SET's failure to justify the factors influencing local community's perceptions which means SET alone cannot fully explain the antecedents that shape residents' perceptions. Based on the limitations of SET, this paper applied Weber's theory of substantive and formal rationality (WTSFR) in order to justify and conceptualize the direct and indirect effects of influencing factors on residents' perceptions and support for tourism development (Choguill, 1996). WTSFR suggests that 'matter-of-fact calculations' allow individuals to accomplish their goals efficiently (Weber, 1978). Thus, rationality can be seen in two ways namely; formally and substantively. On one hand, formalization can render several contradictions visible through a mechanical form of simplification (Faure, 2020). Thus, formal calculation focuses on the processes, not the results.

Therefore, the emphasis is placed on the decisions made instead of how the results can be achieved. Formal rationality exists in bureaucratic and capitalist economy where large-scale structures exist. For instance, the existence of laws, regulations and structures determine the means to ends. On the other hand, substantive rationality is concerned with clusters of values that influence people in their daily lives and how their choice of means to ends. The means to ends are determined by a set of human values. The rationality of action is based on consistency of structure and its elements pointing to one direction without anyone counteracting another. In this case, there will be consistency in its structure which is aided by formalisation.

Literature review

Preserving the integrity of both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage while making it available to visitors is a challenge (Cadar, 2014). Some of the major challenges in WHS management include unequal benefit sharing, dispossession of historic sites and forced displacement (Yang, Xue & Jones, 2019). Faced with such a challenge, young people in the rural areas migrate to towns and cities thereby threatening the physical fabric with decay and the disruption of intergenerational knowledge and traditions transmission. Migration of the younger generation also leaves behind the aged people leading to the decline of human resources in the rural areas. Challenges faced by locals in underperforming heritage destinations include lack of leadership and strategic direction for tourism development (Nkwanyana, Ezeuduji & Nzama, 2016). There has been limited involvement of previously disadvantaged individuals in tourism in support of the pro-poor development. The local authorities at times ensure that particular people or events are de-emphasized coupled with serious governance problems. In addition, governments have a relative lack of policy coordination between tourism development and rural development as lower priority is given to less densely populated areas (Viljoen & Henama, 2017).

National Parks in some cases have contributed to poverty as they impose park access restrictions, disrupt local cultures and economies and increase human-wildlife conflict. Residents are often pushed into marginal lands, with harsh climatic conditions and diseases. Yet their traditional rites and livelihood rely on natural resources in the park (Arowosafe & Emmanuel, 2017). Although there may be some form of compensation for the loss of domestic animals and crops, some communities have argued that it is not adequate (Manwa, 2012). This further hinders the economic benefits from permeating down to communities. In most cases, members of the community with adequate skills and awareness will continue to get more benefits whilst the rest remain in poverty (Abachebsa, 2017; Chiutsi, 2014; Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2014; Wuleka et al., 2013). The other contributing factor is that the small and scattered populations do not support a sufficient scale of local economies to allow diversification into other economic activities to reduce pressure on natural resources (Moshi, 2016). The locals fail to support their household subsistence needs because of land scarcity, increased population and low agricultural yields (Edwin, 2017). When locals are left with limited pieces of land, they are unable to diversify into other economic activities. Yet many studies have revealed that protected areas can help in poverty eradication through empowerment. Besides, locals will still regard poaching of park resources as the only livelihood alternative to address their household needs (Edwin, 2017; Munien, 2016). Sometimes the local authorities are unable to articulate the opportunities and policy imperatives thereby depriving the local community of the opportunity to improve their lives in the tourism industry. For instance, Amboseli National Park in Kenya produces a significant amount of revenue, but the local residents continue to languish in poverty (Ondicho, 2017).

Scholars such as Kausar and Nishikawa (2010) and Rossler (2012) have highlighted the potential of WHS to bring benefits to the rural poor. Nevertheless, there is a serious oversight on the UNESCO Convention of 1972 which excludes local communities in the planning and control of WHS. Consequently, WHSs has been perceived as a plaything for political and global interests. For instance, the claims to universality inevitably rest on making the complex simple while obscuring the diversity of meanings at a more local level (Caust & Vecco, 2017; Vinals & Morant, 2012). Others have hailed the sites as positive catalysts for change and partnership (Borges, Carbone, Bushell & Jaeger, 2011). Yet many African WHSs are in the midst of impoverished communities (Nodoro, 2015). Additionally, some scholars (Ascaniis, Gravari-Barbas & Cantoni, 2018; Patuelli, Mussoni & Candela, 2013) have admitted that the proclamation of WHSs has not stimulated sufficient transformation and the desired socio-economic benefits.

Methodology

This paper adopted a mixed method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods (Doyle, Brady & Bryne, 2009; Morgan, 2007). The mixed-method design chosen for the study was the Convergent parallel design, whose purpose is to obtain different but complementary data to answer a single research question. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and given equal weight, analysed separately and integrated at the level of overall interpretation (Halcom & Hickman, 2015; Salmon, 2016). The research population comprised 12 rural villages of Sehlabathebe National Park which constitutes a complex social setting that requires analysis which is supported by diverse perspectives (Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Melhuish, Taggard & Eliot, 2005). There are 12 rural villages with 792 households within Khomo-Phatsoa Council (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 2006). These villages are adjacent to Sehlabathebe National Park. The study adopted stratified random sampling, a probability sampling technique that is utilised when a heterogeneous sample is used and is divided into homogenous strata. The use of stratified sampling provided the researchers with an opportunity to be flexible in emphasis on some strata through the use of proportional sampling (Pirzadehi, Hamou-Lhadj, Shaman & Shafiee, 2011). The total stratified sample for the 12 villages was 286 households.

For qualitative sampling, the researchers used both purposive and snowball sampling respectively. Snowballing is a good sampling technique when the study is on perceptions and the participants are elites as it was in this paper (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013). Therefore, a total of 11 key informants who were made up of policymakers, academic, researchers, world heritage convention and tourism entrepreneurs were interviewed. The use of interviews gave the researchers an opportunity to probe and ask extra questions when a new line of inquiry propped up during the interview. When investigating a complex issue such as perceptions of the community whose livelihoods depend on a protected area, flexibility is critical. The researcher-administered questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. Permission letters were sought from the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture, village chiefs and UNESCO. Data was then analysed using SPSS and thematic analysis.

Results

Demographic characteristics of respondents

This section presents an item analysis on the demographic background which includes gender, age, location, distance, education, period of stay, source of livelihood, income and land size (See Table 1 below).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

Dimension	Categories	Percentages
Gender	Male	38.1
	Female	61.9
Age	18-25	12.2
	26-35	23.8
	36-45	16.8
	46-55	14.3
	56-65	16.4
	66 +	16.4
Education	Primary	50
	Secondary	25.2
	College	9.4
	Bachelor's degree	1.0
	Masters/Doctorate	0.3
	None	14.0
Period of stay	Less than 5 years	3.8
	6 years	2.8
	7 years	1.7
	8 years	3.1
	9 years	1.4
	10 years +	33.2
	All my life	53.8
Major sources of livelihood	Crop farming	18.9
	Livestock husbandry	31.8
	Buying and selling	15.7
	Migrant labour	3.8
	Garden cultivation	8.4
	Tourism business	0.3
	Other	21
Household monthly income	High	1.0
	Medium	7.0
	Low	80.4
	None	11.5
Household land sizes	Less than 0.5ha	59.1
	0.5ha	26.2
	1.5-2ha	8.0
	3-5ha	3.1
	6-10ha	2.8
	More than 10ha	0.7

The sex composition comprised 61.9% females and 38.1% males. This implies that most households in Sehlabathebe are headed by females. The smaller number of males also indicates the effect of migrant labour. The age range for the study participants was 18-72 years and the greatest proportion of the study participants were in the 26-35 years' age group with the highest percentage of 23.8. Approximately 50% of the study participants had attained primary education and 25.2% secondary education with only 10.7% having tertiary education. However, 14% of the study participants had no formal education. The table above shows that the majority of study participants (87%) have been residing in their respective villages for either 10 years or more or the rest of their lives. Judging by the rural standards, what is considered low income can be equivalent to poverty. The majority of the participants (80.4%) indicated that they were in the low monthly income category which implies that they struggled to meet their livelihood needs. A total of 11.5% of the respondents have no monthly income which again suggests the level of poverty in Sehlabathebe. Approximately 59.1% of the sample own less than 0.5 hectares of land and a very small proportion (14.7%) have more than 1.5 hectares.

Distance from the Sehlabathebe National Park

Based on Table 2 below, the selected 12 villages are located within a radius of about 8 kilometres from Sehlabathebe National Park. The ones that are nearer to the park include Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeng, Letlapeng and Ha Katela and those that are far away are Ha Moshebi and Ha Sephelane. See table 2 below.

Table 2: Distance from Sehlabathebe National Park

Name of village	Frequency	Distance from the park in km
Mavuka	30	About 2
Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeng	22	Less than 1
Letlapeng	28	Less than 1
Koung	11	Between 3 and 4
Ha Moshebi	28	Between 6 and 8
Mpharane	29	About 2
Ha Semenyane	34	Between 3 and 4km
Ha Edward	27	About 5
Ha Sephelane	25	Between 6 and 8
Thamathu	37	Between 3 and 4
Ha Katela	8	About 2
Mafika-Lisiu	7	Between 3 and 4
Total	286	

The socio-economic impact of the National Park on communities is generally determined by the distance between the village and the park usually because the park provides a market to the communities.

Benefits to the community resulting from Sehlabathebe National Park WHS

The respondents who included park management concurred that the villagers were fully aware of the benefits to be derived from the World Heritage Site because community consultations were done and the villagers were given all the necessary information. The respondents further claimed that the villagers were informed through the Community Conservation Forum (CCF) which represents all the villages Sehlabathebe. However, the respondents indicated the park revenue promised to the villagers has not been paid to them to date. Respondents further claimed that the community had benefited through employment in the park, crafts, cultural activities and homestays. Some of these benefits include crafts sales, part-time jobs, homestays and hiring out of horses.

However, it was evident that not all villagers own homestays or horses. After all, homestay projects elsewhere have reported only marginal impact on household income and inequitable distribution of benefits among different stakeholders (Anand, Chandan & Singh, 2012). In fact, Thamathu village is the only village that has some households that own homestays. Yet homestays have become a narrative for community tourism benefits but they do not cater for the most vulnerable particularly the old age. Respondents from the park management and Community Conservation Forum (CCF) indicated that the available benefits are fairly distributed despite other respondents complaining of unfair distribution of jobs, horse hiring and village tours as represented. For instance, Respondent 7 said:

There is no fair distribution of hiring of horses. They just get horses from 2 or 3 villages near the park. The association of horse owners is there but very weak. The Whiteman owner of Thamathu lodge hires horses from SA. The Government has failed to address this, he hires 15 to 20 horses from SA and villagers get nothing...

Respondents lamented the Government's failure to stop a South African lodge owner from hiring out horses from South Africa to Lesotho for use at the site at the expense of the Sehlabathebe villagers. They claimed that 15 to 20 horses that are hired should come from the local villages. For instance, a case study that was done at Kome Caves Heritage Site (Lesotho) revealed that the people who were there were not from the local community (Shano 2014).

Local people livelihood challenges

The respondents stated that the community extracts grass for thatching, minerals and plants for cultural and healing purposes, firewood and water during the drought from the park. The villagers also use the park to hunt wild animals for meat and for grazing their livestock. The park is also used for conducting traditional ceremonies and rituals. Some households also see it as a burial site for their ancestors and a home for the "snake" that brings rain to the villages. For instance, Respondent 1 noted that:

They hunt and graze cattle, considered as tour guides, family graves accessibility, minerals and plants for cultural and healing purpose...

The above evidence shows that the community's rural livelihoods depend on the Sehlabathebe National Park due to the organic relationship between the park. The relationship fundamentally includes ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations as a result of limited alternative forms of livelihood and poverty (Duan & Wen, 2017; Wuleka et al., 2013). For instance, Wuleka et al.'s (2013) findings also concluded that if locals have limited alternative forms of livelihood, they will depend almost entirely on the park resources for food and income.

Restricted grazing

The respondents complained that the Park is failing to meet their expectations after taking away their land. The much-talked-about COMPACT site strategy was intended to support local communities in their stewardship of protected areas (Ward, Stringer & Holmes, 2018) but local communities are being policed and punished heavily if they are found in the park. For instance, Respondents 10 said:

...Livestock is not allowed to graze. Not being able to graze as freely as they would want to. The Park is not meeting the expectations after taking away the land.

If livestock is found grazing in the park, the owner is fined heavily. Despite exorbitant fines, some community members still take their livestock for grazing in the park, especially during the night. Respondent 4 indicated that:

They know that if found grazing your livestock in the park, they are fined R500 per head for cattle and R200 per head for sheep...Some villagers still graze cattle during the night. No other challenges between the park and villagers.

The respondents further complained that the fines are too high yet people were not given alternative grazing land when the park was designated. Wild animals from the park come out

and kill their sheep and destroy crops and if the villagers kill these animals, they get arrested. Respondent 9 said:

Fines are heavy. If we are not allowed to graze our livestock inside the park, then we should be given an alternative grazing area. People want to kill jackals which eat their sheep but if they kill them they get arrested.

When people are denied their livelihoods, they can do anything for survival. The villagers' grazing land was taken without compensation. When they try to claim their grazing land which was taken away when the park was proclaimed, they are heavily fined, they are punished for killing wild animals from the park that come out and eat their sheep and crops.

Lack of financial capital

The park staff disclosed that government had no enough money to run the park. For the year 2020, the park did not even get half of the budget for managing park. As a result, the park does not have a communication network, proper park signage and uniforms for the park staff. At times, the park staff use their own cell phones and data for work-related communication. For instance, Respondent 8 said:

More can be done. The budget we are getting from the Government brought constraint and limitations, we don't have enough money for our park signage. We didn't get even half of the budget of the park, for example, no communication network, we use our own data, no uniform for staff...

As if that was not enough, the villagers who get employed in the park are employed on a temporary basis, at times get their payment is delayed. So, if the government is struggling to raise the money for the park operations, how can they raise money for training and funding the villagers to start their own businesses. Some respondents have criticised the government for prioritizing road construction over-improving marketing and service quality at the park in order to increase tourism demand. They argued that putting millions into road construction had raised the expectations of people unnecessarily. Respondents 1 suggests that "...It is the market and quality of services at the park, not the road that may increase tourism demand". Both the government and the villagers do not have the financial resources due to low tourism arrivals. Respondent 3 indicated that "... Villagers do not get anything from the proposed 15% revenue. Park tourism is at its low level because of lack of accommodation...". The low tourism demand at the park seems to exacerbate the problem.

Unemployment and mistrust

Respondents raised a number of issues concerning employment in the park. They claimed that the criteria for employing people in the park is not transparent. For instance, one of the respondents indicated that:

The way or criteria used to employ community members in the park is not clear and it is unfair because sometimes, we register for the jobs but we find out that people who did not even register for the jobs are given jobs before us ... (Respondent 10).

Local communities should be given chances to work in the park not people from outside the areas surrounding Sehlabathebe national park... (Respondent 11),

The villagers argued that only people from the local villages should be employed because they know the park better than those from outside Sehlabathebe. For instance, Respondent 9 said:

We should be hired on what we have because most of us know how to work on certain creations like rock paintings and tour guiding. We have to be truthful to tourists because sometimes they are given false information about certain features in the park

From the above statement, villagers have high expectations for jobs in the park, yet there is not much tourism activity taking place in the park currently. Some of them demand permanent jobs but there are only a few job opportunities available and they are largely seasonal. There seems to be mistrust between the local community and the park management. As a result, some of the community members want the park either to be closed or the park management to be changed. For instance, respondents 5 and 7 said “The park should be closed” (Respondent 5), while the other asserted that “management should be changed so that improvement can be enforced so as the local community can benefit from cultural tourism” (Respondent 7).

The above sentiments show that the management of the park leaves a lot to be desired. The conflicts between the local community and the Community Conservation Forum has led to a lack of trust due to a lack of leadership and strategic direction for tourism development (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). For Sehlabathebe National Park to deliver the expected benefits, the local community’s interests should be understood.

Community participation in tourism and conservation activities

Table 3 below summarises the analysis of the responses on community participation to evaluate the extent to which local communities participate in tourism activities.

Table 3 Community’s participation in tourism activities

Tourism participation constructs	Strongly disagree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Agree n(%)	Strongly agree n(%)	Total	Overall view
Q1. Taking leading role as entrepreneurs	49(17.1)	93(37.5)	31(10.8)	75(26.2)	38(13.3)	286	Disagree
Q2. Taking leading role as workers	60(21)	138(48.3)	30(10.5)	28(9.8)	30(10.5)	286	Disagree
Q3. Having a voice in decision making	19(6.6)	87(30.4)	30(10.5)	94(32.5)	56(19.6)	286	Agree
Q4. Community is consulted	18(6.3)	77(26.9)	23(8.0)	109(38.1)	59(20.6)	286	Agree
Q5. Final decision by Park	15(5.2)	43(15)	36(12.6)	92(32.2)	100(35)	286	Agree
Q6. No participation in tourism	38(13.3)	109(38.1)	26(9.1)	60(21)	53(18.5)	286	Disagree
Q7. Financial support	80(28)	135(47.2)	28(9.8)	25(8.7)	18(6.3)	286	Disagree

Based on the above analysis, the respondents disagreed that they were taking a leading role as tourism entrepreneurs (37.5%). They disagree (48.3%) that they were taking a leading role as workers. However, 32.5% agreed that they have a voice in decision making and they were Community is consulted (38.1%) when the park was proclaimed and they made the final decision by Park (35%). The community felt that they are not participating fully in tourism (38.1%) due to a lack of financial support (47.2%).

Community participation in conservation activities

Table 4 below shows the responses on community participation in conservation at Sehlabathebe National Park as a World Heritage Site.

Table 4: Community’s participation in conservation activities

Conservation participation constructs	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree	Total	Overall view
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	% (Agree)		% (Disagree)			
Q8. Taking leading role in conservation	44(15.4)	49(17.1)	21(7.3)	115(40.2)	57(19.9)	286 Agree
Q9. Taking leading role in conservation projects	52(18.2)	96(33.6)	37(12.9)	56(19.6)	45(15.7)	286 Disagree
Q10. A voice in decision making in conservation	23(8)	68(23.8)	37(12.9)	100(35)	58(20.3)	286 Agree
Q11. Community is consulted	20(7)	70(24.5)	33(11.5)	105(36.7)	58(20.3)	286 Agree
Q12. Final decision by Park	17(5.9)	26(9.1)	47(16.4)	103(36)	93(32.5)	286 Agree
Q13. No participation in conservation	46(16.1)	113(39.5)	18(6.3)	90(31.5)	19(6.6)	286 Disagree
Q14. Financial support	77(26.9)	125(43.7)	28(9.8)	33(11.5)	23(8.0)	286 Disagree

A total of 40.2% of the respondents were of the view that they are taking a leading role in conservation. However, they disagreed that they were taking a leading role in conservation projects (33.6%). Local community members agreed that they have a voice in decision making in conservation (35%) and agreed that they were consulted in conservation activities in the park (36.7%). The community agreed that the final decision on conservation activities was made by Park officials (36%). However, they disagreed (39.5%) that there were not participating in conservation (39.5%). The community also disagreed that they were financial resources to fund conservation efforts in the park (43.7%).

Community participation summary statistics by village

Table 5 below presents the participation summary statistics for each village to establish their respective participation levels.

Table 5: Community participation summary statistics by village

Number	Name of Village	Participation in tourism average scores		Participation in conservation average scores	
		Median	IQR	Median	IQR
1	Mavuka	2	[1-5]	3	[1-5]
2	Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeleng	2	[2-4]	2	[2-4]
3	Letlapeng	3	[2-4]	3	[2-4]
4	Koung	2	[2-4]	2	[2-4]
5	Ha Moshebi	3	[3-5]	4	[3-5]
6	Mpharane	2	[2-4]	2	[1-3]
7	Ha Semenyane	3	[2-4]	4	[2-4]
8	Ha Edward	4	[2-4]	4	[2-4]
9	Ha Sephelane	4	[2-4]	4	[2-4]
10	Thamathu	4	[2-5]	3	[2-5]
11	Ha Katela	3	[2-5]	3.5	[2-5]
12	Mafika-Lisiu	3	[2-4]	4	[2-5]

The level of participation in both tourism and conservation activities was lowest (M-2) in Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeleng, Koung and Mpharane while it was highest (M-4) in Ha Edward and Ha Sephelane. Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeleng (M-2) and Letlapeng (M-3) are both adjacent to the park yet their participation levels were lower. Interestingly, the furthest villages, Ha Moshebi (M-3; M-4) and Sephelane (M-4; M-4) were among those with high participation levels. Another outstanding statistic is in Mavuka village with IQR (1-5) which is the highest for both tourism and conservation participation. The evidence shows mixed views with regards to participation and it is consistent with a neutral median (3) for conservation. The results suggest that there is inequality in participation opportunities.

Discussion and implications

The results revealed that rural households had relied heavily on crop farming and livestock husbandry for their livelihoods and most of the households had low monthly income. Considering that the majority of households have small pieces of land, they have a higher probability of livelihood diversification. Households with small pieces of land tend to diversify more towards various livelihood activities for subsistence (Swain & Batabyal, 2016). Whereas, those with big pieces of land are less likely to diversify to the non-farm sector (Avila-Foucat & Rodriguez-Robayo, 2018; Rahut & Scharf, 2012). Therefore, the hope of livelihood diversification through cultural and heritage tourism in Sehlabathebe lies in those households with small land sizes. The distance from the WHS is important in determining livelihood diversification. Those households who are close to the park are likely to diversify their livelihoods and increase non-farm activities. Hence, proximity to the market has a significant influence on livelihood diversification for communities adjacent to the park (Khatun & Roy, 2012; Rahut & Scharf, 2012). Therefore, there is an expectation that those villages closest to the park (for instance Sehlabathebe-Lebenkeng and Letlapeng) should have a higher likelihood of livelihood diversification than those furthest (such as Ha Moshebi and Ha Sephelane).

The results of this paper are similar to studies conducted in Namibia by Ndlovu, Nyakunu and Awala (2011) who concluded that issues of governance and ownership of commercial activities are still beyond the reach of the community members, and CBT partnerships have been pursued for economic purposes than for sustainable development. Governments, especially in the developing world should be reminded that every human being has an inalienable right and is entitled to the right to development (Disko et al., 2014). For instance, the community does not have access to financial capital, there is a high level of unemployment and mistrust and restricted grazing areas. So, effective management strategies for WHSs must address conservation as the overriding goal while also seeking to balance tourism needs and local community benefits (Negussie & Wondimu, 2012). The challenges faced by the Sehlabathebe community reinforce the assertion by Arowosafe and Emmanuel (2017) who argue that WHSs might have contributed to poverty in rural communities. Other studies by Mugizi, Ayorekire & Obua (2018), Arowosafe and Emmanuel (2017) and Lipton and Bhattarai's (2014) have revealed that once local communities are displaced and denied access to their resources, cultural disruption and poverty are inevitable. Communities are not given an opportunity to participate meaningfully in tourism activities, they are only taking part as workers, they were not consulted and they do not get any form of support. Consequently, some local communities have resorted to poaching park resources as the only viable livelihood option to address their household needs. Households bear the burden of increased predation of crops and livestock by wild animals and some risk prosecution from illegal entry into the park in order to survive (Edwin, 2017). The paper has further revealed that the Sehlabathebe National Park is using formal rationality and an exclusionary approach to the WHS management. Apart from affecting the authenticity of the heritage site, the exclusionary approach has the potential to cause conflicts, violence and crimes and bring poverty instead of benefits among the locals (Dans & Gonzalez, 2019; Mutanga et al., 2015). Formal rationality is guided by regulations or laws and rules which are determined by formal calculation which leads to decisions that disregard the needs and values of people. When locals are excluded from park management and their needs are ignored, conservation policies become difficult to enforce (Moshi, 2016). Wuleka et al. (2013) opine that most foreign plans for ecotourism development often include community involvement from a mostly inappropriate 'Western mind set' and not from the traditional cultural framework and cognition of the local residents. The results reinforce the fears around formal rationality whereby different sectors of society would be dominated by rationalised principles. For instance, people living adjacent to Sehlabathebe

National Park are locked into a series of rationalised recreational, rationalised workplaces and rationalised homes. Hence, the establishment of the park has made the Sehlabathebe community's livelihoods and wellbeing vulnerable due to the park management's protectionism that further perpetuate poverty in its strategy. As shown in the results, the determination of benefits is skewed towards conservation than addressing the community livelihood strategies. Apparently, the community wants grazing land for their livestock and they want employment and increased entrepreneurship opportunities. Nonetheless, the challenges faced by the local people in underperforming heritage destinations include lack of leadership and strategic direction for tourism development (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). On account of this, the same industrialised development processes that threaten biodiversity often threaten the sustainable livelihoods of many local communities (Allan, Kormos, Jaeger & Venter, 2018). Similarly, in his study, Yang et al., (2019) noted that some of the major challenges in WHS management relate to unequal benefit sharing, dispossession of historic sites and forced displacement. A lot of young people have migrated to urban areas in search of greener pastures. In any case, when there is rural poverty generated by the above challenges, young people migrate to towns and cities thereby not only threatening the physical fabric with decay but also disrupting an intergenerational transmission of knowledge and valuable traditions (Cadar, 2014).

The findings show that there has been limited involvement of previously disadvantaged individuals in tourism in achieving pro-poor development. This supports the argument that benefits hardly reach the poorest members of the communities and in most cases, benefits are captured by elites (Mao, 2015). The evidence above shows that inequitable distribution of benefits among communities surrounding World Heritage Sites will remain as long as the local community has mixed perceptions about community-based tourism. Whilst the conservancies were set up as a strategy for poverty alleviation the study observes that development has not yet filtered down to the needy (Ndlovu, Nyakunu & Auala, 2011). In line with democratic and egalitarian ideals, pragmatism entails close collaboration between park authorities and local communities for the sustainability of the park. Whilst the distribution of benefits and costs amongst local communities can be a highly complex process, local communities must not be denied their indigenous human rights (Disko et al., 2014; Ward, Stringer & Holmes, 2018). So, in order to balance conservation and consumption, the government needs to follow substantive rationality in choice where there is consideration of clusters of values that lead people to choose their means to ends which are important in their everyday lives.

The implications of this study are that locals depend almost entirely on the park resources for food and income because of limited alternative forms of livelihood and poverty (Wuleka et al., 2013). The major challenge is the human population growth which has led to overexploitation, degradation of resources and loss of habitats as demand for agricultural land, grazing and settlement increases from time to time resulting in human encroachment into the park (Manwa, 2012; Welteji & Zerihun, 2018). Competing interests between humans and wildlife have resulted in the loss of domestic animals and crops. Because of their poverty, poor education levels and lack of knowledge about the tourism industry dynamics and biodiversity conservation, local communities are illiterate to challenge the policy with regards to human-wildlife conflict and this further hinders the economic benefits from permeating into the communities. The paper revealed that the establishment of Sehlabathebe National Park has not significantly improved the status quo of the community. Therefore, local communities should be given opportunities to sell their products and services to tourists and work in partnership with park authorities in conserving the park resources.

Conclusions

The paper revealed that most respondents were aware of the benefits associated with WHSs. However, the majority of local communities are not participating fully in cultural and heritage tourism activities. Generally, local communities agreed that cultural and heritage tourism products need to be conserved. The study discovered that there were a number of positive outcomes associated with tourism development in Sehlabathebe. The positive outcomes include employment opportunities, horse hiring, and homestays, promotion of cultural pride, improved standards of living, income generation business opportunities and the development of support infrastructure. However, the community was uncertain about beneficiation and transparency in benefits distribution. The paper has shown that the majority of community members are not participating fully in tourism due to scepticism. Therefore, Sehlabathebe National Park authorities should tread with care with regards to the involvement of local communities in the development of community-related tourism products. The paper concludes that there should be a collaborative approach amongst local stakeholders in order to increase employment opportunities for locals. Park authorities should allow local communities to enjoy the cultural and heritage services offered to tourists, encourage local access to the park, promote local participation at all level. The paper recommends the development of an inclusive model for local community participation in the park through institutional capacity-building and inclusive culture and tourism development. The paper contributes to the current discourses on the use of community-based tourism as an alternative livelihood diversification strategy in rural areas.

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