



The Voice of the Traditional Authorities in the Management of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park, South Africa

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Abstract

The study focuses on the community-conservation partnership between the conservation agency, Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW) and the surrounding tribal communities. The community-conservation partnership approach can be attained through economical involvement of rural people in promoting the survival of species within protected areas. This approach suggests that greater involvement of neighbouring communities in the management of the Park should target the interest of the communities in promoting community-conservation partnerships. Community-conservation partnerships are a means of addressing the challenges that resulted from the western colonial system which led to the removal of the local communities when their land was wrenched from them to form Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park. The tribal authorities were less recognised as most of the traditional functions were passed to the magistrates. The purpose of this research paper is to establish the extent to which local communities participate in decision-making regarding the management of nature conservation resources, whether Park officials are supportive of a participatory community-conservation approach and to evaluate the extent to which tribal authorities participate in tourism development within the study area. With the changes in the political landscape, the portion of the park was subjected to land claims by communities that were historically dispossessed of their land and rights. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from the respondents, who consisted of local communities, residing adjacent to the park and officials of EKZNW. The findings indicate that, although opportunities are created for local communities to be involved in the management and tourism development within the Park, the concept of a participatory community-conservation approach seems not to have been fully pursued in the context of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park. Co-existence of the communities and park authorities is still unattainable at the participatory level, in spite of both parties showing willingness for it.

Keywords: Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park; community-conservation partnership; tribal authorities; indigenous conservation.

Introduction

The paper investigates the community-conservation partnership relationships between the conservation agency, Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW) and tribal communities living adjacent to a protected area (PA). The topic of this research is useful, relevant and worth investigating since it forms part of a significant and well-established research area. Firstly, the researcher chose Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park as a study area because it was among the first protected areas to be established in KwaZulu-Natal, is surrounded by dense traditional communities and is rich in biodiversity. The problem of control on the inflow of surrounding communities, their produce, and their livestock into the protected area is a matter which has been present in the history of the protected area for the past 80 years and which has not yet been finalised (Brooks, 2005).

The area established is a recognised protected area and a game reserve from the Natal Colonial rule as the iMfolozi Junction Reserve, together with the Hluhluwe Valley Reserve in



1895. The traditional authorities had used a certain degree of control over game resources in the study area since 1824. Most hunting was purely for effective explanations and the succession of Zulu kings enforced boundaries on the hunting of certain types of wild animals, which were viewed as a royal game (Brooks, 2005). The practice of these acceptance arrangements was geared toward defending and stimulating collective decisions, rather than working separately (Diawuo & Issifu, 2015). Extensive use was made of the animal populations occurring in the area, and it is recorded that Shaka established a private hunting ground between the Black and White Umfolozi Rivers, where the remains of hunting pits are still visible near the confluence of these rivers (Brooks, 2005).

The formation of game reserves was strengthened through protectionist conservation strategies, later identified as the 'fences and fines' method or 'fortress conservation' and these strategies created a struggle between surrounding communities and management (Mutanga, *et al.*, 2017). The authority of chiefs was less recognised than before, including the role they played in the control of natural resource use, as most of the traditional functions of the chiefs were passed to the magistrates. Local communities were not happy that the boundary was being erected up without informing them and that it did not follow the reserve's original border as they understood it. Demarcation is an important significant of change in rural KwaZulu-Natal and causing a conflict between park management and traditional authorities. According to Brooks (2005), the declining penetrability of Hluhluwe's border, brought about by fencing and several other limitations on communities' entrance to reserve land, is the key feature of the historical natural features of the reserve since 1939.

According to Schoon (2008), no direct compensation plans exist for community members affected by animal attacks. The compensation of ecological activities in China is usually reflected as a recognised procedure regulating financial interests between environmental defenders, recipients, and destructors (Xie, *et al.*, 2015). It is in this light that the interrelationship between the park and tribal authorities has been appraised to serve as the basis for sustainable management of the park resources. However, factors affecting the relationship between the conservation agency and communities include conflicting views about the park management's role; land tenure issues; local development; and expectations which have been raised, and not met. A considerable amount of research has been conducted around HiP but little research has been done on the role of Tribal leadership in the management of PAs.

The area under study is located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and it was established by the former Natal Parks Board. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park is the oldest and premier park in KwaZulu-Natal. The background in historical/cultural geography and its particular geographical focus is the two oldest protected areas in Zululand and indeed in Africa, the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves, declared in 1895 and, ever since 1989, integrated into one body, the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park under the control of the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Services (Brooks, 2000). The majority of the population lives in rural traditional settlements under the leadership of traditional authorities. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park is surrounded by ten Tribal Authorities. These are the people residing in the communities of Hlabisa, Mpembeni, KwaXhimba, Mngobokazi, and others. The problem seems to lie in the absence of an economic base, with the greater part of the population making a living from subsistence farming and the harvesting of available natural resources.

According to de Koning & Marais (2009), since 1996 three land claims have been registered in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. The previous claimants succeeded in claiming the protected area that comprises the restoration of land that involves all the responsibilities. A number of other land claims in protected areas, preserving natural woodlands, swamps, cultural sites, and wilderness areas, to name a few, are known to exist (Wynberg & Kepe, 1999; Plummer, Fitz & Gibbon, 2006), and numerous were certainly not formally lodged by December 31st in 1998 but carry on to be a source of conflict among the claiming locals and the management of the



park (Kepe, 2001). In KwaZulu-Natal, after the execution of a land reform program when apartheid was finished in 1994, numerous land claims impacted game reserves (Wynberg & Kepe, 1999; De Villiers, 1999; Naguran, 2002; Kepe *et al.*, 2005). An operational Co-Management Agreement was developed and signed to facilitate the interaction and management of the park into the future. It can be contested that the formation of co-management in these game reserves was encouraged through a robust lobby of ecological preservationists who primarily disagreed with the land claims but then chose for a co-management cooperation as a means of protecting the game reserves (Magome & Murombedzi, 2003). The literature plainly shows that alternative key motivation in forming co-management activities is the realisation through the government that it cannot keep the resource without including local people (Plummer, Fitz & Gibbon, 2006).

The Community Levy Programme was initiated with the sole purpose of being instrumental in establishing viable people driven and owned projects in a bid towards poverty alleviation and job creation through increasing benefits for the rural communities (Kepe, 2001; NCS, 2000). The overall mandate of the programme speaks to the Social Responsibility drive of Ezemvelo of ploughing back tourism revenue into communities. It is the Nature Conservation Services belief that conservation which incorporates "community participation, provides substantial and sustainable development opportunities, particularly in impoverished rural areas" (NCS, 2000; Timothy & Tosun, 2003). This is the first decision in the history of the province where a community has voluntarily chosen to invest their money in a protected area and is undoubtedly a landmark in the history of nature conservation in KwaZulu-Natal (Foggin & Münster, 2000; Kepe 2001). The decision by the traditional leadership was considered to be a gesture of faith in the future of conservation and of confidence in the current land use of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, and is undoubtedly a very wise investment for the future of their people in terms of employment and added opportunities through increased tourism (Foggin & Münster, 2000; IMP, 2011). The communities chose to save the money earned from the Conservation Levy in order to accumulate enough funds to develop an entrepreneurial project that could create jobs for the community members. Nselweni is the first community-funded bush lodge in the park. Ten communities benefited from the building of the Enselweni bush camp through a beneficiary trust fund set up so that communities bordering the park benefit directly from the bush camp.

Methodology

For this paper, data was collected from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park between May and June 2017, through questionnaires and household interviews. The design of the instrument or questionnaire based on the objectives of the study has facilitated the addressing of all relevant objectives. From the three surrounding communities of Mpembeni, KwaXhimba, Mngqobokazi, a total of 101 households were sampled at random. 44 were sampled in each of the three communities recognised as appropriate, male heads of households, women, and youth were interviewed. A total of 13 park officials were purposively selected. Appropriate tools used to collect information for this study were the questionnaires which utilised open and closed-ended questions. In these questionnaires, several issues as reflected on the objective of the study, are addressed covering both local community's views and perceptions of conservation and natural tourism resources, as well, as strategies of management techniques used by the tourism authorities in the study areas.

It should, however, be noted that not all the questions are understandable and equivalent than those that are in English. Data collection also subscribed to the language of the respondents: Zulu in most instances and English in some instances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with illiterate community members using the same questionnaires. Shrivastava and Heinen (2007) define a well-educated participant as a person who has obtained one year of schooling and illiteracy as someone who spends less than one year. The two languages used in questionnaires were therefore meant to facilitate maximum extraction of responses from all



targeted respondents. The main purpose of using questionnaires, both in the form of structured and unstructured interviews, is to ensure that no section is over or under-represented in relation to the local community. Primary and secondary literature (existing organisation policies, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Conservation Plan, case studies, schemes, procedures, guidelines, and contracts) were used to evaluate the value of protecting plant/animal species and the potential of tourism advancement for the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park.

The qualitative and quantitative data analysis was therefore used in the study to analyse responses from the samples of local communities including traditional authorities, park officials that were involved in the sample. An in-depth analysis of the responses was done to enhance the data collected from the illiterate communities' respondents and to offer more awareness into the dynamics of conservation and tourism management in the protected areas in KwaZulu-Natal. Lastly, the researcher incorporated the quantitative and qualitative data for results' presentation. The combination of qualitative and calculable methods as espoused by numerous authors (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) was carefully considered and applied in data analysis and interpretation in this particular study, as it has its peculiar merits and demerits.

Results and Discussion

The results for **Table 1** below indicate that a total of 26.8% respondents participated, 6.8% in anti-poaching campaigns and 7.6% in awareness campaigns. The majority of the respondents (58.6%) said they were not involved since they were not conscious of the relevance of conservation, nor of increasing poaching/illegal hunting activities to the protected areas. Some indicated that participation encourages people to protect nature. At Empembeni, traditional authorities complained about lions killing their cattle, this was not the only issue of damaging the produce and cattle that bothered communities. *“Every time we report damage of our crops and the loss of our cattle to the people from the park nothing is done, but whenever we try to defend ourselves against the wild animals they are there within a minute to arrest us.” No compensation is paid to residents for the loss of crops or livestock”.*

Table 1: How do Tribal authority participate in providing solutions with regards the management of nature conservation resources

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Community participated	39	26.8%
Awareness campaigns/education	11	7.6%
No participation	85	58.6%
Anti-poaching campaigns	10	6.8%
Total	145	100%

Some respondents indicated that they would encourage the community to report dangerous animals that have escaped the enclosure without harming or killing the animals. This indicates that conservation cannot be achieved without involving the local community and that a high level of awareness and responsibility towards biodiversity conservation is needed. Some respondents reported that when these protected areas were established they lost land and access to grazing as a result of the proclamation. It is significant that although rural communities are dependent on natural resources, most of those interviewed did not see any value in biodiversity. The local communities are expected to take part actively in tourism planning and development as well as in decision-making process so as to access the business opportunities generated by an increase in tourist arrival (Rogerson & Visser, 2004). As argued previously in this study, a proper management of KZN's natural resources such as protected areas should be understood in the context of the history surrounding their establishment.

Knowing how local people appreciate natural resource management and may offer views on how interventions and procedures can be considered and executed to ensure sustainable



natural resource management (Mdiniso *et al.*, 2017). The importance of a protected area is determined by its ability to contribute to the surrounding local communities. However, the analysis confirms that community participatory approach development has not improved through a partnership between the park officials and the traditional authorities. The host communities seem to have inadequate expertise, entrepreneurial principles, and economic resources at the grassroots level to facilitate honest local involvement (Barnes & Hayter, 1994, Tosun, 2000; Brousse-James, 2009).

On the other hand, without eradicating several socio-cultural, business, economic, political and administered difficulties to a development style that is participatory, effective and productive practices of local involvement will not transpire (Tosun, *et al.*, 2003). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that because they do not directly provide for direct active involvement in the management or control of operations, joint venture agreements have the potential to create community dependence and to undermine efforts at local capacity building if they lack provisions that specifically require strategies and actions to promote capacity building and devolution of control over natural resources to the community (Lepetu, Richard, Makopondo & Darkoh, 2008).

The results presented in **Table 2** below indicate that 53% of the respondents do operate business activities in the in the park where local tribal authorities own accommodation known as Enselweni camp. The general response was that people are aware of tourisms, “*we do business with tourists*”. The respondents further mentioned that they are also given the opportunity to interact with tourists. The most likely reason for such positive responses may be that they are motivated by employment opportunities (29.6%) that have been created by protected area in the study area. This is an indication that when locals participate in the decision-making procedure of resources close them, they view biodiversity conservation in a positive way.

Results also indicate that there has been a change of perceptions at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi with regard to tourism development from the time community-based projects were introduced in these neighbouring communities. At Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, a 59-year-old traditional leader also noted, “*the more tourists visit our area, the more our livelihoods as a community improve. Tourists are a source of income for us*”, At Enselweni community camp (HIP), a man of 52 years old man managing the Enselweni tented camp mentioned, “*tourists stay at our camp and this generates money for livelihood at Zamimpilo craft center (HIP) noted, “tourists buy our baskets and we buy food and clothes for our families”*”. The results indicated that 13.7% of the members of the local communities think that the protected areas do not contribute significantly to the local economies of the surrounding villages, especially in entrepreneurship. Other respondents indicated that they are not aware of any businesses or practices that contribute to community development. Other responses indicated that local communities would like to provide tour guiding, local craft, and tourist information services.

Table 2: How do Tribal authorities participate in tourism development

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Participate in tourism	77	53 %
Tourist attraction	05	3.4 %
Do not participate in tourism	20	13.7%
Job opportunities	43	29.6%
Total	145	100%

The core business of the parks is tourism. The post-1994 political changes have opened up South Africa to a major flow of regional tourists (Rogerson, 2003). Tourism as a field of operation in KZN has been seen as a strategic playing field for supporting locals by giving them chances for employment and poverty relief (Magi & Nzama, 2009). In most cases, the



conflict between the maximisation of tourist numbers and minimisation of environmental impacts shows inequality in partnership, administration, and flow of profits from the usage and preservation of environment (Furze, *et al.*, 1997; Brousse-James, 2009). A lot of forest inhabitants take care of forests and derive a livelihood from forest resources to meet subsistence and also derive financial provision to meet the requirements of self-sufficient from any external funding or incentives, depending on local practices, provisions, and organisations (Mille, 2017). Gunn (1978) suggest that the need for tourism, instead of causing struggle with preservation, really wants that the appeal which attracts tourists to a destination should not be eroded. The local communities should benefit from the services of the protected areas, both in terms of entrepreneurial opportunities and job creation. Entrepreneurial opportunities may afford the local communities the opportunity to participate in business activities within the protected areas, such as operating small business enterprises: for example, offering tour guiding within the parks. Such initiatives would benefit the members of the local communities by reducing poverty and creating jobs.

There is often a sense in the study area that some locals are not grasping the immense opportunities being created, especially in tourism, and therefore they might not benefit. Over and above the need to develop tourism fortified by sustainable tourism practices, tourism should be conducted as a progressive means for the upliftment of formerly deprived local people and social groups (Rogerson & Visser, 2004). In the light of the survey conducted in this study, members of the local communities are ready to provide services if given the opportunity. The success of community-tourism partnership in any tourism development policy must seek a meaningful partnership with the previously deprived locals, not only in the supply of their employment facilities as well in business activities.

The arguments continue that infrastructural development in provincial and communal reserves in the country remains underdeveloped, hence making it difficult for tourism to be pursued in such developments (Sebola, 2003). Such a neglectful attitude by the responsible authorities makes the purpose of nature conservation in KwaZulu-Natal on public natural resources management doubtful. However, it is not clear whether they have the inspiration and readiness to contribute in tourism development. It is challenging to reject these restrictions regarding community involvement in the unadventurous tourism development procedure, but it should be acknowledged that host community would study the politics of tourism growth by contributing in local organisations and forums that make resolutions on tourism ventures and other local progressive matters (Tosun, 2000).

Failure to access finance and to take advantage of business opportunities provided by the tourism industry is another challenge facing local communities (Hall, 2005; Page, 2005). However, deprived of an economic and business commitment as a result of neighbouring communities, community partnership as an approach could be unproductive. It must be understood that eliminating the traditional obstacles (especially) towards participating in tourism expansion strategy involves an extended scholastic development and flexibility rather than once-over inflexible improvement efforts (Tosun, 1998; Zesmi & Ozesmi, 2003). According to Kavita, Erling and Saarinen (2016), tourism businesses generate tax revenues, including revenues from employees.

Even though community-based tourism developments in their natural surroundings are minimal, a unified tourism sector favours bigger businesses. Tour operators do not see any value in dealing with minor accommodation institutions and the other small businesses that offer amenities for visitors (Timothy & Ioannides, 2002). In practice, nevertheless, joint venture arrangements only require very little local participation and employment and do not inspire environmental management and preservation of natural resources (Van der Jagt, *et al.*, 2000). Pigram and Wahab (2004) indicate that a key to tourism improvement is the capacity and



preparedness of the participants to recognise the modification and use it to their benefit for lasting ecological development.

The results presented in **Table 3** below indicate that, a total of 41.3% respondents indicated that officials are supportive of a participatory conservative approach since these areas should be protected to prevent their extinction. A total of 18.6% indicated that people need to be protected from wild animals. 14.4% of respondents feel that community members need to be involved and educated about the importance of preserving the natural environment. 14.4% indicate that those officials are not supportive. A total of 11.03% respondents also indicate that plants and animals attract tourists which boosts the economy and creates employment. Quite a number of old women from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, however, claim that the greatest fear is that of being attacked by wild animals when they move within the game reserve. They are also concerned about the safety of their children. A group of women stated that they have a challenge when it is the season for collecting certain fruits and farming in some parts. The locals argued that they have no means of defending themselves, their livestock or their crops against wild animals.

A variety of reasons for conservation were mentioned by the respondents, such as that some plants are used to cure illnesses, and animals are important for a variety of reasons, such as being a source of food. The role of Trust in community improvement was highly appreciated and preservation was clarified by one of the traditional authorities when he said, *“Our Trust is doing a lot more than what the government does for us. It has improved our wellbeing and the development of our community”*. The presiding officer of the Trust indicated, *“Ever since there was a Trust in our community, people’s lives have improved. People are able to build houses and send their children to school”*. Induna mentioned that, *“Before there was a Trust in our community, we starved and poverty was high. We now have a Trust and our kids now work and bring income home”*. In a related view, local people prepared reports to the Trust. These comments suggest that communities around the park through their respective Trusts be involved in conservation/tourism growth and gain financial profits from it. The local people realise the necessity to preserve the plant and animal species because tourism development depends on it.

Table 3: Are Park officials are supportive of a participatory community-conservation approach

Officials are supportive	60	41.3%
Protect people from wild animals	27	18.6%
Tourist expenditure boosts the economy	16	11.03 %
Improve education	21	14.4%
Not supportive	21	14.4 %
Total	145	100%

The rise in unlawful resource harvesting led to an understanding that the boundaries and penalties strategy was deteriorating as a wildlife protection process and this led to the introduction of unified preservation and the projects that are improving (Mutanga, 2017). As resource organisation move towards a more comprehensive approach of governance, data on how communities and Park authorities work collectively in partnerships may demonstrate extremely beneficial to land managers (Miller, 2017). Capacity-building, community development and involving expertise are therefore required to destabilised the obstacles experienced by locals in community-based environmental management and tourism (Mdiniso et al., 2017). The achievement of conservation partnerships through game parks can depend on the capabilities of management to merge environmental protection objectives with social and economic concerns and to stimulate more compliance of local people through protected area preservation approaches (Chape, et al., 2008).

The conservationists failed to fulfill the material expectations of communities (Henning, 2016), therefore, local involvement in nature conservation, after centuries of neglect and exploitation, cannot guarantee immediate and fruitful benefits in the short term. The idea of a participatory



community-conservation method seems not to have been fully considered in the situation of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park. It is anticipated that as soon as these aspects are in order, locals will understand tourism development definition and be encouraged to be involved in its growth. Tosun (2000) argues that various complications such as absence of transparency, political uncertainty, lack of evidence and information around developmental concerns, and inequitable natural resources make it problematic to separately highlight conservation and local involvement in tribal communities. The process of community participation in development efforts varies according to industries of the economy in a state and prevailing local situations under which community participation will be practiced (Tosun, 2000; Timothy & Tosun, 2003).

A related question is what outcomes would be expected from partnership arrangements involving the community and the park authorities. Supporters of 'sustainable use', or 'incentive-based preservation', recommend that conservation can best be attained by allowing local community a direct economic interest in the survival of plant and animal species, thus literally connecting preservation achievement to the issue of protecting livelihoods (Hutton & Leader-Williams, 2003). This has significant effects for protected area authorities and proposes that greater inclusion of locals in decision-making must be an important approach for safeguarding the integrity of community-conservation partnerships. Its principles negate the original mandate of the protected areas, which were mainly based on conservation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The focus of this article was to explore the role of the tribal leadership in the decision-making of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park regarding natural resource conservation and management. The findings indicate that participation of traditional authorities in natural resource conservation and management of the protected area has helped to promote not only the natural environment but also traditional belief systems as well as the generation of revenue for the community development through tourism activities. The traditional authorities remain the main aspect guiding people's conduct towards the exploitation of natural resources (Rim-Rukeh *et al*, 2013). However, the idea of a participatory community-conservation policies seems not to have been fully considered in the situation of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Park. Co-existence of the communities and park authorities is still unattainable at the participatory level, in spite of both parties showing willingness for it. Unilateral decisions lead to the misunderstanding that tends to create mistrust and cause enmity between the main role players. The findings also indicate that both parties, communities and park authorities need to find common ground to accept each other as equals, then, level the ground of decision-making that will enable bilateral planning to equally set the same goal to be achieved and create sustainability in whatever they intend to achieve.

The local communities should be able to contribute their inputs because of their indigenous knowledge of conservation, their expected benefits from the project, and the way they should be made to participate in such developments (outputs). Even though efforts to assimilate local community into the preservation of environmental programmes and projects have been in place for a long time (Hulme & Murphree 1999), the assimilation has been slow. The government through the local municipalities, community based-organisations, and park management should make a conscious effort to integrate current regulations and traditional norms and beliefs in natural resource conservation and management into a single policy framework enforceable by law. By doing so, rural communities within areas where these resources are situated will freely and willingly be involved in the management and preservation of the environment for the benefit of the living and future generations. The park management should review their policies, design programs, and projects that will ensure community participation as well as educate locals about the importance of conservation.



The implication for this study means that traditional authorities have significant roles to play in natural resource conservation and the management of protected areas. Therefore, traditional authorities are encouraged to establish strong links that see human survival as closely related to its natural resources, and thus, enabling other ecological services that people need in order to survive on earth. It is therefore evident that the role of community leaders in the preservation of a huge amount of environment of nature irrespective of the period utilised dating back to creation (Shastri, Nagaraja & Ravindranath, 2002). It is obvious that traditional authorities have lately been revealed to be some of the informal institutions geared concerning the protection of forests and other ecological resources (Eneji, Ntamu, Unwanade, Godwin, Bassey, Willaims, Ignatius, 2012). In spite of the effectiveness and the role of cultural African belief methods in environmental management and natural protection, little consideration is provided to this informal organisation (Kankpeyeng, 2000). The success or failure of reducing negative conservation impacts on communities and ecosystems clearly depends on how relationships between people and resources as well as between people and their ecosystems are valued.

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