


Chapter 3

Community–Based Tourism and Local People’s Perceptions Towards Conservation: The Case of Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Uganda is among the most bio-diverse countries and a competitive wildlife-based tourism destination in the world. Community-based tourism approach has been adopted in the country’s conservation areas as a strategy to ensure that local communities benefit and support wildlife conservation. This chapter analyses local communities’ perceptions of conservation and the benefits they get from tourism in Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area. The study reveals that local communities were concerned about loss of protected resources and support their conservation irrespective of the benefits they get from tourism in the conservation area. There is need to design conservation programmes that focus on local community-conservation-benefits nexus which take into consideration the perceived conservation values, strategies for benefit sharing and incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT), also known as community-based tourism initiative (CBTI) or rural-based community tourism (RCT) is one of the alternative strategies for empowerment of local communities through enhancement of their capacity to harness opportunities in tourism related enterprises around protected areas (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). CBT is intended to promote locally based development processes by building local capacity in creating jobs with positive spin offs for the community including indirect impact by tapping into local supply chains of the informal economy (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). It focuses on mechanisms through which communities can collaborate with other actors to meet locally defined community development needs and deliver livelihood and other benefits through tourism enterprises (Mayaka et al., 2019).

For conservation to succeed the local communities need to have positive perceptions towards protected areas and wildlife resources. According to Eaton & Visser (2008), perceptions have predictable influence on behavior. Thus, predicting local community's conservation behavior requires knowledge of their perceptions which can guide conservation area managers and local community leaders on how to mobilize and engage them in community-based tourism programmes. Limited community awareness and negative perception of conservation lead to destructive activities such as poaching and unsustainable harvesting of plants that compromise conservation and jeopardize tourism. Knowledge of local community perceptions is, therefore, crucial in Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area (QECA) which is surrounded by a high population who's positive perceptions of conservation is pivotal in sustainable tourism.

For a long time, community-based tourism has been promoted to meet the social, environmental and economic needs of local communities. According to Weaver (2010), Hall (2005) and WWF (2001), the concept CBT originated in the 1980s, when it was regarded as a development alternative for rural communities. At that time, the World Conservation Strategy linked protected area management with economic activities that would benefit local communities (Mearns, 2003). Community-based tourism was, therefore, considered a viable approach to empower local communities to take control of their land and resources as well as acquire skills to develop themselves (Mearns, 2003). CBT is a development alternative characterized by local community management and conservation of natural resources and economic empowerment (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Okazaki, 2008; Manyara & Jones, 2007). The application of community development approach is a resident-responsive strategy for motivating local communities to embrace community-based tourism in QECA and enhance their participation.

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