

Full Length Research Paper

Residents decision-making in tourism at Sitatunga's swampy habitat: Saiwa National Park, Kenya

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The local community is one of the most important stakeholders in tourism development. Local people could participate in tourism through policy and planning process; benefits sharing or owning community projects. However, in most instances, private benefit of conservation to individuals, households and even entire community are not made clear or may be non-existent. This research examines the level of participation by communities around Saiwa Swamp National Park, created primarily for the protection of the rare Sitatunga antelope in Rift valley Kenya. Chi-square test, ANOVA, t-tests and correlations were performed in order to investigate, if there is a direct relationship between residents' participation variables and support for tourism. In general, there is a direct relationship between involvement in decision-making and support of tourism.

Key words: Tourism, residents' participation, Saiwa, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Wildlife and conservation areas will remain, only if the surrounding human population derives benefit from them and feel motivated to continue to protect them (Timothy, 1999). Participation comes from a realization that, it is their own project (Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996), that they are the main beneficiaries (Williams and Lawson, 2001) and that they truly have ownership in their future. The fact that too little benefits are received directly by the people who are accommodating wildlife, irrespective of its distribution will make them less supportive of wildlife conservation (Omondi, 1996). Policy and institutional mechanisms are lacking to encourage local participation in the design, implementation and management of tourism projects and local use of tourism resources. Local communities need to be empowered to determine what forms of tourism facilities they want to be developed in their respective communities and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders (Akama, 1996a; Tosun, 2002). They need to be compensated for the opportunity costs of hunting restrictions, wood-cutting bans and other resource uses that are judged incompatible with the relation of conservation areas (Musyoki, 1995).

Whenever, tourism activity is concentrated in time and space, builds rapidly and ignores community input, the seeds of discontent are sown (Holloway, 1998).

The problem to be investigated in this study, therefore, is the general lack of involvement and participation of local peasants and pastoralists who inhabit the lands adjacent to tourism areas in matters of policy formulation (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999), implementation and evaluation (Timothy, 1999) of state and private conservation programmes and tourism management, as well as in benefit sharing (Akama, 1996b; Omondi, 1995; Ondimu, 1996; Sindiga, 1984; Musyoki, 1995). Based on the problem stated, the purpose of this study is to investigate how local communities adjacent to tourism development areas can participate in tourism in an effective and sustainable manner. The specific objective is to explore the relationship between residents' involvement in decision-making and their attitude and support for tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

The study adopted an exploratory approach using descriptive survey design to investigate if there is a direct relationship

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between residents' involvement in decision-making and support for tourism as described by Kothari (2004), Orodho (2004), Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). A case study was selected, Saiwa Swamp National Park, because Saiwa Swamp National Park lies not far from Mount Elgon and only 24 km from Kitale with a size of 190 ha. Created primarily for the protection of the rare Sitatunga antelope, the Saiwa Swamp National Park is a perfect example of how a small area can survive as a complete ecological entity. The semi-aquatic Sitatunga relying on a swamp habitat has evolved to survive in such conditions and despite the minute size of Saiwa Swamp National Park, it seems certain to continue to thrive there. The Sitatunga is a swamp-dwelling antelope found in Central and East Africa. It is about one and a half meters tall. It has a water-proof coat that is dark brown in males and reddish brown in females.

Their hooves are long and thin to cope with the Sitatunga's swampy habitat. Males have a mane as well as horns, which are twisted and can reach almost a meter in length. The Sitatunga at Saiwa Swamp National Park is sufficiently numerous to ensure seeing them. No vehicles are allowed in the park, so this is another bonus as it is one of the few parks in which walking is permitted or in this case mandatory. Saiwa Swamp National Park has around 15+ km of walking trails. It also has four observation towers, where African Mecca guests have a birds eye view of the swamp. There are platforms built into trees overlooking the swamp, provided of course, for Sitatunga watchers but also a splendid perch in which to contemplate nature's glory. There are several home stay accommodation experiences in the area. The study is aimed at investigating the various ways in which local people can participate in tourism, to ensure sustainability and support for the industry.

Sample design

Stratified random sampling was applied to come up with the sample size, since the population in different villages was heterogeneous, implying that a simple random sample would have been unrepresentative of the population. Stratified random sampling ensured that each village was represented in the sample in sufficient numbers for fair comparison and generalization of the findings. Therefore, the population was divided into six strata (the six villages) and a 20% simple random sample was taken.

Instruments and procedures

Through the use of structured and unstructured questionnaires and oral interviews, data related to local community participation in tourism was collected from Saiwa area. The questionnaire survey was mainly interviewer-completed because of the high illiteracy rate in the area, a technique that was supported by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). The researcher interpreted the questions in the language and manner, in which the respondent would understand. Language translations were at times necessary. The questionnaires consisted primarily of 'closed' questions. A few open-ended questions were included in order to give the respondents a chance to freely express their attitude and perceptions hence providing qualitative insights and illuminations. Mainly, household questionnaire survey was used whereby respondents were selected on the basis of where they lived and were interviewed in their homes. A few captive group surveys were also applied to gather information from school children and employees around Saiwa. A 5 point Likert scale, questionnaire survey was the main instrument providing quantitative data on the attitude of the local community. Likert scale questionnaire surveys have been widely used for measuring perceptions and attitudes of the host community towards impacts of tourism (Besculides et al., 2002; Smith and Krannich, 1998; Lee and Back, 2003).

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) programme was used for analysis. A number of techniques were used; frequency and mean (central tendencies) as tools of descriptive data analysis, and t-test, one way analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and correlation as instruments of bivariate analysis. One way ANOVA was conducted in order to find out if residents' perception and support of tourism were a function of their decision making. A series of independent t-tests were conducted between residents' involvement in decision-making and their perceptions and support for tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A series of independent t-tests were undertaken in order to achieve the objective, which sought to examine if there exists a relationship between residents' involvement in decision-making and their perceptions of the industry. The use of independent t-tests was deemed appropriate for this analysis because the observations were independent, random samples from normal distributions and had no outliers. The grouping variable was a short string (yes and no) and the test variables were Likert scale values. As shown in Table 1, significant difference was noted as regards tourism bringing pride to the community. Respondents who were involved in decision-making agreed more strongly that, tourism brought them pride than those who were not involved. It was however observed that, there was no significant difference in perceptions between residents who were involved in decision-making and those that were not as regards to the other positive impact variables.

In general, the results indicated that residents who were involved in decision-making had less negative perceptions towards the industry and its impacts than those who were not (Table 2). Significant differences were observed in the following variables: increase of prostitution, divorce, alcoholism, crime, corruption, family disruption, overcrowding and noise. A third attempt was made to examine if there exists a relationship between residents' involvement in decision-making and their support for the industry. As indicated in Table 3, in general, the results showed that residents who were involved in decision-making were more supportive of the industry. Significant differences were observed in all the four support variables. Residents who were involved in decision-making perceived that their future was brighter because of tourism, that tourism made their area a better place, they were proud of neighboring tourism and that they supported tourism more than those who were not involved in decision-making. In general, those residents who were involved in decision-making had less negative perceptions and were significantly more supportive of tourism than those who were not. Timothy (1999) in his research on what is being done in tourism planning in Yogyakarta (a developing destination) found out that, involvement of local people in decision-making in tourism development is fundamental for sustainability.

Table 1. Perceptual differences between those residents who were involved in decision-making and those who were not as regards positive impacts.

Impact variables	Average responses		T- values	Sig. (2 -tailed)
	Involvement in decision making			
	Yes	No		
Created employment	2.22	2.25	-0.155	0.877
Raised standards of living	1.82	2.02	-1 .427	0.155
Provided irrigation	2.48	2.85	-1 .792	0.075
Give donations	2.19	2.11	0.508	0.612
Investment and business opportunity	2.48	2.76	-1 .389	0.166
Improved quality of life	1.76	1.95	-1.451	0.149
Improved Community Spirit	2.10	2.20	-0.665	0.507
Improved Education Environment	1.52	1.72	-1 .726*	0.086
Brought Pride	1.64	1.96	-2.500	0.013
Preserved culture	2.25	2.26	-0.022	0.983
Preserved history	2.41	2.25	0.861	0.390
Preserved natural beauty	2.01	2.02	-0.039	0.969

*Statistically significant at 0.05 or less.

Table 2. Perceptual differences between those residents who were involved in decision-making and those who were not as regards negative impacts.

Support factor	Average responses		T-values	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Involvement in decision making			
	Yes	No		
Increased cost of living	2.99	3.16	-0.802	0.424
Increased tax burden	3.27	3.40	-0.664	0.508
Increased leakages	3.47	3.35	0.587	0.558
Increased prostitution	4.00	3.32	3.548*	0.000
Brought divorce	3.82	3.39	2.282*	0.024
Increased alcoholism	3.95	3.21	3.906*	0.000
Increased crime	4.33	3.90	2.384*	0.018
Increased corruption	4.07	3.47	3.320*	0.001
Brought family disruption	3.89	3.45	2.372*	0.019
Brought overcrowding	3.81	3.40	2.086	0.038
Increased litter	3.89	3.76	0.672	0.503
Increased noise	4.25	3.88	2.188*	0.030
Brought water pollution	4.12	3.83	1.671	0.096
Destruction of environment	3.98	3.89	0.453	0.651
Brought route disruption	3.54	3.27	1.333	0.184
Denial of facilities	3.69	3.45	1.175	0.241

*Statistically significant at 0.05 or less.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Designating an area as a reserve or game park may frequently conflict with traditional resource management practices meaning that, for example, local people

may find themselves excluded from traditional hunting or farming territories. Areas which have formerly provided communities with resources such as grazing or construction materials may suddenly become unavailable and any management plan has to take into account provision of

Table 3. Support differences between those residents who were involved in decision-making and those who were not.

Support factor	Average responses		T-values	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Involvement in decision making			
	Yes	No		
Brighter future	1.04	1.18	-3.180	0.002
Better place	1.02	1.13	-2.624	0.009
Proud neighbouring tourism	1.02	1.11	-2.289	0.023
Support tourism	1.00	1.11	-3.188	0.002

*Statistically significant at 0.05 or less.

of an alternative resource base as well as potential compensation. The development of a sustainable project should mean financial benefits for local people but this is not always the case.

The importance of local community support of tourism has been widely recognized and as a result, this has been a growing area of research (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004; Lee and Back, 2004). Results in this research established a conclusion that independent t-tests indicated that, residents participating in decision-making process show less negative perceptions towards the industry and its impacts and are more supportive than those who are not involved.

Recommendations

Saiwaa's goal to create a strong awareness of importance of environment, wildlife conservation and tourism is commendable. However, a number of recommendations were drawn:

1. The researcher recommends that the local people should be involved more in decision-making in order to feel a sense of ownership of any projects that will affect them either directly or indirectly.
2. There is need to educate the local people on conservation. This public awareness could be enhanced through such methods as holding of public hearings, using poster in business areas and schools, seminars, workshops and introduction of classes in local schools involving tourism and conservation. Through creation of such awareness, the local people will view tourism as an important economic option, and this will reduce the possibility of conflicts.
3. The multiplication effect of tourism benefits to the local people has received little attention. Research should be carried out to quantify the benefits accruing from tourism related employment, education bursaries, provision of community facilities and other tourism related community initiatives.

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