

## COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING, PERCEPTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN KING NEHALE CONSERVANCY, NAMIBIA

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the rapidly growing industries in the world. The development of this sector has become a strategy for poverty alleviation and economic development for developed and developing countries. Community contributions and knowledge of tourism play a significant role in the development of tourism. This paper assesses community understanding and perceptions of tourism development in the King Nehale Conservancy. The study used both interviews guides and semi-structured questionnaires for data collection. Microsoft Excel was used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data was analysed thematically. The findings suggest that local people in the King Nehale Conservancy do not understand tourism development. Majority of the respondents are not involved in tourism activities except those who are in the conservancy and thus have negative perceptions of tourism development. Craft making/selling was found to be the essential tourism-related activity of the conservancy.

*Keywords: community tourism, perceptions, understanding of tourism, community involvement, tourism development*

Developing countries recognize the potential contribution of tourism to their economy and this has increased efforts to develop the tourism sector. International tourism has grown significantly in recent decades, thereby raising living standards and leading to rapid increases in visitor numbers (MET, 2017). Globally, tourism development is influenced by economic change, the evolution of governance

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structures and the pressures of demographics and technological change (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001).

In the developing world, tourism has become progressively incorporated into many economic and social development plans that aim to improve livelihoods and drive national economies (McLachlan & Binns, 2014). The tourism industry is an important contributor to the generation of foreign exchange earnings, investments, revenues, employment, rural development, poverty reduction and growth of Namibia's economy (Namibia Vision 2030; National Development Plan [NDP 5], 2017).

Tourism development in Africa is seen as the focal point of economic growth and poverty reduction (Aref & Redzuan, 2009). The tourism industry is regarded as a means to achieving sustainable development for local communities (Sharpley, 2002). The development of tourism has been identified by scholars as a key strategy that can lead to economic upliftment and community development in the developing world (Aref & Redzuan, 2009; Ashley, 1995). Ghana, like many other African countries, embraced tourism development as a socio-economic development strategy in the early 1990s (Sirakaya, Teye, & Sonmez, 2002). In southern African countries, tourism provides new development opportunities, jobs and economic benefits for local people (Saarinen, 2010).

The Namibian government recognises tourism as an important generator of employment, particularly in rural areas (Namibia Vision 2030). Government uses tourism to increase benefits to rural communities through promoting the development of new tourism joint-venture enterprises, via partnerships between the private sector and communal conservancies (Mosimane & Silva, 2015). The Namibian government encourages the establishment of tourism on communal land as an efficient means of involving communities in the tourism sector and to enable them share in the benefits derived from tourism (MET, 2008). Conservancies are part of the Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programme aimed at linking conservation, tourism and rural development by giving local communities rights over wildlife and tourism (Gariseb & Mosimane, 2016). Increased local involvement and equity are essential to spreading the benefits of tourism as one of the principles of the national policy on tourism for Namibia (MET, 2008).

The primary objective of the study was to assess community understanding and perceptions of tourism development, and their involvement in tourism. The sub-objectives are: i) Appraise community understanding and perceptions of tourism; ii) Evaluate the involvement of community members in tourism activities; iii) Identify, what impedes or facilitate tourism development.

The study contributes to existing knowledge, through introducing new approaches and strategies which can be used in the planning, decision-making and implementation process of community-based tourism development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Community-Based Tourism**

Community based tourism (CBT) is tourism that takes environmental, social, and cultural sustainability into account; is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and their way of life (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Suansri, 2003). The concept of community-based tourism is associated with alternative development approaches formulated during the 1970s. These were conceived with focus on issues such as empowerment and self-reliance (Telfer, 2009). CBT emerges from a community development strategy that uses tourism as a tool to strengthen the ability of rural community organizations that manage tourism resources with the involvement of the local people.

Through CBT, local people find themselves in an internationally unified system of resource use over which they do not have control. The local people and the resources upon which they depend on become the targets of top-down decision making external to the community (Brohman, 1996). Rural areas in developing countries are inhabited by the poorest people in the society, therefore earnings from community-based tourism create an alternative means of survival for the locals (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012). Thus the tourism industry is dependent on the local community's hospitality and therefore it should be developed according to the local community's needs and desires (Andriotis, 2005). Rural communities have been known to be involved in tourism activities such as the establishments of lodges, campsites and selling of crafts to tourists; they also participate by forming joint venture partnerships with safari companies and the government - where they sub-lease their concession areas for safari hunting tourism purposes (Mbaiwa, 2008).

Community involvement in tourism is becoming increasingly popular in the developing world as a means of contributing towards rural development and poverty alleviation (Aung, 2012). Local communities are an important asset to tourism development because they own the premises where tourism activities take place (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). Community involvement in tourism can be considered from at least two viewpoints: The decision-making process and the benefits of tourism development (Tosun, 1999). Communities should be allowed to

become the decision makers in order for more benefits to accrue to the society. Muganda, Sirima and Ezra (2013) reveal that regardless of their literacy level, local people want to be involved in tourism decision-making process. The involvement of the local community ensures that visitors get an unforgettable and pleasant tourism experience while at the same time enabling the community to derive benefits from their visits (Sebele, 2010).

According to Aref (2009), community perceptions play a major role as regards the impact of tourism on a community and these can vary significantly. Latkova and Vogt (2012) posit that communities express positive or negative perceptions depending on whether their expectations of tourism development are met or not met. Communities further express negative perceptions when they are not fully informed of tourism development benefits and contributions to their overall quality of life.

Community benefits come about when the local communities take part in promoting their natural resources and their area as an attraction to tourists. To achieve long-lasting outcomes, communities need to be actively involved rather than being inactive observers (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). Since tourism is a community development tool, the development process should not destroy the values people seek in the community but instead, they should embrace and enhance the livelihoods of the community in return providing better standards and increasing the quality of life of those in these areas (McCool & Martin, 1994).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Area**

The study was conducted in King Nehale Conservancy in Onashikuvu village; a settlement close to the town of Omuthiya Gwiipindi, the capital of Oshikoto region in northern Namibia. Onashikuvu village is situated approximately 10 kilometres from Etosha National Park's King Nehale Gate. The village has an estimated number of 10-25 people/km<sup>2</sup> with approximately 30-40 households (Mendelsohn, Jarvis, Roberts, & Robertson, 2002). The village was chosen for the study because of its close proximity to the Etosha Gate which is one of Namibia's top tourist attraction and its location on the main B1 road linking Windhoek and Ondangwa, which provides easy access for visitors to the conservancy.

The King Nehale Conservancy is along the northern border of Etosha National Park. The conservancy is a relatively small; just over 500 km<sup>2</sup>. The environment of the conservancy is shaped by dynamics of the Cuvelai basin (NACSO,

2013). It lies on the eastern fringes of the basin, a landlocked depression into which rainwater from southern Angola drains along broad and shallow waterways called *oshanas* which culminate in the Omadhiya lakes and Etosha pan. The conservancy is approximately 1 100 meters above sea level, and annual rainfall is 450 millimetres on average. The conservancy has a large population of 20 000 (NACSO, 2013). King Nehale Gate in the northern border of Etosha was officially opened in 2003 and allows visitors the opportunity to combine the natural wonders of Etosha with the cultural vibrancy of Aawambo.

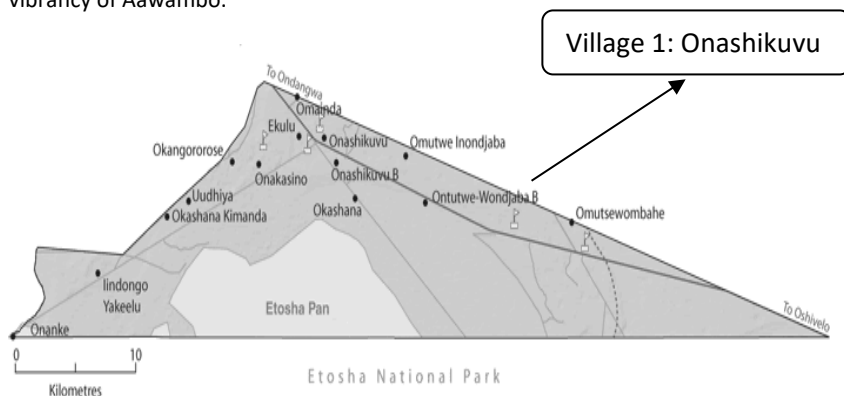


Figure 1: Map of the study area (NACSO, 2013)

### Research Design and Methods

The study used a mixed method approach. The mixed method approach enables both quantitative and qualitative approaches to inform each other (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the context within which decisions and actions take place (Marshall, 1996). The approach was fitting for this study because it seeks to build a holistic narrative of a social or cultural phenomenon (Marshall, 1996). The quantitative approach seeks to explain phenomena by collecting numerical data to explain same (Marshall, 1996). Quantitative research emphasizes numbers more than anything else; representing values and levels of theoretical constructs and concepts and the interpretation of the numbers is viewed as strong scientific evidence of how a phenomenon works (Myers, 2013).

The study used interview guides and semi-structured questionnaires. A key informant interview is a direct face-to-face attempt to obtain reliable and valid information from one or more respondents. Interviews allow people to convey a situation from their own perspective and in their own words (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Key informant interviews also provide a deeper understanding of

social phenomena, especially where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Key, 1997). The study selected five key informants from 32 committee members representing various sectors of the community. All key informants were conservancy committee members of which three were representatives of the respective areas of the conservancy in the committee; one member of the Tulongeni Craft Centre and one representative of the traditional authority. Purposive sampling method was used to select the five (5) key informants. Purposive sampling is when a researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996). With the use of purposive sampling, the researcher was able to get the most knowledgeable respondents and those willing to participate in the study.

The study questionnaire provided a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining information from a large sample (McLeod, 2014). A questionnaire is a means of eliciting the feelings, beliefs, experiences, perceptions or attitudes of a sample (McLeod, 2014). Convenience sampling was used to select 50 respondents within the study area. Convenience sampling involved drawing samples that were both easily accessible and were willing to participate in the study (Tongco, 2007). The head of household or the second elder in the house were the main participants in the study.

Quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires were entered into a Microsoft Excel sheet to create graphs and tables. Qualitative data were analysed in terms of emerging themes. Respondents were treated with respect and all the information from the respondents remained confidential. Only the researchers had access to the information. Accessibility of households was a challenge because households are a distance apart without proper roads that enable access. Some respondents were not available or reluctant to participate in the study which reduced the sample size. The researchers made provision for possible challenges by increasing the original sample size of the study.

## **RESULTS**

A total of 50 respondents participated in the survey, of which 62% were females (31) and 38% were males (19). A majority (72%) of the respondents were unemployed. Some of the respondents (36%) were in the age groups of 21-30, followed by those over 60 years (34%). The majority of the respondents were young, which could be attributed to young unemployed members of the community staying home. About half of the respondents (48%) completed secondary education, 36% received primary education and 10% had no education at all. Only 6% of the respondents had tertiary education.

## **Understanding and Perceptions about Tourism in King Nehale Conservancy**

Conservancies aim to foster sustainable resources management and to promote local socio-economic development through a decentralisation strategy. Tourism is understood through the conservancy decision-making process where the conservancy committee is responsible for decision making. A respondent (R4) said that "decision making is done by the conservancy committee members. The Conservancy has 10 centres and each centre has its representatives when the AGM takes place each centre sends a representative". Another (R1) indicated that "decisions are made by the conservancy management, which comprises of ten centres; each centre has a representative that is present at the AGM when decisions are made. Both men and women take part".

Respondents pointed at the Tulongeni Craft Centre as the only established initiative that involves a lot of women and which also provides the residents with skills training. The conservancy also provides educational materials such as brochures and organises information sessions for the community members. According to R4

We don't really have much education material as a conservancy, but what we do is that the community members can visit the different centres and the representatives will be able to give them individual information sessions on the conservancy matters or whatever they would like to find out about.

But R5 had a different view noting that "We have a conservancy brochure that we give to the community members and the nearby schools; we also have pamphlets and maps of the conservancy. The Conservancy provides workshops on the conservation of wildlife to community members".

A third of the respondents (30%) had no knowledge of tourism nor they do not know what tourism is all about, while a majority (70%) of the respondents were aware of tourism. Craft making/selling, trophy hunting and photography are the most known tourism activities taking place in KNC (see Table 1). Mostly women (16%) and youths (12%) participated in tourism activities while men were the lowest participants with 6%. The results explain why craft making/selling is the major activity because it is women and young people who are mostly associated with this activity.

Table 1

Tourism Activities in King Nehale Conservancy

| Types of Activities  | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Craft making/selling | 28%            |
| No Response          | 28%            |
| Trophy Hunting       | 18%            |
| Photography          | 14%            |
| Tour guiding         | 6%             |
| Accommodation        | 4%             |
| N/A (Not Applicable) | 2%             |

When asked whether community members think that tourism development in their village will be beneficial for the community, the majority (78%) agreed and a small number (22%) disagreed. The respondents indicated that they would be willing to be involved in the conservancy. In addition, the respondents are of the opinion that the conservancy is a good initiative as it encourages community members to conserve wildlife and practise their culture, and still benefit from it.

The respondents were asked what the community members in KNC would do to improve and develop tourism in their area. Most respondents said they need to come together as a community and make decisions that would benefit everyone. The community also needs to focus on preserving and conserving their traditions because this is what attracts the tourists to their area. A few respondents indicated that taking part in community initiatives such as workshops and training programs increases the community's knowledge and skills on how to improve tourism in the area. Some of the respondents felt that as community members, they at times feel helpless when it comes to issues of tourism, in the sense that they would not know who or how to approach the issues. However, few of the respondents said that creating a friendly and welcoming environment for the tourists would improve tourism in the area (see Table 2). More than a third of the respondents gave no response to this question for reasons such as they were either not interested in being part of the conservancy or they think that tourism would not benefit them.



Table 2

Community Suggestions to Improve Tourism in the Conservancy

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Taking ownership</b>                           | <b>38%</b>  |
| <b>No response</b>                                | <b>22%</b>  |
| <b>Take part in community initiatives</b>         | <b>16%</b>  |
| <b>Raise money</b>                                | <b>8%</b>   |
| <b>Community feels helpless</b>                   | <b>8%</b>   |
| <b>Create a friendly environment for tourists</b> | <b>6%</b>   |
| <b>Safety</b>                                     | <b>2%</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>                                      | <b>100%</b> |

**Community involvement in tourism development**

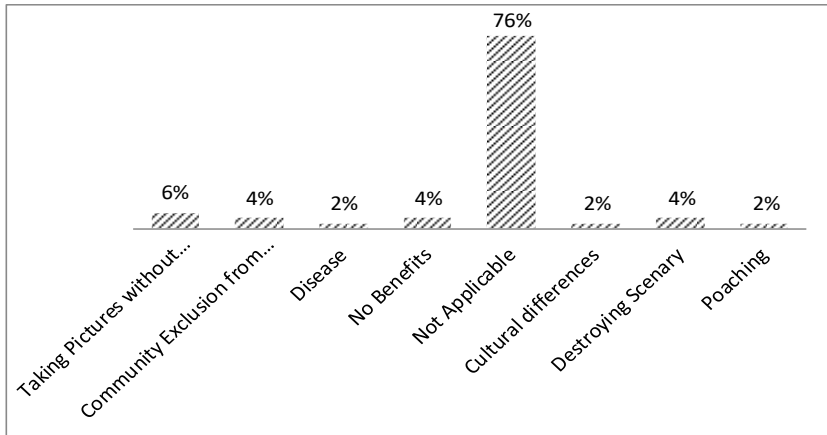
Respondents confirmed that they do have what it takes to attract tourists more so as “they are the ones that are supposed to be coming up with projects that are related to tourism, to bring more visitors to the area” (R3). They affirmed that involvement of the community in tourism contributes to tourism development. R1 was unhappy with the attitude of community members: “From what I can tell is that most of them are not interested in joining and becoming part of the conservancy but they want to get benefits from it.” Community involvement encourages an understanding of tourism as well as results in cultural promotion/preservation and conservation of the environment according to respondents. Tourism development is encouraged because the respondents feel that it will bring benefits such as employment creation and reduce poverty in the community. The community does foresee changes that could be brought by developing tourism in the area, such as a cultural village and accommodation facilities (lodges, campsites).

**Factors Impeding Tourism Development in the Conservancy**

The respondents were asked whether they felt that tourism caused any problems. A majority of the respondents (80%) said that tourism does not cause problems to communities. Most respondents did not mention problems associated with tourism because they stated that tourism causes no problems to the community.

Problems associated with tourism identified by respondents were tourists' taking community members' pictures without permission and lack of benefits. Community members were of the opinion that they are being excluded from the conservancy which is a tourism initiative, that they do not benefit from the conservancy and that tourists litter and destroy the environment.

Figure 2: *Types of problems brought about by tourism*



Tourism development is proving to be a challenge for the conservancy because of factors such as access to finance in that the available funds can only be used to cater for their basic needs. R1 noted that "without finances, we cannot really make many improvements in the conservancy." The community also mentioned the conflict between community and conservancy members. R2 put it succinctly stating that there are

Disagreements and conflicts between the community members and the conservancy members because the community members that are not part of the conservancy when they notice the benefits the conservancy members are getting, they want to know why they are excluded.

Another area of conflict involves the town council. According to R3 "the town council is now expanding their townland into the conservancy boundaries."

Another challenge is the unfriendliness amongst community members towards tourists. According to R5: "I would say that at times community members are not really friendly and welcoming to tourists. So this creates a hostile environment for them which is not very attractive". This informant also pointed out other matters:

The shortage of basic tourist facilities in the area contributes negatively to the development of tourism in the King Nehale Conservancy. The other issue is the lack of accommodation. Because we do not have many accommodation facilities in the area, tourists do not see the need to visit or stay in our area. There is also a lack of other services such as health facilities, network coverage etc.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **Community Understanding and Perceptions of Tourism**

Tourism has proven to be a local development strategy for Namibia and other developing nations (McLachlan & Binns, 2014; Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). The development offers a continuous and positive change in the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of the human condition (Tosun, 1999). According to Andriotis (2005) development of the tourism industry has been widely accepted as a positive in terms of economic growth, especially in developing countries.

In Namibia, conservancies are the primary agency for tourism development (MET, 2008). Tourism on communal land is encouraged to improve the quality of life of the local people and to empower the community. Tourism development directly or indirectly involves the support of the community (Andriotis, 2005; Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). In other words, the human aspect is of primary importance in tourism growth provided that locals are well informed and included in decision making and planning processes. Many rural communities do not have knowledge of tourism. Besides their basic understanding of a tourist, they do not understand what the purpose of tourism is. Therefore they do not know how, what or when exactly they can benefit from tourism activities taking place in their areas.

In KNC, most respondents expressed positive sentiments about developing the tourism sector. But it was clearly the conservancy committee members and conservancy members who showed greater enthusiasm about tourism because of its benefits. This finding supports Claiborne's (2010) assertion that often the local people that are involved in tourism have positive attitudes and local people who are not directly involved in tourism activities are negative towards tourism because they lack awareness and understanding of tourism. The findings of this study indicate that tourism awareness in KNC is very low and it is only those involved in tourism activities that gain from it.

Local people need to be aware of their natural resources, tourism products and how the products are promoted in order to understand tourism development

within their community. There is a need to make local people aware of tourism development and specific development projects as well as how they will affect the community, both positively and negatively (Sirakaya, Teye, & Sonmez, 2002). The government of Namibia promotes development programs which can assist Namibians in understanding the importance of tourism and its role in improving the standard of living as well as the economic, social and environmental development of the country. Government allocates concession rights over wildlife which form the basis for communities to enter tourism joint ventures.

Despite the KNC's initiative aimed at educating the community through the conservancy centres, brochures and information sessions, proper marketing and promotion have not taken place at both national and local levels. The findings support Latkova and Vogt (2010) that if local people are not fully informed of tourism development benefits and contributions to their quality of life, they become negative towards tourism development.

The community receives few benefits from tourism; mostly employment, meat, wildlife and grazing land for their animals as well as training in arts and crafts. This could be as a result of the conservancy not being fully established; therefore it is not able to provide many benefits to the community. When local people are allowed to think and design their own version of tourism in their community, they will be able to mitigate some of the negative impacts of regular tourism (Muhana, 2007). This will certainly have to be done with proper guidance and facilitation in order for tourism to be feasible and successful. However, the majority of the respondents in KNC were generally not satisfied with the current levels of tourism in the conservancy.

***Involvement of the Community in Tourism.*** A major aspect of tourism development is community involvement in tourism activities and projects because local communities are regarded as an important asset to tourism development (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). Some of the local people in the KNC have shown willingness to be involved in tourism developmental activities in the hope that tourism can be beneficial to them. This is not only because of benefits such as income and employment creation that are derived from tourism development but because cultural preservation is important to the community of King Nehale Conservancy. This supports Forstner's (2004) view that community involvement needs to be critically assessed because not all community members are likely to have an interest in becoming directly involved.

The findings of this study have shown that community members of KNC have indicated interest in becoming decision makers and participants in the conservancy activities. Community members feel helpless at times when their opinions are not taken into consideration by the conservancy management. This

finding supports Sebele's (2010) view that communities should be allowed to become active participants and decisions makers as this allows more benefits to accrue to society. In Tanzania, for instance, locals see the need to be involved in the tourism decision-making process regardless of their education level (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). Sebele (2010) further maintains that locals can only become active participants if they have support from the government, private sector and NGOs to enable the transfer of skills and knowledge.

The response could be both positive and negative in terms of community involvement in tourism (Forstner, 2004). Communities themselves know what they can offer; therefore their involvement is required to make tourism in their surrounding a success. Activities such as lodges, campsites, joint venture partnerships with safari companies are supposed to encourage the involvement of rural communities (Mbaiwa, 2008).

In KNC, Tulongeni Crafts Centre is the only initiative in which community members are involved. Ashley (1995) argues that local crafts are important for several reasons: The basis already exists, they provide a significant share of locally-controlled income and earnings reach producers directly. Further growth of the conservancy establishments such as cultural villages, lodges, etc. are to be expected which will encourage the involvement of the community through direct employment. This is important in ensuring that visitors will get an unforgettable experience whilst enabling the community to derive benefits from these visits (Sebele, 2010).

It is critical for the local communities to understand the importance of tourism development in their region in order to encourage them to be involved (NDP 5; Tuson, 2001). Local involvement in tourism planning and decision making in tourism development process is often ignored and research to determine the significance of local people's input in the decision-making level is limited (Sherpa, 2012). It is significant to note that proper formulation and implementation of a favourable policy on tourism development is required if locals are to enjoy the benefits of tourism (Mazumder, Sultana, & Al-Mamun, 2013). Where local people may initially resist externally-based tourism development initiatives, the subsequent feedback and interaction between developers and community organizations could provide an appreciative dialogue necessary for the collaborative implementation of tourism (Hwand, Stewart, & Ko, 2012).

***Impediments Associated with Tourism Development.*** Since tourism is a community development tool, the development process should not erode local values and mores. Local communities in KNC are faced with a different set of problems such as tourists taking pictures of them without their permission, the community feeling excluded from the conservancy, not deriving benefits for the community from the

conservancy, destruction of the natural environment as well as poaching. Communities can be empowered economically to help withstand and overcome the challenges that they are experiencing (Ferreira, 2004).

On the other hand, the conservancy has experienced some problems that are hindering the growth and slowing down tourism development. A range of factors such as; access to finance, the conflict between the community and the conservancy, land distribution, unfriendliness amongst community members and a lack of facilities are just some of the problems hindering tourism development in KNC. The findings support Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012) who noted that rural areas in developing countries are often characterized by a shortage of facilities and are inhabited by the poorest people in society who cannot facilitate tourism development.

Community dissatisfaction is a major threat to the growth of tourism in any given area. When locals are continuously faced with problems such as those experienced by the community of KNC, their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism become negative. The vast majority of respondents were not satisfied with the current levels of tourism development in the conservancy and asked for further expansion and diversification in tourism activities. Results revealed that some community members feel that the costs they incur far outweigh the benefits. And the loss of access to natural resources and the lack of benefits for a majority of the community members were identified as major obstacles hindering progress in tourism development. According to Ferreira (2004), community satisfaction may be a useful approach for evaluation of local people' perceptions and attitudes in the process of tourism development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study's findings indicate that although local people in the King Nehale Conservancy know about tourism, they do not understand the complexity of the tourism sector. Therefore, there is a need for the King Nehale Conservancy committee to educate the community on tourism development. This is imperative to enable locals to understand and relate to tourism development. Another finding is that majority of the respondents are not involved in any tourism activities within the conservancy except those who are directly involved in the conservancy. Therefore, the study recommends that the conservancy should review and improve community involvement especially in the planning and implementation of tourism development. Access to finance, community exclusion from the conservancy and a lack of tourism facilities are some of the challenges impeding tourism development in King Nehale Conservancy. Governments should put measures in place such as a funding programme to provide capital for facilities if tourism development is to succeed as a development strategy. Finally, King Nehale Conservancy has shown potential for

further tourism growth but the government and the community should ensure that proper planning, training of staff, marketing and promotion are incorporated into its development strategy.

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