

The Influence of Wildlife Conservation on Local Economic Development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

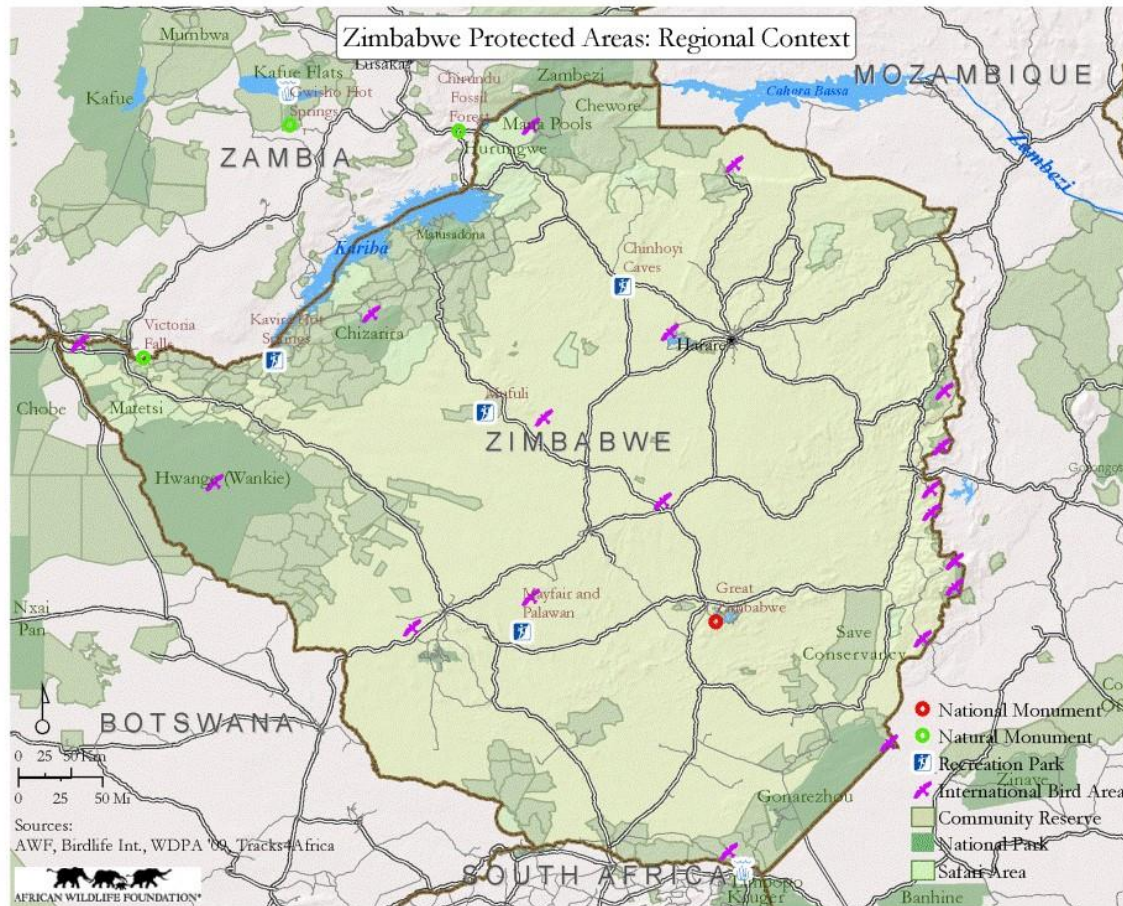
The study was conducted in the districts of Beitbridge, Chipinge and Chiredzi which share boundaries with the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted to investigate the influence of wildlife conservation on local economic development. Wildlife is significant both ecologically by providing rich biodiversity and ecosystems' services, and economically through its sustainable utilisation, and it appears Zimbabwean communities are not benefiting from its sustainable utilisation. The study sample comprised of 310 community heads, 32 local authority officials, 15 tourism industry entrepreneurs and 3 district development coordinators. Purposive sampling was used to sample the respondents. Results revealed that wildlife conservations are growth poles for local economic development and that the geographical location of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park provides some rich biodiversity and ecosystems' services. The study revealed that communities have been empowered through Community Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) which has modernised communities through infrastructure development and wealth creation. The findings established that human wildlife conflict cases have been contained whilst communities now have access to modern public infrastructure, uninterrupted access of basic necessities such as food, clothing and health services, human capital improvement and unequivocal redistribution of wealth. Wildlife Conservation Areas have become major attractions the world over and this study recommends that neighbouring communities be involved in the decision making and management of natural resources for the sustenance of wildlife conservation and preservation. Additional research in the area would centre on economic evaluation and value chain analysis of wildlife products (baseline and potentials).

Key words: Local economic development, wildlife conservation, human wildlife conflict, biodiversity and ecosystem services

Introduction

Wildlife conservation is the art of protecting flora and fauna, in addition to their habitants. Within the world's ecosystem, flora and fauna provides some equilibrium and stability to wildlife's processes. The human populace has grown exponentially over the past 200 years, to more than seven billion people today and it continues to grow. This means natural resources are equally being utilised to the billions of people around the globe. The government of the Republic of Zimbabwe appreciates the significance of its natural resources

in terms of both ecological (biodiversity conservation) and economic (sustainability utilisation) value. Biota plays a fundamental role of this biodiversity. The government of the Republic of Zimbabwe is steadfast in preserving and conserving wildlife as proven by the fact that as far back as 1991, it had territorially demarcated 13% of its land as protected State Land under wildlife (Policy for Wildlife, 1992). This terrestrial that constitutes the Parks and Wildlife Estate is not subject to land conjecture and it cannot be reallocated except by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.



Protected Areas of the Republic of Zimbabwe Sources: AWF, Birdlife Int, WDPA Co. Track 4Africa

The administration of Zimbabwe's commitment on territorial also incorporates Communal Lands where Rural District Councils superintend natural resources (including wildlife) on behalf of the communities. The administration of the Republic of Zimbabwe also acknowledges the role played by private landowners in biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilisation. The administration is in support of the different actors in the wildlife sector through the enactment of legislation and guiding policies supporting wildlife conservation. The establishment of Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) and birth of wildlife conservancies is a culmination of the existing and an enabling legal and policy environment.

The promulgation of the Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29:13] in Zimbabwe has been key within the wildlife sector as it provides for a legal entity (in Communal Lands) accountable for wildlife resources. Communal Land in Zimbabwe is not privately owned by

communities and these communities do not constitute a legal entity it then confers the appropriate authority status to Rural District Council (RDC). The administration confers rural district councils as custodians of the wildlife resources on behalf of the local communities. The administration's resolve to devolve authority to the lower echelons has paved way for the creation of Community Development Trusts. There is latitude for these Community Development Trusts to be used as administration vehicles to further devolve decision making from district level to the sub-district level, which will afford more income opportunities at a community level thereby enhancing conservation support and participation from the community as they will have a factual and reliable entrenched interest. Numerous pieces of legislation and policies do govern the wildlife sector and chief among them is the Parks and Wildlife Act [Chapter 20:14], Wildlife Based Land Reform Policy, Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29:13] and the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act [Chapter 14:33].

Effects of Wildlife Conservation on Local Economic Development

The justification aimed at establishing endangered areas and wildlife reserves has been central in the preservation and conservation discourse since the nineteenth century (Andam et al., 2010; Noe & Kangalawe, 2015; Ahmad et al., 2012). Clearly, the objectives of nature reserves and national parks are integrally preservationist and fixated on fortification of biodiversity, conservation of acute ecological processes as well as ecosystem goods and services (Torri, 2011). It is evident, that ecocentrism has been manifested in most institutions of nature reserves and has become concrete in most nations across the globe (Igoe, 2005). Nevertheless, large territories of human habitants have been synonymous adjacent to nature reserves particularly in developing countries. The hegemony of the nature-centred attitude substantiates insinuations that calls for the desires of local communities which are often neglected (Mariki, 2013). The ostensible exclusion of accessing natural capital is generally attributed to the overwhelmingly negative attitudes, negligence and destruction as local communities try to circumvent threats associated with poverty, deprivation, undernourishment and food insecurity (Watts & Faasen, 2009). Consequently, to deal with such negative manifestations, an impulsive paradigm shift was observed in conservation discourse and practice skewed towards utilitarian and anthropocentric purposes (Scheba & Mustalahti, 2015; Watts & Faasen, 2009).

Meanwhile the primer of World Conservation Strategy in 1980, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992 and the World Parks Congress Durban accord of 2003 held in South Africa, most nature reserves in the world embraced a people-centred approach that integrates environmental, political and socioeconomic benefits for the local communities (Pelser, Redelinghuys, & Velelo, 2013; Noe & Kangalawe, 2015). The World Parks Congress views nature reserves and other endangered areas as vehicles for poverty reduction, economic development and sustainable livelihoods (Pelser et al., 2013). This encompasses the significance of nature reserves in contributing towards local economic development in relation to career and market opportunities, generation of income, facilitation of entrepreneurship and business opportunities, and the creation of an enabling local economic development environment. Consequently, consideration has gradually moved from observing local societies as menace to biodiversity to stewards and beneficiaries of flora and fauna (Kothari, 2002; Mariki, 2013; Camill et al., 2013).

It is perceptible that for nature conservation to have a significant effect on local economic development (LED), it is apposite to comprehend the administrative systems or approaches

adopted in protected areas. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the paradigm shift in conservation, many wildlife reserves still fail to adhere to the idea of community participation and enhanced local economic development initiatives for adjacent local communities. Pelsier et al., (2011) say that the majority of the outreach conservation interrelated programmes undertaken within the dictates of the new conservation management system local communities did not afford local communities' tangible benefits which could make a lifelong difference to their poverty level, income, livelihoods and local economic development. Furthermore, poverty, inequality, unemployment and economic stagnation persist in communities inhabited by nature reserves (Beer & Marais, 2005). In the conservation discourse, the increasing popularity of nature reserves rests on the postulation that a permitting local economic development environment would be established wherein increased tourism would precipitate economic growth, employment creation and such other attributes which are mutually considered as local economic development (Ntonzima & Binza, 2011; Ramukumba et al., 2012; Spenceley & Snyman, 2012; Das & Chatterjee, 2015). In reality, the interface of nature conservation remains scarcely tested.

Furthermore, the practice of nature conservation has often been viewed as a playground for the most privileged groups with the deprived societies drowning in poverty (Watts & Faasen, 2009). In developing countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, nature reserves appear to serve the commercial interests of global business and capital rather than promoting economic development of local communities (Watts & Faasen, 2009). It is common practice that nature reserves are established through natural capital in areas occupied by poor communities, the emphasis on nature conservation tends to exclude those owner-communities having access (Pelsier et al., 2011). The South African government has made it a legal requirement for nature reserves and other protected areas to incorporate local communities in conservation, most nature reserves often fail to adhere to such requirements.

Wildlife conservation involves the creation of businesses that are focused on conservation efforts, such as ecotourism, sustainable agriculture and wildlife management. The objective has been to create sustainable local economic opportunities that benefit both local people and wildlife whilst preserving natural resources for future generations.

Local Economic Development

Economic development is frazzled and commences with a departure from territorial economic development. Economic development is a practice in which a community manages natural resources and establishes partnerships to create new employment and encourage territorial economic development (Kuncoro, Otonomi, & Daerah, 2004). Each effort at economic development has as its prime purpose the enlargement of the quantity and types of employment opportunities available to the community. Every development in communal areas, even from the agricultural sector, should be taken as a very important, dynamic, and decisive component in the overall economic development strategy. This is common practice and evident especially in low-income developing countries, where they are passive and only become supportive in the overall economic development process.

Local Economic Development (LED) is an approach to local development, focusing on local economic makeover to respond to opportunities and threats prevailing in local and national economies (Bartik et al., 2003). Local economies are designed internationally through guidelines and procedures that are formed at the supranational, national, sub national and local levels, and include complex forces and processes such as globalization, urbanization,

migration, global and national production systems and trade. These forces create opportunities and threats to localities which call for intervention through preparing plans and projects by both national and local governments seeking to create and promote local and national development (Trah, 2004).

The necessity for local economic development also arises out of the developmental challenge that economic development does not occur everywhere at the same time, but occurs unevenly and inequitably across economic space, landscape, and social groups thereby creating major challenges in terms of satisfying the wants of the inhabitants in terms of employment opportunities, wealth creation and services particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. This forms the foundation of regional development theory and planning (Trah, 2004).

In terms of precise deliverables, local economic development frameworks seek to grow local economies (raising local GDP's and standards of living), to create employment opportunities, facilitation of investment opportunities and foreign direct investment, grow existing industries, and connect them to global value chains (Helmsing & Egziabher, 2005). LED is territorial and bound by local jurisdictions who adopt it through their local powers and jurisdictions in a bid to address societal needs, equalisation, creating new opportunity and unlock development potential (Helmsing & Egziabher, 2005). Helmsing & Egziabher (2005) posits that LED is a process nurturing partnership to manage existing resources, creating jobs and stimulating the economy. Nancey & Blakely (2013) in his classic work identifies LED as a process which brings local governments and other key stakeholders to work together in their localities to encourage and maintain business activity to foster local employment.

The drive for local economic development is towards building the economic capacity of a local area in order to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all. It brings stakeholders together to collectively partner in creating favourable conditions for economic growth and employment creation. The development of a community depends upon its aptitude to adjust to the dynamic local, national, and international market economy. LED is increasingly used by communities as a strategy to strengthen local economic capacity of an area, improve the investment opportunities, and increase the productivity and competitiveness of local businesses, entrepreneurs, and workers. Local economic development is a central in resource management and sustainable economic growth. It is increasingly being considered as a key function of local government and a tool of ensuring that local authorities can address the priority needs of local citizens in a sustainable manner.

Government Efforts in promoting local economic development in Zimbabwe

Local administrations in the twenty-first century have developed into centres for developmental programmes. This entails that they are now supposed to go beyond the basics of service delivery. The vision of Zimbabwe of being a developmental state focussing on economic development being driven by indigenous resources has placed local authorities as primary actors in local economic development. This situation has compelled local authorities to develop individual local economic development policies towards the promotion of the social well-being, growth and prosperity of local communities. Zimbabwe has fully conceptualised the concept of Local Economic Development as a government and through development partners such as Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to strengthen the economic base and ties of the local economy.

Methodology

Study Area

The study focused on the districts of Beitbridge, Chipinge and Chiredzi, as these are the districts that share boundaries with Gonarezhou National Park in the Southern Lowveld of Zimbabwe. The study area is located between longitude 29°E-33°E and between latitude 20°S-22.5°S and lies within the prairie countryside. The study area is located in the South and Southeast of Zimbabwe. The Great Limpopo Trans frontier Park is home to more than 850 faunae and 2 000 plant species and is one of the first officially recognised peace parks in Southern Africa. This 35 000 km² park links the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, the Kruger National Park in South Africa, and the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe. The Trans frontier Park also encompasses the Sengwe communal land in Zimbabwe and the Makuleke region in South Africa, which lies between the Kruger and Gonarezhou Parks. The larger Great Limpopo Trans Frontier Conservation Area (TFCA), measuring almost 100 000 km², includes the Banhine and Zinave National Parks, the Massingir and Corumana areas in Mozambique, as well as various privately and state-owned conservation areas in South Africa and Zimbabwe which are periphery to the trans frontier park.

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive design on the basis of the primary research question, which reads: 'Is the Great Limpopo Trans-Frontier Park (Wildlife Conservation) a growth pole for the districts of Beitbridge, Chipinge and Chiredzi'? As this question required the study participants to express their views on the preferred focus, the study used qualitative mode of survey during collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. The local authorities' officials, conservationists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and households were the target population of the study. They were used as appropriate stoolpigeons from whom dependable data were obtained. In this sense, population can be interpreted as a pool of cases or elements from which a sample is drawn (Neuman, 2003). Having realised the impossibility of including the whole populace in the study coupled with other critical considerations, such as financial constraints and timelines, a sample of 360 respondents was drawn to represent the entire population comprising of 310 communities, 32 local government officials, 15 entrepreneurs and 3 district development coordinators.

Study questionnaires encompassed of unstructured and semi-structured questions were used to collect primary data from the relevant respondents, while discussion and policy documents, intellectual journals, thesis and internet sources were used to collect secondary data. The typology of questions contained in survey questionnaires permitted respondents to provide rejoinders and further elucidate on their rejoinders by asserting why things are as they said. In other words, it provided the respondents with a chance to forthrightly express their concerns relating to their own circumstances. The data was scrutinised by means of content analysis. This was done by sifting the couched meanings entrenched in the responses in order to establish the respondents' in-depth and own conceptualisation and interpretation of the phenomenon under exploration.

The sequential parts of the data were categorised in accordance with their classifications in order to generate themes and/or sub-themes for the resolve of interpreting the results against the primary research question. Content analysis was preferred on the basis that it is a systematic method which is bendable to curtail large volumes of data and aptly scrutinise

qualitative responses to unstructured open-ended interview questions. During the interpretation of data, the study concentrated on central areas that dogged the formulation of the questions and objectives of the study. This was done to generate connotations from the qualitative results. The study equated the results with the reviewed literature to determine whether the latter corroborates or refutes the former. Subsequently, insinuations were drawn against the research question. The elucidation of data assisted as an important aspect in depicting corollaries from the findings of the study (Verma & Verma, 2006).

Results and discussion

Cross tabulation report is used to analyse the relationship between wildlife conservation variables and Local Economic Development variables. The cross tabulation has the x-axis as one variable and y-axis as another variable. This analysis is crucial in finding underlying relationships within survey results. Generally, these results are presented in aggregate that is we only see the summary of results, one question at a time. Cross tabulation (or crosstab) analysis reveal a relationship in the data that is not initially apparent as we are elaborating the original relationship between the original independent variable and the original dependant with the aid of the control variable (Base Line Variable).

Economic Development and Wildlife Conservation Cross Tabulation

Wildlife Conservation				
ECD	1	2	3	Total
-----+-----+-----				
1	4	34	27	65
2	1	21	21	43
3	3	17	17	37
4	4	28	34	66
5	8	35	47	90
-----+-----+-----				
Total 	20	135	146 	301

The total cross tabulation responses (301) match the total survey responses (301). All data were accounted for and were properly separated by Wildlife Conservation categories and the dependant variable. The cross descriptive relationships in the data represents four (4) respondents in category (1) agreed that job creation has some relationship with local economic development, thirty-four (34) respondents in category (2) could neither relate or not relate job creation to local economic development and twenty even (27) respondents said there is no relationship between Wildlife Conservation Entrepreneurship and Local Economic Development

During the interviews one of the key informants elaborated the purpose of local economic development is to build up the economic capacity of a local area in order to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all. It is a process by which the public, business, and non-governmental sector partners work collectively to create conditions for economic growth and employment generation. The district development Coordinator was asked to elaborate on what he meant. His reply was, *“Communities must be involved in all local economic development planning processes to have sustainable development projects to enable them have ownership of such entities. Economic Development projects are meant to transform livelihoods of local people and enable them have control and access to the socio-economic infrastructures. Community exclusion in developmental projects will result in such a community not realising economic benefits and usage of the facilities. The ideal situation is of having sound synergies of all economic players of the community that is the business sector, development partners and local government officials to have a shared vision. The existence of the Great Limpopo Trans-Frontier Park referred as (Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe) has created several social benefits to our communities ranging from education, campfire, community dividends, wild produce and products, infrastructure development and rehabilitation and entrepreneurial activities. Communities adjacent to the park have what we call Campfire Villages which receives dividends from concession areas under the Campfire Model as proceeds from sport hunting”*.

The study established that Gonarezhou national Park and the surrounding communities have established a Community Environment and Development Fund (CEDF) to support implementation of development priorities and integrated landscape management to promote and improve social economic and ecological resilience in the Gonarezhou National Park and the neighbouring communities. The existence of CEDF has helped stakeholders to engage positively with each other as key partners in conservation for improved social sustainability and economic development.

All key informants alluded the need to improve relations of communities and national parks management as they chronicled the establishment of national parks by saying *“The removal of communities for the establishment of national parks was backed by a draconian legislation to forcibly remove people and confiscate land, as communities were marginalized and impoverished. As a result, the relationship between national parks management and communities is characterised by ongoing conflicts and unresolved struggles over land and natural resources culminating into poaching and destruction of flora and fauna”*. The overall perception by the study’s key informants is supported by Omoding, et al. (2020) as Uganda has unresolved conflicts and ongoing struggles over land and natural resources. In Zimbabwe the establishment of the Gonarezhou National Park resulted in the dispossession of the various communities living on the land and lost their ancestral land, cultural sites and livelihood resources. In an effort to address the tension between the national park authorities and the communities resulted in the establishment of Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) to mediate human-wildlife conflict. The programme promotes community based natural resources management and has facilitated a mutual benefit to local communities.

During the interviews one of the keys participants responded by highlighting perennial administrative challenges by saying *“The governance of national parks includes community-based planning mechanisms though at times not being practised, local, national, regional and global frameworks formulated at the various levels. These structures are there, though*

not limited to but in adherence to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the one that easily comes to my mind is SDG number 15 that is Life on Land, also SDG number 13 on Climate change and several protocols and the one that comes to my mind is the Nagoya Protocol making its administration so complex and challenging for our communities who I view as being at the periphery of the administration chain. This make it very difficult for our communities who live in the vicinity of national parks to be heard, even to be involved or considered in the decision making of running these parks and in my view remain marginalised. Thus, in order to promote sustainable natural resources management, communities must be involved, be involved in decision making and the challenge at hand is for the communities and national parks management to establish operational processes and actions which will foster sustainable natural resources management as this will enable the communities derive socio-economic benefits from the existence of these parks". This postulation is validated in our descriptive and cross tabulation results on community participation and exclusion in their involvement in the administration of national parks affairs and supported by (West et al., 2006). This is also supported by Swinburn et al., (2006) whereby public, business and non-governmental sectors work collectively as partners to create a better quality of life for local residents through economic development by creating jobs/wealth, addressing poverty levels and attracting investments. The greatest potential for development support exists at the local government level, with a focus on attracting investments, creating jobs and boosting demand. The existence of parks have developed local communities and at national level through the construction of public infrastructure ranging from but not limited to state-of-the-art hospitality structures, roads, schools, clinics among others and the preservation of natural resources.

Interestingly, all the key participants of the study had this to say *"Traditionally the identification and preservation of heritage has been driven by community aspirations about preserving connections with history and ancestors as part of the national identity. Heritage conservation may be very expensive both to the public purse and may provide economic reason to preserve that heritage. The most benefit from heritage is the chance to change community perception of the way in which heritage places should be treated. The following are the most significant economic benefits being derived from the Great Limpopo Trans-Frontier Conservation Park:- Employment creation for the host community, Improvement and development of public service and public infrastructure utilities, increase in local sustainable income levels, increase in demand for goods and services and the overall improvement of living for residents of the heritage area. I understand you have asked about benefits but please take note we have negative impacts as well which include among others: exploitation of the rural populace, repatriation of profits from the communities, the underpayment of rural labour, misuse of local infrastructure by visitors and prostitution and increased social life problems".* As can be expected, the exploitation of any resource, natural or otherwise creates debate about the cost benefit of the utilisation of the resource in question (Frechtling, 2011). The community in tourism is very important since tourism affects the whole community in one way or the other be it benefits (value accrued to the community such as income, jobs) or costs (the negative effects tourism activities could have on a community such as environment degradation, pollution, social vice and crime). A study conducted in a Nigerian rural area found that tourism is a catalyst to socio-economic development with benefits accruing at all levels of society, making tourism a viable poverty alleviation tool (Framgialli, 2008). Trans-frontier parks aim to provide jobs and revenue-generating projects as well as livelihood opportunities for local people covered by these parks either through the promotion of entrepreneurship activities or community dividends. The improvement of lives of people in these local communities potentially further cascades to the

instigation of a positive perception around willingly taking part in sustainable wildlife management as people witness and enjoy the social and economic advantages that can be achieved sustainable. Trans-Frontier parks may also be a means for empowering and uplifting previously marginalized communities as they participate in the management of these parks as key sub-state entities. Trans-Frontier parks can also be seen as revenue generators, providing a conducive environment for investment as well as employment and income sustainability.

From the interviews, it was learnt that community wildlife management and conservation can bring about significant improvement to the lives of rural poor, bringing in significant financial and material resources than traditional subsistence lifestyles provided. From the interviews it is evident that nature-based tourism inclusive of photographic and sport hunting as well as game ranching can create employment opportunities and sustainable financial resources both at national and local level than subsistence cropping or traditional cattle raising especially on marginal land. Although tourism opportunities will never be adequate to satisfy the necessities of each and every individual, it is evident that transfrontier conversations parks will add value by attracting more tourists, explore additional market access, and creates new opportunities for larger ecosystem-based management areas, including exclusive hunting areas and game ranching in the neighbourhood.

Conservation and wildlife management at the Great Limpopo Trans frontier Conservation Area is transforming communities within the periphery of the park from being a poverty-stricken community because of its geographical location and history linked to national parks establishments in Zimbabwe. This is what the key informants had to say *“National parks historically are located in areas not suitable for human habitants and crop farming in Zimbabwe and the existence of the GLTFP has transformed the areas forming the corridors of the park habitable areas through campfire dividends as communities’ livelihoods is being sustained from consumptive tourism. The co-existence of wild animals with human beings has brought about significant and major improvements in these poor communities bringing in more funds and resources than traditional subsistence lifestyles do provide”*. It is evident that the park has created concession areas for the benefit of communities where animals from the park easily move to these areas and at times become resident animals there prompting the communities and the local authority to carry out sport hunting within the concession areas thereby racking in some foreign currency to communities through tourism. It is understood that the communities did cede their prime farming land to form concession areas which are under the management and auspices of the community based natural resources management programme in which Rural District Councils, on behalf of the communities on communal land are granted authority to market wildlife in their district to safari operators under Communal Areas management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). In these concession areas safari operators construct camping sites which will be used by tourists during the period of their hunt whilst the hunters pay daily rates for the period of they stay. Proceed from the tourist will be shared amongst the three bodies that is rural council, communities and campfire association.

Within the GLTFP, it has been realised that nature-based tourism which comprises photographing and sport hunting and at times traversing fees do provide employment opportunities and substantial income at local and national level. It was also observed that Trans -Frontier parks do provide formal employment and revenue generation as well as livelihood opportunities for communities. Communities are now used to sharing and co-existing with wild animals and cases of human wildlife conflict are no longer prevalent. The improvement of community livelihoods and sustainable income in these local communities

has potentially further cascades to the instigation of a positive perception towards wildlife conservation and the enthusiasm of the community in taking part in sustainable wildlife management. The communities have realised the benefits of wildlife conservation such as socio-economic benefits and infrastructure development. Trans-Frontier parks may also be a means for empowering and uplifting previous marginalised communities as they participate in the management of these parks as state stakeholders. The following are some of the mentioned socio economic benefits from Gonarezhou trans frontier park cascading to communities: Interaction with local and foreign tourists, tourists visits and expenditure has improved sustainable earnings of communities, tourists expenses has improved the quality of life of surrounding communities to the park, tourism has created formal employment for the local communities, the standard of living has improved due to tourism and infrastructure development has improved remarkably.

Interestingly, the interviews with district development coordinators did reveal some contrasting observations and had this to say, *The Great Limpopo Trans-Frontier Park has contributed a lot of positives to our districts, but it has brought some social ills which has compromised our social moral fibre. Prostitution is now rife; drug abuse is so prevalent and our culture has been compromised thereby causing a lot of social problems*". For instance, the respondents explained the vices of tourists on the communities such as the introduction of prostitution to the community, decay of local communities' social fibre and drug abuse resulting in increased social problems. In the tourism industry the formal working population lost their jobs due to Covid 19 and several families were left without sustainable income. Due to the pandemic, the tourism fraternity in 2020 generated a loss of income 10 (ten) times greater than the global economic crisis of 2009 (Organisation Mundial del Turismo [OMT], 2020b). Evidently, the consequence of the pandemic for tourism business and the livelihoods and their workers are enormous.

Conclusion and recommendations

The park is made up of South Africa's Kruger National Park, Mozambique's Limpopo Park and Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park to form a huge ecosystem that is home to wildlife including rhinoceros, elephants and lions. Evidence from the study has shown that the Great Limpopo Trans-Frontier Conservation Area did broaden its protected area to include communal land outside the park to form what is called concessions areas, an initiative that has immensely benefited both wildlife and local peoples. The study established that the concession areas are under the management of CAMPFIRE and is involved in consumptive tourism much to the benefit of the local people. From the study findings it is evident that the three countries have strengthened economic relations between the states by attracting a greater number of tourists within the region which has resulted in the creation of employment, sustainable wealth, infrastructure development, wildlife conservation, law enforcement and fire management strategies. In view of these findings, the study concludes that wildlife conservation contributes towards local economic development.

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