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The role of tourism employment in poverty reduction and community perceptions of conservation and tourism in southern Africa

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High-end ecotourism operations in African protected areas often claim to share the benefits of ecotourism with surrounding rural communities through employment and “trickle down” effects of revenues that result from such operations. The receipt of benefits from ecotourism is also claimed to promote an appreciation of biological diversity and conservation in surrounding communities. In practice, these claimed benefits can be challenging to measure and no multi-country study has attempted to assess the efficacy of these claims across a variety of circumstances. This study assessed various impacts of ecotourism employment at study sites in Botswana, Malawi and Namibia. Analysis of household income, social welfare impacts and the number of people indirectly affected by ecotourism employment indicates that rural communities are moving towards an engagement with the market economy as a result of ecotourism operations. Monthly income from ecotourism employment was shown to enable households to invest in assets, education and “luxury” goods, which improved financial security and social welfare in remote, rural areas. A thorough analysis of the various factors impacting attitudes towards conservation and tourism showed that ecotourism employment positively affects attitudes, though level of education showed the largest impact.

Keywords: high-end ecotourism; rural communities; poverty reduction; conservation attitudes; southern Africa; tourism employment

Introduction

Many rural communities in Africa are characterized by their remoteness, high levels of poverty and unemployment, low levels of skills and education, and a high dependency on natural resources for survival (Ellis, 1999). The majority of high-end ecotourism camps are situated in such remote areas, with little development and very few other employment opportunities for local communities. New threats to traditional rural livelihoods posed by climate change mean that, now more than ever, there is an urgent need for alternative – and sustainable – income-generating opportunities, and the panacea is sometimes thought to reside in high-end ecotourism1 (Ellis, 1999; Nelson et al., 2009).

High-end ecotourism operations in protected areas often claim to share the benefits of ecotourism with surrounding local communities and to ensure a “trickle down” effect of the revenues that result from such operations through community engagement models (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Spenceley, 2008). These ecotourism businesses claim to offer efficient, effective and sustainable alternatives that generate meaningful revenue and help to make conservation economically viable through the economic engine of tourism (Mitchell &
The benefits to local rural communities are said to include employment, other income-generating opportunities (both direct and indirect), training, skills development and improved social welfare (Jamieson, Goodwin, & Edmunds, 2004; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Spenceley, 2008). At the same time, these economic models are also claimed to promote an appreciation of biological diversity and the conservation of natural resources in rural communities (Bookbinder, Dinerstein, Rijal, Cauley, & Rajouria, 1998; Kiss, 2004; Shibia, 2010; Sifuna, 2010). In practice, these benefits can be challenging to implement, and to date, no multi-country study has attempted to assess the efficacy of these claims across a variety of circumstances.

In the past, communities were able to survive through subsistence farming and, in some cases, government rations and grants (Ellis, 1999). As population growth has escalated, people are finding it harder to survive in this manner and there is a greater need for permanent employment and a steady income (Alexander, 2000; Barrow & Fabricius, 2002). The increasing role of climate change and its effect on subsistence lifestyles is also resulting in a growing dependence on the market economy and a declining ability of traditional subsistence lifestyles to sustain rural populations and satisfy their development aspirations (Ellis, 1999). There are studies indicating that climate change is having a real impact on rural Africa, in terms of changes in climate variability, seasonal shifts and precipitation patterns, and that this situation will deteriorate further (Morton, 2007; Nelson et al., 2009). The biggest vulnerability is that the weather affects the developing countries’ main economic activities: farming, fishing and tourism. It is therefore critical that land use choices are made with these factors in mind, and that there is a diversification of rural livelihoods to assist in lowering the risk faced by rural households (Ellis, 1999, 2000; Ellis & Freeman, 2004).

Ecotourism’s promised employment and income impacts (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010), as well as the social welfare impacts and limited impacts on the environment, mean that it has the potential to offer a viable and sustainable land use alternative in these remote rural areas. An essential element is to ensure that communities in these areas do in fact receive tangible benefits from ecotourism, and that, therefore, they have a vested interest in conservation of the land and a reduced incentive to engage in alternative land uses, e.g. agriculture, mining and/or livestock farming (Mbaiwa, 2005; Tapela & Omara-Ojungu, 1999). Langholz (1999, in Stronza & Gordillo, 2008) argues that the income earned from ecotourism can minimize or eliminate dependence on activities that exploit natural resources, such as commercial agriculture and cattle farming. It can also lower the risk associated with these weather- and market-dependent income sources.

In 2009, sub-Saharan Africa’s travel and tourism was expected to generate US$66 billion of economic activity (US$22 billion directly, or 2.2% of total GDP), and 1.7% of total direct employment (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2010). Beyond direct job creation, the infrastructure requirements of tourism (buildings, roads, parks, hotels and airports) mean that there is a direct capital injection and a resultant job creation in tourism that extends beyond the service and hospitality sectors (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Spenceley, 2008). The reinvestment of ecotourism funds into other economic activities by rural villages is an important aspect of community development, and through this, ecotourism can be described as one of the tools promoting local economic development in rural areas (Mbaiwa, 2008). High-end ecotourism, however, is also vulnerable to a number of factors, such as changing exchange rates, political instability, crime rates, impact of air travel on climate change and the costs associated with this, as well as the needs and constantly changing desires of tourists (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Zhao & Brent Ritchie, 2007).
Loss of access to land can impose a number of direct and indirect costs on local communities (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Barrow & Murphree, 2001; Mbaïwa, 2005; Steenkamp & Uhr, 2000). Poor people use natural resources in a number of ways that help them to diversify their livelihoods: trading (e.g. wood, wild fruits), supplying inputs (e.g. for craft making), and for formal or informal employment (e.g. in tourism) (Roe & Elliott, 2006). There are also opportunity costs of foregone opportunities due to a lack of access to natural resources within a protected area, including the protection against shocks – both economic and natural shocks – that could affect the survival of marginal households (Roe & Elliott, 2006). Diversification of livelihoods through, for example, employment in ecotourism can help community members lower this risk (Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Freeman, 2004).

It is frequently argued that employment in ecotourism operations increases people’s awareness of the importance of conservation (Shibia, 2010; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001). Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler, and Schelhas (2003), however, found that employment in tourism had minimal influence on conservation perspectives. Tessema, Ahsenafi, Lilieholm, and Leader-Williams (2007) found that local residents generally held positive attitudes towards wildlife and nearby protected areas in their study around four protected areas in Ethiopia. The same finding was established by Mehta and Heinen (2001) for communities around two parks in Nepal. The main reasons given for the importance of wildlife in the Ethiopian study included its attraction to tourists, the hunting opportunities during drought, the enjoyment derived from wildlife viewing and its value for future generations (Tessema et al., 2007). There are, however, studies that do not find a correlation between tourism/economic benefits and more positive attitudes towards conservation (Walpole & Goodwin, 2001), or that suggest that economic benefits alone are not sufficient to encourage conservation (Stem et al., 2003; Stronza & Pêgas, 2008). Stem et al. (2003) found a positive association between tourism employment and conservation practices, while the associations were less clear for conservation perspectives. They also found that participation in indirect tourism benefits showed stronger associations with pro-conservation perspectives than did participation in direct tourism benefits (Stem et al., 2003). Stronza and Gordillo (2008, p. 450) also found that non-economic benefits, such as new skills, broader experiences in managing people and projects, strengthened abilities to negotiate with outsiders, and expanded circles of contacts and support for community efforts, can also influence the chances for conservation.

This study looks at the various factors that impacted on attitudes to tourism and conservation in three southern African countries. An understanding of what factors influence community members’ attitudes to tourism and conservation can assist in managing expectations, and it can also be used in education and awareness-raising programmes to improve attitudes and to garner support from communities living in and around conservation areas (Allendorf et al., 2006; Sifuna, 2010; Simelane, Kerley, & Knight, 2006). This understanding is also important because, as pointed out by Emerton (1999), benefit distribution is a necessary, but in itself not necessarily sufficient, condition for communities to engage in wildlife conservation.

De Boer and Baquete (1998) also found that the attitude of local people was influenced predominantly by the degree of crop damage (i.e. the level of human–animal conflict). Efforts to mitigate the human–wildlife conflict would go a long way in assisting with reducing the negative impacts of living alongside wildlife and in the promotion of conservation and ecotourism as viable land uses in rural areas. Numerous other studies (Baral & Heinen, 2007; Hill, 2004; Newmark, Manyanza, Gamassa, & Sariko, 1994; Shibia, 2010) have looked at the effect of human–wildlife conflict on attitudes towards conservation and tourism. In general, these studies focused on one study area and did not compare
community attitudes between different countries and conservation areas. The present study compares such attitudes in three southern African countries: Malawi, Botswana and Namibia.

In the majority of rural areas in southern Africa, there are few income-generating and employment opportunities (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Bourdreaux & Nelson, 2011; Scherl et al., 2004; Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007). Many people live a subsistence lifestyle, resulting in those people who are employed being heavily relied upon for support by a large number of people (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Tao & Wall, 2009). Together with this, the impact of HIV/AIDS and the resulting number of orphans has further increased dependency levels in rural areas, with anyone who can find employment supporting a number of other people, not only children and spouses (Drimie, 2002; Snyman, forthcoming). As will be elaborated on in the Results section, the economic impact of job creation and employment in marginal societies is particularly important due to the size of households supported by each wage earner (Salole, 2003).

This study contributes to a greater understanding of the role of high-end ecotourism employment in poverty reduction and its role in the understanding and appreciation of conservation and tourism. This is done through an analysis of extensive primary data collected from 812 socio-economic surveys conducted in the three southern African countries of Malawi, Botswana and Namibia. According to Goodwin and Santilli (2009, p. 9), there has been limited research into the effectiveness of using tourism to deliver economic development and conservation objectives (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Lepp, 2007; Shibia, 2010; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001).

The tourism sites in this study fall into the high-end category by virtue of the accommodation rate charged to guests (in the range of US$220 to US$1484 per person sharing per night) and the low density of beds and vehicles relative to the traversing area. Training and skills development is aimed at offering excellent service standards, due to the high accommodation rate charged and the concomitant high expectations of visitors at these camps. Exclusivity, privacy and attention to detail are characteristics of high-end ecotourism products. This means that the tourism industry is employment-intensive and offers permanent employment, as opposed to other industries in these areas that frequently offer only seasonal employment (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010).

Area of study and methodology

In this study, extensive socio-economic surveys were conducted in camps run by Wilderness Safaris in Malawi, Namibia and Botswana. A total of 194 staff surveys were conducted in six high-end ecotourism camps, constituting a majority of the staff in these camps (ranging from 58% to 74%). A further 618 community surveys were conducted in 25 rural communities, covering 13 different ethnic groups and an average of 28% of households (ranging from 10% to 49%). Wilderness Safaris was chosen for the study as it offers a consistent set of objectives over a broad area in southern Africa. This allows for a comparison of the interactions under changing circumstances, such as due to the varying population density of the area surrounding the conservation area, tenure arrangements and employment in high-end ecotourism. Table 1 summarizes the camps, and communities and ethnic groups surveyed in each country.

The surveys were conducted by both male and female interviewers, and local translators were used in circumstances where the respondent could not speak or understand English. The surveys contained questions relating to demographics, social welfare and
Table 1. The camps, communities and ethnic groups surveyed in each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>List of camps surveyed</th>
<th>Land ownership</th>
<th>List of communities surveyed</th>
<th>Ethnic groups surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Mvuu Camp, Mvuu Wilderness Lodge</td>
<td>National Parks owns the land (Government)</td>
<td>Balaka District, bordering Liwonde National Park</td>
<td>Lomwe, Yao, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Tonga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>Duba Plains, Vumbura Plains, Little Vumbura</td>
<td>Kwedi Concession where camps situated is owned by the Okavango Community Trust (Community concession)</td>
<td>Okavango Community Trust (OCT) villages – Seronga, Gunotsoga, Beetsa, Eretsha, Gudigwa</td>
<td>Bayei, Hambukushu, Basarwa, Bakgalagadi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Skeleton Coast Camp</td>
<td>Ministry of Environment and Tourism runs Skeleton Coast National Park (Government). Voluntary community levies are paid to the four adjacent conservancies.</td>
<td>Okondjombo Conservancy; Purros Conservancy; Sanitatas Conservancy; Orupembe Conservancy</td>
<td>Herero, Himba, Damara, Riemvasmaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For more information on the camps surveyed, see www.wilderness-safaris.com.
living standards, education, employment patterns, income and expenses, health and safety, and attitudes towards tourism and conservation. Each survey was conducted verbally, with the interviewer completing the questionnaire survey during the interview. Each survey took approximately 20–30 minutes when conducted in English, and approximately 25–45 minutes when translated, depending on the respondent’s educational level.

All staff who were on duty and available for interview were surveyed, while community households were selected at random, with one member of each household being surveyed. A household is defined here as a group of people living together and sharing income and expenses (Mohr & Fourie, 2003 in Simelane et al., 2006). The surveys consisted of a structured set of questions, with the majority being close-ended questions, with some questions having the option for further explanation. Interviewers introduced themselves to respondents and explained the purpose of the research: a study on the socio-economic impact of conservation and tourism on surrounding communities. The interviewers would have been associated with Wilderness Safaris because of the use of their vehicles in some areas and through the introduction process and explanation relating to the conduct of the surveys, and this may have biased responses. It is impossible to predict the direction of the bias, however, as some respondents may have been negative in order to ensure changes or positive in order to win favour with the private-sector operator in the area (Allendorf et al., 2006).

Respondents were told that the surveys were confidential and their participation in answering all questions in the survey was voluntary. This resulted in some questions not being answered. Non-response to questions did not cluster on particular questions, however, as no particular question had a greater non-response rate than any other question.

Two types of community member are identified in this study: those employed in a high-end ecotourism operation and those living adjacent to a conservation area where the high-end ecotourism operation is situated. This allowed for a comparison of the average community member’s household income and that of someone employed in high-end ecotourism, in order to ascertain the influence of this employment.

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) defines six categories of protected areas worldwide, depending on the level of protection and use. The categories range from areas under strict protection with limited public access, to areas where recreation is encouraged but there is no resource development and to multiple-use areas that allow resource utilization, recreation and nature conservation (Dudley, 2008). This study includes areas specifically set aside for conservation, which in some cases has resulted in the relocation of local people who were living in the area and who, historically, used the natural resources in the area. It also includes the Namibian conservancy approach, where people live inside the protected area and have access to the natural resources.

Varying opportunity costs of conservation existed in the three countries surveyed. These costs included the income lost due to using the land for conservation or ecotourism as opposed to another use, as well as the costs arising from the human–wildlife conflict that results from conservation (Baral & Heinen, 2007; Hill, 2004; Scherl et al., 2004). Namibia, for example, has a very low opportunity cost of conservation due to the arid nature of most of the country, resulting in few alternative land use options. The population density in the northwest of Namibia in Kunene region, where the research was conducted, was 0.6 persons per square kilometre (Namibia Population and Housing Census, 2001). The study area of Balaka district in Malawi had a population density of 144 persons per square kilometre (Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2008), and it had a high opportunity cost of land set aside for conservation due to the high rainfall and fertile soils, which allows for a number of different land uses. This made it more important that ecotourism operations provided
tangible, sustainable benefits to surrounding communities. The population density in the study area of west Ngamiland in Botswana was 2 persons per square kilometre (Botswana Census, 2001).

A drawback of questionnaires can be that people are unwilling to express negative opinions or attitudes to a third party, and they may be reluctant to confess to illegal exploitation practices, such as snaring or collecting plants in a restricted area. However, questionnaires are often a cost-effective method of research (De Boer & Baquete, 1998). This needs to be kept in mind when analyzing the data collected on opinions and attitudes to tourism and conservation in this study. There were negative attitudes expressed by respondents that would indicate that in fact some respondents did not mind expressing negative opinions, and this suggests that the opinions expressed largely were honest.

All data collected were analyzed using SPSS, version 12, and a combination of descriptive statistics and t-tests was used in the analysis.

Socio-economic survey results

Demography

For the three countries, the mean age in years of the respondents was 32.97 in Botswana (min. 17, max. 101), 38.21 in Malawi (min. 15, max. 98) and 33.75 in Namibia (min. 15, max. 93). On average, the community respondents (M = 35.7 years) were slightly older than the staff respondents (M = 33.63 years). The gender of respondents is shown in Table 2.

In Botswana, the majority of the respondents were single (67%), while in Malawi and Namibia, most were married (81% and 42%, respectively), with the figures including traditional and civil marriages. For those employed in high-end ecotourism, the majority were single (51%), whereas most of the community respondents were married (45%).

The 21–30 year age group had the highest average number of years in education (6.82 years), as opposed to older age groups, such as 41–50 year group, who had an average of only 2.57 years in education. For all age groups above the 21–30 year group, the mean number of years in education was lower than 6.82, with the 15–20 year group having a mean of 6.25 years in education. The 21–30 year group also had the lowest percentage (17%) of uneducated respondents (0 years of education) as opposed to the 31–40 year group with 38% uneducated, the 41–50 year group with 52% uneducated, the 51–60 year group with 58% uneducated and the 61–70 year group with 75% uneducated. These results are relevant to the later assessment of the impacts of education and age on attitudes to tourism and conservation, and to the associated recommendations for garnering community support for biodiversity conservation and ecotourism as a viable land use.

Number of dependents

In the surveys conducted for this study, there was an average of 5.81 dependents per community respondent in the three countries studied. For respondents employed in a

Table 2. Gender of the respondents in each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Average number of dependents among respondents in each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Staff ($n = 193$)</th>
<th>Community ($n = 593$)</th>
<th>Average ($n = 786$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>7.95 (min. 1, max. 18)</td>
<td>4.24 (min. 0, max. 17)</td>
<td>5.37 (min. 0, max. 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>6.47 (min.1, max. 10)</td>
<td>7.26 (min. 0, max. 30)</td>
<td>7.15 (min. 0, max. 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>7.84 (min. 0, max. 22)</td>
<td>5.08 (min. 0, max. 36)</td>
<td>5.90 (min 0, max. 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.42</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.81</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.01</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

high-end ecotourism operation, the average number of dependents for the three countries was higher, at 7.42. This difference was statistically significant ($t(348) = 8.760, p < 0.05$). An outlier number of dependents ($n = 100$) for one respondent in the Namibian community study tended to skew the data, with this respondent insisting that this was the number of people that he/she supported. If this value is removed, however, then the average number of dependents for the Namibian community was 7.26 (min. 0; max. 30), which is more realistic, and this was used in the comparisons. It was still higher than the average number of dependents for the staff in Namibia ($M = 6.47$, min. 1; max 10). Table 3 shows the average number of dependents among respondents in each country, and it illustrates that people employed in ecotourism were supporting a large number of people in these remote rural areas.

In terms of the number of people indirectly affected by the high-end ecotourism operations, Table 4 shows the number of people employed in the surveyed camps and also the average number of their dependents used in the calculations. The table also includes an average amount paid by staff directly to their dependents and does not include other amounts paid on behalf of dependents for food, education, clothing and other expenses.

The total of over 2300 people indirectly impacted by employment in the six camps was significant. This figure excludes the multiplier effects of staff spending in their communities (this is beyond the scope of this paper), and it indicates that the social welfare of a large number of people was impacted by high-end ecotourism operations in these remote rural areas. It is important to note here that employment of any kind results in a positive impact on rural communities, but in the study areas discussed here, there were few other viable, sustainable land use options other than ecotourism, highlighting the very important impact of employment in these tourism camps. Tourism is one of the few businesses able to generate income in impoverished rural areas with high unemployment levels and marginal opportunities for agriculture (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011; Scherl et al., 2004; Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007).

With respect to the number of children per respondent, it is interesting to note that the mean number of children for those employed in high-end ecotourism was lower ($M = 2.51$ children; min. 0; max.10) than for community respondents ($M = 3.3$ children; min. 0; max. 23). Despite all groups having a similar mean age, Malawi as a whole had the highest mean number of children per respondent (3.99 children; min. 0; max. 23), followed by Namibia (3.34 children; min. 0; max. 16) and Botswana (2.23 children; min. 0; max 10).

**Household income impacts**

Respondents who were employed in high-end ecotourism operations ($n = 189$)³ on average had a higher total household income (in US dollars⁴) than average community respondents. The mean staff household income was US$ 233.13 (SE = 20.65) and the mean community ($n = 601$) household income was US$ 100.07 (SE = 8.97). This difference was significant ($t(262.7) = -5.910, p < 0.05$, with a medium-sized effect, $r = 0.34$). Six percent of
Table 4. Number of people indirectly affected by ecotourism employment.\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total no. of staff in the surveyed camps</th>
<th>Average monthly wage per staff member (US$)\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>Average no. of dependents per staff respondent\textsuperscript{c}</th>
<th>Total no. of people indirectly impacted by camp employment\textsuperscript{d}</th>
<th>Average monthly amount given to dependents per staff respondent (in US$)</th>
<th>Total payments to dependents per month (in US$)\textsuperscript{e}</th>
<th>Total number of people lifted above the poverty line ($1.25 per day\textsuperscript{f}): staff and dependents\textsuperscript{g}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Namibia (1 camp surveyed – 12 beds)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>271.51</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>$95.5</td>
<td>$2,196.50</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana (3 camps surveyed – 58 beds)</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>219.18</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>1356</td>
<td>$36.54</td>
<td>$6,321.42</td>
<td>1,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi (2 camps surveyed – 42 beds)</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>85.59</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>$5.64</td>
<td>$609.12</td>
<td>966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average/Total (6 camps – 112 beds)</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>195.53</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>2,363</td>
<td>$45.89</td>
<td>$13,950.56</td>
<td>2,667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} All figures relating to the number of people indirectly impacted, as well as those lifted out of poverty, have been rounded up.

\textsuperscript{b} Over and above wages, employees receive gratuities (not included in this analysis) as well as other non-monetary benefits of employment, such as accommodation, food, uniform, and a company HIV awareness/testing and education programme. These figures are based on preliminary data from socio-economic surveys conducted by Snyman (forthcoming) and are not official wage figures.

\textsuperscript{c} This result is calculated by multiplying the number of people employed in the surveyed camps by the calculated average number of staff dependents.

\textsuperscript{d} These figures were obtained from the expenses section of the surveys conducted in the countries. All figures were converted to US\$ for comparison purposes using www.xe.com exchange rates on 2 December 2010.

\textsuperscript{e} These figures were calculated by multiplying the total number of staff by the average monthly payment to dependents.

\textsuperscript{f} World Bank (2011) poverty line figure.

\textsuperscript{g} The number of people lifted out of poverty figure is greater than the number of people indirectly impacted, because that figure includes the staff themselves (who have also been lifted out of poverty), whereas the dependents figure does not.
community respondents said that they had no household income, and 59% had a monthly household income of less than $50. In total, 89% of the community respondents had a monthly household income of less than $200.

The population densities of the three study areas varied: in Namibia, it was 0.6 persons per square kilometre; in Botswana, it was 2 persons per square kilometre; and in Malawi, it was 144 persons per square kilometre. A t-test was used to compare the total household income (in US$) in the most densely populated area (Malawi: \( n = 246 \)) with the least densely populated area (Namibia: \( n = 104 \)). This showed that the highly populated area had a lower mean household income (\( M = \text{US$44.11, SE} = 5.058 \)) than the less densely populated area (\( M = \text{US$263.47, SE} = 39.826 \)). This result was significant (\( t(106.3) = 5.464, p < 0.05 \); a medium-to-large effect size was calculated, \( r = 0.46 \)). Despite the fact that this result is significant, there are a number of other important factors, aside from population density, that need to be considered here. For instance, the GDP per capita in Namibia is much higher than that in Malawi. Comparing the impact of population density in Namibia (\( n = 104; \text{density} = 0.9 \text{ persons per km}^2; M = \text{US$263.47, SE} = 39.826 \)) with that of Botswana (\( n = 251, \text{density} = 3 \text{ persons per km}^2; M = \text{US$87.2; SE} = 10.482 \)) also produced a significant difference (\( t(117.531) = 4.28, p < 0.05 \)), but the effect size was small, \( r = 0.12 \), indicating that on its own, population density did not significantly impact on household income. Other factors, such as GDP per capita, governance and local economic development, need to be taken into consideration (but are beyond the scope of this paper).

A total of 33% of the staff respondents had had a permanent job before. For 77% of the staff respondents, their current job in high-end ecotourism was therefore their first permanent job. For the community respondents, only 22% had ever had a permanent job in their lives, and only 12% were currently employed. This figure, however, excludes those community members who were not at home because they were in full-time employment.

For 77% of the staff respondents, the salary that they earned in high-end ecotourism was the sole source of income in the household. For 95% of the staff respondents too, their salary was the main source of income in the household. The mean number of household income sources for staff respondents (\( n = 194 \)) was 1.24 (min. 1; max. 3), and for community respondents (\( n = 617 \)), it was 1.33 (min. 0; max. 4). The main sources of household income for community respondents were casual labour, family/spouse, pension (in Namibia) and using/selling natural resources for farming, weaving, thatching, etc. The majority of community respondents relied on subsistence farming for the provision of food for the household, and in Malawi, many respondents relied on cash crops, such as cotton and tobacco.

**Social welfare impacts**

Cattle are generally regarded as a sign of wealth in most African communities (Low, Kemp, & Doran, 1980). In Botswana and Malawi, staff had more cattle per household on average than did the community members. This was not the case in Namibia, however, where community respondents had on average more cattle per household (\( M = 57.36 \)) than did staff members (\( M = 41.41 \)). This is most likely due to the fact that the community respondents in the Skeleton Coast concession area were predominantly Himba (semi-nomadic people who rely on livestock for their survival). In rural areas of Africa, cattle often represent a “pension” system for households, as they are a form of wealth and can be sold to provide very important household income (Low et al., 1980). Staff members’ ability to afford cattle assists in ensuring future financial security as well as in increasing
Table 5. Percentage of respondents who owned or had access to a mobile phone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Staff ((n = 194))</th>
<th>Community ((n = 618))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>87%</strong></td>
<td><strong>29%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

social status. Further, 87% of staff members had access to, or owned, a mobile phone in their household, compared with only 29% of community respondents (see Table 5).

Only 4% of the community respondents owned, or had access to, a motor car in their household, whereas 21% of the staff respondents did. Table 6 shows the top categories of monthly expenditures as a percentage of the total monthly household expenditures. Average expenditure patterns of staff and community members show that staff members spent a smaller percentage of their salaries on food, and more income on “luxury goods”, as opposed to community members who spent more on “necessities” (e.g. paraffin, transport). It is argued (Namibian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006), therefore, that the greater the percentage of household income spent on food, the “poorer” the household as they have less available income for “luxury goods”.

**Attitudes to tourism and conservation**

Comparison of data collected from staff employed in ecotourism operations and random community members supports the argument that employment in tourism increases people’s awareness of the importance of conservation, although a significant difference was not found \((t = 2.388, df = 772, p > 0.05)\). The majority of community members did think that it was important to conserve natural resources (average 84%), though the average was

Table 6. Top categories of monthly household expenses as a percentage of total expenditure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Botswana community</strong></td>
<td>((n = 261))</td>
<td><strong>Botswana staff</strong></td>
<td>((n = 101))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual labour</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiletries</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Education/school fees</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas/paraffin/candles</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Money to dependents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel expenses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mobile phone airtime</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malawi community</strong></td>
<td>((n = 251))</td>
<td><strong>Malawi staff</strong></td>
<td>((n = 76))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Money to dependents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Accommodation/rent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraffin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mobile phone airtime</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Namibia community</strong></td>
<td>((n = 106))</td>
<td><strong>Namibia staff</strong></td>
<td>((n = 17))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Money to dependents</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Accommodation/rent</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiletries</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Toiletries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Percentage of respondents who felt that conservation was important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Staff ( (n = 194) )</th>
<th>Community ( (n = 618) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>99%</strong></td>
<td><strong>84%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

not as high as for those employed in ecotourism (99\%). The main reasons given by staff respondents for the importance of conservation were for tourism and for future generations. Only 13\% of the community members surveyed \( (n = 618) \) said that they did not think that conservation was important. Only two (1\%) of the staff surveyed \( (n = 194) \) said that they did not think that conservation was important. For community members, the most positive responses were in Namibia (91\%), with Botswana (82\%) and Malawi (80\%) also having a majority of community respondents feeling that conservation was important (Table 7).

Respondents were asked whether or not they considered that Wilderness Safaris and the tourism camps in the conservation areas where they lived had created jobs for local people. Eighty-eight percent of the staff respondents said that they felt that the camps did create jobs for local people, whereas only 62\% of the community respondents agreed with that. Respondents were asked which land use they felt created the most jobs for local people in the area. Forty-seven percent of community respondents said that agriculture created the most jobs, followed by tourism (24\%). For staff respondents, the majority said tourism (66\%), followed by agriculture (22\%). For the land use that benefited local people the most, the community respondents said that this was agriculture (61\%), followed by tourism (14\%). Half (50\%) of the staff respondents said that tourism benefited local people the most, followed by agriculture (33\%). These results are not unexpected, as it makes intuitive sense that those employed in tourism will see a greater, more tangible benefit from it than those who do not receive direct benefits. It also supports the view that employment in high-end ecotourism increases people’s positive perceptions of conservation and tourism as a land use. The importance of subsistence agriculture for the survival of the majority of households in rural areas explains the importance placed on agriculture as a land use.

Table 8 shows that 81\% of the staff surveyed felt that tourism helped to reduce poverty in the area. Fifty percent of the community respondents felt that tourism reduced poverty, with Botswana having the highest percentage (70\%) of community respondents responding positively to this.

### Impact of human–animal conflict on attitudes to tourism and conservation

Analysis was undertaken of the impact of problems with wild animals on attitudes to tourism and conservation. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents who said that they did

Table 8. Percentage of respondents who feel that tourism reduces poverty in the area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Staff ( (n = 194) )</th>
<th>Community ( (n = 618) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>81%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
not have problems with wild animals felt that conservation was important, as opposed to only 85% of those who said that they did have problems with wild animals. Problems with wild animals also seemed to have influenced attitudes towards tourism. Eighty-two percent of those with no problems felt that tourism created jobs for local people, as opposed to 65% of those who did have problems. Sixty-nine percent of those who had no problems with wild animals felt that tourism camps reduced poverty in the area, and this compared with 55% among those who did have these problems.

Impact of level of household income on attitudes to tourism and conservation

Respondents’ total household income (in US$) was divided into the following categories: no income ($0, n = 30), low income ($1–100, n = 467), middle income ($101–350, n = 228) and high income ($351 and above, n = 65). Twenty-two respondents did not answer the section on household income, so did not fall into any of these categories. The importance of conservation to the four categories was then assessed. As anticipated, the middle- and high-income groups had more respondents who thought that conservation was important (95% and 94%, respectively). The group with no income had the lowest percentage (70%) who felt that conservation was important, with 84% in the low-income group feeling that conservation was important. In the four categories from no income up to high income, the percentage of respondents who felt that conservation was not important was as follows: 23%, 14%, 3% and 2% (Figure 1).

Education and employment impacts on perceptions of conservation and tourism

The results indicate that staff (n = 193) on average had a higher number of years of education (M = 8.8 years, SD = 3.48) than the average community member (n = 617) (M = 4.82 years, SD = 4.38). This result was found to be significant (t(399) = −12.983, p < 0.05), with a large effect (r = 0.54). This highlights the importance of education in securing permanent employment. Consideration was given to the impact of education on perceptions of the importance of conservation. In the survey, it was found that those who felt that conservation was important (n = 704) had a mean of 6.26 years of education,
while those who did not think that conservation was important \((n = 83)\) had a mean of 2.42 years of education. To ascertain the impact of employment and education on perceptions of conservation, a separate assessment was made only of staff members. Among this group, it was found that those who felt that conservation was important \((n = 191)\) had a mean of 9.31 years of education, as opposed to those who did not feel that conservation was important or who were not sure \((n = 3)\), who had a mean of 6.33 years of education. In general, it appears that education per se does play an important role in positive perceptions of conservation.

When the sample was divided into those who were employed (in any job, not exclusively high-end ecotourism) and those who were unemployed, 96% of the employed respondents felt that conservation was important, in contrast to 83% of the unemployed respondents. Interestingly, of the unemployed respondents, 14% felt that conservation was not important, and only 2% of the employed respondents felt that it was not important, with the remainder not answering, not knowing or being undecided. This result suggests that permanent employment (and the security of monthly income) has a positive relationship with positive perceptions.

**Impact of age on attitudes to conservation**

In this study, it was also found that respondents who were younger \((M = 34.83 \text{ years, } SE = 0.510)\) were more positive about conservation and tourism than those who were older \((M = 38.21 \text{ years; } SE = 1.903)\). This difference, however, was not significant.

**Discussion**

Although the analysis focused on the staff of one high-end ecotourism operator, the camps and areas surveyed represented a wide cross-section of ecotourism operations under varying tenure arrangements, with varying ethnic groups, differing population densities and differential rates charged to visitors. There is applicability, therefore, to a wide spectrum of high-end ecotourism operators in southern Africa as well as to other operators engaging with communities (e.g. in Canada and Australia).

While conducting the surveys, it was clearly evident that permanent employment (irrespective of the form) and a monthly salary were important in terms of social welfare, financial security, development and empowerment (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). The security of a steady income allowed households to invest in non-essential goods, such as higher education, infrastructure, mobile phones, and other “luxury” goods, all of which were seen to improve social welfare and status in the community. These “luxury” goods could be said to improve social welfare, often through improvements in communication and transport. When conducting the surveys, the author often had community respondents saying that the high-end ecotourism staff had “nice houses” and could afford to “buy nice things”. A number of staff members could afford “luxury goods”, such as generators in areas with no electricity, better education for family members, mobile phones, televisions and motor cars. Staff members usually used local builders to construct their homes: this created a multiplier effect in the rural communities that went beyond the direct payment of wages and salaries to staff members (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010), but this is beyond the scope of this paper. The perception in the communities that was noted by the author was that employment in high-end ecotourism afforded one the opportunity to have a better general standard of living than the average community member. Other, often “unmentioned” benefits associated with tourism employment included the provision of staff accommodation and food, flexible
work schedules and part-time employment (Meyer, 2008, p. 567; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Spenceley, 2008). The high percentage of staff respondents who had never had a permanent job before indicates the importance of the training and skills development obtained from jobs in high-end ecotourism in these remote areas.

In Botswana and Malawi, the average number of dependents for respondents employed in high-end ecotourism was much higher than that for community members, indicating the importance of salaries earned in high-end ecotourism in terms of supporting a large number of people in these areas. Support was mostly given through buying food and paying for education for dependents. In Namibia, the situation was different, largely due to the fact that the Himba people living in the Skeleton Coast concession area lived in large extended family groups, with many people living together and sharing income and expenses (the mean for the community (including the outlier figure) was 8.1 dependents and excluding the outlier of 100, it was 7.26, min. 0 and max. 100).

To a certain degree, the link between employment and gender was determined by local cultural traditions, where women stay at home to look after the children and homes, and men seek employment. This would also explain the greater percentage of females in the community surveys (also evidenced by Odindi & Ayirebi, 2010). It also illustrates the important need to focus on engaging specifically with women with respect to conservation and natural resource use and to the impact of households on biodiversity conservation, as they are more frequently the ones collecting and using natural resources in the rural areas (Allendorf et al., 2006; Odindi & Ayirebi, 2010).

As was expected, respondents employed in high-end ecotourism operations generally had more positive attitudes towards conservation and tourism, as they were directly receiving tangible benefits from it (Stem et al., 2003; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001). What was surprising was the high percentage of community respondents who felt that conservation was important, despite incurring significant costs in terms of loss of livestock and crops from wild animals, as well as a loss of, or reduced access to, natural resources (also evidenced by De Boer & Baquete, 1998; Driscoll, Hunt, Honey, & Durham, 2011; Mehta & Heinen, 2001; Sekhar, 2003). Education appears to be one of the key factors in garnering community support for, and understanding of, the importance of conservation and tourism as an alternative land use (Gadd, 2005; Larson, 2010; Shibia, 2010; Stem et al., 2003; Teye, Sönmez, & Sirakaya, 2002). In line with this study, Allendorf et al. (2006) also found a positive correlation between number of years of education and positive attitudes towards protected areas in Upper Myanmar. Mehta and Heinen (2001) also found in their Nepal study that high school graduates were in a better position to understand the importance of conservation areas, and this resulted in positive attitudes. In this study, larger households tended to be more positive about conservation than smaller households, but this difference was not found to be significant. Tessema et al. (2007) also found that larger families valued protected areas more.

Younger respondents were more positive about conservation and tourism than older respondents, though the difference was not significant and is possibly due to the higher education levels of younger respondents, rather than the actual age. Shibia (2010) found a significant difference in the relationship between the age of the respondents and their attitudes to conservation around the Marsabit National Park in Kenya. As was found in this study, he found that young respondents were more positive towards conservation (Shibia, 2010). Tessema et al. (2007) found the opposite: they found that older residents valued protected areas more. De Boer and Baquete (1998) found no significant influence of household size, ethnic group, religion, gender or educational level on attitudes to the protected area in their Mozambique study.
De Boer and Baquete (1998) stated that an awareness of benefits from the conservation area, together with education programmes encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources, could result in an acceptance of restrictions on use. While conducting the surveys for this study, it was evident that unless community members were themselves employed in high-end ecotourism or had a family member employed in ecotourism or conservation, there was limited awareness of the direct, tangible benefits of ecotourism and conservation. Education in this area is critical to the long-term success of conservation as a sustainable land use (a similar result was also found by Tessema et al., 2007). A willingness and eagerness to learn more about conservation and ecotourism was felt in all the communities surveyed. It would appear from the study results that problems with wild animals led to less positive perceptions and attitudes to tourism and conservation (Baral & Heinen, 2007; De Boer & Baquete, 1998; Shibia, 2010), highlighting a role for effective human–animal conflict mitigation measures in improving attitudes (Worah, 2002).

Allendorf et al. (2006) found that socio-economic status significantly affected attitudes towards protected areas, but that perceptions of these protected areas, particularly positive perceptions, were better predictors of attitudes and had a much larger effect on attitudes than socio-economic variables. De Boer and Baquete (1998) found that the income of employed people decreased their dependence on natural resources in the Maputo Elephant Reserve in Mozambique. This possibly also could explain the increased positive attitudes for higher-income groups in this study, as they were not as affected by the negative impacts of conservation areas, such as restrictions on resource use and crop or livestock damage by wild animals, as they had alternative income sources to buy necessities and the associated security of livelihood diversification (Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Freeman, 2004). The results clearly illustrate that households with lower total income tended to feel that conservation was less important than those with a higher total household income.

The direct benefits that ecotourism employees received through their salaries and wages and skills training offered tangible, measurable impacts that could be directly related to conservation. Largely due to the nature of community living, other members of the community were able to see these benefits in the lives of other community members and to relate this to conservation and tourism. Over and above this, a number of community members in this study felt that conservation was important for their children and for future generations. This was a far-sighted approach in traditionally poor, rural communities that are often thought to live in terms of daily survival (this positive attitude was also found by De Boer & Baquete, 1998; Mehta & Heinen, 2001; Sekhar, 2003).

Conclusions

Stronza and Gordillo’s respondents remarked that “ecotourism is not a solution to our economic concerns, and it is not a panacea” (2008, p. 459). This is a profound statement that reflects the need to manage community expectations and to ensure that the community does in fact receive tangible benefits from ecotourism. The importance of empowerment and development of rural communities is essential in ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism in rural areas (Alexander, 2000; Grossman & Holden, 2009). Wise investment of community income from ecotourism into sustainable projects is also critical to the long-term success of ecotourism as a land use (Ashley, De Brine, Lehr, & Wilde, 2007). Providing ecotourism employment opportunities for educated youth in rural areas can assist in lessening the move of young people to urban areas in search of employment, and thereby it can assist in keeping rural families closer together. There is, however, the potential negative impact of accelerated population growth around protected areas, which Wittemeyer et al. (2008)
found could lead to increased pressure on natural resources and the availability of land. But their results have since been challenged by Joppa, Loarie, and Pimm (2009), who argue that population growth that does occur near protected areas is likely to result from a general expansion of nearby population centres.7

In order to encourage community support for conservation and the consequent protection of natural resources, a direct connection needs to be ascertained between conservation and ecotourism and the benefits that accrue to the community from it, whether collective or individual. The timing of benefit distribution is also important and should be as quick as possible in order to establish a link between income and conservation (Mulonga & Murphy, 2003). Creating awareness of intangible benefits will also assist in establishing links with conservation and ecotourism, e.g. skills training and infrastructure upgrades. While undertaking the surveys for this study, many respondents commented on the improved roads since ecotourism operations had been established, as well as improvements to schools and clinics, and in terms of scholarships, feeding schemes and water provision (Ashley & Roe, 2002).

Reducing poverty in rural areas can help to reduce pressure on biodiversity by reducing the need for unsustainable use, providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods, and by placing people in a position where they can choose to conserve (Walpole & Wilder, 2008), rather than be forced to. Diversification of rural livelihoods will also reduce dependencies, as well as pressure on natural resources (Ellis, 1999; Okello, Buthman, Mapinu, & Kahi, 2011).

The private sector, in the form of high-end ecotourism, has much to offer in the realm of community conservation and high-end ecotourism (Ashley, 2005; Spenceley, 2003). The necessary start-up funding, skills, expertise and marketing capabilities ensure that the business then has a higher likelihood of succeeding (Spenceley, 2003). Essential to this process is the empowerment of local people so that ultimately they can take over the management, operation, as well as potentially, the ownership of the business (Lepp, 2007; Teye et al., 2002). If this does not happen, then ecotourism can serve to entrench rather than alleviate poverty in rural communities, through the restrictions on land use and the damage caused by wild animals on crops and domestic livestock. Mitigation measures to reduce the human–wildlife conflict will improve attitudes to tourism and conservation, and consequently, support for them as viable land uses (Worah, 2002). The private sector has an important role to play in this area in terms of education, training and skills transfer. It is also critical that the private sector partners with a community structure that is efficient, representative and legitimate and that will distribute the benefits equitably (Ashley et al., 2007).

The results in this study show that attitudes of communities around conservation areas differ depending on household income levels, education, population density and age groups. These results are important in terms of managing relations between conservation areas and adjacent communities. Community projects and the establishment of ecotourism operations in rural areas need to be aligned with the expectations of the communities, and be based on the varying income levels, education and general social welfare in the area, and be designed accordingly (Simelane et al., 2006).

Communities are heterogenous in their composition, in the natural resources available to them and in the economic conditions that they face (Barrow & Fabricius, 2002). There is thus no one solution that will work for all communities. There is a need for basic guidelines that cover all community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) areas, and then specific guidelines for countries and within countries, and for specific communities and cultural groups, based on the economic conditions of the area and the alternative
income-generating opportunities in the area (Snyman, forthcoming). According to Emerton (1999), community incentives to conserve wildlife, and the various conditions that this depends on, vary at different times for different people. Prevailing economic conditions play an important role in social welfare, and from there, in the economic and financial situation of households. This in turn plays a role in determining households’ attitudes to conservation and tourism, which may also vary over time.

If conservation is to remain as a primary land use in a number of rural areas in Africa, then it is important that communities living in and around these areas have an appreciation and understanding of conservation (Alexander, 2000). The introduction, implementation and sustainability of community engagement projects relies heavily on an understanding of the cultural, economic, as well as non-economic characteristics of the communities concerned. It is essential that the differences in communities are understood and taken into consideration in community engagement projects (Simelane et al., 2006).

The results of this study have highlighted the critical importance of tourism employment in remote, rural areas in terms of reducing poverty, improving the social welfare of local communities and promoting biodiversity conservation. The key is to find ways that can increase the impacts of tourism employment, which are limited by the size of the tourism operation (Spenceley & Snyman, forthcoming). Over and above increasing tourism employment, the study’s results indicate that financial management training and advice should be given to tourism staff and community members to encourage them to save, reduce debt and invest wisely.

Further research conducted in 2010 in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa will extend this study further and provide a comparative analysis across the region (Snyman, forthcoming).

Acknowledgements

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Thanks to all the interviewers, translators, staff and community members who helped with and/or participated in the surveys for this research.

Notes

1. The term “ecotourism” was coined by Cebellos-Lascurain in 1980 and redefined by him (in Scheyvens, 1999, p. 245) 16 years later as “environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Salole, 2003).

2. Wilderness Safaris is a private ecotourism company operating over 70 camps in six southern African countries; for more information, see www.wilderness-safaris.com.

3. Seventeen community respondents did not complete the income section, with five staff respondents not giving household income information.

4. All incomes were converted to US dollars for comparison purposes.

5. These two countries have a GDP per capita that is more similar: Namibia $6658, Botswana $10,866.
6. This analysis was done to determine whether or not it was the effect of employment in ecotourism and education from the employer that affected attitudes to conservation, or general education.


Notes on contributor

Susan Lynne Snyman has a Master of Business Science (Economics) from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and is currently working towards a PhD at the same university. She completed PhD coursework at the University of Göteborg in Sweden in 2008. Her research focuses on the socio-economic impact of high-end ecotourism in remote, rural communities adjacent to protected areas in southern Africa. Susan has 11 years of experience in the luxury ecotourism industry in southern Africa, including guiding, community development and liaison, camp management and environmental impact assessments, as an independent consultant.

References


