

Book review

Natural resources, tourism and community livelihoods in Southern Africa. Challenges of sustainable development

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Southern Africa is a global outlier. Like much of the world its wildlife had been decimated, but unlike the rest of the world and despite significant challenges, this region has seen impressive recovery over the past four decades. This book looks at a range of case studies from Southern Africa and unpacks the complex and dynamic relationship between natural resources, tourism and community livelihoods. This four-part book based on regional case studies is of particular interest to those working in the region and forms part of a study series in conservation and environment.

Part 1, consisting of six chapters, includes an introduction and looks at the historical evolution of conservation and tourism in Southern Africa.

Historically, conservation and tourism have been viewed through a colonial lens with little research and recording of how indigenous people viewed these two concepts. The chapters in this section present a historical review, and notes that the “immediate needs [of communities] often precludes the development [...] to address longer-term challenges”.

Case studies in Part 1 includes:

- The historical evolution of conservation and tourism, a case study in Botswana.
- Nature tourism, wildlife resources and community-based

conservation, a case study in Malawi.

- A review of community social upliftment practices by tourism multinational companies in Botswana.
- Navigating community conservancies and institutional complexities in Namibia.
- In total, 14 years of tourism and climate change research in Southern Africa: lessons on sustainability under conditions of global change.

In particular, Chapter 4: “The context and future of tourism in Africa’s national parks” may be of interest to tourism futurists. The chapter reminds us that there is no over-arching model to address the key issues and challenges in the nexus of tourism and national parks in Africa. The traditional “people out” park management system has been losing popularity as a strategy and that the future of conservation and tourism in national parks is dependent on a model that concretises the benefits to local communities including ownership, benefit sharing and general well-being of communities.

Part 2 consisting of four chapters focusses on policy issues, practices and challenges associated with the growth of natural resource-based tourism development.

Chapters include:

- An analysis of land use conflicts in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. Exploring the conflict over land use between tourism and agricultural activities the writers conclude that a balance needs to be found between contemporary (ranches and commercial use associated with

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tourism) and traditional land (primarily for subsistence farming).

- A case study of the Lusaka National Park in Zambia with a view to understanding local people's perspective of protective areas. Local communities resent "fortress conservation" areas unless they perceive a net benefit.
- A Namibian case study unpacks the complexities in using corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a poverty alleviation tool. The chapter interrogates a new conceptional framework for poverty alleviation through CSR towards responsible tourism.
- Using a Zimbabwean case study, the authors found that while authorities recognise the need of community involvement in the management of natural resources; they are in fact reluctant to devolve power in decision-making to the grassroots level of the community.

Part 3 consists of four chapters focussing on the origins, narratives and progress of development debates in conservation and tourism.

Chapters include:

- A review of the wildlife economy in dryland Southern Africa. Colonial wildlife policies originated in the 1900s in the North America's. These were misaligned and later, outdated for Southern Africa. Radical policy reforms since the 1960s focussing on community-based nature resource management resulted in the successful and significant expansion of wildlife in the region.
- A case study from the Chobe District in Botswana finds that forest and livelihoods are intertwined, as assets, activities and access shape how communities close and adjacent to the forest sustain their

livelihoods. Eco-tourism needs to take this into account.

- A Mauritian study, a country where tourism contributes 18% to the island country's gross domestic product. Despite tourism playing such an important role in its economy, the island is known for its all-inclusive beach holiday offerings and ecotourism as a subsector has seen "painfully slow" growth. The chapter explores the constraints to the growth of the eco-tourism economy and concludes with the need for an integrated eco-tourism plan.
- The final chapter in this section looks at a South African wetland park and investigates sustainable development goals, livelihoods and tourism development in a rural protected area. The conclusion notes that as a survivalist community, immediate livelihoods need to be sustained first with sustainable tourism development only possible once the immediate need of livelihood is taken care of.

Part 4 consists of three chapters and situates Southern Africa in the world, acknowledging that natural resources and community livelihoods are not only inseparable and interlinked entities but also have a complex and dynamic relationship.

Chapters include:

- A comparison between a developed USA site and a developing Botswanan site. It found that success was dependent on the level of involvement, empowerment of local communities and the diversity of services on offer. Power dynamics in the developing nation tended to not be as favourable as in the USA.
- A case study on the use of handicrafts in Southern and Eastern Africa. Handicrafts are considered part of the informal economy despite the significant contribution they play to

economic development and the high participation rate by rural communities and in particular women. Handicrafts may be informal in nature but play an important role in human well-being – particularly in rural settings. A major hurdle faced is the lack of access to capital; political and physical but in particular financial capital.

- Tourism flows have increased to parks, but tend to be focussed on a few selected, primarily iconic parks. In Southern Africa, there is a competition for the tourist visit and parks struggle to differentiate themselves. Park-based tourism tends to be dependent on wildlife, scenery and infrastructure and parks compete with each other on this basis.

The conclusion highlights the interdependence of community development and sustainable land-use practices and the link to land tenure and property rights. There is a general move towards a more people-centred approach and away from ring fenced parks. There is an agreement that tourism development has the potential to support a healthy relationship between natural resources and the improvement of community livelihoods – but this has not yet been realised.

Despite the subject matter, the set of case studies does not have a futures focus. Conservation is ultimately a

futures-based activity whereby, according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), sustainable development is defined as: “a pattern of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

It would be interesting to use futures and foresight tools to explore the medium- to long-term future particularly as its success is based on the interaction of local community, international visitors and diminishing natural resources. It is interesting to consider how current and future tourists view a nature park experience as one with wildlife and scenery but no people. This “people out” view is no longer the view of those managing and living in natural resources but still abounds in the tourist’s view of an authentically wild and wildlife experience. There is much food for thought in this set of case studies to form the basis of some much-needed foresight work in the field. Natural resources parks were formed with the future in mind, but more work needs to be done to bring in the conversation of the future.

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