

Local community perceptions on tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park, Voi sub-county, Kenya: A social exchange theory approach

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Abstract | This paper seeks to understand the perceptions of the local community in Voi sub-county on tourism and the conservation efforts in Tsavo National Park. Social Exchange Theory underpinned the theoretical framework of this study. Primary data were collected from the local community using questionnaire surveys conducted with the residents, and the data was analyzed. Results highlight that the community finds tourism in Tsavo National Park beneficial and would prefer increased tourism activities. The local community tends to recognize that nature, culture, and the political environment influence conservation. The study conclusively shows community support for the conservation efforts in Tsavo National Park. Results indicate that Social Exchange Theory can explain Voi residents' perceptions of tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park. This study is expected to provide practical ways for concerned authorities to make future policies and strategies that relate to how local communities view tourism and conservation.

Keywords | Social exchange theory, local community perceptions, tourism, conservation, Tsavo National Park

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1. Introduction

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2021) reports that there were 1.5 billion global tourist arrivals in 2019. This was a 4% increase compared to 2018, confirming that tourism is the leading and most resilient economic industry. Evidence suggests that the success of the tourist industry in many emerging economies depends on the involvement of local populations near conservation areas (Ntuli et al., 2019; Vannelli et al., 2019). Community involvement is essential to the long-term success of wildlife reserves and makes for better ecological sustainability (Dudley & Stolton, 2018). By pooling resources, locals are more likely to take care of protected places (Spenceley et al., 2019). Moreover, participation and equitable allocation of benefits are associated with more positive attitudes among communities (Brooks et al., 2012), while views of unjust distribution leads to discontent and negative perspectives (Muzirambi & Mearns, 2018). How tourist attractions affect local economies can be crucial in determining how people in those areas feel about sustainability (Abukari & Mwalyosi, 2018). Therefore, protection and coping strategies could more explicitly consider these economies when establishing and maintaining attraction sites.

Evaluating conservation programmes through the lens of public perception is, thus, crucial to ensure effective ecological conservation and the welfare of individuals who live near nature reserves (Abukari & Mwalyosi, 2018). Authorities could develop suitable management strategies by delving into people's perspectives on conservation efforts. Most environmentalists believe that protected areas will not be prosperous unless residents in the region play a role in protecting them. Thus, innovative approaches like community participation have been suggested to address this concern (Ngonidzashe Mutanga et al., 2015; Mutanga et al., 2015). Consequently, community engagement in ecosystem management is boosted, and inhabi-

tants' economic well-being is enhanced when strategies balance discrepancies between inhabitants' requirements and tourism destinations (Ngonidzashe Mutanga et al., 2015).

Sustainability, as seen by locals at major attractions, could be grouped into four distinct but inter-related areas: social implications, ecological implications, proper conservation stewardship and legitimate conservation management (Bennett, 2016). Locals may reject environmental protection and refuse to help achieve their goals if they perceive infringing on their cultural and economic interests (Klain et al., 2014). Tourist destinations with a beneficial impact on local populations or that provide financial rewards to those areas are better able to meet conservation goals (Oldekop et al., 2016). Frameworks of governance for tourist destinations that are both localized and participatory tend to improve openness and responsibility, which in turn decreases administration costs and boosts efficiency (Abukari & Mwalyosi, 2018). However, the legal, cultural, economic, and social characteristics of a given region might dictate the extent to which the local populace will accept particular management practices (Bragagnolo et al., 2016; Oldekop et al., 2016). This means that local opinions can be utilized as a benchmark for how well tourist destinations supervision is perceived.

Moreover, evidence suggest that tourism development needs to be planned, managed, and developed responsibly for it to be successful (Hawkins & Bohdanowicz, 2011). While Mowforth and Munt (2015) opine that tourism development is a global success, they observe cases of deterioration, over-saturation, transport hitches, and a growing resentment of residents in some destinations. Therefore, to understand tourism development better, stakeholders need to link their perspectives and how tourism development should be carried out. Not only does it make sense to do so in the context of existing studies, but it also proves crucial from a pragmatic standpoint. Hence, the importance of tourism destinations as socioeconomic or regional

economic units is being prioritized in the backdrop of expanding human populace and declining natural resources. This study sought to understand the local community's perceptions of tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park. Considering residents' points of view can help shape regulations more tailored to local realities and requirements, ideally encouraging more responsible actions in line with the goals of ecological sustainability.

1.1. Research Aim and Objectives

The following objectives guided the study:

- (i) To establish how the local community perceives tourism in Tsavo National Park.
- (ii) To understand local community perceptions of the conservation in Tsavo National Park.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Communities and Tourism Development

For any development to be sustainable, all stakeholders should be involved (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Tourism is a dynamic, multi-sector and socioeconomic development process that needs responsible use of resources based on collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders involved (McCool & Lime, 2008). This suggests that tourism growth and its role in society have various implications. As defined by Singh (2004), stakeholders include everyone or any group with a vested interest in or potential impact on the success of an organization's goals. According to Goeldner and Ritchie (2012), the main stakeholders who play significant roles in tourism development are the government of the host community, the host community itself, the business offering tourist goods and services, and the tourists.

However, the likelihood of collaborative action is influenced by individuals' attitudes and perspectives (Ntuli et al., 2019). People's views and beliefs are influenced by their life observations with the resources, including their sense of control over it, the objectivity of the establishments regulating access to it, the benefits or losses experienced by their households as a result of interacting with the resources, and the overall quality of those observations (Mutanga et al., 2017). However, structural differences, such as differences in legislation, fines, and administrative ability, make widespread collective action challenging to implement when dealing with evasive resources like wildlife that transcend international borders (Ntuli et al., 2019).

A stakeholder assessment conducted by Manetti et al. (2019) to determine who should be included in establishing a conservation areas network surrounding Namibia's Etosha National Park revealed that livestock producers, despite being open to the idea, were mostly against it. Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) and Gunn (1994) further argue that stakeholder inclusion is vital for tourism development. The authors stress that responsible tourism development cannot happen without the inclusion of stakeholders. Chen (2000) and Gunn (1994) suggest that stakeholders should be involved throughout the planning, management, and development process. They recommend that their involvement be efficient and fair and offer knowledge, stability, and wisdom.

Morgan et al. (2003) concurs that emphasis on formulating a tourist destination's vision through a publicly driven process based on stakeholder consensus and values is vital rather than opting for a more personal approach that mainly focuses on market forces. They further stressed that all stakeholders must agree on the final decision and ensure it offers a meaningful and operational dream for their destination's future.

A recent study done in Algarve by Pimentel de Oliveira (2022) proposes that the opinion of residents and visitors should form one of the bases for

the design of sustainable tourism. Escudero Gómez (2019) sought to establish how the residents of Toledo in Spain felt about the impact of tourism on their city. The results suggested that the host community has a somewhat more positive than negative view of tourism development in their city. The study stressed that understanding and factoring in the host community's opinion is critical in tourism and key to the visitor experience and destination success. Similar sentiments are echoed by Alrwajfah et al. (2019). They opine that disregard of residents' perception by tourism leaders and the lack of residents' involvement in tourism planning may increase their negative feelings toward tourism management. In their study in the Jordanian region of Petra, Alrwajfah et al. (2019) argue that the involvement of the residents in planning and making decisions about the development of their area helps to increase their satisfaction with tourism management.

Using a retrospective lens on human-wildlife conflict in Namibia, Stoldt et al. (2020) investigated the role of various socioeconomic and ecological aspects. The human-wildlife conflict in the Namibian part of the KAZA TFCA significantly affected the locals' standard of living. Compared to periods when animal populations were severely reduced, the rebound in wildlife populations that resulted from conservation efforts was smaller and more limited in scope.

According to Juma and Khademi-Vidra (2019), the local citizenry in Kenya was found to have positive perceptions towards tourism as a tool to contribute to the socioeconomic sustainability of rural regions with the assumption that there are suitable governance structures for its development. In their study, Juma and Khademi-Vidra (2019) noted that the community-perceived contributions of tourism include the creation of a market for local goods and services, providing development opportunities for young people, fostering good relations amongst local stakeholders, a sense of local pride and place, improved livelihoods and job creation.

2.2. Communities and Conservation

According to Brockington et al. (2012), some key conclusions drawn from scholarly works on the social dynamics of biodiversity conservation show that conservation areas have made life more difficult for local communities across the African continent. This position is further reiterated by Gandiwa et al. (2013), who observed that African conservation areas share common characteristics of poor public relations and minimal support from local communities. In a study on community perceptions towards nature conservation in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, Angwenyi et al. (2021) established that local communities knew and appreciated the importance of nature and natural resources. This indicates that if local communities are allowed to participate in running reserves, they are likely to be effective co-custodians. The study also found that local communities felt that restricting access to natural resources negatively impacted their livelihoods. In their study, Ngondzashe Mutanga et al. (2015) found that community attitudes toward conservation efforts were predominantly positive, whereas attitudes toward tourism were shown to be negative overall across four nature reserves in Zimbabwe. The researchers noted that natural resource sustainability rewards were distributed unevenly in some areas.

In a recent study, considerable endorsement for biodiversity protection and protected areas was found to be outweighed by substantial scepticism at Borakalalo National Park in South Africa (Gordon-Cumming & Mearns, 2021). The locals, however, felt like they were not truly given a chance to contribute, and the benefits need to be properly shared with them. According to Gordon-Cumming and Mearns (2021), the finding demonstrates that the intricacies and fundamental value of collaborative conservation are only partially admired because of a lack of appreciation for the purported lack of reward or involvement. To debunk the myths surrounding the detrimental ef-

fects of tourism on host communities, Cardoso and Silva (2018) studied the perspectives and opinions of inhabitants toward projected tourism increase. Most respondents indicated that tourism positively impacted the local economy and helped promote cultural growth in the area. Employment in the ecotourism industry positively affects tourism and conservation perspectives, according to an assessment conducted by Snyman (2012) in Botswana, Malawi, and Namibia. However, education level was found to be the most influential component. This is the case in practically every tourist location, according to Krishnaswamy et al. (2018), who ascribe this to tourism's capacity to generate jobs. While Gillingham and Lee (2003) argue that the supposed benefits must surpass the apparent drawbacks to instigate positive inclinations towards sustainability, McGehee and Andereck's (2009) stance on the social exchange theory affirms that public backing for sustainable tourism will be inspired by their assessment of the subsequent outcomes in the location. This finding is consistent with the perspective of Ramchander (2004), who argues that tourism management is more likely to garner approval for its development plan if it considers the needs of locals. In another study, Black and Cobbinah (2018) reported that positive conservation views were much more prevalent among people whose livelihoods depended on the tourism industry in the two localities in Rwanda and Botswana, especially among the workforce.

However, Snyman (2014) argues that locals' attitudes about tourism and protected areas cannot be changed by financial incentives alone because of the complexity of the elements at play. Among such include demographics, the state of the local economy, one's values and culture. Snyman (2013) points out that simply because an individual has a pro-conservation or pro-tourism mindset does not mean their actions would always translate into actions that support tourism and conservation. Many of the challenges that low-income rural families confront make it difficult to devote resour-

ces to conservation (Snyman, 2013). Nevertheless, this is only the case if the local population benefits from the environmental resources in the vicinity of the conservation areas.

In a recent study, local community perceptions of the Kibale and Queen Elizabeth conservation areas in Uganda were influenced by community knowledge and awareness of the existence and importance of the park, its attributes, wildlife resources, and benefits (Katswera et al., 2022). The authors aver that socio-demographic factors, community knowledge and awareness of the presence of the park, its attributes and resources, community benefits, and costs incurred by the community because of invasion by wild animals' influence community perceptions and attitudes towards conservation of parks and wildlife. Katswera et al. (2022) concludes that conservation area managers should integrate local community perceptions and perspectives in the park management plans, intensify wildlife conservation education and awareness programs, and provide incentives to local communities to improve community perceptions and attitudes towards the park and wildlife.

A similar observation was made by Abukari and Mwalyosi (2020), who surveyed Ghanaian and Tanzanian residents living near parks to assess their views on protected areas' positive and negative effects on their daily lives and local economies. The position of parks concerning surrounding communities influenced how those populations perceived parks. The locals' views on the effect of the two protected areas on their livelihoods and community development were found to be most influenced by administrative problems. In another study, community-based ecotourism development and preservation of Botswana's Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KPT) were studied by Moswete et al. (2012), who analysed the factors influencing community support for these initiatives. There was a pervasive absence of political commitment to engage in all KTP initiatives because local authorities needed to be informed.

By analysing two case studies in South Africa and Tanzania, Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010) show that current conservation practises in Africa are not compatible with the win-win discourse but are instead more in line with the 'fortress conservation' that has largely shaped both debates and practise. According to Gandiwa et al. (2013), human-wildlife encounters in Zimbabwe have consequences for local economies. Most commonly troublesome wildlife was perceived negatively across all four study groups. In another study, Larson et al. (2016) surveyed residents near the Tiwai Island Wildlife Reserve in rural Sierra and discovered that conflicts between wildlife and humans caused by bushmeat harvesting and crop depredation were widespread and had far-reaching effects. Villagers' conservation perceptions were significantly predicted by their perspectives on such confrontations. Blair and Meredith (2018) observed that low-intensity conflict occurs frequently and substantially impacts how locals view the costs and benefits of conservation in the Mukogodo district of Laikipia, Kenya. In fact, Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL) in Rwanda and Uganda, where Sabuhoro et al. (2023) discovered a strong correlation between human well-being and the attitude of human-wildlife conflict, highlights the necessity for an all-encompassing and holistic strategy for policy and execution.

In sum, a large body of research indicates a consensus that community perceptions towards conservation are crucial and that many factors may impact such sentiments. However, it can be challenging to draw parallels between them because they are done in different settings and with diverse assessment methods.

2.3. Social Exchange Theory (SET) in the tourism context

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) was first developed by Homans (1958) to examine hu-

man behavior. Kelley and Thibaut (1978) later strengthened this theory with their work on the Social Psychology of Groups. Subsequently, Blau (1964) and Emerson (1987) used it to investigate organizational behavior. They were the primary researchers who extended the social exchange theory to understand how organizations and residents interact to minimize their costs and maximize their rewards. According to the social exchange theory, individuals consider the benefits and drawbacks of forming social ties and adjust their behavior accordingly (Ntuli et al., 2019). Thus, it is essential to seek people's perspectives to comprehend their perspectives and actions regarding sustainability. According to Homans (1961), social exchange is the exchange of tangible or intangible activity, and more or less rewarding or costly between at least two people. Furthermore, Homans (1961) argued that the exchanges do not necessarily have to be material goods but also symbolic values like prestige and approval.

The social exchange theory mainly focuses on the perceptions of the benefits and costs of relationships and their consequences for relationship satisfaction (Ward & Berno, 2011). The main idea of this theory is that individuals behave rationally in their social circles and hoard the costs and benefits they encounter. Moreover, in economic terms, under open markets and free competition, people rationally measure and strive for maximum utility from an exchange or transaction. Thus, in tourism, the social exchange theory can be described as a general sociological theory that deals with understanding the exchange of resources between people and groups in an interactive situation (Ap, 1992).

The social exchange theory proposes that individuals' attitudes towards tourism and their consequent level of support for its growth will likely be motivated by their evaluations of tourism and their communities (Ward & Berno, 2011). If individuals appreciate the impacts of tourism in terms of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic issues, they will tend to have a more positive at-

titude towards tourism. In other words, the more dependent a community or individual is on tourism development, the higher the chance of their attitudes towards tourism development being positive and vice versa (Weaver & Lawton, 2013).

Interestingly, some studies have shown the opposite. For instance, a study by Cornell et al. (2019) found that while the residents of Sagada, Philippines were most satisfied with the environmental influence of tourism development, they opined that the greatest environmental problems were actually because of tourism.

The social exchange theory is important as it helps clarify stakeholders' perspectives on tourism when tourism development is involved (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). Because of its attention on exchanges between individuals, the social exchange theory is well suited to explain stakeholder perceptions of tourism. Ap (1992) argues that stakeholders evaluate tourism development regarding its foreseen benefits and costs. The social exchange theory frames stakeholders' perceptions as a cost-benefit investigation (Ap, 1992).

Numerous studies have applied the social exchange theory to understand stakeholder relationships (Burns & Fridman, 2011; Chuang, 2010; Schofield, 2011). For example, Burns and Fridman (2011) used the social exchange theory to underpin

their study on stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions towards tourism in the South Downs National Park. Similarly, Schofield (2011) found the social exchange theory extremely helpful when seeking to determine the level of support of residents towards tourism development proposals and their perceived impacts in the Worsley area, England. The social exchange theory helped to understand why the attitudes on environmental impacts were negative while the level of support for tourism was high. For these reasons, the social exchange theory is the best theory that can be used to fully understand local community perspectives on tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park.

3. Study Area

The study was limited to participants in the community of Voi sub-county, one of the four sub-counties in Taita Taveta County, which surrounds Tsavo National Park. Voi was selected for this study for two key reasons:

- (i) The sub-county shares the longest border with Tsavo National Park
- (ii) It is the most populous sub-county in Taita Taveta, as depicted in table 1.

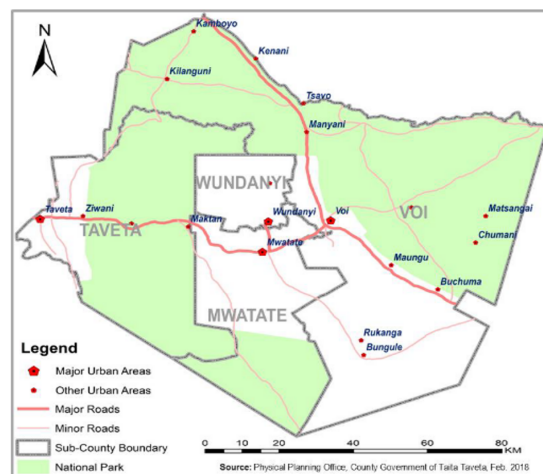


Figure 1 | Map of Tsavo National Park Coverage in Taita Taveta County
Source: Physical Planning Office, County Government of Taita Taveta (2018)

Table 1 | Population distribution and density by Sub-County

Sub-county	Area	2009 Census		2019 Census	
	(Km2)	Population	Density	Population	Density
Mwatate	1837.6	71,513	38.92	81,659	47.56
Wundanyi	701.3	56,021	79.88	55,959	97.63
Voi	3269.1	89,458	27.36	111,831	33.45
Taveta	626.2	67,665	108.06	91,222	132.07
Total	17084.1	284,657	16.66	340,671	20.36

3.1. About Tsavo National Park

Tsavo National Park is the largest national Park in Kenya and consists of two separate parks: Tsavo East and Tsavo West. Altogether, Tsavo measures about 21,000 square kilometres and spans the counties of Taita Taveta, Makueni, Tana River, Kajiado, Kwale, Kilifi, and Kitui. Tsavo National Park was officially gazetted as a wildlife conservation area in 1949. The Park has a sizeable elephant population of over 10,000 and is known as one of the remaining refuges of the black rhino. Due to its vast size, TNP is home to numerous wildlife species, such as the big five (Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, Lion, and Leopard), making it one of Kenya's premier tourist destinations. Significant tourism developments such as trails, lodges, and tented camps have been established in the park.

The Park is mainly covered in savanna and semi-arid grasslands and is globally recognized for its rich biodiversity. Tsavo East is famous for the big five and is home to more than 500 bird species. It is generally flat with dry plains from where the Galana River flows. Other features include Lugard's Falls, Kanderi Swamp and Yatta Plateau.

Tsavo West National Park is wetter and more mountainous and is famous for its large mammals and birdlife. Its savannah ecosystem consists of open grasslands, acacia woodlands, scrublands, rocky ridges, and belts of riverine vegetation. The human population around the boundaries of the park has heightened cases of human-wildlife conflict. Also of great interest are the implications of tourism developments on the people.

4. Methods

The study adopted probability sampling to administer questionnaires to the participants from the Voi sub-county of Taita Taveta county. Data were collected using questionnaires to solicit information from participants. Specifically, participants responded to questions rated on a Five point-Likert scale (Strongly agree - 1, Agree - 2, Neutral-3, Disagree - 4 and Strongly Disagree-5) options that reflected their opinions. Likert scale is 'a psychometric scale that has multiple categories from which participants choose to indicate their views, attitudes, or feelings about a particular issue' (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014, p.2). An open-ended question was included at the end of the survey to enable participants to express their opinions further and enrich the study findings. Completed questionnaires were loaded onto Open Data Kit (ODK), an open-source suite of tools that allows data collection using Android mobile devices and submitting the data to an online server. Using smartphones and offline data collection capability using ODK allowed the researcher to reach more participants and cover a larger geographical area. The ODK also allowed for capturing Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates, further enhancing data integrity.

4.1. Data Analysis

Quantitative data comprised of 143 filled and usable survey questionnaires were analysed. They were coded and transferred from ODK to a Microsoft Excel worksheet and then exported into SPSS version 27 for analysis. The results were analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.2. Reliability

This study used Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to calculate internal consistency (Table 2). According to Whitley (2002), Cronbach's Alpha is the

ideal tool to measure reliability in a study using the Likert scale. From the results, all the Cronbach Alpha values were above the generally accepted value of 0.7, suggesting a good internal consistency (Pallant, 2020).

Table 2 | Reliability Coefficients

Metric	Cronbach Alpha Value
Understanding of community participation in the governance of tourism development in Tsavo National Park (TNP) Questions	0.701
Opinion on the barriers to community participation in the governance of tourism development in Tsavo National Park (TNP) Items	0.742

Source: Own elaboration

4.3. Ethical considerations

Before conducting the study, research authorization was obtained from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The study adhered to voluntary participation, informed consent, and anonymity (Hasan et al., 2021). The participants were reassured that their participation in the study would not have any negative repercussions. The questionnaires were coded to protect the identity of participants.

5. Results

A total of 143 participants participated in the study, with a higher proportion of the participants (58%) being males, while the proportion of female participants was 42% (Table 3). The average age of the participants was 36.9 years (SD=14.1), while the average duration of stay in Voi was 17 years. Over half (69.3%) of the participants were below 40 years, while 30.7% were above 40 years. The survey found that 76.2% were registered, voters. Kaloleni and Mbololo had more participants compared to Kasigau and Marungu. The study found that 51.1% of the participants had either a college or university certificate, and only 28%

in employment. However, the rest (37.1%) were unemployed, while 35% were self-employed. The average duration of stay in the area and other information is summarized in table 3.

Table 3 | Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Variables	n	%
Age Group (N=143)		
18-29 years	63	44.1
30-39 years	36	25.2
40-49 years	17	11.9
50-59 years	19	13.3
Above 60 years	8	5.6
Duration of stay in Voi (N=143)		
Less than 1 year	5	3.5
1-5 Years	49	34.3
5-10 years	26	18.2
10-15 years	11	7.7
15-20 years	8	5.6
Over 20 years	44	30.8
Education level (N=143)		
Primary School	21	14.7
High school	49	34.3
College or Vocational Training	54	37.8
University	19	13.3
Employment Status (N=143)		
Unemployed	53	37.1
Self-employed	50	35
Employed	40	28

Source: Own elaboration

Opinions on tourism activities in Tsavo National Park are summarized in table 4. The study found that 65.7% of the participants agreed that they got all the benefits listed in table 4, with the majority (79.7%) noting that tourism in Tsavo National Park benefited the community. Nonetheless, 32% were neutral when asked if the community considered Tsavo National Park useful for education and research.

The impacts of conservation are summarized in table 5. The results established that conservation in Tsavo National Park had negative and positive effects. The survey found that conservation positively impacted tourism activities, as reported by 83.3% of the participants, more than it generated employment opportunities (74.1%). The human-wildlife conflict was the most prevalent negative impact reported by participants. However, 16.1% were neutral when asked if the conservation of Tsavo National Park led to property damage (Table 5).

Table 4 | Local Community opinions on tourism activities in Tsavo National Park (N=143)

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Stdev
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
The community gets employment opportunities at TNP	10 (7)	16 (11.2)	13 (9.1)	94 (65.7)	10 (7)	3.55	1.02
The community uses TNP for recreational purposes	14 (9.8)	31 (21.7)	19 (13.3)	73 (51)	6 (4.2)	3.18	1.12
The community views TNP as an important part of our cultural heritage	2 (1.4)	15 (10.5)	28 (19.6)	78 (54.5)	20 (14)	3.69	0.89
The community considers TNP to be useful for education and research	2 (1.4)	22 (15.4)	45 (31.5)	57 (39.9)	17 (11.9)	3.45	0.94
Tourism in TNP is beneficial to the community	6 (4.2)	16 (11.2)	7 (4.9)	81 (56.6)	33 (23.1)	3.83	1.04
Tourism in TNP employs the local community.	4 (2.8)	18 (12.6)	13 (9.1)	93 (65)	15 (10.5)	3.68	0.92

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree, M=mean, and Stdev= standard deviation

Source: Own elaboration

Table 5 | Local Community opinions on the impacts of conservation in Tsavo National Park (N=143)

Impact	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Stdev
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
Human-Wildlife conflict	12 (8.4)	26 (18.2)	7 (4.9)	55 (38.5)	43 (30.1)	3.64	1.31
Damage to property	11 (7.7)	31 (21.7)	23 (16.1)	49 (34.3)	28 (19.6)	3.37	1.24
Destruction of crops	14 (9.8)	28 (19.6)	13 (9.1)	54 (37.8)	34 (23.8)	3.46	1.31
Loss of livestock	11 (7.7)	29 (20.3)	14 (9.8)	53 (37.1)	36 (25.2)	3.52	1.28
Employment opportunities	4 (2.8)	22 (15.4)	11 (7.7)	75 (52.4)	31 (21.7)	3.75	1.05
Tourism activities.	2 (1.4)	21 (14.7)	1 (0.7)	71 (49.7)	48 (33.6)	3.99	1.03

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree and Stdev= standard deviation

Source: Own elaboration

While there was a significant variation in the number of participants who highlighted various benefits, the study found that 94.4% benefited from water from the park (Table 6). Over half (53.1%) of the participants were neutral, and 24% reported that they got minerals from the park. The study also found that the community's least benefit from

the park were crops (13.3%) and fishing (18.2%). Further, 41% were neutral when asked if they got medicinal herbs or plants from the park.

Factors that influence conservation are summarized in table 7. The major factors that influenced conservation were nature (77.7%), economy (60.2%) and culture (52%).

Table 6 | Local Community opinions on the services and goods the community gets from Tsavo National Park (N=143)

Service/Goods	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Stdev
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
Wild fruits	7 (4.9)	63 (44.1)	44 (30.8)	18 (12.6)	11 (7.7)	2.74	1.01
Crops	11 (7.7)	83 (58)	30 (21)	12 (8.4)	7 (4.9)	2.45	0.93
Fishing	18 (12.6)	74 (51.7)	25 (17.5)	20 (14)	6 (4.2)	2.45	1.02
Game Meat	4 (2.8)	11 (7.7)	16 (11.2)	99 (69.2)	13 (9.1)	3.74	0.84
Firewood	3 (2.1)	11 (7.7)	18 (12.6)	78 (54.5)	33 (23.1)	3.89	0.92
Medicinal herbs/plants	2 (1.4)	8 (5.6)	58 (40.6)	51 (35.7)	24 (16.8)	3.61	0.88
Grazing Pasture	3 (2.1)	21 (14.7)	16 (11.2)	84 (58.7)	19 (13.3)	3.66	0.96
Water	1 (0.7)	3 (2.1)	4 (2.8)	95 (66.4)	40 (28)	4.19	0.65
Minerals	5 (3.5)	28 (19.6)	76 (53.1)	30 (21)	4 (2.8)	3	0.81

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree and Stdev= standard deviation

Source: Own elaboration

Table 7 | Local Community opinions on the factors that influence conservation

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Stdev
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
Do you agree that the political and legal environment influences conservation in TNP?	3 (2.1)	6 (4.2)	56 (39.2)	64 (44.8)	14 (9.8)	3.56	0.81
Do you agree that the economy affects conservation in TNP?	1 (0.7)	18 (12.6)	38 (26.6)	44 (30.8)	42 (29.4)	3.76	1.04
Do you agree that culture influences conservation in TNP?	0	21 (14.7)	48 (33.6)	40 (28)	34 (23.8)	3.61	1.01
Do you agree that nature influences conservation in TNP?	2 (1.4)	8 (5.6)	22 (15.4)	54 (37.8)	57 (39.9)	4.09	0.95

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree and Stdev= standard deviation

Source: Own elaboration

Principal component analysis (PCA) was performed to investigate factors that significantly influenced conservation. PCA was utilized to estimate and comprehend the significance of the variables that substantially affected conservation in the dataset. PCA seeks to uncover a small number of variables that reflect the underlying structure between a group of interrelated variables (Pallant, 2020). The suitability of the data as assessed by the KMO (0.68) and Bartlett's Test ($t[\chi^2(6) = 132.8, p < .001]$) indicated the data was

suitable for PCA. The results revealed that economy, culture and nature correlated highly with conservation (Table 8).

Moreover, 88% of the participants supported the conservation of Tsavo National Park, while a small proportion (7%) did not support it; 5% were neutral. Findings showed that most participants (79%) wanted more tourism in Tsavo National Park, while 12% wanted the current status to be retained.

Table 8 | Component correlations

Opinion	Components
Do you agree that the economy affects conservation in TNP?	0.854
Do you agree that culture influences conservation in TNP?	0.788
Do you agree that nature influences conservation in TNP?	0.746
Do you agree that the political and legal environment influences conservation in TNP?	0.549

Source: Own elaboration

5.1. Local community perceptions of tourism

The findings point toward a local community with a positive perception of tourism and support for increased tourism. The results indicate that the local community's opinions towards tourism are correlated with their appreciation of the biodiversity and the rewards they derive from the attraction sites. Nonetheless, it is also coupled with negative impressions. Some community members felt they were not benefiting from the revenue from Tsavo National Park. A participant stated:

"As a community, we strongly feel the

government is stealing from us. Tsavo National Park is not helping us as much."

Others felt the Park was expensive for the locals and suggested that locals should access Park at lower prices to encourage domestic tourism. A participant stated:

"The Park is expensive for the locals. Locals should access Tsavo National Park at lower prices to encourage domestic tourism."

Some participants felt that the management of Tsavo National Park was not creative in improving tourism for the benefit of the community. A respondent lamented that most activities, especially recruitment, happen without their knowledge:

“I am mostly concerned about Kenya Wildlife Service recruitment on Tsavo National Park. As community we are not engaged in these opportunities, we just hear there was recruitment, there is no early information to allow the community to participate.”

Locals also suggested that Tsavo National Park should be opened for the locals at least once a year to appreciate its importance. Generally, most participants perceived tourism in Tsavo National Park to be beneficial. Participants' appreciation for the benefits of tourism is further reiterated, with findings showing that most participants wanted more tourism in Tsavo National Park. The findings mirror those of Cardoso and Silva (2018), who found that the economic dimension made tourism perceived positively by the host community. The results are also in tandem with Krishnaswamy et al. (2018). They observed that inhabitants in almost every tourism destination perceived tourism positively and attributed this to the employment creation ability of tourism. On the other hand, Snyman (2014) believes that the complexity of the factors at play means that monetary incentives alone will not be enough to shift residents' attitudes about tourists and conservation areas. Snyman (2013) corroborate this and argues that it is difficult for low-income rural families to participate in conservation because of the numerous challenges they must overcome (Snyman, 2013).

The perceived benefits of tourism agree with McGehee and Andereck (2009), whose position on the social exchange theory states that community support for tourism development will be influenced by their evaluation of the resulting outcomes

in the destination. From a social exchange theory perspective, it can be inferred that the local community in Voi perceives tourism as beneficial and, therefore, a viable exchange relationship. These findings have substantial policy implications, including the need to listen to and include local populations and other relevant parties to boost interaction and change attitudes about and participation in conservation efforts. As noted by Abukari and Mwalyosi (2018), governance frameworks for localized and participatory tourist destinations tend to improve the locals' openness and responsibility in realizing the benefits of tourism. Similarly, Juma and Khademi-Vidra (2019) observed that local communities in Kenya had positive perceptions towards tourism as a tool that contributed to the socioeconomic sustainability of the localities, assuming suitable governance structures.

Gomez (2019) suggests that tourism should be planned and managed sustainably to benefit present and future generations in an attempt to boost positive perception and stresses the understanding and factoring in the host community's opinion in tourism promotion. Alrwajfah et al. (2019) opine that disregarding residents' perception by tourism leaders and the lack of residents' involvement in tourism planning may increase their negative feelings toward tourism management. These results corroborate Gursoy and Rutherford's (2004) arguments that local communities as inclusion as stakeholders are vital for tourism development. Without the inclusion of stakeholders, responsible tourism development may not be achieved.

5.2. Local Community perceptions on conservation

Tourism and conservation are important in Kenya because the tourism industry is mainly nature based. With several wildlife-protected areas, Kenya's nature parks have a dual role of biodiversity conservation and tourism attractions. This

importance is evident by the high proportion of participants advocating for more tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park. Consistent with Ngonidzashe Mutanga et al. (2015) and Black and Cobbinah (2018) findings, community attitudes toward conservation efforts were predominantly positive. However, conservation had both negative and positive impacts. Most participants supported the conservation of Tsavo National Park, while a small proportion did not. The human-wildlife conflict was the most prevalent negative impact reported by participants. The findings suggest that human-wildlife conflict influenced community perceptions of tourism which negatively impact community participation. A participant stated:

"I am concerned about the conflicts that emerge between wildlife and human at large. These conflicts occur when the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) and the tourism sector in Tsavo National Park do not associate with the community on how to find ways to go about the conflicts."

Another participant lamented:

"My main concern is that there has been rising cases of human wildlife conflict, hence the community has no faith in the KWS."

These results are consistent with a stakeholder evaluation by Mannetti et al. (2019), which found that human-wildlife encounters prompted contrasting views of tourism among locals. The findings agree with those of Stoldt et al. (2020), who found that residents' perceptions of tourism in Namibia's KAZA TFCA were considerably impacted by human-wildlife conflict. Human-wildlife conflicts negatively influence locals' perceptions of tourism, and Gandiwa et al. (2013) discovered that these

interactions have economic repercussions. Larson et al. (2016). also found that locals' perspectives on conservation activities were influenced by the frequency with which residents had confrontations with wildlife. Sabuhoro et al. (2023) and Blair and Meredith (2018) argue that a comprehensive and holistic approach to policy and implementation is required, as demonstrated by their findings indicating a strong association between human well-being and the perspective of human-wildlife conflict.

There were mixed views on the administrative issues between the tourism industry players and the community leaders. Whereas the tourism industry players pointed out the positive contributions from the county governments, there was very little support from the community leaders. A representative explained:

"The county government has aid in ensuring the wildlife is protected by providing security personnel who bar poachers from entering the park and trying to sensitize the locals on the importance of wildlife. Although the county government ensures the wildlife is protected, they are reluctant on ensuring the community owns the park."

Another representative stated:

"County government has helped during dry seasons to provide food to the animals in the park and they provide us with accommodation during seminars."

Abukari and Mwalyosi (2020) reported a comparable finding for residents of Ghana and Tanzania. It was revealed that residents' perceptions of the impact of the two conservation areas on their livelihoods and social inclusion were typically mo-

tivated by administrative issues. The lack of political will to participate in all KTP activities was also noted by Moswete et al. (2012), who argued that this was due to a need for more information on the part of local officials. However, community members also stated that they are not involved in the governance of tourism projects and need to see the significance of the parks in improving their livelihood. A community leader in Mbololo stated:

“The community does not get involved in governance of tourism development in TNP but they just reap from us. When it happens by coincidence your livestock enters the park, the officers will subject you to heavy fines so the park does not help us at all.”

Community leaders in Voi and Taveta, respectively stated:

“The community is marginal because they do not get involved with the Tourism Industry.”

“I can say it is marginal because there is no decision the community makes concerning the management of TNP.”

Consequently, both the tourism industry players and the community leaders unilaterally agreed that there is a need to have robust community participation in the governance of tourism in the TNP since the participants noted the vital role of the community in the planning and management phases. Likewise, Gordon-Cumming and Mearns (2021) found that locals needed more confidence in their ability to make meaningful contributions, and they recommended that the rewards be fairly distributed.

The participants proposed sensitization of local communities on importance of conservation to boost conservation efforts. Moreover, the participants felt that conservation initiatives should be

rolled out for the community to participate as a collective responsibility in close collaboration with the local community and consider long-term projects like afforestation. Most participants believed that conservation created employment opportunities. Participants found nature, economic forces, and the political-legal environment as the three critical influencers of conservation in Tsavo National Park. The community's perceptions towards conservation concur with Gillingham and Lee (2003), who suggest that perceived benefits must outweigh perceived disadvantages to engender positive attitudes towards conservation. These results validate the social exchange theory in the Voi sub-county case. The local community's support for conservation in Tsavo National Park is directly proportional to the positive benefits they perceive. The findings also lend credibility to the conclusions made by Alrwajfah et al. (2019), who argued that the involvement of the residents in planning and making decisions about their area's development helped increase their satisfaction with tourism management. Goeldner and Ritchie (2012), on the other hand, argue that the main stakeholders who play significant roles in tourism development are the government of the host community ahead of the host community themselves.

Thus, how tourist attractions affect local economies can be a crucial factor in determining how people in those areas feel about sustainability, a claim supported by Abukari and Mwalyosi (2018) in their study. The findings also echo the Government of Kenya's development strategy (Republic of Kenya, 2018). The government considers tourism and the environment among the key drivers of the Kenya Vision 2030 economic growth blueprint (Republic of Kenya, 2013). In the context of this study, understanding local community views on tourism and conservation in Tsavo National Park, Kenya's largest national Park, is critical. This helps policy planners understand how local communities can participate in the realization of Kenya Vision 2030. This observation corresponds

with Ramchander (2004), who opines that if tourism governance pays attention to residents' concerns, it is likely to generate more support for their development plan.

6. Conclusion

These results imply that the expansion of the tourism industry is more than just a financial activity; it also has emotional, cultural, and social effects on the local population. Findings point towards the local community's positive perception of tourism and support for increased tourism. From a social exchange theory perspective, it can be inferred that the local community in Voi perceives tourism as beneficial and, therefore, a viable exchange relationship. The study has numerous policy and programmatic ramifications for the institutions and governments tasked with administering and maintaining Tsavo National Park; its continued growth depends on community perceptions, which the local government should positively influence. Sustainability in the future relies on locals being involved in protecting their environment and building up their tourism industry. To gain more public backing for conservation initiatives and tourist activities, local governments should prioritize resident economic opportunities and attempt to boost resident rewards from tourism. Officials should make it a priority to raise citizens' level of education and expertise in the fields of tourist promotion and preservation. Participation in such events would help locals have a positive perception.

Furthermore, the authorities could invite citizens to engage in the decision-making mechanism of tourist activities to increase the feeling of locals acting as hosts and, consequently, their backing for tourism advancement. Therefore, locals could be encouraged to articulate their perspectives and concerns through the organizations re-

presenting them if disputes arise throughout tourism activities. Thus, the study lends credibility to the growing body of evidence favouring the idea that communities can benefit from and even be catalysts for tourism expansion. These results could prove invaluable for shaping future involvement initiatives that might set the stage for equitable and sustainable popular destinations. However, putting a participatory tourist development method into practice to influence perceptions and conservation efforts does not have a specific blueprint. For an initiative to be successful, it must be tailored to the localities under which it will be used.

Consequently, it is recommended that safeguards be made at the initial stages of exploring potential tourist attractions to give locals a voice in the direction of tourism growth before those areas get more established and desirable to wealthy backers. These improvements should encourage emerging governments to take steps towards building a democratic society that gives the people a voice in the management of attraction sites. While additional stakeholders, such as non-profits, may be affected by the findings, their perspectives were not explored in this research. Perhaps future studies could consider such perspectives. Thus, the evidence suggests that this avenue of research needs to be pursued extensively.

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