

Stakeholder Perceptions of Wildlife Tourism in Communal Conservancies within the Mudumu North Complex, Zambezi region, Namibia

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Abstract : Wildlife tourism (WT) in communal conservancies has the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable rural development. However, understanding local perceptions, promoting participation, and addressing stakeholder concerns are all required for sustainability. This study looks at stakeholder perceptions of WT in conservancies near protected areas in Namibia's Zambezi region, specifically the Mudumu North Complex. A mixed-methods approach was employed to collect data from 356 households using stratified sampling. Qualitative data was gathered through six focus group discussions and 22 key informant interviews. Quantitative analysis, using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation, investigated socio-demographic influences on WT perceptions, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify key themes. Results revealed high awareness and generally positive perceptions of WT, particularly in Mashi Conservancy, which benefits from diverse tourism activities and joint ventures with lodges. Kwandu and Kyaramacan, which rely heavily on consumptive tourism, had lower awareness and perceived benefits. Human-wildlife conflict emerged as a persistent issue, especially in Kwandu and Mashi, where crop damage and wildlife interference undermined community support for WT. Younger, more educated, and employed individuals held more positive attitudes towards WT. The study highlights the importance of recognising community heterogeneity and tailoring WT strategies to meet diverse needs, including HWC mitigation. Policy implications include increasing community engagement, ensuring equitable benefit distribution, and implementing inclusive tourism strategies that promote long-term sustainability. These findings are critical for developing long-term WT models that address local challenges, encourage community participation, and contribute to socioeconomic development and conservation goals.

Keywords : sustainable tourism, stakeholder perceptions, community participation, rural socio-economic development

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