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Hindered growth: The case of community base tourism in and around Save Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

In Zimbabwe little, if any, research, has examined why community based tourism (CBT) has been constrained in spite of the much hyped national tourism growth agenda. Yet globally, and more-so in less economically developed countries (LEDCs) CBT is highly esteemed as one form of sustainable tourism appropriate for poor and remote rural areas. In such areas it has been credited for fostering alternative development, empowerment and self-reliance of impoverished local communities. Therefore, fundamentally, understanding why local people in and around Save Valley Conservancy, a successful tourism destination, are constrained in adopting CBT ventures as alternative livelihoods will be helpful to development planners. Ironically, the local people continue to eke a living from ancient, out-dated and unproductive rain-fed agriculture in a semi-arid agro-ecological region.

In this study qualitative research method was used to unpack the inherent hindrances which have stifled the adoption of CBT in spite of the apparent rich wildlife tourism spearheaded by safari operators in the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC). The research results exposed predominantly non-economic constraints, key among them being poor social relations, human-animal conflict aggravated by collapsed perimeter game fence, and land tenure uncertainties. This paper recommends that inclusive community based organisations (CBOs) should be established to act as internal facilitators and organised power brokers in the region who can collaborate with powerful and highly resourced external facilitators such as government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in enabling the local community residents of Save Valley to participate in decision making on community development issues.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, CBT, CBOs, collaboration, human-animal conflict, internal facilitation, external facilitation

Introduction

In Zimbabwe community based tourism (CBT) has been ill-defined and equated with the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (Campfire), a top-down, non-participatory approach and explicitly non-developmental model enforced on the people through unpopular natural conservation legislation (Wolmer *et al.* 2004: 90-91) ^[40]. This distortion of the definition of CBT disenfranchises local people in Save Valley who deserve to diversify into the sub-sector and earn themselves extra income (Hlengwa and Maruta, 2020) ^[21]. Yet worldwide CBT is viewed as a form of sustainable tourism appropriate for poor and remote rural areas where it has been used as an alternative development approach for empowerment and self-reliance of impoverished local communities (Telfer, 2009) ^[35].

Therefore, in this paper the central issue to CBT development in Save Valley Conservancy (SVC), a major wildlife area in south-eastern Zimbabwe, is to expose the major constraints that have long hindered the adoption and growth of CBT ventures in a generally tourism-rich region. Adopting CBT can lead to poverty alleviation by enabling local communities to earn extra income while also contributing towards wildlife conservation (Timothy, 2002; Giampiccoli and Kali, 2012; Hlengwa and Maruta, 2020 ^[36, 13, 21]).

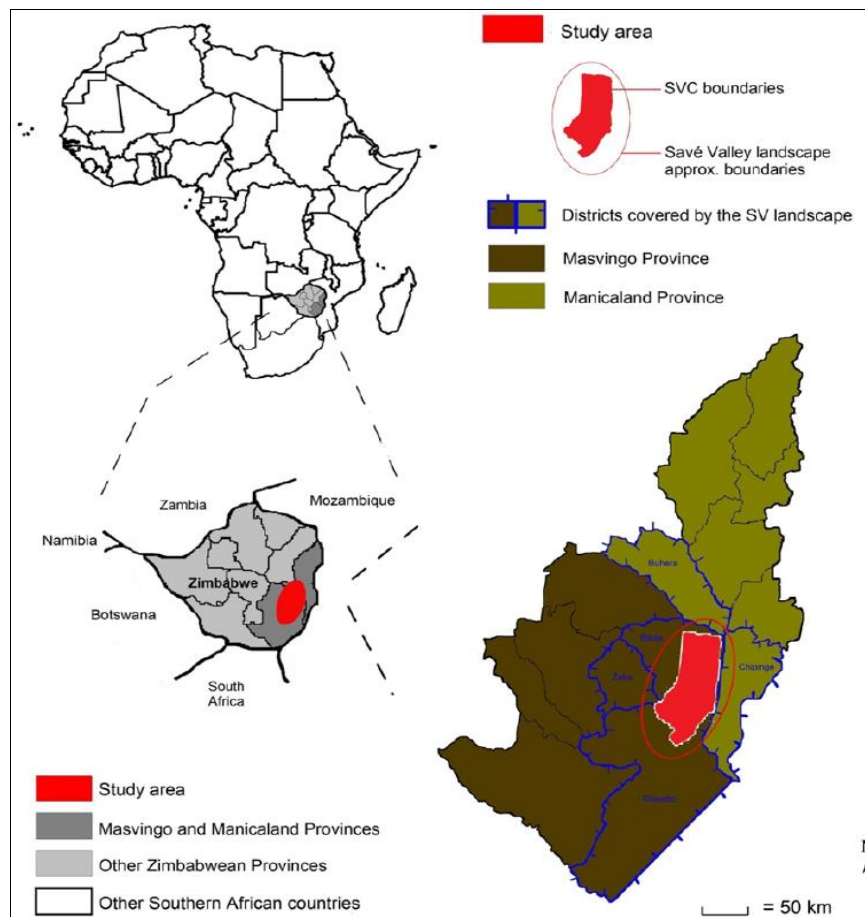
Study Area

The study was carried out in part of the Save Valley covering the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC) and the adjacent densely populated communal villages of wards 24, 25 and 26. Figure 1 is an illustration of the location of Zimbabwe within the African Continent and the Save Valley within the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe.

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Source: Torquebiau, Cholet, Ferguson and Letourmy, 2013: 711

Fig 1: Map showing the location of Zimbabwe and the study area

The main tourist attraction in the region is the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC) subdivided into SVC North and SVC South with a total area of 3,442km² (Figure 1). The conservancy is a co-operatively managed wildlife sanctuary and safari area with multiple properties held by private safaris, local councils, international investors, and government (Lindsey, du Toit, Pole, and Romanah, 2008; Hlengwa and Maruta, 2019) ^[41, 20]. The surrounding communal areas are densely populated and semi-arid receiving less than 400ml of annual rainfall, with smallholder dryland farming as the main livelihood (Mombeshora, Mtisi, and Chaumba, 2001; Hlengwa and Maruta 2020) ^[21].

The safari operators earn revenue from trophy and other fees, and from daily rates from accommodation and food sales to local and foreign hunters. Figure 2 is an oblique aerial photograph of part of the Save Valley illustrating its expanse and wealth as a wildlife habitat.



Fig 2: Oblique aerial view of part of Save Valley Conservancy, Zimbabwe (Ufumeli, 2014)

Literature Review

Studies conducted in many global regions have doubted the sustainability of CBT ventures particularly with respect to poverty alleviation (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Harwood, 2010; Lapeyre, 2010; Chili and Mabaso, 2016) ^[18, 19, 25, 5] because of numerous economic hindrances. In the literature economic factors have predominantly been cited as key hindrances of CBT development such as lack of capital and financial support, lack of markets, opportunity costs of CBT, and lack of entrepreneurial skills in the community among others (Tosun, 2000; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Lapeyre, 2010; Giampiccoli and Nauright, 2010; Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Giampiccoli and Mtapuri, 2015; Giampiccoli and Mtapuri, 2017) ^[38, 18, 25, 27]. In support, Goodwin and Santilli (2009: 4) ^[18] argue that the great majority of CBT ventures enjoy very little success owing economic hindrances.

Furthermore, the lack of financial viability has been attributed often to lack capital by entrepreneurs coupled with lack credit worthiness and government support through grants and soft loans (Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Dodds *et al.* 2016; Hlengwa and Thusi, 2018) ^[27, 22, 9]. In support, Tosun (2000: 624) ^[38] noted that financial resources required for investment in tourism were very scarce and not readily available in LEDCs thereby impeding the implementation of participation in CBT ventures. Hlengwa and Thusi (2018: 11) ^[22] strongly argue that it is a well-known fact the majority of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) owned by previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa do not have sufficient business records or assets to use as collateral to be credit worthy.

The literature also demonstrated that many CBT initiatives fail to attract sufficient business to be economically viable. For example, a research on 200 CBT ventures conducted by Rainforest Alliance and Conservation International Latin America indicates averages of only 5% occupancy for accommodation initiatives (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Dodds *et al.* 2016) ^[18, 9]. In another study conducted on tourism SMEs in Umsunduzi Local Municipality, South Africa, Hlengwa and Thusi (2018) ^[22] found that 56.9% of the sampled 65 businesses indicated lack of access to markets as one of their major constraints.

Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the market is widely regarded as crucial for CBT enterprises in LEDCs to attain commercial viability including developing partnerships ^[1] between CBT businesses and the private tourism sector players such as tour operators and hoteliers. In addition, many CBT initiatives have been blamed for commencing before conducting sufficient market feasibility research (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Dodds *et al.* 2016) ^[27, 18, 9] to achieve visitor satisfaction, a factor that influences the margin of profitability also related to the creation of products that match the needs and preferences of the tourists.

In many LEDCs economic hindrances have been twinned with poor governance. This scenario has been blamed for the lack of sustainability of CBT ventures (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Dangi and Jamal, 2016) ^[18, 8]. Essentially, the government is widely considered as an important external facilitator in CBT development (Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2017: 8) for empowerment of local communities with, not only financial resources but also decision-making and management skills, a lack of which has resulted resentment of tourists by local people. For instance, in Greater Mekong sub-region countries the lack of decision making power by local communities has led to resentment of tourists by the indigenous people (Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Dodds *et al.* 2016) ^[27, 9]. Similarly, in Namibia it has been observed that local people were excluded in the initial planning, formulation and implementation of tourism policy (Nyakunu and Rogerson, 2014: 10) consequently causing resentment of tourists by the indigenous people. Zapata *et al.* (2011) recommends that decision making doors should be opened and power redistributed to local communities to strengthen the skills, resources and the will of people to start CBT SMEs buttressed on a stronger orientation towards the domestic market.

A few studies in other regions have alluded to the destruction of tourism resources by local people as another key hindrance to viability of CBT ventures in and around wildlife areas such as conservancies and national parks (Kiss, 2004; Lucchetti and Font, 2013) ^[27]. The magnitude of this attribute would be examined in this study. Therefore, an understanding of the challenges that hinder success of CBT initiatives in wildlife environments will inform future effort at CBT development to minimise failures and increase the life expectancy of the ventures.

Precisely, in and around Save Valley Conservancy studies have concentrated on explanatory approaches articulating the conservation successes and challenges that threatened the large commercial investments and biodiversity loss (Mombeshora *et al.* 2001; du Toit, 2004; Lindsey *et al.* 2008) ^[11, 28] with little or nothing reference to issues that have long hindered the establishment of CBT ventures on a sustainable basis (Hlengwa and Maruta, 2019) ^[20]. It is our

fervent belief that going forward a clear understanding of the hindrances of the development of CBT ventures in and around Save Valley Conservancy would, inevitably, become increasingly necessary to enable the local people to diversify into alternative livelihoods and effectively contribute to conservation the wildlife (Kreuter *et al.* 2010; Hlengwa and Maruta, 2020) ^[24, 21].

Methodology

According to Fox and Bayat (2007:2) ^[12] a researcher should use tried and tested research methods that can withstand scientific scrutiny for the findings to be accepted as sound. In producing this paper, therefore, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with eminent persons as the key informants (Table 1) who responded to the why and how questions (Maree, 2012: 76) ^[28] to decipher their contextual details, experiences and expectations. Purposive sampling was used in getting the respondents for the in-depth interviews which served as part of the exploratory design as well for convenience, ease and availability of the respondents. In support, Creswell (2007: 141) ^[6] maintains that purposive sampling is usually selected because the selected individuals for study can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study. The interview guide made of open-ended questions and themes, was used because it allowed for more flexibility and versatility as the interview developed than a questionnaire. (Brink, 2007: 152; Walliman, 2011: 192) ^[4, 39]. The main sought-after attribute of an in-depth interview was its ability to produce detailed information about the thoughts, feelings or behaviours being explored from a small sample (Patton and Cochran, 2002; Boyce and Neale, 2006; Driscoll, 2011) ^[33, 3, 10].

Table 1: In-depth interview with key informants

	Category of informant	Population	No. of Participants
Bikita District and SVC	District Administrator	1	1
	Rural District CEO	1	1
	Safari Operators	11	5
	Chiefs	1	1
	Councillors	3	3
	Village Head	12	3
	Total		14

As stated earlier, in this study, in line with what the literature provides, in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 key informants purposively selected to include district administrator (DA), rural district council (RDC) chief executive officer (CEO), chief (C), safari operators (SO), and councillors/village chairpersons (C/VC) as shown in Table 1.

Data collection using in-depth interviews was done according to the following chronological plan as suggested by Boyce and Neale (2006: 6) ^[3].

- Setting up the in-depth interviews with key informants and explaining the purpose of the interview, why the participant has been chosen, and the expected duration of the interview;
- Seeking informed consent of the participant in accordance with the recommend ethics
- Conducting the in-depth interview after obtaining consent

- Summarising the data immediately after the interview
- Verifying the information
- Data analysis through transcription
- Report writing

Results and Interpretation

Hindrances of CBT ventures in Save Valley

The interview responses on this theme produced a diverse spectrum of hindrances much more significant than simple economic factors detailed in the literature. The hindrances

included poor social relations, non-participation in tourism by some groups, lack of skills, human-animal conflict, land invasions by community members, and the collapsed perimeter fence. Figure 3 is a thematic analysis of hindrances for adoption of CBT ventures on a sustainable basis; some were common in the literature while others that are unique to Save Valley. Please note that only those hindrances with an overarching influence would be discussed in greater detail such as bad social relations, human-wildlife conflict, and the land question.

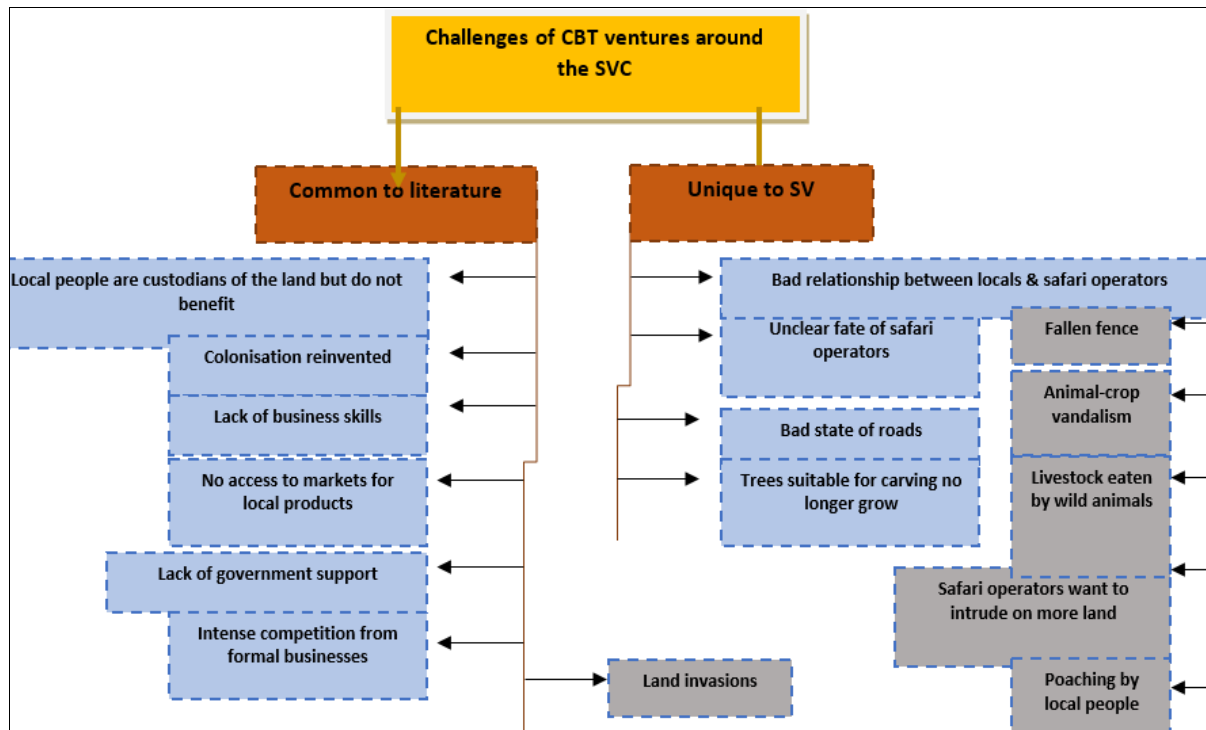


Fig 3: Challenges faced by CBT ventures around the Save Valley

a) Bad Social relations

The interview reports revealed that the respondents concurred on that bad social relations were a major challenge that would impede the introduction and successful adoption of CBT ventures in the Save Valley. This has been reported as a major drawback although the local people have the potential to generate extra income to alleviate poverty through this route while also contributing to wildlife conservation since the region has a huge sanctuary. It can be concluded that bad social relations between local people and safari operators had an overarching influence on most of the success factors such as access to markets, capital, accessibility and technical know-how.

In addition bad relations seemed to blur any prospects of sustainable implementation of locally-owned CBT projects in which local people participate in management and decision making processes. The local people accuse and deny responsibility for lack of cooperation, poaching, vandalism of the perimeter fence, and poverty. The following quotes are examples of attitudes shared by different groups of residents towards each other well known to government and other officials in the region.

‘We have bad relations with safari operators. We are labelled poachers because we live close to the boundary fence. We are accused of setting up snares to catch the game animals belonging to the white safari operators. But since we were resettled here over 30 years they have not captured

a local poacher. All the poachers they have captured were from Botswana and Zambia’. (Village Head 1).

‘Currently, the relationship is not cordial or good because of what has happened. A lot of destruction of crops has occurred and losses have been recorded through livestock being devoured by the big five. The community have been further impoverished. If there is no co-operation from the safari operators the people may have problems in accessing the market since they may be competing for customers because some of the items the local people will be selling such as jewellery and traditional accommodation may already be on offer at safari operators’ outlets. There is also need to build a relationship with the safari operators. The game farmers are alleging that the fence was destroyed by the villagers during poaching activities. They argue that the onus is on the communities who are being affected by the wild animals to repair the fence. This is also why the farmers are neither maintaining the roads nor assisting the communities’. (District Administrator).

The interviewees regarded bad social relations as a divisive issue which would militate against any CBT initiatives from the onset, and weaken any facilitation framework. Furthermore the narratives above and other reports seemed to confirm that successful resolution of conflict in Save Valley would unlock other socio-economic variables thereby making way for sustainable introduction and maintenance of CBT projects. As such the issue of

improving relations in the Save Valley was viewed by the respondents as a critical factor for the success of CBT ventures in the region. In addition respondents stressed the importance of collaboration between the safari operators and local community residents as a key success factor for any CBT initiative. This meant that every other challenge quoted such as lack of access to markets, poor accessibility, low skill levels, and lack of capital, were essentially, secondary hindrances for successful introduction and adoption of CBT ventures in Save Valley. The reported lack of willingness and pompous attitude by safari operators through non-attendance to meetings, and non-involvement of local residents as entrepreneurs in wildlife tourism other than as safari employees or recipients of remittances has complicated the possibility of establishing viable CBT enterprises.

On the other hand safari operators seemed conciliatory and proactive although seemingly not appreciative of the potential of local people to participate in tourism. Some of the responses seemed to blame local people in neighbouring villages of vandalism and poaching as exemplified in the following quotes.

‘Allow the private enterprise to do most of the wildlife business side whilst members of the community learn and protect the resources they have, a programme similar to CAMPFIRE. The private sector has the money and know-how. The communities have the land. Combining the two is most lucrative’. (Safari Operator 1)

‘Safari operators should take part in joint ventures with residents in the villages where they will provide marketing of jewellery or works of art and running of the safari business on behalf of the community’. (Safari Operator 2)

The safari farmers are alleging that the fence was destroyed by the villagers during some poaching activities. They are reluctant to maintain the fence because the onus to repair the fence is on villagers who are being affected by the wild animals after destroying the fence. This is why also they are neither maintaining the roads nor giving anything to the villagers’. (Top Council Official)

b) Human-wildlife conflict

Some respondents reported hostility towards safari operators and dislike of wildlife conservation as they regarded it as a menace to their crops, livestock and lives as illustrated in the quotes below. The matter was complicated by the vandalised perimeter fence as stated in earlier quotes. The views were supported by some studies that concluded that conflicts between safari operators in conservancies and the neighbouring poor farmers were almost inevitable from the onset largely due to human-animal conflict, a situation that did not augur well for CBT projects (Bond *et al.*, 2004; Cumming, 2005; Lindsey *et al.* 2008) ^[2, 7, 28].

‘The conflict between the residents and the animals will be made worse. If we utilise that land beyond those mountains it will be like drawing the problem animals closer to the people. There must be a very good approach to the issue. It is our tradition that economic status of a black person in this area is measured in terms of the number cattle one has. Ninety percent of the people from this area who graduated went to school using money from the sale of cattle. Now the fence has not been maintained for the past 4-5 years while game animals are straying out killing our cattle, elephants destroying crops, buffaloes spreading diseases to cattle. How can relations be good in this situation?’ (Chief)

‘We do not want wildlife CBT because if we decide to reserve a portion of our land for wildlife conservation like in SVC the wild animals will come out and eat all our livestock. We do not have an electric fence to confine the game animals inside the conservancy. We have caves only’. (Village Head 2)

Sebele (2010:143) ^[34] argues that the local residents value their agricultural and livestock farming more than wildlife CBT projects. Furthermore, human-wildlife conflict was complicated by farmers who retaliated for the agricultural loss or damage as evidenced by killing of 140 elephants in 2013 by local residents nearby Hwange National Park (Mhuriro-Mashapa *et al.*, 2017:1678) ^[29]. This scenario makes external facilitation more relevant and urgent to bring about mindset change among local residents of natural environments. Indeed some respondents reported incidents of stray wild animals from SVC which destroyed crops, killed livestock and injured or killed people without compensation as confirmed by the following assertions. Yet the local people put a lot of value in their livestock and crops (as their only source of livelihood), hence the hatred for the marauding animals. In as far as this research is concerned this is a serious issue if at all CBT ventures have to be adopted sustainably local people to alleviate their poverty and for them to contribute to wildlife conservation. On the other hand other respondents blamed local community members for vandalising the fence (see Figure 4) during poaching activities. Yet local residents viewed the lack of maintenance of the fence as punishment for refusing to surrender more land to wildlife conservation.



Source: Author's own photograph

Fig 4: A section of the boundary fence of SVC that collapsed.

‘Our relationship with white safari operators in SVC is bad. When we invite them to meetings they do not come or run away, and only sent their guards. They (safari operators) deliberately removed the solar powered fence to punish us for settling on land they wanted for themselves’. (Village Head 3)

In addition, respondents revealed that the bone of contention was the responsibility to repair and maintain the electric fence that should keep wildlife in confinement which was in a state of disrepair at the time of investigation (Figure 4). The results of the interviews showed that the two groups blamed each other for state of the fence. In spite of the contestations about who was to blame for the collapse and non-maintenance of the fence, in essence, the issue of restoring the electric fence was critical in order for cordial relations to develop.

Similar studies conducted in conservancies made also observed about the seriousness of human-wildlife conflict situation in the region. For instance, Mhuriro-Mashapa, Mwakiwa and Mashapa (2017:1678) ^[29]; Mombeshora and Bell (2009: 2602) ^[30] confirmed that human-wildlife conflicts were a serious concern for local communities that lie adjacent protected areas in Zimbabwe such as SVC. Essentially, scholars have since observed that managing human-wildlife conflict has become a critical aspect of most local communities peripheral to wildlife sanctuaries in southern Africa. A research in communal lands adjacent SVC found out that elephants, buffaloes, hyenas and lions were the most problematic animals in the area (Mhuriro-Mashapa *et al.* (2017:1678) ^[29].

c) The Land Question

Another hot issue which emerged as a major non-economic hindrance was the land question as illustrated by the quotes below.

‘The relationship got sour when the government gave allegedly allocated the 10 km wide buffer zone safari farmers’. (Top Council Official)

‘The land on which the conservancy was established belongs to the people who now live in the surrounding communal lands that are now overpopulated. The fate of the game farmers is very unclear because land ownership models have changed over time. At one point there was an opinion in government to indigenise the conservancies and offer letters were given out to black farmers. At a later stage the offer letters were withdrawn. Government ended up proposing the current modus operandi where a safari community ownership trust was formed involving safari operators, National Parks representing government, and communities represented by chiefs’. (Chief)

‘We always had problems with them (white safari operators) because they told us to shift and resettle on the other side of the road you used to come here. They wanted to extend their game farms into our land we were given by the government. This is why they are deliberately disabling the electric fence in order to unleash their lions and hyenas on us to make us suffer’. (Village Head 3)

As can be established from the responses above and other reports respondents attributed the lack of participation in CBT to the historical background of the establishment of SVC. They reported that SVC was established on land that belonged to them before they were driven out to live in communal lands that were now crammed and overpopulated. As exemplified above the interview results also showed inconsistent government policy on land tenure which aggravated the conflict situation and anxiety in the Save Valley by causing uncertainty among safari operators who invested heavily in their businesses.

In addition by making SVC a subject of the land reform programme which began in 2000, some respondents felt that government caused land tenure uncertainty, anxiety and aloofness among safari operators, and scuttled any hope of their involvement in outreach programmes. This could have caused the safari operators to neither cooperate with local communities nor assist to establish CBT ventures for as long their investments were being threatened by the lack of security of tenure. Furthermore, non-participation in wildlife tourism by the local residents of the Save Valley created a pre-cursor for a situation where the local people and the safari operators saw each other as ‘us and them’.

Furthermore, the reported reactionary practices such as bushmeat poaching and vandalism on the perimeter fence could be interpreted as expressions of despair and resentment due to land tenure policies of manipulation, therapy or tokenism superimposed on the communities by elitist and bureaucratic development planners, government officials, politicians, and local authorities in the region (Arnstein, 1969, Okazaki, 2008) ^[1]. On the other hand some scholars (Bond *et al.*, 2004; Wolmer *et al.*, 2004; Lindsey *et al.*, 2008) ^[2, 40, 28] interpreted the destructive practices as the negative effects of an exclusionist top-down approach to community development, and political machinations, which leave local community residents with no alternative sources of livelihood.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has shown that despite CBT being highly esteemed as one form of sustainable tourism appropriate for poor and remote rural areas in many LEDCs to offer an alternative development trajectory for empowerment and self-reliance, numerous constraints have hindered the adoption and development of sustainable CBT ventures in and around Save Valley Conservancy. Chief among the constraints include human-wildlife conflict, bad relations, and the land question which have had an over-arching influence on most of the success factors such access to markets, capital, accessibility and technical know-how.

This paper recommends that community based organisations (CBOs), as internal facilitators and an organised power base in the community, in collaboration with powerful and highly resourced external facilitators such as government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), should intervene in a big way to overcome the hindrances, and encourage the local community residents of Save Valley. Furthermore, to attain a ‘win-win’ situation among the different groups in the region outreach programmes that have long been contemplated as a conduit to transmit tourism benefits to local community residents, particularly women and the youths, should be transformed into CBT projects to bring about active community participation in tourism and achieve sustainability of the conservation mandate. In addition, without meaningful community participation in tourism by mostly women and the youths in the region resentment to the conservancy project will persist. Resentment will continue to be expressed in the form of destructive practices such as bushmeat poaching, retaliatory killing of wildlife, and vandalism of the perimeter fence.

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