

## Original Paper

# An Analysis of the Status of Ecotourism and Related Developments in the Zimbabwe's Component of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area

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### Abstract

*This study analysed the status of ecotourism and related developments in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA) with some specific examples drawn from Zimbabwe. The objectives of the study were to: (i) explore the evolution of wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprise development by local communities, and (ii) determine factors influencing local community-owned wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprises in the GLTFCA. The study was based on two data collection methods, i.e., documentary review of academic literature and reports, and key informant interviews with 30 selected stakeholders from Chipinge and Chiredzi districts conducted between January and June 2018. The findings showed that there is some progress related to initiatives to help improve community-based wildlife conservation and cross border ecotourism. However, some challenges attributed to lack of market linkages and networks, macro-economic challenges faced by Zimbabwe which escalated since the year 2000 and limited institutional capacity of*

*It is recommended that participatory planning and enhanced involvement of the local communities in wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprises be prioritized.*

### Keywords

*conservation, ecotourism, enterprises, poverty, wildlife*

## 1. Introduction

Ecotourism and wildlife conservation are complementary sectors of the economy (Buckley, 2010; Chiutsi & Saarinen, 2017). The outcomes of ecotourism and wildlife conservation are linked to the economic, social, and environmental pillars that drive sustainable development in protected areas and adjacent areas (Mudzengi et al., 2020). Globally, literature has proved that demand for ecotourism related products is on the rise (Balmford et al., 2009; Hoogendoorn et al., 2019). Thus, in contemporary conservation, ecotourism has been identified as a useful method of community engagement. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century most colonial governments, especially those in the southern Africa region adopted the “fortress” conservation approach (Jones, 2006). There were attempts to confine wildlife in protected areas while alienating the local people from wildlife resources existing in their environment (Muboko & Murindagomo, 2014). Strict conservation laws were then enacted with a quasi-military unit of rangers being established to enforce these laws (Songorwa, 1999; Büscher & Ramutsindela, 2016). This did not only prove to be costly, but also unsustainable as poaching and human-wildlife conflicts kept on increasing (Barrett & Arcese, 1995). Over time, particularly from the 1980s, it was realised that there was need to shift from these centralised command and control approaches, often referred to “fences and fines” towards community-based conservation initiatives, especially for communities co-existing with wildlife (Barrett & Arcese, 1995; Hutton et al., 2005; Mutanga et al., 2015a).

Pressure kept mounting on most governments including those in southern Africa to harmonise conservation and community benefits (Decaro & Stokes, 2008; Tchakatumba et al., 2019). It was noted with growing consensus from conservationists and governments that local communities should take part in wildlife conservation other than being reduced to the role of spectators (Metcalf, 1994; Murombedzi, 2008; Muphree, 2009). This saw the adoption of a series of initiatives which sought to include and benefit the local communities from wildlife conservation. Among others, the Integrated Conservation Development Projects (ICDPs), Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) and transfrontier conservation (Martin, 1986; Barrett & Arcese, 1995; Murombedzi, 2008) become more prominent. Transfrontier conservation is a relatively new conservation approach for both terrestrial and marine wildlife where by two or more countries collaboratively manage their wildlife sanctuaries which could be national parks, conservancies or communal areas (Hanks, 2008). The transfrontier conservation approach has a number of objectives, some of which include the need to improve the collaborative management of natural resources and shared cultural resources, and improved biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development across national boundaries (Anderson et al., 2013; Chiutsi & Saarinen 2017). Some of the advantages of transfrontier conservation are improved employment opportunities for the local people, improved regional collaboration and poverty relief (Munthali, 2007). In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), there are currently 18 Trans frontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) covering an estimated total area of over 700,000 km<sup>2</sup> (SADC, 2012).

Ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises were embraced outside protected areas to

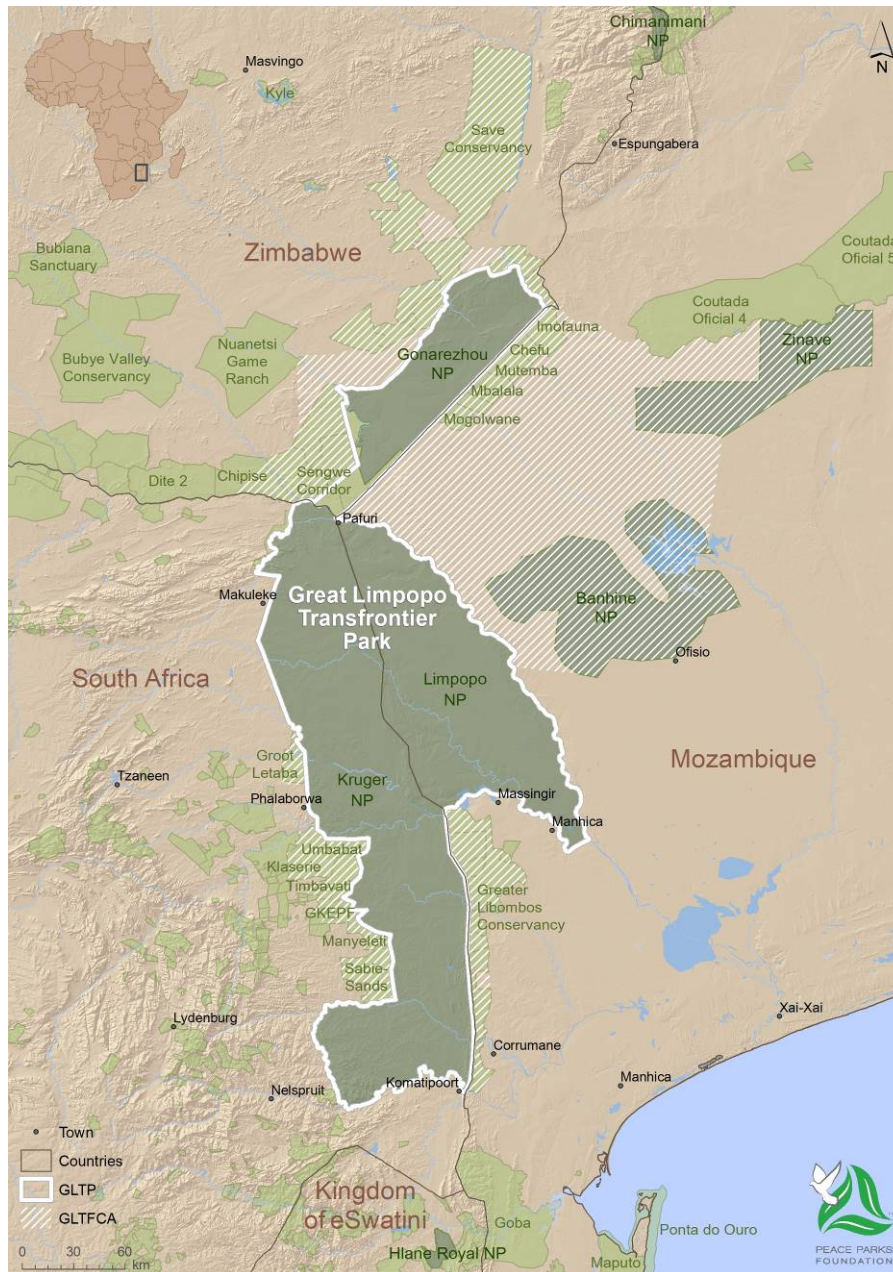
create benefit opportunities to the local communities living with wildlife or adjacent to protected areas in line with the objectives of these broader landscape level initiatives like the TFCAs (Suich et al., 2013). The establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP), after the GLTP treaty, signed in the year 2002 paved way for the creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA). The GLTP encompasses state protected areas such as the Kruger National Park in South Africa, Limpopo National Park in Mozambique and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, while the GLTFCA encompasses the GLTP and adjacent areas comprising multi-land use practices including local communities. Hence, the creation of the GLTFCA potentially created benefit opportunities for communities living within and adjacent to the GLTP (Spiereburg et al., 2008; Mutanga et al., 2015b).

Even from the local communities and other stakeholders, greater expectations arose at the formation of this extensive wildlife sanctuary to improve the socio-economic well-being of people through the development of ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises. However, several years after the adoption of the transfrontier conservation approach, the expectations of improved developments are disillusioned as both direct and indirect benefits trickling to households, for instance, in Zimbabwe's part of the GLTFCA are minimal (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2016). The present study assessed wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprise development in southern Africa, with some specific examples drawn from the Zimbabwe's component of the GLTFCA. The specific objectives of the study were to: (i) explore the evolution of wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprise development by local communities and (ii) determine factors influencing local community owned wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprises in the GLTFCA.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Study Area*

The study focused on Chiredzi and Chipinge districts, in the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe, part of the GLTFCA (Figure 1). At its formation, the GLTFCA covered an area of approximating 99,800 km<sup>2</sup> consisting of 66,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Mozambique, 22,000 km<sup>2</sup> in South Africa, and 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Zimbabwe (Wolmer, 2003). The GLTFCA is composed of land encompassing various tenure systems including private game reserves, state protected areas and state-owned 'communal' agricultural land (Wolmer, 2003). On the Zimbabwe's part of the GLTFCA, rural communities are mostly dependent on natural rain-fed subsistence agriculture, livestock production, and natural resource management under the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) (Gandiwa et al., 2014; Mashapa et al., 2020). The study area has diverse wildlife species of conservation, cultural, economic and ecotourism value (Gandiwa et al., 2016).



**Figure 1. Location of the GLTFCA**

Source: Peace Parks Foundation <https://www.peaceparks.org/tfcas/great-limpopo/>

*2.2 Research Approach, Data Collection and Analysis*

The study adopted a case study approach, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within real-life context (Yin, 2014). Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data on factors which influence local communities-owned wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprise development in the TFCA were collected from 30 key informants in southeast Zimbabwe, i.e., Chiredzi ( $n = 22$ ) and Chipinge ( $n = 8$ ), who were interviewed using a snowball sampling approach. Among those interviewed were traditional leaders, professionals in wildlife and tourism related institutions and

representatives from community-based management institutions. In snowball sampling, the sample population is selected in a social context and in a multi-stage process, i.e., after gaining access to the preliminary samples, the samples begin to introduce other people to take part in the research (Naderifar et al., 2017). This process continues in a semi-automatic and chain-like manner until data saturation (Naderifar et al., 2017; Young et al., 2018). According to Kumar (1989), 15-35 key informants are sufficient for most studies. Interviews were conducted between January and June 2018.

Secondary data were gathered from published and unpublished literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, websites, text books and reports. Key words used to search online material from Google and academic search engines such as Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Knowledge included: ecotourism, community-based ecotourism enterprises, GLTFCA, local community benefits, transfrontier conservation, wildlife conservation and Zimbabwe. The literature, which contained the aforementioned keywords in the abstract were included in the analysis list, while the rest of the literature were discarded (Naderifar et al., 2017). The study period of interest was 2002 to 2018 so as to incorporate the timeframe after the signing of the GLTP treaty. Following the analysis method described by Muboko (2017), data were analysed using qualitative approaches where similar issues were grouped into thematic areas. Thus, the results were generalized to show the emerging issues from both the key informants and literature.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### *3.1 Evolution of Wildlife Conservation and Ecotourism Related Enterprise Development*

Literature indicate that wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprises developed or co-evolved with broader landscape level conservation initiatives like the ICDPs, TFCAs and spatial development initiatives to reconcile conservation and development tradeoffs (Brown et al., 2005; Sayer et al., 2013; Thomson et al., 2013; Mudzengi et al., 2020). Within these initiatives so emerged pro-community-based conservation programmes such as the CBNRM. These community-based conservation initiatives promoted the participation of local communities in wildlife conservation and ecotourism enterprises. The historical evolution of the CBNRM concept is well-documented (Brosius et al., 1998; Kellert et al., 2000; Muboko & Murindagomo, 2014). Some of the reasons that expedited the establishment of CBNRM were the failure of the top-down conservation approaches associated with high law enforcement costs, increases in poaching and human wildlife conflicts (Jones, 2006; Songorwa, 1999), which led to the realization that as long as the local communities were not participating in the management and conservation of wildlife the challenges would escalate. Barrett and Arcese (1995) pointed out that the failure of the “fines and fences approach” was mainly because the authorities had failed to consider the socio-economic needs of the local communities. The emergence of CBNRM in the 1980s resulted in a series of legislative reforms devoted to land owners (Hutton et al., 2005). This dramatic shift away from strictly centralised governance of wildlife effectively changed wildlife’s status on private and communal lands from being an economic liability to an asset (Muphree,

2009). Thus, community-based wildlife conservation approaches were initiated. In Zimbabwe, this led to the amendment of the Parks and Wildlife Act 14 of 1975 in 1982 to enable the participation of the local communities in wildlife conservation (Martin, 1986; Gandiwa et al., 2013). This resulted in profound recoveries of wildlife on private and communal lands and the growth of wildlife-based industries in Zimbabwe (Reidinger & Miller, 2013).

In southern Africa, a number of initiatives have been adopted by the various governments to try and motivate the local communities especially those at the interface of protected areas to live in harmony with wildlife through community-based ecotourism partnership initiatives. These include CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, the Administrative Management Design Programme for Game Management Areas (ADMAD) programme in Zambia, Tchuma Tchato in Mozambique and Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) in Namibia (Machena et al., 2017). In the case of Namibia's CBNRM, the rights over wildlife are given directly to local communities and institutions enabling even regional government structures to devolve authority further down (Machena et al., 2017). Manyara and Jones (2007) noted that communities have to define themselves, enabling the development of cohesive social management units with incentives for individuals to cooperate together rather than artificial administrative units which potentially force people to work together who would not normally cooperate. Many project areas in Namibia recognize the role of women as resource managers who need to be involved at community level decision making over the use of natural resources and distribution of benefit (Madzudzo, 2003). Wildlife, ecotourism and CBNRM are very instrumental tools for rural development and wildlife resources conservation in Africa (Mbaiwa, 2010). In the SADC, CBNRM programs have facilitated the creation of community organisations that allow the communities and households to capture part of the monetary value associated with wildlife oriented enterprises (Muphree, 2009).

The key informants, especially those from Chiredzi district indicated that development of some sections of the GLTFCA, particularly, Sengwe-Tshipise corridor as a wildlife corridor and community wildlife management area was slow despite having been formally gazetted by the Department of Physical Planning in 2009. Further, it was reported that TFCA activities have not yet been formalised at the local level. However, the GLTP Treaty was perceived to have been activated at national level but not at local level. The majority of the key informants suggested that in order to better enhance the conservation objectives within the TFCAs there was need for the stakeholders involved to have a shared vision and goals that are well-articulated to the local levels.

With regard to eco-tourism and wildlife conservation, key informants' reported that there are a number of community-based institutions in the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe but that they were not meaningfully contributing towards ecotourism and wildlife conservation enterprise development. Some of the reasons advanced for this situation included lack of financial support from the government and developmental partners. It has been reported that the institutions which were created to drive ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises developments remain weak and lack capacity

(Metcalf, 1994; Chiutsi & Saarinen 2017; Mudzengi et al., 2020). Most local institutions lack funding and the members do not have the desirable education and professional skills to run the ecotourism enterprises. Further, key informants highlighted that due to the of lack meaningful remuneration, only those with passion end up holding administrative positions of local enterprises, though some may not have the appropriate skills to professionally develop these ventures which compromises governance of local community owned ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises.

In line with earlier studies, ecotourism potential is indeed affected by barriers such as lack of government support, local people cultures, lack of inclusivity and perceptions and level of capacity in terms of education and skills for the local people (Jamieson & Nadkarni, 2009; Chiutsi & Saarinen 2019). In most developing countries, there are competing claims between conservation and the need for resources such as firewood and other forest resources by the local people which affects the tourism product. Thus, balancing these concerns is widely regarded as not an easy task (Frey and George, 2010).

### *3.2 Factors Influencing Local Community Owned Wildlife Conservation and Ecotourism Related Enterprises*

Generally, literature on challenges related to community ecotourism enterprises in developing countries is available (Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2009). Apart from institutional capacity issues (Metcalf, 1994), most key informants, pointed to lack of awareness about business opportunities created by TFCAs, lack of involvement in GLTFCA development plans, activities and funding mechanism for local community businesses. For instance, it was reported that most of the plans and policies which were crafted at the inception of GLTP to guide ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprise have not been rolled out to the local community people.

Although literature points out that ecotourism opens opportunities for other entrepreneurial activities through demand for related goods and services in communal areas where ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises are conducted (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Chirozva, 2015), lack of awareness and involvement in such developmental plans hampers community participation (e.g., Chiutsi & Saarinen 2019). However, in as much as ecotourism has potential for advancing sustainable development, it also can have detrimental effects. The negative effects among others include local culture dilution and infiltration by foreign culture. Further, ecotourism may also result in water and air pollution including other undesirable environmental, ecological and socio-cultural impacts if not managed well (Okech, 2010; Duffy, 2006).

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on this study we conclude that although opportunities exist for wildlife conservation-based projects and ecotourism related enterprise development by local communities in the GLTFCA and southern African in general, such opportunities remain largely unexploited. This is evidenced by low local community participation in ecotourism and conservation-based enterprises as recorded in this present study. The level of participation is mostly limited to employment benefits. Factors influencing the few local community owned wildlife conservation and ecotourism related enterprise and inhibiting the participation by the majority within the GLTFCA are varied, but include inadequate institutional capacity at the local level, lack of funding and lack of awareness of such opportunities. Such constraints are, however, not only confined to the GLTFCA, but can be generalized to other CBNRM projects. We recommend for enhancement of awareness programmes about the GLTP Treaty and enterprise opportunities arising from the treaty and its implementation. Local institutions need better funding and capacitation so that they can effectively participate in planning, local and cross border ecotourism and wildlife conservation related enterprises value chains.

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