

Charity or Partnership? Striking a Relational Balance in Wildlife Conservation and Ecotourism Development

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Abstract

Tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown considerably in recent years, in fact, 7% of the region's gross domestic product (GDP) is derived from travel and tourism (DeVivo, 2012). Collaborative governance brings public and private stakeholders together in collective forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-orientated decision-making (Ansell and Gash, 2008). This study explores the community voice and engages with the community for its views and opinions. While there was an appreciation for the activities of Phinda and Africa Foundation, the participants expressed their unfulfilled expectations, concerns and made suggestions for a way forward to prevent future conflicts, to establish collaborative partnership and ensure sustainable conservation and tourism. Skewed power relations, lack of participation in decision-making, poor local governance and poor communication strategies were among the main issues raised by the participants. This paper delivers valuable criticisms and suggestions for improvement of private sector conservation and tourism management.

Keywords: Local community participation, collaborative governance, sustainable conservation, sustainable development, sustainable ecotourism, capacity development

1. Introduction

The colonial era (and apartheid in South Africa) brought with it deprivation of the Africans' most valuable resource, the land (including the wildlife in it) due to the protectionist and exclusivist modes of conservation (Kamphorst, Koopmanschap & Oudwater, 1997; Nash, 2014). According to Hottola (2009), some of both conservation and tourism initiatives are still maintaining the marginalization of black South Africans from wildlife and tourism economy, The SADC identified major challenges affecting the region, which included the lack of full participation and self-representation of local communities in the management of protected areas (PA), lack of sufficient local benefit generation, inequitable sharing of benefits and costs, institutional and legal framework to support community rights, and poor governance (IUCN, 2010).

In Ruhanen, Scott, Ritchie & Tkaczynski (2010), the definition of governance emphasises the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken and how citizens or other stakeholders have a say. Governance refers to the effectiveness of decision-making processes and institutions (Balint, 2006; Kauffman, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2005). Balint (2006) further stresses that where governance is weak at local level, community participation might be limited and local political or traditional leaders or private firms might steal community benefits.

This paper focuses on the nature of relationships between a private game reserve (and its development partners) on one side and the local community on the other, and the impact thereof on wildlife conservation and ecotourism development. The research interrogates some of the challenges identified by SADC in IUCN (2010) which include lack of meaningful community participation and self-representation in protected area management, inequitable distribution of benefits and costs, and poor governance at local levels.

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It explores community facilitation and communication processes in order to create dialogue and establish the state of balance in power relations which would contribute positively to wildlife and ecotourism management. Governance is therefore one of the central issues discussed in this paper. Where there is weak governance, capacity-building becomes an imperative, in order to improve natural resource management, which in turn, is central to the improvement of governance and empowerment of local communities (IUCN, 2010; Ntuli & Muchapondwa, 2018). UNDP (2002) defines capacity as the levels of competence, ability and skills necessary to set and achieve relevant goals. Bello, Lovelock & Carr (2016) express the need for advocacy of community participation and the need to incorporate specific strategies that can facilitate community engagement and are tailored for developing countries.

2. Background

In the USA, the National Parks Services, as well as conservation advocates, initiated the complete separation of untouched nature from humans, originating from the “Yellowstone Model” of conservation (Nash, 2014), which became the globally accepted model of conservation in the 20th century. The exclusion of local communities from protected areas became the norm (Nash, 2014). Conservation of nature reserves was characterised by forced removals, both physically and rhetorically, of local, indigenous people who lived for generations on the land now purported to be pristine (Rechlin & Taylor, 2008). Nature conservation in Africa also adopted the policies of the “Yellowstone Model”.

In contrast to the “Yellowstone Model”, over a long period before the 19th Century, indigenous and local people in southern Africa had enough land to sustain them for all their needs (Kamphorst et al., 1997). The traditional methods of natural resource management were all adapted to conservation (Moyo, Robinson, Katarere, Stevenson & Gumbo, 1991). The whole management of life for the African people revolve around the concept of humanity (i.e. Ubuntu, in Nguni languages, or Hunhu, in Shona). The African ethos explains the concept of being human explicitly. It states that:

To be, to exist means to be so for the community and for others, with the self, emerging from relationship with others and the natural environment. The human is never alone but in constant communication and communion with others, in a permanent listening to the pulse of the world and in close contact with the universe. (Humanity's Team South Africa: Awakening the world to oneness-Downloaded: 20 June, 2017)

Natural environment and nature conservation have been and are still an integral part of the African culture. Valuing and respecting others and nature, overrides any other principles within the African context. The coming in of the Western conservation approaches like the “Yellowstone Model” meant that the local communities' autonomy and their traditional methods of natural resource utilisation and management were seriously compromised and even lost (Balint, 2006). Bramwell and lane (2012) explain that local communities were regarded as completely incompatible with the protection of species, ecosystems and biodiversity, yet they used to co-exist with nature before.

At the inception of democracy and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, vast areas of land had been already established through forced removals and relocations; were under military protection and financed through government subsidies (Govender et al., 2005). Political democracy did not automatically translate into fair, democratic, or even accommodating wildlife and ecotourism management practices. To this effect, even today, many of the game parks and tourism initiatives still represent the “Yellowstone Model” in a disguised format. Unbalanced power relations negatively impact on human rights, socio-economic development and conservation (Balint, 2006; Mutandwa & Gadzirayi, 2007). Rogerson (2009) highlights limited linkages of tourism enterprises in South Africa, with disadvantaged black communities at the receiving end. Poor levels of consultation, engagement and trust have been identified as a source of future conflicts between local communities, the State, conservation and tourism authorities (Guyot, 2002; Gandiwa et al., 2013). New development initiatives might not be accepted, supported or properly managed, if the local communities are not part of the decision-making processes. Hence, there is a call from the community-based conservation and tourism supporters, of the need for a paradigm shift from the protectionist conservation epistemology to sustainable, collaborative utilisation and management of natural resources.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted. This research is a Case Study, carried out in Umkhanyakude District of KwaZulu-Natal, in which Phinda and its surrounding local communities are located. Makhasa and Mngqobokazi are situated about 30-40 kilometres north-east of Hluhluwe, on the R22 Road that links the town with Sodwana Bay.

Documentary analysis, semi-structured individual and group interviews and direct observations were the data collection methods used in this study. Semi-structured individual and group interviews allowed the participants to identify and describe concerns or concepts that might not have been expected or considered by the researcher. Interviews are of particular importance to ensure honesty and impartiality. Documentary analysis allowed the generation of inferences through objective and systematic identification of core elements of written communications. Direct observation was used to capture situations of interest not readily volunteered by the participants due to notable different views among members of a particular community. A multi-method approach ensured that reliability of the findings and the validity of both the approaches and the data collected.

Documentary analysis: &Beyond, Phinda Game Reserve documents together with those for Africa Foundation, which included organogram, activities, employment and management information, were used. Interviews were conducted with selected members of the community including leadership, management and employees of Phinda and Africa Foundation. Group interviews were both voluntary and by request. Community members were asked to volunteer to participate in the interviews. However, with the help of the community leaders, some key members were requested to be part of the interviews. Direct observation of general relationships between the community and Phinda management, and the patterns of behaviour of stakeholders with each other were also observed. Focus group was used to investigate general perceptions of specific groups within the study area.

4. Findings

4.1. Documentary Analysis

Conservation is the foundation of &Beyond activities. The Company defines it as the preservation and careful management of the environment and nature resources (&Beyond, 2014). It involves the utilisation of natural resources along with the protection of biodiversity within natural ecosystem. The future of humankind is entirely dependent on dialogue. This stems from &Beyond's belief in the care of the land, the care of the wildlife and care of the people (&Beyond, 2014; 2015). Conservation and development do not have to be irreconcilable goals, but they need to be realistically considered as part of a political and social process of engagement and negotiation among different interests (Ruhanen *et al.*, 2010).

The Company, currently contributes to the sustenance of over 3.7 million acres of wildlife land of which Phinda is a part (&Beyond, 2014; 2015). The &Beyond model seeks to place more land on a sustainable economic footing through high yield and low impact responsible tourism. The organisation works hand in hand with a number of conservation bodies and the local communities surrounding the lodges and game reserves, who are vital stakeholders in sustainable conservation. In many instances, the land surrounding the lodges belongs to national or private park owners (&Beyond, 2014; 2015).

While &Beyond strives to remain integrally involved in decision-making at a high level, as well as in managing careful and sensitive interactions with the wildlife and habitat, it is also critical to ensure that the other stakeholders, especially the local communities, are involved as equal partners and not recipients of resolution and the benefits of sustainable conservation. &Beyond believes the reward of wildlife and nature conservation can be reaped sustainably through multi-sectorial tourism, benefiting not only the tourist but also the land, animals and rural communities (&Beyond, 2014; 2015).

&Beyond 'Phinda' pioneered the successful land restitution settlements with local communities with the return of land to its ancestral owners. Makhasa and Mngobokazi community leaders and &Beyond signed a groundbreaking, mutually beneficial land claim settlement on the 11th of August, 2007, in favour of the community for 9500 hectares of Phinda Private Game Reserve land (&Beyond, 2012). In terms of these agreements, &Beyond secured a commitment from the community to keep the land under wildlife rather than return it to farming (&Beyond, 2016). In this way, both the communities and conservation benefit, demonstrating once more &Beyond's commitment to the Care of the Land, Care of the Wildlife and Care of the People (&Beyond, 2016).

&Beyond's community development partner, Africa Foundation, is a successful, independent, non-profit organisation registered in South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom (Africa Foundation, 2016). The focus of &Beyond is primarily on conservation of wildlife and tourism, in the form of low impact, high earn lodge management. Phinda is surrounded by neighbouring communities with whom they necessarily have to interact. Positive relationships tend to benefit both stakeholders and negative interactions bring about costs on both sides (&Beyond, 2015; Africa Foundation, 2016).

& Beyond's tourism business, which is the engine behind both conservation and social development, would be greatly affected by these relationships. Working together with &Beyond and in consultation with local communities, Africa Foundation facilitates the socio-economic development of rural communities around conservation areas in Africa (Africa Foundation, 2016). The involvement of Africa Foundation represents one of the pillars of &Beyond's ethos, *Care for the People* (&Beyond, 2016).

The success of the Africa Foundation-community relationship has a positive impact on the conservation and tourism efforts by Phinda on one hand, and the social development and the raising of the standard of living in general, on the other hand. Community support ensures that Phinda conservation and tourism business thrive. Local employment opportunities are so limited that around 30% of bread-winners migrated to cities in order to fend for their families. The youth is hit hard due to the lack of opportunities for a better future (Africa Foundation, 2016). In spite of the fact that conservation and tourism efforts were initiated some years ago, the economic opportunities for rural communities living in the neighbourhood of these ecotourism ventures still remain a dream (Africa Foundation, 2016).

The issue of local community governance has compromised some gains brought by democracy. As is typically in rural communities, traditional leaders work in collaboration with the political leadership, to effect policies. The main challenge is the alignment of individual, community and political agendas so that they all contribute to social development and improvement of livelihoods. The projects facilitated by the Africa Foundation are based on two sets of values: they are grounded in community participation and are driven by local leadership but, is it enough to solely rely on community leadership? Partnership with local stakeholders is vital for the achievement of the goals of the projects and the Organisation plays a critical role in forging the relationship between communities, local government and & Beyond (Africa Foundation, 2016). The Foundation focuses on four key development areas, namely Healthcare, Education, Enterprise development and Environment and Conservation. The Africa Foundation has successfully facilitated several projects that directly or indirectly affect the local population in areas of health, education, skills development and small business development, amongst others (Africa Foundation, 2016).

4.1.1. Impact of the Africa Foundation on local communities around &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve

Some of the Africa Foundation's greatest community achievements in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, include (Africa Foundation, 2016; &Beyond, 2016):

- *Nkomo Primary School*: 60 children used to gather in four makeshift classrooms on the grass beneath four large trees until the Africa Foundation constructed ten classrooms and other facilities;
- *Mduku Clinic*: A dedicated 24-hour healthcare facility for communities living around &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve serving 25 000 people;
- *Mbedhula Craft Market*: Empowers local artisans to showcase and sell their crafts in order to support their families;
- *Nkomo Ark*: A safe haven for over 500 children affected and/or orphaned by HIV/Aids;
- *Conservation lessons*: Teachers and children from communities neighbouring the wildlife areas have enjoyed interpretive game drives with &Beyond rangers to learn about the importance of conservation, while conservation debates on topics relating to conservation have been held at community high schools;
- *Community Leaders Education Fund (CLEF) bursary programme*: Provides tertiary education bursaries to aspiring young learners.

4.2. Interviews with community members and Phinda workers

Activities of Phinda directly impact on these communities and the activities of the community affect the wildlife and ecotourism operator (Snyman, 2014). Due to this close proximity, the cultural, socio-economic and political relationships need to be managed appropriately to build a common understanding about the roles of each stakeholder in mutually beneficial interaction. The local communities are a very important and critical stakeholder as they are capable of making or breaking conservation and tourism management efforts. There was a need to win the confidence and trust of the community. More time was allocated for familiarisation with different aspects of the culture of the local communities, to become visible and to be able to interact informally through conversations and meetings.

The informal interactions allowed the researcher to clarify the purpose of the research and its contributions to all the stakeholders in terms of its findings. Mingling with the local residents made it easier for them to open-up later during the formal interviews. A total of 44 individuals of three group interviews were conducted during three different data collection periods so as to ensure objectivity and reliability of the data collected. For the group interviews, Nyathini village of the Makhasa community was represented by 26 participants. Mngqobokazi had 19 people coming from different villages. The group of Phinda employees consisted of 12 participants. Twenty-three (23) employees from lower levels and three members from management of *Phinda* participated in the interviews, 16 of whom were males and 10 females. Fourteen of the 26 were interviewed individually. Makhasa had a total of 42 participants; Mngqobokazi had 29 and Africa Foundation, three at management level.

The first part of the interviews was concerned with perceptions and views of local residents of their participation in decision-making and management of wildlife conservation and tourism. The second part of the interviews focused on perceptions of the local communities on their participation in social development and benefit-sharing. Interviewees were allowed to express themselves as much as possible and in whatever way and language they chose to communicate. Where necessary follow-up questions, or clarity-seeking questions would be asked. The researcher captured the main ideas on paper, as they were presented by the interviewees, audio-recording of all the proceedings were also made after seeking permission from the interviewees. Based on the grounded theory approach, rich data was presented in order to avoid loss of important linkages. The responses would be presented according to the main ideas which the questions represented.

4.2.1 The perceptions and attitudes of local residents on their participation in conservation and tourism management

One of the expectations of the local community, after the signing of the agreement with Phinda, was that the company would equip their youth with skills, take them to universities and absorb them into tourism management. However, participants observed that currently, there are very few, if any, people from Makhasa, Mngqobokazi or even Nibela who are in management or decision-making positions, or who are being trained for such portfolios at Phinda. Whilst there is great appreciation for the job opportunities created by Phinda, the participants indicated that the majority of the jobs available for the local people were at the lowest levels, including waiters, maintenance workers, housekeepers and trackers. They said that some of the jobs were not permanent. Participants felt that Phinda did not put enough effort into integrating the locals in the management of wildlife and tourism, in spite of the fact that quite a number of their children had completed tertiary education in relevant areas, through the support of the Company and the Africa Foundation. For example:

Phinda has not trained any person to manage the game reserve as we expected, even though it has assisted in the education of our children at tertiary level.

Some interviewees alleged that people from outside the area, most of them whom were whites, were being given preference and occupied important decision-making, management positions:

There is no one or if any, very few people from our communities who are in management positions or who are currently being trained for these. Many youngsters from Makhasa, Mngqobokazi and Nibela wish to be future leaders of Phinda. Some have even studied tourism and other relevant courses, but they are not being given a chance. Leaders at Phinda are whites only.

The participants interviewed suggested that the community was not involved in the actual management and decision-making processes of conservation and tourism at Phinda. The findings from the practical observations of the researcher concur with the views of some of the grassroots community participants. During two separate visits at Forest Lodge, the researcher observed guests leaving for game drives, in the morning and late afternoon. From the nine vehicles which left the lodge on the first day, all game rangers were whites. On the second visit, there were six white rangers and one black ranger. The trend was the same at Mountain Lodge, in the two different days observed, eight of the eleven game drive outings observed had white rangers and only three with black rangers. Whether or not it is intended, or whatever other reasons, placing a disproportionate number of whites in managerial roles accentuates white privilege and fuels a subtle form of racism, especially when advancement of indigenous people from local communities is considered inconsequential.

Community members who were interviewed felt that, as a result of the land restitution and Phinda agreements, there is an opportunity for both stakeholders to work together as partners and neighbours in the conservation of nature and tourism business.

Participants pointed out that Phinda should take youth from the community and train them in wildlife management. To this effect, forty-three interviewees felt that education and training in wildlife management should be offered to any member of the community and not only to the committee members and community leaders. The following quotes, illustrates these sentiments:

As a community, we need such training because we also live in the proximity of the game reserve. Our lives and that of our livestock may also be in danger from wild animals. The lions will attack both Trust members, as well as other community members, attacking their goats, cattle and crops.

I would like Phinda to be as close to the community as possible and bring them inside the game reserve. They [Phinda] should show and educate the people [the community] about wildlife management, including the dangers they pose to humans. As a result, the community may be well informed as to what to do when they come across such violent and dangerous animals, even outside Phinda.

Some participants said that the community was not taught about the role they were expected to play in this new dispensation of being partners and owners of the land.

Now, we cannot say the community is welcome because as we are sitting here, there is no one amongst us who understands their responsibilities and privileges inside Phinda. You see? That is why I am saying the land is theirs. You should feel welcome but at the end I am hoping Phinda will notice and address this.

The community was not well versed about the laws that govern conservation of wildlife. The participants called for Phinda to facilitate community education on nature conservation and training in relevant skills. They claimed that the community was not involved in decision-making processes. They just saw things happening. As voiced by some interviewees, the local communities are not represented on the Board and hence their interests, aspirations and concerns are not considered. Other participants, however, felt that they were owners of the land and had decided not to interfere with conservation and tourism ventures at Phinda, as long as they were receiving their rentals and some other benefits. The interviewees suggested that there was an amicable relationship between Phinda and the community.

4.2.2. The perceptions and attitudes of local communities on their participation in social development

The community expected infrastructural development, in terms of the construction of the much needed social amenities, which included health centre, schools, water, communication and business enterprises. Some community members interviewed pointed out that they were not happy with the level of community participation in planning, decision-making and management of community development projects. On the other hand, other participants expressed satisfaction about their relationship with Phinda:

We work well with Phinda and In general, Phinda is very cooperative.

Almost all participants in one way or another referred to the achievements, which were made as a result of the partnership between Phinda and the local communities. Of significance, are the successes scored in the areas of health and education, which also include the bursary support scheme.

Phinda (through Africa Foundation) brought about infrastructural development, e.g. our clinic at Mduku, classroom blocks and school renovations in most schools in our area.

Whilst the community was grateful for the development efforts, most of the participants felt that the participation in decision-making and management of these projects was minimal. Some interviewees viewed the Phinda-Community relationship as that of donor and beneficiary or recipient. According to participants, the community, through its leadership, seem to be powerless to influence, let alone determine the course of development as perceived by residents. For example:

“We are not involved in decision-making processes”,

“We just see things happening”,

“Phinda does not respond to our priorities”.

Participants advocated for transparency and good governance with regard to community projects. Some interviewees even challenged the Africa Foundation to assist and facilitate training and education for good local community governance.

Firstly, they argued that, as a community, they did not have the final say in the prioritisation of projects that were supposed to address their challenges. Interviewees added that the community should take ownership of the projects which were intended to assist them.

Participation of local community in benefit-sharing involves the management and decision-making processes with respect to the inventory of such benefits, who should receive what, how, when and why. Interviewees distanced themselves from involvement in decision-making processes. They categorically stated that they were not involved and they just see things happening. Some participants, however, expressed dissatisfaction about benefit-sharing processes. They felt that there were some community members who were benefitting at the expense of others.

Some are benefitting but others are not. My answer is that, because we live in the community and there are things that could be done so that all members of the public will also benefit, not just the beneficiaries. Also, that the kids get financial support when they pass interviews, to go to school, from the money that comes from the rentals, according to the agreement. The money should not only cater for the beneficiaries but for any deserving member of the community. There are some people who receive benefits but I don't.

4.3. Interviews with management of & Beyond Phinda and Africa Foundation

Members of the management for both & Beyond Phinda and the Africa Foundation who participated in this research ranged from six years to more than twenty years of experience with these organisations. This means that they had varied perspectives on community participation at Phinda. The participants were convinced that there was, and still is, a good understanding between the parties involved. One manager concluded that with regard to land restoration and business agreements, Phinda is a success story when compared to other places which have had similar experiences. However, the manager felt that they could be doing much more than they were doing regarding their community responsibilities, for example, more involvement in community initiatives and hence improving their relationship and communication with the local residents. One participant explained that most of the workers in the northern region of Phinda's lodge section come from Makhasa (some from Mngobokazi and Nibela) and most of the activities involving guests are also done by these communities. The participants were requested to suggest any changes they felt would improve the current situation and their interaction with the community. It was suggested that more staff from local communities should be appointed to experience what Phinda has achieved and there was a need to improve lodge section participation so that it can contribute meaningfully and play a more active role in community development.

Considering the views on local community participation in decision-making and management processes as equal partners on issues that affect them, the participant managers conceded that Phinda had much more control over the communities. To instil a sense of ownership in the local community, the interviewees suggested that there should be preparation of youth from the community for more meaningful involvement and deeper understanding of the ethos and activities of Phinda. Involving the community, talks to the motto of &Beyond- the three ethos of 'Care for the Land', 'Care for the Wildlife' and 'Care for the People'. By making the community understand the goals, vision and motto of &Beyond the earlier would they support and own both conservation and tourism activities of the later. The participants said that although Phinda has a monthly reporting system on community work, it was possible that there could be communication breakdown in the flow of information. They acknowledged that more work could be done to get people educated and trained in basic wildlife and tourism management. In an attempt to put into perspective some issues raised by the community participants, I requested the managers to provide details concerning their staff complement and the organogram of the lodge section. They would also state the origin of their staff members (whether they were from the local communities or outside). The researcher consulted the Human Resources Department, but could not obtain the number of workers, from the 241 in the lodge section, who were from the local community, that is, Makhasa, Mngobokazi and Nibela.

Regional Manager	(Outside)
General Manager	(Outside)
Lodge Managers	(Outside)
Assistant Lodge Managers	(Outside)
Heads of Department	(Only two out of seven are local)
Assistant HODs	(No data)
General workers	(The majority are locals, No specific numbers given)

Figure 4.1: Organogram of northern region lodge section of Phinda

The example of organograms provided in Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of workers, whether they are from the local communities or outside. There are only two employees from the local communities who are in the middle to top management positions (from Head of Department to General Manager) in the northern region and three in the southern region of Phinda's lodge section.

The participant managers also observed that although there were many youths from the communities studying for relevant careers at tertiary level, more needs to be done to integrate them into Phinda. The interviewees went on to elaborate that the company was still very young, 21 years since its establishment. There were no programmes yet to motivate and recruit local qualified people, but something was being done in order to address this issue. It was also explained during the interviews, that some youth (mostly employees of Phinda) participated in the 'iNkwazi Project' which was an in-house training programme to ascertain whether the candidates were ready to be trained as rangers. Very few of the iNkwazi trainees were from the local communities and the interviewees argued that the demands of the programme were well beyond the reach of the poor local residents. Could &Beyond Phinda not have created a parallel programme which could accommodate the levels of the local residents? Community participation was well below expectations.

The interviewee argued that most community members were aware of what Phinda was doing, but did admit that there were others who were still ignorant. The researcher also posed the question of whether Phinda was meeting community expectations. The participant conceded that it was not easy, but the company was making great strides towards this goal. He explained that their main challenge was that the current communities were much larger than they were at the beginning. Also the generation that negotiated with Phinda was slowly phasing out through aging and death. The company was now dealing with the younger generation and it was necessary that they understood what the goals and values of Phinda were and also the Company to understand the needs and aspirations of the local youth. That is, Phinda needed to be sensitive about the new expectations of the community. The participant also added that the management tries to go out to communities to explain how things work in a business like Phinda. They believe that even if the communities were not directly involved in the business, they needed to know how it worked. However, progress has been slow.

Some members of the community interviewed in this research, raised as one of their concerns, the lack of education and training in wildlife management and conservation. Thus, the researcher requested a response from management. The interviewee admitted that the community members were correct, because Phinda did not have the capacity to reach out to the more than 15000 people living just outside the game reserve. For that reason most of the information is passed on to the community leadership so that it may be cascaded to the grassroots. Community leaders were educated and requested to do the same at their villages on what to do when wild animals have escaped from the game reserve into the community. The interviewee acknowledged that even their expectations of the community as management, were not being met due to communication breakdown along the way. The participant agreed that the Company has not yet fully explored the potential of community meetings and other open-door strategies for the wildlife conservation education and other communication strategies for mutual benefit. However, there were programmes in the pipeline, in which Phinda was going to maximise the use of community forums.

The participant also made an observation of the youth, who were being trained in the Inkwazi Project, that out of the three groups in session, no one was from the local communities. The interviewee acknowledged that so far there was no programme in place to recruit and integrate the university graduates, who are products of the bursary scheme.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The conceptual framework of this study exhibits a network of issues surrounding community participation in wildlife conservation and tourism management. It is critical to note the perceptions and attitudes of the local residents themselves on the level of their engagement in decision-making and management of conservation, tourism and any other issues that directly affect their livelihoods. This means the voice of local residents needs to be considered seriously for sustainable conservation, tourism business and livelihoods of households. The concerns of local and indigenous people were the point of focus, thus the research attempted to represent their perceptions and attitudes as accurately as possible. Of the 100 participants, fifty-seven Percent of the participants were males (57%) and forty-three Percent were females (43%).

The majority of the respondents (61 %) were youth below the age of 36 years, representing the sector of the community that have potential to actively contribute to the economy of the area and the country as a whole. All in all, 84 % of the participants were not more than 45 years of age. Frequent visits and spending time with the local people assisted in the creation of favourable conditions for the interviews.

Good governance ensures efficient flow of information in all directions, which leads to collective and cooperative decisions, owned by all stakeholders. In agreement with the findings of Strickland-Munro and Moore (2014), governance issues related to power differences and conflict over resources, such as reserve access, benefit-sharing and natural resources management, were some of the concerns also raised by the participants in this study. There was general consensus that the community was not actively engaged in wildlife management and conservation. The findings of the present study agrees with Rogerson (2009) who criticises South African tourism enterprises for their limited linkage with disadvantaged black communities and their lack of pro-poor focus.

Active community participation promotes sustainable utilisation of natural resources, environmental protection and environmental education. Local community participation increases the sense of belonging to natural land around them (Jusoh, 2012). The participants felt that Phinda did not put enough effort into integrating the local communities with the management of wildlife and tourism. Most of the participants concurred that the community needed education and training in wildlife management in order for them to be relevant and able to actively contribute towards conservation ... *there is no one amongst us who understands their responsibilities and privileges at Phinda*. There is therefore need for capacity development and good governance for the empowerment of the local residents (Muzirambi & Mearns, 2015). As participation in wildlife and tourism management and related decision-making processes were the pertinent issues raised by the respondents, community participants categorically stated that the community was not involved in decision-making and they just saw things happening. This was also confirmed by Dzvimbo et al. (2018) in their comparative study of the CAMPFIRE Programme in Zimbabwe. Nielsen (2011) argues that provision of opportunity to participate in management and decision-making processes on issues affecting the community, reduces the conflict potential and can positively shift the attitude of stakeholders. Jusoh (2012) and Bello *et al.* (2016) summarise it all by emphasising that ignoring local people's interests and excluding them from planning, management and decision-making around protected areas, are the main sources of conflict between local communities and designated areas, like game reserves.

From all the interview results, participants agreed that &Beyond Phinda had much more power and control over conservation, tourism and even social development issues than the other stakeholders. Respondents from the community, together with employees of Phinda argued that very few, if any, people from the local community were in management and decision-making positions at Phinda; a view which was supported by the organograms provided by management of Phinda. This illustrates a skewed relationship in favour of the Company, which has serious implications on the nature and levels of interaction with the local community.

Concerns about the lack of protection from wild animals (Snyman, 2014), lack of conservation education and the lack of job opportunities for a large number of unemployed youth in the community were some of the issues raised. Participants suggested that there should be preparation of the local youth, especially the academics, for more meaningful participation in conservation and tourism business of Phinda and also to have a deeper insight into the ethos of the Organisation. It was important to the local residents that the youth, especially the tertiary graduates who were beneficiaries of the Africa Foundation Bursary Scheme, would be gradually integrated into management at Phinda. However, according to the participants, there were no local people, or very few if any, who were employed in management positions in the tourism sector of Phinda. Hence, their expectations on this aspect were not met. Therefore, the respondents felt that the community members were excluded from both management and decision-making affecting the tourism sector (Campbell- Vainio & Mattila, 2003; Nelson, 2010). There was also a strong view that there was preferential treatment of people from outside the community, especially whites, for the management and decision-making positions. The expectations of the local residents, who participated in the study, were that Phinda would offer a lifeline in terms of employment opportunity. Of the 69 respondents who made reference to jobs or employment, only 29 had a positive perception in terms of acknowledging that they or their relatives had been employed by Phinda. The findings of the present study concur with Strickland-Munro and Moore (2014) and Snyman (2016) that direct employment was highly valued by community members on account of its ability to provide for family dependents and educational needs.

Lack of skills and knowledge in conservation and tourism management have prevented local residents from accrual of meaningful employment benefits, which were typically limited to those members with the requisite skills and knowledge. There is need for serious consideration for capacitation and empowerment of the local communities so that they could start occupying some of the influential positions within the conservation and tourism organisations. Absorption of the graduate bursary beneficiaries could be one of the many ways to ensure local community participation in meaningful decision-making processes in the management of wildlife, tourism and even social development. A sense of ownership among local resident employed, quickly cascades to their families and the rest of the community and this would have a positive impact on sustainable conservation and tourism business. Skewed power relations are the recipe for future conflict. Burgoyne and Mearns (2017) summed it all when they concluded that to avoid conflict stakeholders must demonstrate the ability to align their interests instead of competing for them.

Documentary analysis provided ample evidence which demonstrates how Phinda has transformed the community in the areas of job opportunities, health, education and skills development, including small business development. The participants confirmed that Phinda improved their livelihood through the construction of a clinic at Mduku, as healthcare was the greatest challenge of the local residents. The Africa Foundation, a social development partner of Phinda, built additional classroom blocks at the schools within the community and therefore affording the children another opportunity of building their future through education. Emptaz- Colomb (2009) urges organisations engaged in conservation and tourism to assist in improving the lives of the local residents through providing access to quality education, health, transport and communication.

The partnership relationship should entail active participation of the community in the planning, decision-making and management of projects. The interviewees expressed dissatisfaction on the level of their involvement in the social development projects, arguing that the community members only featured at the last implementation stages of the initiatives. The participants sensed unwillingness, on the part of Phinda, to actively engage the community in decision-making and management processes inside the game reserve. A school of thought suggests the “arm's length approach”. For as long as the local community keeps its distance, does not interfere with conservation and tourism and is not directly involved in the management and decision-making processes, the relationships are deemed to be good and the benefits continue to flow in the form of community development to the local residents.

For the local residents, the mentality of donor-recipient or beneficiary still persists. Most of the respondents did not understand the meaning of the present relationship of partnership, its rights, responsibilities and privileges. There were concerns raised by some participants that some processes lacked transparency, fairness and good governance. According to participants, levels of participation depended on the status and socio-political relations, such as those more connected had more opportunities to participate and also to receive more benefits than those who were not. Participants from the Africa Foundation acknowledged that on the surface and in the view of residents, it appeared as if some communities were more favoured than others.

In the view of some community participants, Phinda was doing favours as beneficiaries and they felt obliged to comply to show their appreciation and loyalty. It is possible to re-align the relationship between Phinda and the community, as well as re-orientate the local residents to suit the new dispensation, which came as a result of the restitution agreements. The question that comes to mind, concerning the cascading of information to the grassroots, is whether the communication strategy of Phinda and the Africa Foundation to work only through community leadership, is effectively serving its purpose. At the end of the day, good communication and transmission of information may result in the prevention of unnecessary confrontation and conflict between Phinda and the local communities. It goes without saying, that responsible leadership (at all levels) plays a significant role in relationship-building and collaboration for addressing the needs of all stakeholders.

There was great appreciation for both financial and non-financial benefits from the participants. Non-financial benefits were popular among the participants. These included job opportunities, infrastructural development, and the bursary scheme and business opportunities. In line with Strickland-Munro and Moore (2014), intrinsic benefits appear to provide local community members with a sense of stewardship for the game reserve and its tourism resources. The employed local residents were concerned about the low level jobs which most of the local community members occupy and that very few were in the management positions. Issues of transparency, fairness and general governance were raised and these views concur with Simpson (2009) who argued that negative perceptions and attitudes may result from inequality of benefit-sharing.

6. Conclusions

This study informs conservation and tourism authorities about the challenges, concerns, expectations and attitudes of the local communities, as perceived by the residents themselves which, if addressed appropriately, would lead to sustainable conservation, tourism business and social development. The findings showed that some community participants preferred non-involvement in Phinda conservation and tourism business, as long as a constant flow of benefits was maintained, according to the agreement, whilst others especially the youth interviewees were advocating for much more meaningful participation in decision-making, planning and management of wildlife, tourism and social development at Phinda. It was general agreed by the interviewees that the community members were not directly involved in decision-making and management processes at Phinda. Also, there was a call for an alignment and management of community expectations, especially those of the youth, through robust engagement among stakeholders. Private game reserves, like Phinda, may consider assessing the kind of relationships they have with the local communities to accommodate the younger generations in decision-making and management processes. The findings also revealed that there was a need for community education and training in wildlife conservation and tourism management for the residents to be relevant and actively involved.

This case study on Phinda Private Game Reserve generated valuable knowledge and understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of local communities on their participation in wildlife conservation and tourism. However, it presents a few limitations, for example, the very nature of being a case study (this research was limited in both space and scope), size of the sample and socio-cultural and political challenges, among others.

Power dynamics among stakeholders, especially between the local communities (the land owners) and the conservation and tourism operators (the businesses) need to be carefully managed to avoid future conflict with the younger generation. Interventions, including inclusive education and training, may be considered to improve governance at local community level. &Beyond may also play a more pivotal role in educating and guiding the community on good governance, accountability and transparency principles. Phinda may also consider coming up with a programme where they would identify, recruit, motivate and train bursary beneficiaries and even absorbing the best and most motivated ones into management portfolios. Besides the above, this research further proposes the following recommendations:

- Private game reserve management-community forum may be occasionally planned and carried out.
- Strengthening (or establishing, if not available) the community liaison department of the private game reserves
- Establishing a private game reserve open-door policy.
- Management internship programme for graduate bursary beneficiaries to inculcate values of social responsibility and develop interest in conservation, tourism and social development.

Cordial, cooperative and beneficial relationship between Phinda (representing all private game reserves) and the local communities is a necessity in the interest of conservation, tourism and the community. A level playing field should be created to enhance good communication strategies among stakeholders, in which the voice of the down-trodden and disadvantaged community would be heard, understood and taken seriously.

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