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Levels of community participation and satisfaction with decentralized wildlife management in Idodi-Pawaga Wildlife Management Area, Tanzania

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Abstract

Participatory approaches to conservation are viewed as a plausible alternative to the old ‘fortress conservation’ approach. The design and implementation of these approaches in developing countries have tended to embrace community participation through decentralized governance mechanisms in the past three decades. However, sustainable conservation approaches that maintain community livelihoods while conserving biodiversity are challenged with meeting both objectives. In addressing this challenge, little attention has been given to an empirical analysis of community’s satisfaction levels on how they participated in the design and implementation of this approach. In this article, we use a mixed method approach using both quantitative and qualitative data to examine levels of satisfaction and participation of local communities in the Idodi-Pawaga Wildlife Management Area (WMA), south-western Tanzania. We find that social economic factors (e.g. age, household size, gender, number of years living in the same location and participation/non-participation) influence, in different ways, the satisfaction levels of community’s participation towards the WMA creation. Due to inadequate participation, we find that the WMA design and implementation process failed from the beginning to actively involve the local communities and this has resulted in the near absence of the promised economic benefits from wildlife conservation. We suggest that participation should go beyond the simple information sharing to actively engage the local communities in key planning activities from the beginning of any WMA programme. It is also important to take into consideration their levels of satisfaction with the process of decision-making if meaningful decentralized governance is to be achieved.

KEYWORDS: Participation, decentralized governance, satisfaction levels, communities, Wildlife Management Areas, Tanzania