CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism (CBT) has, in recent times, been looked upon as a catalyst for a tourism industry that is sustainable within the rural areas of the developing world. This is seen in its ability to bring about positive change within a rural community inclusive of social justice, empowerment (both economic and social), equity in distribution of benefits and overall community development. These impacts have been seen to justify concerted efforts of tourism development stakeholders in involving local communities, particularly community members in rural areas of the developing world. However, despite the efforts aimed at affording the local communities an opportunity to meaningfully participate in development initiatives aimed at their own development, community participation remains a challenge. The above narrative clearly extrapolates the aim of this particular study as it is intended to establish challenges that the community of Nqileni village in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa are faced with in relation to their participation in the development of tourism and tourism-related initiatives undertaken within the area. The study employed a qualitative research approach coupled with an in-depth exploratory examination of community participation in the development of rural areas through tourism in Nqileni village. This relied on semi-structured interviews using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to collect the empirical data from 25 respondents. The sample of the study comprised of community leadership and general community members in the village. The results of the study indicate that community members felt that their participation in the tourism industry were challenged because of several factors, those being: elitism, factions, greed and corruption, leadership conflict, language and lack of capacity to participate in development initiatives, lack of support from government as well as lack of funding.
Keywords: community participation in tourism, community-based tourism, challenges to community participation, sustainable rural development.

1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of tourism as an economic activity in the 1960s has seen concerted efforts in the promotion of tourism by governments of countries in both the developed and less developed world [1]. This has seen purpose being placed on tourism development as a catalyst for the creation of opportunities and facilities for income generation and rejuvenation of rural areas [2]. With this kind of attention, the world has seen little recognition given to tourism development within the corridors of power where policymakers and world leaders reside [1]. As a result, scholars have undertaken to embark on research that will ensure the development of a sustainable tourism which has seen an approach geared towards the participation of local communities, thereby creating better opportunities for the local people to accrue greater and more balanced benefits from the development of tourism within their localities [1], [3]. This has seen a continuous appeal for a collaboration of stakeholders including the local community with the aim of obtaining a clear mandate from all interested and affected parties on the desired outcomes of tourism development [4]. Such participation can ensure that the local communities become the focal point of tourism development, as they are part of the tourism product and therefore, their inputs being pivotal to the decision-making process [1], [5].

While considerable effort has been made to ensure community participation in the development of tourism in rural areas, in many instances, this has presented challenges that

hinder meaningful and capable participation of the citizenry in development initiatives aimed at the emancipation of area and its people [6]. This is seen in the restricted participation or even total omission of local communities in decision-making processes in relation to development initiatives undertaken within their habitat [1], [4]. This study then intends to navigate the maze in which community participation finds itself in relation to the development of tourism in rural areas such as Nqileni village.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Community participation is seen as an ideology deeply embedded in beliefs derived from the social and political theories relating to the way society needs to be organised [3]. This gives credence to the importance of establishing connections and sustaining interactions, and in so doing, create strong bonds and relationships, further instilling a sense of belonging, trust and credibility among community members [7]. Similarly, this participation requires that locals be empowered with adequate knowledge about tourism, while enabling them to engage in tourism development [8], [9]. This is further asserted by Hampton [10] who pointed out the importance of communication that will allow for the opinions of the host community to be heard and heeded, while encouraging the development of local small businesses to encourage participation. This can be achieved through placing a requirement on managers and planners to afford residents educational information and initiatives such as workshops and awareness programs [11].

However, the rhetoric surrounding community participation seems to have its roots in an idealistic Western setting, leaving questions around its applicability to settings characterising the developing world. The developing world is faced with constraints in terms of community participation in development initiatives such as tourism, which places barriers on the participation of community in tourism development that go far beyond governance and economics – inclusive of elements such as culture, social norms and behaviour [9], [12].

The sources of constraints to host community participation in tourism development are articulated in the work of Tosun [3], further expanding on Timothy's [12] work, wherein he posits three sources (operational, structural and cultural) of lack of participation in tourism development. Firstly, shortcomings in operational procedures are a result of questionable communication regarding tourism development with destination residents. Secondly, structural constraints relate to institutional factors such as regional power structures, legislative bodies, and economic systems. Thirdly, cultural limitations mostly relate to the capacity of locals in relation to dealing with the impacts associated with the development of tourism. For example, deficient levels of formal education amongst locals may lead to an inability to fully exploit opportunities and benefits that can be brought by tourism development to the destination [9], [13].

The core of sustainable tourism and community development lies in active and meaningful community participation [14]. However, this is often impeded by barriers that disable the intended involvement of the community in development initiatives aimed at improving their quality of lives [13]. Ideally, tourism has the potential to enable meaningful community participation, with the reality being that the barriers exist and impede on the effectiveness of the employment of tourism as tool for community development [14].

The greater challenge faced by literature concerning community participation in tourism sits with the lack of debate by scholars of tourism [13]. This subject is limited to a study conducted by Tosun [3], suggesting that three barriers (operational, structural and cultural) exist in developing countries. According to Aref and Redzuan [14], the barriers formulated by Tosun [3] are meant to facilitate a theoretical understanding of community participation in tourism development without any special reason for the classification.

It must be noted that community participation in developing countries requires a concerted effort involving different ideological beliefs, political forces, administrative arrangements and redistribution of wealth and power [3], [15], [16]. This becomes difficult in a world where community participation is often used as a cloak of words to disguise business as usual – to hide power inequities, gloss over differences, and enable elites to pursue their own agendas [15]. Similarly, this can be a sad result of either the unwillingness of communities to participate due to the absence of ownership sense, insufficient employment generation, deficiency of information, and the unwillingness of top-down institutions to enable real participation [17]–[19].

The challenge faced by the notion of community participation in the development of tourism that is often perpetuated by the reluctance of certain stakeholders with an agenda to maintain a status quo that limits the community's involvement through centralisation of authority, elite domination, poor information sharing and contemptuous professional attitude to capacitating locals with the requisite skills to meaningfully participate [1]. This is a result of poor legal and regulatory systems aimed at supporting and defending the interests of local communities to ensure real participation in the planning, development and management of tourism [3].

Consequently, developing countries like South Africa have to a great extent, been able to achieve a certain degree of success in the legislation of community involvement in development. According to van Niekerk [20], the dawn of a democratic dispensation in South Africa has seen the country becoming exemplary on how, through legislation, the community has been afforded the opportunity to partake in integrated development planning (especially in tourism) following planning practices that were shaped by the history of embedded inequalities that characterised pre 1994 development planning.

The success of the South African community participation project rests upon the decentralisation from national to local government with local government empowered by legislation on the how, when and where the community participation process is administered [21]. van Niekerk [20] makes reference to the uniqueness of South Africa's tourism planning being integrative, goal-oriented and systematic with the overall economic, social and cultural development placed into consideration from the very beginning. This process enables community participation aimed at ensuring success and growth of tourism while providing communities with a real and transparent opportunity to play their part in the development of their own area. This necessitates a need for all stakeholders to work on creating meaningful participation of the community in development initiatives, thereby avoiding the relegation of one group of stakeholders to spectators in development meant to improve their lives [17].

3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is confined to determining the challenges faced by rural communities in relation to participation in the development of tourism through the eyes of the residents of Nqileni village, which form part of the four village that that make up the Xhora Mouth Administrative Area on the Wild Coast of the former Transkei, in the Mbhashe Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa [22].

According to the Mbhashe Local Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) [23], Mbashe Local Municipality was constituted in terms of the Municipal Structures Act 17 of 1998 (as amended) and comprises the areas that previously formed the Elliotdale, Willowvale and Dutywa. The Municipality is a Category B, Third Grade municipality situated in the south-eastern parts of the Eastern Cape Province, and is bound to the east by the coastline flowing from the Qhora River in the south to the Mncwasa River in the North along the Indian Ocean. The Municipality is in the North-Eastern part of the Amathole District Municipalities'

area of jurisdiction with its main administrative office situated in Dutywa [23] (see Fig. 1 below depicting Mbashe Local Municipality where Nqileni village area is located).

The size of the municipality and its location in relation to South Africa's economic spatial development make the area poor given the socio-economic conditions of the area. This is seen in the high levels of unemployment (estimated at 42%), which is indicated to significantly improved from an estimated 69.9% in 2001 [23]. This is possibly a reflection of the migration out of the area and also probably due to the positive impact of Community Work Programme [24]. According to the municipality's IDP [23], the municipality's economic value is estimated to be R684 million ($43,807,508.64), with agriculture, tourism, community service, construction and trade being the largest economic sectors. Most of the jobs created within the municipality are in the community services sector, which cannot be regarded as sustainable sector for job creation.
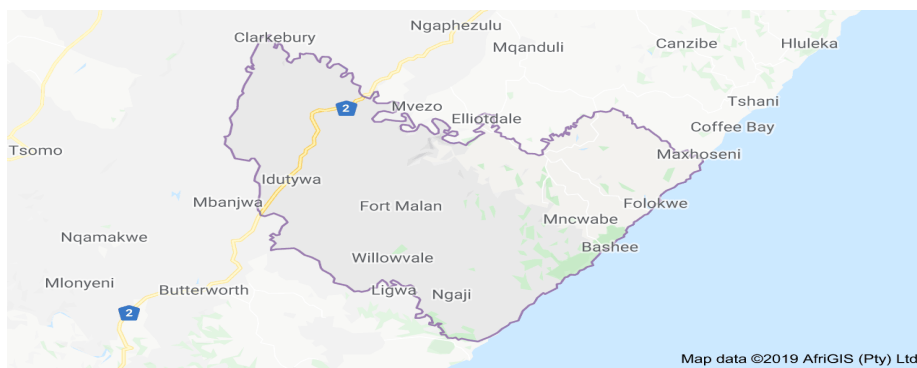

Figure 1: Mbashe Local Municipality where Nqileni village area is located.

4 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach coupled with an in-depth exploratory examination of community participation in the development of rural areas through tourism, in Nqileni village. This relied on semi-structured interviews using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to collect the empirical data required. The sample was chosen based on the respondents' proximity to activities and developments associated with tourism within the village. The study included five semi-structured interviews with community leadership and 19 with the general community members in their different capacities and roles associated with tourism activities in Nqileni village. From a leadership perspective, the respondents were comprised of local headman, ward councillor, ward committee member, manager of Bulungula lodge and local economic development officer for Mbashe Local Municipality whilst community members comprised amongst others, entrepreneurs, employees within tourism sector in the village and general residents of Nqileni village. Data was collected in isiXhosa using a digital recorder. These interviews averaged a duration of 20 minutes per interview. In addition, services of professionals were solicited for the transcription and translation of the data. The data was then analysed using the NVivo version 11, producing themes that allowed for the study to provide a clear picture of the challenges of community participation in community-based tourism in rural areas. This further produced a comprehensive observation report accompanied by nodes, word clouds, cluster analysis, tree maps and words trees, which were used by the research to interpret and present the findings to follow.

<div align="center">5 RESULTS</div>

Emanating from the analysis of the data, five themes emerged indicative of a range of challenges faced by rural communities in terms of participation in community-based tourism in Nqileni village. These are elitism, greed and corruption; leadership conflict; lack of capacity to participate in development initiatives; lack of support from government; and lack of funding and infrastructure. Following is the presentation and discussion of the findings as per responses of the respondents that took part in the study.

5.1 Elitism, factions, greed and corruption

The ugly head of elitism reared its head with respondents indicating the uneven distribution of benefits from development initiatives as these are mostly directed to a few local elites. This is further exhibited in the conduct of community leaders and elites treating development initiatives as personal wealth accumulation exercise, often at the expense of the whole community or the development itself. Such undertakings often compromise the integrity of development initiatives through the creation of factions within the community, which lead to corrupt practice including nepotism, thereby diminishing interest to participate in ordinary members of the community. This is supported by narration from respondents stating the following:

> "No matter how good a development plan might be, there will always be people who will have their own agendas for a particular development. It is therefore up to traditional leaders and general leadership to ensure that they select the right people".
> "They want to make sure that any kind of development there must be something for them to get anything for that particular area".
> "There seems to also be some occurrences of factions between the village chief, local members and business people. This causes segregation and has a negative influence on development".
> "Corruption is also a factor, and this discourages people from participating. Sometimes individuals aim for personal benefit rather than that of the community".

The narratives indicated above give credence to literature critical of the behaviour of elites in rural communities. This is seen in their hesitation to allow ordinary members of the community to obtain a piece of the pie of development initiatives simply because of their social standing, poor or lack of education and lack of connection to the corridors of power [3], [25]. This is attributed to structural limitation of community participation. This is also seen the responses that mirror Mustapha et al. [1] finding indicating the concentration of power in the hands of public administration who see ideas of professionals more valuable than those of local people due to their low levels of education. Consequent to this viewpoint, is the creation of elites, who are then placed in positions of power, thereby leaving community members behind in terms of politics and economic activities [1], [3].

5.2 Leadership conflict

Rural areas in South Africa and many other countries in the world are subject to the challenge of two types of leaderships, namely, traditional and political. Nqileni village is no stranger to the challenge. This has often resulted in strained relations between the two institutions to the detriment of development initiatives, which is often followed by adverse consequence for the very communities that both leaderships claim to care about. These challenges are clearly orated in by respondents as follows:

"Traditional leaders and ward councillors are not working together in some of the projects. Traditional leader believed that they owned the land, whilst some local communities preferred to work with ward councillors. This then lead to lack of cooperation".

"Because you find out that some of the people or the local communities they prefer to the ward committee… to ward councillor rather for any kind of development that they're interested on. On the other hand, there's a chief here or a traditional leader that says 'We own the land, the land belongs to us. If government or whoever who want to develop this area must come to the chief because the land belongs to the chief.' So, this kind of… kind of not good cooperation between the traditional leaders and the ward councillor".

The above rhetoric asserts truth to the limitations formulated by Tosun [3]. This rings true to operational limitations where a lack of co-ordination between traditional and political leadership is common (Tosun [3]). Such lack of co-ordination hinders community participation in development initiatives and further hampers the destination from developing tourism as a considerable economic activity worthy of investment in time, financial resources and an economic sector capable of creating employment opportunities [1]. It must be noted that the realisation of community participation in development initiatives such as tourism require collective collaboration of all stakeholders including contradictory leadership style of both institutions inclusive of their different ideological outlook in areas such as administration and management of projects together with the distribution of wealth and power for the benefit of the community and the area at large [3], [15], [16], [25].

5.3 Lack of capacity to participate in development initiatives

Respondents indicated a chronic shortage in capacity, disenabling them from meaningfully participating in development initiatives in the area. This is made evident by declarations stating the lack of knowledge, information and understanding of development amongst members of the community. This is further exacerbated by the low levels of education and literacy amongst members of the community coupled, with their inability to communicate in English, as this is the language mostly used in development circles (especially in tourism). This issue is further compounded the lack of interest of the youth in education, and the community's awareness of markets which leaves them ill prepared to exploit opportunities presented by development initiatives such as tourism. These concerns are corroborated by respondents' narrations that follow:

"It is being uneducated. As I have said that most of us are not educated thus it becomes a barrier to communicate in the English language. We are not able to even converse with the tourists because we do not understand what they are saying".

"Illiteracy remains the biggest challenge. Most of us do not understand the English language and as such, are not able to interact with external people, especially developers and tourists".

"The lack of education among youth is also a challenge. Youth should be educated about what exactly tourism is and how they can play a role in developing it".

"People in the village do not know much about tourism and development and also what they will do with products that can be produced from the area. This makes market intelligence critical".

The above narratives about the community's lack of capacity to participate in development initiatives coincide with the constraints stated in the White Paper for the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa [26], that indicate a need for previously neglected groups (especially in rural areas) to be introduced to community-wide tourism awareness programmes, as well as a wide range of basic skills that will enable participation in development. This is on the back a study conducted by Scheyvens and Momsen [27] indicating that rural areas often start on the back foot, given a multitude of inhibiting factors such as lack of education and skills, limited development opportunities, and limited access to tourism enabling infrastructure and markets.

The findings further give credence to the importance of a community being capacitated for active participation in development activities and initiatives aimed at improving their lives. Efforts to ensure that such capacity is realised, stem from a lack of capacity, which chiefly discourages the enthusiasm of the community to participate in development initiatives, thereby leading to the failure of the community to recognise benefits and ultimately leading to the development being dominated by the elites within the society [4]. This can be remedied through indications made in the work of Murphy [28] as cited in Harun et al. [29] stating the value of such participation as it assists in the decrease of tension often created by development initiatives that are contrary to the aspirations, needs and capabilities of the host community. Consequently, this kind of undertaking can further assist in the improvement of the community's ability to participate in decision-making processes relating to development, and enhance the resources (human, organisational and infrastructural) that will enable the community to draw upon in the quest to improve their own lives [30], [31].

5.4 Lack of support from the government

Respondents indicated a serious lack of government support for the village. This is shown in comments that paint the government as unresponsive to the needs of the village. Respondents further indicate avenues in which government could partner with the community to achieve sustainable development. In addition, they give credit to the establishment of the lodge, and the subsequent development of tourism, for the creation and development of services and infrastructure that the government failed to provide. These are stated in the following respondents' dialogues:

"Let me just say, we are not getting any of the government benefits. All the developments that that you see here have been brought by establishment of Bulungula lodge in 2004. There is no government involvement whatsoever, in this village".
"I am not sure what those obstacles are because we do everything that is required from us such as voting, but still do not see any efforts from the government to develop our area".
"I mean I think the Eastern Cape government doesn't talk to our communities enough. We tell them that our road is terrible, and they don't do anything about it".

The above rhetoric by the respondents is in sharp contrast with the works of van Niekerk [20] hailing South Africa as a beacon of hope for the community participation arena. This is seen in the country's formulation of legislation (such as Batho Pele meaning *People First*) that places community participation in the centre of development initiatives [21]. This is the legislation that is said to be in place to supposedly afford local communities an opportunity to partake in integrated planning (especially in tourism) following planning processes that were shaped by the history of embedded inequalities that characterised pre-1994 planning [20].

5.5 Lack of funding and infrastructure

Lack of funding and poor infrastructure were also indicated as major obstacles to community participation in development initiatives. Respondents commented on the lack of infrastructure, such as roads, that hinders development within the area. This was further exacerbated by an inadequate telecommunication infrastructure, coupled with power (electricity) shortages and lack of a proper transport system to connect the area with other areas. In addition, respondents further state that the development of tourism has seen opportunities (especially entrepreneurial) become available for residents of Nqileni village, yet there are no financial resources available for them to exploit such opportunities. These problems have placed participation of the community in development initiatives in limbo, and are narrated by respondents as follows:

> "The lack of funds makes it difficult for us to take advantage of development opportunities that arise".
> "Also the lack of financial support affects our progress".
> "Firstly, we do not have roads, electricity, housing and telecommunications".

The above narrations agree with the accounts of the severe lack of infrastructure in rural areas, which limits the participation of rural communities in development initiatives such as tourism [27]. In addition, the absence of adequate transportation services effectively prevents rural communities from participating in the industry, both as potential suppliers of products and services, and as tourists themselves [27]. Consequently, the unavailability of funding and infrastructure disables the core of sustainable development (community participation), which is aimed at improving the lives of the local community [13], [14].

6 CONCLUSION

Community based tourism is key to, and fundamental in, achieving sustainable rural development. Literature has clearly indicated the importance of community participation in development initiatives. This has seen community participation being lauded as the cornerstone of sustainable development [32], especially in tourism, since the preservation and development of resources needed for the development of tourism often represent interests of the local communities and international authorities [33]. This paper highlighted the common problems associated with challenges to community participation in tourism in rural areas such as lack of capacity to participate in development initiatives, lack of support from government, lack of funding and infrastructure as well as elitism, factions, greed and corruption. To ensure maximum community participation, the community should be well informed and educated about tourism initiatives and there should be enough support for them to fully participate in tourism development initiatives in their area.

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