Review

Towards harmonious conservation relationships: A framework for understanding protected area staff-local community relationships in developing countries

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ABSTRACT

This paper conceptualises a framework for assessing protected area (PA)–community relationships and is premised on the view that positive PA–community relationships enhance conservation. A meta-synthesis of existing academic literature with a qualitative orientation was used to review the PA staff-community relationships, and data were analysed using an inductive qualitative approach. From a review of 105 published documents focusing on wildlife conservation, community involvement and PA–community relationships, it emerged that relationships are mostly influenced by attitudes. With the case of PA–community relationships, the question that arises is 'whose attitude'? The paper proposes that both PA staff attitudes and community attitudes play an important role in shaping these relationships. Based on these findings, we propose a PA–community relationship framework that illuminates the human–wildlife interface as critical space in shaping conservation attitudes. In particular, four major factors affecting PA staff-community relationships were identified: (i) history of creation of the PAs focusing on forced relocation, and the fences and fines approach; (ii) benefits and costs associated with living closer to PAs; (iii) socio-demographic factors in which the influences of sex, age, level of education, number of years stayed in the village, experience accrued from working in PAs, household size, number of livestock, sources of income, and level of income; and (iv) community involvement in conservation-related developmental projects. We conclude that enhanced PA–community relationships promote wildlife conservation through participatory approaches and collaboration between PA staff and communities. We recommend for continued assessment and monitoring of PA staff and community relationships in order to allow for sustainable conservation especially in developing countries.

Introduction

The question of whether protected area (PA)–community relationships are important for the success of wildlife conservation is an issue of concern which is highly debated. Positive PA–community relationships can enhance local support for PA existence and wildlife conservation in the sense that if local people do not support PAs, they can refuse to cooperate with PA authorities or participate in their plans (Holmes, 2007; Holmes, 2013). While some studies have shown that local support have little influence on the success of wildlife conservation (e.g., Brockington, 2004; Bruner et al., 2001; Young et al., 2013), the issues of PA–community relationships appear to be of vital importance to wildlife conservation (e.g., Berkes, 2004; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2002; Brockington, 2004; Buscher & Whande, 2007; Hausser et al., 2009; Ramphal, 1993; Tessema et al., 2010). There are also cases that show that some PAs can succeed even in the midst of local opposition and discontent (e.g., Jacoby, 2001; Walley, 2004). This has been attributed to the fact that some PAs have more resources than local communities to draw on during disagreements (Holmes, 2013). In these disagreements with the communities, PAs often tend to use force over local people (Laudati, 2010; Milgroom & Spierenburg, 2008) and local people may comply out of fear since there is some form of law enforcement in most PAs and also some PAs are national

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government/state owned. Thus, this partly demonstrates whether or not local communities' support has a bearing on wildlife conservation success.

While local community opposition to PAs may have minimal impact on wildlife conservation success, the idea of not considering local community support appears to be unethical (Holmes, 2013). Furthermore, the consideration of local community well-being is an important factor in successful wildlife conservation (Brockington, 2004). For successful wildlife conservation, Holmes (2013) recommends for the move towards solutions which are beneficial to both the PAs and the local people.

A relationship refers to the interactions between two or more people in which the participants are interdependent, i.e., the behaviour of each affects the outcomes of the other (Blumstein & Kollock, 1998). A good relationship involves both parties. While one side can take initiative, it still requires the other side to make a relationship a good one (Hinde, 1979). In this study PA–community relationship therefore refers to the interrelated interactions between PA staff and the local communities in which these two are interdependent and where the behaviour of each affects the outcomes of the other. Positive PA–community relationship means PA staff and the local community have good contact and interaction; they tolerate and relate well whereas negative PA–community relationship means PA staff and the local community have no interaction or no tolerance and do not relate well.

Some previous studies that have assessed PA–community relationships, for example, Brandon et al. (1998) and Raval (1994) have highlighted the social implications of the establishment of PAs on local people; Furze et al. (1996) and Berkes et al. (1991) examined participatory or collaborative planning and management whereas Eagles and McCool (2002) and Adams and Infield (2003) examined the effects of tourism in local communities adjacent to PAs. These studies, however, emphasise mostly the effects PAs or PA management have on the local communities and not the other way round. But, what effect does community behaviour have on PA–community relationship? Grunig and Huang (2000) reported that it is important to determine what all the parties who are involved in a relationship perceive of all of the members who are making an effort to maintain the relationship. This study attempts to fill this gap by incorporating PA staff perspectives of the factors that influence their relationship with the community. More so, many of these aforementioned studies emphasise particular aspects of PA–community relationships and yet PA–community relationships cannot be influenced by just one factor but a number of factors. This study, therefore, proposes a framework for assessing PA staff-community relationships that takes into consideration the attitudes of both PA staff and local communities and their determinant factors. Looking at the relationships from both PA staff and local community perspectives is important in exploring approaches and/or factors that promote collaboration and harmonious relations, hence, reducing conflicts between PA staff and local communities in wildlife conservation.

Methods

Research approach

We approached our review from a holistic, historical and comparative perspective (Gandiwa et al., 2014a) to better understand PA-local communities' relationships. First, the holistic perspective, allowed us to focus on the broader issues related to PA-local communities' relationships since it helps shed light on the connections between and interactions of various factors. Second, the historical perspectives allowed us to evaluate frameworks that were previously proposed on PA-local communities' relationships, and third, the comparative perspective allowed us to compare strengths

and weaknesses of the existing frameworks, and hence, led us to proposing a new framework on understanding PA staff-local communities' relationships.

Data collection and analysis

We conducted a meta-synthesis of existing academic literature focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, edited book chapters and academic theses related to PA–community relationships with a qualitative orientation (Atkins et al., 2008). Using academic literature search engines, namely, Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science, we used the following key words or phrases: "protected areas", "community", "protected area–community relationships", "tourism", "wildlife conservation" and "attitudes" with also a combination of 'AND' between key words to retrieve relevant literature.

For each article, we first read the abstract, and all abstracts that contained at least two of the key word/phrases were considered and the documents were read through to check if they discussed PA–community relationship issues. After rigorous screening of a pool of initially selected documents, we finally settled on a total of 105 relevant documents which were then used for this review. Although, our literature search was not limited to any geographical region, we discovered that most of the articles we finally used in the analyses focussed on Africa and Asia, hence, this points to the fact that our findings applies more to developing countries with, however, some aspects still applicable to developed countries.

We categorised the main issues and factors influencing PA–community relationships into themes. Thus, we used an inductive qualitative data analysis approach where we derived themes from interpreting each article and later grouping these into each of the identified themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, these themes allowed us to analyse the strengths and weaknesses, and determinants of PA–community relationships based on presence and absence of key issues in each article.

Specifically, weaknesses and strengths of the existing models were analysed and assessed by looking closely at the details the authors reported about that framework, comments other researchers gave about the frameworks, and an assessment the current authors made on the frameworks. Strengths/weaknesses were measured based on: (1) whether the framework assesses the relationship from the sides of both PA staff and communities and (2) whether the framework covered multiple factors in discussing the determinants of PA staff-community relationships. Factors that influence PA–community relationships were determined based on factors mostly mentioned in the reviewed documents.

Results and discussion

Comparison of existing PA–community relationship frameworks

Multiple factors are often at play in influencing PA–community relationships which include history of creation of PAs, benefits associated with living closer to PAs, problems PAs cause for communities, problems communities cause for PAs, community attitudes and perceptions towards PAs, PA staff attitudes and perceptions towards communities, and socio-demographic factors. These factors form the basis for comparison of existing frameworks as elaborated in Table 1. While Zube and Busch (1990), Brechin et al. (1991), Kappelle (2001), Eagles and McCool (2002), and McCleave et al. (2006) frameworks are helpful in understanding PA-community relationships, they do not clearly capture some of the factors that influence PA staff-community relationships like problems caused by communities or by protected areas, and community or PA staff attitudes towards each other (Table 1). On the other hand, while Allendorf (2010), discusses a number of factors,