



## Short communication

## Local perceptions of trophy hunting on communal lands in Namibia

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## ABSTRACT

Trophy hunting in Africa is currently under pressure as some countries explore various policies that aim to put a halt to an activity that many people in the Western developed world view as unpalatable or unethical. However, in the debate over trophy hunting policy the voices of local communities, who in many instances allow wildlife to persist on the lands they control because of the tangible benefits they derive from it, have been largely unheard. Here, we report on an opportunistic survey of 160 rural residents of Namibia from 32 communal conservancies that generate varying levels of livelihood benefits from wildlife uses, including trophy hunting. About three quarters of these community members were employed in some manner by the conservancy. We used a mixed methods approach to assess community members' perceptions on trophy hunting, the benefits it generates, whether it was "good" or "bad", and how they would respond if trophy hunting were halted. 91% stated they were not in favour of a ban on trophy hunting, and only 11% of respondents would support wildlife on communal lands if a ban were in fact enacted. Most respondents (90%) were happy with trophy hunting occurring on communal lands due to the benefits it provides. These responses were consistent across respondent demographic categories, although those who stand to lose the most (i.e., those employed by or managing a conservancy), viewed trophy hunting in an even more favourable light. Our results suggest that in Namibia, a trophy hunting ban would be viewed very poorly by conservancy residents, and would seriously weaken their support for wildlife conservation. The imposition of trophy hunting policies by countries far from where rural land managers are conserving wildlife would not only restrict communities' livelihood options, but may have perverse, negative impacts on wildlife conservation.

## 1. Introduction

In the debate over trophy hunting that is currently playing out in public and policy spheres (di Minin et al., 2016; Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b), the voices of local communities have been conspicuously absent. Local communities are the land managers who will dictate the fate of conservation efforts in large parts of Africa that are outside of protected areas (Roe et al., 2009), therefore policy changes that are likely to impact their wildlife conservation decisions should proceed cautiously and on the basis of the best available scientific information. Yet despite having little understanding of how communities perceive the issue, and of how they may change their land use and wildlife management practices should a major source of livelihood benefits be removed, countries such as Kenya and recently Botswana have banned trophy hunting (Pabst, 2013) while governments of countries in Europe and Australia have stopped or are considering banning the import of trophies of various species (Milman, 2015).

Increasing public opposition to trophy hunting from people living in many developed Western countries may eventually result in the industry being shut down. Yet, a failure to understand how trophy hunting of wildlife and its benefits and costs are perceived by local communities may result in conservation policies that achieve the exact opposite of the intended effect, i.e., a reduction in biodiversity and in the amount of area under wildlife management (di Minin et al., 2016).

To address this gap, we present in this research note the results of a preliminary survey of 160 rural residents across 32 communal conservancies in Namibia, a country in which trophy hunting is a common activity pursued on private, state, and communal lands (Lindsey et al., 2013; Naidoo et al., 2016). Communal conservancies are areas of customary landholdings whose natural resources are managed by local communities for their own benefit, with trophy hunting and nature based tourism being the dominant wildlife-based enterprises that generate livelihood returns (Naidoo et al., 2011a; Naidoo et al., 2011b). These activities, and the communal conservancy program more

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Name of conservancy: Sesfontein Conservancy

Age: < 25 years  26 to 39 years  40 to 49 years  50+ years

Gender: Man  Woman

- Are you employed by the conservancy? Yes  No
- If yes, as what?
  - Game Guard
  - Manager
  - Secretary
  - Finance
  - Other (please specify) Camp Manager
- Are you a Committee Member? Yes  No
- Are you employed by the lodge? Yes  No

Does trophy hunting provide benefits to you or to your Conservancy?

Are you happy that trophy hunting takes place in the Conservancy?

Why is trophy hunting Good?  
It generates income for the conservancy.

Why is trophy hunting Bad?  
It is not bad, but the income generated is not a lot.

- Should trophy hunting be banned? Yes  No
- Is trophy hunting bad for wildlife? Yes  No
- Which is best:
  - Tourism only
  - Trophy Hunting only
  - Both Tourism and Hunting

How strongly would the community support wildlife if hunting was not allowed?

What do you want to say to people who want to ban trophy hunting?  
We rely on trophy hunting for the successful operation of our conservancy do not ban trophy hunting.

Fig.1. A completed questionnaire on attitudes towards trophy hunting and a possible ban that was administered to 160 rural residents of communal conservancies in Namibia.

broadly, are recognized as having contributed to dramatic recovery of wildlife populations across the country as well as significant improvements in rural livelihoods (Roe et al., 2009). Trophy hunting can generate substantial benefits for local communities (Naidoo et al., 2016). These include revenues for conservancy management (typically between 30 and 75% of a trophy prices), jobs for local community members at hunting camps, and perhaps most importantly, meat distribution to all community members. However, less positive aspects of trophy hunting can include low or inequitable distribution of benefits from hunting operators to local communities, poor skills among community members to fully participate in the hunting industry, and questions about the ecological sustainability of hunting (Suich, 2010; Yitbarek et al., 2013; Lindsey et al., 2006a, 2006b).

## 2. Materials and methods

We employed a mixed methods survey approach (Johnson et al., 2007), using an in-person interview comprising both closed and open-ended questions that asked community members for their feelings on trophy hunting (Fig. 1), for reasons why hunting is either “good” or “bad” for themselves or their communities, and their thoughts on a possible trophy hunting ban. Using a 1-to-5 Likert scale (colour-coded and represented by “smiley” faces to facilitate understanding by rural residents), we asked conservancy members to rate their support for trophy hunting, the level of benefits it provides to themselves or the local community, and what their degree of support for wildlife conservation would be if trophy hunting were banned on their lands. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to voice why they thought hunting was good or bad, and whether it should or should not be

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