

THE VALUE OF WILDLIFE TOURISM: PERSPECTIVES FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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The value of wildlife has been categorized into different classes varying with authors, e.g. direct and indirect values, option value, ethical value, etc. Here we address the value of wildlife-based tourism. With the development of the world tourism industry, the value of nature-orientated tourism is rising in all continents, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The value of such tourism is often understood as restricted to a tangible economical value through wildlife uses for direct income-generation at country level. However, there are other values of wildlife which are not enough taken into account, i.e. the diverse values of ecosystem services, comprising wildlife services, including associated ecological value, nutritional value, cultural value, etc. The value of wildlife tourism in SSA is largely supported by the various categories of Protected Areas (PA) which are clearly the backbone of the wildlife tourism industry.

The non-consumptive use value of wildlife tourism is concerning wildlife-viewing tourism. In most of SSA countries, this category of tourism mainly occurs in PA of the public domain, principally National Parks, with a few other situations in private and community-based PA such as game ranches and communal conservancies mainly in the Southern African sub-region. With a few notable exceptions, most National Parks are struggling to fulfill effectively their conservation mandate due to a lack of financial and human resources for their management: very few of them attract enough tourists to cover their management costs. It is nothing new, PA cannot be justified by their sole direct economic contribution: their whole range of values should be considered. At present, external funding is needed in most cases to support PA and maintain all their values.

The consumptive use value of wildlife tourism is mainly concerning hunting tourism. This category of tourism principally occurs in PA of the public domain which are officially gazetted and earmarked as Hunting Areas under various names (e.g. Hunting Blocks, Game Reserves, Coutadas, Zones de Chasse, Domaines de Chasse, etc.). In a few Southern African countries, hunting tourism is also carried out in private and communal land. Covering much more extensive surfaces than National Parks, those Hunting Areas often act as buffer zones and ecological corridors around National Parks. Their private management, which is mainly privately financed, reduces the Governmental financial burden to conserve and manage its biodiversity assets in these areas, a budget that is often under sourced and last of national development priorities. Improved professionalism of the tourism hunting industry could substantially increase its efficiency to conserve huge tracts of natural habitats with their whole biodiversity while increasing benefits to local people and Governments.

However most of PA are exposed to human threats emerging from growing populations and needs for land and natural resources. In developing countries concerned by food security and poverty alleviation, poaching is a well known and widespread threat to PA. The often massive production of bushmeat extracted from both inside and outside PA represents a sort of hidden value since it is largely unknown, overlooked and often illegal. Where and when the consumptive use of game for food turns out unsustainable due to overharvesting of the resource, its value becomes negative and counter productive to wildlife tourism. Pastoral encroachment is a relatively newly occurring threat to National Parks and Hunting Areas, often neglected in management schemes although on the rise. These two different types of PA complete each other very well in their common function of resisting the biological collapse affecting vast areas of SSA.

