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Leveraging Wildlife Tourism for Employment Generation and Sustainable Livelihoods: The Case of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Southern Africa

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Abstract. This study examined the contribution of wildlife tourism and conservation to employment generation and sustainable livelihoods of a community residing adjacent to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Southern Africa. Adopting a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders and focus group discussions with members of the community. The findings reveal wildlife tourism to have positively contributed towards providing diverse employment opportunities for the community. Additionally, the livelihood diversification strategies largely involved integrating the cultural and natural resources with the wilderness experience of the region. However, a major concern is the significant lack of linkages between wildlife tourism and the local economy of the community. While the study concludes wildlife tourism to be an important economic sector for the community, it recommends further integration of micro and small local businesses into wildlife tourism so as to enhance the contribution of the Park and wildlife tourism to community livelihoods.

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1. Introduction

Southern Africa's wilderness areas and wildlife are a key component of the region's tourism industry (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2018; Stone et al., 2020). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2019) reports wildlife tourism to be one of the largest tourism segments on the African continent, comprising a third of the total amount of revenue generated from tourism. Natural resources, particularly as found in the form of such protected areas as national parks, game reserves and transfrontier parks, have become major drawcards for international tourists visiting the continent (Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2019; Eshun and Tichaawa, 2019; Saarinen, 2019). As a consequence, national governments in the region have sought to harness the tourism potential of protected areas, to enhance not only the conservation initiatives involved, but also to improve upon the socio-economic conditions of surrounding local communities (Makindi, 2016; Tichaawa and Moyo, 2019). The use of wildlife tourism to improve the socio-economic conditions has emerged from the developmental potential that is inherent in tourism, as one of the largest global economic industries. Owing to the scale and scope of tourism, the sector often intertwines with sustainability and development (Kimbu and Tichaawa, 2018; Siakwah et al., 2020). Several countries in Southern African countries are utilising their natural resources, argued to be their greatest competitive advantage, to attain developmental goals (like poverty alleviation, employment generation and sustainable livelihoods) in rural communities, through promoting wildlife tourism (Francis et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2020).

Moswete and Thapa (2018) regard poverty alleviation and conservation as being achievable through the linking of local livelihoods to biodiversity. In fact, while the focus of protected areas is strongly on conservation, subsequent development of socio-economic goals tied to the protected areas has occurred, with the goals concerned pointing to the provision of employment and livelihood diversification opportunities through wildlife tourism (Margaryan and Wall-Reinius, 2017). In the case of the transfrontier parks, the issues of conservation and socio-economic development are magnified, as they involve an increased number of natural resources to be conserved and additional host communities to be taken into account (Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2019; Tichaawa and Mhlanga, 2015). Bhatasara et al. (2013) point to the biggest argument for transfrontier parks being their substantial capability to attract millions of tourists and to provide ample employment opportunities for the host communities, especially for the poorest population residing in the rural and remote regions where the protected areas are located. However, Chiutsi and Saarinen (2019) question the extent to which the protected areas have actually realised such socio-economic benefits. Most studies on transfrontier initiatives in the region have sought to examine the protected areas as political entities and assess the impact of their institutional arrangements towards inclusive and collaborative governance (Moswete et al., 2012; Thondhlana et al., 2015; Mukobo, 2017; Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2019; Lekgau and Tichaawa, 2019). As such, the present study examines the contribution made by wildlife tourism and conservation in the case of the Kgalagadi

Transfrontier Park in Southern Africa to employment generation and sustainable livelihoods in the surrounding community.

2. Literature review

2.1. Transfrontier conservation initiatives in Southern Africa

Transfrontier conservation initiatives emerged as a reaction to the global recognition of the importance of international cooperation in conserving biodiversity (Ramutsindela, 2007; Spenceley, 2008; Büscher, 2013). Transfrontier parks, which are also known as 'peace parks', are premised to support biodiversity conservation, sustainable tourism development and regional peace (Ferreira, 2004; Francis et al., 2016; Moswete and Thapa, 2018; Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2019). Regarding tourism development, transfrontier parks are perceived as being viable means of mutually strengthening and growing the tourism industry of neighbouring countries, thereby considered a key to regional socio-economic development with a narrowed focus on boosting the local economies of rural communities (Ferreira, 2006). In recent decades, the region of Southern Africa has witnessed an increase in the number of transfrontier conservation initiatives (Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2019). Indeed, the region presently hosts ten transfrontier conservation areas (Fig. 1.)

The premise of wildlife tourism in transfrontier parks, such as being vehicles for job creation and

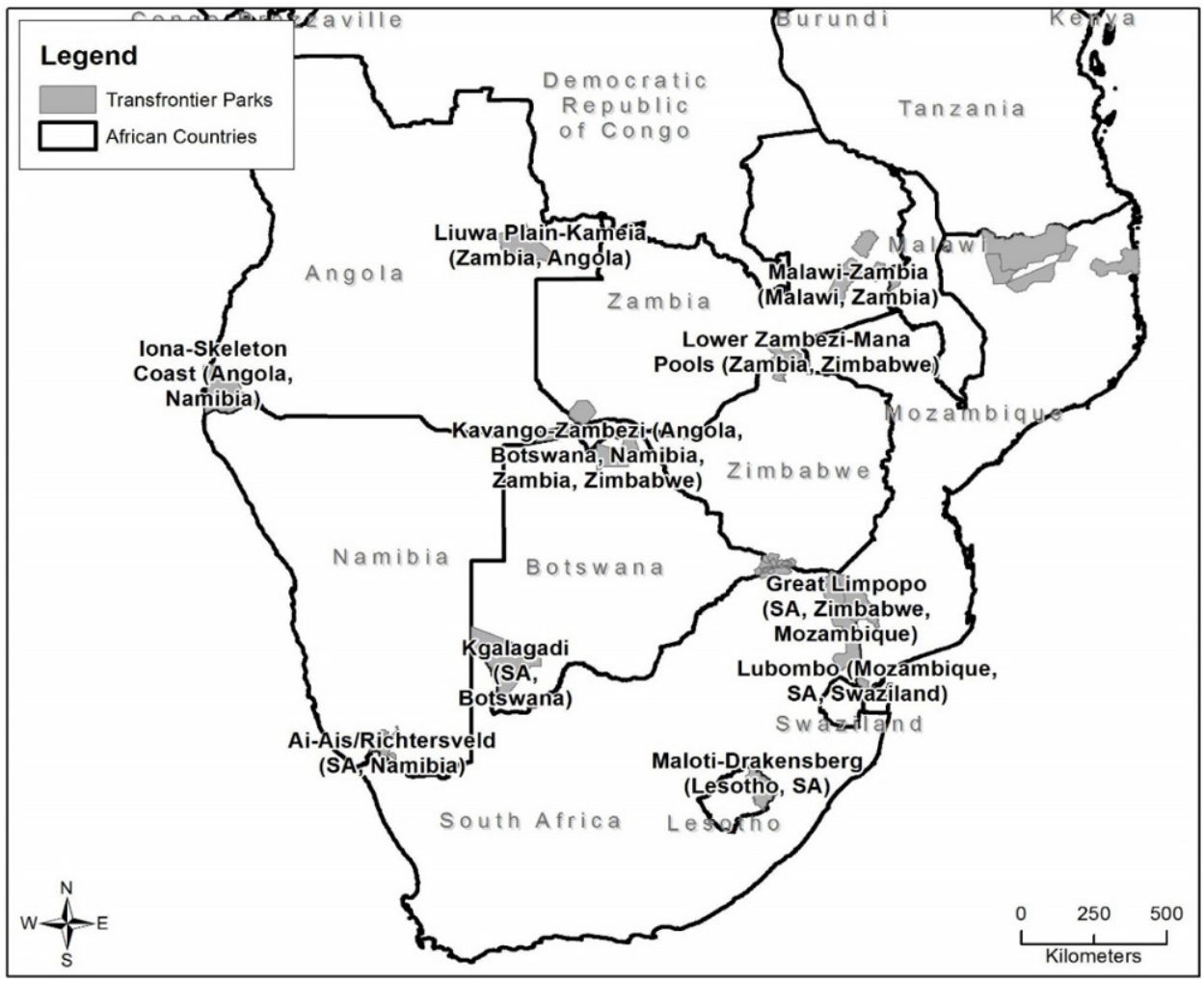

Fig. 1. The geography of transfrontier conservation areas in Southern Africa
Source: Authors

for livelihood diversification, results from the previous conceptualisation of the protected areas in the region (Cobbinah et al., 2015; Black and Cobbinah, 2018; Fu et al., 2018). Historically, the establishment of protected areas in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) during the colonial period disrupted the livelihoods of many of the region's communities (Larkin, 2014; Francis et al., 2016; Epanda et al., 2019). Indeed, the conservation paradigm, during the period concerned, was based on the use of exclusionary practices, in terms of which communities were forcibly removed and displaced from their traditional land which provided for their subsistence and livelihood (Mbaiwa, 2017). Traditionally, such communities relied on hunting, farming and gathering activities. Only at the beginning of the early twentieth century was there a realisation of the significant role of communities for conservation (Mbaiwa, 2017; Zafra-Calvo and Moreno-Peñaranda, 2018). The recognition of community custodianship over the local natural resources, and subsequently their central role in conserving the natural environment, resulted from sustainability and sustainable development becoming global priorities (Cobbinah et al., 2015). Accordingly, many countries in SSA began community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) programmes, alongside the development of remedial policies, in order to leverage wildlife tourism as a means not only for aiding conservation, but also providing alternative (and sustainable) livelihood options to the communities whose livelihoods had been strained due to the presence of the protected areas (Van Wijk et al., 2015). Wildlife tourism has, therefore, evolved on the premise that communities have the right to derive a sustainable livelihood from the natural resources in their area through involvement in the sector.

2.2. Sustainable livelihood approach (SLA)

The SLA has largely been used in exploring the connection between protected areas and host communities. The approach aids in providing a basis on which the livelihoods of the poor can be understood (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2018). A sustainable livelihood is built on an understanding of the term 'livelihood', which is defined by Chambers and Conway as 'comprising the activities, capabilities, and assets required for [establishing] a means of living' (cited in Mbaiwa and Stronza, 2010). Such an approach places focus on the assets of communities and how they can increase efforts to withstand shocks and vulnerabilities to their livelihood (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2018). The approach focuses on accessing and interacting with, the five assets of the community, being natural, physical, human, social and financial (Mbaiwa and Stronza, 2010). According to Harilal and Tichaawa (2018), the natural assets consist of natural resources, being air, water, plants, animals, land, forests, and other environmental resources; physical assets, being the infrastructure, tools, and technology required for day-to-day activities; human assets, being the knowledge and skills possessed by the different communities; social assets, being the community-based connections, networks, shared norms and values; and financial assets, being the monetary resources available to the community. The context of such an approach includes the history, economic factors, and demographics of the community (Lee, 2008). The SLA is particularly useful in providing an understanding of the manner in which the communities' livelihoods are supported through wildlife tourism.

2.3. Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, community livelihoods and wildlife tourism

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, the first formally established transfrontier park in Southern Africa, was constituted in 1999 by South Africa and Botswana (Moswete and Thapa, 2018). Located in the south-western region of the continent, the Park was formed from the merger of the South African Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (KGNP) and the Botswana Gemsbok National Park (GNP) (Moswete et al., 2012). Although the two countries signed a bilateral agreement to merge the two national parks in 1999, the existence of the Park dates back to as early as 1984, when the two countries first devised an informal agreement to conserve the unique Kalahari ecosystem (Peace Parks Foundation, 2019). The wildlife tourism features of the Park include its wildlife resources, the wilderness landscape and its community-based tourism ventures (Botswana Tourism Organisation [BTO], 2015). Large mammals are the

major drawcard of the Park, with it accommodating several species, including the black-maned lion, cheetah, leopard, brown hyena, silver fox, gemsbok, springbok and wildebeest (BTO, 2015). Tourists can additionally view smaller mammals and various bird species in the Park (BTO, 2015).

Initially, the main objective of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was to maintain the ecological integrity of the region (Moswete et al., 2012). Subsequent objectives of the Park were later developed to increase the tourism profile of the protected areas, as well as to realise the economic potential for adjacent communities (SANParks, 2015). Although guided by such objectives, it is important to note that the Park is governed by the individual policies of both Botswana and South Africa. Moreover, as wildlife tourism developments are autonomously managed by the two governing entities differences exist in the tourism infrastructure and wildlife-related activities between the South African and Botswana sides of the Park (BTO, 2015). The South African side of the Park has been divided up into five segments in recognition of the local ownership and use of the Park (Thondhlana et al., 2015). Three of the five segments of the Park belong to both the Khomani San and the Mier communities, with another separate segment belonging to SANParks albeit allowing access to the traditional communities for symbolic and cultural reasons (Dikgang and Muchapondwa, 2011). The community ownership of land inside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park has resulted from the communities' success in a 1994 land claim (Kepe et al., 2005; Thondhlana et al., 2015). The two communities, traditionally consisting of hunters and gatherers, had been forcibly displaced from their ancestral land inside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in the 1970s, due to the creation of the KGNP (Schoon, 2013). Through the new democratic government of South Africa elected in 1994 had enacted the Restitution of Land Act, the wrongdoings imposed perpetrated towards the communities started to be righted (Dikgang and Muchapondwa, 2017). SANParks, in recognising the community's subsistence off the natural resources inside the Park, began to develop and leverage wildlife tourism to create economic opportunities, including employment, entrepreneurial developments and other means of livelihood diversification, while simultaneously ensuring the sustainable and non-consumptive use of the natural resources inside the Park. The community of Askham was selected as the case study site for the current research, owing to its historical proximity to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (Fig. 2).

3. Study methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which enabled the exploration of how wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park contributes to job creation and livelihood diversification for the adjacent communities. As two population groups were involved in the study, the data collection was conducted in two phases. The first group included 29 tourism stakeholders, who were purposively selected, owing to their knowledge and involvement in wildlife tourism in the case study area. The stakeholders included the owners or managers of formal and informal tourism businesses, tourism marketers, and representatives of community-based organisations and conservation agencies. Such stakeholders were considered relevant in terms of providing information about employment and related effects on the community's livelihood in the case study area and hence, were found to inform the study's objectives. The researchers reviewed relevant academic literature as well as conducting a documentary analysis with the view to understand the institutional structures, as well as cogent plans that have guided the development of wildlife tourism (see Lekgau and Tichaawa, 2019). The above aided in developing an interview guide that was used to conduct in-depth interviews with the stakeholders. The interviews usefully provided the basis for phase two of the data collection.

Phase two of the data collection included host community members. The nature of the study deemed it essential to include the views and opinions of such communities because they are most affected by wildlife tourism, and the community has historical connections with the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. During the specified phase, purposive sampling was used to select members of the community to understand the economic impacts of wildlife tourism. The participants included community leaders as they were most likely to be aware

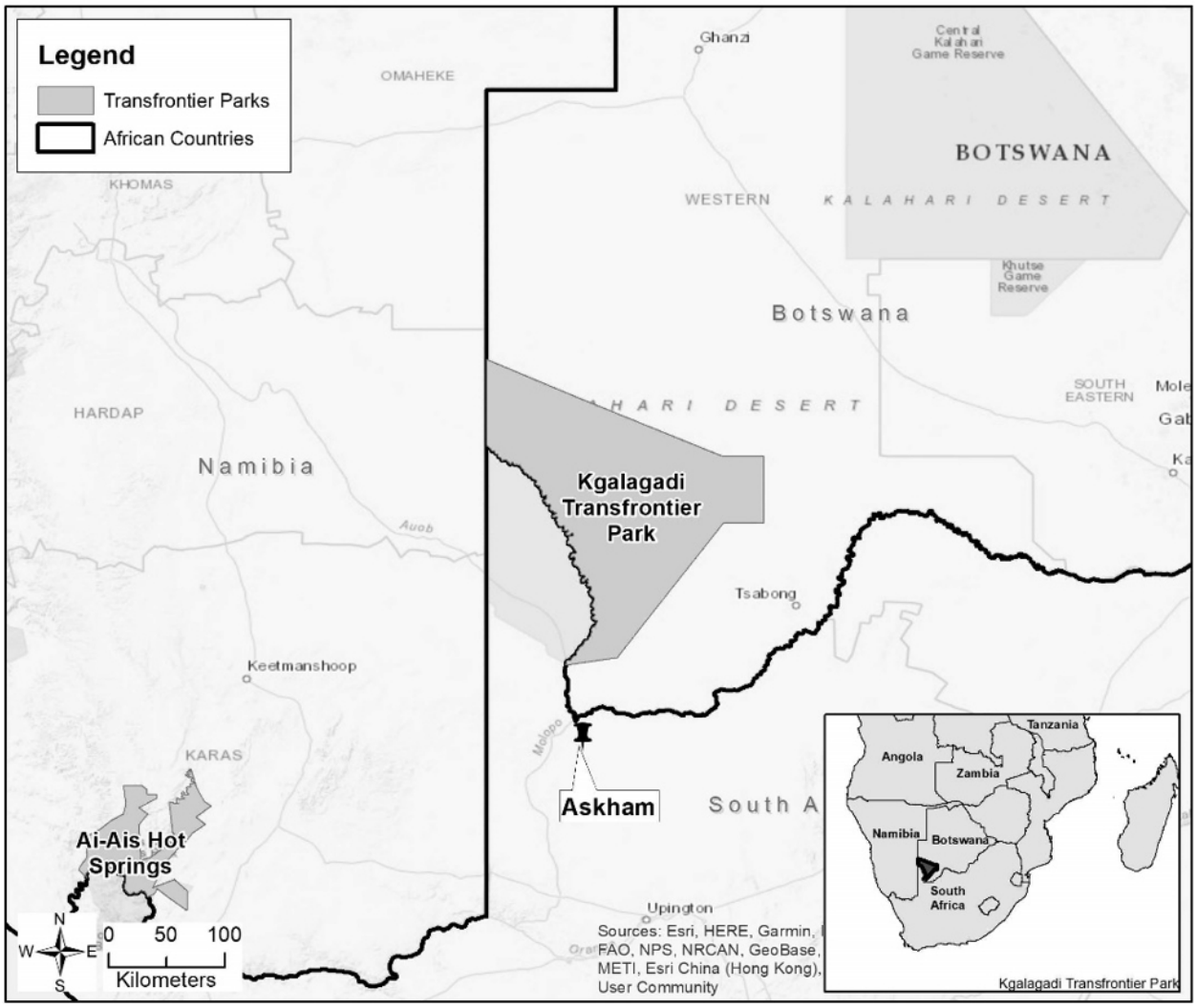

Fig. 2. Location of Askham
Source: Authors

of the wider community's views and to communicate directly with the park managers and community members employed in wildlife tourism and who had spent the majority of their lives in the community. The 20 community members willing to take part in the study were then divided into two groups, comprised of 10 people each. Focus group discussions were subsequently held with each group in turn.

Both the interviews and the focus groups utilised open-ended questions to allow for open and explorative discussions. The questions sought to explore the contribution made to the provision of employment opportunities and, livelihood diversification, as well as the extent to which wildlife tourism integrated into the local economy. The interviews and focus group discussions, which each lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, were recorded verbatim (having obtained prior permission from research participants), transcribed and uploaded onto Atlas.ti, version 8. The qualitative data analysis software allowed for the coding and thematic analysis of the data. Details of the thematic discussions are presented below, with reference made to FG1 (Focus Group 1) and FG2 (Focus Group 2). In some instances, reference is made to the stakeholder group interviewed, rather than to the individual organisations or persons interviewed, in order to maintain their anonymity.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Employment generation

Wildlife tourism and conservation are promoted as economic tools that can be leveraged by host communities resident near the protected areas. A key aspect of wildlife tourism is employment generation. The study sought to understand the extent to which it is realised through the wildlife tourism and conservation undertaken in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It was revealed the Askham community is reliant on wildlife tourism and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park for job creation. Many of the study's respondents pointed to the positive impact that the sector has had on creating employment opportunities in the region. For instance, one respondent, a manager of a tourism establishment stated:

'All I know is that there is opportunity [in wildlife tourism] and [that] this is [especially] important in South Africa, because of the [level of] unemployment. So we [i.e. the tourism industry] need to create jobs, that is one of our responsibilities, to try and make it better for everybody. So I think we are really helping [in this regard] here in Askham.'

This view was reinforced by focus group participants:

'In this area, I think it is a very important sector because most of us are working in the wildlife tourism industry. For example, in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park here, there aren't much [i.e. many] opportunities, unless it is in wildlife tourism, such as in the Park or the lodges around the area. So, I think it is a big deal for us here.' (FG1)

The study found wildlife tourism to be a crucial economic sector that has afforded livelihood opportunities for a substantial number of the local community. Such findings are particularly important when considering the remoteness of the Askham community, relative to the major cities in the region, with the nearest city being Upington, 180 km. away. The study findings in this regard draw parallels with wildlife tourism literature in Southern Africa, in that the sector provides much-needed opportunities for employment in communities that are remote from mainstream economic activities (see Cobbinah et al., 2015; Mbaiwa, 2017; Snyman, 2017; Black and Cobbinah, 2018; Stone and Nyaupane, 2018). Indeed Snyman (2012) found that wildlife tourism in such remote regions is one of the largest employers and the biggest income providers for the surrounding communities. Many respondents in focus groups agreed with the contribution that wildlife tourism had made in providing a much-needed source of income. One community leader passionately described the broad contribution made by the Park to the communities in the Kalahari region:

'The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is really doing a lot for the community. So that is what the Park is doing on a broader scale, employing more people from the broader community within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, within their wildlife tourism camps. They are employing camp assistants, and they are employing guides within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Some years ago, they even availed some person, a master tracker within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, [access] to the community, and he trained a lot of the San trackers. So, on a broader scale, I think the Park is doing a lot. They even have a forum on which these aspects of participating and supporting and consulting are being discussed.' (FG2)

The above statement highlights the contribution which is made by the Park not only to employment opportunities but also to diversity, in terms of the range of local employment opportunities. Moreover, the quote indicates the opportunities opened up for training in wildlife tourism, which further enhances the human assets available in the community. The particular importance of such opportunities lies in them allowing for livelihood diversification to occur through wildlife tourism even beyond the protected area itself. For example, tour guides and wildlife trackers can be an alternative means whereby the locals can participate in wildlife tourism. Furthermore, the contribution made by wildlife tourism to employment generation was affirmed by numerous respondents in the interviews that were held with several different business owners and managers. Typical responses were:

'Most of my employees are locals, as we always try to make [the] most use of the local people. We try to accommodate them.'

'So all of my employees are locals, all local. People don't want to come and live here; it's too far from towns and city life. So it is easier to hire locals because they are used to the way of living here.'

'I don't think locals benefit that much from the Park. They [i.e. the community] do benefit from the subsidiaries, like myself. I think we provide employment for quite a lot of locals. Each one of these accommodation places does employ locals. Then, of course, you've got things like the Diamond Tea, where the locals are employed in things like cooking and serving. And the shops in Askham, such as Agrimart, they employ a lot of locals as well. For example, you want someone there by the petrol pumps, to be there for filling the cars up, and stuff like that.'

The above findings suggest that, while the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park provides some job opportunities for the locals, it is the wider wildlife tourism industry that has the largest impact on employment generation in the region.

4.1.1. Wildlife tourism establishments and employment generation

The Kalahari Region contains a number of hospitality establishments, including guest houses, restaurants and activities, several included in the Red Dune Route, which is a collection of wilderness experiences and establishments stretching from Upington to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (Open Africa, 2019). The activities offered along the Red Dune Route are dune boarding, game drives, desert walks, guided walks, 4×4 trails, and other wilderness activities (Open Africa, 2019). The research revealed the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to have supported the growth of such establishments, as the respondents explained that they were developed to complement the Park. For example, one owner/manager of an accommodation establishment stated, '*For me to establish this lodge without the Park, that would* [have] *be*[en] *useless*'. Accordingly, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is the largest tourism attraction in the area, and its pull of wildlife tourists has nurtured the growth of wildlife tourism establishments. One respondent explained as follows:

'So what happens here is that people try to combine their experience at the Park with other attractions and activities in the area. Often, because the Park is [frequently] fully booked, people can stay at the guest houses in the area, spend a couple of nights at the Park and then partake in some activities in the area. I think one of the main reasons people come here is photography, so they can still do that, even if they are not in the Park for all their days here. So that gives us the opportunity to be a part of the experience.'

It was evident that the community of Askham depends on the wildlife tourism industry to provide employment opportunities through privately owned businesses. However, the wildlife tourism businesses depend on the forces of nature, and policies of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, as such, determine the scale of tourism permitted. The sustainability of the associated employment opportunities is therefore questionable with the primary mandate of the Park being that of conserving biodiversity which implies regulation of the volume and growth of wildlife tourism in the Park (Lekgau and Tichaawa, 2019).

Regarding the expansion of wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, a SANPark representative explained:

'There is an agreement with the community, and there is an agreement with the Botswana government. Initially, when the Transfrontier Park was started, they [the Botswana and South African governments] agreed … that there is [a] certain amount of extension we can do and a certain amount of extension they can do. We've got an existing footprint, and we've got permission to do two more camps. One is a camp near Mata Mata, and the agreement is for ten sites. And we've got another one wilderness camp; it has got no more than 28 beds. We cannot extend more than that.'

The above statement indicates some restrictions on the number of community members that the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park can absorb, but also the tourism pull of the Park and, consequently the region. This becomes especially important when examining the role of the establishments in the region to contribute towards employment generation. One manager of an establishment observed:

'With these Park rules, it will affect the business operations. Because, what am I going to do when I don't have enough money to pay my salaries, I am going to have to let two or three people go. So that may be the only thing I can do. I will still pay my salaries, but I will be forced to let one of the chefs go so that I can scale down because you can have some connection between the number of people working with the number of employees.'

Another respondent stated:

'We really do try to employ [the] locals. We have employed three locals, and I know the other lodge near us has employed about six or seven locals and they [i.e. the lodge] are much bigger compared to us.'

Overall, the importance of wildlife tourism for employment generation was limited by it generally occurring on a low scale. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the value and size of the contribution made to the Askham community. While the findings made support the idea that wildlife tourism is a job creator in the region, many of the jobs are menial and low-wage, as one respondent in the focus group stated: '*Most of the people in this area are working like 12, 13, 14 years in the same position as waiters and cooks*' (FG2).

4.2. Livelihood diversification through wildlife tourism

When examining livelihood diversification through wildlife tourism, it is important to consider the context of the communities involved. Communities, such as the one under investigation have been subjected to the historical injustices characterising the creation of protected areas, which led to their traditional mode of subsistence (consisting of hunting and farming) being severely disrupted resulting in high levels of poverty. The promotion of wildlife tourism in the region is centred on maximising the potential for livelihood diversification in the region, including a wide range of both formal and informal activities. In South Africa, protected areas as the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park have sought to reconcile the above-mentioned historical injustices by means of reverting some land to the community, as well as providing sustainable livelihood opportunities. The study respondents in the focus groups strongly highlighted their land ownership and their position as the beneficiaries of wildfire tourism and conservation in the Park. One community leader articulated this position in the following manner:

'Through government negotiation, the Park handed over the 25 000 hectares to the Mier area, and 25 000 hectares to the Khomani San community. What is so good about the Park is that it is a tourist attraction where lots of people go. These days, they do job creation projects, where they reach out to our community. They also make use of contractors, who are appointed to provide jobs.' [FG2]

SANParks is legally bound to ensure that host communities are integrated into the wildlife tourism and conservation activities pursued in the various parks (SANParks, 2016). The redistribution of land to communities is not only a means of correcting the past wrongdoing, but also provides an opportunity to participate in Park-related activities, which can open up further livelihood-related activities. The study sought to explore the strategies leveraged by communities to ensure their continued subsistence and income. It was found the Askham community to be diversifying their livelihood strategies by means of intertwining their culture with the wilderness experience predominantly provided in the region. Especially in the focus group discussions, the participants recognised that the sector enabled community members to leverage their tradition and cultural knowledge in terms of wildlife tourism. For instance, one respondent related:

'In terms of other types of job creation and employment opportunities, there are your guides and trackers, because part of the experience is walking with the Khomani, or having a nature-based expe-

rience that is translated from [i.e. by] the Khomani San guide, so there are a lot of guides and trackers also benefitting from wildlife tourism.' (FG2)

The local community thus leverages their status as the oldest indigenous community in South Africa to provide natural and cultural experiences to tourists. This was made clear by one conservation representative interviewed, who stressed that tourists to the area primarily sought to interact with the Khomani San people, affirming '*Everyone that comes here wants to know about the Khomani San* [community]'. Wildlife tourism provides an opportunity for the community to use their inherent resources (i.e. their cultural knowledge and natural assets) to derive a living from wildlife tourism. This argument is underscored by a representative from a community-based organization:

'It is twofold, because we have [a] cultural guide and then [a] nature guide. We have a pool of qualified guides, which are mostly from the younger generation. We also work with your storyteller, and what you call your traditional guides. So, they do not necessarily have the formal skills; they have the traditional skills that are transferred from one generation to the next. So, it's practical experience these guides have, through the veld school, as well as other community projects, where we transfer knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation. Some, like me, are fully qualified. Say 70% of the knowledge actually comes from [the] elderly within the community, which you cannot find in any reference books. It is community knowledge from [i.e. on the basis of] which we do tourism this way.' [FG2].

The above statement supports the assertion of wildlife tourism being complementary and contributing to conserving, local culture by providing a means of income for communities to continue living as they are and sharing their local knowledge and experience. In addition, it shows the contribution of the sector to absorbing both the youth and elder members of the community into the tourism economy. Elsewhere, while other studies point to wildlife tourism as an important economic lever in rural communities due to it allowing for livelihood diversification (see Moswete et al., 2012; Chiutsi and Saarinen, 2017; Mbaiwa, 2017), an important finding in this research relates to the incorporation of youth in the wildlife tourism economy. The inclusion of local cultural knowledge in the tourism experience, therefore, facilitates the diversification of the livelihood opportunities of the community members. The above holds especially true for the Khomani San community that still lives traditionally. Through the integration of local culture and traditional knowledge into the wildlife tourism experiences a number of entrepreneurship opportunities have been taken up by the Khomani San community. A representative from a community-based organisation outlined:

'I think wildlife tourism is the biggest accelerator from my perspective because the three successful Khomani businesses actually came through the tourism development side. So, we have got three entrepreneurs, the kitchen, the living museum, and … a local tour operator, so that's all tourism-related.'

The community also owns land both inside and outside the Park, as well as a farm, with its co-managing the Khomani Cultural Landscape, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. The developments are largely intended for the Khomani San community and managed through the CPA and as such they do not represent the Askham community.

4.3. Informal livelihood activities supported through wildlife tourism

The contribution of wildlife tourism to livelihood strategies further extends to informal activities. Propoor growth in terms of wildlife tourism intends to realise the economic potential of the communities, enable various livelihood activities, be they formal or informal, to reduce the level of poverty in the community (Truong, 2018). A key aspect of propoor wildlife tourism entails including the informal sector in the rural regions, as doing so enables the entry of communities into the wildlife tourism market (Truong, 2018). The selling of arts and crafts was a common informal activity evident in the

Khomani San community. The community found opportunities to sell their arts and crafts in the various lodges, and alongside the road leading to the Park. Responses received on the informal activities that the communities performed to earn some income included:

'Mainly, the community makes and sell[s] their crafts and some artefacts. I mean, it is not an industry that you need a lot of money to participate in, because you can make small stuff, and sell them to big businesses like us. And that is what the people here do.'

'The Park is including the communities to go there and work, to go there and practise making … and selling that craft, and also to do some dancing for the tourists from time to time.'

'The tourists like crafts and the stock that I have in my shop is more Kalahari-based from the Khomani San [community], so I sell it for them.'

The importance of encouraging wildlife tourism in supporting the small and informal businesses of the host community is apparent. Stone and Nyaupane (2018) consider wildlife tourism as providing a market for the local producers and artists, allowing for the development of a source of income from the sector. Considering the limited opportunities that exist for employment in wildlife tourism in the Park, such informal activities are important for providing alternative means of accessing a livelihood through wildlife tourism. However, the examination of such livelihood activities, according to the SLA, might undermine their sustainability. While the sale of crafts and dance performances for tourists might provide some income for the residents, such activities are evidently undertaken during the high tourism seasons when both the lodges and the Park experience high tourist volumes. As the activities are not performed on a daily basis, the wages generated thereby might be little and scarce. What occurs during the low- tourism seasons, and how effective the livelihood diversification strategies are in combatting the dire socio-economic conditions in the region, is questionable. The study respondents highlighted the lack of other economic activities in the community, with agriculture (as discussed below) not being a viable option for economic gain. Accordingly, the effectiveness of wildlife tourism as a sustainable livelihood option for offsetting the vulnerabilities caused by wildlife conservation in the Park must be questioned as the local community experiencing some strain in its pursuit of sustainable livelihood activity.

4.4. Tourism linkages

Investigating the contribution of the Park towards sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation necessitates exploring the linkages of wildlife tourism to Askham's local economy. For wildlife tourism to contribute to poverty alleviation and local development in such communities, local linkages are significant (UNCTAD, 2017; Giddy et al., 2020). The linkages concerned describe how the sector spreads and shares opportunities for other small businesses in the locality, meaning how integrated wildlife tourism is with the local economy. Overall, the interview responses illustrate the minimal extent of linkages in the existing community. In general, the study found wildlife tourism establishments mainly source goods and services from the nearest major urban centre, namely Upington. The owner of a wildlife tourism establishment stated:

'We don't get services and goods supplies here. I mean, the closest [town] here is Upington, so all of our services and stuff that we need is sourced … [there] … . I am talking about specialised services like I said. I won't get a guy from Upington if we need to lay piping or something like that; we need somebody local. If we need to fix stuff, we will get somebody local. But if I have a refrigeration problem, [an] IT [information technology] problem or something like that, I need to get somebody from Upington, because there are no specialised persons here. And, product-wise, there are no suppliers here of anything. We buy … the local Khomani San curios, you know that kind of stuff; that's the only thing that's here.'

Likewise, a restaurant owner stated:

'… sourcing locally is very difficult; it is not easy. Upington is our nearest city to go [to] for getting what we need. I also go twice a year to Johannes-

burg to buy in bulk, especially for baking. What you don't get in Upington, and other stuff, we order via the Internet and courier it here.'

Although the owners and/or managers of wildlife tourism establishments are willing to form linkages with the local producers they are unable to do so. Lack of available goods and services is by far the biggest challenge which causes the establishments to source goods from Upington. Another challenge identified was the limitations in the local environment natural resources .In Askham one focus group respondent elaborated: '*There is nothing else here; nothing grows from this land. It is a very sandy and very dry area*'. The demand for agricultural products cannot therefore be met by local produce. An interviewee explained that they sourced their supply locally as much as they could, but that consistency was a problem in terms of local supplies. One accommodation manager stated:

'We can look to [the] locals for help with our business functions, that is their labour. But, other than that, they cannot supply us with anything. Well, except for the Khomani San community that sometimes sell[s] eggs and other things on [i.e. alongside] the road, but that is it.'

The study thus finds employment opportunities rather than supply chain linkages as the major source of impacts of wildlife tourism for the local community in this area.

4.5. Dependency on wildlife tourism for employment and income generation

Despite the sustainability issues regarding wildlife tourism and employment generation in the region, apparent in the above discussion is the significance of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and wildlife tourism to job creation and income generation for the Askham community. The Askham community depends heavily on the existence of wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park for their livelihood activities. The situation of local dependence was reinforced by one respondent:

'Some of our people still go to the white people and work on farms. Some ... have started small businesses … selling stuff like wood, and so forth. Some are selling craft[s], that's also a way of [making a] living. And some people are working for the Khomani San Communal Property Association, for the CPA. They are working for that organisation. Some will be working for the Kgalagadi Lodge, and some are unemployed. Most of the people are unemployed, and those people who are having livestock, they are living from [i.e. off] those.' (FG2)

The use of natural resources is central to the livelihood activities of the region. Evident in the quote, and the earlier discussion, is the fact that the wildlife tourism sector supports both informal (selling wood) and formal (lodges and restaurants) livelihood activities. Other studies agree that natural resources lie at the core of most, if not all, of the livelihood strategies of rural communities (Spenceley et al., 2010; Cobbinah et al., 2015; Epanda et al., 2019; Manwa and Modirapula, 2019). Wildlife tourism provides a more stable means for income generation than farming and hunting for the community. A representative of a community-based organisation stated as follows:

'So, wildlife tourism is [a] big deal for us here. It is a huge source of income. If it wasn't for these jobs, nobody will [i.e. would] be able [to] send their kids to school, or even [to] have a small house or something like that.'

The above statement was supported by another participant in the focus group, a community representative with considerable experience in working on the Park–and–people relationship:

'There is a difference in what wildlife tourism and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park do, because they give people in Askham jobs, so, from my side, it's good. Most of the people employed at the Kgalagadi Lodge and [at] the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park are from here [i.e. Askham].' (FG1)

These results position wildlife tourism and the Park as being at the very core of all economic activities in the region. This confirms similar findings about wildlife tourism as an important econom-

ic sector in rural regions near protected areas (Spenceley et al., 2010; Black and Cobbinah, 2018; Moswete and Thapa, 2018; Stone and Nyaupane, 2018). Whether wildlife tourism is a sustainable livelihood activity, particularly in cases like Askham where much of the community relies on the sector, is a matter for debate. Indeed, the need to combat the coronavirus pandemic, which has had a devastating impact on protected areas and the nature tourism industry has become an issue of international concern (Hockings et al., 2020). In South Africa the spread of COVID-19 has had devastating consequences for tourism-dependent communities (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020). Its impact has been particularly damaging for communities like Askham, with limited economic activities beyond wildlife tourism. The suspension of travelling, albeit temporary, especially for tourism-related reasons, means that the wildlife tourism establishments can neither pay their employees' salaries nor afford to absorb additional members of the community into the tourism economy. In Askham, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that employment is one of only few ways of sourcing an income in terms of wildlife tourism and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Consequently, with COVID-19, the dependency of the local community on wildlife tourism threatens the availability of income and subsistence for the foreseeable future.

5. Conclusion

Wildlife tourism is a significant focus in the expanding literature produced recently by tourism geographers in Southern Africa (Rogerson and Visser, 2020; Stone et al., 2020).This research investigated the extent to which wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park contributes towards employment generation and livelihood diversification for the local community of Askham. Use of the SLA proved valuable in gaining an understanding of how the communities leveraged their (particularly human, social and natural) assets (mainly the Park) so as to access a sustainable livelihood through wildlife tourism. The study found wildlife tourism to be the main employer in the region, with the community members earning an income from working in the local wildlife tourism establishments, incorporating their culture so as to be able to provide diverse wilderness experiences and to be able to sell their arts and crafts. Nevertheless, one major concern highlighted was the sustainability of employment and income generation from wildlife tourism, due to the low tourism scale permitted in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, as well as the inherent characteristics of tourism. The community was shown to depend greatly on wildlife tourism, and, therefore, to be much affected by the factors influencing the sector. It is concluded that while wildlife tourism is an important economic sector providing diverse employment opportunities for the community, a substantial gap exists in integrating wildlife tourism and the local economy.

The study presents some policy implications for leveraging the Park as a tool for poverty alleviation and the creation of sustainable livelihoods. In enhancing the contribution of the Park to the economic development of the community, it is crucial to facilitate the entry of micro and small-scale economic/livelihood activities into the wildlife tourism economy, thereby maximising the contribution that the sector could make for providing viable sources of income. The above might largely point to integrating small-scale suppliers into the supply chain of the wildlife tourism establishment. Further, owing to the apparently limited employment capacity in the Park, the additional development of community-led wilderness experiences would assist to incorporate additional members of the community into the sector, particularly as doing so could require utilising the cultural knowledge of the communities. Moreover, in protecting, and sustaining, the community's livelihood, lessening dependency on wildlife tourism to other alternative means emerging from the natural assets inherent in the region could be crucial. The current researchers do not intend to discredit wildlife tourism as a viable economic sector for alleviating poverty in the region, but they only wish to suggest that sole dependency on the sector could have dire consequences. One limitation is that study findings cannot be generalised to the other transfrontier parks in Southern Africa. However, the results provide the basis for further research into the contribution of wildlife tourism to transfrontier conservation are-

as, in terms of employment generation and sustainable livelihoods.

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