



Research Article

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Challenges in Community Participation in Management of Nature Reserves

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Abstract

The management and protection of protected areas such as nature reserves remains a primary concern for the different stakeholders involved especially the marginalised rural communities that are deprived of genuine ownership of the natural resources. Therefore, the representation of the marginalised rural communities adjacent to the protected areas has become significant in the control and utilisation of natural resources in protected areas. Community Property Associations (CPAs) have been tasked with the mandate to ensure community representation in the management of natural resources. However, their participation in the management of natural resources have been questioned and under scrutiny. The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges in communal participation in management of nature reserves. A qualitative research method was used for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data from a sample constituting n=10 respondents. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The data from this study revealed that there is limited participation by the CPA members in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The ownership and participation in the management of natural resources by local communities is important in ensuring meaningful development.

Keywords: Community Property Association, conservation, government, management, nature reserve, participation and protected area

1. Introduction

The use of land and the protection of the environment is always at the centre of conservation discourse globally, regionally and nationally. Of great concern is balancing human activities and protecting the environment, especially biological diversity (Wali et al., 2017; Stronza, Hunt & Fitzgerald, 2019). The need to protect natural resources that are susceptible to extinction has led to the formation of protected areas. Bango and Xelelo (2017) highlight that in Sub-Saharan Africa, protected areas encounter several problems from neighbouring communities, predominantly in remote rural communities where natural resources dependency is a vital livelihood strategy.

Therefore, as purported by Hansen, Islar and Krause (2015), obtaining 'win-win' outcomes and abating trade-offs between environment and socioeconomic development is still a major problem.

Local South African communities were removed from their ancestral land and prohibited from utilising resources offered by nature under the pretext of establishing protected areas (Brownlie & Botha, 2009; Brownlie et al., 2017). The introduction of CPAs was meant to allow local communities to participate in the management and utilisation of natural resources in Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve, a protected area. Studies conducted soon after its formation have shown that a number of community members have raised concerns about Dwesa-Cwebe CPA being able to benefit the people of Dwesa-Cwebe significantly in terms of the management of the nature reserve (Palmer et al., 2002; Ntshona et al. 2009; Bango & Xelelo, 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate challenges in communal participation in management of nature reserves. Following on this introduction, the paper will present the problem investigated, research questions, literature review, research methodology, results and discussion and managerial implications.

2. Problem Investigated

The participation of CPAs in the management and utilisation of natural resources in protected areas understudied and remains marred with inconsistencies and paradoxes.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to address the main research question in this study:

RQ 1 What are the tales of the members of Dwesa-Cwebe CPA on their participation in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve?

RQ 2 To what extent is the membership in Dwesa-Cwebe CPAs a true representation of the needs of the local communities in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve?

RQ 3 What are the challenges faced by the members of the Dwesa-Cwebe CPA in representing the local communities in the management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve?

RQ 4 What recommendations can be provided to solve the challenges faced by the Dwesa-Cwebe CPA in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve?

4. Literature Study

4.1 Protected areas

Protected areas are pieces of land as well as water bodies largely devoted for the protection and conservation of various biotic species and of natural and connected cultural resources, legally controlled by efficient measures (Bango & Xelelo, 2017). Since the beginning of the 20th century, both private and public protected areas have been the backbone of intercontinental protection systems (Matseketsa et al., 2019). Of late, protected areas have been viewed as a way to promote development that is sustainable, through which local communities can earn some form of revenue (Mapoma, 2014). Partnerships which consist of the government, indigenous units, local people, non-profit organisations and the private sector are now being utilised to manage protected areas (Mapoma, 2014).

Nowadays, local communities are dynamically participating as associates, rather than performing a submissive role as passive recipients (Mapoma, 2014). Qwatekana and Mazibuko (2020) also assert that local communities become more interested and involved in conservation if protected areas provide notable economic benefits for the community. Therefore, protected areas are largely regarded as assets for communities because they are catering for the requirements of these local communities by providing several benefits economically (Mapoma, 2014).

Mangu (2018) also adds that protected areas tend to neglect rights of indigenous and local communities. In many incidents, creation of these protected areas deprived local people of resources that they had been accessing for a long time, for both their cultural and economic values (Bango & Xelelo, 2017).

Mangu (2018) states that indigenous communities are often denied admission to land as well as resources in protected areas without reimbursements or other means of earning an income or a livelihood. Furthermore, Matseketsa et al. (2019) purport that the creating and managing protected areas through a top-down approach has been unpopular among local communities because of the unfair gazettement and management process. There is also an element of the “unseen” expenses of economic prospects, deprivation to accessing essential resources pertinent for sustainable livelihoods as well as the predation of livestock and crops by wildlife (Matseketsa et al., 2019).

4.2 Local Communities in Conservation Areas

Local communities are susceptible to the formation of protected areas as this is accompanied by policy and regulation on wildlife which often restricts local people from accessing and utilising natural resources in that protected area (Mangu, 2018). Additionally, land rights serve as the foundation for indigenous communities to attain clean water, food as well as shelter (Mangu, 2018).

The choice of supporting the livelihoods of early communities in protected areas is usually taken as an afterthought and a reaction to the pressure on protected areas from human activities (Abukari & Mwalyosi, 2020). Local communities are either beneficiaries or victims of protected areas, therefore it is crucial to consider their participation or involvement in conservation of nature reserves (Bennett, 2016).

4.3 Nature Reserves Conservation and Community Participation in South Africa

Additionally, the Native Land Act of 1913 resulted in the dispossession of land from native black people, displacing them from all the productive land in order for the state to use it for activities such as nature reserves. Ntsholo (2014) argues that Whites seized for themselves under the 1913 Natives Land Act with more than 90% of the land in the country belonging to them, which left the Black indigenous groups in peripheral reserves that were usually overpopulated and not productive. Musavengane and Leonard (2019) also mention that the Natives Trust and Land Act of 1936 pushed Blacks away from productive land so that white people could occupy it and engage in nature preservation as well as agricultural production.

Mapoma (2014) also assert that the forced evictions of Black people were conducted so that protected areas could be established - some of which were national parks, provincial game and nature reserves dedicated to environmental protection. In the post-apartheid era, it became more and more evident that what was needed was a strategy that provided tenure security, but on a collective or group base in which customary law ideals could be upheld (Pienaar, 2017).

Large segment of land belonging to community stayed enlisted in the name of the government as the principal administrator as well as the trustee of the land (Pienaar, 2017).

Historically founded on protectionist, exclusionary and state-centred orientations, the country's democratic government seeks to promote a more inclusive, participatory and human-centred approach to conservation (Paterson & Mkhulisi, 2014). This inclusive, participatory and human-centred approach is particularly essential when protecting and conserving nature because the apartheid-era strategy of ‘fencing and fines’ usually deprived natives of their land by using forced removals and resulted in unequal accessibility to natural resources which was premised on people's race (Hansen et al., 2015).

In order to correct these inappropriate standpoints and systems, environmental justice activists have been and are promoting the use of inclusive strategies and fair representation and involvement in protection of the environment (Tantoh & Simatele, 2018). According to Maluleke (2018), this

pressure from political activists pushed the South African National Parks (SANP) to establish 'contractual' national parks where management of conservation is done in partnership with the adjacent communities and a public body like the SANP.

In response to the growing claims for land by local individuals as well as native communities, the state has specified that claims for land by persons and groups will be studied in the framework of national interest by in light of the intrinsic biodiversity value of the land under review, and looking for results that will intermix the aims of restitution with the protection and sustainable utilisation of biodiversity (Humby et al., 2015).

However, for local communities, this stance by the current government is a story of loss of land during the apartheid era which has been followed by a long battle to reclaim the ancestral land under the restitution programme (Pienaar, 2017). The regime of South Africa is struggling to resolve this land restitution subject principally because of two key aspects, which are balancing the reduction of poverty while conserving biodiversity (Maluleke, 2018).

4.4 Stakeholders in Nature Conservation

Stakeholders play different roles in conservation of nature reserves or natural resources, as well as the management. According to Vallet, Locatelli, Levrel, Dendoncker, Barnaud and Conde (2019) define stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of some objectives.

Mannetti et al. (2019) also purport that stakeholders can be described as individuals, groups, communities, organizations, societies, the natural environment and all entities that qualify as being actual or potential stakeholders. The main stakeholders that are involved in management and conservation of nature reserves in South Africa are the state, local community, non-government organisations and communal property associations.

All these stakeholders can be further branched into different groups because of their different interests. Cape Nature (2020) contend that stakeholder engagement promotes communication and the derivation of new information and/or expertise. Chardonnet (2019) argues that each stakeholder should respect their role and not encroach on other stakeholders' role.

4.5 Challenges of Nature Reserves Management and Community Involvement

There are several challenges that are encountered in the management and conservation of nature reserves. According to Hansen et al. (2015), realising 'win-win' outcomes and minimising trade-offs between environment and socioeconomic development remains a challenge. There is a growing feeling in South Africa that customary land rights are only respected in the absence of lucrative business opportunities (Branson, 2016). A sense of contravention on cultural as well as socio-economic rights of indigenous people due to practices aimed at conserving biodiversity will result in hostilities and a poor backing for conservation targets (Abukari & Mwalyosi, 2020).

Interventions that are created for biodiversity that depend on the management of nature reserves or parks work together with indigenous communities to govern the protected areas usually try to harmonise preservation aims with native livelihoods and economic problems, for instance, by providing financial benefits for loss of access to natural resources or funding income-generating initiatives connected to ecotourism (Masterson et al., 2019). Such interventions which focus on community participation in conservation are usually defined as 'win-win' scenarios which are beneficial ecologically and socio-economically (Chaigneau & Brown, 2016).

Nevertheless, these interventions rarely consider the cultural, spiritual as well as individual's beliefs regarding nature both as indigenous individual and part of natives in that community (Bologna & Spierenburg, 2015). The price of the conflict between humans and wild animals is usually understood as generating strong opposition from already frantic people who believe that these destructive animals are more valued than their existence (Ayivor, Gordon & Ntiamoa-Baidu, 2014).

According to Matseketsa et al. (2019), due to this feeling, communities end up not feeling part of the conservation strategies but at the same time bear the costs of conservation resulting in communities being uncooperative towards conservation. Additionally, in situations where wild animals cause destruction to people's properties and life, and they are neither restrained nor paid for damages, hostility towards conservation and wildlife resources becomes engrained (Matseketsa et al. 2019).

Even though the government has created strategies that are aimed at redressing the historical discrepancies, the execution of the strategies seems to be primary problem in several communities (Dube, 2018). Maluleke (2018) argues that the continuous imbalanced distribution of power between community and government, as well as the continuous institutional and economic shortfalls in managing protected areas, normally results in unproductive co-management execution and insignificant valuable outputs in South Africa.

Findlay (2015) also mentions that even though there are numerous situation-specific aspects that can possibly contribute towards poor beneficial outputs of management and conservation of nature reserves, poor implementation noticeably produces community disenchantment, decreased 'buy-in' from all groups, fractured co-operative associations and, in some situations, total dissolution of the arrangements agreed.

Human population growth especially in areas around nature reserves leads to conflict between humans and wildlife. Hunninck et al. (2017) argue that due to population growth, wild animals' populace and the human communities residing together with them usually compete over land and the natural resources in that area. Such a situation usually leads to damaging exchanges between them and might lead to, among other, destruction of crops or physical damages (Hunninck et al., 2017).

Chardonnet (2019) posit that certain species are more problematic to conserve compared to others because they cause conflict with the inhabitants (the huge predators, for instance), they are species that are preferred for the money-making benefits from parts of their body (pangolins for their scales, rhinoceroses for their horns, elephants for ivory, etc.), they are protected by local cultures (as is usually the scenario with the gorilla or chimpanzee), or otherwise they merely need big ranges (such as the African hunting dog or the cheetah), and the area is no longer capable of offering the space they require.

5. Research Design

The study is a non-positivist study employing a qualitative research methodology. The collection of data was done using semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. The semi-structured interviews for this study were conducted because they were appropriate to elicit the views of the participants of this study. The collection of data was carried out through ten prearranged meetings at the participants' residential areas in Dwesa-Cwebe, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher through a face-to-face. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher also observed and noted any additional detail from the research setting which was used to support the data collected during interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

6. Research Approach

The population of this study were all CPA members from Dwesa-Cwebe who are part of the Community representatives at the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve area. There were 30 CPA members that are currently serving on a five-year term. From that population of 30, a sample of ten participants were selected using convenient sampling (non-probability sampling).

7. Empirical Results

The study collected data from ten participants who had varying demographic features. The gender composition consisted of 80 percent male and 20 percent female participants. The age composition consisted of 20 percent participants that were between 26 and 30 years as well 31 and 35 years. Those aged between 18 and 25 years, 36 and 40 years, 46 and 50 years, 51 and 55 years, 56 and 60 years as well as above 66 years all had 10 percent representation.

The majority of the participants, 90 percent were Black and only 10 percent were Coloured. The level of experience in the CPA also showed variation with 30 percent of the participants revealing having between 1 to 5 years of experience, 20 percent having 6 to 10 years as well as 11 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years of experience. Only 10 percent had over 20 years of experience in the CPA.

7.1 Participation in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve

The research's empirical findings showed that members of Dwesa-Cwebe CPA have limited participation in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The limitation as indicated by the findings of this study is due to lack of required skills, limited opportunities, political influence and restrictions on authorised entries into the nature reserve. Lack of the required skills is caused by lack of educational qualification that are necessary to handle nature reserve management duties.

Even though some local people believe that their indigenous conventional knowledge about the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve is adequate and qualifies them to be part of the management, they are not afforded an opportunity to utilise that knowledge in the management of the nature reserve.

The inadequacy in formal skills development is pinned on the lack of educational institutions or structure that offer educational programmes on nature conservation management in the Dwesa-Cwebe area. The participants feel that they can be able to participate in management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve if they are equipped with the required. Therefore, there is need for education structures or institutions that offer educational programmes on nature reserve management to be established.

Furthermore, the study's empirical findings also found that the members of the CPA at Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve have limited participation because of elimination of involvement in some of the activities. The prime examples that were raised to highlight this concern were issues on lack of involvement into the issues of shellfish harvesting and grazing access. The local people feel that these kinds of activities have been set aside for management only because they are trying to conserve biodiversity resources which might exploited. However, local people also feel that there should be a strategy that is able to involve them in determining the management of these activities because the community needs to benefit from the nature reserve's resources.

The participants believe there is a way of making sure that the local people are involved in the use of the resources while preserving those resources. Currently, the participation of CPA members in management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve is limited due to elimination in the involvement of several activities. This limitation in opportunities of involvement is affecting inclusiveness as the CPA members like the local people feel excluded in the participation of managing the nature reserve. There is marginalisation that is perpetrated by the protectionist and state-centred approach being utilised at Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve.

The study's empirical findings also found that political influence is also affecting the CPA members' participation in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The political influence is exercised by political officials and community elites that utilise the nature reserve for political benefits to certain people within or outside the community. The political influence is curtailing the participation of CPAs in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve because of the different actions that are aligned to certain political interests, the involvement of some members in the management is restricted. Nepotism based on political influence is determining the participation of CPA members in the management of the nature reserve.

7.2 *Utilisation of Generated Revenue*

The study's empirical findings indicated that even though the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve is generating revenue, CPA members are not aware of how the revenue is being utilised. The Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve has been a potential income generating venture for the Dwesa and Cwebe communities. The value-addition aspect of the nature reserve pinned on the capacity of the reserve to provide financial resources for the development of local communities. The income generated from Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve can fully benefit the community if they know how it is being utilised. The lack of transparency in handling and utilisation of the income generated from the nature reserve implies that the local people are being excluded from how their resources are being utilised.

The study's empirical findings also revealed that the income attained from the activities at the nature reserve is being directed towards the development of other areas in Cape Town.

The communities that are supposed to from the income that is being generated are not benefiting. The intended value-addition through income from nature reserve is being undermined due to the exclusion of CPA members from the participation of management of the nature reserve. If CPA members were allowed to fully participate in the management activities such as utilisation of revenue generated from the nature reserve, they could help with channelling that income towards community development.

7.3 *Participation Mechanisms*

The empirical findings of this study also depicted that the participation mechanism that are used to engender participation at Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve in Dwesa and Cwebe communities is mainly consultation forums. However, even though the consultation forums are conducted but are not effective in producing the desired results. Meetings and reports are additional participation mechanisms that are used to engender participation in activities at the nature reserve. Like consultation forums, meetings and reports are also not producing the desired results which implies that the participation mechanisms are not effective in engendering participation in the activities at Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve.

The study's main findings indicated that there are no proper structures and processes that ensure transparency and accountability by institutional stakeholders in the management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. Transparency and accountability largely depend on the mechanisms that are used to ensure their effective implementation and usefulness, in this study it was revealed that there are no mechanisms that help with transparency and accountability by institutional stakeholders. The only form of demonstration of accountability and transparency is when the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve management officials attend the consultation forums. The consultation forums compel the nature reserve management officials to provide an explanation on how the management is using the income that is generated by the nature reserve. In essence, there are no efficient and effective processes and structures that promote transparency and accountability in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve.

7.4 *Relationship between the CPAs and Management*

The study's findings also revealed that there is an imbalanced relationship between CPAs and management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve that is primarily unrepresentative. The engagement and agreement between the CPAs and Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve management is largely focused on serving to fulfil the interests of management. The CPAs and reserve management have a brittle relationship which is not conflictual, but it is not very cordial making it easily broken. The lack of transparency and accountability makes it impossible for the community to trust and fully support the management which is why the relationship is brittle.

7.5 Challenges of Participation

There are several challenges faced by CPA members at Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve that were discovered in this study. These challenges are impeding the representation of local communities in the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. One of the major challenges that was noted was the limited participation of CPA members in management activities.

Those that have limited opportunities of participating in activities aimed at the management of the nature reserve have pointed at lack of consultation, delayed feedback, lack of skills development and dealing with non-compliant local residents. Another challenge was the lack of consultation by the reserve management. Some community members believe that the CPA members are serving the interests of the reserve management by neglecting or overlooking their concerns.

The other challenge that was raised by the participants was the lack of skills that are necessary for them to be able to participate in the management of the nature reserve. The other challenge is lack of transparency and accountability which is critical for community and members of CPA to engage in issues relate to the nature reserve's generation of revenue.

8. Conclusions

The CPAs were established to ensure that the marginalised rural communities are represented in the ownership and management of the natural resources so that they can benefit from the nature reserves. However, this is not the reality. Therefore, study was conducted to investigate the challenges in communal participation in management of nature reserves. In order to elicit insightful and rich data based on the perspectives and experiences of the CPA members, the study utilised the qualitative research methodology. Data were collected through interviews and non-participant observation using a sample of 10 CPA members from the Dwesa-Cwebe area. The data were analysed thematically.

The empirical findings of this study indicated that community members are not fully participating in the management of the nature reserve. Challenges include lack of required skills, limited opportunities, political influence and restrictions on authorised entries into the nature reserve.

9. Recommendations

The study recommends for the establishment of proper structures that will help CPA members to be able to participate more in the management of the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The structures will focus on addressing issues of how to bridge skills gap which will equip and enable more CPA members to be involved in decision-making regarding activities at the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The study also recommends that the government should intervene and mandate the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve to produce a report for the communities on the generated revenue, how it is going to be used as well as outlining the personnel and units that will be responsible for particular tasks. The report must be formally presented to the communities quarterly or annually. The development projects update report must be separated from the financial report.

The study recommends that the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve should provide opportunities that will ensure that CPA members are involved in the management of the nature reserve. The opportunities can be offered using different strategies such as inviting some CPA members to attend board meetings, offering update reports which have future plans of the nature reserve among other things.

The study recommends that there should be a monitoring and evaluation structure which helps with follow up on what has been discussed and accomplished. The government will have to play a significant role in ensuring that management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve is able to adhere to the agreed obligations.

The study also recommends a shift in the management approach from state-centred approach to a bottom-up approach that is more inclusive and community-oriented. Involving the Dwesa and Cwebe community should be the main concern for the management of Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve.

The study recommends that the different stakeholders that are in Dwesa-Cwebe area such as police, community members, government, CPAs and management of the nature reserve must work together to deal with the issue of illegal activities at the Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve.

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The author has declared that he has no financial or personal relationship that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

11. Author's Contributions

This primary research study was undertaken by LZ in fulfilment of the requirement of an MBA degree. This article was written by LZ who synthesized the main aspects of the study with literature in support of the research objectives, findings and recommendations with input from LM.

12. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was applied for through the Nelson Mandela University's Research and Ethics Committee (H20-BES-BUS-106).

13. Data Availability

Data are available within the article or its supplementary materials, and other data are available from the author (LM) upon reasonable request.

14. Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

15. Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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