

## **Sustainable Community-based Tourism: Exploring the Socio-economic Benefits Enjoyed by the Gairezi Community, Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper seeks to explore the sustainability of the socio-economic benefits derived from the Gairezi ecotourism project based on the community's narratives. Relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology were adopted in order to best understand the community's experiences and perspectives regarding how they benefit from the ecotourism project. The research identifies the different groups within the Gairezi community to explain the sustainability concept in terms of degree of community involvement, the project's impact on the quality of life, contribution to the community's economic activities and preservation of tourism resources. Thematic content analysis was used to present the community's narratives and results were interpreted through an analysis of the community's experiences and perspectives. The research findings indicate that the Gairezi CBT initiative has managed to conserve the area's natural resources. The local residents expect more direct monetary benefits, and current income sources are wages and sale of handicrafts. Furthermore, the study found that the CBT's benefits were enjoyed by a few individuals and the project provides no linkages with the community's economic activities. The researchers concluded that the socio-economic benefits derived by the community from the ecotourism project are limited. This research elaborates the different ways in which the Gairezi community is benefitting from the CBT project with much focus on the sustainability principles. It provides future direction to researchers and policy makers on the ability of the ecotourism project to sustain rural livelihoods*

**Keywords:** *Community-based tourism, ecotourism, socio-economic-benefits, sustainability, Zimbabwe.*

### **1. Introduction**

Rural communities are endowed with tourism resources (natural wonders, diverse wildlife and authentic cultural experiences, and tourism presents an economic opportunity to diversify rural communities' sources of income (Ashley & Roe, 2002). UNWTO (2019) noted that the global tourism exports earnings growth rate (+4%) has been higher than global goods export earnings (+3%) for the past seven years. The international tourism earnings were approximately US\$1.7 billion in 2018, indicating that tourism has the potential to positively contribute towards rural regeneration and alleviate poverty especially in developing countries (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). The tourism earnings are realised against a background of both opportunity costs and socio-economic costs and this brings out sustainability issues.

As such, this paper assesses the sustainability of the potential and actual socio-economic benefits earned by the Gairezi community from the community-based tourism (CBT) initiative. The link between sustainability and CBT initiatives is reinforced by Nsukwini and Bob (2016) who stressed the need to meet the needs of the present generation with the future generations' needs in mind. The assessment of the sustainability of the Gairezi CBT was based on the project's ability to involve the wider community, improve the community's quality of life, preserve tourism resources and contribute to the community's other economic activities. This contributes to the current debates regarding the sustainability of CBT initiatives in Southern Africa (Chirenje, 2017; Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012; Nsukwini & Bob, 2016) and our theoretical contribution lies on the application of the sustainability principles to analyse the impact of the benefits accrued by the local residents from the CBT project.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 CBT in Southern Africa**

CBT is defined as tourism-based initiatives that are owned and/ managed by the local community, and intended to deliver meaningful benefits to the wide community (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). It has enabled local communities to gain access and control over tourism resources (Spenceley, 2008). In South Africa for example, Shackleton et al. (2002) note that the land restitution processes fuelled community participation in tourism activities. The Makuleke community owns the Makuleke Contractual Park, a 25 000h piece of land in the Pafuri region that they reclaimed in 1996 (Maluleke, 2018; Shehab, 2011). The ADAMADE programme has influenced the dimension of community participation in Zambia through financing community infrastructure (ZAWA, 2009). The CAMPFIRE program in Zimbabwe has enabled community participation through the devolvement of community's rights to access, and utilisation of tourism resources in their locality(Child, 2004).

CBT has also been shaped by the different resource endowments of the communities and generally the tourism initiatives pursued include the provision of accommodation, ecotourism, gastronomy, trophy hunting, heritage and cultural activities (Child, 2004; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Spenceley, 2008). The Buhoma village walk, Uganda enables visitors to see gorillas during the day and the Covane community, Mozambique runs a lodge (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009) whilst game viewing and village tours are conducted in the Makuleke community, South Africa (Shehab, 2011). This has enabled the communities to enjoy socio-economic benefits that include employment opportunities, culture preservation, improvement in social amenities and poverty alleviation. Nonetheless, the communities involved in CBT also incur socio-economic costs in terms of opportunity cost, negative externalities and direct costs that include destruction of crops by wildlife, competing resource use with tourists and acculturation. This research therefore seeks to highlight the sustainability of the Gairezi ecotourism project in terms of uplifting the community's livelihoods. It analyses the extent to which the socio-economic benefits influence the host community's activities.

### **2.2 Socio-economic benefits of CBT**

CBT has been premised on the notion that the community itself has control over management of the initiative and it receives a substantial proportion of the benefits generated by the project (Trejos & Chiang, 2009). Based on this scenario, there are socio-economic benefits that can be enjoyed by local communities as they engage in tourism activities in their localities. The devolvement of these

benefits is influenced by the degree of community participation in tourism activities (Giampiccoli, 2015). The local communities actively participate in tourism activities that lead to social improvement, most importantly poverty reduction and acquisition of knowledge and skills (Gan, 2020).

Lorio and Corsale (2014) carried out a research in the Viscri, Romania and highlighted that the local communities derived numerous benefits from their involvement in CBT initiatives. They indicated that about 27 women have been trained in customer care issues to host tourists in their houses, and about 10% of the village's active population gained employment albeit seasonal. The seasonality of the tourism business is not too risky as the local communities are also involved in agricultural activities. This means that CBT activities complement agricultural activities in Romania thereby enabling the host community to earn additional income. Local communities in Viscri acknowledged that their livelihoods have significantly improved as a result of tourism activities as they are able to pay for their bills such as health and school fees for their children up to the university level. Linkages were also raised as critical benefits to the local communities as the guesthouse owners normally buy vegetables, fruits, eggs and milk from locals. According to Lorio and Corsale (2014), some guesthouse owners do not own cows so they buy milk from their neighbours thus spreading the benefits to many.

In Namibia, the local communities have benefited significantly from CBT operations, the Torra conservancy for example, has enhanced social cohesion among community members (Ashley & Roe, 2002). In addition, the community members' sense of belonging to the community was improved through working together in tourism activities while neighbouring communities involved in the CBT activities realised improved relations despite previous political tensions and diverse ethnic backgrounds. They posited that CBT generates income for rural households in the form of wages for those working as guides, security, housekeepers among others. In Namibia, the wages lifted the employed local communities from insecure to secure status both socially and economically, and the earnings partially circulated within the local economy, thus creating a multiplier effect. However, few people are employed on part-time basis, and Chirenje (2017) opines that CBT does not contribute much in terms of direct employment to local communities as it provide jobs to about 5.5% of the local residents in Nyanga. Nonetheless, the wage earnings are complemented by income generated from selling crafts, wood, and performing some cultural dances as part of visitor entertainment (Nazrin et al., 2017). Ashley and Roe (2002) added that collective income in the form of profits by the host community also boosts community livelihoods. For example, the Makuleke community earned more than three million Rands from lease fees between 2005 and 2010, and the income was used to develop community infrastructure that include construction of a primary school (Shehab, 2011). This indicates that tourism can be used as a vehicle to improve social amenities in rural communities.

In Namibia, the income was insignificant to change the livelihoods of the local communities, and only managed to cover school fees and reduce hunger through purchasing few bags of maize per family (Ashley & Roe, 2002). Mbaiwa (2005) revealed that tourism accounted for 4.5% of the total employment in Botswana, and Sandbrook (2010) also obtained similar findings in Uganda. As such, Trejos and Chiang (2009) also observed that tourism earnings in most regions are spent outside rural economies hence local communities do not benefit from the CBT initiatives. From this perspective, this research sought to analyse the sustainability of the socio-economic benefits

derived from the Gairezi CBT. Previous research assessed the impact of the CBT activities on poverty alleviation (Chirenje, 2017) and concluded that ecotourism activities improved the local communities' livelihoods. This research probes further these benefits to ascertain the CBT activity's ability to meet the needs of both the present and future generations, contributions towards conservation of both natural and cultural resources, and influence on the community's economic activities. Such a holistic approach helps in determining the sustainability of the CBT activities and providing guidelines on improving its performance.

The participation of local communities in tourism activities has been advocated by many researchers as key to the sustainability of CBT activities (Lorio & Corsale, 2014). The active participation of local communities in the decision making process ensure that CBT activities are implemented in line with the community's needs (Juma & Khademi-vidra, 2019). Local community participation in tourism activities makes planning process more effective, equitable and legitimate (Lorio & Corsale, 2014).

However, there are barriers that prevent effective local community participation in CBT activities and these include lack of resources and skills to participate effectively, and lack of knowledge to attract visitors (Silva & Khatiwada, 2018), internal power struggles, high illiteracy levels (Gan, 2020), and centralised public administration by traditional authorities (Chen et al., 2010) that characterise most rural communities in developing countries. The negative impact of centralised administration has been marked in China where people are not familiar with the democratic processes and in Zimbabwe where the devolution of running CBTs has been under the Rural District Councils (Hlengwa & Maruta, 2019). Su et al. (2019) added that rural communities in particular, hardly participate in the CBT planning processes because high illiteracy levels hinder their ability to understand policy documents. From this perspective, this study analyses the socio-economic benefits of the Gairezi CBT activities based on the locals' narratives thereby providing the marginalised host community with a voice that helps to understand tourism activities in their locality.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Background of the Gairezi ecotourism project, Zimbabwe**

The Gairezi community, located in the Tangwena ward in Nyanga district, Zimbabwe has been pursuing non-consumptive CBT initiatives. It consists of the Dazi and Nyamutsapa villages and the two villages are on either side of the Gairezi River. The community borders Mozambique in the East and Nyanga National Park in the North. Moore (2005) stated that Nyanga Rural District Council (NRDC) was accorded appropriate authority status in 1992 and that allowed the community to initiate the CAMPFIRE project. The local authority devolved the powers to manage and use the natural resources to the Gairezi Development Trust (GDT), and that paved way for the GDT to enter an agreement to operate the ecotourism project together with the Nyanga Downs Fly Fishing Club (NDFFC) in 2003. Unlike CBT initiatives in other districts that are driven by wildlife resources; the tourism activities in the Gairezi community are influenced by riverine attractions in the Gairezi River, and they include fly fishing, bird watching, rafting and picnicking. Although this is but one of the few CAMPFIRE projects that involve non-consumptive tourism activities in Zimbabwe, research on its sustainability has been limited.

### **3.2 Data collection procedure**

In this study, we tried to determine the host community's perceptions and experiences of the socio-economic benefits derived from the Gairezi CBT initiatives. The Gairezi community was purposively selected because of the abundance of tourism resources within and in proximity with the community, and also because it is one of the few communities involved in non-consumptive CAMPFIRE project in Zimbabwe. The case study of the Gairezi community provides a clearer picture of the socio-economic benefits enjoyed by the community in running the tourism enterprise and this study focused on ascertaining the contributions of the benefits towards improving community livelihoods, and conserving tourism resources.

The study subjects were residents of the Dazi and Nyamutsapa villages and a sample design was carried out by means of stratified random sampling. The researchers acknowledged that the Gairezi community is heterogeneous; comprises of segments that have varying perceptions and experiences regarding the CBT project. In this case, the community members were segmented as follows; CBT members, and non-CBT members. The CBT member were further sub-grouped into GDT members, employed members, and unemployed members. The random sampling technique was conducted within each segment and interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The interviews were conducted in order to ascertain the socio-economic benefits of the CBT initiatives based on the local community's perceptions and past experiences. The personal interviews were conducted at the participants' homes thereby allowing them to freely express their views and overlook authoritative and or outspoken individuals that might have dominated proceedings in public gatherings.

The secondary data sources that were used to complement the personal interviews include; journals, unpublished reports, CBT reports and pamphlets, and the internet. The secondary sources were key in providing background and a historical perspective of the socio-economic benefits of the CBT project. The data collected were then analysed using thematic content analysis. The re-listening of the tape-recorded interviews, transcription and translations were all part of the data analysis. The narratives enabled the researchers to interpret how the locals evaluate the socio-economic benefits derived from the CBT initiative in relation to their household and community livelihoods. The meanings deduced were interwoven with the literature relating to sustainability principles. The researchers' own perspectives were also part of the data analysis.

## **4. Results and discussions**

### **4.1 Demographic profile of the participants**

The demographic profiling of the participants indicates that 63.8% were female, and 36.2% were male. The average age of the participants was 40 years and ranged from 18 years to 65 years. 70% of the participants were in the 45-65 years category, and 15% were in the 36-45 years category. All the participants were blacks and the dominant language was Manyika. The sources of income among the participants were agriculture (90%), remittances (20%), timber harvesting (40%), pension earnings (1%), and 3% of the CBT members were formally employed in the ecotourism project. The majority of the participants were married (65%), single (4%), widowed (15%), and divorced (6%). The average household size was 7 and included extended family members that include grandparents and children of relatives working in the city.

## **4.2 Impact on community's quality of life**

Evidence from the study revealed that the Gairezi CBT initiative influenced the community's quality of life through availing employment opportunities, tourism income earnings, community participation in tourist activities, and training of community members.

### **4.2.1 Employment opportunities**

The Gairezi CBT project has managed to create employment benefits for the local people and one participant revealed that "*About 10 people are employed at the ecotourism project as housekeepers, receptionists and conservationists*" and further explained that the employees "*...reside in Dazi and Nyamutsapa villages*". The importance of the employment opportunities created by the project is further buttressed by another participant's assertion that there are limited employment opportunities availed to the locals "*even when one migrates to Nyanga town*". The above narratives concur with Mbaiwa's (2005) and Snyman's (2014) conclusions that CBT projects create low skilled employment opportunities that improve the social welfare of rural households. The employment of locals revitalises local economies as the wage earnings received are used to support local families. More importantly, the income earned circulates in the community's economy when the employees purchase local agricultural produce, for example. A rough estimate of the CBT's total monthly wage bill is ZW\$7 000.00 (US\$87.50). The income is used to purchase farm produce, products in local retail shops, and pay local service providers; this depicts a monthly injection to the community's economy.

On the other hand, the employment opportunities created are insignificant considering the average household size, poverty datum line and the project's total membership. An analysis of the participants' demographics reveal that the average family size is 7 and the majority are dependents that is, minors and the aged. Informal conversations with the locals revealed that most the able-bodied leave the community either to further their education or in search of better opportunities in the urban centres. Resultantly, the tourism earnings cannot meet the daily family needs that include school fees, health care, food, and sustain households in the event of unexpected shocks.

All the participants indicated that they rely on multiple sources of livelihoods, and apply different combinations of remittances, timber harvesting and agricultural earnings for their livelihoods. The fact that the average monthly earnings for each employee is below the present poverty datum line attests to the unsustainable nature of CBT initiative. In this case, the monthly earnings cannot meet the monthly family requirements. Rather, based on the estimated monthly wage earnings and provided employees receive the same wage and assuming there are no other sources of income, the tourism earnings will mean that the family will survive on less than a dollar per day. From this perspective, the wage earnings do not sustain the socio-economic well-being of rural households. This supports Mbaiwa's (2005) and Okech's (2011) earlier observations that CBT activities create only low wage employment opportunities hence fail to reduce high poverty rates that characterise these regions. In fact, Silva and Khatiwada (2018) noted that rural regions in Southern Africa are characterised with high poverty rates despite their participation in CBT activities.

In addition, the total number employed, 10 is marginal especially when one considers the project's membership of 306, and the average household size of 7. The researchers observed that the Gairezi community is characterised by extended family members living together, and sharing income and expenses. From this perspective, the very few employed in the project would cater for the needs

of the extended family members especially payment of school fees and purchase of food items. As such Snyman (2014) alluded that the sustainability of an ecotourism project is based on its ability to employ a large number of local people on a permanent basis. All the same, the researchers observed that the few employment opportunities availed to the locals are on a permanent basis. This guarantees the few employed a monthly income which facilitates planning household spending and acquisition of family assets.

#### **4.2.2 CBT income earnings**

The CBT project earns income from accommodation (cottages and campsites), membership fees and riverine activities (rafting bird watching and picnicking). Both the GDT members and CBT members were not aware of the monthly CBT performance (monthly total earnings). One participant explained that, *“earnings and expenses are presented by the club to us at the annual general meeting and we are given no documentation. Over the years we have been told that the project’s earnings cannot sustain the operations”*. Deductively, the inability of the project to use direct earnings for community projects or distribution among members indicates that little income is channelled to the local community.

As such, the sustainability of CBT activities is enhanced when the local residents earn income directly from the project in the form of rent, gate fees and profit sharing (Mbaiwa, 2005). Proceeds from CBT initiatives elsewhere have managed to uplift the community’s quality of life. Nsukwini and Bob (2016) conclude that ecotourism activities in the Somkhanda community in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa trebled the average income per household to approximately R1 300 in 2010. Child (2004) stated that the Torra conservancy allocated US\$63 per household in 2003, enabling the local residents to earn more especially when one aggregates other benefits like employment wages. Such tangible benefits help the communities meet the present generation’s social needs.

#### **4.2.3 Participation in tourist activities**

All the participants, both members and non-members indicated that they do not participate in the tourist activities (bird watching, nature walks, rafting, and picnicking). They concur that they cannot afford the rates for either accommodation or tourist activities. One member of the project is of the opinion that the tourist activities are meant for the NDFFC’s club members, international tourists, and urban dwellers. This scenario is synonymous with other CBT projects in Zimbabwe. For example, the exorbitant trophy hunting licensing fees inhibit the Sengwe community members to participate and they only enjoy meat rations. Unlikewise, the community members in the Makuleke are given ‘pass’ when accessing the Makuleke Contractual Park, and the Kruger National Park (Makandwa, De Klerk, & Saayman, 2021). This limits the cost of game viewing for the locals to the transport costs. Although 30% of the female participants acknowledged their willingness to participate in tourism activities, they cited lack of ‘leisure’ time as they will be occupied with agricultural tasks, daily household chores and family care. Thus low income earnings coupled with lack of leisure time limits the locals’ participation in the CBT’s tourist activities.

#### **4.2.4 Training**

All the participants employed at the CBT project and GDT members acknowledge having received varied forms of training. They revealed that most of the training programs covered customer care,

housekeeping, conservation strategies, leadership and budget interpretations. In this case, the CBT improved the community's social capital. The knowledge and skills gained from the training and short courses can be applied to other economic tasks and when executing community responsibilities. A former GDT member, now a member of the local school development committee revealed that the oral communication skills and conflict resolution skills he gained during his former role have been handy in fulfilling the roles of his current position. Nsukwini and Bob (2016) noted similar findings in Northern Cape, South Africa where the local residents surrounding the Richtersveld National Park participated in environmental training programs. Nonetheless, such benefits are limited to a few individuals, which supports Snyman's (2014) earlier conclusions that the socio-economic benefits generated from tourism activities are enjoyed by the rural elite.

#### **4.3 Contributions to other economic activities**

Evidence from the study revealed that agriculture, timber harvesting and remittances are the major sources of income in the Gairezi community. The main crops grown include maize and potatoes, and the abundant water facilitates crop production throughout the year. Apart from a 50kg bag of fertilizer and maize seed that CBT members receive annually, all the participants indicated that they received no other benefits to support their economic activities. Although the traditional authority in both villages appreciate the contributions of the CBT project in stimulating crop production, the community members indicate that the agricultural support is too little to stimulate change in the agricultural sector considering their inputs requirements. For example, 60% of the participants explained that they grow crops like maize and potatoes and one participant indicated that he grows a variety of crops throughout the year.

All this clearly elaborate that the agricultural support is little. Instead all the participants are of the view that the CBT neither stimulate nor hinder the community's economic activities. The lack of direct technical and training support towards crop production limits the economic significance and sustainability of the agricultural inputs that are received annually.

In addition, the majority of the participants indicated that the tourists rarely purchase their agricultural produce. One participant aptly said, "*they (tourists) bring their own food supplies from town.....and rarely visit the communities*". From this perspective, the contribution of the CBT project towards the community's well-being is insignificant. The situation is worsened by the researchers' observations that none of the cottage's supplies were sourced from the community. Such a lack of both backward and forward linkages between the community's economy and the ecotourism project constrains the latter's ability to influence livelihoods.

The results support Trejos and Chiang's (2009) observations that tourism earnings in most regions are spent outside rural economies, and that there are few links between tourism and the informal economy that sustains rural livelihoods. This is despite Silva and Khatiwada's (2018) assertion of the need to utilise local produce as a way to support local livelihoods. Juma and Khademi-vidra (2019) further explains that tourism projects in rural peripheries should generate income for the locals as a means to sustain rural livelihoods in the face of competing economic activities. For example, Nsukwini and Bob (2016) indicate that small local firms receive contracts for road maintenance, and the local residents also directly receive 10% of Pilanesberg National Park's gate entry fees which stimulate the local community's other economic activities.



#### **4.4 Wider community involvement**

Unlike other CAMPFIRE projects in Zimbabwe whose management and control is vested in the hands of district councils, the Nyanga Rural District Council (NRDC) is not a member of the Gairezi CBT project. The council officials stated that their participation in the project is limited to regulation of the project, provision of expert advice, and provision of linkages between the stakeholders and the community. This allows the community to actively participate in the management activities of the tourism project (Lorio & Corsale, 2014). Nonetheless, evidence from the study revealed passive community participation. A member of the GDT revealed that their participation in the ecotourism project is limited to attending meetings while the supervision of daily operations and overall management of the project (management of cottages and conservation measures) are done by the NDFFC. Although, members of the project acknowledge participation in annual meetings and getting feedback, they felt that their input was not considered when making final decisions. For instance, all the participants explained that the decision to get agricultural inputs as membership benefits was imposed on them by the NDFFC. All this point to the fact that the community members have limited control over decision making, and benefit sharing. This scenario is unsustainable as the community members are unable to voice their concerns and influence decision making.

The results are in sync with Lorio and Corsale's (2014) conclusions that communities are manipulated and power is retained by the project partners because the local residents lack capital and marketing knowledge. The community's inability to influence decision making is also evidenced in other CAMPFIRE projects in Zimbabwe where the RDCs retain control over revenue allocation and trophy hunting activities (Rihoy et al., 2010). The wider participation of the local community in tourism activities enhances the sustainability of the tourism destination by ensuring that benefits cascade even to the informal economy and marginalised community members (Juma & Khademi-vidra, 2019). This is evidenced by the improvement of water supplies and construction of school classroom blocks in communities surrounding the Pilanesberg National Park, a result of the local residents having an input in the allocation and distribution of benefits (Nsukwini & Bob, 2016).

#### **4.5 Conservation of tourism resources**

The community members identified natural resources (beautiful landscapes and riverine attractions) as major tourism attractions, and the researchers observed that these tourism resources are conserved by the ecotourism project. The quality of these resources is reinforced by the tourist numbers visiting the area despite poor road networks and marketing efforts. The NRDC further adds that the Gairezi community has rich cultural heritage (defined by sacred places) and unique way of life (portrayed by traditional dances that include *Ndandariya*, *Jekunje*, *Jiti*, and *Maganzvo*). Although the ecotourism project has managed to conserve the natural resources, the cultural resources have been neglected.

The CBT project is viewed as sustainable when both natural and cultural tourism resources are conserved (Juma & Khademi-vidra, 2019). Snyman (2014) noted that the sustainability of a CBT project is based on both the non-consumptive use of natural resources, and conservation of the community's cultural values. The Gairezi CBT project has managed to conserve the riverine resources and promote non-consumptive activities that include rafting, fly fishing, and picnicking.

The utilisation of cultural resources that include village visits, and cultural performances will conserve the community's cultural aspects, improve social cohesion and the local people's pride in themselves. In addition, the production of artefacts and performances meant to meet tourists' demands provide locals with an opportunity to generate income. This is evidenced in the Makuleke community, South Africa where the locals earn income from performance of traditional dances, sale of handicrafts and showcasing traditional healing sessions (Shehab, 2011).

### **5. Limitations of the study**

The study focused on the Gairezi community and overlooked the benefits of the CBT activities in other communities. The study results cannot be representative of the CBT projects in Zimbabwe due to differences in resource endowments, degree of community involvement and geography. Nonetheless, the concentrated nature of the case study approach helped critical examination of the sustainability of socio-economic benefits of the CBT project which facilitated the identification of ways to boost the CBT's influence on community livelihoods and conservation of tourism resources.

The research findings are based on the experiences and perceptions of the local residents who were present during the period of the study. It also overlooked the opinions of the NDFFC relating to the benefits derived from the CBT projects and reasons for such. The researchers made use of secondary data sources and field visits to evaluate the local residents' narratives and make observations respectively. Besides, the soliciting of data from the local residents provided a voice to the marginalised rural populace to share their experiences and perceptions regarding CBT activities pursued in their locality.

### **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

The study findings showed that the Gairezi CBT offers socio-economic benefits that include employment opportunities, support local enterprise, revitalize local economy and conserve natural tourism resources. Based on the evidence from the study, the researchers concluded that the socio-economic benefits were not sustainable as they do not improve the community's livelihoods both in terms of meeting the community's social needs and supporting community's economic activities. The researchers recommend that the local residents should earn direct monetary benefits through profit sharing, channelling revenue directly to them (for example, a percentage of picnicking fees is retained), and subcontracting the locals.

The research findings revealed that non-consumptive tourism activities facilitated conservation of tourism resources. Nonetheless, the conservation efforts should be extended to safeguard the community's cultural resources as well. The researchers recommend the establishment of a craft village to promote the sale of handicrafts and performance of traditional dances, marketing homestays and initiate village tours. This not only complements nature-based tourism activities but enables the locals to conserve their cultural resources and earn income simultaneously. The researchers also recommend that external interventions in the form of technical assistance (skills development and social media marketing) and financial assistance should be made to the locals to enhance their participation in CBT as entrepreneurs.

The study contributes to research on CBT by explaining the sustainability of the Gairezi CBT initiative. An analysis of the socio-economic benefits derived from CBT activities based on the

sustainability principles highlighted the need to ensure active participation of the local community in the decision making and management activities of CBT projects. The feasibility of the establishment of culturally-based tourism ventures can further be analysed based on both the quality of cultural resources and the tourists' expectations and preferences.

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