

An Economic Analysis on the Viability of Wildlife Hunting and Viewing Tourism as a Conservation and Rural Development Tool in Namibia

GREGORY PARENT

The lack of sustainability and developmental potential of cattle and agricultural systems has been a stimulus for many southern African countries move towards a focus on wildlife utilization as a development and conservation tool. While countries have taken different strategies, the ultimate goal of the various policy approaches is to capture wildlife's biophysical and economic advantage to generate a steady stream of benefits to local communities, thereby incentivizing the conservation of wildlife and the ecosystems they are present in. While studies have demonstrated wildlife's economic advantage at the national and regional level, there is a gap in the wildlife economic research for the understanding of benefit attainment at the community level. If wildlife viewing and hunting tourism is to be a sustainable source of revenue and continue to produce incentives towards conservation of wildlife and biomes in which they live, understanding how institutional factors effect local benefit attainment is key, as it is the local inhabitant who will ultimately make the decision to plant another row of crops, pasture more cattle, poach another animal, or conserve for future benefit.



The purpose of the summer 2008 round of research was threefold. First, it was a preliminary investigation to gain an increased understanding into structure of the rural southern African economy in order to improve the econometric models to be utilized in my Ph.D. research. Secondly, it was used to pilot question design, specifically methods to minimize participant recall errors to survey questions. Finally, as much of the southern African region is characterized by recurrent droughts and a lack of water infrastructure, water is potentially a serious input constraint to households. As such, this study investigated the importance of water access to a household's ability to participate in the market economy by integrating spatial classes of households differentiated by their distance to potable water so as to analyze the distributional impact on household income using the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke P2 measure.

The study was conducted in four villages within the Choi village area located in the Mayuni Conservancy in the Caprivi Strip, Namibia. Participants from 100 households were interviewed as part of the study. While final data analysis has yet to be completed, some interesting patterns have emerged. Of note, all four villages have little internal commerce. Households rely on traveling to distant urban centers (2 hours) to conduct the majority of their purchases. The lack of internal commerce reduces the possible multiplier affect that any tourism enterprise may produce through direct or indirect income impacts. As such, much of the potential benefit is leaked to urban centers in the form of expenditure for goods.

Gregory Parent is a doctoral student in Geography and is an NSF IGERT Fellow (Adaptive Management: Water, Wetlands, and Watersheds). He was awarded a preliminary summer research grant from the Working Forest in the Tropics IGERT program at the University of Florida.