

Community-Based Ecotourism Development in Kgalagadi District, Western Botswana

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Last fall (October 2008 to January 2009) I traveled to Botswana to conduct my doctoral research. I completed four months of fieldwork in Kgalagadi district where I worked with nine local communities. My dissertation research was supplemented by a pre-dissertation trip to the region in 2006, during which I introduced myself to local authorities, familiarized with the study site, and also conducted key informant surveys in six villages.

In 2008 -2009 I returned to the study area, and conducted the larger part of my dissertation research. The study sites, Kgalagadi District and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park were chosen due to the fact that community-based ecotourism is lowly developed, dependence on livestock farming and rangeland resources has led to severe land degradation and conflicts over natural resource use. Furthermore, increased incidence of poverty has been observed. Even though some of the Botswana's tourism policy objectives are to promote socio-economic well being of communities living adjacent to protected areas, and increase the number of citizens meaningfully involved in, and benefiting from their tourism industry, these areas are still lacking in community-based tourism development. It is important to emphasize that community-based ecotourism (CBE) is still relatively



new and numerous projects are in the initial stages of development in Botswana. However, the government has identified CBE projects as possible avenues for diversification, and they have been encouraged around the country. Thus, this study investigated stakeholder's perspectives about the potential for community-based ecotourism development, and support for Kgalagadi Trans-frontier Park as a Trans-boundary protected area.

The study was conducted in nine village/settlements within the Kgalagadi region, four of which were located in the Wildlife Management Area (WMAs) and Controlled Hunting zone (areas that are strictly protected for wildlife conservation purposes). Two data collection methods were employed. Participants from 700 households were interviewed. Although I am still working on my final data analysis, some interesting findings have emerged. For example, despite unfamiliarity with tourism as a

business, the majority of the residents considered ecotourism as positive and a worthwhile development for the Kgalagadi region. Also, participants indicated mistrust as a major barrier in developing community projects (including trans-boundary resources), and they also emphasized the need for strengthening local management skills and entrepreneurship in tourism as the best strategy for community-based ecotourism development.

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