

# ERSA Research Brief

March 2019

---

## **Factors influencing people's perceptions towards conservation of transboundary wildlife resources. The case of the Great-Limpopo Trans-frontier Conservation Area**

By Herbert Ntuli

The perceptions of indigenous people towards protected areas greatly determine the success of integrated conservation and development projects in most 3rd world countries as their perceptions affect their attitude and behaviour towards conservation. Local communities living adjacent to national parks are now viewed as important stakeholders in wildlife conservation in a new development paradigm that seeks to deal with illegal wildlife harvesting. The management of transboundary wildlife such as elephants requires local communities in different countries to come together so that they can protect the resource through the creation of large-scale common pool resource institutions and stabilization of cooperation at a bigger scale. The creation of the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier Conservation Area bordering South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique is an example par excellence of a large-scale conservation model in the new world order, but since its inception, it has not been able to move from paper to reality. As a result, there is very little evidence of local communities from different countries coming together to protect wildlife. Large-scale community initiatives of this nature can only happen if local people perceive conservation as a beneficial activity. The communities in the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier Conservation Area come together to participate in annual soccer events they organize themselves. Although this is a good starting point, there is need for more support from the different states, private sector, international development agencies and NGOs in order to increase the integration and participation of local communities in conservation matters.

In a collaborative research project, Herbert Ntuli and Edwin Muchapondwa from the University of Cape Town working together with a team of researchers from the Centre for Collective Action Research at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden set out to investigate the extent to which the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier Conservation Area and its activities has been implemented by the respective authorities so far, and how local communities perceive its establishment. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of indigenous communities towards transboundary wildlife and the creation of the Trans-frontier Conservation Area focusing mainly on communities in South Africa and Zimbabwe<sup>1</sup>. The belief is that involving indigenous communities in wildlife conservation might create adequate incentives for them to manage natural resources sustainably, while at the same time making sure that they also benefit from their effort.

Our results show that the perception that management of the park is good, positively affect the perception of benefits from the park, rules governing the park, and how people perceive wildlife in general. Park management negatively affects people's perceptions of environmental crime, while household expertise positively affects environmental crime. Household expertise measures household dependence on environmental resources such as household extraction of firewood, wild vegetables, crafts, medicines and bushmeat. Our results show that if people perceive the rules of the park in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Local communities around the Limpopo National Park are not part of the sample because at the time the paper was written data collection in Mozambique was still underway.

negative way, then they are less likely to conserve wildlife and at the same time this will increase the likelihood of environmental crime. Receiving benefits from the park seem to have a positive effect on people's perception of the rules governing the park and wildlife, but not environmental crime. Surprisingly, high levels of corruption positively affect people's perception of wildlife benefits and environmental crime. There is lack of evidence of the role of socioeconomic variables on people's perceptions towards wildlife. However, our data seems to support the idea that unobservable contextual factors could be responsible for explaining part of the variation in people's perceptions.

These variables are intertwined and as such they should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of the bigger picture. For instance, there is need for the park managers to work together with indigenous communities, i.e., develop common rules governing the conservation area, communicate with local people and get constant feedback from these communities since their livelihoods depend on wildlife conservation. Local communities suffer wildlife intrusion, but there is no compensation or benefits to counter the loss. Our results have policy implications since they speak to large-scale collective action. The way people perceive management and benefits from the park is likely to initiate self-organization within communities and large-scale cooperation among communities in different countries so that they are able to protect their resources sustainably. There is also need for communities in different countries to work together to fight poaching activities since communities are usually the entry points of most illegal trophy hunters. We propose the use of training related to wildlife management and conservation, and awareness campaigns to stabilize large-scale cooperation in the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier Conservation Area.