

# Perceived Benefits and Sacrifices of a Community Resource Management Area in Ghana

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This investigation focused on the perceived benefits and sacrifices (costs) related to the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary as identified by the Sanctuary staff (tour guides and rangers), Sanctuary Board Members, and primary-six (grade six) students at the Heather Grahame School. Permission to complete this research was granted by the Chiefs of the local area: Wechiau naa Imoru Nandom Gomoh ii, Metue naa Banda Naa Chialinaah, and Tokali naa Seuba Walaman I. Funding for the research was provided by: a) the Protected Areas and Research Project-Canada (PAPR-Canada); b) the Ghana-Canada Partnership for Environmental Education, and c) the VIU's Department of Recreation and Tourism Management.

This study was completed as part of an extended research and study tour that involved undergraduate students from Vancouver Island University and the Faculty of Forestry Resources Technology (Sunyani). These students spent time in two northern Ghanaian communities (Wechiau and Larabanga), where they explored the potential relationships between protected areas, tourism development, and poverty reduction. The overall purpose of the study tour was to provide students with an opportunity to conduct applied research within a cross-cultural context while also exploring issues faced by rural communities in northern Ghana.

Any questions, comments, or concerns about the research presented in this report can be directed towards: Dr. Aggie Weighill at [Aggie.Weighill@viu.ca](mailto:Aggie.Weighill@viu.ca) or (250)-753-3245 ext. 2416.

Copies of the report will be available through the PAPR-Canada website: <http://www.papr.co.ca>, or by contacting Aggie Weighill.

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this research was to identify the perceived benefits and sacrifices expressed by community members in relation to the creation of a protected area in the Upper West Region of Northern Ghana. Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) is a model of community-based natural resource management working to protect endangered hippopotami along the Black Volta River. This research was conducted for Protected Areas and Poverty Reduction (PAPR), a research alliance with partners in British Columbia, Ghana, and Tanzania. In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to explore community member's perceptions of benefits and sacrifices. These were explored on an individual, family, and community level.

Overall, the participants felt that the benefits of the community resource management area greatly outweighed the sacrifices due in part to the creation of new sustainable livelihoods including eco-tourism and extraction of non-timber renewable forest products. In addition, it was felt that infrastructure development resulting from the creation of the sanctuary greatly improved the health of the communities as well as connection between the 17 communities within the sanctuary. A key finding of this research is that for conservation to occur, benefits must be received by those who are making sacrifices. The results of this research can inform community conservation efforts in Ghana, as well as Canada and other countries.

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## Introduction

Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) located in the Upper West Region of northern Ghana was founded in 1999. The Sanctuary was created as a response to government pressure to conserve the hippopotami and to respect diverse cultural values surrounding their sacredness (Sheppard et al.,



2010, p. 271). WCHS recently gained Community Resource Management Area (CREMA) status from the Ghanaian government increasing funding which is beneficial because achieving trust, cohesion, and corporation can be time consuming and expensive (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

Collaboration through partnerships aid WCHS in its conservation efforts. WCHS utilizes partnerships with external groups such as the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC), a Ghanaian NGO, and The Calgary Zoo to use the conservation of hippopotami to create equitable community benefits.

The creation of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) has changed economic opportunities for the 17 communities within the Sanctuary. Certain livelihoods were lost and sacrifices were made due to conservation efforts; however, new livelihoods such as eco-tourism and non-timber forest product extraction, help in diversifying the local economy. The protection of the

hippopotami, other biodiversity, as well as receiving CREMA status from the government has provided direct and indirect benefits for the community. Sheppard et al., (2010) documented that the WCHS conservation efforts provide various conservation and socio-economic benefits to community members (p. 270). However, little research has been done to unveil the benefits and sacrifices based on the perceptions of different Sanctuary stakeholder groups. The purpose of this study was to identify those perceptions.

## Methods and Sample

Prior to conducting data analysis the research team was granted an audience with the Paramount Chief and his divisional-Chiefs (Wechiau naa Imoru Nandom Gomoh ii, Metue naa Banda Naa Chialinaah, and Tokali naa Seuba Walaman-I) and were given permission to conduct project work while on their land. Further, the team was introduced to the community and stakeholders by the Sanctuary Manager (Issahaku Abudulai) and Sanctuary Advisor (Donna Sheppard), thus creating an atmosphere where participants felt more comfortable talking to team members.

The primary research techniques used to collect data were in-depth interviews conducted in a community café setting in which researchers directly or indirectly (i.e., through interpreters) talked to stakeholders from the WCHS. Participants were asked to identify what they perceived as the benefits and sacrifices of the WCHS to themselves, their families, and their



community. These methods were chosen to avoid influencing the responses of participants and to gain a better understanding of the issues as described by participants.

The sample size was approximately 50 people including WCHS Tour Guides, Rangers, and Board Members, and Primary 6 (P-6) students at the Heather Grahame Primary School (within the Sanctuary). The Tour Guides and Rangers were predominantly male (1 female guide); however, the Sanctuary Board and the P-6 students included a notable proportion of female participants. During data collection steps

were taken to minimize the potential impacts of social hierarchy and gendered power relations.



## Data Analysis

The researchers utilized a coding system based upon the questions asked regarding— benefits and sacrifices related to self, family, and community – the two analysts found 53 and 59 themes respectively. These coding matrixes were then compared to ensure inter-rater reliability. After completing the coding comparison, a second stage of coding was conducted in order to group the specific thematic areas into broader categories. These include: infrastructure, livelihoods, conservation, community change, loss of livelihoods, loss of subsistence activities, and relocation.

## Findings

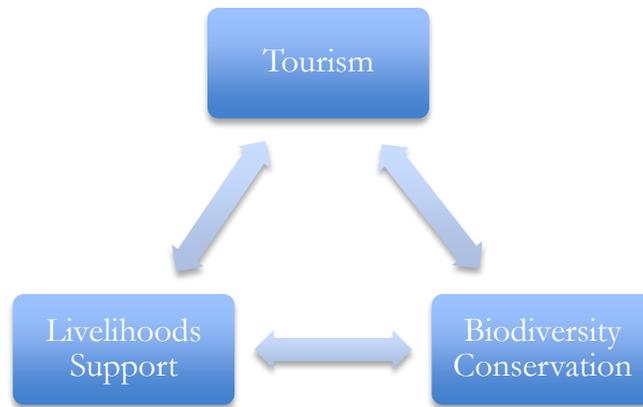
The findings were organized into two categories: the perceived benefits of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary and the perceived sacrifices. Participants were asked to articulate the benefits and sacrifices of the Sanctuary

to themselves, their families, and the community. The following key findings are organized thematically with no segregation between the perceived benefits/sacrifices to community, family, or individual responses. The reason for this was that there was little differentiation between these groups by participants. Most respondents attributed all the benefits and sacrifices to the community. It was observed that this might be due to the more collectivist nature of Ghanaian society. This notion of a collectivist society has been noted in an exploration of human resource management in Africa. Kamoche et al. (2004) found there was a “growing conceptualization of the employment relationship as a social exchange is congruent with the collectivist ethos of Ghanaian and, for that matter, African society” (p. 131).

## Benefits

A majority of the participant’s perceptions of the benefits can be grouped into the following areas: Infrastructure, Livelihoods, Relationships, Conservation, and Community Change. These thematic areas will be described in further detail below. An overlying theme emerged illustrating participants had a strong connection between the conservation of hippos, tourists coming to see the hippos, and equitable community benefits through supported livelihoods. Figure 1 demonstrates this relationship.





**Figure 1: Tourism offering a marriage between biodiversity conservation and livelihoods support as articulated by the participants.**

### *Infrastructure*

The most prominent benefit expressed by the interviewees was the development of new infrastructure. Sheppard et al., (2010) noted that little formal infrastructure existed in Wechiau before the establishment of the

Sanctuary. Study participants indicated the new infrastructure resulted from: a) funding from becoming a CREMA, b) Government recognition of being a regional district, c) profits from eco-tourism, and d) through external partnerships (e.g., Calgary Zoo). The infrastructure projects most commonly



mentioned were the new boreholes, schools, solar lights, and roads within the 17 communities inside the Sanctuary. A tour guide summarized some benefits associated with the Sanctuary:

*“Yes it has [been beneficial]. It brought solar lights and boreholes. It has brought tourists and other*

*foreigners to the area. It helped to bring the schools and school materials.”*

Boreholes were often the first benefit acknowledged by participants, as the provision of clean drinkable water eradicated many health issues in the community, contributing to overall well-being of residents. Women and children are typically responsible for retrieving water for the households. Some participants recognized that their workload had lessened and they were able to invest more time on livelihoods such as shea nut harvesting. A member of the Sanctuary Management Board stated:

*“People used to drink water from dams, now we drink clean water from boreholes. It has decreased waterborne diseases in community members.”*

According to Sheppard et al. (2010), early borehole development inspired the installation of solar lights to interested households. Solar lights were offered to households in exchange for a small amount of money for a maintenance fund (p. 275). Similar to boreholes, access to the solar lights was a benefit mentioned by almost every participant. Specifically, they felt that school children being able to do their studies in the evening was a positive result of the solar lamps.

Participants also consistently identified the development of roads to and within the Sanctuary as a benefit resulting from the protected area. A Ranger said:

*“before there were no roads, [the] Sanctuary has created income to build roads.”*

Prior to the construction of roads, the majority of the communities were connected through a series of paths which made accessibility challenging. Increased unity was said to have resulted from better roadways.

Another benefit recognized was the construction of schools and their proximity to the communities. In particular, participants expressed that more children were attending school on a regular basis because of increased availability. A parent, and member, of the management board said:

*“the children do not have to walk as far to go to school. Their mothers do not have to worry so*

*much about their safety.”*

The development of the Wechiau Visitor’s Centre was seldom mentioned in the results but is worth noting as it is an essential component of the tourism development which is the root of many other benefits mentioned by participants (i.e., gifts from tourists, income from tourism, meeting international visitors, partnerships, and medical supplies). A few also mentioned the construction of a clinic within the Sanctuary, which was an outcome of the government recognizing WCHS as a regional district. A member of the management board said,



*“the Sanctuary allows us to ask the district for things”*

referring mainly to improved infrastructure. The WCHS Management Board, the Sanctuary’s governance structure, empowers rural people by giving them a platform and a voice to engage with government and non-government organizations (NGOs) and create policy level change (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

### *Livelihoods*

Employment opportunities emerged as a secondary theme when exploring perceived benefits. This finding was not surprising as most of the participants were employed or contracted by the Sanctuary. Individuals working as Rangers or Tour guides spoke of tangible and intangible benefits such as uniforms, use of bicycles to get to work, and training opportunities. A Ranger employed by the Sanctuary stated:



*“the sanctuary has provided Rangers with uniforms, bicycles to do work, boots, and training sessions.”*

WCHS utilized knowledge from pre-existing livelihoods in an alternative way. For example, a community member with a previous primary livelihood of fishing would be hired as a boatman to take tourists on the hippo safari, allowing them to use his previous skill set. A guide also explained he was able to integrate traditional knowledge into his new livelihood as a Sanctuary guide,

*“My father’s knowledge of plants as herbalist has helped greatly with plant walks [that he conducts].”*

Other employment opportunities are supported through the WCHS to diversify beyond tourism and conservation. Extraction of non-timber forest products is permitted in the core conservation zone of the Sanctuary, thus women are able to continue harvesting Shea nuts. Shea harvesting was commonly acknowledged as a benefit because it provides economic opportunities, primarily for women.

*“The sanctuary provides women with employment through shea nut harvesting; this now provides them with greater income.”*

A collective was created to increase selling power for the women to the Savannah Fruits Company.

A member of the management board explained:

*“women used to gather shea nuts and sell them at the market for a low price. Since the WCHS, Savannah Fruits Company buys shea nuts from women at a premium price.”*

The success of the collective, when attempts by the exporter had previously failed, shows an increase in social capital amongst community members (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 276). The cooperative currently has 1445 members and acts as a second line of economy for the Sanctuary, primarily for women (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011). The value of shea nuts increases drastically if processed into Shea butter before exporting. Recognizing this, WCHS is currently funding a Shea processing plant; another benefit commonly mentioned as an

alternative livelihood developed as a result of conserving the hippos.

With an influx of international visitors some participants recognized the opportunity to sell handicrafts as a benefit. A small selection of handicrafts are available at the visitors center for tourists to purchase. Overall, interviewees



were able to clearly identify new livelihood opportunities created from eco-tourism and ultimately the protection of the hippopotamus. The following findings compare to those found by Sheppard et al. (2010): “improved infrastructure attracted the shea cooperative and facilitated eco-tourism, which is now sufficiently lucrative to sustain Sanctuary salaries and support capital needs. Tourism has encouraged a nascent trade in arts, crafts, and visitors have sponsored schools and scholarships” (p. 275-276).

Income from tourism was commonly presented as a community and individual benefit. To provide context on job creation as a direct outcome of the Sanctuary, “approximately 50 community members received regular income directly from the Sanctuary, including three stipend receiving land owners, 17 full-time employees and 31-40 commissioned staff. Approximately 100 more people benefitted from occasional employment” (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 274). Without clear economic outcomes, conservation is not likely to succeed in developing countries (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011). To provide an understanding of who is directly benefitting through employment, Table 1 illustrates employment that came to fruition as a result of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary.

Table 1: Employment opportunities directly linked to the operation of WCHS

<i>Position</i>	<i>Nature of employment</i>	<i>Number of people</i>
Executive staff	Full-time	4
Accountant	Full-time	1
Accountant's assistant	Full-time	1
Ranger	Full-time	10
Caretaker of the tourism lodge	Full-time	1
Stipend-receiving landowner	Full-time	3
Tour guide	Commissioned	7–8
Boatman	Commissioned	15–20
Cook	Commissioned	4–6
Household offering cultural tour	Commissioned	5–7
Mason	Occasional	2
Painter	Occasional	2
Unskilled labourer (lodge repairs, water fetching)	Occasional	>50
Dancer	Occasional	50–80
Artist/crafts person	Occasional	10–20

(Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 275).

### *Relationships*

Although relationships were not as prominent a theme as others, stakeholders with a good understanding of the functioning of the Sanctuary stated that since the creation of the WCHS the relationships formed between national and international partners was a benefit. These stakeholders mainly included the Tour guides and the Management board. Major partnerships include the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC) and the Calgary Zoo.



Participants recognized that national and international relationships have resulted in better access to resources and thus allowed the Sanctuary to progress successfully.

Partnerships helped the WCHS create a model of community-based conservation resulting in international recognition, which was also considered a benefit by participants. Specifically, the WCHS received the prestigious United Nations Equator Award in 2008 where the Metue naa Banda Naa Chialinaah (Divisional-Chief) travelled to Spain to receive the award. The Paramount Chief and Divisional-Chiefs have also travelled to Canada on several occasions to visit the Calgary Zoo; travel opportunities for the Chieftaincy were considered a benefit to some interviewees.

Visits from international tourists were also identified as a consistent benefit for participants. One tour guide said:

*“I like to see people coming to learn, it gives me energy to continue – to keep working.”*

Exposure to international visitors was also mentioned as a motivator for school children to learn English. Their curiosity about why the visitors were coming encouraged them to learn more about the Sanctuary’s activities.

### *Conservation*

As noted in Figure 1, the community members interviewed have a good understanding that the conservation of hippos brings tourism to the region and creates new economic opportunities through livelihoods support. Tourism takes many forms in Wechiau including: university field schools, scientists/researchers, development workers on vacation, and general holiday travellers. A member of the management board expressed the benefit of having research tourism,



*“children gain knowledge from research that is carried out by visiting scientists.”*

Many participants communicated that an important benefit of conserving the hippos was to ensure they were there for future generations. Conservation was believed to have two facets: cultural and environmental. The conservation of biodiversity was understood by many as a key factor in order for the hippos to survive. Interestingly, in interviews with school pupils from various communities, the students with the most exposure to tourists could more accurately describe the purpose and activities of WCHS (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 278). The outcome of awareness initiatives is demonstrated through community comments such as,

*“I didn’t know cutting trees was bad. With the sanctuary people have received knowledge on why they shouldn’t cut down trees.”*

As previously mentioned, essentially all community members interviewed comprehended the relationship between conserving the hippos and visitors coming to the Sanctuary. A Ranger reiterated:

*“eating and killing is not as beneficial as protecting.”*

### *Community Change*

Benefits received from the creation of Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary have brought many changes to the community. A member of the management board shared that,

*“the Sanctuary brought people out of the darkness and into the light.”*

Another board member expressed he was

*“[pleased to have] the ability to share the benefits with others, for the greater good of the community.”*

It was said the benefits of the Sanctuary were equitable amongst the 17 communities. As a



result of this, many spoke of the newfound unity between the communities after the establishment of the Sanctuary. Unity was developed and encouraged through the purchase of a Sanctuary vehicle to transport community members to Sanctuary meetings. A Ranger explained:

*“it used to be difficult to get community members together, now there are many meetings which has created unity between individuals, families, and communities.”*

Attending the meetings fostered unity, bringing together community members who would not normally have the opportunity to interact on a reoccurring basis.

In addition to community benefit, individual benefits were expressed. Interviewees articulated feelings of pride, confidence, and increased respect for and from other villagers, “pride in the initiative is palpable at WCHS” (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 278). A Ranger said:

*“becoming a Ranger has held me in higher esteem within the 17 communities.”*

Pride was especially prevalent amongst the Sanctuary management board when speaking of the UN Equator Award and the attendance of foreign and national dignitaries at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sanctuary in 2009. In general, national and international attention was of great pride to the interviewees;

*“strangers want to learn what WCHS has and that is dear to me.”*

Pride also translates to motivation for some employees of WCHS,

*“when people come to see what the WCHS is doing, it gives me motivation to show tourists why WCHS is so important.”*

The P-6 students interviewed for this study attended the Heather Graham School, which was built through a partnership with Calgary Zoo. The research team learned from the Sanctuary advisor that with the onslaught of tourism a tendency for visitors to bring gifts (often in the form of school supplies) for the school arises. Based on observation of how the gifts are distributed, it is WCHS

policy to ensure equitable distribution by awarding school children for achievement opposed to the usual random “hand out” approach. This was not always the case and has resulted in positive change for the community (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Some participants articulated these gifts from tourists as a benefit of WCHS. Another benefit acknowledged is school scholarships provided by the Sanctuary. Scholarships increased accessibility of education for needy but brilliant students;

*“children have been helped through scholarships, building of schools and new teachers.”*

## Sacrifices

Perceptions of the sacrifices to the community, families, and individuals from participants included loss of livelihoods and subsistence activities, loss of tradition, relocation, dealing with tourists, and a few sacrifices directly related to working for the Sanctuary.

### *Loss of Livelihoods and Subsistence Activities*

Most sacrifices articulated by participants were related to restrictions on past livelihoods and subsistence activities such as fishing, hunting, oyster harvesting, timber harvesting, bush fire restrictions, and farming. While most interviewees consistently mentioned these sacrifices, they reiterated they were

*“sacrificing to leave a legacy behind for further generations” and “benefits greatly outweigh the sacrifices.”*

Participants recognized some livelihoods could still be practiced in new locations but with greater difficulty,

*“we used to cultivate crops along the river where soil was*



*fertile, now we have to farm where soil is not.”*

The loss of many livelihoods was mitigated by new income generation opportunities as a result of the Sanctuary. Since the Sanctuary facilitates these livelihoods they are subject to Sanctuary regulations. A member of the management board explained:

*“we used to pick Shea nuts and sell them to whomever. Now [we are] restricted by WCHS to sell only to [Savannah Fruits Company] SFC.”*

### *Loss of Tradition*

Some respondents felt that not being able to hunt the hippos was a sacrifice. A Sanctuary Ranger said:

*“Our forefathers used to eat the hippos, this tradition has died.”*

Rangers also found there were

*“interfamily issues about hunting and taking some blame for working at the Sanctuary.”*

Rangers sometimes catch their family members participating in illegal activities in the Sanctuary and struggle to prosecute them because of the cultural importance of family. Another cultural sacrifice identified was the restriction on collecting traditional medicines in the core zone.

### *Relocation*

Many of the interviewees who had previously lived in the core conservation zone spoke of repositioning their farm or home as a sacrifice; however, the greater benefit of doing so was understood. A P-6 student said:

*“My family was living at the land near the hippo hide and*



*we had to relocate.”*

A guide mentioned:

*“relocation was difficult for some due to cultural ties to the land.”*

Some community members continued to farm outside the Sanctuary, others engaged in alternative livelihoods such as Shea nut harvesting/processing or tourism, and other livelihoods encouraged by the Sanctuary. A majority (83%) of interviewees who were inconvenienced by the creation of WCHS, primarily due to relocation, agreed that if the core zone was converted back into farmland and the hippos disappeared the community would be negatively affected. More specifically, the interviewees expressed these impacts would be: loss of benefits, reduced employment, economic stagnation, less tourism, a halt to infrastructure development, and environmental detriment (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 278).

#### *Being on Display for Tourists*

To provide a unique and authentic tourism experience, the WCHS offers tours of the community of Wechiau and the Lobi community compounds. On a Lobi compound tour, tourists are able to view traditional villages and ways of life. People who live in the compounds open up their homes to tourists; this was viewed as a small sacrifice. Cultural dancing is also offered as a cultural tourism product. Many community members come out to dance for tourists and having to entertain tourists was identified as a sacrifice by some interviewees.

#### *Cons of New Livelihoods*

Lastly, a select group of Sanctuary employees acknowledged seasonal work, hard work, and being paid commission as a sacrifice within their job. A guide said:

*“I like to guide but the work is inconsistent and I only get paid in commission.”*

Although most participants believed the benefits outweighed the sacrifices, it seemed as though they began to list sacrifices for the sake of answering the question.

## Conclusion

Participants articulated benefits and sacrifices associated with the creation and operation of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary and how it affected them personally, their families, and their community. The overlying theme that emerged when exploring this question was the participants' ability to make the connection that conserving the hippos brought tourism to the community and the community benefitted as a result. Perceived benefits of the Sanctuary were mainly connected to: the development of new infrastructure, creation of new livelihoods, partnerships, conservation, and community change. Perceived sacrifices were associated with: relocation, loss of livelihoods and subsistence activities, loss of tradition, dealing with tourists, and sacrifices relating to Sanctuary created livelihoods. Despite the sacrifices identified participants reiterated that the benefits outweighed the sacrifices. A Ranger said:

*"I put all my energies into the Sanctuary because I believe in the benefits of the Sanctuary."*

The support for the Sanctuary was often connected with the importance of creating a legacy;

*"I am sacrificing to leave a legacy behind for future generations."*



## Further Research

Community-based conservation literature is recognizing that including local people in the implementation of conservation strategies is not enough (Hoehn & Thapa, 2009, p. 428). Local people need to be engaged in, or in control of, decision-making processes in order to achieve greater community ‘buy-in’. The stronger the community ‘buy-in’ the more likely the development and implementation of community-based conservation initiatives will be successful. The advisor of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary attributes some of their success to the clear and explicit nature of the conservation messaging. Additionally, community members must be involved in the development and delivery of those conservation messages, not an outside agency (Donna Sheppard, personal communication, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Throughout this case study it emerged that if community members are truly engaged and they receive benefits they are much more likely to support the conservation area and be able to articulate those benefits. To further understand community member’s perceptions, this methodology could be developed into a longitudinal study to explore how perceptions change over time and as the Sanctuary develops new initiatives.

A limitation to this study was the sample was composed of participants who directly benefitted from the Sanctuary, primarily through employment. While attitudes amongst the inconvenienced residents through the creation of WCHS has been conducted in a previous study (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 278-279), further exploration of the perceptions of the benefits and sacrifices from community members who do not directly (ie. staff) benefit from the Sanctuary on a regular basis would be beneficial. Additionally, further research investigating the level of engagement in terms of decision-making would provide insight into the attitudes of community members. “Participation in local decision-making is an important variable to assess attitudes and perceptions of local people: it creates a sense of empowerment...is likely to lead to adoption of responsibility towards a resource, and has been shown to produce more positive perceptions towards conservation”

(As cited in, Hoehn & Thapa, 2009, p. 428).



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