

# Does social capital really enhance community based ecotourism? A review of the literature

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## Abstract

Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is a unique type of tourism which was introduced as a way of alleviating the impact of tourism activities on the environment as well as striking a balance between local people and the natural environment. It is a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people implying that there is a necessary social dimension to ecotourism. The results from the review of literature suggest that social capital plays a critical role in the successful CBET ventures. However, most CBET ventures are failing due to a number of problems such as unequal distribution of economic benefits, poor or lack marketing knowledge and poor infrastructure. This paper suggests that, there is a need for government intervention to help CBET ventures for them to be successful. It is argued in the paper that social capital can be a route through which the accumulation of other forms of capital can be achieved and contribute to enhancing sustainable community based ecotourism.

**Key words:** Community Based Ecotourism, natural environment, conservation



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## Introduction

Over the last decades the tourism industry has been growing rapidly and its impact on the environment and the community at large has become a cause of concern to both tourism researchers and practitioners (Chaminuka, *et al.* 2012; Liu, *et al.* 2013; Reimer & Walter, 2013). This growth has attracted the attention of many researchers and the area has received a considerable attention (Oslo's 2007 Global Ecotourism Conference; Sayyed, 2013; Bego & Maltezi, 2011; Musavengane & Steyn, 2013). This has led to the birth of a unique type of tourism, Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) in a bid to alleviate the impact of tourism activities on the environment as well as striking a balance between local people and the natural environment.

Community based ecotourism, according to (Community based tourism handbook, 2004) is a unique type of tourism with characteristics quite different from mass tourism. It is much concerned with the impact of tourism activities on the community and environmental resources. The term ecotourism is frequently debated in tourism literature. In other words there is no generally accepted definition for Ecotourism (Nelson 2004; Alejandro & Mara, 2014; Moskwa, 2011; Reimer & Walter, 2013). Reimer & Walter (2013) argue that the main focus of ecotourism is on preserving the natural attraction that draws in tourism. The International Ecotourism Society (2004) defines CBET as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people implying that there is a necessary social dimension to ecotourism. Ceballos-Lascurain (1996: 241) echo the same sentiments by defining ecotourism as *"travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas"*.

CBET, according to the World Wide Fund (WWF) report, 2001 report, takes this social dimension to a further stage by involving the local community. Thus, CBET can be defined as another form of tourism where the local community has substantial control over and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community (Khanal & Babar, 2007; Jones, 2005; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Reimer & Walter (2013) note that CBET appears to hold greater promise in resolving the contradiction between conservation imperatives and local and native rights by reinforcing a mutual relationship between environmental conservation and local economic livelihood. Thus, in essence CBET helps to preserve natural resources, but further acknowledges that conservation initiatives should also involve people living within the areas (Jalani, 2012).

From the above definition of CBET, it can be noted that for efforts of CBET to be fruitful, it requires maximum support and participation from local communities. In other words Social capital plays a pivotal role in the success of CBET ventures (Liu *et al.*, 2014) yet the issues of local community participation and involvement in tourism are rarely discussed in scientific literature (Hakim & Nakagoshi, 2008). Social capital is a new term in tourism literature hence its definition is not yet agreed upon by a number of researchers thus its definition is still debatable (Woolcock, 1998; Portes, 1998; Jones, 2005; Okazaki, 2008; Ha, 2010). Despite this, social capital aspect is centered on networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups (Putnam, 1995; Baksh *et al.*, 2013).

Social capital comes from the interaction of many factors, each of which needs social relationships which in turn, forms the way society reacts (Lyon, 2000). Generally, social capital is defined as the networks of relationships that foster the development of resources and benefits that can be used for

the good of the individual as well as the collective (Portes 1998, Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Pretty & Ward, 2001; Pretty & Smith, 2003). Pretty & Smith, (2003) argued that strong positive relationships within and between social groups can significantly lower the cost of working together, facilitate cooperation, reduce the likelihood that individuals will engage in activities that result in negative impacts to the group and lead to quicker innovation in response to new or previously unmet needs. Social capital consists of three main features; trust, reciprocity and co-operation and when these elements are strong with the community, there are more likely to enhance CBET ventures in that community (Zahra & McGehee, 2013).

The potential of Social Capital to enhance CBET ventures has been examined by a number of academics (Jones, 2005; Thakadu, 1999; Jóhannesson *et al.*, 2003; Juska & Koenig, 2006; Macbeth *et al.*, 2004). These academics concur that social capital plays a major role in enhancing CBET ventures. Jones (2005) in the survey conducted in Gambia, it was concluded that Social capital plays a crucial role in the development of ecotourism. Social capital appeared significantly as the main mechanism that push and pull people to participate in their local tourism development (Pongponrat & Chantradoan, 2012). Putnam (1993) considers social capital as the main mechanism to influence people to participation for community development. Though a number of studies have been conducted to establish the role of social capital in supporting CBET ventures, little work has been done so far to synthesize literature on this particular aspect. There is a need therefore, for a study which combines findings of the previous studies in order to come up with a general acceptable role of social capital in the development or in enhancing community based ecotourism ventures.

In light of the aforementioned importance of social capital in enhancing Community

based ecotourism ventures, this paper seeks to sythesise the work that has been done on the role of social capital in enhancing community based ecotourism ventures as a way of establishing the exact contribution that Social Capital plays in tourism. Compiling literature on this aspect will help to uncover the role of social capital in community based ecotourism since the paper will synthesis studies conducted in various fields as well as different locations. This paper will also shed light on the challenges that can be faced by CBET ventures and how social capital can be used to mitigate those challenges.

The article commences with a point of departure, outlining problem statement and objectives of the paper. Thereafter it highlights methodological considerations followed. Theoretical conceptualisation of social capital will be briefly discussed. It then reviews the importance of community based ecotourism and highlights challenges faced in the sector. Thereafter, the role of social capital is reviewed in light of reviewed case studies. Finally, the paper synthesizes the discussions and engages critically with the issue of the role of social capital in CBET. The article is concluded with recommendations based on the discussions and pointers for future research.

### **Point of Departure: Problem statement and objectives**

Local community participation is one of the pillars for sustainable development especially in community based ecotourism. It is believed that in order to be sustainable, any efforts to sustain ecotourism options must have strong community support (Chencai *et al.*, 2012; Coria & Calfucura 2012; Abesha & Ongaro, 2013). A review of literature shows that social capital can positively enhance the success of community based ecotourism (Park *et al.*, 2012; Bennett *et al.*, 2012; Zahra & McGehee, 2013). However, little work has been done so far to synthesize what has been done so far to establish the role of

social capital in the enhancement of community based ecotourism. In the same line of thinking Liu *et al.*, (2014) pointed out that empirical research on social capital and community based ecotourism is still limited. This is maybe because the concept of social capital is still new in tourism research (Jones, 2005). Thus to address this, this paper will review literature on the role or impact of social capital on community based ecotourism in order to establish what has been done so far and identify the major findings from previous research. This will assist in identifying gaps in the literature which needs further attention.

The actual questions that the paper seeks to answer are: What are the major challenges being faced by community based ecotourism ventures? What are some of the factors which affect the success of community based ecotourism? Does social capital plays a role in the development of community based ecotourism? Through a review of literature this paper seeks to achieve the following four objectives. Firstly, to establish whether there is a relationship between social capital and the success of Community Based Ecotourism. Secondly, to establish the factors which cause failure of Community Based Ecotourism ventures (CBET). Thirdly, to identify what has been done to assess the impact of social capital on the success of Community Based Ecotourism in the South African context and. Lastly, to establish the benefits of Community Based Ecotourism to the local people as well as the environment at large.

The results can potentially extend the available theoretical knowledge on the role of social capital in community based ecotourism, which will further promote the formulation of strategies that will socially or financially benefit both community members and ecotourism ventures (both old and new). Ultimately, successful community based ecotourism will pave way for sustainable livelihoods of community members and promote further development of ecotourism business.

## **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION**

This paper is a qualitative desk study on social capital in CBET. The data was collected through a review of global articles and reports on the role of social capital in community based ecotourism. A total of 27 peer-reviewed articles focusing on CBET in the West, North and East parts of the world were reviewed and added significant value to the discussions and analysis in the paper. In addition to that 11 journal articles focusing on CBET ventures in were drawn within the African continent including South Africa. Combined together; various elements from articles added value to the discussions around the role of social capital in managing CBET's in global rural areas. These sources were used as part of data collection procedure, and critically examined for information relating to the role of social capital in community based ecotourism. Relevant data was also drawn from a number of studies that investigated natural resources management of rural environment. In essence, the methodology is based on different case studies in the mentioned regions. It therefore implies that the objectives of this paper were achieved through a review of literature.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: SOCIAL CAPITAL**

At the centre of social capital literature, is the works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putman. Social Capital was divided into social, economic and social forms by Bourdieu (1983, in Chowdhury, 2013). Although categorised differently; each form of social capital complements each other in such a way that, the resources held by a member of the group will collectively help the group through relations and interactions between group members.

Social capital is relatively abstract unlike other forms of capital such as human, financial and social capital (Liu, 2014). It

exists in social relationships rather than in tangible possessions. Social capital nevertheless has direct impact on other types of capital (Esterhuysen, 2012), for example strong social capital attracts superb personnel (*human capital*) and enhances growth which ensures higher financial opportunities (*financial capital*) (Department of International Development, 2000; Grichnik *et al.*, 2014). The degree of connectedness, quality and quantity of social relationships within a particular community is mainly used when defining the concept (Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Harpham *et al.*, 2002).

Social capital can be categorised into three main dimensions: i) *structural and cognitive forms*, which are divided based on whether social capital relates to state of mind of community members or on socio-economic institutions; ii) *micro* (household/individual), *meso* (regional/community) and *macro* levels (national), which are categorised based on the level of economic structure that social capital affects; iii) *bonding, bridging, linking and bracing* types, which are based on social the roles that social capital works within a particular community or between individuals in different communities (Bain & Hicks 1998, Harpham *et al.*, 2002; Liu *et al.* 2014; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013). These types of social networks are crucial in co-management of CBETs.

Structural social capital is a tangible and objective concept, which focuses on the organisational structure in a community (Liu *et al.*, 2014; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013). Previous definitions on structural social capital address the scope of local level institutions, both formal and informal and the composition and practices that enhances mutually beneficial collective actions (Krishna & Shrader, 2000), or the intensity or extent of associated links within a community (Harpham *et al.*, 2002). Whereas, cognitive social concept is subjective as it focuses on the intangibles such as values, attitudes, norms and beliefs among individuals (Jones, 2005; Krishna &

Shrader, 2000), as well as trust, perceptions of support, sharing and reciprocity amongst members of a specific population (Fisher, 2013:15; Liu, *et al.*, 2014). In essence, cognitive social capital focuses on the feelings of people while structural social capital relates to their action; these two types of social capital are therefore complementary and enhance community development (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013).

On the other spectrum, bonding social capital consists of strong relationships within a horizontal network such as friends, family, neighbours and colleagues (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013). It is works within the community that facilitates the cooperation and collective action amongst the members in a particular environmental collaborative; while bridging social capital consists of relationships or ties with the members of other communities with similar social, economic and cultural status (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013), such as relationship between two conservancies or environmental collaboratives. A study done by Narayan and Cassidy (2001) found out that, bridging social capital helps communities to improve the access to the outside such as NGOs, markets and government.

## **1. Reviewing Community Based Ecotourism**

This section unravels the importance of community based ecotourism particularly its economic, environmental, social, political and cultural benefits.

### **a. The importance of community based ecotourism**

The concept of community based ecotourism has propelled high level discussions on the benefits and best ways of implementing the CBET strategies; such as, the Johannesburg 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the 2002 Quebec's World Ecotourism Summit and

Oslo's 2007 Global Ecotourism Conference (Chaminuka *et al.*, 2012). These gatherings and other researches outlined many benefits of CBET that can be classified into five main themes; economic, social, cultural, political and environmental status (Chaminuka *et al.*, 2011; Bego & Maltezi, 2011; Sayyed, 2013). The sub-sections below will therefore provide a review of the benefits of CBETs based on these five themes.

*CBET's has extensive Environmental Benefits for communities.* One of the core principles of ecotourism is to promote environmental conservation (International Ecotourism Society, 2004). Among a plethora of reasons for developing community based ecotourism ventures, one of the reasons is to restore community degraded land (Blangy & Mehta, 2006). In order to ensure effective and efficient restoration and protection of land and biodiversity, various approaches such as creation of parks, protected areas, nature reserves and implementation of ecotourism projects (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

A comparative study on the role of ecotourism in Ecological Restoration (ER) done by Blangy & Mehta (2006) in Phinda Game Reserve, South Africa and The Baboon Sanctuary in Belize, found out that community based ecotourism can positively promote ecological restoration. One of the fundamental goals of communities when starting CBET projects is to restore their degraded land through funding. For example, due to the alarming diminishing of the endangered Black Howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*) a Community Baboon Sanctuary was created in Belize on a voluntary basis on private farms. Most community members pledged to keep the forest intact, to preserve fruit trees and other species vital for the survival of the howler monkeys. Due to the success of the pilot project, many farms were pledged towards this initiative. CBET is now fully

blown as resembled by various activities in the area such as; canoe trips, horse riding, monkey viewing, bird watching, and relaxing in thatch-roofed canabas. The local people are continuously trained on how to operate and maintain CBET ventures (Blangy & Mehta, 2006).

Furthermore, in their exploration study on the environmentally responsible behavior of tourists engaged in tourism, Chiu, Lee & Chen (2014) find out that ecotourism can positively change the attitude or behavior of tourists towards ecological resources. Tourist positive perceptions of ecotourism are formed when ecotourism providers offer services that satisfy tourist needs which would subsequently increase tourist participation in the ecotourism activity. Furthermore; the higher the degree of tourist's involvement in ecotourism activities, the deeper is their psychological feelings for ecological areas. Chiu, Lee & Chen (2014), therefore concluded that; the involvement of tourists is important in their behavior model – this behavior model emphasizes that satisfaction and activity involvement have partially mediating effect, and thus are drivers of environmentally responsible behavior.

*“In the model of environmentally responsible behavior, perceived value has a direct (0.25) and indirect impact (0.11, 0.12) on environmentally responsible behavior, with total effect of 0.48. This shows that the perceived value of eco-travel activity positively influences environmentally responsible behaviour directly, while satisfaction and activity involvement can additionally strengthen environmentally responsible behavior”* (Chiu, Lee & Chan; 2014:326).

In complementing Chiu, Lee & Chan (2014) study is a study on the effect of local cultural context on the success of community-based conservation by Waylen, Fischer, McGowan, Thirgood, Milner (2009). The study found out that; interventions providing community outreach and education on

conservation were significant in changing environmental attitude of tourists and local people (Waylen *et al.*, 2009). Although community participation is integral in enhancing positive environmental attitude, it is not a simple prescription to guarantee success of eco-activities, whereby utopia is assured if communities have complete control (Waylen, *et al.* 2009). For example, a forest management intervention in Tanzania that was participatory and decentralised, yielded good ecological outcomes but inequitable social outcomes because resources and power were controlled by local elites (Friis & Treue, 2008).

Furthermore, *CBET's are a vehicle for social and political benefits*. Ecotourism has created bridges for many to cross and established vital links amongst community members. Tran & Walter (2014) study at Giao Xuan CBET project, Vietnam found out that, ecotourism promotes affirmative action policies by empowering women to be involved in CBET ventures. The study revealed that, ecotourism can empower women in four dimensions; economic, political, social and psychological. Before the introduction of CBET projects in the most of the local women used to earn wages from collecting marine and aquaculture products from water, where they would immerse half of their bodies into the water and often suffered from skin-related diseases.

During the interview, one of the woman eluded that *"it's so much easier to work in CBET. I just use my own knowledge, my understanding about my village to guide tours. I can easily earn 130,000 Dong (about \$6.00) in around two to three hours, compared to seven hours of hard labor in the water. With this income, I can have extra money for my family's daily expenses or for my kids' education"* (Tran & Walter, 2014:122). Scheyven (1999), also support this as the author indicated that, the community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interests of all

community groups, provides a platform through which people can raise questions relating to the ecotourism venture and have their concerns dealt with. Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture normally seek out the opinions of community groups (including special interest groups of women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups) and provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making bodies.

CBET's brings *Economic Benefits* to both communities and entrepreneurs. For ecotourism to be regarded as successful there should be tangible economic benefits on the host communities (Blangy & Mehta, 2006). The economic benefits that accrue to the society will directly lead to improvement of community livelihoods. According to Chambers & Conway (1992), livelihood comprises all forms of assets, capabilities, activities and the access to the fundamentals required for a means of living. In communities where CBET functions, livelihoods is directly connected to human capital where unemployment rates are high; social capital and financial capital where there is lack of income diversification (Lepper & Schroenn, 2010).

In a study on community-based tourism ventures in Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust (KRST), Central District in Botswana; Sebele (2010) find out that local people were permanently employed by the sanctuary. During the interview with the Chief Warden it was reported that 26 community members were permanent staff members, with 23 coming from the 3 member villages of Serowe, Paje and Mabeleapudi and the other 3 from other parts of Botswana. A number of people were also engaged in casual work and the money they earn is vital for their livelihood (Sebele, 2010). Furthermore, Mbaiwa & Stronza (2010) view these small financial benefits from ecotourism as significant in improving the living standards of indigenous communities.

Cash income from ecotourism will furthermore stimulate income diversification and risk management amongst households as reflected in the empirical evidence from studies that were done by Stronza (2009) & Lapeyre (2010). For instance, a study by Jalaria (2012) on the perceptions and of local people on the impacts and importance of ecotourism in Sabang, Philippines revealed that livelihoods of community members positively improved due to successful community based ecotourism ventures.

Most household in the Subterranean River depends on ecotourism as it is their primary source of income. This is evidenced by the paradigm shift from fishery and agriculture to ecotourism in Sabang, Palawan. A sample of 153 community members was used in this study and the livelihoods of 112 respondents were directly depending on ecotourism while 41 respondents livelihood was not related to ecotourism. A similar study on 3 communities (Sankoyo, Kwai & Mababe) in Botswana was done by Mbaiwa and Stronza (2010), they found out that, traditional activities such as hunting, gathering, livestock and crop production which degraded the land were replaced by ecotourism which created a lot of job opportunities for local people.

Mbaiwa & Stronza (2010) therefore concludes that, ecotourism positively increases '*land value*'; compared to the land allocated for other activities such as agriculture, logging, or ranching. A point of close on the benefits of ecotourism; social, financial and human capital obtained through ecotourism serves as a security in times of unplanned events and unforeseen expenses (Lepper & Schroenn, 2010).

#### **b. Challenges of community based ecotourism ventures**

Community-based ecotourism although it has many benefits as discussed above, it faces a number of challenges as any other business form. Unequal distribution of

economic benefits of ecotourism is one of the major challenges of CBET ventures (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Unequal distribution of economic benefits refers to imbalances between the economic benefits obtained by local people where CBET ventures function and the benefits that accrue to external communities (people outside the protected areas). This is mainly common in developing countries where there are vast opportunities of ecotourism growth and economic incentives to enhance this growth. Instead of these economic incentives being channeled in the right direction, they end up used by the elite for personal development or serving foreign interests (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). For example, He *et al.* (2008) reported that economic benefits which accrue from China's three key ecotourism sectors (hotel & restaurants, souvenir sales and infrastructure construction) are remitted to stakeholders outside the local community.

Lapeyre (2010) provided similar evidence in a research conducted in Namibia where inbound and tour operators tend to be the major beneficiaries of ecotourism since are the ones who control most of tourism flows in the country. The capacity of local communities in generating income for development therefore relies on vital '*commercial links*' with tour operators and agents. Failure to create these links derails the functioning or development of local communities. From this point of view, relationship between tourism operators and indigenous communities is both symbiotic and agonistic (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Lapeyre, 2010). Indigenous communities they get jobs such as tour guide, lodge positions while tourism operators depend on community land for trekking and for the visitors to stay. Borman (2008) notes the growing concern on the perceptions of indigenous communities on their relationship with tourism operations – which they termed exploitive. Thus, this led to resource conflict between indigenous people and tourism operators. For example, tourism operators purchased or occupied



land of cultural significance to indigenous communities. On the other hand, local communities have barricaded access to their land (Borman, 2008).

Some studies find out that, lack of resources and skills limit local community's bargaining power (Coria & Calfucura, 2008). Although the role of community cohesion is widely accepted as significant in the success of ecotourism business, there is a veil of ignorance on the actual benefits that will accrue on the communities when compared to national averages (i.e. health conditions, unemployment or population). A study by Buultjens *et al.*, (2010) found out that; operating ecotourism business in remote areas has various challenges such as remoteness, climate change, lack of access to skilled personnel and other physical conditions. '*Human capital*' weaknesses in communities therefore exclude other communities from direct ecotourism benefits as the unskilled tend to be left out. Coria & Calfucura (2012) argues that, due to lack of human capital in communities, NGOs are often engaged in preparing proposals and planning processes which leaves the human capital gap wide as usual.

Poor '*financial capital*' also limits indigenous communities in accessing funds through formal funding channels as they depend on communal land which is mostly rejected as collateral security (Meza, 2009). Such land cannot be used as collateral as it is communally owned and marked with diverse conflicts; for example, indigenous laws in Chile prohibits the selling or trading of communal lands which equally means that the land is valueless in the sense of collateral securities (Meza, 2009). Furthermore, securing biodiversity requires much of external funding and communities find it difficult especially if they lack skills on proposal writing, planning and management skills (Garnett *et al.*, 2007).

On the other hand, He *et al.* (2008) and Lapeyre (2010) argues that, not every

community member will be able to venture into ecotourism business as they are high sunk costs in starting the businesses. Consequently, only the elite community members will benefit much from ecotourism as they will be the ones with more financial capital to venture into the business. These can be diverse businesses such as purchasing a car to carry tourists to different areas. For example, Fennel (2008) and Meza (2009) find out that; in the Mapu Lahual Initiative in Chile and Gales Point Manatee in Belize there is need of transport to ferry tourists to the protected areas but due to high entry costs involved many community members were not able to benefit from the opportunity.

A study conducted by Lukhele (2013) on the challenges faced by CBET ventures in Swaziland revealed that, poor visitor experience due to limited resources, accessibility problems due to poor roads and difficulties in making information about the ventures to the public were the major challenges faced by many CBET ventures in Swaziland. To date most tourist rely on the internet and social media platforms when searching for information about destinations to visit thus most CBET ventures are located in rural areas where it almost impossible to have internet access and this makes it difficult for these ventures to market their services (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004:354).

## **2. The role of social capital in promoting community based ecotourism**

Since the pioneering work on the concept of social capital by Coleman (1988) which was popularized by Putnam (1995, 2000), there has been wide researches on the concept (Compton & Beeton, 2012; Liu *et al.*, 2014; Land *et al.*, 2014) and the concept has been applied to a number of studies (Esterhuysen, 2012; Vervisch & Vlassenroot, 2013; Grichnik *et al.*, 2014) in a number of fields (Vemuri & Costanza, 2006; Zali *et al.*, 2012;

Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013) to enhance understanding of the role or significance of social capital in day to day living in diverse phenomena. This section will review the role of social capital in CBET and related projects in light of the above discussion.

Firstly, an interesting study done by Youdelis in Northern Thailand, where local people were legally prohibited to operate community based tourism projects separate from the ones offered by the Thailand's Department on National Park (Youdelis, 2013). A group of charismatic leaders initiated the CBET project although some community members were skeptic of the program and for bringing in tourists into the community. The project was initiated due to vital links of engagement with the Headman. As a result of the success of this first project through participation of few community members, some decided to breakaway away from the CBET and opened their own ecotourism businesses along with it – entrepreneurship. Youdelis (2013) termed this form of entrepreneurship 'neoliberalised' form of market engagement since it promotes free competition and supporting of all players.

In a study on the role of social capital in encouraging residents' pro-environmental behaviors in community-based ecotourism; Liu and colleagues find out that social capital enhances the understanding of pro-environmental behaviours in CBET's where residents have limited means to economic emancipation (Liu *et al.*, 2014). The study further confirms the correlation between financial concerns and social capital; where cognitive social capital has an influence on the pro-environmental behaviors of local residents. Amongst a lot of positive impacts, is the restoration and maintaining of vibrant ecosystems within communities. In addition to that, the study proves the relationship between positive economic benefits and community participation. Hence, both social capital and community participation influences the behavior of local people towards the environment (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

"Compared with the short-term effect of economic benefits, social capital directs residents' behavior through the community's norms, rules, and values, which is a means to achieve long-term sustainability and will be mutually beneficial to both residents and the environment" (Liu *et al.*, 2014). Jones (2005) adds that social capital can improve a community's ability to sustainably manage natural resources through generating appropriate norms, rules and enhancing trust and reciprocity.

Local culture plays a significant role in CBETs. More related to community based ecotourism is the study of wilderness. Huntington (2002) work reported the positive relationship between wilderness protection and traditional knowledge among North American indigenous communities. Basing on Huntington's study, Watson *et al.*, (2003) conducted a research on the role of wilderness protection in mediating the inherent relationship between indigenous people in the North and wilderness landscape. The authors emphasized Salmon's kincentric ecological principle which suggests that indigenous people have experienced the environment in totality or as a whole and that parts of the system are interrelated. According to Watson *et al.*, (2011), traditional knowledge can be viewed as the quantitative information about these interrelationships that has accumulated across generations of people. In their study in Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana, U.S., Watson and colleagues concluded that social capital which includes protection of indigenous people and relatively intact, complex systems is a very significant contributor to sustainability and cultural heritage (Watson, *et al.*, 2011). Although not per se on ecotourism but more related, a study done on the effects of local cultural context on the success of community-based conservation intervention by Waylen and peers found out that, resources can successfully be protected directly by shared values such as traditional beliefs (Waylen *et al.*, 2010). The authors also find out that, conservation interventions are more

successful if they respond to local institutions and cultures.

Through social capital, a more welcoming environment for tourist can be created thereby improving the image of the destination. This can in the long run promote the sustainability of community based ecotourism ventures (Kencana & Mertha, 2014). The same authors, Kencana and Mertha (2014) further highlighted in their finding on the people participation in sustainable ecotourism in Bali that, community involvement especially in the beginning of development can positively affects the destination's quality which could possible help to minimize conflicts regarding to ecotourism development between community members and the initiators.

## SYNTHESIS OF ANALYSIS

A review of literature shows that community based ecotourism is one part of tourism which is growing so fast and is very important in promoting local tourism. It is also realized from the literature that a considerable amount of work has been

conducted specifically to assess or analyse the importance of community based ecotourism to the tourism industry at large (Bego & Maltezi, 2011; Reimer & Walter, 2013; Alejandro & Mara, 2014; Khanal & Babar, 2007; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Jalani, 2012). The influence of social capital on community based ecotourism ventures also attracted the attention of many researchers in the field of tourism (Li *et al.*, 2014; Mauerhofer, 2014; Okazaki, 2008; Ha, 2010; Zahara & McGehee, 2013). In the South African context, the aspect of community based ecotourism has also received some attention; this is evidenced by the Johannesburg 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a study by Blangy and Mehta in Phinda Game Reserve. This shows that even in developed countries the need to conserve natural resources is a concern. From a review of literature, it was realized that there are some benefits which accrue from CBET ventures and that social capital plays an important role in the development and success CBET.

Thus, the following sections highlight the major findings from literature review. Table 1 shows the benefits of community based ecotourism as highlighted in the literature.

Table 1: Benefits of community based ecotourism

The benefits of community based ecotourism	
<b>Environmental benefits</b>	Restoration of community degraded land through initiatives such as creation of protected areas, nature reserves and implantation ecotourism projects ( Blangy & Mehta, 2006; Coria & Culfucura, 2012)
	Change the attitude of or behavior of tourist towards ecological resources through seeing the initiatives by local people (Tran & Walter, 2014).
<b>Economic benefits</b>	Improvement of community livelihoods through creation of employment which increase the community's disposable income. (Sebele, 2010; Lepper & Schroenn, 2010; Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2010).
	Improvement in community infrastructure (Manu & Kuuder 2012).

<b>Political benefits</b>	promotes affirmative action policies by empowering disadvantaged groups (Tran & Walter, 2014.)
<b>Social benefits</b>	Creation of bridges to cross and establish values among community members thereby strengthening social bonds within the community by promoting cooperation among community members, Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build a successful ecotourism venture.(Tran & Walter, 2014;).
<b>Cultural benefits</b>	Preservation and appreciation of community cultures which motivates the local people to participate in the CBET ventures.

The main role played by social capital in promoting community based ecotourism are; influences the behavior of local people towards the environment thus, it can improve a community's ability to sustainably manage natural resources through generating appropriate norms, rules and enhancing trust and reciprocity (Jones (2005; Liu *et al.*, 2014;), creating a welcoming environment which can improve the image of the destination which in the long run promote the success of the venture (Kencan & Mertha 2014), it can act as a mechanism that push and pull people to participate in their local tourism development (Pongponrat & Chantradoan, 2012).The impact level of social capital in CBET is reflected by attaining specific good governance criterion which include; participation, inclusiveness, responsiveness, equity, rule of law, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, freedom of information, efficiency and consensus building (Muller, 2012). Trust and norms of reciprocity increase the willingness of both internal and external stakeholders to cooperate because "people have confidence to invest in collective activities, knowing that others will also do so" (Pretty & Ward, 2001:210). As a result of collective action, social capital may accumulate because social capital is created by well-knit processes of working together (Naughton, 2014).

The main challenges of community based ecotourism as suggested in the literature are difficulties in controlling the carrying capacities of target areas, limited access of the poor to the tourism market and insufficient knowledge about tourism service skills, management and implementation at local level (Manu & Kuuder, 2012). Unequal distribution of the economic benefits also hampers the progression of CBET ventures (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Lepyre, 2010; He *et al.*, 2008). Poor visitor experience which affect the image of the destination, poor accessibility and shortage of marketing resources are some of the major challenges of CBET ventures (Lephele, 2013).

The implications of these findings are twofold; firstly the government should support the initiatives of ecotourism ventures. For instance one the major challenges being faced by CBET ventures is inaccessibility which can be resolved with intervention of the government in providing such ancillary services. Assisting the local communities in the marketing of these ventures will go a long way in supporting their sustainability. The local governments should also involve the community when crafting frameworks on community based ecotourism. Including the local members at an infant stage of the ventures will help them understand the reasons of the ventures and how it will benefit from it. Community based ecotourism agents or

initiators need to exercise fairness when distributing income from these ventures so as to lure more local community member in the ventures. Bridging social capital will therefore help to grow relationships between government and communities. Bridging social capital consists of relationships or ties with the members of other communities with similar social, economic and cultural status such as relationship between two conservancies or environmental collaboratives (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013). A study done by Narayan and Cassidy (2001) reviewed that, bridging social capital helps communities to improve the access to the outside such as NGOs, markets and government. If bonding capital is strong there will be strong local tiers which will eventually create good relationships with external actors, thereby increasing bridging capital.

## CONCLUSION AND POINTERS TO FUTURE RESEARCH

Community based ecotourism venture if properly managed have the ability to transform the lives of poor local people by creating employment thereby increasing their disposable income. CBET is a branch of tourism which can alleviate the impact of tourism on the environment at large and benefiting the local people simultaneously. Research literatures shows that the benefits of CBET are not only limited to economic improvement of the local people but also stretches to political, environmental, cultural and social benefits. Social capital on the other hand was found to be one of the major aspects which can positively affect the perpetual success of CBET ventures. The study at hand was a review of literature; it implies that the conclusion made was based on the results obtained by other researchers, which is one the limitation of this study. The authors are therefore proposing that future studies on social capital and community based ecotourism must use a different approach; a survey can be used in future especially in the Southern

Africa Region. Southern African people have a culture of relying on one another and helping each other as families and friends. Therefore, if social capital is well cultivated in communities with tourism ventures there will be a bumper harvest for both local people and entrepreneurs.

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