Residents’ attitudes towards tourism in Bigodi village, Uganda

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Abstract

This research was conducted in the rural village of Bigodi, Uganda. Bigodi is a village of approximately 385 adults and has been involved with tourism since 1991. Bigodi’s primary attraction is a forested wetland managed by a local tourism cooperative. Tourists are guided through the wetland in search of primates and tropical birds. Village life and local culture are also experienced. This research investigated residents’ attitudes towards tourism in Bigodi. Data were collected and analyzed with qualitative methods. Results show residents have consistently positive attitudes towards tourism. Positive attitudes result from resident’s belief that tourism creates community development, improves agricultural markets, generates income, and finally, that tourism brings random good fortune. Using the Theory of Reasoned Action, it was hypothesized that positive attitudes would lead to pro-tourism behavior. Observations of behavior over 6 months in Bigodi support this hypothesis. Implications for tourism development in poor rural areas are discussed.

1. Introduction

Uganda is an equatorial nation in East Africa of nearly 27 million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005). Roughly 80% of Ugandans are dependent on subsistence farming to meet their daily needs (Uganda Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, 2002). Uganda’s president has referred to subsistence farming as “disguised unemployment” (President Museveni, 2002). While Uganda’s subsistence farmers produce enough food to support a family, they produce little surplus for trade. Thus, capital for investment is limited and rural Uganda is extremely poor. In an effort to create economic opportunities, the central government is now promoting rural tourism (Uganda Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry, 2002, personal communication). In the 1950s and 1960s, tourism played a significant role in Uganda’s economy, however the industry confined itself to a few enclaves and there was little interaction with rural people (Ouma, 1970; Senior Community Conservation Officer, Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2003, personal communication). Now for the first time, rural Ugandans are encountering tourism. The literature provides examples of communities throughout the world which have rejected tourism (Aziz, 1995; Sindiga, 1996) and of others which have embraced it (Oakes, 1999; Wilson, 1994). Thus, tourism should not be viewed as universally appropriate.

One indicator of tourism’s appropriateness is residents’ attitude towards tourism. The study reported here used qualitative methods to elicit residents’ attitudes towards tourism, as well as the factors which influenced those attitudes, in the rural community of Bigodi, Uganda. This is because tourism is a new phenomenon there dating only to the early 1990s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, tourism in Uganda was non-existent due to severe political instability and civil war (Assistant Commissioner, Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry, 2002, personal communication).
Therefore, results of this study can contribute to the development of a form of tourism appropriate for poor, rural people which is able to foster positive attitudes and inspire pro-tourism behavior.

2. Setting

Bigodi is a small village situated on the edge of Kibale National Park (KNP) in western Uganda. Consistent with rural Uganda, most residents are subsistence farmers. Unlike most other villages, Bigodi has been involved with tourism since 1991. Bigodi’s attraction is a communally owned, forested wetland called Magombe Swamp. The swamp is home to a variety of primates and birds. Local interpreters guide tourists through the swamp on well-maintained boardwalks and trails. The trail system also passes through Bigodi providing tourists with opportunities to view village life and learn about local culture.

Tourism development did not come easily for Bigodi’s residents. Tourism was never part of their leisure repertoire. The local language did not even have a word to describe it. Furthermore, political realities precluded residents from ever experiencing tourism as hosts. Not surprisingly then, the idea of tourism was introduced to Bigodi by an outsider, a US Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV). From the residents’ perspective, this new idea of comparatively wealthy foreigners traveling to their humble village seemed outlandish. For many, it conjured memories of British imperialism. For this reason, residents’ initially feared tourism was a plot by foreigners to steal village land. As a result, residents reacted to the idea with suspicion, anxiety and fear (Lepp, 2004). Thus, the tourism development process was slow, tedious and on rare occasion inflammatory.

Under these conditions, it took nearly 2 years to develop a simple tourism infrastructure. The seeds of success were sewn when the PCV convinced six, well respected, local elites to form a tourism cooperative. The cooperative became known as the Kibale Association For Rural and Economic Development (KAFRED). KAFRED proposed to manage a small portion of the swamp for tourism and to use tourism revenue for community development. Under the PCV’s guidance, members drafted a constitution describing KAFRED as not for profit. The constitution also described the terms and duties of membership. For example, the constitution allowed each member an equal vote in decision making, stated that officers would be elected on a 2 year basis, and required all members to pay a one time fee of about 10 US Dollars. However, the idea of using communal land for tourism increased concerns that a plot to steal land was afoot. These concerns were assuaged when KAFRED extended free membership, complete with all privileges, to the peasant farmers whose land bordered the project area. This doubled KAFRED’s membership and greatly legitimized the project in the eyes of the community.

KAFRED’s eventual success was assisted by geography as well. Bigodi is situated on the border of KNP and in close proximity to KNP’s main tourist center, called Kanyanchu. Kanyanchu is off the beaten path. A tourist must travel over 40 km of rough dirt road to arrive there. Kanyanchu offers simple, backpacker type lodging only. For this reason, overnight visitors are typical of the novelty seeking tourists described by Cohen (1972) as explorers and drifters. A survey of visitors to Kanyanchu (Obua, 1996) found the primary motivation was to see wildlife; however 50% mentioned culture and people as a secondary motive. For such people, Bigodi has obvious appeal.

Indeed, KAFRED’s initial marketing efforts targeted Kanyanchu’s tourists. It was an easy sell. Tourists arrived in Bigodi from Kanyanchu soon after KAFRED opened for business. KAFRED immediately began generating revenue. As the cooperative’s relative prosperity became apparent, residents wanted a voice in how the money would be spent. Thus, KAFRED’s membership grew to near its present size of 42. In addition, residents who were not members were able to participate in the cooperative via an annual meeting rooted in local tradition (Lepp & Holland, 2006).

By 2003 (the time of this research), KAFRED was receiving approximately 75 tourists a month. The price for touring the swamp was 10 US Dollars. KAFRED’s most notable achievement was the construction of a secondary school, the first in the area. The school was fully operational, registered and licensed with the state. Tourism had created other opportunities as well. One resident successfully operated a backpacker hostel and several women sold handcrafts. It was in this setting that research into residents’ attitudes towards tourism was conducted, twelve years after the idea of tourism was introduced to Bigodi.

3. Literature review

The theoretical significance of understanding residents’ attitudes is their connection with behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) explain this connection with their Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA is a hierarchical model which asserts that behavior is influenced by behavioral intent, behavioral intent is influenced by attitudes and subjective norms (perceived social pressure for a particular behavior), and both of these are influenced by beliefs. In a meta-analysis of past research, Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw (1988) found widespread support for the validity of TRA. In a tourism context, a variety of studies have shown a connection between tourists’ attitudes and their behavioral intentions (Hudson & Ritchie, 2001; Kim & Littrell, 1999; Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2004; Yu & Littrell, 2005). Touristic behavior has also been explained by TRA. For example, Brown (1999) used the hierarchy to show how tourists’ beliefs about climbing Australia’s Ayers Rock influenced their attitudes about climbing and their actual climbing behavior.
Yet TRA’s application as a behavioral predictor is not without caveats. For instance, McKenzie-Mohr, Nemiroff, Beers, and Desmarais (1995) found that while pro-conservation attitudes predicted behavioral intent, pro-conservation attitudes only occasionally predicted pro-conservation behavior. This was especially true when pro-conservation behavior required significant effort. Likewise, Ryan (2000) found tourists’ attitudes about conservation were poor predictors of environmentally conscious touristic behavior. Kaiser, Wolfing, and Fuhrer (1996) and Kaiser and Gutscher (2003) suggest that TRA sometimes fails as a predictor when general measures of attitude are used to predict specific behaviors. Consequently, they found that a general measure of attitude towards the environment was a good predictor of general conservation behavior. Considering the above discussion, TRA can provide a fertile ground for hypothesizing relationships between residents’ attitudes towards tourism and residents’ behaviors. In this regard, TRA’s importance for tourism management is the possibility that fostering positive attitudes towards tourism among residents might lead to pro-tourism behaviors.

More commonly, research into residents’ attitudes towards tourism has been used to judge tourism’s appropriateness for a particular community. The intuitive understanding is that positive attitudes are an indication that the social and cultural obligations of tourism development are being met. In this regard, several variables have been used to explain residents’ attitudes towards tourism including enjoyment of benefits, involvement with decision making, stage of destination life cycle, tourist type, economic dependence on tourism and the degree of cultural difference between residents and tourists (Brohman, 1996; Brown, 1998; Drake, 1991; Horn & Simmons, 2002; Lawson, Williams, Young, & Cossens, 1998; Simmons, 1994; Timothy, 1999). The relationships between these variables and residents’ attitudes merit further discussion.

Butler (1980) described tourism development as a series of stages through which a destination evokes—exploration, involvement, development, consolidation and stagnation. Residents’ attitudes depend, in part, on these stages. This is described by Doxey (1976) who proposed that residents’ attitudes are positive during the initial stages of tourism development but become increasingly negative as a destination evolves towards stagnation. A possible addendum to this is Lepp’s (2004) suggestion that at destinations with no prior knowledge of tourism, initial tourism development will be met with suspicion, anxiety and fear. This was the case in Bigodi when tourism was introduced in 1991.

Contrary to Doxey (1976), Horn and Simmons (2002) found destinations at similar stages of tourism development can have very different attitudes. One explanation of this is the difference in the relative economic importance of tourism at each destination. Similarly, Smith and Kranich (1998) found communities desirous of economic development had better attitudes towards tourism than economically satiated communities. They developed a typology identifying host communities as either tourism saturated, tourism realized or tourism hungry. Tourism hungry communities can maintain positive attitudes despite negative impacts as long as economic benefits are forthcoming. In general, economic benefits are an important influence on residents’ attitudes towards tourism (Harambopoulos & Pizam, 1994; King, Pizam, & Milman, 1992; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997).

Economic benefits, most notably revenue, are what make tourism so attractive to developing nations (Brohman, 1996; Brown, 1998; Weaver, 1998). However, developing nations often rely on Western investors to fund tourism development (Konadu-Agyemang, 2001). As a result, a significant percentage of tourism revenue flows out of the developing world back to the Western investor (Britton, 1996). This is known as leakage. It has been estimated that as much as fifty percent of tourism revenue leaks from the developing world (Honey, 1999). Significant leakage can cause negative attitudes towards tourism.

However, leakage can be reduced by encouraging smaller scale tourism developments. This enables local investors to participate (Brohman, 1996; Burns, 1999; Honey, 1999; Loon & Polakow, 2001). Yet, in countries like Uganda, the investment necessary for even the humblest tourism development is beyond the means of most people. For this reason, Brown (1998) suggests the appropriate form of tourism development for rural Africa is the cooperative. Cooperatives gather small investments from many people, making it possible to raise the necessary capital. As a result, tourism revenue remains in local hands and is multiplied through the economy several times (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Cooperatives allow for increased local participation in tourism planning and management as well as increased local enjoyment of tourism’s benefits. For these reasons, a cooperative neighboring Uganda’s Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park has fostered positive attitudes towards tourism (Lepp, 2002).

Typically, rural tourism cooperatives are imbued with unique local flavors as traditional building methods, foods and customs are incorporated into the project. Thus, local norms and standards may be more prevalent in cooperatives than in large-scale, Western funded developments. This difference influences the type of tourist attracted to cooperatives. Cohen (1972) suggested that tourists could be identified by the degree of novelty or familiarity they seek. Rural cooperatives would be expected to attract novelty-seeking tourists and repel those tourists who need the comfort of familiar surroundings. Smith (1989) suggests that residents’ attitudes towards tourism are influenced by the tourists’ abilities to adapt to local standards. Novelty seeking tourists would be expected to better adapt to local conditions than those tourists in need of familiarity. Accordingly, novelty-seeking tourists would have less of an impact on residents’ attitudes.

Despite some tourist’s desire to adapt to local norms and standards, the vast cultural differences between Western...
tourists and rural people of the developing world often remain obvious. These differences can influence residents’ attitudes towards tourism (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Lawson et al., 1998). In rural areas, the excesses of tourism present quite a contradiction to residents’ humble lifestyles. The perception that tourists are excessive consumers of sex, alcohol, food and natural resources can be the source of negative attitudes (Aziz, 1995; Ebron, 1997; Gossling, 2002; Mansberger, 1995; McKitrick, 1993; Sindiga, 1996; Teye, Sonmez, & Sirakaya, 2002). Dogan (1989) found residents protect themselves from various impacts by adjusting to tourism in one of five ways: resistance, retreatism, boundary maintenance, revitalization and adoption. Dogan predicted residents’ adjustments will be homogenous in communities where tourism is in its initial stages of development. However, as a destination matures, various adjustments might emerge, some in conjunction with tourism and some in opposition. The success or failure of adjustment strategies influences residents’ attitudes.

As the literature reviewed shows, a variety of factors can influence residents’ attitudes towards tourism. Intuitively, positive attitudes among residents are one indication that tourism development is appropriate for local conditions. The theoretical significance of understanding residents’ attitudes is the relationship between attitude and behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The purpose of this study was to identify and explain residents’ attitudes towards tourism in Bigodi, Uganda. Although residents’ behavior was not directly measured, regular and repeated observations of residents’ behavior over the course of the study allow the researcher to hypothesize some relationships. The following section describes the methods of the study.

4. Methods

From 1996 until 1998, the researcher lived and worked in rural Uganda (although not in Bigodi). As a result, the researcher is familiar with several Ugandan languages and cultures. Preliminary investigations were conducted in Bigodi during the summer of 2001. Primary data collection occurred in Bigodi over 6 months in 2003. Qualitative methods were used. Research by Shanahan, Pelstring, and McComas (1999) found that qualitative methods produce a more detailed and nuanced assessment of attitude than quantitative methods. This in turn allowed for better predictions of behavior.

The primary sources of data were “active” interviews, informal conversation and participant observation. Active interviewing is a qualitative method likened more to a conversation than an interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Active interviews empower the respondent to direct the conversation within an area of interest specified by the researcher. This allows for the injection of new and often unexpected ideas. Indeed, respondents freely injected thoughts and feelings throughout the interview process. However, attitudes towards tourism were of particular interest so each interview-included questions like “How do you feel about tourism in Bigodi?” and, “How do you feel about KAFRED?” Respondents were then asked to explain their feelings.

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed while informal conversations and observations were recorded daily in field notes. All data was analyzed within a grounded theory framework using the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initial analysis coded each line of data with a descriptive word or phrase. In a process called focus coding, frequently appearing codes were selected to sort larger amounts of data (Charmaz, 2002). Focused codes represented specific themes and cut across multiple interviews. As focused codes emerged, they guided consequent interviews allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of important themes. Focused codes were then united into concise categories of data. Grounded theory is developed as the researcher seeks to understand each category and the relationships between them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Qualitative analysis software (NUDIST) was utilized in this process. NUDIST was developed to relate to the logic of grounded theory construction. It allows for the automated retrieval of text categorized by particular analytic concepts. Its ability to sweep vast quantities of data for related text encourages a more rigorous analysis of the data (Seale, 2002). All results were regularly cross checked with informants to assure accuracy and reliability.

As is common with the method of constant comparison, theoretical sampling guided the data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling is conducted in conjunction with the data analysis and continues until each criterion of interest has been saturated with information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Warren, 2002). Therefore, residents of Bigodi were interviewed until the subsequent analysis of those interviews failed to reveal new information. Respondents were chosen by the researcher with the help of informants to achieve a representative sample of the community in terms of age, gender, education, involvement with tourism and location of household (in Bigodi’s trading center versus Bigodi’s countryside). This process yielded 48 interviews out of a population of approximately 385 adult residents (12.5%). Only one request for an interview was refused.

The representativeness of the sample was based on comparison with available demographic data and consultation with local informants. Of the 48 residents interviewed, 29 were men (60%) and 19 women (40%). Local government data such as tax roles and immunization records shows that women make up approximately 45% of Bigodi’s adult population. Twenty-five people interviewed stayed primarily in Bigodi’s trading center (52%). Similar local government data shows approximately 55% of Bigodi’s residents live in the trading center. Life stage was substituted for age. Eight respondents were young adults (16%), 19 were adults (39%), 14 were older adults (30%), and 7 were elderly (15%). Age related demographics were not available for Bigodi. However, in
Uganda, the average life expectancy is 52 years and the adult population is weighted towards young adults and adults (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005). Fourteen of the respondents were directly involved with tourism (29%). This means they were employed by KAFRED, KN, a tourist hostel, or were members of the KAFRED cooperative or the Bigodi Women’s Group (the women’s group manages a tourist canteen and sells handcrafts). Informants calculated that overall, 90 residents of Bigodi were directly involved with tourism using the same measure (23%). Concerning education, 29 had a primary school education or less (60%), 12 completed O-level (junior high school) (25%), 5 completed A-level (high school) (10%), and 2 had a two year certificate beyond A-level (4%). Educational demographics were not available for Bigodi, however prior to KAFRED building the O-level school in 1993, there were only primary schools in the area. Thus, the majority of residents have a low level of formal education. Two additional interviews were conducted with Ugandans living near Bigodi who had an in-depth knowledge of Bigodi’s history and culture. From this sample, the major themes regarding residents’ attitudes towards tourism were elicited using the methods described. Results are presented below. The names of all respondents have been changed to protect anonymity.

5. Results

Forty-five of the 48 respondents (94%) expressed positive attitudes towards tourism. The three respondents who did not express any positive attitudes towards tourism were farmers bordering KNP. Farmers bordering KNP were the poorest in Bigodi. Their energy was consumed protecting crops from the park’s wildlife. As a result, most were not engaged with tourism, had little knowledge of tourism, and had neither positive nor negative attitudes about it. In general, negative attitudes were rarely expressed despite the researcher’s probing. For example, one resident became exasperated after several probes for negative attitudes rhetorically stating, “What bad things have tourists brought? They don’t steal, they don’t abuse people, when they come they are happy and get along with locals.” (Katiti, 2003, personal communication). As residents explained their attitudes, four benefits and two costs emerged as dominant themes.

5.1. Costs

The costs were inflation and crop raiding. Both costs had little effect on overall attitude. Inflation was only mentioned by four individuals (8%). Interestingly, these individuals were substantially profiting from tourism. As the owner of Safari Tourist Hotel said with chagrin, “locals charge me more because they think I am paid in dollars” (Lubega, 2003, informal conversation). This cost was not mentioned by subsistence farmers or casual laborers who occasionally found work in tourism.

Crop raiding by wild animals was a much greater problem and, within the context of tourism, was mentioned by 24 respondents (50%). Farmers along the edge of KNP and KAFRED’s tourism project suffer the most. However, in-depth discussion revealed residents generally do not consider crop raiding a cost of tourism. Instead, crop-raiding is considered a cost of conservation. Indeed, conservation and tourism are closely linked in the minds of Bigodi’s residents owing to the success of KAFRED’s nature-based attraction. However, residents tended to view tourism as compensation for crop-raiding rather than a cause. This worked to create negative attitudes towards KNP and positive attitudes towards KAFRED despite the fact that both protected-areas harbor crop-raiding wildlife. A significant difference is that residents believe the tourism revenue KAFRED shares with the community is compensation for crop raiding while believing KNP does not do enough to compensate residents (Lepp & Holland, 2006).

5.2. Benefits

Tourism’s benefits were community development, income, improved agricultural markets and random good fortune. Community development as a result of tourism was mentioned in 45 interviews (94%). There was a widespread belief that even residents who do not receive direct benefits at least receive indirect communal benefits. For example, a farmer living on the edge of KAFRED’s swamp was asked if he benefited from tourism. He replied, “Not quite, personally I have not. But communally I have benefited. I am part of the community so the development going around I am part of it” (Kamuhanda, 2003, personal communication). The most commonly mentioned communal benefit was KAFRED’s secondary school. It had a powerful effect on people’s attitudes, influencing even some of Bigodi’s most estranged residents—farmers on the edge of KNP. A widow, farming on the edge of KNP was asked to weigh the costs and benefits of tourism. She replied:

The benefits are greater because building a school is so good. It helps a very big area. It is a small portion of those in that area that suffer from animals. Those can be helped later as the area improves from education… now our children can get an education and the area can develop, so you cannot say that tourism is bad because of a few people who are suffering from the wild animals (Mbabazi, 2003, personal communication).

However, the three respondents who did not mention this theme were all farmers bordering KNP. Income as a benefit was mentioned by 26 respondents (54%). Merchants in Bigodi’s trading center were clear beneficiaries. One explained:

I like Bigodi for one thing—it is all about tourism and tourism’s benefits which affect how people get their income… here there is reliable income from these tourists who buy things like mineral water, things of
It is not only merchants who have increased their income through tourism. Backwards linkages have extended opportunities to farmers, artists, laborers, and even the tailor who occasionally repairs tourists’ tents and clothing. Nearly everybody occasionally supplemented their income through tourism. A woman who made peanut butter for tourists explained:

Everybody is benefiting from tourism. If you have something to sell you get money. Before people were suffering, there was no way to get money; but since tourism came to this place now everybody at least knows what to do. There are different activities; people are getting money in every corner (Akello, 2003, personal communication).

With strong linkages to the local economy, tourism has improved the market for local agriculture. Twenty-eight respondents (58%) mentioned this benefit. As one farmer explained, “Tourism is good. We get its value in almost every household, because whoever has tomatoes can sell them, whoever has eggs and cabbage can sell them” (Tamale, 2003, personal communication). This works in two ways. First, tourists have increased the demand for local agriculture, and most of what Bigodi’s tourists eat is produced locally. Second, some residents of Bigodi are now fully employed in tourism and no longer have time to farm; therefore they buy food from others. An elderly man, still farming, explained “when those people working get money from tourism so do we because they buy food from us” (Mzee Isabirye, 2003, personal communication). While no one referred to this as the multiplier effect, most were well aware of this economic principle.

A side effect of improved agricultural markets is an improved diet. Residents indicated that before tourism, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage and cauliflower were not locally available. The first tourists brought those items with them. Bigodi’s farmers quickly noticed and began planting these vegetables. Today, these vegetables are also enjoyed by residents. Thus, the market for this produce is gaining the stability of local demand. As a local teacher explained:

People have started eating new crops because of tourism. At first people used to not eat tomatoes. Only after tourism did people start growing tomatoes and those things to sell to tourists. Then, in the end, they started eating these things themselves. So even if tourism ended right now they would have to continue with these crops (Bagonza, 2003, personal communication).

While it was the self-determination of farmers that allowed them to benefit from tourists’ demands for new fruits and vegetables, there is also a sense that chance is a benefit of tourism. Chance, as used by respondents, means unexpected, random good fortune. Fourteen respondents (29%) mentioned random good fortune as a benefit of tourism. A resident of Bigodi told a story illustrating this exactly. He said:

One time a boy leading a goat happened to pass by three tourists drinking at a hotel in Bigodi and one tourist asked the boy, how many people does it take to finish that goat? The boy said eight. The tourist asked how many are in your home and the boy said four. The tourist said there are three of us so you bring one more, that equals eight. Here is 30,000 [USh] for that goat. Take it home, prepare it and we’ll come for dinner. You can collect us here. Before the boy ran off the tourist gave the boy a little more money to buy drinks. At six the boy returned, gathered the tourists and they went home and feasted! They ate the whole goat plus the mother had prepared some other food. The tourists asked if they could take photos and they were allowed so they photographed the whole evening and when they left they were so satisfied they gave the family another 10,000 [USh]. So, as you see, tourism gives everyone a chance! (Emmanuel, 2003, personal communication).

Others in Bigodi have enjoyed unimaginable good fortune because of tourism. For example, four residents traveled to the United States because of connections formed through tourism. All expenses were covered by foreign donors. From residents’ perspective, the trip was a result of tourism’s random good fortune. Others in town are faithfully waiting for chance to shine on them. One of KAFRED’s guides identified the best part of his job as the chance that a lady from the US might provide her address and a relationship develops. This was surprising considering he had one of the few full-time jobs in town, and that he has never maintained communication with any tourists.

In Bigodi, like most places on earth, money and good fortune are the objects of much desire. Although they provide status, across Uganda people sometimes describe themselves by their absence. It is not uncommon to hear “no money” in reply to “how are you?” Considering this, it is easy to see why the money, opportunity and good fortune created by tourism has been welcomed in Bigodi. Thanks to tourism, residents believe that Bigodi is developing, that they have greater access to income, that agricultural markets are improved and that good fortune could unexpectedly chance upon anyone. These beliefs explain why the vast majority of Bigodi’s residents have positive attitudes towards tourism.

6. Discussion

Results indicate a drastic change in residents’ attitude towards tourism since its introduction in 1991. At that time, residents reacted to tourism with anxiety, suspicion and fear. In fact, they believed tourists would steal their land (Lepp, 2004). This shows the euphoria Doxey (1976) associated with the initial stages of tourism development is not automatic. Over the next decade, residents slowly came
to believe that tourism provides benefits in the form of community development, income, improved agricultural markets, and a chance at good fortune. By 2003, the belief that tourism provides these benefits resulted in widespread positive attitudes about tourism. This is in accordance with the Theory of Reasoned Action which states attitudes are directly influenced by beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The uniformity of attitude is explained by Dogan (1989) who predicted small, rural communities’ initial response to tourism development will be homogenous. It is not until later stages of tourism development that responses vary.

Surprisingly, participation in decision-making was not mentioned in connection with attitudes about tourism. This is despite the prevalence of local participation in Bigodi’s tourism. Perhaps the reason for this is that residents take participation in tourism for granted. It is the only form of tourism development they have ever known. However, when residents’ attitudes towards KAFRED’s approach to protected area management were compared with attitudes towards KNP’s approach to protected area management the results showed that residents favored KAFRED’s approach because it allowed residents to participate in decision making. In contrast, residents disapproved of KNP’s management which excluded locals from decision making (Lepp & Holland, 2006). Thus, participation in decision-making is important. However, it may become a more salient theme after residents have experienced exclusion from decision-making.

As described by Butler (1980), initial tourism developments in Bigodi were small scale and imbued with local flavor. This attracted tourists in search of novelty who were more adaptable to local standards (Cohen, 1972). These tourists have less of an impact on residents than tourists with a need for familiar Western amenities (Smith, 1989). In addition, such tourists typically put more money in the hands of local people through their desire to experience local conditions (Hampton, 1998; Scheyvens, 2002). Nearly all of Bigodi’s residents perceive an opportunity to access this money. This has been accomplished through the integration of tourism and agriculture. Tourism has improved agricultural markets in two ways. First, demand from residents has increased as some are now fully employed in tourism and can no longer grow their own food. Such residents spend a portion of their tourism earnings on food multiplying tourism revenue throughout the community (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). In addition, residents are beginning to eat the vegetables tourists enjoy, although such foods have never been a part of the local diet. This diversifies markets and bolsters demand. Second, agricultural markets have been improved through tourist demand. Nearly all of the tourist demand for food is met by local farmers. Therefore, tourists’ food expenditures remain in local hands.

This is in contrast to the often cited problem of capital leakage. Foreigners have difficulty accessing local markets and prefer extraneously established supply channels (Brohman, 1996; Brown, 1998). For example, in Botswana’s Okavango Delta a foreign dominated tourism industry has yet to forge significant linkages with the local economy, including agriculture (Mbaiwa, 2005). As a result, tourism provides little economic benefit to the region. In contrast, Bigodi’s tourism infrastructure is locally owned and managed. Tourism’s decision makers are deeply embedded within local networks and agriculture is a major beneficiary.

Bigodi’s primary tourism decision makers are the members of KAFRED. KAFRED is a cooperative managed exclusively by local people. Brown (1998) suggests cooperatives are the most appropriate type of tourism venture for rural Africa. Cooperatives raise more investment capital than a single rural farmer, encourage local participation and keep management in local hands. An additional advantage, demonstrated by KAFRED, is that cooperatives have a broader interest than a single, profit seeking investor. Therefore, cooperatives have greater potential to serve the wider community. The best example of this is KAFRED’s use of tourism revenue to build a secondary school. The school generated tremendous support for tourism. A tourism cooperative next to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda had a similar effect on residents’ attitudes suggesting tourism cooperatives are a good fit in rural Uganda (Lepp, 2002).

A benefit not previously discussed in the tourism literature but identified in Bigodi is the belief that tourism provides everyone with a chance at good fortune. An example is the story of the boy who by chance sold his goat to tourists. Adding to the good fortune, the tourists paid the boy’s family to roast the goat and partake in the feast. In addition to the money, the meat was a windfall. Bigodi’s subsistence farmers cannot afford to buy meat. Meat is a special meal reserved for holidays. This theme indicates that much of tourism is still a mystery and more education is needed. For example, if tourism were better understood, residents might recognize that there is an opportunity to host tourists in their homes. Such opportunities could be planned and marketed instead of being left to chance.

Throughout the data collection, residents were quick to identify tourism’s benefits. However, identifying costs was difficult. Many said there were no costs. This is surprising considering the literature identifying tourism’s negative impacts in rural Africa (Aziz, 1995; Ebron, 1997; Erisman, 1983; Gossling, 2002; Mansberger, 1995; Sindiga, 1996; Teye et al., 2002). One explanation for the lack of negative attitudes is residents’ hunger for economic development. Lindberg and Johnson (1997) found that residents’ interest in economic gain was a much stronger predictor of attitude than perception of community disruption. Likewise, Smith and Krannich (1998) found communities interested in economic development had better attitudes about tourism than communities content with their level of development.
Communities interested in development were labeled “tourism hungry.” This label fits Bigodi perfectly. An additional explanation is that some of tourism’s negatives like sexual promiscuity (Ebron, 1997; Teye et al., 2002) and alcohol abuse (Aziz, 1995; Sindiga, 1996) are commonplace with or without tourism. One exception may be tight-knit, faith-based communities such as Muslims along the Kenyan coast (Sindiga, 1996). Bigodi, however, has its share of residents operating on the moral fringes of society. One resident proudly described local expertise with alcohol saying, “people here really know how to drink, on weekends you just find people crawling down the road for home’” (Informal conversation, 2003). In fact, the owner of Bigodi’s Safari Lodge believed tourists should not frequent local bars. He worried tourists would be upset by the drunkenness sometimes found there. The idea that Bigodi is a morally pristine setting into which tourism dumps its vices would seem funny to residents. This is an important realization. It indicates residents already have methods for coping with such behavior.

The negative impacts residents did mention were relegated to a small segment of society. The two negative impacts mentioned were inflated prices and crop raiding. Inflation resulting from tourism has long been observed (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). However, in Bigodi, it seemed to mostly affect individuals fully employed by tourism. Subsistence farmers did not mention the problem. This indicates that price increases were applied selectively. In fact, there are no fixed prices in Bigodi, everything is negotiable. Many merchants mentioned they start negotiations at a higher price for tourists than residents; evidently, the same treatment is given to full-time employees of the tourism industry.

The other impact, crop raiding, was much more severe for those affected. However, residents do not attribute the problem directly to tourism. Instead, crop raiding is attributed to the protection of natural areas which harbor wildlife. Therefore, the managers of protected areas should be involved with finding a solution. Residents believed KNP’s managers were doing little to solve the problem. This created negative attitudes towards KNP (Lepp & Holland, 2006). To the contrary, residents believed KAFRED addressed the problem by sharing tourism revenue as compensation. Previous research has confirmed tourism’s ability to partially compensate victims of crop raiding (Mehta & Heinen, 2001; Picard, 2003; Sekhar, 2003; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001). In Bigodi, this belief led to positive attitudes towards KAFRED (Lepp & Holland, 2006).

Yet residents’ positive attitudes towards KAFRED and tourism are of limited value if they do not lead to pro-tourism behavior. According to Ajzen & Fishbein’s Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (1980), the relationship between attitude and behavior is mediated only by behavioral intent. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that positive attitudes towards tourism would increase intentions to behave in a manner conducive to tourism and this would lead to an increase in pro-tourism behavior. While neither behavioral intent nor behavior was directly measured in the study, several observations support this hypothesis.

First, the natural resource upon which Bigodi’s tourism is based (Magombe Swamp and all its wild inhabitants) is actively conserved by the entire community. This was not the case before the introduction of tourism (Lepp & Holland, 2006). Second, the researcher regularly observed residents interacting with tourists in a positive way. This was true even of residents not involved with tourism. For example, residents routinely offered directions or other voluntary assistance to tourists. Furthermore, the researcher observed residents inviting tourists to join in local football matches and bike races. On occasion, the tourists obliged. Concordantly, behavior which could be considered adverse to tourism such as begging, shouting at tourists, stalking tourists, and incessantly hustling souvenirs was not observed. Thirdly, local participation in Bigodi’s tourism cooperative, KAFRED, dramatically increased from just six members in 1992 to 42 members in 2003. In addition, KAFRED holds an annual meeting in which advice from the broader community is solicited and this is a well attended event (Lepp & Holland, 2006). Thus, indirect evidence supports the hypothesis that positive attitudes about tourism lead to pro-tourism behavior. However, this relationship deserves a more rigorous analysis.

7. Conclusion

Residents’ attitudes towards tourism were positive. Positive attitudes were connected with the belief that tourism creates community development, opportunities for earning income, improved agricultural markets, and a chance at good fortune. Bigodi was nearly homogenous in this regard. In the discussion of residents’ attitudes, several strategies emerged which can be used to develop an appropriate form of tourism for poor, rural people: encourage cooperatives; encourage the use of local materials and local design; target backpackers and other tourists eager to adapt to local conditions; foster local decision making; integrate tourism with local agriculture; and use tourism revenue for community development. In Bigodi, these strategies have created positive attitudes towards tourism and an apparent increase in pro-tourism behavior.

The only inconsistency among those interviewed was farmers bordering KNP. Some of these farmers were so beleaguered from crop raiding they had little opportunity for community engagement, knew little of tourism and had neither positive nor negative attitudes towards it. This shows how agriculturalists are vulnerable to the same wildlife which attracts tourists. In Uganda, a farmer’s entire harvest can be destroyed overnight by a troop of baboons or a single elephant. In Bigodi, tourism’s benefits partially mitigate negative attitudes towards protected
areas which result from crop raiding (Lepp & Holland, 2006). However, mitigation of negative attitudes is not enough. Just compensation is a worthy goal. The feasibility of an insurance program should be considered. Farmers’ contributions could be matched from tourism revenue. This would create further incentives for tourism managers to work with farmers on minimizing risk. Considering this, the continued injection of new ideas is needed. This can occur through education. Bigodi’s residents learned of tourism just over a decade ago. Their learning curve has been steep. Yet, much of their newly acquired knowledge has translated into success. Nevertheless, there is much more for them to learn. This is illustrated by the widely identified benefit of “chance.” The perception that some of tourism’s benefits arrive by chance indicates a lack of understanding. If better understood, such benefits could be anticipated and captured. This raises an important question: to what extent does a lack of tourism knowledge constrain development? Without increased knowledge, local enterprises are at risk of being overtaken by more tourism savvy outsiders, as predicted by Butler (1980). This would most likely create negative attitudes about tourism (Doxey, 1976). What can be done at the local level to prevent such changes from occurring? As Bigodi demonstrates, local benefits can secure tourism’s short-term acceptance. Therefore, a community’s ability to expand upon these benefits may be the key for sustaining positive attitudes towards tourism into the future.

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