



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2023, hybrid conference
“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

Game farming as sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation strategy in Okavango rural communities in Botswana

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Abstract

The push for environmental stewardship and justice continues to find relevance in debates on the relevance and importance of local-level participation in natural resource governance. Rural communities situated within wildlife management areas (WMAs) could play vital roles in enhancing sustainable environmental conservation if utmost consideration is given to their indigenous ecological knowledge and livelihoods within the context of a holistic natural resource conservation. This paper addresses game farming as a strategy for achieving both sustainable livelihoods for local communities and environmental conservation. Rooted in the Ostrom’s socio-ecological framework, the analysis focuses on the need to create opportunities for local farmers to diversify their livelihoods from core farming to a combination of both farming and game rearing within the context of climate change in an arid environment where mainstream farming may prove daunting due to the prevalent harsh climatic conditions that often jeopardise traditional, peasant agriculture. Understandably, the reactionary attitudes of indigent local communities to centralised conservation approaches continues to lead to massive failure in conservation objectives in developing economies. The urge to minimise human wildlife conflicts and enhance local people’s sense of place and ownership of resources, therefore, are veritable avenues for enhancing individuals’ drive towards environmental stewardship and sustainable rural entrepreneurship development. The recent introduction of certain guidelines by the Botswana’s Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) on how to help small farmers acquire ownership of game and manage them on their farms is, therefore, a step forward in achieving biodiversity conservation goals. The paper thus employs critical analyses to provide a road map for driving natural resource conservation and sustainable rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta, Botswana.

Keywords: Botswana, entrepreneurship development, environmental stewardship, game farming, natural resource conservation, Okavango Delta, rural communities, small farmers