

**THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN THE MITIGATION OF WILDLIFE
CRIME IN QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK-UGANDA**

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RS19M54/019

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM MEDIA AND
COMMUNICATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION OF UGANDA
CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

May, 2024



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda. Through a qualitative methods approach, the research investigated the perceived level of community involvement and the effectiveness of participatory communication methods employed in wildlife crime mitigation efforts. Findings reveal commendable progress in raising awareness and fostering collaboration among community members. However, a significant gap exists in the implementation of true participatory communication methods, with current strategies falling short of empowering communities to actively engage in decision-making processes. Challenges such as persisting negative attitudes and bureaucratic communication approaches hinder the effectiveness of mitigation efforts. Recommendations include a paradigm shift towards genuine participatory communication, empowering communities to become active decision-makers and fostering transparent and responsive approaches from wildlife conservation authorities. This study contributes to enhancing community involvement and the efficacy of strategies for wildlife crime mitigation, ultimately fostering sustainable conservation efforts in Queen Elizabeth National Park and beyond.

DECLARATION

I, **Faith M. Mundua**, declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the guidelines of Uganda Christian University and is original. The dissertation has not been presented to any other education institution for an award. This topic of study was also inspired by my position as a former attaché in the communications department at Uganda Wildlife Authority.

Sign.....: .

Date.....26/03/2024..

APPROVAL

I, certify that the dissertation titled “*The role of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Uganda*” was conducted under my supervision and has been submitted for examination with my approval in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Arts in strategic communication of Uganda Christian University.

Sign: 

Date: 20/03/2023

DR ANNET KEZAABU

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family members for their encouragement, prayers, and support during my study. Without them, this journey would not have been possible. Thank you all for believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God, for sustaining me to the completion of this dissertation. My unreserved gratitude goes to Dr Annet Kezaabu and Dr Sara Namusoga for her guidance and reviewing my work at various stages as well as making many valuable comments and suggestions. I owe her my deepest appreciation for the supervision of my work. I would like to express my gratitude to all my lecturers at Uganda Christian University who have in many ways facilitated me on this Master's study. I am also grateful to classmates for the wonderful discussions they organized which gave me an opportunity to improve on my understanding of the course. Writing this dissertation would have been impossible without the support of the communities around Queen Elizabeth National Park. I am indebted to all of them for giving me their time and for enabling my research. Lastly, I would also like to express my humble appreciation to my family members for their unconditional love, encouragement, and support. Your immeasurable moral support was my greatest source of motivation, without which the completion of this dissertation would have been no more than a dream.

Contents

- ABSTRACT ii
- DECLARATION..... iii
- APPROVAL.....iv
- DEDICATIONv
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....vi
- LIST OF FIGURESx
- LIST OF TABLES.....xi
- LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONSxii
- CHAPTER ONE 1
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION 1
 - 1.1 Introduction 1
 - 1.2 Background of the study.....2
 - 1.3 Problem Statement7
 - 1.4 Purpose of the study..... 8
 - 1.5 Objectives of the study 8
 - 1.6 Research questions 8
 - 1.7 Justification of the study.....9
 - 1.8 Significance of the study.....9
 - 1.9 Scope of the study 10
 - 1.9.1 Content Scope 10
 - 1.9.2 Geographical Scope 10
 - 1.9.3 Time Scope 11
 - 1.10 Definitions of operational terms and concepts..... 11
- CHAPTER TWO13
- 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW13

2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Conceptual review	13
2.2.1 Conceptual framework	13
2.2.2 Wildlife crime in Uganda	14
2.2.3 Causes of Wildlife Crime	15
2.2.4 Wildlife crime mitigation strategies	16
2.2.5 Participatory communication in Uganda	17
2.2.6 Community Engagement Methods	23
2.2.7 Factors influencing participation in wildlife crime discourses.	25
2.2.8 Participatory Communication and Wildlife Crime	26
2.2.9 Community Benefits of Participatory Communication	27
2.2.10 Implementation of Participatory Communication	28
Step 1: Issue Identification and Definition	28
Step 2: Establish a Common Space	28
Step 3: Assessing Needs, Problems, Risks, Opportunities, and Solutions.....	29
2.3 Summary of the literature review	29
CHAPTER THREE	31
3.0 METHODOLOGY	31
3.1 Introduction	31
3.2 Research Design	31
3.3 Study Population.....	32
3.4 Determination of sample Size	33
3.5 Sampling techniques and procedure	34
3.6 Data Collection Methods.....	34
3.6.1 Interview Method	35
3.6.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).....	35
3.6.3 Documentary Review	35
3.7 Data Collection instruments.....	36
3.7.1 Interview Guide.....	36
3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide	36
3.7.3 Documentary Checklist	36
3.8 Validity and reliability of the instruments	37
3.8.1 Validity.....	37
3.8.2 Reliability	37
3.9 Procedure of Data Collection	38
3.10 Data Analysis	38
3.11 Ethical Considerations.....	39
CHAPTER FOUR	40
4.0 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Objective 1: Participatory communication methods for wildlife crime mitigation	40
4.2.1 Reasons for Wildlife Conservation	41

4.2.2 Causes of wildlife crime	42
4.2.3 Laws against wildlife crime.....	43
4.2.4 Methods of Engagement	44
4.3 The effectiveness of current community engagement methods used in the mitigation of wildlife crime.	47
4.3.1 Implementing UWAs conservations strategies.	47
4.3.2 Participating in the protection of wildlife.....	48
4.3.3 Providing information to UWA	48
4.3.4 Hindrances to Community Participation	49
4.3.5 Response to Community Challenges i.e. human-wildlife conflict.....	52
4.4 Objective ii: The perceived level of community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime	55
4.4.1 Level of involvement	55
4.4.2 Frequency of Engagement.	59
CHAPTER FIVE.....	61
5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	61
5.1 Introduction	61
5.1.1 participatory communication methods.....	61
5.2 level of involvement	64
5.3 Conclusion	66
5.4 Recommendations	67
REFERENCES	71
APPENDIX I: VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT	74
APPENDIX II: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES.....	75
APPENDIX III: APPROVAL LETTER	76
APPENDIX IV: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE	77

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of participatory communication on mitigation of wildlife crime. 14

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:Sample size determination.....33

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CVI	:	Content Validity Index
UWA	:	Uganda Wildlife Authority
CCR	:	Community Conservation Rangers

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, wildlife crime has emerged as a pressing global issue, posing significant threats to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development efforts. Illegal activities such as poaching and the illicit trade in wildlife products have escalated, fueled by factors such as economic incentives, habitat loss, and inadequate law enforcement.

After an extensive review of the literature, this study identified significant gaps in the communication aspect and employed participatory communication to ensure rigor and validity, while also contextualizing the research within the broader scholarly landscape. Using interviews with community conservation rangers (CCRs) and Focus Group Discussions with community members in Rubirizi and Kasese, this research delved into the study of 'The role of Participatory Communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Uganda'. With the aim to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders, including communities, regarding how to enhance community involvement, raise awareness, and facilitate behavior change towards wildlife conservation. Throughout the study, the lens of participatory communication was applied to foster a more inclusive, equitable, and ethically grounded approach to knowledge generation. This approach ensured that the voices and contributions of all stakeholders were acknowledged and valued, highlighting the importance of collaboration in fostering meaningful insights and advancing social justice goals.

1.2 Background of the study

Wildlife crime represents a formidable challenge to global conservation endeavors, posing a grave threat to the survival of numerous crucial wildlife species (Muthui, 2012). This illicit trade in wildlife resources, including poaching and illegal trade, has garnered considerable attention due to its far-reaching implications for conservation, development, and security (Travers et al., 2017). Over the past decade, there has been a notable surge in the illegal exploitation and trafficking of high-profile species like elephants and rhinos, with estimates suggesting an annual worth ranging from US\$7-23 billion (UNEP-Interpol, 2016). While the illegal use of wildlife encompasses a wide array of fauna and flora, a significant portion of such activities is driven by subsistence needs (Jachmann, 2008).

Definitions provided by Travers et al. (2017) and Moreto et al. (2017) characterize wildlife crime as any illegal utilization of wild living resources, contravening national laws and regulations aimed at conserving natural resources. This study concentrates on two primary manifestations of wildlife crime: illegal wildlife trade and poaching. Poaching entails the unlawful capture of wild animals, whereas illegal wildlife trade involves the illicit sale or exchange of wild animals and their derivative products (Moreto and Lemieux, 2015b; Moreto et al., 2017). The extensive scale of wildlife crime, valued at over 27 trillion Uganda shillings annually, not only jeopardizes the existence of iconic species but also perpetuates corruption, instability, and resource depletion within some of the world's most impoverished communities (Musinguzi, 2016).

Policy responses to wildlife crime have predominantly focused on strengthening law enforcement, although recent reports underscore instances of abuses directed

towards local communities (Survival International, 2017). Despite increased investments in patrolling protected areas, the effectiveness of enforcement measures remains uncertain, with questions arising regarding their cost-effectiveness (Jachmann and Billiouw, 1997; Johnson et al., 2016; Travers, 2016). Additionally, complementary strategies such as community engagement recognize the underlying drivers of household participation in wildlife crime, including subsistence needs and human-wildlife conflict (Harrison et al., 2015).

The unprecedented escalation in human and livestock populations, coupled with shifts in land use and socio-economic values, has intensified competition for resources and exacerbated wildlife crime (Weru, 2016; Mbau, 2013). Wildlife crime, recognized as a major global concern, is implicated in biodiversity loss and poses a significant threat to endangered species, such as lions in Africa (Muthui, 2012; Mike, 2017). The ensuing conflicts between human communities and wildlife have precipitated negative attitudes towards conservation efforts, fostering retaliatory killings, habitat destruction, and poaching (Madden, 2004; Sitati, 2016).

Uganda, renowned for its abundant biodiversity, attracts tourists from across the globe, drawn by its diverse wildlife, including mountain gorillas, chimpanzees, lions, and elephants (Plumptre et al., 2019; English & Ahebwa, 2018). Ecotourism serves as a significant revenue stream, supporting various tourism-related services and conservation initiatives (Anon., 2012a). Nevertheless, persistent challenges such as poaching and illegal wildlife trade underscore the need for collaborative efforts between international organizations, wildlife agencies, and local communities to combat wildlife crime effectively.

Participatory communication, as defined by Tufte and Mafelopoulous, involves an interactive and inclusive process whereby all stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, actively engage in the creation, dissemination, and exchange of information, knowledge, and ideas (Tufte & Mafelopoulous, 2017). This approach emphasizes the empowerment of communities and individuals through dialogue, collaboration, and shared decision-making, aiming to address power imbalances and foster social change (Tufte & Mafelopoulous, 2017). By prioritizing the voices and perspectives of all participants, participatory communication seeks to enhance understanding, build trust, and facilitate collective action towards common goals, such as sustainable development and social justice (Tufte & Mafelopoulous, 2017).

In wildlife conservation, this approach involves engaging various stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and conservation organizations, in decision-making processes related to the conservation of natural resources such as wildlife (Muthui, 2012). This approach recognizes that conservation efforts are most effective when they involve the active participation of those directly affected by them. Participatory communication brings stakeholders together by fostering open dialogue, sharing information, and seeking input from all parties involved (Travers et al., 2017). Through collaborative efforts, stakeholders can collectively address problems that arise from wildlife conservation, such as poaching, habitat destruction, and human-wildlife conflict.

Participatory communication works with Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior (KABs) to bring harmony by empowering stakeholders with the necessary information and skills to understand the importance of wildlife conservation and to adopt behaviors that support it. Through participatory communication processes, stakeholders gain knowledge about the ecological significance of wildlife, the threats they face, and

the benefits of conservation efforts. This knowledge, coupled with positive attitudes towards wildlife and conservation, can lead to changes in behavior, such as refraining from poaching, supporting anti-poaching initiatives, and advocating for wildlife protection measures. By addressing KABs holistically, participatory communication fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among stakeholders, resulting in collective action towards conservation goals.

In the literature, Travers et al (2017) and Mefalopulos (2003) provides several techniques that can be adopted to encourage stakeholders and communities to voluntarily participate in wildlife protection and conservation through participatory communication some of these include.

Community Engagement: Involving local communities in decision-making processes and conservation activities fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. Techniques such as community meetings, participatory workshops, and focus group discussions allow for meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

Education and Awareness: Providing information about the ecological importance of wildlife, the threats they face, and the benefits of conservation through various channels such as workshops, educational materials, and media campaigns can increase awareness and motivate stakeholders to take action.

Capacity Building: Empowering stakeholders with the necessary skills and resources to participate effectively in conservation efforts, such as training programs on sustainable resource management, alternative livelihoods, and wildlife monitoring, enhances their ability to contribute to conservation goals.

Incentives and Rewards: Recognizing and rewarding communities for their conservation efforts, such as through financial incentives, livelihood support, or

ecotourism benefits, can motivate voluntary participation and sustainable behavior change.

The study of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park is there for essential for several reasons which include:

Local Contextualization: Participatory communication allows for the customization of conservation strategies to the specific socio-cultural context of the park and its surrounding communities, ensuring that interventions are relevant, effective, and socially acceptable.

Stakeholder Engagement: By involving local communities, park authorities, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders in decision-making processes, participatory communication builds partnerships and fosters collective responsibility for wildlife protection and crime prevention.

Behavior Change: Understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of stakeholders towards wildlife crime is crucial for designing targeted communication interventions that address underlying factors driving illegal activities and promote sustainable alternatives.

Sustainability: Participatory communication promotes the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts by empowering communities to take ownership of wildlife protection initiatives, fostering a sense of stewardship over natural resources, and building resilience against external threats.

Whereas reports from UWA have indicated the use of some these community engagement approaches, it is not clear if they constitute participatory

communication methods, or how they have been used and how effective these approaches are in the mitigation of wildlife crime.

1.3 Problem Statement

The tourism industry in Uganda plays a vital role in the country's economy, contributing significantly to revenue generation and employment opportunities (UWA Report, 2021). However, this sector faces a growing threat from wildlife crime, including poaching and illegal trade in wildlife resources, despite government efforts to protect national parks and game reserves (UWA Report, 2021). The scale of illegal wildlife trade is alarming, with losses amounting to more than 27 trillion Uganda shillings annually, endangering iconic species like elephants and rhinos (UWA Report, 2021; CITES, 2012).

One contributing factor to the persistence of wildlife crimes is the inadequate participation of surrounding communities in efforts to mitigate these crimes, including communication and reporting of criminal acts against wildlife (UWA Report, 2021). This lack of community involvement not only threatens biodiversity but also undermines tourism revenues and employment opportunities, necessitating urgent intervention to address this criminality.

In response to this challenge, the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and other conservation partners have implemented various community engagement initiatives. However, it remains unclear whether these initiatives constitute participatory communication-based approaches to wildlife conservation or merely community engagement projects (UWA Report, 2021). Thus, there is a pressing need to investigate the Role of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Therefore, this research aimed to examine the current strategies and determine whether they qualify as participatory communication approaches to wildlife conservation. By providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current strategies, the study seeks to inform future conservation efforts and enhance community participation in mitigating wildlife crime in Uganda.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This study assessed the role of participatory communication in mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park-Uganda.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The following were the study objectives:

- a) To identify the participatory communication methods, strategies, techniques used in mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda.
- b) To assess the perceptions of the level of community involvement in participatory communication to mitigate wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park-Uganda.
- a) To make recommendations for effective participatory communication in mitigation of wildlife crime in Uganda.

1.6 Research questions

The following were the research questions:

- a) What participatory communication methods, strategies and techniques have been used in mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda?

- b) What is the level of community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park-Uganda?
- c) What effective participatory communication methods can be used in mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda.

1.7 Justification of the study

The findings for this study add to the body of knowledge in managing the Uganda's pristine natural resources including wildlife and specifically in the implementation of interventions to mitigate wildlife crime. Studies have indicated that the current wildlife crime is typified by insufficient or incorrect information that often led to failure in crime mitigation interventions and high level of stakeholders' distrust (Madden, 2004). Based on the various studies available, it is with no doubt that there is urgent need to reduce wildlife crime. It is also evident that existing strategies and policies are inadequate. With allied negative effects on livelihoods, the country's economic muscles, life threatening injuries and loss of lives, it is timely to come up with new thinking. This research views participatory communication as an additional approach to combating wildlife crime. Conducting this study therefor will provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, conservation practitioners, and local communities striving to combat wildlife crime and promote sustainable conservation practices in Uganda and beyond.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study will be of benefit to ecologists and development for communication professionals in the endeavor of promoting good environmental stewardship. The study provides policy makers with empirical recommendations for enhancing effective participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime. The findings of

this study may also be useful to researchers and practitioners to understand the influence of participatory communication in mitigation of wildlife crime. Furthermore, the findings may be used by the enforcement agents to ensure compliance with existing guidelines, standards and as well encourage continual improvement in wildlife conservation. This study has the potential to empower and mobilize local communities to take an active role in mitigating wildlife crime and promoting sustainable conservation practices and enabling them to learn better communication strategies in order to communicate effectively with conservation authorities and stakeholders.

1.9 Scope of the study

The scope of the study describes the boundary of the research in terms of content, geographical area, and time frame.

1.9.1 Content Scope

The focus of this study is the role of participatory communication in mitigation of wildlife crime. This study further established the extent of community involvement, methods used and effectiveness of the methods in mitigating wildlife crimes such as poaching, destruction of environment and illegal wildlife trade.

1.9.2 Geographical Scope

The study was carried out in Queen Elizabeth National Park in Western Uganda with the surrounding communities which include Kasese and Rubirizi.

1.9.3 Time Scope

This study assessed the role of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime considering the period from 2017 and 2021. During this period, there has been an exponential increase in wildlife crimes in the area (UWA report, 2021).

1.10 Definitions of operational terms and concepts

Participatory Communication is a means away from the linear model of communication to a dialogical communication aimed at empowering the audience as an active participant in decision-making.

Community participation means the effective engagement of the local community in the complete project cycle of interventions to help mitigate wildlife crime.

Wildlife crime is human-wildlife interaction that would lead to loss of property, life, or injuries to both human and wildlife.

Wildlife Conservation refers to the practice of protecting and preserving wild animals, plants, and their habitats to ensure their survival for future generations. It involves various strategies aimed at maintaining biodiversity, preventing species extinction, and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources.

Wildlife Trade is the buying, selling, or exchange of live wild animals and plants as well as their parts and derivatives. This trade can be legal or illegal and encompasses a wide range of activities, including the sale of exotic pets, traditional medicine ingredients, fashion items made from animal skins, and souvenirs crafted from animal parts.

Poaching refers to the illegal hunting, capturing, or killing of wild animals, typically for their valuable parts such as ivory, horns, fur, or meat.

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) refers to the negative interactions between humans and wildlife that arise when their interests or activities overlap.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains review of literature on the influence of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime to identify research gaps. Literature review is the systematic, explicit and reproducible method of establishing, evaluating, and construing an existing work by other scholars (Ragin, 2011). The purpose of the literature review is to validate and to ensure consistency in the study (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). The major sources of literature used in this study include textbooks, journals, newspapers, dissertations and thesis, conference papers, and government reports. This chapter addresses the conceptual review, review according to research objectives and summary of literature review.

2.2 Conceptual review

This chapter provides an overview of participatory communication in Uganda, wildlife protection in Uganda, wildlife crime, causes of wildlife crime, factors influencing participation in wildlife crime mitigation discourse, the role of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime, factors that hinder participatory communication and levels of participatory communication.

2.2.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework below describes the key dimensions of both participatory communication and wildlife crime.

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION	WILDLIFE CRIME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of community involvement • Methods, strategies, and techniques used. • Effectiveness of the methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poaching • Destruction of environment • Illegal wildlife trade

Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of participatory communication on mitigation of wildlife crime.

Source: The researcher reviewed Muthui (2017) and adapted the conceptual framework with modification.

From the conceptual framework above, the hypothesis is that participatory communication is seen as being able to influence wildlife crime. Participatory communication is determined in the dimensions of level of community involvement, methods used and effectiveness of the methods. Wildlife crime was measured in terms of poaching, destruction of environment and illegal wildlife trade.

2.2.2 Wildlife crime in Uganda

An important and pressing problem in Uganda is conservation of its wildlife, like lions, elephants, zebra, monkeys and apes that are visited by international tourists year-round. Ecotourism is one of the major revenue sources for the government hence the need to manage and conserve Uganda’s high biodiversity (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). Within Uganda’s national parks there are few ecotourism activities to generate income, yet these contribute substantially to the operating costs of the national parks. For example, there are a little more than 1000 gorillas

remaining, and Uganda hosts over half of this population and thus is a critical refuge for them.

Due to this rare and unique resource, tourists from around the world flock to Uganda to engage in an exclusive 'gorilla tracking' ecotourism experience whereby they view the gorillas for one hour under a permit obtained at a high cost of \$600 US per hour (Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2018). Consequently, most ecotourism revenue for Uganda is generated through the sale of these mountain gorilla permits. This revenue provides for all operating costs of the protected area supporting gorillas and also provides funds to support other national parks. The funds also provide local communities with some additional income for community projects through a revenue sharing program (Ahebwa & van der Duim, 2012). While these programs have their challenges, the ecotourism experience is one that is highly beneficial to the protection of biodiversity and maintaining good relationships with communities adjacent to the parks (Tumusiime & Vedeld, 2012).

2.2.3 Causes of Wildlife Crime

Changes in land use practices in what used to be predominately wildlife habitat has greatly contributed to increased human-wildlife interactions in most cases leading to crimes (Thuilleret al., 2006). Land fragmentation and farming in wildlife abundant areas intensify wildlife crime (Okello, 2006). Mbau (2013) asserts that in Africa, by the year 2000, human population tripled since 1960. This has seen the spread of agriculture leading into encroachment of more marginal lands, which have been acting as wildlife habitats (Okello and Kioko, 2010 as cited in Mbau, 2013).

The settlement of people into new habitats leads to increased demand for resources that are also a necessity for wildlife, for instance, water and pasture for their

livestock. Different measures, most informed by scientific research have been used to reduce wildlife crime. This measure in most cases is counterproductive, as it creates physical barriers for migratory wildlife species. “In a bid to reclaim their migratory routes, migratory species such as elephants, wild beasts, and zebras would break such fences leading to conflicts” (Mbau, 2013).

2.2.4 Wildlife crime mitigation strategies

According to Travers et al (2017), community engagement has long played a part in Ugandan conservation policy. A key component of UWA’s community engagement strategy is a protected area revenue sharing scheme that redistributes 20 per cent of park entry fees back to adjacent villages. The money is spent on community infrastructure such as clinics and schools, or for livelihood enhancement projects such as livestock rearing. Local government, not UWA, distributes the revenue-sharing funds. Travers et al (2017). This means that, although local communities benefit from the park, the funds are rarely targeted to change behavior or local attitudes towards wildlife conservation (UWA 2010).

UWA also has a resource access programs that allows for limited access to certain park resources for communities living next to the protected areas. Typically, resource access agreements cover low conservation value, but locally important, resources such as fish, grasses, and firewood. They may also allow beehives on protected land. In return, so-called ‘authorized resource users’ are required to tell UWA about any illegal activities and to keep the areas they use clear of snares. Travers et al (2017).

Law enforcement activities receive the highest proportion of the parks’ operating budget. Most of the budget is spent on ranger patrols. Other activities include gathering intelligence and bringing prosecutions. UWA’s emphasis on law

enforcement as the main way to combat wildlife crime is also clear from the General Management Plans for both parks. Although each plan does address community-focused interventions, the sections on tackling threats to resources are almost entirely concerned with law enforcement.

2.2.5 Participatory communication in Uganda

Wildlife crime has moved to the top of the agenda for conservation and development following the rise in illegal poaching and wildlife trafficking which has drastically reduced animal population Travers, et al., (2017). Previously, the most common response to wildlife crime has been investing in law enforcement to restrict illegal wildlife products all along the commodity chain from hunter to consumer (Roe et al. 2014). However, Travers et al (2017), asserts that community engagement has recently been adopted in managing human wildlife conflict and poaching in the various conservation areas in Uganda. He however adds that developing community-based responses to wildlife crime has been given very little attention.

Participatory communication is key in enabling frontline communities to appreciate and fully engage in the protection of wildlife. This has been proved in different studies conducted from several countries for instance in the study, *The role of participatory communication in de-escalating human wildlife conflict in transamara county in kenya*, participatory communication is described as key in creating good relationships with the community thus mitigating human wildlife conflict.

In Uganda, the research “*Case study of participatory action research for wildlife conservation*” by Krista M. Milich¹ et al (2021) indicated that in order to address conservation concerns, project implementers need to discover the most urgent needs of the community and provide solutions for them. The study analyzed how

participatory action research approach as a method can be used for wildlife conservation but did not discuss much on other participatory communication methods and their roles.

Studies in Uganda include reports from wildlife conservation bodies such as the UWA assessment report (2018) and *Taking action against wildlife crime* by Travers, H et al. (2017). These studies have mostly acknowledged the use of participatory communication without discussing in-depth the methods used and how effective participatory communication has been in mitigating wildlife crime. Much as there are a few studies on participatory communication in Uganda, not many have addressed the issue of wildlife crime. Most research has focused on using participatory communication in addressing human wildlife conflict and not wildlife crime. This research therefore will document the use of participatory communication, the methods and its role in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth national park. Queen Elizabeth is a man and biosphere park, which allows for constant interaction between wildlife and human beings. The major social economic activities include fishing, cattle rearing and salt mining; the park has a big population of about 20,000 inhabitants within the ten settlements of the biosphere reserve according to UNESCO report (2019).

According to Mefalopulos (2003), Participatory communication is a term that denotes the theory and practices of communication used to involve people in the decision-making of the development process. It intends to return to the roots of its meaning, which, similarly to the term community, originate from the Latin word *communis*, i.e. common (Mody, 1991). Relatedly, Mefalopulos (2003) also states that the purpose of communication should be to make something common, or to share. It implies the sharing of meanings, perceptions, worldviews, or knowledge. In this context, sharing

implies an equitable division of what is being shared, which is why communication should almost be naturally associated with a balanced, two-way flow of information. Instead, the ramifications of the power structures in society and the emergence of mass media have often reduced the conception of communication to a one-way, top-down, flow of information, from a single source to many outlets. Mefalopulos (2003).

Participatory communication tradition is the notion of multiplicity in one world (Servaes, 1985, 1986, 1989). This approach recommends strong, grassroots participation in development efforts, but explicitly rejects universal approaches to its application (Servaes, 1986, 1996a). Participatory communication emphasizes the terms “diversity” and “pluralism,” which implies that nations and regions cultivate their own, responsive approaches to self-determined development goals that emerge out of participatory processes. Mefalopulos (2003),

Participatory communication is seen by some as being a potential source of social transformation (Nair & White, 1994a; Riaño, 1994). By virtue of the differences in ethnic, gender and the like that multiple social actors bring development projects, participatory communication reveals how power functions to subordinate certain groups of people (Riaño, 1994). Furthermore, participation functions to cultivate “generative power” where individuals and groups develop the capacity for action, which can be harnessed to reshape and transform conditions of subordination (Nair & White, 1994a).

Mefalopulos (2003) urges that the development literature and project documentation indicate that participation and communication are two concepts highly praised but poorly applied or applied ambiguously in a number of different ways. There is no consistent definition or operationalization of the term participation, neither in

theory nor in practice (Pretty, 1995). This allows the labeling of projects as participatory even when they contain a very limited and partial involvement of the local people, the so-called beneficiaries Mefalopulos (2003). Most of these organizations have been often accused of using participation only at face value in order to legitimize their interventions (Rahnema, 1992; Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Participation should not be limited to people's participation in project implementation; rather, it should begin at the outset. There can be no true engagement if people do not have the power to choose their top needs and problems. Similarly, a free and equitable exchange of information is impossible unless both actors in the communication have a similar amount of decision-making power Mefalopulos (2003).

Kretser et al 2009 asserts that the local people's opinions can influence conservation efforts and therefore understanding local communities concerns in relation to natural resource management, which provides a basis for effective management of conflict. Ebuwa Agwafo and Fonkwo (2011) state that putting into consideration local people's perspective on human-wildlife conflict, in addition to understanding ecological factors leading to conflict is key in coming up with workable solutions to solve conflict. Research *The Role of Incentive Programs in Conserving the Snow Leopard* by Charudutt et al (2003) indicated that incentive programs could potentially strengthen conservation efforts, as reflected in changes in people's attitudes toward wildlife and in the response of wildlife to conservation efforts.

The study *Towards Sustainable Wildlife Conservation: a case study of wildlife crimes in two major protected areas and adjacent communities in Zimbabwe*. Edson Gandiwa et al. Indicates that wildlife crimes have negative impact on flagship

species, framing of ecotourism, community-based wildlife management and increases conservation costs. At local level, the extent of local people involvement in wildlife management and incentives are important variables for buffering wildlife resources in the protected areas from illegal exploitation. At the regional level, cross-border networks related to transboundary conservation provides opportunities for enhanced collaboration of wildlife resources and wildlife protection among range states. Addressing wildlife crimes, thus, requires both bottom-up and top-down approaches as a way of enhancing sustainable wildlife conservation.”

Williamson in his paper *Community-based wildlife management in Africa* asserts that community-based wildlife management can contribute significant progress to the development of several countries. He states that it is becoming widely accepted that the future of wildlife in developing countries depends largely on its capacity to deliver benefits to rural people and that the most effective way of delivering benefits to rural people is to give them the right and the responsibility to manage wildlife. Williamson asserts that not all communities are stable and socially cohesive, and their members do not always act in concert or make all decisions for the common good. Sometimes, the decisions made by communities may not necessarily accord with the interests of biodiversity conservation.

According to Krista M. Milich¹ et al 2021, Project implementers need to discover the most urgent needs of the community and provide solutions for them. In this study crop destruction was highlighted as one of the major causes for constant conflict with wildlife. A participatory action research approach was deployed to establish the land-use changes through- out 2016 and 2017. It involved interacting with communities to identify the most pressing needs and recommend the best solution to the problem.

The study *Adapting a community-participatory wildlife conservation model to management of Nigerian national parks for sustainable tourism* by P. C. Ngoka¹ & G. A. Lameed², indicated that alienating local people from direct involvement in the management of Nigerian national parks has been, and might remain antithetical to sustainable management of the parks for sustainable tourism. Forms of co-management of natural resources in which responsibilities and benefits are shared between Government and support zone communities appear inevitable if the environment is to be saved, and for national parks to make significant impact on locals in the forms of direct benefits. Such a situation can resolve conflicts, guarantee local support for protection of the parks, and create the right environment for tourism to thrive. Engaging the local people in meaningful dialogue can reveal the most convenient structure to be adopted in each local setting.

The study *Role of Participatory Development Communication in Natural Resource Management: A Case in Ratchaburi Province, Thailand* Cherdpong Kheerajit & Alexander G. Flor 2014. Confirmed that community based natural resources management can address the problems of poverty and natural resources degradation simultaneously even if these solutions are seen as in direct conflict. The results of this study show that the community should improve and continuously find ways to properly involve and encourage participation from various stakeholders.

According to UWA (2018) assessment report, the Community Conservation program identifies management objectives and actions to address issues that affect the relationship between the neighboring communities and the PA management. The major issues addressed under this program include human wildlife conflicts, the various benefits that communities get from the PA, revenue sharing program.

Kheerajita & Flor, (2013) asserts that the involvement of local communities has been advocated in response to environmental deterioration, including the loss of biodiversity. Participatory approaches are seen as a key way to link conservation and sustainable development. Kheerajita & Flor, (2013). Uganda Wildlife Authority conducts community sensitization which includes a variety of approaches like community meetings whereby rangers interact with villagers to discuss the benefits of the park, provide education and information on conservation initiatives and a forum for locals to air grievances, concerns or discuss other issue UWA (2018).

Participatory communication is based on the right of individuals to speak out collectively without anyone prescribing for them what they should. According to Kheerajita and Flor (2013), sharing of information and making it common within natural resource management including wildlife conservation falls under the larger field of development communication and in particularly public participation. Kheerajita and his associate argue that local community's involvement through participatory communication has been advocated in response to environmental deterioration, including the loss of biodiversity. Participatory approaches are seen as a keyway to link conservation and sustainable development (Kheerajita & Flor, 2013). Odote, et al. (2015) stated that, environment is part of a country's heritage and the achievement of sustainable development.

2.2.6 Community Engagement Methods

Revenue sharing: A key component of UWA's community engagement strategy is a protected area revenue sharing scheme that redistributes 20 per cent of park entry fees back to adjacent villages. The money is spent on community infrastructure such as clinics and schools, or for livelihood enhancement projects such as livestock

rearing. Local government, not UWA, distributes the revenue-sharing funds, Travers et al (2017).

Skilling and knowledge: dissemination of information education materials such as information on the laws and benefits for communities. Training of community members such as wildlife scouts and skilling in beehive farming.

Sensitization: Sensitize the communities within the fishing villages on importance of the PA. Sensitize and educate communities on stock densities and problem animal management

Community meetings: UWA implements general management planning (GMP) where leaders get to decide on development avenues available and employment.

Resource access from parks: Communities neighboring the PA have been allowed regulated access to resources in the park. A number of MOU's have been signed to access firewood in Kayanja, Kishenyi, and Rwenshama parishes. Communities neighboring Kazinga channel at Katunguru Rubirizi and Kasese, have been accessing papyrus through Memorandum of understanding that has been signed with the women groups of resource users. Seventy-five (75) members have been involved in the resource access exercise. Communities of Kayanzi have been allowed to get herbal medicine from the park.

User rights. Communities engage and benefit immensely from activities such as sport hunting. This involves killing game for trophies on community land and reserves and the revenue generated from it is shared with the communities as an appreciation for their conservation efforts.

2.2.7 Factors influencing participation in wildlife crime discourses.

Wildlife crime is partly to blame for the poor living conditions of the people living close to the wildlife due to poor resource management (Muthui, 2012). Muthui argues that management methods hardly consider local community perspectives, since in most cases; they do not cooperate with the wildlife and conservation authorities. If local communities living around protected areas made money from wild animals, these animals would become assets and there would be reasons for conservation (2012).

The attitudes and perceptions of local communities influence public participation in human-wildlife discourse. Mbau (2013) writes that local communities often view wildlife as a threat to their wellbeing. This is more so for local communities that inhabit areas surrounding protected areas where wildlife is frequently responsible for adverse consequences, such as, crop and livestock damage, death or injury. The current researcher observes that, “in other instances, wildlife is viewed as a source of hardship through increased competition for food and water resources.” In other instances, wildlife is viewed as a source of hardship through increased competition for food and water resources. Such association of wildlife with damage influences local community tolerance to wildlife and their response to conservation initiatives/efforts (Mbau, 2013). Losses of properties, death/injuries and lack of compensation for these losses from the government are some of the issues that influence community involvement in wildlife conservation.

Mbau (2013) observes that lack of a clear understanding of the linkages between the ecological and policy factors that drive these crimes and the integration of these factors with indigenous ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge and perceptions

held within local community domains in influencing their dynamics (also influence communication engagement in human-wildlife conflict). This is manifested when communities reject conservation efforts because they feel sidelined in the policy-making processes.

2.2.8 Participatory Communication and Wildlife Crime

Kheerajita and Flor (2013) state that best methods of conserving and managing wildlife outside protected areas are those that promote the equality and equity in access to natural resources goods and services. Participatory approaches are seen as a keyway to link conservation and sustainable development. These researchers argue that local community's involvement through participatory communication has been advocated in response to environmental deterioration, including the loss of biodiversity. In a study on the effectiveness of participatory communication in solving land conflicts in Kenya, Mulae (2013) revealed that there was a gap in the achievement of the desired social setting due to the numerous land related conflicts. Mulae pointed to the need for participation in driving the social change agenda through dialogue and participatory communication.

Madden (2004) posit that the needs of the local people should be addressed by relevant wildlife authority in matters of human-wildlife conflict as a measure to reduce escalation of the conflict. Muthui (2012) on the other hand observes that participatory planning can help resolve wildlife crime. This concept builds into the notion that through effectively communicating duties of different stakeholders the objectives aimed at mitigating wildlife crime and improving human welfare can be attained. Local people's opinions are known to influence conservation efforts, and thus understanding local communities concerns in relation to natural resource

management which provides a basis for effective management of wild life crime (Kretser et al., 2009). Eboa, Agwafo and Fonkwo (2011) posit that putting into consideration local community perspectives on wildlife crime in addition to understanding the ecological factors leading to conflicts is key in coming up with workable solutions/strategies to solve the crimes.

2.2.9 Community Benefits of Participatory Communication

There are many reasons for the adoption of participation in development and these include,

- i. By actively engaging stakeholders from the start and by seeking a broader consensus around development initiatives, participatory communication has begun to be considered a crucial tool to avoid past mistakes.
- ii. Many conflicts and obstacles can be prevented if addressed in a timely manner and more work can be accomplished when community is involved, services can be provided at a lower cost.
- iii. An increasing number of NGOs, international organizations, and UN agencies, also considers people's participation as a human right. In this respect participatory communication fulfills a broader social function, providing a voice to the poorest and the most marginalized of the people around the world.
- iv. Participation has intrinsic values for participants, it alleviates feeling of alienation and powerlessness.
- v. By engaging all relevant stakeholders, participatory communication becomes a tool that helps alleviate poverty, mitigates social exclusion, and ensures priorities and objectives are agreed to and refined by a wider base of the

constituencies. This process enhances the overall results and sustainability of any development initiative.

- vi. Participation also leads to a sense of responsibility for the project and participation ensures the use of indigenous knowledge and expertise (McKee, 1994).
- vii. Genuine participation increases the sense of project ownership by local stakeholders, thus enhancing sustainability. Reports by UWA (2018) have shown that programs such as community engagement and sensitization have boosted the relationship with the communities and the organization; communities develop a sense of ownership and responsibility towards wildlife protection.

2.2.10 Implementation of Participatory Communication

The following steps by (Mefalopulos, 2009) indicate how to implement participatory communication-based research:

Step1: Issue Identification and Definition

Initiatives originate in a number of ways: request of local stakeholders, study by a public or private organization, government-defined priority or need identified by outside technical experts. When defining the area of intervention, it is also crucial to identify and engage the major stakeholders and their basic positions and perceptions about the proposed change as soon as possible.

Step 2: Establish a Common Space

Past experiences teaches that many project failures result from two major factors: faulty project design and lack of buy-in by those who are supposed to be beneficiaries. Both of these problems are due to a basic flaw: insufficient or very

limited involvement of key stakeholders in the decision-making process of the development initiative. Establishing a space where all stakeholders feel comfortable enough to express their views, share their concerns, and provide their inputs on the desired change is key for the success and long-term sustainability of any initiative.

Step 3: Assessing Needs, Problems, Risks, Opportunities, and Solutions

Participatory communication assesses relevant problems, risks, and needs and it identifies best options, opportunities and solutions. Participatory communication is the key for the discovery process, described previously in the Johari window, acknowledging what each party knows and does not know, facilitating the sharing of existing knowledge, creating new knowledge, and defining solutions to achieve the intended change.

2.3 Summary of the literature review

The extent literature reviewed shows a significant influence of participatory communication on mitigating wildlife crime. However, majority of the studies are done outside Uganda hence creating huge knowledge gap which the current study will address. A critical review of the literature shows that several conceptual and contextual research gaps exist in the understanding of the influence of participatory communication on mitigation of wildlife crime. This creates an objective gap which this study addressed. In several countries, research indicated the success of participatory communication in wildlife protection for instance research conducted in Kenya by Odhiambo (2015) shows the success of participatory communication in deescalating human wildlife conflict in Mt. Kenya. In Uganda, apart from anecdotal reports from wildlife conservation bodies little is documented to show the use and impact of participatory communication in wildlife crime mitigation. This research

therefore documents the use of participatory communication and its impact in mitigation of wildlife crime.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explicitly describes the approaches the researcher used to assess the influence of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime. These approaches are intended to achieve the study objectives and answer the research questions (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012; Grbich, 2013). Research methodology includes the systematic steps taken by a researcher in studying the research problem as informed by logic (Kothari & Garg, 2014). This chapter further covers the research design, study population, sample size determination, sampling techniques and procedure, data collection methods, data collection instruments, validity and reliability of the instruments, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted and constitutes the blueprint for collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Tripathy & Tripathy, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Authors Obengo (2016), Rukwaru (2015), Bryman (2015), Ritchie, Lewis, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston (2013), Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2012), share the same view and defined research design as the scheme or overall plan used to generate answers to the research problems. Creswell (2013) further emphasizes that a suitable research strategy should completely address the research questions. Robson & McCartan, (2016), validates this claim and asserts that the appropriate research design must be informed by the purpose of the study, the research questions, the types and size of data required and the available resources.

This study adopted cross sectional survey design which allows the researcher to collect data at a single point in time to establish the influence of participatory communication in mitigating wildlife crime. The cross-sectional survey design is less costly and contains multiple wealth of details to gain deeper understanding of the relationship between the study variables. The cross-sectional survey data will be collected within a relatively short period of time, given the fact that the study is time bound (Almalki, 2016).

This study involved the use of qualitative paradigm to achieve the objectives of the study (Arghode, 2012). The researcher used the qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the study variables (Earl- Babbie, 2013). The qualitative approach was used by the researcher to understand people's cultures, beliefs, values, experiences, situations and be able to develop theories that describe these experiences (Munhall, 2012; Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

3.3 Study Population

Population is the total number of units from which samples are selected for measurement and includes individuals, organizations, objects and events (Parahoo, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Population also refers to an entire group of persons or elements from which the sample is taken (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). The target population is that kind of population where the researcher ultimately wants to generalize the study results from (Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson & Wang, 2015). Therefore, the target population selected for this study were the 2 local community focus groups and 4 wardens.

3.4 Determination of sample Size

A sample is a subset of the population comprised of some selected members to represent individuals from the larger population (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Selecting samples provides the researcher more time to collect data, reduces the cost of the study, increases accuracy and details of data collected. The study was based on a sample size of 4 wardens and 20 focus group members drawn from a target population of 5 community conservation rangers (CCRs) and 21 community members respectively. Through a purposive sampling method, the researcher selected 4 community conservation rangers who are attached to Queen Elizabeth National Park and work closely with the surrounding villages. The selected Rangers mobilized community members with the help of the LC1 and randomly selected 20 participants, 10 from each village. Both males and females were included in this sample.

Table 1: Sample size

Category	Sample size	Sampling Techniques
Community Conservation Rangers	4	Purposive sampling
Focus group comprised of community members from Rubirizi and Kasese (both male and female)	20	Random sampling
Total	24	

Vasileiou *et al.* (2018) urge that, “sample composition and size” are key ingredients of an acceptable sample determination in qualitative research studies. In this study, the sample is composed of respondents deemed as key informants from the wardens and focus group members from the community. Additionally, as Cresswell (2014) advises, the sample size for this study was kept relatively smaller compared to that in quantitative studies, in order to facilitate a “deep case analysis”.

3.5 Sampling techniques and procedure

In this study, non-random sampling method which involves purposive sampling strategies was used. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the study respondents for the study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In purposive sampling, members are selected based on their knowledge on the subject matter (Rahi, 2017). This technique enables the researcher to select respondents by “virtue of their capacity to provide richly textured information, relevant to the phenomenon under investigation” (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). As Vasileiou *et al.* (2018) explained this; when the process of data collection is ongoing in qualitative research, there may reach a point when no newer data can be obtained by contacting more respondents and the process needs to be terminated immediately.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

This study used qualitative data collection method. Primary qualitative data was collected using interviews and focus group discussions and secondary data was collected using documentary review.

3.6.1 Interview Method

According to Barrett and Twycross (2018), this method of data collection takes a form of face-to-face or telephone (for reaching respondents in disperse geographical locations) interviews. These was semi-structured, in-depth interview with selected rangers and the warden was to give their views on the influence of participatory communication on wildlife crime. Four community engagement rangers were interviewed. This was based on their role which involved continuous engagement with the communities in which they patrolled. The rangers were crucial in giving insights from the perspective of those implementing community engagement initiatives.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

In order to understand the perception and attitudes of community members towards wildlife protection and to come up with practical solutions that are locally generated, FGD was used principally in the extraction of qualitative data. FGDs entail diverse groups of local people analyzing their own development needs, conditions leading to wildlife crimes, perceptions, constraints and choosing their own means of improving participation in wildlife protection (Barrett and Twycross, 2018). In this study, two communities were selected, and these include Rubirizi and Kasese. This was mainly because of their proximity to the park and their day to interaction with wildlife. 10 members were randomly selected to participate in the FGD from each of the communities.

3.6.3 Documentary Review

Secondary data was obtained from published information, archival records like journals, reports, development plans, annual budgets, magazines, newspapers,

textbooks and past thesis. Ragin (2011) argues that secondary data provides a baseline for comparing the primary data collected which leads to logical conclusions and recommendations. The researcher used this method to generate more information about participatory communication and wildlife crime (Sekaran, 2003). For this study, the researcher mainly focused on reports from UWA and international conservation organizations like CITIES, IFAW among others.

3.7 Data Collection instruments

The questionnaire and documentary review checklist were used to gather facts, opinions, perceptions, and beliefs of the respondents about participatory communication and wildlife crime.

3.7.1 Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was used to guide the flow of an open-ended interview or discussion between the respondents and the researcher (Ryan et al., 2009). The guide emphasized flexibility for the respondents to tell sort of a story or explain their perspectives in detail) on issues surrounding the phenomenon under study (Coombs, 2015).

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide

Focus Group Discussions was aided by FGD guides. This guide was designed prior the discussions and entailed guiding themes for discussion.

3.7.3 Documentary Checklist

According to Kakinda, (1990), documentary review is the systematic process of analyzing the available literatures in form of reports and files for the purposes of

regaining the necessary information relating to the subject matter. The researcher reviewed available documents in public domain such as journals, magazines and government reports and historical documents. A list of documents reviewed is provided under appendix (iii).

3.8 Validity and reliability of the instruments

This is the process of ensuring that the data collected is valid and reliable through testing the data collection instruments and judging the quality of the questions (Street & Ward, 2012).

3.8.1 Validity

Validity refers to the ability to produce findings that are in agreement with the theoretical or conceptual values (Bailey & Kenneth, 2014). Validity testing confirms the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2014). The researcher ensured rigor through triangulation, participant checking and reflexivity. The member checking function of allowing participants to review researchers' interpretation of their transcripts to confirm accurate reporting of their contributions to the study achieved credibility (Harper & Cole, 2012). As Cresswell (2014) and Vasileiou et al. (2018) advise, the researcher ensured that sensitive personal questions to respondents that may cause bias was avoided.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability is the ability of others to repeat a study and achieve similar results and enables researchers to replicate the study results to ensure meaningful coherence which is a critical element of the research (Tracy, 2010). The researcher ensured systematic and transparent/verifiable processes or steps are followed as stated in this proposal during data collection, coding, analysis, and reporting - which are

hallmark principles of qualitative research (Leung, 2015). Moreover, the researcher conducted a data collection tools pre-test exercise in order to verify the applicability of such instruments before the actual data collection starts off (Leung, 2015).

3.9 Procedure of Data Collection

The researcher approached the respondents of the study with introductory letter from Uganda Christian University (UCU) requesting for permission to collect data for the study. The researcher ensured ethical standards in the study by explaining to the respondents the purpose of collecting the data and how their responses were treated with confidentiality without causing harm to anyone including the government. Respondents were assured of their personal protection and that they have the right to refuse or accept to participate. These ethical standards promote values such as trust, accountability, respect, transparency, and impartiality (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2009).

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process by which raw data is organized and transformed into useful information (McNabb, 2015a). Similarly, Zikmund *et al.*, (2013) opines that data analysis is the application of reasoning to comprehend the data that has been collected with the aim of determining consistent patterns and summarizing the information. Using thematic analysis, the textual data from interviews was coded and then categorized into key ideas or concepts. Thereafter, a higher level of synthesis resulted into main themes, generated from the categories organized earlier. Using descriptive and interpretive approaches, responses/data was used to explain themes, interpreted and conclusions/findings grounded in data were reported (Gibson, 2013). Data from document review/analysis and observation notes

(gathered per research objective and question) was also synthesized in key concepts and themes, earlier developed. This same data was later used to compare, corroborate, through triangulation, other analyzed data from interviews.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

There are always possibilities that doing research can present risks to participants hence the ethical norm in research promotes the aims of research and avoidance of error. The researcher has an obligation to ensure that the wellbeing of the participants is safeguarded throughout the research process (Polit & Beck, 2010). Preserving participants' comfort involves respect for autonomy, protecting participants from harm, informed consent, and voluntary participation (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The researcher emphasised anonymity, privacy, and responsibility as well as confidentiality. Consent was obtained before respondents complete the questionnaire. Respondents' names were withheld to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher used the data collected for academic purposes only.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation and interpretation of findings on the role of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park-Uganda. All the data was collected from key informant interviews and two Focus group discussions from the two communities in the park i.e. Rubirizi and Kasese. As mentioned in the methods chapter, the key informant respondents have been named R1, R2, R3, and R4 for purposes of confidentiality. The presentation and interpretation of the findings were guided by the objectives of the study which were:

- a) To identify the participatory communication methods, strategies and techniques that have used in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda
- b) To assess the perception of the levels of community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park-Uganda
- c) To make recommendations for effective participatory communication for the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda

4.2 Objective 1: Participatory communication methods for wildlife crime mitigation

To identify the participatory communication methods employed in mitigating wildlife crime, the researcher investigated the knowledge of communities on wildlife protection and the reasons for conservation, the importance of conservation to the

community, awareness of the law, and the factors causing wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth national park. It was important to understand the above factors because participatory communication methods for wildlife crime mitigation require an understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the local communities. The responses were derived from both focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

4.2.1 Reasons for Wildlife Conservation

This study investigated the respondents' views on reasons why wildlife should be protected. This question was useful in establishing the motivation of the various stakeholders in protecting wildlife as these guides them to develop the necessary strategies for participation, gauge the awareness of conservation issues, and identify barriers to effective participation. All the key informants (R1, R2, R3, and R4) agreed that wildlife should be protected. The justification for protecting wildlife according to all four respondents and the focus groups was that it promotes tourism as elaborated in this quote from R4.

“Queen Elizabeth is one of Uganda’s national parks with the biggest visitor numbers both domestic and international tourists. This is visible from the number of visitors that flock to the park daily.” R4

They also stated that wildlife species could be used for study purposes and research. They stated that a number of researchers visit this park for study purposes and that has contributed to the body of knowledge in the scientific field.

Wildlife conservation also protects endangered species from extinction and preserves the existing wildlife for future generations. It also helps in environmental conservation and protects the habitat of wildlife. It is also a source of income

generation for the government and the community neighbors since the locals get a percentage of the revenue from the government.

The findings above imply that the communities are aware of the value of protecting wildlife. When asked about how the community members learn about the benefit of wildlife conservation, respondent R2 stated that “ *we hold a number of sensitization meetings with the local communities and explain to them the importance of protecting wildlife and we encourage them to support us in our activities,*” a respondent from the community in Rubirizi also confirmed this claim by saying that “ *The people from UWA come and they talk to us, even sometimes our leaders bring the message from UWA*”

4.2.2 Causes of wildlife crime

Wildlife crime is still an issue of concern in this park. Despite the conservation efforts to create awareness of the benefits of protecting wildlife, some community members are still involved in illegal wildlife activities. The researcher, therefore, investigated why this is still the case for Queen Elizabeth national park and both community members and rangers provided the following reasons:

Poverty has been listed as a major cause of crime in this area as many people turn to the park to hunt food for daily consumption and sell bush meat to earn a living. A member from focus group one noted that because of poverty, they're unable to afford basic needs and therefore put their lives at risk to survive. “*Sometimes, it is hard to get money ton buy food and other things so some people risk their lives by going into the park so that they can get meat and sell to provide for their families.*”

Another major cause of wildlife crime in this area is crop damage by the wild animals hence leading members to retaliation. Another respondent from the Rubirizi focus

group stated that *“We don't have food, and as human beings sometimes we want meat, so now what do we do. Sometimes you can wake up in the morning and find the food in your garden has been destroyed, it makes you feel really bad.”* R1 stated that *“Animals such as elephants stray onto community land and destroy farms and in revenge the farmers harm or even kill these animals. Such victims are often not compensated by national park management which further aggravates the issues.”* The communities have complained that issues of compensation often go unattended to and therefore leave members with no choice but to take action for their loss. *“When our crops are damaged, we call UWA but sometimes they just come and look and say they will report to their bosses, but they don't do anything about it.”* a respondent noted.

The members of the community feel that they are entitled to utilize park resources such as firewood however on most occasions they are denied access to the park and are granted limited access sometimes. *“Why should we be stopped from entering into the park when this is our land? They should just allow us to go and get what we want and leave”* one respondent from focus group 2 inquired while explaining their frustration of denied park entry.

4.2.3 Laws against wildlife crime

Queen Elizabeth is governed by several laws that prohibit community members from destroying natural resources. Ignorance of these laws often led to committing crimes therefore the researcher inquired about the communities' knowledge of the laws relating to wildlife protection. The respondents claimed to be aware of the laws put in place to protect the park and are also aware of the implications since the community conservation rangers constantly conduct sensitizations. A respondent

from the Kasese focus group stated that the park is not for human settlement and therefore every community member is expected not to encroach on the parkland. another respondent in the same focus group also highlighted the law prohibiting bush burning, “*this is because the fire may spread into the park thus damaging and killing wildlife.*” in Rubirizi a community member also stated that killing animals is prohibited and could result into being paying a high fine or imprisonment. The FGD respondent also stated that community members are also prohibited from illegally entering the park. The general law that is known to the community is that they are not allowed to kill wildlife and cannot enter into the park without permission.

4.2.4 Methods of Engagement

The initial aim of this objective was to investigate the approaches utilized by UWA for incorporating participatory communication into wildlife conservation. The researcher obtained feedback through focus group discussions and interviews, and the collected responses are provided below.

Meetings: Both respondents from the FGDs and interviews noted that community meetings are the most common way of engagement. The respondents claimed that UWA constantly holds meetings with the community members to find out their challenges in relation to coexisting with wildlife. In most cases, these meetings involve representatives from UWA coming to communities to bring reports and decisions made by higher officials for instance policy decisions.

Sensitizations: Community Conservation officers also conduct sensitizations about the need and benefits of protecting wildlife. Sensitization is done through document sharing like posters de-campaigning poaching, and brochures providing details of the services offered and the charges. The respondents also pointed out the most

meetings are held to sensitize community members for them to live harmoniously with wildlife. Other channels of sensitization include radio talk shows.

Although the above are the most common methods of engagement, UWAs wildlife community rangers also pointed out other ways in which they perceive is a form of engagement with the communities. These include:

Reports from the community

The officers noted that they often get reports from the community members highlighting the challenges they faced, or the progress of community projects set up by UWA in each period. The FGDs respondents noted that UWA brings projects to communities that are aimed to benefit communities economically but also are a measure of protection from wildlife. For instance, beekeeping prevents the animals from crossing into the community land.

Memorandum of Understanding

The community conservation rangers also pointed out that the community leaders are involved in the process of developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for resource access. One respondent however noted that at the present time, there is so much restriction from the UWA in regard to the access to park resources causing increased bitterness and tension between the park rangers and community members. Respondent R4 described the process of generating MOUs.

“We start with participatory rural appraisal; the community members tell us what they want, and we go and check if we have the resource

they need. If the resource is abundantly available in the park, we discuss, make a report, and then sign a memorandum of understanding for resource access.” R4.

Members of the community are however dissatisfied with some restrictions made by UWA. For instance, limited access to park resources has resulted in illegal entrance into the park. The process of developing an MOU for resource access involves first checking the availability of the resource in the park. This MOU is community-driven because the need arises from the community however a lot of demands from the community may be rejected.

Revenue Sharing

This is the most direct benefit the communities get from living around the national park as UWA is mandated by law to give 10% of annual revenue back to communities. During this process, wildlife officers engage the communities when providing guidelines for revenue sharing. They work hand in hand with leaders both at the local and district level to ensure that these funds are given and utilized for community-based development projects.

Work with the local police in apprehending criminals.

UWA works with police to apprehend wildlife criminals. The police are from the communities and are involved in maintaining law and order in the area.

The FGDs revealed that the most common method of community engagement has been sensitization, and this has been conducted through, radio shows, church gatherings, local leaders, and the display of posters.

4.3 The effectiveness of current community engagement methods used in the mitigation of wildlife crime.

This section investigated the outcomes of the perceived participatory communication methods implemented by UWA in wildlife crime mitigation. It explores the various strategies employed, such as community awareness, stakeholder engagement, information sharing, and community-based monitoring systems. The evaluation seeks to determine the extent to which these methods have been successful in enhancing community participation, strengthening law enforcement efforts, and ultimately reducing wildlife crime. Some of the outcomes are listed below.

4.3.1 Implementing UWAs conservations strategies.

From the education passed to the communities through activities like information sharing and sensitization, the community members play a role in implementing measures to prevent wild animals from accessing their gardens. The respondents from the focus groups claimed to participate in activities such as digging trenches around the gardens, creating barriers that make it challenging for animals to cross over to community land. They also claim to engage in planting thorns as a protective measure against elephants and utilize beekeeping along the boundary as a form of natural fencing to deter wildlife encroachment. These actions have proven to be effective in deterring elephants, as the presence of bees trouble and chase them away from community land. Such strategies have been useful in reducing human-wildlife conflict as well as creating a good relationship with UWA.

4.3.2 Participating in the protection of wildlife.

Through continuous dialogue with the communities, members of both FGDs stated that they engage in creating alternative livelihoods to safeguard wildlife e.g. piggery, making papers out of elephant dung as a way of protecting elephants for future generations. Another way is by participating in wildlife protection clubs that are dedicated to protecting wildlife. Through these clubs, community youth learn more about wildlife conservation and take part in protecting the park. They are also involved in tree planting to restore damaged forested lands and alternative firewood sources other than the park.

4.3.3 Providing information to UWA

The community members attend community meetings aimed at wildlife conservation. Through these meetings, they give useful information to UWA officials who use this as feedback to improve their strategies. In some instances, these members act as spies for wildlife rangers by reporting illegal/suspicious activity around the protected area and reporting to UWA in case an animal breaks out of the park.

Respondent R4 said,

“Community engagement has helped us in information sharing. For example, the locals can report to us when an animal like a buffalo has crossed from the park to people’s gardens. Also, poaching has been reduced since poachers are aware that community members would report them to the wildlife rangers.”

“Granting locals resource access in the park has made poachers fear sneaking into the park because the community members will see them and report them to us. The members in these villages know each other so it is easy to tell who went to the park illegally” R2 said.

In essence, granting locals resource access in the park instills a collective responsibility for protecting natural resources, making poaching a riskier endeavor for criminals. R2 stated that many poachers have laid down tools and adopted alternative livelihoods such as farming.

“Our sensitization activities have been really helpful in reducing illegal activities in the park, now Ex-poacher groups have been created and the members in these groups were given alternative livelihood activities and resource access, especially fishing in Lake Nyamigire.”

Proper utilization of resources: Community engagement has helped to ensure the proper utilization of resources.

The researcher also inquired about the challenges or barriers that have been encountered in implementing participatory communication methods. Identifying obstacles and challenges allowed the researcher to gain insights into what factors may be hindering the effectiveness of participatory communication methods. Understanding these challenges helps refine strategies and interventions to overcome them, thereby making communication efforts more impactful and successful.

4.3.4 Hindrances to Community Participation

Negative attitude: the key informants stated that some communities haven't benefited much because there is still an issue of negative attitudes. The two

CCR rangers, R3 and R4 claim that whenever someone from the community is killed by an elephant or any animal in the park, the community members believe that they have been murdered by UWA officials hence the negative attitude and hatred. A Member of the FGD in Rubirizi said that,

“Sometimes we call the CCRs to come to our rescue when we’ve been invaded by wildlife but because they’re few, you find that the same person has gone to the neighboring village to handle a similar problem but since not everyone is aware of that, we become dissatisfied thinking that UWA is not helpful,” R3 said.

Communication gap: They also noted that there is a big communication gap between the community and UWA top officials which has made community members lose interest in meetings.

“If the CCR comes alone, the people don’t come for the meetings, they want to address their issues directly to top management.” Says R3.

A member from the FDG in Kasese said that they also have access to CCRs only.

“We normally see CCR but UWA officers from other departments don’t come to us and this creates a barrier to communication because we don’t have anyone else to contact if the CCRs are not on the ground.”

Hostile communities: The CCRs also stated that community participation is not widely spread all over the park because some communities are hostile. For instance, some people are habitual poachers, and therefore people from such communities’ view UWA as enemies, and in return, UWA resorts to using law enforcement to handle such people which increases tension between the

community and UWA. Queen Elizabeth is a man and Biosphere Park which makes it challenging since it has enclaves prone to wildlife attacks. When this happens, the locals retaliate in anger.

Limited community projects: aside from revenue-sharing projects, there are not so many activities that involve community participation. The respondents believe that there would be more engagement and interaction if they had more projects to participate in.

The CCRs however suggested that in order to ensure the effectiveness of participatory communication methods, the communities need to realize that the protected area is part and parcel of their well-being.

“If all the communities can understand this, we won’t even need rangers. The attitude of community members positively changes towards wildlife. R2.

The community members of both FGDs on the other hand suggested a number of solutions that would better UWA's participatory approach and these include;

One strategy for effective participatory communication suggested by both FGDs is a change in UWA's management approach to prioritize providing employment opportunities to local residents living near the protected area. This strategy involves creating job openings that are accessible to community members, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and investment in conservation efforts.

The FGDs also suggested a direct interaction between local communities and UWA leadership. Unlike the current approach where rangers may not hold final decision-making authority, this strategy encourages meaningful discussions and collaboration

with decision-makers, leading to more inclusive and informed conservation decisions.

Further enhancing the UWA-community relationship, the members of the FGDs emphasized granting increased resource access to the communities. By allowing them to utilize certain resources sustainably, UWA acknowledges the communities' needs and provides tangible benefits, contributing to cooperation and positive sentiment.

Finally, incorporating alternative livelihood projects. This will contribute to diversifying income sources through projects tailored to the communities' skills and preferences, thereby aligning conservation efforts with local aspirations.

4.3.5 Response to Community Challenges i.e. human-wildlife conflict

The study also gauged the communities' perception of UWA's responsiveness to their issues, particularly in the context of human-wildlife conflict. Findings from the two focus group discussions indicated a mixed sentiment among community members regarding UWA's effectiveness in addressing their concerns, even though they acknowledged partial efforts by UWA in this regard.

Several participants expressed grievances related to their crops being damaged by wildlife, without receiving compensation. They reported that although UWA staff assess the damage, no subsequent action is taken to rectify the situation.

Additionally, the disappearance of community members who entered the park illegally has caused distress, with no clarity from UWA about their fate.

Limited manpower within UWA was also highlighted as an obstacle to promptly addressing the issues of the local communities. A communication barrier emerged

from the observation that only Community Conservation Rangers (CCRs) are actively involved in UWA activities, leaving other UWA staff relatively unknown to the community. This gap hindered effective communication and engagement.

“Only CCRs are active in UWA, we don’t know the other UWA staff. This has caused a big communication barrier due to the absence of the other UWA staff.” one of the FGDs members said.

These findings underscore the potential for unresolved community issues to escalate into human-wildlife conflict. While the community acknowledged UWA's collaboration with external organizations like WWF, UNDP, and USAID in managing human-wildlife conflicts and initiating community development projects, concerns were raised about UWA's follow-through on promised actions.

Key informants interviewed had diverse opinions on UWA's response frequency to human-wildlife conflicts. While respondents noted UWA's consistent response to these conflicts, they expressed dissatisfaction with the outcomes. UWA had provided training to local residents on self-protection against wildlife intrusion, recommending techniques like lighting campfires and using vuvuzelas. However, the community's demand for compensation in case of crop damage remained unmet due to the absence of official compensation guidelines. *“We tell locals to set campfires and blow vuvuzelas. The locals are not satisfied with the solutions we offer, they demand compensation in case of crop damage which UWA isn’t able to do at the moment because guidelines for compensation haven’t been officially released.” R1 said.*

Respondents also identified delays in resolving human-wildlife conflicts due to factors such as delayed responses from supervisors and transportation challenges for

Community Conservation Rangers (CCRs). Limited equipment availability for wildlife scouts, who play a pivotal role in rapid response to intrusion incidents, was noted as a further impediment. *“We have scouts strategically positioned to quickly respond when communities report intrusion by the wild animals. The scouts are community members who work closely with UWA. They have been trained with basic skills and given equipment like gum boots, torches, raincoats, etc. These scouts are identified through sub-county chiefs. They are beefed up with rangers and UPDF soldiers in areas where the situation is overwhelming. They use tactics like flashlights at night, drumming, blowing vuvuzelas, setting campfires at the entrance of the gardens/homes however not all of them have these resources.”*

In conclusion, the study revealed complexities in UWA's responsiveness to community challenges, particularly those related to human-wildlife conflict. The insights garnered highlight the need for streamlined communication, timely resolution of issues, and enhanced resource allocation to effectively manage and mitigate human-wildlife conflicts in collaboration with the local communities.

The researcher also asked about the mechanisms that are in place to ensure feedback and two-way communication between UWA and communities. Effective participatory communication involves not only information dissemination but also a feedback loop. Knowing if feedback mechanisms exist and are utilized helped to identify areas of improvement for continuous engagement. Members from both focus groups noted that through meetings they tell their problems to the CC Rangers who then convey the message to their bosses. *“The problem is that we tell the rangers our problems but since he's not the boss he cannot do anything until they tell him to, so we don't get the help we want very quickly.”* a member of the Rubirizi focus group stated.

“We also report our problems to the community leaders like the Local Council Chairman who can talk on our behalf to the UWA officials.” another member of the same focus group added.

4.4 Objective ii: The perceived level of community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime

4.4.1 Level of involvement

To assess the level of community involvement, the researcher posed questions on the degree of participation and the frequency of engagement. Assessing the level of information flow is crucial in evaluating the level of community engagement because the information is a fundamental component of effective communication and meaningful participation. In this study, it has been useful to ensure informed decision-making where community members have access to accurate and comprehensive information and can provide input and contribute to decision-making processes. To ensure transparency and trust-building, accountability, and participation, by providing Information that enables communities to hold UWA accountable for their actions and decisions. As well as understanding how this engagement has led to empowerment and capacity-building. The study examined the extent to which UWA provides information on park activities to the communities to assess the extent of information flow between UWA and the communities. Understanding the practices and methods of information sharing is crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of participatory communication in wildlife conservation. The "level of involvement" in this study sought to assess the extent and degree of engagement that the communities have in the conservation process. A high level of involvement indicates that the communities are actively engaged in conservation

activities which include participation in discussion, providing input, sharing knowledge and experiences, collaborating in decision-making processes, and taking actions to support conservation. This involvement goes beyond mere passive receivers of information and emphasizes the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches to conservation.

According to Mefalopulos (2008), the levels of participation include passive participation where stakeholders participate by being informed of what is happening or has already happened. Participation by a consultation where stakeholders provide answers to questions posed by outside experts however the professional is obliged to incorporate the input of the stakeholders in developing interventions. The other form typology is participation by collaboration where community members form groups to participate in discussion and analysis of predetermined objectives set by the project. Participation by empowerment is the highest level of involvement where primary stakeholders are capable and willing to initiate the process and take part in the analysis and take part in joint decision making.

The study findings revealed specific circumstances in which communities are involved in wildlife conservation. The researcher discovered that the extent of community participation depends on the nature of the issues at hand. During both focus group discussions, community respondents agreed that communities play a significant role in implementing strategies and making decisions on certain issues, such as formulating Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for resource access. These MOUs are mutually agreed upon by both UWA and the communities, determining the resources accessible to the community. The community's role is to express their needs from the park, which are then evaluated and considered by UWA based on

resource availability. However, the final decision-making authority lies outside the purview of the communities.

According to one community conservation ranger R2, community members are not involved in decision-making processes, except for a few technical individuals at the district level. The degree of community engagement varies depending on the specific circumstances and roles assigned within the addressed issues.

Additionally, the level of involvement of locals from the village, parish, and district levels depends on the nature of the issues. For instance, matters related to revenue sharing are addressed at the district level, and UWA seeks consultation from local leaders who represent the views of community members on this matter. All the interviewed key informants (R1, R2, R3, and R4) agreed that UWA does indeed share information on park activities with the communities.

According to the informants, UWA communicates park-related information to the communities through various channels such as meetings, radio talk shows, and posters. Additionally, UWA relies on local leaders to disseminate information to their respective communities. These leaders are informed about management decisions and subsequently relay this information back to the community members.

The study also revealed that UWA utilizes ex-poachers as a means of information sharing. UWA provides them with information regarding wildlife conservation. However, it should be noted that sometimes UWA fails to meet up with the promises made to the ex-poacher groups which demotivates them from participating in conservation activities. A community member in Rubiziri focus group claimed that some ex-poachers are now requesting alternative livelihood projects from UWA, as no such projects have been provided. In the past, UWA donated bee hives, allowing

the communities and ex-poachers to harvest honey for their benefit. They further explained that UWAs failure to fulfil their promise results to ex-poachers returning into poaching.

The findings suggest that while UWA does provide information on certain park activities to the communities, the nature of the information appears to be one-sided. The community primarily reports incidents of animals causing damage or encroaching on community land, while UWA's key messages seem to emphasize the need for community efforts in protecting wildlife. There is no clear indication that UWA provides comprehensive information to the communities, such as accountability of park resources, management decisions, or the status of wildlife in the park. The discussions revealed that UWA is majorly concerned about the community's contribution and not the welfare of the community members who live in these areas, It is noteworthy that the communities generally rely on UWA's decisions and strategies. Although some respondents expressed contentment with UWA's approaches, the findings indicate that communities are primarily engaged passively, with decision-making predominantly controlled by UWA and its partners. Sensitization efforts and meetings, where communities receive information from authorities, were identified as the primary forms of engagement.

The findings of this study suggest that communities are predominantly engaged in a passive manner, as the majority of decision-making processes are led by UWA and its partners. Consequently, communities are primarily informed about decisions and expected to implement predetermined strategies. Sensitization efforts and meetings have been identified as the primary modes of engagement, with communities receiving information primarily from authorities.

Consultation-based participation is also employed, particularly during the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for accessing resources. The findings reveal that communities are consulted regarding their most pressing needs from the protected area. Subsequently, experts analyze the available resources and recommend an acceptable quantity for community use. In summary, the findings demonstrate that community engagement primarily occurs through information sharing and consultation, with decision-making largely centralized within UWA and its partners.

4.4.2 Frequency of Engagement.

This study also investigated the frequency of involvement of community members in UWA's activities. According to all four community conservation rangers, the following activities are conducted frequently.

Daily patrols: The four conservation rangers stated that communities are involved in daily patrols which is majorly to check for issues within the communities and then write assessment reports on their findings. Here the communities interact with the rangers but give information on the different wildlife challenges they encounter on a daily.

Monthly meetings: The conservation rangers also said that there are at least 15 meeting sessions in a month, eight are sensitization meetings, 2 are for monitoring projects, and the rest are for the revenue-sharing project sessions. Each meeting session sits between 25-150 people.

One ranger R3, however, differed in the view that UWA does not involve the communities that much. They just meet the communities to tell them what UWA is suggesting. Most involvement is done only when the need arises.

However, according to the FGDs in Rubirizi, sensitization meetings are held three times a month.

“Sensitization is the most common form of engagement and is conducted every month. The CCRs sensitize communities about the values of wildlife, develop guidelines for resource access and MOU, guide the communities to come up with proposals for projects under the revenue sharing scheme, and how to handle interventions when wild animals storm into villages for example, scare shooting, growing chili along the boundary, assessment of crop damage for compensation, etc.” R4 said in response to this claim

Generally, the frequency of sensitization by UWA is appreciable. UWA involves the communities on, a daily basis, weekly, and quarterly depending on the nature of the activity. However, there is no indicator that UWA frequently involves the communities in decision making, strategy development or planning. Involvement occurs mostly when UWA is sensitizing or informing the community of its decisions and plan of action.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of findings according to the objectives.

5.1.1 participatory communication methods

The study sought to unveil the participatory communication methods, Strategies, and Techniques Used in mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National park-Uganda.

The findings from this study indicate that sensitization and meetings are the most common community engagement methods. Sensitization is conducted periodically to enlighten the community on the benefits of protecting wildlife, the dangers of involving in wildlife crime, and laws associated with wildlife crime. Meetings are also held to inform the communities on management decisions, to allow communities to echo out the challenges posed by wildlife and listen to community needs.

From these findings, it is evident that the current strategies employed by UWA, and its partners are general community engagement methods. Although the term community engagement and participatory communication are somewhat related, there is a difference between the two concepts. Participatory communication methods are a subset of community engagement methods, with a specific focus on making communication processes more inclusive, interactive, and participatory. Community engagement methods, on the other hand, encompass a wider range of strategies that involve communities in decision-making and development processes, including but not limited to communication. Tufte et al (2009).

Participatory communication primarily emphasizes communication processes that involve community members in decision-making, information sharing, and knowledge exchange. The goal is often to ensure that communication is a two-way process, where community members actively participate in shaping and sharing information. It specifically utilizes channels, methods, and tools that facilitate active participation, dialogue, and collaboration in the communication process. Whereas community engagement methods encompass a wider range of activities, including but not limited to communication.

This study therefore found that participatory communication is not being utilized in the mitigation of wildlife in Queen Elizabeth National Park but rather a more general practice of community engagement.

The study further analyzed the effectiveness of the current methods used and their contribution to mitigating wildlife crime. Tufte et al (2009) assert that to gauge the effectiveness of participation, the following results need to be recognized and these include.

“Psycho-social outcomes of increased feelings of ownership of a problem and a commitment to do something about it, improvement of competencies and capacities required to engage with the defined development problem and actual influence on institutions that can affect an individual or community” Tufte et al. (2009)

The current strategies have yielded more into enhancing awareness and collaboration. Community members collaborate to implement strategies of UWA and its partners for instance such as participating in fencing community land to prevent animals from straying into their gardens. They collaborate with UWA to protect wildlife, foster proper utilization of park resources, and get information from the

communities. Community members have also become more aware of the benefits of conservation and the dangers of engaging in any wildlife crime. There is a significant gap in communication due to the bureaucracy and a one-way communication approach where most information comes from the governing authority and its stakeholders. This researcher discovered a lack of direct communication between UWA and communities, with Community Conservation Rangers (CCRs) serving as intermediaries. This indirect approach, while intending to facilitate information flow, poses challenges such as delays, distortion of facts, and a lack of direct engagement with top management. Feedback is gathered through community meetings, relying on leaders like LC 1 chairpersons. The middleman role, however, hinders accurate representation of community challenges, fosters communication gaps, and diminishes a sense of belonging among community members.

There's no clear commitment to combat wildlife crime since many community members still attribute the issues to UWA rather than observing a dedicated effort to address the challenges. Based on Tufte's arguments. The current methods, without participatory communication are not fully effective in mitigating wildlife crime.

In evaluating obstacles to the full engagement of community conservation rangers, a notable challenge is the persisting hostility and negative attitudes towards both wildlife conservation and UWA as the overseeing agency. Despite ongoing efforts in sensitization and engagement, the lack of evident behavioral and attitude change suggests that this approach is insufficient, leading to only marginal improvement in their relationship with the communities.

Upon examining the factors contributing to dissatisfaction with how UWA addresses community challenges, several issues emerged. First, there is a lack of prompt action when community members report problems, such as crop damage. Additionally, inadequate information is provided to communities, particularly in cases involving illegal access to the park or disappearances of individuals. This lack of transparency leads to resentment between UWA and the neighboring community.

Moreover, manpower shortages result in delayed responses to community challenges, adding to the dissatisfaction. The absence of compensation for crop damage further underscores a discrepancy between the expectations of community involvement in conservation and UWA's fulfillment of its responsibilities. In essence, while communities are urged to contribute to conservation efforts, UWA appears to be falling short in meeting its commitments to the community's needs.

5.2 level of involvement

The second objective sought to investigate the perceived level of involvement of community members in mitigating wildlife crime.

Mefalopulos (2008), suggests that the levels of participation include passive participation where stakeholders participate by being informed of what is happening or has already happened. Participation by a consultation where stakeholders provide answers to questions posed by outside experts however a professional is obliged to incorporate the input of the stakeholders in developing interventions. The other form typology is participation by collaboration where community members form groups to participate in discussion and analysis of predetermined objectives set by the project. Participation by empowerment is the last typology where primary stakeholders are

capable and willing to initiate the process and take part in the analysis and take part in joint decision making.

The results from this study indicate that communities are engaged passively since most decision-making is done by the UWA and its partners. The study revealed that sensitization and meetings are the most common form of engagement where communities hear more from the governing authorities. Since communities are only informed and required to implement strategies that have already been decided upon, this is a strong indicator of passive engagement.

Participation by consultation is barely applied except during the development of MOUs for resource access. Findings show that communities are consulted on what their most urgent needs are from the protected area. Experts later analyze and recommend the available resources and quantity acceptable for community use.

Generally, the communities play a more active role in implementing decisions and strategies related to wildlife conservation as outlined by UWA and its partners. They are primarily implementers rather than decision-makers. Even when communities are consulted, their input is typically evaluated by experts before any action is taken. Mefalopoulos (2008) suggests that true participation involves empowerment, where participants are capable of and engaged in final decision-making alongside authorities. However, the findings do not suggest an empowered group of stakeholders making informed decisions that are duly considered.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on participatory communication methods and the perceived level of community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park underscores both notable achievements and areas requiring improvement. The findings reveal that while there has been commendable progress in raising awareness and fostering collaboration among community members, a substantial gap exists in the implementation of true participatory communication methods. The current strategies, primarily centered around sensitization and meetings, fall short of empowering communities to actively engage in decision-making processes. The analysis indicates that communities play a more passive role, with limited consultation and a lack of true collaboration and empowerment.

Challenges such as persisting negative attitudes, a bureaucratic one-way communication approach, and delays in addressing community-reported problems contribute to dissatisfaction and hinder the effectiveness of mitigation efforts. To enhance community involvement and the efficacy of strategies, there is a critical need for a paradigm shift towards participatory communication, empowering communities to become active decision-makers and fostering a more transparent and responsive approach from wildlife conservation authorities. This shift is imperative for building a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship between Uganda Wildlife Authority, its partners, and the communities residing in and around Queen Elizabeth National Park.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following general recommendations are suggested for Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to enhance communication and community involvement in mitigating wildlife crime:

Embrace Participatory Communication Philosophy:

Shift the communication approach from a one-way dissemination of information to a participatory model. Embrace a philosophy that values the active involvement of communities in decision-making processes related to wildlife conservation.

Establish Direct Communication Channels:

Create direct communication channels between UWA and local communities to facilitate open and transparent dialogue. Minimize reliance on intermediaries and implement direct communication methods to bridge gaps and foster a sense of inclusivity.

Strengthen Community Engagement Strategies:

Develop and implement comprehensive community engagement strategies that go beyond sensitization and meetings. Prioritize methods that actively involve communities in shaping, implementing, and evaluating wildlife conservation initiatives.

Promote Two-Way Communication:

Cultivate a culture of two-way communication where community members are encouraged to share their insights, experiences, and concerns. Actively seek feedback and demonstrate responsiveness to build trust and collaboration.

Empower Community Representatives:

Empower community representatives to take on more active roles in decision-making processes. Facilitate training programs to enhance their communication skills, enabling them to effectively convey community perspectives and needs.

Utilize Diverse Communication Platforms:

Explore and leverage a variety of communication platforms, including digital, social media, traditional media, and community-specific channels. Adapt communication strategies to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of different community segments.

Regular Evaluation and Adaptation:

Establish mechanisms for regular evaluation of communication strategies. Gather feedback from communities and assess the effectiveness of methods in real-time. Use this feedback to adapt and refine communication approaches continuously.

Build Trust through Transparency:

Prioritize transparency in communication efforts. Address community concerns promptly, provide timely information on UWA activities, and openly acknowledge challenges. Building trust is essential for fostering a positive relationship with communities.

Foster Collaboration through Shared Initiatives:

Encourage collaborative initiatives where UWA works hand-in-hand with communities on conservation projects. This not only enhances community involvement but also fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for wildlife conservation.

Implement Capacity Building Programs:

Invest in capacity-building programs for both UWA staff and community members. Enhance communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and understanding to facilitate more effective and respectful interactions between the parties.

Demonstrate Commitment to Action:

Showcase tangible and visible efforts by UWA in response to community concerns. Act promptly on reported incidents, address issues of crop damage, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to resolving challenges faced by local communities.

Encourage Positive Narratives

Highlight success stories and positive narratives in communications. Showcase instances where collaboration has led to positive outcomes for both wildlife conservation and the well-being of local communities. Positive reinforcement can inspire further community engagement.

Implement a Community-Based Participatory Communication Plan

Develop and implement a straightforward working model for a community-based participatory communication plan. This model should focus on effectively involving local communities in decision-making processes, fostering collaboration, and improving the overall effectiveness of wildlife conservation strategies.

By adopting these general recommendations, UWA and its partners can create a communication framework that is not only informative but also actively involves and empowers local communities in the ongoing efforts to mitigate wildlife crime and conserve the natural heritage of Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Areas for future research

Future research should explore the role of policy in supporting the implementation of participatory communication. By incorporating the views of a wider array of stakeholders, future studies can provide a more holistic understanding of the dynamics at play and offer more robust recommendations for enhancing community-based participatory communication initiatives in wildlife crime management.

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APPENDIX I: VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

I am Faith Mundua a student at Uganda Christian university pursuing a master's in strategic communication. This research helps me complete requirements for my education, but more importantly may help improve management of conflicts between people and wildlife. I am very interested in hearing from you what you think about this topic. There are no wrong answers to the questions that will be asked. I ask only for your honest opinion. Your participation will help researchers, regional and local decision-makers better understand how the participation of communities can be helpful in mitigation wildlife. Your responses are completely confidential, as I will not record your name in association with your answers. I will only give your interview a number. The entire interview should take about 30mins to 1 hour. This interview is voluntary, which means that you may choose not to participate in interview at any time. You may also choose not to answer a particular question of the interview. If you do not understand the questions, please ask me and I will be happy explain in detail.

Interview # _____ Language _____ Date: _____ Time Start: _____ Time
End: _____

Location: Kasese Rubirizi Mitooma

Gender: _____

Proximity to protected area: less than 10km more than 10 km

Setting: Residential Outdoors Business Community

APPENDIX II: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES.

Are communities considered to be crucial in the protection of wildlife?

What are some of the participatory methods UWA when dealing with wildlife protection?

How often are communities involved in UWA's activities?

How often do communities participate in the decision-making process?

Does UWA give information on park activities to the park?

Does UWA provide accountability to communities concerning park developments?

Does the community get response from UWA in times of wildlife conflict? If so, how often.

Does the community contribute solutions to handle wildlife conflict?

Are communities involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies for wildlife management?

APPENDIX III: APPROVAL LETTER

Dear Sir/ Madam, I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Faith, and I am a student researcher currently undertaking a study on the role of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park. I am writing to request your approval to conduct interviews with members of both the local communities and park rangers as part of my research.

The aim of my study is to explore how communication can help in reducing wildlife crime, such as poaching and illegal trade, in Uganda. I believe that by understanding the perspectives of both the community members and park rangers, we can find better ways to protect our precious wildlife and natural habitats.

I assure you that all interviews will be conducted with the utmost respect for confidentiality and privacy. Any information shared will only be used for the purpose of academic research, and participants will have the option to remain anonymous if they wish.

Your cooperation in this matter would be greatly appreciated, as your approval will enable me to gather valuable insights that can inform future conservation efforts.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Faith. M. Mundua

APPENDIX IV: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

Hello. My name is Faith Mundua and I am an MA Strategic Communication student at Uganda Christian University (UCU). I am carrying out research on the topic The role of participatory communication in the mitigation of wildlife crime in Queen Elizabeth National Park as part of the requirements for my MA degree.

You have been chosen to participate in this focus group discussion because of your place as a community member residing around the park area.

In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. By saying “Yes I understand,” you are telling me that you at least 18 years of age and want to participate. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Wildlife crime and protection.

What are the major causes of wildlife crime?

Do you know why wildlife should be protected?

Are you aware of the wildlife protection benefits?

What are some of the benefits that you gain from protecting wildlife?

What are the major challenges hindering you from protecting wildlife?

Are you aware about the laws protecting wildlife crime?

Community engagement

These questions will guide investigating the community's knowledge about participation and assess their level of engagement.

How has participatory communication been implemented?

Do you engage in activities aimed to protect wildlife?

What are some of the activities you do to protect wildlife?

Do you benefit from protecting wildlife?

Do you feel your issues are properly addressed by UWA?

Do you feel properly represented on management forums?

How often do you engage in discussing issues about wildlife protection?

How responsive are the agencies responsible when it comes to human wildlife conflict resolution?

What participatory communication methods have been used?

Are you involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies for wildlife management?



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DISSERTATION CORRECTION COMPLIANCE REPORT BY THE CANDIDATE (POST VIVA FORM)

Date: ...21.05.2024.....

Name of Candidate:FAITH MUINDUA.....

Reg. No:RS19M54/019.....

Title of Dissertation ...THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN THE MITIGATION OF WILDLIFE CRIME IN QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK-UGANDA

SN	COMMENTS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	- the writer indicates that several techniques for encouraging communities to voluntarily participate in wildlife protection and conservation are noted in the literature, and proceeds to	Reference inserted	Pg 5

	discuss them, however, there is no literature cited to support this claim.		
2	the writer asserts (without pointing to any supporting literature) that most studies in Uganda have focused on the role of participatory communication in addressing human/wildlife conflict, and not wildlife crime.	Reference added	Page 18
3	The population of study- not sure why this could not have been expanded to include local political and administrative leadership, who in most cases, have a role to play directly or indirectly in wildlife conservation matters. Why the narrow focus on the four (4) warders and two community FGDs? In a sense, this narrowcasting in terms of population of study selection can compromise the quality of the study's findings. Since this is largely a qualitative study, there is a need to seek the views of more interviewees, and this as pointed out could be local political leadership, NGOs, and other interested parties.	This study was narrowed to the perception of communities about their involvement in wildlife crime mitigation through participatory communication. Recommendations for future research have been made for the study of policy and how it supports implementation of participatory communication.	Pg 89
4	The conclusion and recommendations present a clear way forward regarding strengthening community-based participatory communication initiatives in wildlife crime management. As part of the recommendations, the study could go further and suggest a simple working model for implementing a community-based	Recommendation added	Pg 70

	participatory communication plan.		
5			

SN	COMMENTS BY INTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1			e.g. Cover page
2			Page 1, etc corrected
3			
4			
5			

SN	COMMENTS BY VIVA VOCE PANNEL	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Morgan & krejcie table not necessary for qualitative research	Table was removed and the mention of dependent variable and independent variable was removed since it is not necessary in qualitative research.	Pg 14 & pg 33
2	Replace content analysis with thematic analysis	Only retained thematic analysis.	Page 38
3	Distinguish between sensitization and community meetings	Clearly defined under the findings and discussion chapter	Pg 44
4	Harmonize objectives and research questions	Harmonized in chapter 1	Pg 8
5	Reflexivity on researchers' relationship with UWA	Indicated on the acknowledgment	Pg iii

...FAITH MUNDUA...

Candidate's Name



Signature

.....



Supervisor's Name

.....

Signature