

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**A FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AS A MECHANISM FOR
RECONCILING CONSERVATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS IN PROTECTED AREAS.**

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A FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AS A MECHANISM FOR RECONCILING CONSERVATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS IN PROTECTED AREAS.

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DECLARATION

I, undersigned, hereby declare, except where indicated that the work contains in this thesis is my own, and that the references, to the best of my knowledge, are accurately reported.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved late parents, Mrs. B.N. Qwatekana and Mr. N.N.M. Qwatekana, whose love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in me have been the foundation of my journey. Enkosi, Comsi, for your wisdom, guidance, and the values you instilled in me. To my mother, Manche, your endless support, resilience, and sacrifices shaped me. I carry your strength with me always. To my family, my husband, and my children, your love, patience, and encouragement have been my source of motivation. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for walking this path with me.

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ABSTRACT

The governance of protected areas plays a crucial role in balancing conservation objectives with the socio-economic needs of local communities. While collaborative governance has been recognized as a mechanism for enhancing conservation outcomes and community livelihoods, challenges persist in achieving equitable and effective stakeholder participation. This study aimed to examine the governance structures of protected areas in South Africa, focusing on the interplay between conservation authorities, local communities, and ecotourism stakeholders. The research sought to identify both the barriers and opportunities for collaborative governance in ensuring the sustainability of protected areas. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, employing stakeholder interviews, policy analysis, and case studies of selected protected areas. A purposive sampling method was used to engage key informants, including conservation managers, local governance representatives, and community stakeholders. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to assess governance effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and policy implementation in protected area management. Findings reveal that while collaborative governance has the potential to improve conservation outcomes and socio-economic benefits, its full realization is hindered by unequal power distribution, limited local capacity, and conflicting stakeholder priorities. The study highlights that existing governance structures, though well-intentioned, often fail to facilitate meaningful participation and equitable benefit-sharing. Additionally, governance inefficiencies, policy misalignments, and the absence of adaptive management strategies further challenge sustainable protected area management. Despite these barriers, the research identifies opportunities for strengthening governance frameworks through inclusive decision-making, improved local capacity-building, and dynamic stakeholder partnerships. The study underscores the need for adaptive and inclusive governance models that reconcile conservation imperatives with local development aspirations. Without equitable and transparent governance frameworks, the long-term sustainability of protected areas remains at risk. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering stronger collaborative mechanisms to address emerging challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and land tenure disputes. Future research should focus on refining governance models to enhance stakeholder participation and ensure sustainable outcomes for both conservation areas and the

communities that depend on them. The study advocates for the development of dynamic, context-specific governance mechanisms that are transparent, inclusive, and adaptable to changing environmental and socio-economic conditions.

Keywords:

Collaborative Governance, Protected Areas, Conservation, Ecotourism, Local Livelihoods, Stakeholder Engagement

CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
ABSTRACT	V
CONTENTS	VII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	XII
LIST OF TABLES	XII
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	XIII
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	2
1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	3
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	4
1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	5
1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	7
1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7
1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8
1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	8
1.10 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE	8
1.11 MEASURING INSTRUMENT	9
1.12 STUDY VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	10
1.13 DATAANALYSIS	11
1.14 SCOPE, LIMITATIONS, AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	11
1.15 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS.....	12
1.16 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	14
Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION	17
2.2 PROTECTED AREAS AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: AN OVERVIEW.....	17
2.3 Key Elements of Collaborative Governance	19

2.4 THE NATIONAL CO-MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK IN SOUTH AFRICA	20
2.4.1 Models of Co-Management	21
2.4.2 Benefits of Collaborative Governance	22
2.4.3 Successful implementation of collaborative governance in protected areas	23
2.5 CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT .	24
2.6 Levels of Stakeholder Involvement	25
2.7 Table 2.6.1: Levels of stakeholder involvement.....	25
2.8 A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT.....	27
2.9 PROTECTED AREA CATEGORIES.....	29
2.9.1 Category I: Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Area	29
2.9.2 Category II: National Park.....	30
2.9.3 Category III: Natural Monument.....	30
2.9.4 Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area:	30
2.9.5 Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape	30
2.9.6 Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area.....	30
2.10 PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS	31
2.10.1 Adaptive Management in Protected Area Management: A Modern Approach to Conservation.	31
2.10.2 The Open Standards for Conservation: A Structured Path to Effective Conservation Management	32
2.10.3 Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM): A Holistic Approach to Addressing Marine Conservation Challenges	33
2.10.4 The Landscape Approach: Integrating Conservation in Multifunctional Landscapes.....	34
2.10.5 Collaborative Governance: Fostering Inclusivity in Protected Area Management	35
2.11 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS GUIDING PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA	36
2.11.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS.....	36
2.12 LAND RESTITUTION AND CO-MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S PROTECTED AREAS 37	
2.12.1 The Cape Vidal Memorandum and the People and Parks Program.....	38
2.12.2 The Makuleke Contractual Agreement.....	38
2.13 GAPS IN LITERATURE	40
2.14 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.....	40
Chapter 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	42
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	42
3.1 The Collaborative Governance and Social Ecological System theories	42

3.1.1 Collaborative Governance Theory.....	43
3.2 A model for Collaborative Governance: Theory and Practice	45
3.2.1 Starting Conditions	46
3.2.2 Facilitative Leadership	47
3.2.3 Institutional design.....	47
3.2.4 Key components of Collaborative Governance in protected areas	48
3.2.5 South African Case Study: Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife	48
3.3 SES-Based Collaborative Governance in Protected Areas	49
3.4 The Social-Ecological Systems (SES) perspective on Protected Areas.....	50
3.4.1 The SES Approach to Protected Area Governance	50
3.5 Empirical evidence from South Africa	51
3.5.1 Biodiversity Conservation Policies	51
3.5.2 Ecosystem Resilience in Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Reserves.....	51
3.5.3 Evidence from uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park	52
3.6 Collaborative Governance as a Mechanism for SES Integration.....	53
3.6.1 The Complementarity of Collaborative Governance and SES Theory	54
3.6.2 Addressing Power Dynamics and Integrating Local Knowledge	54
3.6.3 Addressing The Limitations of Each Theory	55
3.7 Summary of the chapter	56
Chapter 4 STUDY AREA BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT.....	58
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	58
4.1.1 West Region: Maloti-Drakensberg Park.....	58
4.1.2 East Region: Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and Zululand Reserves.....	58
4.1.3 Coastal Region: iSimangaliso Wetland Park.....	59
4.2 HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK	59
4.2.1 Historical Background.....	60
4.2.2 Socio-Economic Context of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP)	61
4.2.3 Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park Land Claim.....	62
4.3 NDUMO GAME RESERVE	63
4.3.1 Historic Background	63
4.3.2 Socio-Economic Context of Ndumo Game Reserve (NGR)	65
4.3.3 Ndumo Game Reserve Land Claim.....	66
4.4 TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK.....	67
4.4.1 Historic Background.....	68

4.4.2 Socio-Economic Context of Tembe Elephant Park (TEP)	69
4.4.3 Tembe Elephant Park land claim.....	70
4.5 ITHALA GAME RESERVE.....	71
4.5.1 Historic Background.....	72
4.5.2 Socio-Economic Context of Ithala Game Reserve	73
4.5.3 Ithala Game Reserve Land Claim	74
4.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	75
Chapter 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	76
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	76
5.1.1 Research Paradigm: Exploratory and Interpretivist Approach.....	76
5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	77
5.3 TARGET POPULATION	78
5.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE	80
5.4.1 Purposive Sampling.....	80
5.5 DATA COLLECTION	82
5.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	83
5.6.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	83
A. Managers of Selected Protected Areas	84
B. Local Community Partners	84
C. Community Members Actively Involved in Protected Areas	84
D. Members with Diverse Levels of Involvement	84
5.6.2 Focus Groups.....	85
5.7 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS.....	86
5.8 DATA ANALYSIS	87
5.8.1 Thematic Analysis Approach	87
5.9 DATA STORAGE AND SECURITY	88
5.10 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY	88
5.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	89
5.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	90
5.13 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.....	91
Chapter 6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	92
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	92
6.1.1 Data Collection: Fieldwork Experience by Researcher	93
6.2 THEMES FOR DATA ANALYSIS	94

6.3 The Case of Tembe Elephant Park	95
6.3.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs	95
a. Community Members	98
b. Managers	98
a. Community Members	98
b. Managers	99
c. Community Leaders	100
a. Community Members	101
b. Managers	101
c. Community Leaders	102
6.3.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness.....	102
6.3.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision Making	107
6.3.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Tembe Elephant Park....	109
6.4 Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park	111
6.4.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs.....	111
6.4.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness.....	114
6.4.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision-Making	117
6.4.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at HiP	120
6.5 Indumo Game Reserve	122
6.5.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs.....	122
6.5.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness	124
6.5.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision-Making.....	126
6.5.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Hip	127
6.6 Ithala Game Reserve.....	127
6.6.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio- Economic Needs.....	128
6.6.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness	131
6.6.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision Making	132
6.6.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Ithala	133
6.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	134
Chapter 7 DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS	136
7.1 INTRODUCTION	136
7.2 KEY FINDINGS SUMMARISED IN RESPECT OF THE STUDY OBJECTIVES.....	136
7.2.1 Objective 1: To ascertain the extent to which collaborative management policies of EKZNW address the socio-economic needs of local communities	137

7.2.2 Objective 2: To assess the effectiveness of local actors and institutions that are put in place to facilitate collaborative management of EKZNW Wildlife protected areas.....	141
7.2.3 Objective 3: To ascertain the level of commitment on the part of the Protected areas authorities to involve the local community in decision- making.....	145
7.2.4 Objective 4: To explore the extent to which communities are capacitated to take an active role in the management of the study areas.	147
7.2.5 Objective 5: To develop an integrative framework that will facilitate collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas.	151
7.3 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.....	155
Chapter 8 CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS.....	156
8.1 INTRODUCTION.....	156
8.2 SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY.....	157
8.3 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY.....	160
8.3.1 Governance Frameworks and Collaborative Efforts.....	160
8.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation.....	161
8.3.3 Barriers to Effective Collaborative Governance.....	161
8.3.4 Impact of Collaborative Governance on Conservation Outcomes.....	162
8.3.5 Socio-Economic Implications of Governance on Local Communities.....	162
8.3.6 Implications for Sustainable Protected Area Management.....	163
8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON CONCLUSIONS AND MAJOR FINDINGS.....	164
8.4.1 Strengthening Collaborative Governance Frameworks.....	164
8.4.2 Enhancing Community Participation in Decision-Making.....	165
8.4.3 Improving Institutional Capacity for Effective Governance.....	165
8.4.4 Policy and Legislative Reform.....	166
8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	167
8.5.1 Comparative Studies Across Different Contexts.....	167
8.5.2 Longitudinal Studies on Governance and Sustainability.....	167
8.5.3 In-depth Exploration of Power Dynamics.....	168
8.5.4 Investigating the Role of Climate Change in Governance.....	168
8.5.5 The Impact of Tourism on Collaborative Governance.....	168
8.5.6 Enhancing Community Capacity for Governance.....	169
8.6 CLOSING REMARKS.....	169
References.....	171
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	183

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.12.2: Settled land claims on protected areas in South Africa	39
Figure 3.2: Ansell and Gash's Collaborative Governance Model	46
Figure 3.6: Integration of Collaborative Governance and SES theories	53
Figure: 4.2.1: HiP boundary (Map 1) and Location of HiP (Map 2).....	61
Figure 4.3.1: Map of Ndumo Game Reserve	65
Figure 4.4: Regional location of Tembe Elephant Park.	68
Figure 4.5: Tenure Map of Ithala Game Reserve	72
FIGURE 4.5.2: Levels of Employment.....	74
Figure 6.3.1.2: Views on Socio-Economic benefits	97
Figure 6.3.2.3: Co-management Challenges	105
Figure 6.4.3 Views on community involvement	118
Figure 7.2.5.1: Intergrated Framework for Collaborative Governance in Protected	152

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.11.1: Key Regulatory Frameworks	36
Table 3.6.3: Addressing the limitations of each theory.....	55
Table 4.2.3: Land claims in HiP	63
Table 6.3.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups	96
Table 6.4.1: Socio-economic Dynamics of the community	111
Table 6.4.2: Key local stakeholders	114
Table 6.5.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups	122
Table 6.6.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups	128
Table 6.6.2.1: Effectiveness of Local Actors in Decision-Making.....	131
Table 6.6.4 Capacity-Building Programs and Effectiveness	134

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Full Words
CGR	Collaborative Governance Regime
CMP	Conservation Measures Partnership
DEAT	South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
DWEA	Department of Water and Environmental Affairs
EBM	Ecosystem-Based Management
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EKZNW	Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal (KZN) Wildlife
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
GBR	Great Barrier Reef
HiP	Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park
HWC	Human-Wildlife Conflict
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
Ndumo-Tembe-Futi TFCA	Ndumo-Tembe-Futi Transfrontier Conservation Area Poverty Relief Project
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act
NEMBA	National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act
NEMPAA	National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act
NGR	Ndumo Game Reserve

NPA	National Protected Area
NPAES	National Protected Area Expansion Strategy
Pas	Protected Areas
RLCC	Restitution of Land Claims Commission
SANParks	South African National Parks
SES	Social-Ecological Systems
STATSA	Statistics South Africa
TEP	Tembe Elephant Park
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WPC	World Parks Congress

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Protected areas have historically been pivotal in global biodiversity conservation efforts, acting as custodians of unique ecosystems and natural resources (Watson et al., 2018). These sanctuaries, encompassing diverse landscapes from vast national parks to pristine marine reserves, symbolise humanity's commitment to conserving the Earth's natural heritage (Dudley 2016). However, beneath the serene look of protected areas lies a multifaceted challenge, a call for harmonising conservation objectives with the livelihoods, aspirations, and cultural values of the local communities residing within or near these revered landscapes (Lockwood 2010).

In recent years, a need for change has echoed within the conservation community, acknowledging the necessity for protected areas to transcend traditional paradigms (Hockings et al. 2018). This evolution demands the development of management models that not only safeguard biodiversity but also recognise and address the socio-economic needs and aspirations of local communities (Lockwood et al. 2010). Responding to this call for transformation, collaborative governance has emerged as a potential mechanism to forge an integrated and sustainable path forward in the management of protected areas (Berardo & Lubell, 2019).

Collaborative governance is a transformative approach towards protected area management, moving away from traditional methods (Baird et al. 2014). It emphasises meaningful engagement, shared decision-making, and broad stakeholder involvement, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, researchers, and civil society (Ansell & Torfing, 2018). Peters et al., note that collaborative governance challenges rigid hierarchies and power imbalances, it fosters inclusive frameworks that value diverse perspectives. At its core, collaborative governance acts as a bridge between conservation and community development (Dowie, 2017).

Collaborative governance acknowledges deep interconnection between the sustainability of protected areas and the well-being of local communities, recognising their mutual dependence (Jones 2019). This model acknowledges that the sustainable management of

protected areas is not solely a technical effort but a profoundly social one, demanding the recognition and incorporation of the diverse needs, desires, and knowledge of individuals and communities deeply intertwined with these landscapes (Reed et al., 2008). The current study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of collaborative governance as an important mechanism for reconciling conservation objectives and local community livelihoods in protected areas. The study acknowledges the pivotal role of governance dynamics in shaping the outcomes of conservation efforts and aimed to illuminate the potential and challenges of collaborative governance within this evolving context.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Restitution of Land Rights Act (No 22 of 1994, as amended in 2014), which seeks to restore land rights to individuals or communities dispossessed under past discriminatory laws, has significantly impacted many of South Africa's protected areas and world heritage sites. Historically, these areas were isolated from surrounding communities, often preventing local people from accessing resources like food, medicinal plants, and firewood. The aftermath of these policies has left many protected areas now partially or fully under land claims, necessitating the government to promote land restitution and co-management as a viable settlement option.

This study acknowledges the influence of the Cape Vidal Memorandum, which emerged from the discussions held at the 5th World Parks Congress (WPC) in 2003. The memorandum explored critical issues such as land ownership and rights, the capacity challenges faced by both communities and conservation agencies, and the role of tourism businesses in supporting biodiversity conservation. These issues are particularly relevant to the study as it explores the integration of collaborative governance strategies in managing protected areas. Collaborative governance in the context of land restitution and co-management offers a model for fostering partnerships that balance the interests of local communities and conservation objectives (de Koning, Nguyen, Lockwood, Sengchanthavong & Phommasane 2017).

The People and Parks programme, which emerged from the WPC, advocates for including historically disadvantaged communities in conservation efforts, aiming to provide tangible benefits to them. The framework for co-management agreements, which includes

preparatory work with land claimant representatives and ongoing legal support, also aligns with the study's interest in examining how collaborative governance can enhance resilience and sustainability in protected area management (DEAT, 2014 de Koning 2010). This study explores the dynamics of governance frameworks, focusing on how they are applied to improve the integration of local knowledge, enhance community participation, and strengthen co-management structures.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Biodiversity conservation, spanning over a century since the establishment of the world's first protected areas, has consistently posed intricate challenges for government authorities responsible for their management (Petrova, 2014). These protected areas (PAs) have continuously grappled with the need to balance diverse and often overlapping interests and priorities to achieve their conservation goals (Cumming 2016). In recent times, the pressure on PAs has escalated, compelling them to demonstrate their ability to reconcile the requirements of biodiversity conservation with the livelihood requirements of local communities (Cumming 2016).

Furthermore, there is a growing expectation for these areas to offer tangible benefits that can compete with those provided by alternative land uses. However, the predominant focus on biodiversity conservation has, at times, overshadowed the needs, interests, and aspirations of local populations living in and around these areas (Birendra 2022; Petrova 2014). It is now widely acknowledged that the conventional governance of biodiversity conservation has led to the displacement of local communities from PAs and imposed restrictive limitations on the utilisation of natural resources in the name of biodiversity protection (Cumming 2016).

In the post-apartheid era in South Africa, the inclusion of local communities in PA management has become an integral part of the national conservation discourse and policy. This is tied to local community demands for historical redress concerning land dispossession and equitable access to natural resources, aligning with the broader socio-economic transformation goals of the country (Thondhlana & Cundill 2017). However, some scholars argue that despite the rhetoric of local participation and benefit-sharing in Protected Area transformation programs, local communities still have limited influence in

defining 'conservation and development' agendas (Adams et al. 2004; Holmes-Watts & Watts 2018). Instead, they are often expected to support predetermined agendas set by conservation authorities. In response to these challenges, this study assessed the effectiveness of local actors and institutions established to facilitate governance of protected areas in South Africa.

Protected areas (PAs) represent one of the world's most significant approaches to biodiversity conservation, serving as a crucial tool applied extensively in South Africa to safeguard the nation's natural and cultural heritage (Cumming 2016: 46). Kothari, Feary and Pulsford (2015) highlighted that PAs underpin nearly all national and international conservation plans, designating specific areas of land, water, or sea as significant and according to them protected status to ensure ongoing biodiversity conservation. These areas also function as sanctuaries for species and ecological processes that cannot survive in regions subjected to intense natural resource exploitation for human activities (Dudley 2008: 233). Managing these conservation areas requires a delicate balance between human and economic development requirements and the imperative of biodiversity conservation (Worboys et al. 2015). However, achieving ecological and social coherence in the governance of PAs remains a formidable challenge.

Many PAs are characterised by a dominant state-managed governance model, marked by centralised decision-making and a predominantly exclusive approach that prioritises biodiversity considerations over the well-being of local communities (Ayivor, Nyametso & Ayivor 2020). The exclusion of local people from biodiversity management has deep historical roots, with the government often asserting its power, both subtly and overtly, in the discourse surrounding protected areas and ecosystem services. Traditional ecosystem services like ecotourism have frequently been prioritised over other forms of cultural services vital to local communities, including cultural practices crucial for identity formation and knowledge transmission across generations (Berbés-Blázquez et al. 2016; Thondhlana et al. 2016; Cundil et al. 2017).

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Protected areas are an integral part of global biodiversity efforts; however, they face an array of threats, primarily caused by human activities. This highlights the importance of

human involvement in their management (Büscher et al. 2017; Mascia et al. 2014). Collaborative governance arrangements that bring together local communities, conservation authorities, and various stakeholders have emerged as a promising avenue to mitigate natural resource conflicts (Cundill et al. 2017; Birendra 2022). These agreements offer a framework for participatory management and equitable benefit sharing, contributing to the harmonisation of conservation objectives with the socio-economic needs of local populations (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2013).

However, the practical implementation of collaborative governance remains a significant challenge. Even in instances where formal systems and platforms exist, fostering meaningful community participation in policy formulation and decision-making processes often remains a myth. For instance, the strategic plan of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) for the period 2022-2023 acknowledges the presence of systems for collaborative management but highlights the persistent challenge of inadequate community involvement (EKZNW 2022-2023). This disconnect between the theoretical framework of collaborative governance and its real-world application is a critical concern.

The consequences of this gap are critical if collaborative governance remains an unrealised ideal, while protected areas risk perpetuating the neglect of vital socio-economic needs that are fundamental to the livelihoods of local communities. These needs include issues such as land ownership, job creation, employment opportunities, and poverty alleviation (Dube 2018). The failure to address these concerns effectively jeopardises the delicate balance between biodiversity conservation needs and the well-being of the communities closely connected to these protected areas (Berbés- Blázquez et al. 2016; Sandbrook et al. 2013).

Therefore, this study sought to address this pressing problem by critically examining the current collaborative management framework employed by EKZNW and assessing its appropriateness in reconciling the socio-economic needs of local communities with the goals of biodiversity conservation. By doing so, it aimed to shed light on the practical challenges and opportunities associated with collaborative governance within the context of protected area management and further propose an integrative framework that will facilitate collaborative governance.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Collaborative governance represents a profound and revolutionary transformation in the realm of protected area management, marking a clear departure from conventional practices that have often fallen short of achieving sustainable conservation goals (Baird et al. 2014). This approach embodies and champions the core principles of substantive engagement, collective decision-making, and comprehensive involvement, effectively uniting a diverse spectrum of stakeholders who play pivotal roles in the management of protected areas. These stakeholders include local communities, government authorities, non-governmental organisations, researchers, and civil society (Ansell and Torfing, 2018).

Collaborative governance actively seeks to deconstruct entrenched hierarchies and power dynamics that have historically dominated decision-making processes in protected areas. Instead, it introduces innovative and inclusive collaborative frameworks that prioritise the input and perspectives of all engaged parties, levelling the playing field and democratising the management process (Peters et al. 2018). In this transformative paradigm, the traditional top-down approach to decision-making, where authoritative bodies held sway over the fate of protected areas, has given way to a more equitable and inclusive model (Davies et al. 2015).

It is recognised that inclusive participation in management processes is not just beneficial but fundamental for achieving shared conservation goals and for fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship among stakeholders (Ansell & Gash 2018). This collaborative ethos marks a decisive shift from the previously dominant models of protected area management that primarily focused on ecological considerations. It acknowledges that the path to sustainable conservation is not solely an ecological endeavour but an intricately intertwined social and ecological one (Sanz, 2016).

This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of collaborative governance as a pivotal mechanism for reconciling conservation objectives with the well-being of local communities residing in or near protected areas. The study recognizes the transformative potential of collaborative governance in reshaping the dynamics of protected area management. By addressing the complexities and opportunities associated with its implementation, this research seeks to illuminate a path forward where the coexistence of thriving ecosystems and empowered local communities can become a reality within the world's protected areas. Through an in-depth analysis of case studies, stakeholder

interviews, and governance dynamics, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the future of protected area management and collaborative governance's role in shaping that future.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overarching aim of this study is to critically examine the extent to which local communities engage in collaborative governance within protected areas and how government involvement in these areas influences local perspectives and attitudes toward conservation. To achieve this aim, the study pursued the following objectives:

- To ascertain the extent to which collaborative management policies of EKZNW address the socio-economic needs of local communities.
- To assess the effectiveness of local actors and institutions that are put in place to facilitate collaborative management of EKZNW Wildlife protected areas.
- To ascertain the level of commitment on the part of the Protected areas authorities to involve the local community in decision-making.
- To explore the extent to which communities are capacitated to take an active role in the management of the study areas.
- To develop an integrative framework that will facilitate collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions serve as guiding beacons, illuminating the path toward a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between conservation, governance, and community livelihoods:

- To what extent do the management policies of the EKZNW address the socio-economic needs of local communities?
- To what extent are local institutions and actors that are put in place to facilitate collaborative management effectively?
- How can collaborative governance be reinforced to become an effective mechanism that addresses the socio-economic needs of local communities?
- What are the strategies or approaches that could be implemented to facilitate collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The practices and techniques of research will be fundamentally important to ensure reliable data collection instruments and analysis procedures are utilized. These methods are critical for validating the processes and the reliability of the study results. The research methodology is a methodical technique of solving a problem, to provide the work plan of the study (Mishra & Alok, 2017). This part of the study presents the research methodology to be employed in the current study. The researcher explains the methods to collect data that were preferred, as well as how they were designed and utilized. In more detail, the research strategy and methods will be outlined, details of the participants will be explained, and the data collection process will be outlined.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a qualitative case study design, aligning with the assertion by Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2011) that qualitative research is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals, particularly when studying human beings. Qualitative research methods are recognised for their ability to extract meaning and gain insights into people's value systems, making them highly relevant when investigating human subjects (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Within the qualitative paradigm, the selection of a case study design is regarded as the most suitable choice for this research. A qualitative case study design is widely recognised as highly suitable for gaining a deep understanding and meaningful interpretation of the subject matter under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell 2016; Stake, 2013). This choice is motivated by Bartlett and Frances (2017), who characterise case studies as intensive descriptions and analyses of social units or systems that provide in-depth insights for those involved.

1.10 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Bougie and Sekaran (2019) defined the target population as the entire group of individuals or entities from which the researcher intends to select a sample for their research study. In the context of this study, the target population encompasses protected area managers/conservation managers and residents from neighbouring communities. The population under consideration within the jurisdiction of EKZNW consists of 120 protected

areas. For this research project, a selection of four protected areas is made, the selected protected areas have existing co-management agreements.

Qualitative research is designed to delve deeply into specific phenomena. Probability sampling methods, with their rigid constraints, may not be the most suitable approach in such cases. Therefore, a non-probability sampling method is employed. This choice is particularly apt as the focus of the study is not primarily on the representativeness of the sampled population but rather on the diversity of selected cases and their potential to contribute valuable information (Sakaran & Bougie 2016).

For this research, a purposive, or judgmental, sampling strategy is utilised to select participants from both the protected area management and the local community population. This selection includes senior managers, community liaison officers, and individuals involved in conservation from the protected area management side. As for the community population, it includes Traditional Authorities, community representatives, trustees, and other leaders. This comprehensive approach ensures the inclusion of individuals who can provide valuable insights into governance, drawing from their direct involvement in protected area management (Lune & Berg 2017).

1.11 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The study primarily employed semi-structured interviews as a key data collection method. According to May (2011), interviews offer a valuable means of gaining rich insights into individuals' experiences, values, perspectives, and emotions, making them an invaluable tool for qualitative research. This approach is also supported by Creswell and Poth (2018), who emphasised the fundamental role of interviews in qualitative studies for understanding issues from the participants' perspectives and unravelling their unique experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable data collection method for this study, allowing the researcher to engage with participants and capture the nuanced meanings of their experiences in their own words (May 2011). Within the realm of interviews, there are various types, including structured, semi-structured, unstructured, and group or focus-group interviews. In this study, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups will serve as the primary data collection tools (May 2011).

Semi-structured interviews offer the potential to provide rich descriptions and enables the researcher to probe for additional information, while also allowing respondents to share their perspectives beyond the specific questions posed to them (May 2011). Focus groups, on the other hand, provide a unique opportunity to delve deeper into participants' thought processes and gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Silverman 2016; Creswell & Poth 2018). Furthermore, focus groups facilitate group interactions among members of the target population, fostering discussions that can lead to valuable insights and connections between various concepts, which may not be as readily apparent through individual questionnaires (Silverman 2016; Creswell & Poth 2018).

1.12 STUDY VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To establish the validity and reliability of this thesis, a rigorous methodological approach is employed throughout the research process. Validity, in the context of this study, refers to the extent to which the research accurately and meaningfully captures the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Reliability, on the other hand, relates to the consistency and replicability of the research findings (Yin 2018). To ensure the validity of this research, a triangulation approach was adopted by integrating multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, enhancing the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Patton 2015).

Furthermore, member checking, involving participants in the review and validation of the research findings, will be conducted to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflect participants' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell 2017). In terms of reliability, a systematic data analysis process, following the framework approach was applied (Gale et al. 2013). This approach provides a structured and transparent framework for data organization, coding, and interpretation. Additionally, inter-rater reliability checks were performed to minimise potential researcher bias. Thematic analysis was employed, where multiple researchers independently identified themes in interviews or documents and coded a subset of the data to assess agreement (Miles et al. 2014). This methodological rigour is set to contribute to the dependability and consistency of the study's findings.

1.13 DATA ANALYSIS

In the context of this qualitative research project, the intertwining of data analysis with data collection reflects a robust methodological approach that is in line with contemporary qualitative research practices (Miles et al. 2014). This concurrent data analysis strategy ensures that insights and themes are not only identified after data collection but also actively inform the ongoing data-gathering process. The process begins with the initial coding of data into emerging themes, a technique that aligns with the principles of grounded theory and constant comparative analysis (Charmaz 2014). This real-time coding enables the researcher to adapt their data collection approach, tailoring subsequent interviews or observations to delve deeper into emerging areas of interest (Hennink et al. 2019).

The analytical framework employed in this study follows the "framework approach," which has gained prominence in qualitative research (Gale et al. 2013). The researcher's engagement with the data involves identifying and noting recurring themes during the familiarisation stage, contributing to the development of a thematic framework that guides subsequent analysis. This methodological approach offers a structured yet flexible mechanism for systematic data organization and interpretation. The use of descriptor texts for data indexing and charting further enhances the comprehensibility and synthesis of the findings (Richie & Lewis 2020). This methodological progression, from real-time coding to thematic framework development and data indexing, assures a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of the research questions, yielding nuanced insights and a distilled summary of recurring themes.

1.14 SCOPE, LIMITATIONS, AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a specific scope aimed at examining protected area management dynamics within selected protected areas in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The focus of the investigation is on the collaborative interactions between protected area managers or conservation managers and local communities within the context of sustainable resource management. This research delves into the perceptions, experiences, and contributions of a diverse array of stakeholders, including senior managers, community liaison officers, conservation personnel, Traditional Authorities, Community representatives, trustees, and other community leaders (Creswell & Creswell 2017; Sekaran & Bougie 2019).

The geographical scope of this study encompasses the selection of representative protected areas from each region within KwaZulu-Natal. The rationale behind this selection is to ensure diversity and inclusivity within the study. Furthermore, neighbouring communities in proximity to these chosen protected areas actively participated in the investigation, thus providing invaluable insights into the multifaceted relationships that underlie conservation efforts and their impact on local communities (Yin, 2018).

Several inherent limitations need to be acknowledged in this study. Firstly, the research was conducted within a confined timeframe, which posed constraints on the depth of data collection and the extent of subsequent analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Additionally, while attempts were made to select a diverse set of protected areas and communities, caution should be exercised regarding the generalizability of findings to encompass all protected areas and communities across KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from participants may introduce response bias, potentially impacting the accuracy of the findings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). Moreover, the study's findings may be influenced by the unique historical, cultural, and environmental context of KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, care should be taken when extrapolating and applying these results to other regions or countries (Yin 2018). Lastly, the research is contingent on the availability and willingness of participants to engage in the study, which could potentially affect the representativeness of the sample (Creswell & Creswell 2017).

1.15 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The definition of key concepts will help the reader gain an appropriate understanding of the study. These concepts are central to the research focus and will assist in ensuring clarity while limiting the study to relevant issues. Defining these terms also helps to avoid ambiguity and ensure a shared understanding of the themes explored in this research.

- **Collaborative Governance:** Ansell and Gash (2008) defined collaborative governance as a governing arrangement where public and private stakeholders engage collectively in decision-making, often to address complex policy issues. In the context of conservation, it involves multiple actors working together to manage protected areas.
- **Co-Management:** According to Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2007), co-management is a partnership between conservation authorities and local communities, where responsibilities,

decision-making, and benefits are shared. This model enhances local participation and promotes sustainable resource management.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Freeman (1984) described stakeholder engagement as the process of involving individuals or groups who are affected by or can influence a decision or project. In conservation, this means involving local communities, governments, and private organisations in managing protected areas.
- **Participatory Conservation:** Western and Wright (1994) defined participatory conservation as integrating local knowledge, practices, and needs into conservation efforts to promote long-term sustainability and local ownership of natural resources.
- **Protected Area (PA):** The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defined a protected area as "a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated, and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature" (Dudley 2008)
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** According to Groom et al. (2006), biodiversity conservation refers to the protection, management, and restoration of ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity to ensure ecological integrity and sustainability.
- **Ecosystem Services:** Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) described ecosystem services as the benefits humans derive from nature, including provisioning (e.g., food, water), regulating (e.g., climate control), supporting (e.g., soil formation), and cultural (e.g., recreation and spiritual) services.
- **Sustainable Ecotourism:** The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2002) defined sustainable ecotourism as tourism that minimises environmental impact, benefits local communities, and promotes conservation efforts.
- **Local Livelihoods:** Ellis (2000) defined livelihoods as the assets, activities, and strategies that individuals or households use to sustain their means of living. In conservation, local livelihoods refer to how communities near protected areas sustain themselves, often through agriculture, tourism, or resource use.
- **Socio-Economic Development:** Todaro and Smith (2015) defined socio- economic development as the process of improving economic and social well-being, including access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This is crucial in conservation areas where communities rely on natural resources for survival.
- **Land Restitution:** Walker (2008) described land restitution as the process of returning land to communities that were historically dispossessed, often under colonial and apartheid-era policies. In conservation, land restitution affects how protected areas are managed and who

benefits from them.

- **Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC):** Woodroffe et al. (2005) defined human-wildlife conflict as situations where human activities and wildlife needs overlap, leading to negative interactions such as crop damage, livestock predation, and threats to humans safety. These conflicts are common near protected areas.
- **Capacity Building:** According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997), capacity building is the process of developing skills, knowledge, and institutional strength within individuals or organizations to enhance effectiveness. In conservation, this applies to training local communities and park management in sustainable practices and governance.

1.16 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter One: Research Introduction and Background

In the introductory chapter, an extensive overview of the study is presented, highlighting its significance and the underlying research problem. The core problem statement is explored to illuminate its central role in this research endeavour. Furthermore, the specific objectives guiding the study are articulated, outlining the precise aims sought to be achieved. To establish the scope and boundaries of the research, the delimitations and rationale behind the chosen focus are elucidated, setting the stage for a systematic exploration of the research landscape.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the second chapter, the journey through existing literature commences with an introduction underscoring the importance of this review within the broader research context. Within this chapter, the intricate relationship between land claims and protected areas is examined, drawing insights from a multitude of scholarly works. Simultaneously, the realm of theory and concepts is navigated, engaging with pertinent frameworks related to land claims, protected areas, and collaborative governance. Key findings from previous studies are summarised to establish a foundational understanding of the research landscape. Ultimately, the diverse body of literature is synthesised, revealing gaps and areas ripe for

exploration.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

The third chapter is dedicated to the development of the theoretical framework. Commencing with an introduction that elucidates the chapter's purpose and pivotal role within the research, the exploration centres on theories underpinning and supporting the research, clarifying their relevance and applicability. Additionally, a comprehensive breakdown of key concepts and descriptions integral to the chosen collaborative governance theories is provided. This chapter further explores how these theories interrelate with the research questions, setting the theoretical stage for the study.

Chapter Four: Study area context

This chapter provides an overview of the study area's geographical, ecological, and socio-economic characteristics. This chapter provides an overview of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW), the provincial agency responsible for biodiversity conservation in KwaZulu-Natal. It outlines the agency's mandate, governance structure, and the protected areas under its management. The chapter further explores the ecological and economic significance of EKZNW's three operational regions, West, East, and Coastal highlighting key protected areas such as Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, and Ithala Game Reserve. A specific focus is placed on these four protected areas, which have active co-management agreements following successful land claims.

Chapter Five: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter five serves as the cornerstone of research design and methodology. Starting with an introduction that establishes the significance of this chapter within the broader context of the study, meticulous descriptions of the chosen research design are presented, expanding upon its suitability and rationale. The methods, techniques, and instruments utilized for data collection are elaborated upon to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research process. The intricacies of the sampling procedure are navigated, elucidating the criteria and considerations guiding sample selection. Additionally, the data analysis methods are clarified, providing an overview of the processing and interpretation of

collected data.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis and Interpretation

The sixth chapter assumes a central role in the research journey, with an introductory section setting the stage for data analysis and interpretation. The analytical procedures employed are explored in detail, outlining the methods used to rigorously process the data. Building upon this foundation, the research findings are presented and substantiated by relevant data sources. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the findings are analyzed and interpreted within the context of the research objectives. Furthermore, the meaning derived from the data and its broader implications are discussed, facilitating a deeper comprehension of the study's significance.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

In the final chapter, the conclusive phase of the research journey is embarked upon. Through an introductory section, the overarching objectives of this chapter are established. Summarising the key findings, their significance in addressing the central research problem is emphasized. Moving forward, practical recommendations tailored to benefit Protected Area Management, local communities, and other conservation stakeholders, all based on the research outcomes, are presented. Additionally, potential areas for future research are highlighted, contributing to the ongoing scholarly discourse in this field.

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review chapter functions as a guiding compass and a valuable repository of knowledge, facilitating the navigation of research through the intricate web of theories, variables, and phenomena relevant to the chosen topic. Within these pages, a critical analysis of seminal and contemporary works is conducted, all of which revolve around the central objective of the study. This literature review chapter provides an updated overview of the importance of protected areas for conservation and the livelihoods of local communities. It also discusses the challenges in reconciling conservation and local community livelihoods, drawing on recent literature.

The chapter then focuses on collaborative governance, providing a definition and explanation of the concept, highlighting the benefits of using this approach in protected areas, and exploring the key elements of collaborative governance. Subsequently, a proposed framework for collaborative governance in protected areas is presented, emphasising the importance of involving local communities in the development process and outlining the key components of the framework. Finally, recent strategies for promoting sustainable livelihoods for local communities in protected areas are discussed, and their potential to contribute to reconciling conservation and local community livelihoods is evaluated. By exploring these topics and drawing on current literature, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for reconciling conservation and local community livelihoods in protected areas through the lens of collaborative governance.

2.2 PROTECTED AREAS AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: AN OVERVIEW

Protected area governance in South Africa has been a topic of much discussion and debate in recent years. The country has made significant progress in establishing a network of protected areas, currently covering approximately 7.8% of the country's land area (SANParks 2022). However, there are still concerns about the effectiveness of protected area governance, particularly in relation to community engagement and participation.

One of the key challenges facing protected area governance in South Africa is the need to balance conservation objectives with the needs and aspirations of local communities (Adams et al. 2014). In many cases, protected areas have been established on land that was previously used by local communities for grazing or other activities, leading to conflicts over land use (Adams et al. 2014).

Furthermore, many communities feel that they have not been adequately consulted or involved in the decision-making processes around protected area management (Adams et al. 2014). To address these challenges, there have been calls for greater community participation in protected area governance in South Africa (Adams et al. 2014). One approach that has been proposed is the establishment of community-based conservation initiatives, which would give local communities a greater role in the management of protected areas (Adams et al. 2014).

Collaborative governance has gained recognition as an effective approach for managing protected areas. It refers to the process of involving multiple stakeholders in decision-making and action-taking related to the management of protected areas (Emerson et al., 2015). This approach involves sharing power, responsibility, and resources, as well as building trust and mutual understanding among stakeholders (Stern & Baird, 2015). Collaborative governance can take different forms, such as co-management, community-based management, and adaptive management (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2017).

This governance approach further improves the quality and legitimacy of decision-making, increases compliance with regulations and agreements, and enhances the adaptive capacity of protected area management (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2015). In essence, collaborative governance in protected area management involves various stakeholders working together to identify and address issues related to protected area management (Emerson et al., 2015). This approach ensures the sharing of power, responsibility, and resources among stakeholders, fostering trust and mutual understanding (Stern & Baird, 2015).

Collaborative governance can take different forms, such as co-management, community-

based management, and adaptive management (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2017). Protected areas, designated and managed for the conservation of biodiversity, cultural heritage, and ecosystem services (CBD, 2021), require a delicate balance between conservation goals and socioeconomic and cultural values. They also face numerous challenges, including climate change, human activities, and conflicts among stakeholders (Mascia et al., 2014). One example of collaborative governance in protected area management is the establishment of co-management arrangements between indigenous peoples and government agencies (Berkes et al., 2018). Co-management involves sharing authority and responsibilities for decision-making, planning, and monitoring of protected areas. This approach enhances the participation and recognition of indigenous peoples in protected area management and improves the ecological and cultural outcomes of protected areas (Murray et al., 2019).

2.3 Key Elements of Collaborative Governance:

- **Shared Vision and Goals:** Collaborative governance requires a shared vision and goals among all the stakeholders involved. This shared vision provides a common understanding of what the collaboration aims to achieve and allows stakeholders to align their efforts towards a common goal. According to Emerson et al. (2012), shared vision and goals provide the foundation for building trust, which is critical to successful collaboration.
- **Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for effective collaboration. Each stakeholder must understand their role in the collaboration, and what is expected of them. This clarity helps to avoid confusion, duplication of effort, and conflicting priorities. As argued by Ansell and Gash (2008), clear roles and responsibilities provide a framework for accountability, which is essential to maintain trust among stakeholders.
- **Effective Communication:** Effective communication is a fundamental element of collaborative governance. Open and honest communication between stakeholders promotes transparency and helps to build trust. Good communication also enables stakeholders to share information, identify potential problems, and find solutions. As noted by Bryson et al. (2015), effective communication is essential to maintain engagement and participation among stakeholders.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Collaborative governance requires flexibility and adaptability

to respond to changing circumstances. As issues evolve, stakeholders may need to adjust their approaches and strategies to achieve their goals. This flexibility allows stakeholders to learn from their experiences, and to make changes that improve the effectiveness of the collaboration. As argued by Huxham and Vangen (2013), flexibility and adaptability are essential to maintain momentum and sustain the collaboration over time.

- **Importance of Elements of Collaborative Governance:** These elements of collaborative governance are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, they help to build trust among stakeholders, which is critical for successful collaboration. Trust allows stakeholders to work together, share information, and take risks. They further clarify expectations, roles and responsibilities, which is essential for accountability. Clear expectations help to maintain engagement and participation among stakeholders and enable them to work effectively together.

2.4 THE NATIONAL CO-MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African National Co-Management Framework was developed to address the challenges faced by local communities – particularly those affected by land restitution claims – in gaining access to, and benefiting from, protected areas. This framework is built upon South Africa's broader commitment to land restitution, as enshrined in the Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994), and its obligation to comply with international conventions on protected area management, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (No. 57 of 2003) serves as the cornerstone of co-management.

Agreements in South Africa. Section 42 of the Act allows the management authority of a protected area (usually a state agency or a non-governmental organization) to enter into agreements with local communities or other parties to co-manage the area. These agreements can encompass a variety of roles and responsibilities, such as shared decision-making, the delegation of management functions, benefit-sharing, and the promotion of socio-economic opportunities within the protected area (National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), 2003).

A key challenge in this context is the widespread misconception that co-management is synonymous with joint management, where communities are perceived as having equal

authority in managing the protected area. Co-management agreements typically involve a more nuanced power dynamic, where the management authority retains significant control over the protected area's strategic direction, while communities may have limited participation in operational management (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006).

2.4.1 Models of Co-Management

The National Co-Management Framework outlines several models of co-management that vary in their approach to community involvement, benefit-sharing, and governance responsibilities. These models are designed to be flexible, allowing them to be adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of different protected areas and the communities involved.

- **Full Co-Management:** In this model, the management authority and local communities share responsibility for managing the protected area. This includes joint decision-making, involvement in planning, and the equitable sharing of benefits such as revenue from ecotourism or resource use. Full co-management is generally applied in areas where there is viable socio-economic opportunities for local communities. However, it is a complex and lengthy process that requires substantial investment in capacity building and stakeholder engagement.
- **Lease Agreements:** In cases where socio-economic opportunities are limited, a lease agreement may be used, where the state leases land from local communities for the management of the protected area. This model tends to offer more immediate financial benefits to communities through fixed rental income but does not offer them significant management rights or decision-making power. It is commonly used in areas where the state or other actors manage most of the conservation responsibilities.
- **Part Co-Management / Part Lease:** This hybrid model combines elements of both full co-management and lease agreements. Local communities may participate in certain aspects of management and benefit-sharing, but the state retains overall control. This model is often applied when there are limited resources for full co-management but where some degree of community involvement is deemed important for long-term sustainability (South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT, 2014).

Each of these models represents a range of governance arrangements, with varying degrees of community involvement and benefits, depending on the context of the protected area and the level of local engagement (Tshangana et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Benefits of Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance in protected areas refers to a process where multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, private organisations, local communities, and conservationists, work together to make decisions and manage natural resources (Baird et al., 2019). The benefits of collaborative governance in protected areas are manifold and include improved resource management, increased stakeholder engagement and satisfaction, better communication, and increased trust among stakeholders (McLain et al, 2018).

In a study conducted by Baird et al. (2019), it was found that collaborative governance helped in the effective management of protected areas, leading to a better understanding of the ecological, economic, and social values of the area. This, in turn, led to the identification and implementation of sustainable management practices that ensured the protection of natural resources. Another benefit of collaborative governance in protected areas is increased stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. The involvement of multiple stakeholders in decision-making processes ensures that the concerns and interests of all stakeholders are addressed, leading to greater satisfaction and participation (Armitage et al., 2017). This is particularly important in the context of protected areas, where the involvement of local communities can lead to better conservation outcomes.

Better communication is also a benefit of collaborative governance in protected areas. In a study by McLain et al. (2018), it was found that collaborative governance facilitated communication among stakeholders, leading to increased understanding, trust, and cooperation. This, in turn, helped in the development of effective management plans that were widely accepted and implemented. Finally, collaborative governance in protected areas can lead to increased trust among stakeholders. Trust is essential in building long-term partnerships that can sustain conservation efforts (Baird et al., 2019). Collaborative governance helps in building trust by promoting transparency, accountability, and shared decision-making processes. The successful implementation of collaborative governance in

protected areas requires the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders, including government agencies, private organisations, local communities, and conservationists.

2.4.3 Successful implementation of collaborative governance in protected areas

Collaborative governance has been increasingly recognized as an effective approach for managing protected areas. One example of successful implementation of collaborative governance in protected areas is the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor (GCBC) in South Africa (Mkhize et al., 2018). The GCBC is a collaborative effort between the government, NGOs, and local communities to protect and restore the biodiversity of the region while promoting sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

The success of GCBC can be attributed to the strong partnerships between stakeholders and the incorporation of local knowledge and practices in decision-making processes. Another successful example is the Collaborative Management of Protected Areas in Tanzania (COMAP) project (Makungu et al., 2019). The COMAP is a collaborative effort between the government, NGOs, and local communities to improve the management of protected areas in Tanzania. The project has led to improved governance, increased participation of local communities, and improved conservation outcomes.

Lessons learned from these case studies include the importance of building strong partnerships and trust between stakeholders, incorporating local knowledge and practices in decision-making processes, and ensuring that the benefits of conservation efforts are distributed equitably among all stakeholders (Makungu et al., 2019; Mkhize et al., 2018). Additionally, effective communication and conflict resolution mechanisms are critical for ensuring the success of collaborative governance efforts in protected areas (Armitage et al., 2019).

Best practices for implementing collaborative governance in protected areas include the development of clear goals and objectives, the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities for stakeholders, and the provision of adequate resources and support for stakeholders (Armitage et al., 2019; Mkhize et al., 2018). Additionally, the use of adaptive management approaches that allow for flexibility and learning is essential for ensuring the long-term success of collaborative governance efforts (Makungu et al., 2019). These lessons and best practices can guide the development and implementation of collaborative

governance in protected areas to ensure long-term sustainability and success.

2.5 CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

While community-based approaches to protected area management have many benefits, there are also several challenges associated with these approaches. One of the main challenges is the limited capacity of local communities to effectively participate in decision-making processes (Chigumira, 2018). This is often due to a lack of resources, including financial resources and access to information and training (Chigumira, 2018). Another challenge is the potential for conflicts between different stakeholder groups, including local communities, government agencies, and private sector entities (Chigumira, 2018).

Community involvement in protected area management in South Africa is recognised as a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of conservation efforts. The involvement of local communities in the management of protected areas has been recognised as a means of ensuring that the needs and interests of local people are considered, while also promoting the sustainable use of natural resources (Mbaiwa, 2005). This analysis will examine the extent of community involvement in protected area management in South Africa and assess the effectiveness of these efforts.

South Africa has a long history of community involvement in protected area management, dating back to the establishment of the first protected area, the Kruger National Park, in 1926. Over the years, several initiatives have been implemented to promote community involvement, including community conservation programs, community-based natural resource management, and benefit-sharing agreements (McManus, 2000). Despite these efforts, the extent of community involvement in protected area management in South Africa has been limited.

There are several reasons for this, including the limited capacity of local communities to participate effectively in decision-making processes, a lack of trust between local communities and conservation authorities, and conflicts over resource use (Lindsey et al., 2013). In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of community involvement in protected area management in South Africa, and efforts have been made to address some of the challenges that have hindered these efforts in the past. One of the key approaches has been the establishment of community-based conservation

initiatives, which aim to involve local communities in the management of protected areas through the establishment of community-based organizations and the provision of training and capacity-building programs (Lindsey et al., 2013).

Another approach has been the promotion of benefit-sharing agreements, which provide local communities with a share of the revenue generated by protected areas through ecotourism and other activities (Mbaiwa, 2005). These agreements have been successful in promoting community involvement in protected area management and in ensuring that local people benefit from conservation efforts (Lindsey et al., 2013). Overall, while community involvement in protected area management in South Africa has been limited in the past, there are signs of progress in this area. The establishment of community-based conservation initiatives and benefit-sharing agreements has been instrumental in promoting community involvement and ensuring that local people benefit from conservation efforts.

However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the needs and interests of local communities are fully integrated into protected area management in South Africa. The involvement of local communities in protected area management and governance has been a longstanding and complex issue within the realm of conservation policy and practice. Despite the recognition of the importance of local participation in decision-making processes, there are persistent basic mismatches between policy objectives and actual implementation.

2.6 Levels of Stakeholder Involvement

The study considers different levels of stakeholder engagement based on Wight's (2004) continuum of participation, as outlined in Table 2.6.1.

2.7 Table 2.7.1: Levels of stakeholder involvement

Approach	Selected Techniques	Message to the Public
Joint Planning	Consultation, Mediation, Negotiation	Committed to using results in all but extenuating cases

Extended Involvement	Advisory groups, Task forces	Expect to implement most of their advice
Consultation	Community meetings, Conferences, Workshops	Value their views and input
Information Feedback	Briefs, Focus groups	Want them to understand and support the programme
Public Information/ Education	Advertising, News papers, Posters	Want them to be informed and understand the initiative

Source: Self-generated by author

In the context of protected areas, many policies, strategies, and activities are driven by environmental laws, making them difficult to adjust. As a result, some consultation processes may primarily serve as symbolic gestures rather than genuine engagements, functioning as mechanisms to educate or secure public support for predetermined conservation or development goals (Arnstein, 1969). Recognising these dynamics, Wight (2004) developed a framework that categorises different levels of stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes, ranging from one-way communication to collaborative planning. This framework outlines five levels of stakeholder participation. The first two levels, public education and information feedback, primarily involve one-way communication, where institutions disseminate information to communities with the expectation of raising awareness and garnering support. The third level, consultation, introduces two-way communication, where stakeholders provide input, but decision-making power remains with the authorities. The fourth level, extended involvement, and the fifth level, joint planning, represent increasing degrees of participatory engagement, where institutions commit to incorporating stakeholder recommendations into planning and management, except under extraordinary circumstances.

While this continuum acknowledges varying degrees of stakeholder influence, it also highlights a critical gap: the absence of community control and empowerment. This contrasts with broader models of participatory governance, which emphasise shared decision-making authority and equitable distribution of benefits (Arnstein, 1969; Pimbert &

Pretty, 1997). In the context of protected areas, Wight's framework underscores the dominant role of conservation institutions in guiding decision-making processes, often limiting the influence of local communities. This centralised approach raises concerns regarding key governance principles such as equity, subsidiarity, and the fair distribution of authority and responsibilities (IUCN, 2003a, b, c; Graham et al., 2003a, b; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2006).

Although inclusive decision-making is widely promoted (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2006), achieving truly collaborative governance requires more than consultative mechanisms it demands genuine power-sharing arrangements between conservation authorities and local communities. Furthermore, as Wight (2004) and Graham et al. (2003) suggested, the fundamental conservation values embedded in protected area governance can sometimes conflict with the interests of local communities, further limiting their ability to influence decision-making. These challenges are compounded by external social, political, and economic factors that, while seemingly unrelated to conservation, can indirectly shape the governance landscape of protected areas (Richardson & Connelly, 2002). Consequently, governance frameworks must navigate complex interactions between institutional control and community participation to ensure that conservation strategies align with local socio-economic needs while maintaining ecological integrity.

2.8 A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

Protected areas have emerged as crucial instruments in global efforts to safeguard biodiversity, serving as designated spaces that are explicitly recognised, dedicated, and effectively managed to achieve long-term conservation goals while preserving associated ecosystem services and cultural values, as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) definition (Dudley, 2008:9). This concept transcends borders and finds particular significance in the diverse landscapes of South Africa, where protected areas encompass a wide range of environments, from national parks to provincial reserves, marine parks, and reserves administered by both national and provincial conservation agencies (Thondhlana & Georgina, 2017: 206). These protected areas are categorised based on their specific objectives, striving to harmonise scientific and socio-economic imperatives (Ayivor et al., 2020: 3).

For most of the twentieth century, the conservation of biodiversity within protected areas was primarily characterised by strategies that often-excluded local communities, leading to their displacement and the erosion of their land ownership rights and access to natural resources (Thondhlana & Georgina, 2017: 206). However, the conservation landscape has undergone significant transformation over the years. This transformation has been marked by a shift towards a social-ecological systems approach, which acknowledges the intricate interplay between human and ecological components within protected areas (Cumming, 2016: 49). This paradigmatic shift has given rise to the imperative for collaborative governance models that delineate power structures, authority, and the allocation of decision-making responsibilities (Graeme et al., 2015).

In this evolving narrative of protected area management, several critical themes come to the fore:

The Emergence of Protected Areas as Biodiversity Safeguards: Over time, protected areas have transitioned from being mere geographical designations to becoming the linchpin of global biodiversity conservation efforts (CBD, 2021). They serve as sanctuaries for unique ecosystems and wildlife, preserving not only the biological diversity of these regions but also the cultural and ecological values they hold.

South Africa's Diverse Protected Area Portfolio: South Africa, with its rich tapestry of natural environments, has adopted a multifaceted approach to protected area management (SANParks, 2022). The country's protected areas span various ecosystems, including terrestrial and marine, reflecting the nation's commitment to conserving its natural and cultural heritage. National parks, provincial reserves, and marine parks collectively form a comprehensive network of protected spaces.

The Legacy of Socially Exclusive Conservation: Historically, the conservation efforts within protected areas were often at odds with the interests of local communities (Adams et al., 2007). The displacement of these communities, often resulting in the loss of land rights and access to resources, underscores the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between conservation goals and the well-being of local populations.

The Paradigm Shift towards Social-Ecological Systems: Contemporary conservation thinking recognises that protected areas are not isolated enclaves but are embedded within broader social-ecological systems (Berkes et al., 2009). This shift underscores the need for holistic approaches that consider the dynamic interplay between ecological and human

elements.

The Imperative for Collaborative Governance: The recognition of the social- ecological nature of protected areas has led to a growing consensus on the importance of collaborative governance (Emerson et al., 2015). This approach seeks to address power dynamics, allocate decision-making responsibilities, and foster inclusivity in the management of these vital spaces.

As the world grapples with the urgent need to conserve biodiversity, protect ecosystems, and promote sustainable development, the history of protected area management serves as a dynamic narrative, evolving in response to changing societal values, ecological understandings, and governance models. The trajectory of this history reflects a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of nature and human well-being and the imperative for collaborative and inclusive approaches to conservation.

2.9 PROTECTED AREA CATEGORIES

The IUCN Protected Area Management Categories, first introduced in 1994 and updated since, are a classification system that categorizes protected areas based on their management objectives and primary purposes. These categories provide a framework for understanding the diverse goals and functions of protected areas. It is imperative to explore each category and highlight their key characteristics and examine their relevance in the context of conservation and protected area management.

2.9.1 Category I: Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Area

This category designates protected areas primarily managed for science or wilderness protection. It emphasises minimal human intervention to preserve natural processes and ecosystems (IUCN, 1994a). In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the role of strict nature reserves in conserving biodiversity, studying climate change impacts, and preserving wilderness areas (Selva et al., 2021). In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the role of strict nature reserves in conserving biodiversity, studying climate change impacts, and preserving wilderness areas (Selva et al., 2021).

2.9.2 Category II: National Park

National parks are managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation. They aim to strike a balance between preserving biodiversity and providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education (IUCN, 1994a). Recent research (Rogers et al., 2019) emphasises the importance of sustainable tourism and visitor management in national parks to minimize ecological impacts while maximising visitor experiences.

2.9.3 Category III: Natural Monument:

This category is dedicated to protected areas managed mainly for the conservation of specific natural features, such as unique geological formations or rare plant species (IUCN, 1994a). In the past few years, there has been growing recognition of the significance of natural monuments in preserving geodiversity and addressing threats to unique geological features (UNESCO, 2020).

2.9.4 Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area:

Protected areas in this category are managed primarily for conservation through management intervention, particularly for the protection of specific habitats or species (IUCN, 1994a). Recently, Jones et al. (2020) highlighted the critical role of habitat/species management areas in species recovery and habitat restoration efforts, especially in the face of biodiversity loss.

2.9.5 Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape:

This category encompasses protected areas managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation, recognising the cultural and scenic values of the area (IUCN, 1994a). In the current decade, protected landscape/seascape areas have gained importance as models for integrating conservation with sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation (Dudley et al., 2017).

2.9.6 Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area:

Managed resource protected areas are primarily managed for the sustainable use of natural resources while conserving biodiversity (IUCN, 1994a). Ban et al. (2022) recently focused on adaptive management approaches within managed resource protected areas to balance resource utilisation with ecological sustainability and long-term conservation. The IUCN Protected Area Management Categories continue to be instrumental in guiding the management and conservation of protected areas. Their adaptability and relevance reflect the evolving

understanding of conservation needs and the increasing recognition of the importance of harmonising conservation with sustainable human activities, cultural values, and recreation. These categories serve as a valuable tool for stakeholders and policymakers working to protect and manage diverse landscapes and seascapes worldwide.

2.10 PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS

Protected areas serve as vital tools for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem protection, and sustainable development. Their success, however, relies on robust governance structures and management approaches. Protected Area Management Frameworks establish essential policy directives, strategic plans, and operational procedures to maintain these natural habitats while addressing ecological, economic, and social considerations.

2.10.1 Adaptive Management in Protected Area Management: A Modern Approach to Conservation

Adaptive management, a concept introduced by Holling in 1978, has emerged as a dynamic and essential framework within the field of protected area management. This approach centres on the idea of learning from management actions over time and making necessary adjustments to strategies in response to new information and changing conditions. Recent applications of adaptive management have underscored its significance in addressing pressing conservation challenges, particularly in the context of climate change adaptation. In the face of rapidly evolving environmental stressors and uncertainties, adaptive management offers a structured approach to making informed decisions while acknowledging the inherent complexities of natural systems.

Allen & Gunderson (2021) highlighted the contemporary relevance of adaptive management by showcasing its utility in addressing some of the most critical challenges facing conservationists today. One such challenge is climate change adaptation, where shifting weather patterns, habitat disruptions, and altered species distributions require flexible and adaptive strategies to ensure the persistence of ecosystems and biodiversity. Recent literature demonstrates the effectiveness of adaptive management in responding to the impacts of climate change. It allows for continuous monitoring and assessment of ecosystem responses to changing conditions, facilitating timely interventions and adjustments in management strategies.

By integrating new scientific knowledge and local observations into decision-making processes, adaptive management enables managers to make informed choices that enhance the resilience of protected areas. Furthermore, the flexibility inherent in adaptive management aligns with the principles of resilience and adaptability in social-ecological systems (Walker et al., 2008). It empowers protected area managers to experiment with different approaches, fostering a culture of innovation and learning. This adaptability is crucial not only for addressing climate change but also for responding to other emerging threats, such as invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and altered fire regimes. The Adaptive Management Framework stands as a beacon of hope for the conservation community, offering a practical approach to navigate the uncertainties and challenges of the Anthropocene.

2.10.2 The Open Standards for Conservation: A Structured Path to Effective Conservation Management

The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, a framework introduced by the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) in 2018, has become a cornerstone in contemporary conservation planning and management. This framework provides a structured and adaptable approach to guide conservation efforts, promoting evidence-based decision-making and enhanced effectiveness. Recent literature showcases the success of various conservation projects that have harnessed the Open Standards framework, highlighting its versatility and its capacity to deliver tangible conservation outcomes.

The Open Standards framework offers a systematic process that integrates elements of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, thereby ensuring that conservation efforts are guided by rigorous science and adaptive management. As Margoluis et al. (2013) affirmed, conservation initiatives have harnessed the Open Standards approach to structuring their projects, resulting in greater clarity of goals and objectives, improved stakeholder engagement, and more effective allocation of resources. This adaptability is crucial in the face of the evolving challenges confronting conservation, such as habitat loss, invasive species, and climate change.

One of the key strengths of the Open Standards framework lies in its capacity to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, fostering collaborative decision-making and knowledge

sharing. Conservation efforts today demand interdisciplinary cooperation and active engagement with local communities and indigenous knowledge. The Open Standards framework provides the tools and structure to facilitate such collaborations, aligning with the principles of participatory and community-based conservation (Sundström et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the adaptability and scalability of the Open Standards framework enable its application across various conservation contexts, from the restoration of degraded landscapes to the protection of endangered species and ecosystems. Recent literature (Conservation Measures Partnership, 2020) highlighted its successful implementation in projects around the world, emphasising its role in enhancing conservation outcomes and promoting the resilience of natural systems. The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation has evolved into a pivotal framework for contemporary conservation efforts.

2.10.3 Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM): A Holistic Approach to Addressing Marine Conservation Challenges

Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) has emerged as a critical framework for contemporary conservation efforts, focusing on the holistic conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems. Introduced by Douvère (2008), EBM has gained prominence due to its capacity to address pressing marine conservation challenges, with recent applications emphasising its adaptability and effectiveness. Ecosystem-Based Management recognises that ecosystems are interconnected, and their health is essential for both biodiversity and human well-being. Recent literature Long, Charles and Stephenson (2015) highlight the instrumental role of EBM in addressing marine conservation challenges, such as marine spatial planning.

Davies et al. (2020) illustrated how EBM principles are central to marine spatial planning – a crucial tool for balancing competing uses of marine resources while safeguarding marine ecosystems. By considering ecological, social, and economic factors in decision-making, EBM ensures that conservation goals are harmonised with sustainable human activities, facilitating the coexistence of diverse interests in shared marine spaces. One of the strengths of EBM lies in its adaptability to diverse marine contexts, from coral reef conservation to large-scale marine protected area design. Recent applications have demonstrated their versatility in promoting resilient marine ecosystems while accommodating the needs of coastal communities (Halpern et al., 2021).

Furthermore, EBM aligns with global conservation initiatives, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity's post-2020 framework, underscoring its relevance in addressing the interconnected challenges of our time. Ecosystem-Based Management stands as a robust and versatile framework for marine conservation in the 21st century. This is primarily due to its efficacy in addressing marine conservation challenges, particularly through tools like marine spatial planning.

2.10.4 The Landscape Approach: Integrating Conservation in Multifunctional Landscapes

The Landscape Approach Framework has emerged as a pivotal strategy in contemporary protected area management, emphasising the management of protected areas within broader landscapes while considering ecological connectivity and human activities beyond traditional boundaries. As introduced by Sayer et al. in 2013, this approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of ecosystems and human societies, recognising that the conservation of protected areas is not isolated from the multifaceted landscapes in which they exist. Recent studies, for example, Lindenmayer et al. (2021), underscored the profound significance of the landscape approach in achieving conservation outcomes within multifunctional landscapes.

The landscape approach's core strength lies in its ability to transcend the boundaries of protected areas and embrace a holistic perspective of conservation. In an era marked by habitat fragmentation, climate change, and increasing human demands on natural resources, this framework promotes the integration of conservation goals with sustainable land use and development. Recent literature highlights its effectiveness in reconciling the often-competing interests of biodiversity conservation, agricultural production, and urbanisation (Sayer et al., 2013). Moreover, the landscape approach aligns with global conservation initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity's post-2020 framework and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It underscored the need to address the complex challenges of our time, recognising that the conservation of protected areas alone is insufficient to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services. By fostering collaborative partnerships among stakeholders and embracing adaptive management principles, the landscape approach offers a pathway to achieving conservation outcomes that extend beyond the boundaries of protected areas and into the heart of multifunctional landscape

2.10.5 Collaborative Governance: Fostering Inclusivity in Protected Area Management

Collaborative governance frameworks have emerged as a pivotal approach in contemporary protected area management, emphasizing the involvement of diverse stakeholders in decision-making and management processes. Introduced by Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh in 2015, these models prioritize inclusive participation and shared responsibilities among stakeholders. Gupta et al. (2023) underscored the significance of enforcing collaborative governance agreements to ensure the effectiveness of community participation in protected area management. Collaborative governance models represent a paradigm shift from traditional top-down management approaches, recognising the valuable contributions of local communities, indigenous peoples, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders in protected area decision-making.

Such inclusivity fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among those directly impacted by conservation efforts. Gupta et al. (2023) delved into the nuanced challenges and opportunities within collaborative governance, shedding light on the critical role of enforcement mechanisms in ensuring the commitments made by various parties are upheld. Effective community participation in protected area management is not merely an aspirational goal; it is a necessity for achieving lasting conservation outcomes. Jones et al. (2020) emphasised that without the enforcement of collaborative agreements, there is a risk of tokenistic engagement where communities are invited to participate but lack meaningful influence over decision-making.

Enforcement mechanisms ensure that promises of empowerment, local knowledge integration, and resource-sharing translate into tangible actions and outcomes. Thus, collaborative governance not only promotes transparency and inclusivity but also reinforces accountability, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of protected area management efforts. The overarching aim of this study is to critically examine the extent of local community engagement in collaborative governance within protected areas and how government involvement influences local perspectives on conservation, aligns closely with the principles and challenges discussed in the Collaborative Governance Framework. The framework provides for an exploration of the intricacies of community involvement, enforcement mechanisms, and the impact of government participation in protected areas.

2.11 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS GUIDING PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section provides an overview of the key regulatory frameworks and international agreements that govern protected area management in South Africa. It explores the legislative instruments that guide the establishment, management, and conservation of protected areas, as well as the broader environmental regulations that complement these laws. Additionally, it highlights South Africa's commitments to international conventions that influence national policies for biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management. The section also summarises the regulatory frameworks, as outlined in Table 2.2, offering a detailed look at the various laws, strategies, and agreements that shape protected area management in the country.

2.11.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

Table 2.11.1: Key Regulatory Frameworks

REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS	DESCRIPTION
National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMPAA), 2003	Primary legislation for establishing, managing, and protecting protected areas in South Africa.
National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), 2004	Complements NEMPAA by focusing on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, regulating activities impacting biodiversity.
National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (NPAES)	Strategic framework for expanding and consolidating protected areas, setting objectives for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience.
Protected Area Management Categories	Classifies protected areas into management categories (e.g., national parks, nature reserves) with specific guidelines.
Integrated Management Plans (IMPs)	Mandatory plans guiding management and conservation efforts within protected areas, covering biodiversity, visitor management, and

	stakeholder engagement.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations	NEMA-based regulations assessing and mitigating environmental impacts of development activities near or within protected areas.
Community Participation and Stakeholder Engagement	Emphasizes involvement of local communities and stakeholders in protected area management through participatory and co-management approaches
International Conventions and Agreements	South Africa's commitments to global conventions (e.g., CBD, Ramsar Convention) influencing national policies for protected area management.

Source: Self-generated by author

2.12 LAND RESTITUTION AND CO-MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S PROTECTED AREAS

Land restitution in South Africa, particularly within protected areas, is a significant issue that impacts both conservation and local community development. The Restitution of Land Rights Act (No 22 of 1994, as amended) plays a central role in this process, as it provides for the restoration of land rights to individuals or communities dispossessed of their land due to discriminatory practices following the enactment of racially biased laws, particularly after June 19, 1913 (South Africa, 1994). This legislation has had far-reaching implications for the management and governance of South Africa's protected areas, many of which are now partially or wholly under land claim.

Historically, South Africa's protected areas were established through practices that often excluded local communities. These areas were strictly controlled, with little to no positive interaction between conservation authorities and neighbouring communities. In most cases, it was illegal for communities to gather traditional resources such as medicinal plants, firewood, or food from these areas, further exacerbating the socio-economic divide. As a result, many protected areas that were managed by conservation agencies are now

subject to land claims, and land restitution has become a key issue in reconciling conservation goals with the rights and needs of local communities.

2.12.1 The Cape Vidal Memorandum and the People and Parks Program

The issue of land claims and their impact on protected areas was a focal point at the 5th World Parks Congress (WPC) held in Durban in 2003. At this congress, representatives from 12 rural communities living in or near protected areas, who had submitted restitution claims, met at Cape Vidal to discuss the role that protected areas could play in local economic development and poverty alleviation. These discussions led to the formulation of the Cape Vidal Memorandum, which outlined several important issues and recommendations for improving the relationship between communities and conservation efforts (DEAT, 2014). The Cape Vidal Memorandum emphasised the following key points:

- **Land Ownership and Rights:** Secure land ownership and clear access rights are fundamental for local communities to engage in meaningful partnerships with conservation agencies and to unlock the benefits that come with such collaborations.
- **Capacity Building:** The lack of capacity in both communities and conservation agencies was identified as a major challenge to effective co-management, highlighting the need for training and resource allocation to ensure successful partnerships.
- **Tourism Development:** Structured tourism businesses, which link conservation efforts to local economic benefits, were identified as a critical tool for promoting sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation (DEAT, 2014).
- These discussions were integral in advancing the People and Parks Programme, an initiative that seeks to involve historically disadvantaged communities in conservation and to ensure they benefit from the sustainable management of natural resources. The programme encourages the integration of local communities (both claimants and non-claimants) into conservation activities, providing them with access to economic benefits through tourism and resource management.

2.12.2 The Makuleke Contractual Agreement

A key component of land restitution in South Africa's protected areas is the use of co-management agreements. These agreements, which allow for the shared management of protected areas between conservation agencies and local communities, are essential in addressing the tensions that arise from land claims. Under the current legal framework,

the Restitution of Land Claims Commission (RLCC) works alongside conservation agencies to facilitate negotiations with land claimants. Co- management agreements provide a structured way for local communities to engage in the management and decision-making processes related to conservation, ensuring that their rights and interests are considered in the governance of protected areas.

To support these negotiations, co-management frameworks are distributed to land claimant representatives in advance. This allows communities to prepare for discussions and ensures that all parties are clear about the terms and conditions of the agreements. Furthermore, staff from both conservation agencies and the RLCC are available to assist with clarifying legal terminology and addressing any concerns that arise during the process. These frameworks also include provisions for reviewing and amending legal documentation as necessary to ensure that all concerns are addressed, and that the agreements are equitable and sustainable for both conservation agencies and local communities

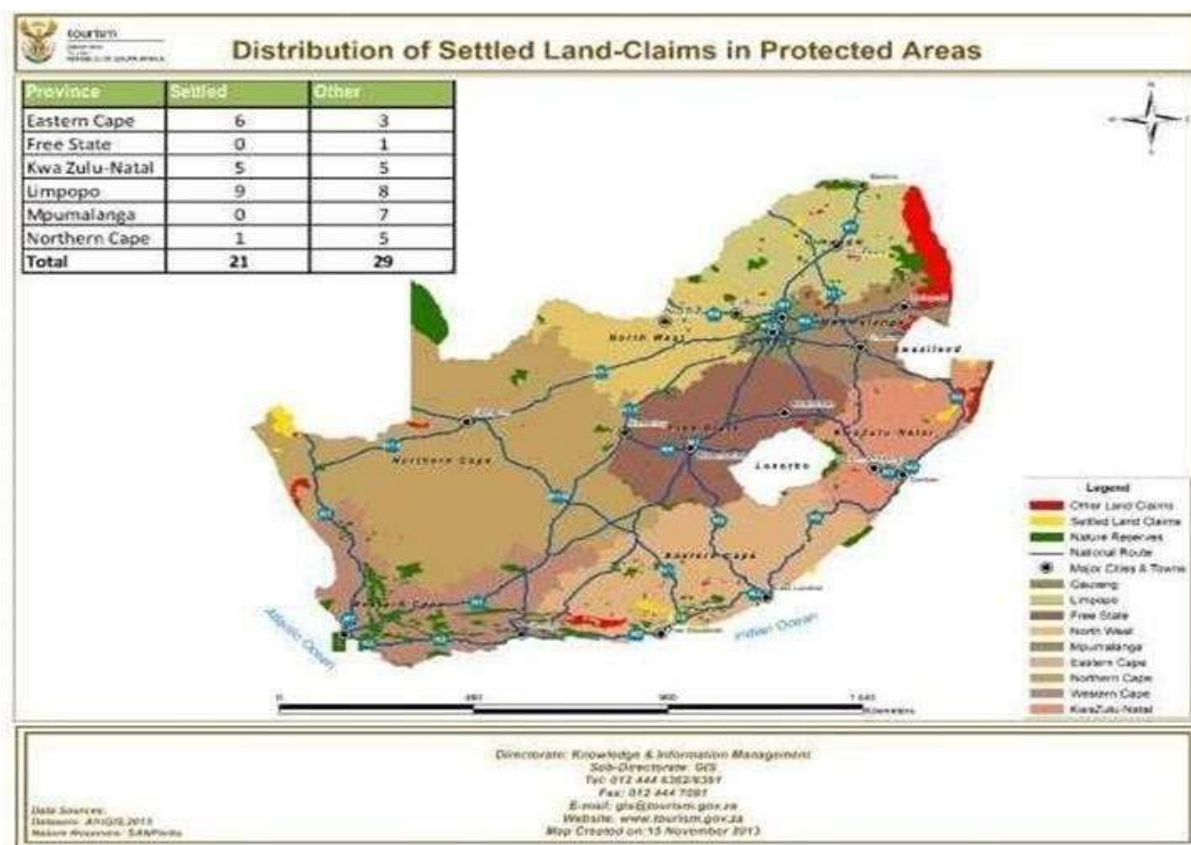


Figure 2.12.2: Settled land claims on protected areas in South Africa

Source: Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) (2013); San Parks (2020)

Figure 2.12.2 maps out the distribution of land claims in protected areas. The distribution

of land claims status is represented by different colours. The land claims list on protected areas was sourced from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. The data sourced from DRDLR and SANParks was then utilised to map land claims which were settled or rather in the process of settlement.

2.13 GAPS IN LITERATURE

One major gap in literature is the lack of attention to power dynamics between stakeholders in collaborative governance efforts. While collaboration is often portrayed as a solution to conflicts between stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge that power imbalances can still exist and impact decision-making processes. There is a need for research that explores how power dynamics can be effectively addressed in collaborative governance efforts in protected areas. There is also a lack of attention to the impacts of external factors, such as political and economic changes, on collaborative governance efforts in protected areas. Collaborative governance can be influenced by broader societal and political changes, and it is important to understand how these changes impact the success of collaborative governance efforts. Additionally, there is limited research on the long-term sustainability of collaborative governance efforts in protected areas. While there are many successful examples of collaborative governance, it is unclear how these efforts can be sustained over time. Research is needed to explore how collaborative governance can be maintained and adapted over the long term to ensure continued success. Addressing these gaps through further research can help to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of collaborative governance efforts in protected areas (Makungu et al., 2019; Armitage et al., 2019).

2.14 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This study explores the role of collaborative governance in managing protected areas in South Africa, focusing on the balance between conservation goals and the livelihoods of local communities. The literature review chapter explored the importance of PAs for both conservation and local community development, citing recent literature that highlighted challenges in reconciling these objectives. The review introduces the concept of collaborative governance, emphasising its significance in promoting stakeholder involvement in decision-making. It defines collaborative governance and explores its key elements such as shared vision, clear roles, effective communication, and adaptability, all of which are vital for fostering trust and effective partnerships between various

stakeholders. The chapter outlined the National Co-Management Framework in South Africa, which offers a model for co-managing protected areas with local communities. The framework includes various models of co-management, such as full co-management, lease agreements, and part co-management/part lease, each varying in community involvement and benefits. The study further assesses the benefits of collaborative governance, including improved resource management, increased stakeholder engagement, better communication, and the building of trust. These benefits collectively contribute to more sustainable and effective conservation efforts, aligning ecological, social, and economic values in protected areas.

This chapter provided a comprehensive understanding of how collaborative governance can improve the management of protected areas while promoting socio-economic development for local communities. It highlights the opportunities and challenges inherent in integrating community livelihoods with conservation practices. The next chapter explores the theoretical framework, exploring the conceptual basis for understanding the dynamics of collaborative governance in protected areas.

Chapter 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A theoretical framework serves as a foundational structure that supports and guides a research study (University of California, 2022). Grant and Osanloo (2014) highlighted its critical role in the research process, describing it as the core foundation upon which all knowledge within a study is built. Similarly, Trafford and Leshem (2008) define theory as a paradigm that shapes how researchers interpret and understand the phenomenon under investigation. Adom, Hussein, and Agyem (2018) emphasised that the absence of a theoretical framework can make it difficult for readers to grasp the academic standpoint and underlying principles shaping a researcher's arguments and reasoning. They further asserted that a theoretical framework provides a fresh perspective for analysing and understanding a phenomenon while also influencing the methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3.1 The Collaborative Governance and Social Ecological System theories.

The Collaborative Governance Theory (CGT) provides a structured approach to cooperative environmental management by engaging public agencies, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders in joint decision-making (Ansell & Gash 2008). This theory highlights the importance of consensus-driven processes and collective action, recognising that complex environmental challenges cannot be effectively managed by a single entity alone (Selin & Chavez, 1995). Therefore, in the context of protected area management, the CGT facilitates inclusive decision-making, ensuring that diverse stakeholder interests are reconciled to develop sustainable conservation strategies.

The Social-Ecological System (SES) theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the interconnectedness between human societies and ecosystems. Berkes and Folke (1998) emphasised that the dynamic relationships and feedback loops between social and ecological systems reinforced the need for integrated approaches to sustainable management. This theory is particularly relevant for conservation governance as it highlights the role of social equity, local knowledge, and institutional capacity in fostering

ecological sustainability (Ayivor et al., 2019). By examining how governance structures and ecosystem dynamics interact, the SES theory helps to explain how adaptive management practices contribute to long-term conservation success. By synthesising the CGT and SES Theory, this study investigates the interplay between governance mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive learning in biodiversity conservation. Both theories underscore the significance of adaptive feedback systems in managing protected areas, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates social and ecological considerations for long-term sustainability. This theoretical integration provides a robust foundation for assessing how governance structures influence conservation outcomes, ultimately contributing to more effective and resilient protected area management strategies. The incorporation of these theories into the study's aims and objectives further helped create a cohesive research approach by directing the methodology, structuring the data collection tools, and shaping the data analysis process.

Therefore, this research employs the CGT and the SES theory to investigate collaborative governance structures in protected area management. These theoretical perspectives emphasize the significance of multi-stakeholder participation, institutional trust, and ecological resilience in achieving sustainable conservation outcomes. By integrating these frameworks, this study seeks to examine how decision-making processes, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive management strategies influence biodiversity conservation (Graduate Studies Support Center, 2022).

3.1.1 Collaborative Governance Theory

Collaborative governance, as conceptualised by Ansell and Gash (2008), provides a foundational framework for understanding multi-stakeholder engagement in addressing complex policy challenges. This governance model fosters structured, consensus-driven decision-making processes by bringing together public agencies and non-state actors within formalised forums. Ansell and Gash (2008) defined collaborative governance as a structured process in which public agencies engage diverse stakeholders in consensus-based decision-making. Their model identifies six key components: (1) public agencies initiate the process, (2) non-state actors participate, (3) decisions are made collectively, (4) interactions occur within structured forums, (5) consensus is the primary decision-making

mechanism, and (6) the focus remains on public policy or management. While this framework provides a robust structure for analysing governance, it may not fully encompass more informal or advisory-based collaborative arrangements that rely on alternative decision-making processes. Nevertheless, this approach is particularly relevant to protected areas, where balancing conservation objectives with local needs necessitates multi-stakeholder collaboration.

3.1.1.1 Origins and Evolution of Collaborative Governance Theory

The emergence of the Collaborative Governance Theory reflects a broader shift away from traditional top-down governance structures, acknowledging the growing complexity of public policy issues. This shift is particularly pronounced in domains such as environmental management, public health, and urban planning, where effective governance requires cooperation among multiple stakeholders (Voets, Brandsen, Koliba, & Verschuere, 2021). Collaborative governance evolved as a response to these challenges, promoting inclusive decision-making processes that integrate government agencies, civil society organisations, private sector actors, and local communities to collectively address pressing societal and environmental issues.

Building on Ansell and Gash's foundational work, Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012) further refined the theoretical construct of collaborative governance by emphasising the importance of shared decision-making, mutual benefits, and inclusive participation. Their model highlights the critical role of trust-building, equitable stakeholder representation, and the development of institutional mechanisms that sustain long-term collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012). By fostering cooperative governance structures, this approach enhances the effectiveness of public policy and natural resource management, particularly in complex environmental contexts such as protected area management.

3.1.1.2 Practical applications of Collaborative Governance

Empirical studies have demonstrated the applicability of collaborative governance in real-world environmental management settings. Fisher et al. (2020) employed the collaborative

governance framework to examine factors that facilitate or hinder stakeholder collaboration in protected area management. Their case study highlighted the importance of principled engagement, which involves fostering meaningful, long-term collaboration among diverse actors. They also highlighted the role of adaptive management, advocating for evaluation approaches that combine traditional logical frameworks with developmental assessment techniques such as Outcome Harvesting (Fisher et al. 2020). This mixed-method approach enables continuous performance assessment and interactive adjustments throughout project implementation. Similarly, De Koning et al. (2017) applied the collaborative governance framework to assess governance structures in Hin Nam No National Protected Area (NPA) in Laos.

Their study identified several key conditions for effective collaborative governance, including incentives for community participation, formalised power-sharing arrangements, recognition of customary resource rights, and accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of trust-building and adaptive performance assessments in ensuring the long-term sustainability of protected area management (De Koning et al., 2017). These studies provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and conditions that shape effective collaborative governance. They inform this research's examination of governance structures in South African protected areas, particularly in facilitating inclusive stakeholder participation and adaptive management approaches that enhance biodiversity conservation outcomes.

3.2 A model for Collaborative Governance: Theory and Practice

Protected area management serves as a key application of collaborative governance, as conservation efforts require the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, environmental organizations, local communities, and private sector actors. Collaborative governance provides a structured framework for these diverse stakeholders to engage in consensus-based decision-making to address complex policy challenges (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Figure 3.2 illustrates the collaborative governance model proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), which emphasises the cyclical process of stakeholder engagement in addressing policy challenges that exceed the capacity of any single entity.

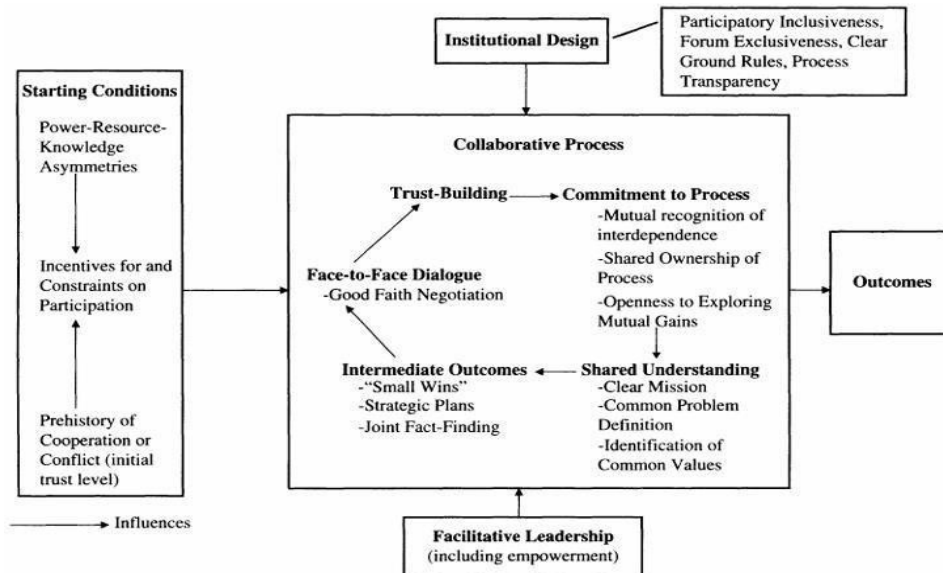


Figure 3.2: Ansell and Gash's Collaborative Governance Model

Source: Ansell and Gash (2008).

Managing protected areas such as national parks, marine reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries involves complex challenges that cannot be effectively addressed by a single organisation. Ansell and Gash's (2008) model of collaborative governance offered a systematic approach to understanding how multiple stakeholders engage in structured decision-making processes. Their framework highlights key elements, including facilitative leadership, trust-building, and institutional design, which are essential for fostering cooperation in conservation efforts.

3.2.1 Starting Conditions

The effectiveness of collaborative governance depends on initial conditions such as power imbalances, historical conflicts, and stakeholder incentives for participation. Addressing disparities among stakeholders is crucial for ensuring fair representation and enhancing cooperative management. Ansell and Gash (2008) identified power imbalances as a significant challenge in collaborative governance, emphasising that effective cooperation requires strategies to empower and represent marginalised stakeholders. Additionally, past conflicts over land use or resource access can influence stakeholder trust in the collaborative process. Stakeholders are more likely to engage meaningfully when they perceive that their participation will lead to tangible benefits (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Incentives such as economic gains from ecotourism or improved resource management

play a crucial role in motivating engagement. Thus, designing mechanisms that promote fair participation is essential for ensuring long-term success in protected area governance (Ostrom, 1990).

3.2.2 Facilitative Leadership

Facilitative leadership is a cornerstone of collaborative governance, fostering trust, guiding dialogue, and ensuring equitable participation. Facilitative leaders act as mediators, helping stakeholders to navigate conflicts and find mutually beneficial solutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Heifetz (1999) alluded that this leadership style is rooted in participatory and democratic leadership theories, which emphasises collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive problem-solving. Facilitative leadership is particularly relevant in protected area management, where multiple stakeholders such as conservation agencies, local communities, policymakers, and private sector actors often hold competing interests.

Research highlights that facilitative leadership strengthens governance frameworks by ensuring transparency, trust, and mutual learning among stakeholders (Reed, 2008). Emerson et al. (2012) emphasised that unlike traditional top-down approaches, facilitative leadership prioritises participatory engagement and capacity-building for stakeholders. However, according to Berkes (2019), given the complex socio-political and ecological contexts of protected areas, effective leaders must navigate power imbalances, mediate conflicts, and create conditions that enable diverse perspectives to shape decision-making processes.

Furthermore, facilitative leadership plays a critical role in fostering cooperation, problem-solving, and adaptive governance structures that are resilient to environmental and socio-economic changes (Armitage et al., 2009). Studies suggest that when leadership enables meaningful stakeholder participation, conservation policies become more effective, equitable, and sustainable (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013).

3.2.3 Institutional design

Protected management areas are vital for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Therefore, institutional design is essential for sustaining collaborative governance by establishing transparent decision-making structures, accountability mechanisms, and formal agreements that support long-term cooperation. According to Lockwood (2010) well-defined institutional arrangements help mitigate power asymmetries and provide mechanisms for conflict resolution and stakeholder engagement. Thus, such frameworks help to balance power dynamics, resolve conflicts, and promote active stakeholder participation, all crucial for the sustainable management of protected areas.

3.2.4 Key components of Collaborative Governance in protected areas

Using Ansell and Gash's (2008) model, this study explores how collaborative governance contributes to:

- Effective conflict resolution – Structured governance mechanisms facilitate dialogue and mediation, helping stakeholders address competing interests.
- Equitable Participation in Decision-Making – Institutional frameworks promote inclusivity and fair representation of all stakeholders.
- Adaptive policy responses to environmental changes – Governance models that incorporate feedback mechanisms allow for policy adjustments based on ecological and socio-economic conditions (Folke et al., 2005).
- Empirical studies, such as De Koning et al. (2017) and Fisher et al. (2020), demonstrate that collaborative governance frameworks enhance conservation efforts by fostering cooperative management and adaptive decision-making.

3.2.5 South African Case Study: Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, a key conservation agency in South Africa, provides an empirical basis for examining collaborative governance in protected areas. Studies on its management practices have revealed that the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes has improved governance outcomes in protected areas such as Isimangaliso Wetland Park (Ramutsindela et al., 2016). However, according to Hutton et al. (2005) despite efforts to involve stakeholders, marginalised communities often face challenges in resource management, highlighting the need for stronger institutional

frameworks to ensure equitable participation. The integration of indigenous knowledge and participatory governance models has led to improved conservation outcomes in certain reserves managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (Berkes, 2009).

3.3 SES-Based Collaborative Governance in Protected Areas

Social-ecological systems (SES) theory is based on the premise that humans are an integral part of nature rather than separate from it. The theory challenges the conventional dichotomy between social and natural systems, arguing that this distinction is subjective and artificial (Berkes & Folke, 1998). SES theory emphasizes the interconnected and co-evolving relationship between human societies and ecological systems, highlighting the reciprocal influences they exert on one another. The intellectual roots of SES theory can be traced back to early ecological studies, particularly the work of Tansley (1935), who conceptualized ecosystems as holistic entities that include social and cultural dimensions alongside biological and physical components.

While Tansley's early insights acknowledged human-environmental linkages, the explicit integration of social dynamics into ecological research gained traction later. By the 1970s and 1980s, growing recognition of the limitations of purely ecological or social approaches in managing natural resources led to the development of the SES-based governance frameworks. The pioneering work of Holling et al. (2002) on resilience and adaptive management became a cornerstone of SES theory, emphasising that ecosystems are dynamic, complex, and constantly evolving. Holling's research underscored the necessity of flexible, adaptive management strategies that account for both social and ecological complexities (Berkes et al., 2003; Holling et al., 2002).

The effectiveness of SES-based collaborative governance in protected areas is largely influenced by the historical and political context in which collaboration is initiated. Factors such as power imbalances, governance legacies, and stakeholder incentives shape the outcomes of participatory conservation efforts (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Power asymmetries are particularly critical in collaborative governance, as dominant actors – such as government agencies and large conservation organizations – may marginalise local communities in decision-making processes. Ansell and Gash (2008) argued that successful collaboration requires active measures to empower and represent historically

disadvantaged stakeholders. In the context of protected area management, this involves developing mechanisms that ensure the equitable participation of local communities, who are often most affected by conservation policies.

3.4 The Social-Ecological Systems (SES) perspective on Protected Areas

Protected areas often represent sites of contestation between conservation priorities and local community interests, particularly where livelihoods depend on natural resource use. Conflicts arise when conservation policies restrict access to resources without adequately considering the socioeconomic impacts on surrounding communities (Berkes et al., 2003). De Koning (2020) argued that this issue is especially relevant in South Africa, where many protected areas are located on land historically owned or occupied by local communities, creating governance challenges. The SES theory posits that effective governance must integrate ecological resilience with socioeconomic well-being, ensuring that conservation efforts are not implemented at the expense of local communities (Holling et al., 2002).

A participatory approach to governance is central to this framework, as it fosters local ownership, enhances social legitimacy, and facilitates the incorporation of indigenous and local ecological knowledge into conservation planning. Such knowledge is particularly valuable in understanding ecosystem dynamics, identifying sustainable resource use practices, and developing context-specific conservation strategies (Berkes et al., 2003).

3.4.1 The SES Approach to Protected Area Governance

The SES framework supports governance structures that integrate ecological and social factors to enhance the resilience of protected areas. This study applies SES theory to examine:

- The balance between biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods, exploring how conservation policies reconcile ecological protection with the economic and social needs of communities.
- Adaptive governance in responding to environmental uncertainties, studying the role of flexible, learning-based management strategies in coping with climate variability, habitat degradation, and shifting socio-political conditions.

- The integration of local ecological knowledge into conservation management, exploring how traditional knowledge systems contribute to ecological monitoring, species conservation, and sustainable land use practices.

3.5 Empirical evidence from South Africa

Empirical evidence from South Africa provides critical insights into the practical application of policies and theories related to environmental governance, land reform, and community-based conservation. Case studies like Thondhlana & Cundill, (2017); Holmes-Watts & Watts, (2018) across the country highlight both the successes and challenges of implementing collaborative approaches, particularly in contexts marked by historical inequalities, contested land rights, and socio-economic disparities. This evidence is instrumental in understanding how governance frameworks function in real-world settings and how local dynamics influence the outcomes of conservation and development initiatives (DRDLR, 2013; SANParks, 2022).

3.5.1 Biodiversity Conservation Policies

South Africa's *National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act* (NEM: PAA) provides a legislative framework for participatory governance in conservation. The act emphasises the inclusion of local communities in protected area management, aligning with SES principles that advocate for co-management and stakeholder-driven decision-making (RSA, 2003). Studies on Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife reserves demonstrated that integrating local ecological knowledge into adaptive management strategies has helped to mitigate the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. For example, community-led monitoring initiatives have provided valuable data on species distributions, habitat changes, and ecological trends, improving conservation outcomes (Shackleton et al., 2015).

3.5.2 Ecosystem Resilience in Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Reserves

Ecosystem resilience refers to the capacity of ecological systems to absorb disturbances, adapt to change, and maintain essential functions over time (Folke et al., 2016; Biggs et al., 2015). In the context of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) reserves, this concept is increasingly important due to growing environmental pressures such as climate variability,

biodiversity loss, and human–environment interactions.

EKZNW reserves, including Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, Tembe Elephant Park, and Ithala Game Reserve, can be understood as social-ecological systems where ecological processes are closely linked with human activities and local livelihoods. These systems operate within broader socio-economic contexts, making resilience not only an ecological concern but also a governance and development issue (Biggs et al., 2015). From an ecological perspective, resilience is reflected in the ability of these systems to respond to disturbances such as droughts, habitat change, and resource pressures. However, resilience is also shaped by governance processes. Limited community participation, unequal benefit-sharing, and weak institutional coordination can reduce the adaptive capacity of protected areas and undermine long-term conservation outcomes. Scholars emphasise that resilience is strengthened through inclusive and adaptive governance systems that integrate local knowledge and stakeholder participation (Folke et al., 2016). In this regard, collaborative governance plays a critical role by fostering shared decision-making, trust, and collective action among stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). These processes enhance the ability of protected areas to respond to change while supporting community livelihoods. In this study, ecosystem resilience is understood as a dynamic interaction between ecological integrity, governance systems, and community participation. Strengthening this interaction is essential for promoting sustainable and inclusive conservation within EKZNW reserves.

3.5.3 Evidence from uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park

The co-management strategies employed at *uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park*, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, illustrate the practical application of SES principles in balancing conservation with socioeconomic development. The park's governance model incorporates:

- Community participation in decision-making, ensuring that conservation policies reflect local priorities and traditional land-use practices.
- Sustainable livelihood initiatives, such as ecotourism and community-based resource management programmes, which provide economic alternatives to resource extraction.
- Adaptive management approaches, allowing policies to be adjusted in response to new

ecological and social challenges (Ntuli & Muchapondwa, 2018).

3.6 Collaborative Governance as a Mechanism for SES Integration

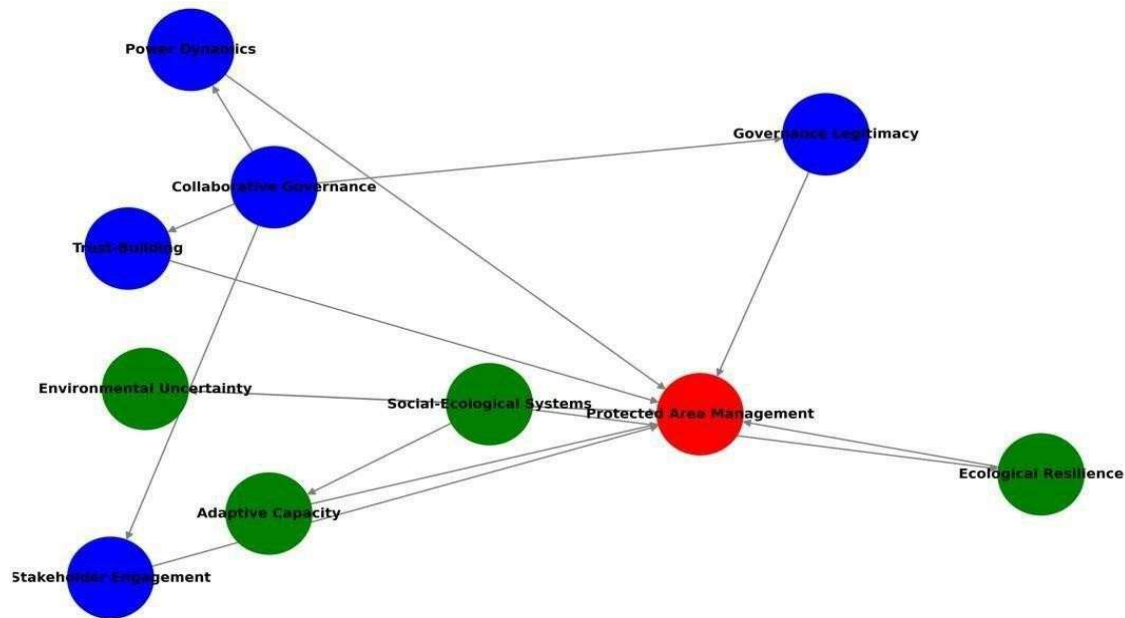


Figure 3.6: Integration of Collaborative Governance and SES theories
Source: (Ansell & Gash 2008).

The integration of Collaborative Governance Theory and SES theory provides a comprehensive framework for managing protected areas, balancing conservation objectives with the socioeconomic needs of local communities (see Figure 3.6). Collaborative Governance Theory emphasises inclusive, participatory decision-making through multi-stakeholder engagement, fostering trust and cooperation among diverse actors (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In contrast, SES Theory offers a systemic perspective, highlighting the interdependence between human and ecological systems while emphasizing resilience, adaptability, and ecological feedback loops (Berkes & Folke, 1998). By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, governance frameworks in protected areas can become more holistic, addressing both institutional dynamics and ecological sustainability.

3.6.1 The Complementarity of Collaborative Governance and SES Theory

The Collaborative Governance Theory primarily focuses on institutional arrangements, stakeholder engagement, and consensus-driven decision-making (Ansell & Gash, 2008). However, it tends to overlook the role of ecological dynamics, and the adaptive capacity required to manage long-term environmental uncertainties. The SES Theory fills this gap by incorporating resilience thinking, recognising that governance structures must remain flexible and responsive to both social and ecological shifts (Folke et al., 2005). Resilience-based governance, as advocated by the SES Theory, ensures that conservation efforts are adaptable and capable of responding to disturbances such as climate change, habitat degradation, and socioeconomic transitions (Walker et al., 2004). By integrating SES Theory with Collaborative Governance, decision-making processes become not only inclusive and participatory but also ecologically informed, ensuring that governance structures account for complex and dynamic social- ecological interactions.

3.6.2 Addressing Power Dynamics and Integrating Local Knowledge

One of the key critiques of SES Theory is its limited engagement with socio-political factors, particularly power asymmetries and institutional constraints that shape governance outcomes (Armitage, Berkes & Doubleday, 2007). While SES frameworks recognise the importance of adaptive governance, they often fail to explicitly address historical injustices, stakeholder power imbalances, and the political economy of conservation. Collaborative Governance Theory, with its focus on deliberative democracy and participatory governance, provides a crucial counterbalance by emphasising the role of trust-building, negotiation, and institutional legitimacy in decision-making processes (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Moreover, effective governance in protected areas must acknowledge and incorporate local ecological knowledge (LEK) as a critical component of conservation management. Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems provide valuable insights into ecosystem functioning, species behaviour, and sustainable resource management (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003). However, power disparities often marginalise these voices in formal conservation governance. The integration of Collaborative Governance and SES.

Theory ensures that governance models not only acknowledge but actively incorporate local knowledge and community agency in decision-making processes. While Collaborative Governance Theory excels in structuring stakeholder participation and fostering cooperative decision-making, it often assumes institutional stability and overlooks the dynamic nature of social-ecological interactions (Chaffin et al., 2014). SES Theory, in contrast, provides an adaptive framework that acknowledges the ever-changing nature of ecosystems and the need for flexible governance structures capable of responding to environmental uncertainties. By merging these perspectives, governance frameworks can foster adaptive co-management, an approach that emphasizes continuous learning, iterative decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration in response to evolving ecological conditions (Olsson, Folke & Berkes, 2004). Adaptive co-management integrates SES Theory's resilience-based approach with the participatory mechanisms of Collaborative Governance, creating a governance model that is both inclusive and flexible. This approach enables stakeholders to engage in ongoing ecological monitoring, co-produce knowledge, and implement governance strategies that evolve alongside shifting social and environmental conditions (Armitage et al., 2009).

3.6.3 Addressing The Limitations of Each Theory

Table 3.6.3: Addressing the limitations of each theory

Theory	Key Limitations	How the other theory Compensates
Collaborative Governance	Lacks explicit consideration of ecological feedback loops and environmental uncertainty	SES theory integrates resilience, thinking and the adaptive capacity of ecosystems
Social- Ecological Systems	Does not sufficiently address power dynamics, political institutions, and social inequalities	Collaborative Governance theory provides a framework for understanding stakeholder engagement, trust building, and

		government legitimacy.
Combination of both theories	Often assumes that stakeholder participation naturally leads to effective governance.	Integration emphasises the importance of power dynamics, adaptive management, and ecological monitoring in decision making.

Source: Self-generated by author

3.7 Summary of the chapter

The integration of Collaborative Governance Theory and Social-Ecological Systems (SES) Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing governance in protected areas. Collaborative Governance Theory emphasises inclusive participation, institutional trust, and multi-stakeholder engagement, ensuring that conservation efforts incorporate diverse perspectives and foster cooperation. SES Theory, on the other hand, highlights resilience, adaptability, and the dynamic interplay between human and ecological systems, reinforcing the need for governance structures that respond to environmental uncertainties. By combining these perspectives, governance models in protected areas can more effectively balance biodiversity conservation with local livelihoods. The integration of the theories is summarised in Table 3.2.

Empirical evidence from South Africa, particularly the case of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, demonstrates the practical application of these theories in addressing biodiversity conservation and governance challenges. The implementation of collaborative governance in Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's protected areas showcases both the opportunities and limitations of multi-stakeholder participation, institutional design, and adaptive management. While collaborative governance fosters inclusivity and institutional legitimacy, persistent challenges such as power imbalances, historical governance constraints, and capacity limitations require further attention to strengthen conservation outcomes. A SES-based approach to collaborative governance provides a holistic strategy for managing protected areas by integrating ecological resilience with social well-being. Prioritising participatory decision-making, knowledge co-production, and adaptive

management can enhance governance effectiveness and sustainability. However, future research should examine the long-term impacts of SES-based governance on biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods, as well as explore strategies to mitigate power asymmetries in collaborative decision-making. Moving forward, enhancing governance mechanisms in protected areas requires continuous learning, institutional capacity-building, and adaptive management practices. The next chapter applies these theoretical insights to analyse the governance structures and conservation strategies of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, further exploring how SES-based collaborative governance can contribute to sustainable conservation and equitable stakeholder engagement.

Chapter 4 STUDY AREA BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) was established under the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Management Act (Act No. 9 of 1997), it is a provincial agency responsible for managing biodiversity conservation and nature protection in KwaZulu- Natal. The organisation oversees over 463 protected areas (PAs), including two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Maloti-Drakensberg Park and Isimangaliso Wetland Park. EKZNW's primary objectives are to promote biodiversity conservation and ecotourism, ensuring environmental sustainability and generating economic benefits for local communities. Its mandate also includes the enforcement of provincial nature conservation laws. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife organises its operations into two main regions: The West and East, each with distinct geographical and ecological features (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Annual Report, 2022-2023; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Conservation: 2024).

4.1.1 West Region: Maloti-Drakensberg Park

The West Region is dominated by Maloti-Drakensberg Park, a 260,000-hectare UNESCO World Heritage Site. Renowned for its dramatic landscapes, including the Drakensberg escarpment, the park also serves as an open-air museum housing thousands of San rock art images. Additionally, it plays a crucial role as a water source, with rivers originating in the region supporting both local and national water systems. Its ecological diversity, formed through the integration of various game reserves and state forests, attracts visitors seeking both natural beauty and historical significance.

4.1.2 East Region: Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and Zululand Reserves

The East Region is best known for the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, the birthplace of the white rhino recovery program. The park holds historical significance, as all current white rhinos trace their lineage to it. Other reserves in the region, such as Ndumo Game Reserve, Tembe Elephant Park, and Ithala Game Reserve, host large populations of mammals,

including elephants and rhinos, making the region a key destination for ecotourism.

4.1.3 Coastal Region: iSimangaliso Wetland Park

The Coastal Region is home to iSimangaliso Wetland Park, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Managed by the Wetland Authority and Ezemvelo, the park is known for its diverse ecosystems, including wetlands, beaches, and forests, and is vital for the conservation of both marine and terrestrial species. Additional protected areas, such as Umlalazi Nature Reserve and Mpenjati Nature Reserve, further contribute to the region's biodiversity, attracting tourists for both conservation and ecotourism purposes. The EKZNW management model aims to integrate conservation with eco-tourism to ensure financial sustainability. A significant portion of their budget comes from eco-tourism, which directly funds conservation efforts. In many rural communities, EKZNW is also the primary employer, and their activities have a ripple effect that boosts local economies and livelihoods (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Annual Report, 2022-2023). For the purposes of this study, four protected areas are selected from the two regions. The selected protected areas are Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, and Ithala Game Reserve.

These four PAs had successful claims lodged against them and presently have active co-management agreements in place. These protected areas serve as the primary focus of this study, which aims to explore the dynamics of conservation, community engagement, and co-management in these areas. This chapter provides an in-depth overview of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as the study area, highlighting its ecological significance, the protected areas that drive conservation efforts, and the local communities impacted by the conservation. Additionally, it draws a focus on the four protected areas along with the claimant communities that have lodged claims within these areas.

4.2 HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

The Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HIP) is the largest game reserve in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, covering approximately 900 km². The park consists of two distinct areas: Hluhluwe Park and Imfolozi Park. Hluhluwe Park is characterised by hilly terrain and well-

watered valleys, with the Hluhluwe River flowing northward toward the endorheic False Bay. The land surrounding the river forms a buffer zone for Hluhluwe Park, which is designated as a strictly protected area, allowing only tourism activities. Whereas Imfolozi Park features more open savannah landscapes and relies on the Black Umfolozi and White Umfolozi Rivers for a permanent water supply. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park gained international recognition for its successful breeding programme for the black rhinoceros, especially following a sharp decline in the population of the species during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The protected area lies within the moist transitional climatic bioregion, with an annual rainfall range of 800–1000 mm. The reserve is a mosaic of ecosystems, with 65% of the land consisting of plains and plateaus dominated by savannah and grasslands. The most widespread vegetation types are dry savannah, wet savannah, and short grass savannah (Bernard & Cryer, 2009). In contrast, the mountainous and sloping areas, particularly along the riparian and scarp belts, are rich in biodiversity. Imfolozi Park was declared a no-human-activity zone in 1987, apart from activities such as game viewing, photography, and fishing.

4.2.1 Historical Background

The Hluhluwe Game Reserve was first proclaimed as the Hluhluwe Valley Reserve by Zululand Government Notice No. 12, gazette in April 1895, and was subsequently re-established as the Hluhluwe Game Reserve in April 1897 through Government Notice (Zululand) 16 of 1897. The area known as The Corridor was so named because it constituted a zone linking the Hluhluwe Game Reserve and the Umfolozi Game Reserve, passing through which was the main road from Mtubatuba to Nongoma. This area was formally proclaimed as the Corridor Game Reserve on 21 July 1989 (Notice No. 35 of 1989). Similarly, Imfolozi Game Reserve was first established as the Umfolozi Junction Reserve by Zululand Government Notice No. 12, gazette on 30 April 1895, and was later re-established as the Umfolozi Game Reserve on 27 April 1897 through G.N. (2) No. 16 of 1897. Subsequent amendments to this proclamation have further shaped the area's management and governance. Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW) is the authority responsible for managing HIP.

Educational attainment is low, with 37% of the population having only primary education, and fewer than 5% having completed matric or obtained tertiary qualifications. The area has long been neglected, resulting in poor infrastructure, including inadequate roads, lack of communication services, and limited access to electricity and water. Public services such as schooling, and healthcare are often of low quality, and there is a general lack of economic development. The region's economy is primarily driven by subsistence farming and the harvesting of natural resources, while high population growth and health issues like HIV further exacerbate these challenges (Statistics South Africa, 2021; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2011). The communities surrounding HiP rely on subsistence agriculture (including cattle, maize, and vegetables) and seasonal migrant labour in larger urban areas such as Gauteng, Durban, and Richards Bay. Despite these challenges, HiP offers several opportunities for local communities.

The park provides direct employment opportunities, particularly through its alien plant control projects and eco-tourism initiatives. Local businesses, such as small service centres, bed-and-breakfast accommodations, curio markets, and vegetable gardens, also benefit from the park's presence. The HiP is a significant tourist attraction, offering a wide range of accommodation and facilities. These include luxury resorts, satellite camps, and nearby private lodges, with approximately 1,580 beds available for visitors. However, most of these facilities are privately owned, and community involvement in tourism management is still limited, though emerging projects show promise for increased participation. Additionally, there are local craft markets where community members can sell handcrafts, though many products are sourced outside the region (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government, 2022; Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, 2013).

4.2.3 Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park Land Claim

Local communities were forcibly removed from the HiP area as part of South Africa's broader policy of land dispossession. The removal of the communities was not only for the establishment of the game reserve but also a result of government policies, which restricted African land ownership and movement. Many families were relocated to distant and less fertile areas, disrupting their livelihoods and social structures (Cousins, 2009). Three land claims have been registered within the HiP. (Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, 2022). These claims involve different communities with specific areas of interest, and they are as

follows:

Table 4.2.3: Land claims in HiP

Area	Size	Claimant	Status
The Corridor Game Reserve	24,100 ha	Mpukunyoni and Hlabisa Communities under the Corridor of Hope Community Trust	This claim was settled on 8 June 2008, and a Co-Management agreement was signed.
Section of iMfolozi near Cengeni Gate and including Okhukho Loop	4,000 ha	Zungu or Okhukho Community	In the process of settlement.
Section next to Cengeni Gate	4,000 ha	Mlaba or kwaXimba Community	In the process of settlement.

Source: EKZNW (2011)

4.3 NDUMO GAME RESERVE

Ndumo Game Reserve, established in 1924, is in the northeastern part of KwaZulu- Natal, near the Mozambique border. Spanning approximately 10,117 hectares, the reserve is managed by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, the provincial body responsible for nature conservation in the region. Ndumo is renowned for its exceptional biodiversity, particularly its birdlife, with over 430 species recorded (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, n.d.). The reserve's varied ecosystems, including sand forests, floodplains, acacia savannahs, and riverine forests, support a wide range of wildlife, including nyala, impala, hippopotamus, and Nile crocodiles (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009). Additionally, Ndumo is part of the Usuthu-Tembe-Futi Transfrontier Conservation Area, which connects protected areas across the region and supports larger conservation efforts. The reserve also plays a vital role in local conservation initiatives and regional ecotourism, offering a peaceful and biodiverse environment for visitors to experience.

4.3.1 Historic Background

Ndumo Game Reserve (NGR) was first established as Nduma Game Reserve in 1924 through Provincial Notice No. 96, in accordance with Section 17(1) of the Game Ordinance No. 2 of 1912. This was followed by amendments to the Game and Vermin Regulations in 1939 and 1941, which included the reserve's name, although these notices did not alter the property's boundaries or description. The KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Management Act erroneously refers to the 1939 notice as the establishment notice, while the 1941 notice is cited as an amendment (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009; Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, 2022).

In 1947, NGR was formally declared a Game Reserve under the Zululand Game Reserves and Parks Ordinance. During the apartheid era, the reserve had several changes. In 1986, the area was released as state land for acquisition by the South African Development Trust, and in 1988, it was disestablished as a Game Reserve. However, it was re-established in 1988 under the KwaZulu Nature Conservation Act by the KwaZulu Government, and the name was officially changed to Ndumo Game Reserve in 1989. The current size of the reserve is 11,898.34 ha, corrected from earlier documents that listed it as 10,117 ha (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009).

Ndumo Game Reserve is currently classified as a Category II protected area under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) system, signifying its status as a national park or equivalent reserve. The reserve's management is overseen by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW). The game reserve was initially established on Mathenjwa and Tembe communal lands, under the leadership of their respective traditional authorities, which lacked legal status at the time. With the creation of the Ingonyama Trust Board in 1994, landholding was transferred to a legal entity representing traditional authorities in line with the KwaZulu Ingonyama Trust Act (Act No. 3 of 1994; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009).

The Reserve is bordered to the east by the Tembe Traditional Authority, to the west and south by the Mathenjwa Traditional Authority, and its northern boundary follows the international border with Mozambique along the Usuthu River. NGR lies within the Umkhanyakude District Municipality (DC 27), with Jozini Local Municipality (KZ 272) to the west of the Phongolo River and Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipality (KZ 271) to the east (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009).

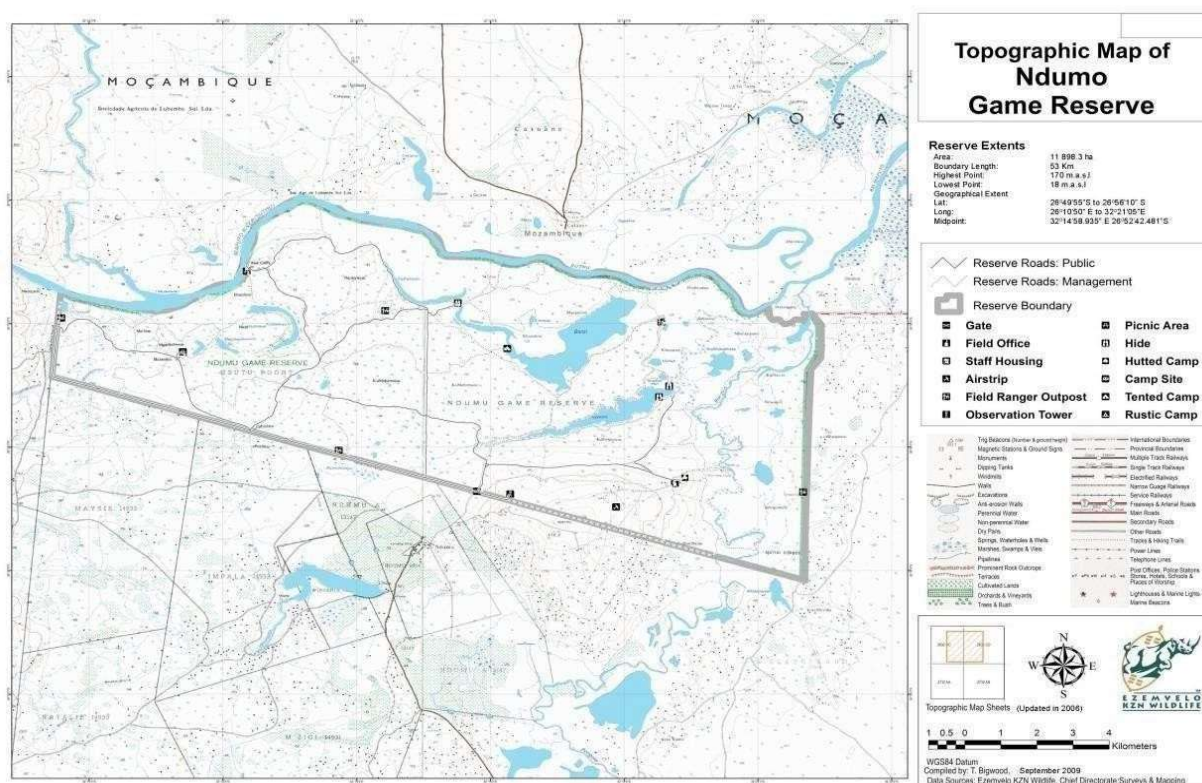


Figure 4.3.1: Map of Ndumo Game Reserve
Source: EKZNW (2009)

4.3.2 Socio-Economic Context of Ndumo Game Reserve (NGR)

The communities surrounding the NGR predominantly comprise rural populations that have historically experienced disadvantages and face significant socio-economic challenges. These communities are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture, with cattle and crop farming serving as principal agricultural practices. This agricultural activity remains the foundation of the local rural economy and constitutes the primary means of livelihood for numerous households. A notable feature of the surrounding area is the Phongolo River floodplain, which serves as a vital natural resource for local communities. The wetland areas upstream of the NGR play a significant role in supporting subsistence and artisanal fishing practices, which are critical for local food security and income generation. Fish breeding grounds within the NGR contribute substantially to replenishing local fish stocks, which hold immense social and cultural significance.

These fishing activities, in conjunction with agriculture, form the foundation of the local rural economy. In addition to agriculture and fishing, local communities rely on government-driven development initiatives, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). A key project in this region is the Elephant Coast TFCA Infrastructure

Project (also known as the Ndumo-Tembe-Futi TFCA Poverty Relief Project), funded by the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs (DWEA) and implemented by EKZNW. This project aims to alleviate poverty, create employment opportunities, and improve infrastructure, thereby enhancing the quality of life of surrounding communities.

UMkhanyakude District Municipality, often referred to as the Elephant Coast or Maputaland, encompasses the area surrounding the NGR. This region, situated on the international border between South Africa and Mozambique, faces additional socio-economic challenges, including illegal cross-border trade and resource harvesting. These activities have become a significant issue, as they not only affect the local economy but also present challenges for conservation efforts within the Game Reserve. Furthermore, ecotourism ventures, including those related to NGR, contribute significantly to the local economy. Hospitality and tourism, both within and around the game reserve, provide income opportunities for local businesses and individuals, thereby supporting broader economic development.

However, the balance between promoting ecotourism and ensuring the conservation of natural resources presents an ongoing challenge. According to the 2022 Community Survey by Statistics South Africa, the Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipality, which encompasses the area surrounding the NGR, has a population of approximately 191,660, with an average household size of 5.5 individuals. The municipality is characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment, with a significant portion of the population relying on subsistence agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods. These socioeconomic challenges are exacerbated by limited access to quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure, which impedes overall community development.

4.3.3 Ndumo Game Reserve Land Claim

In 1998, the Mathenjwa and Tembe communities lodged a land claim under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22 of 1994) concerning the land making up the game reserve. The claim was successful, and a settlement agreement was signed in 2008. However, according to the Restitution of Land Rights Act, the land can only be transferred to legal entities representing the original dispossessed communities or their descendants. As these legal entities were in the process of formation at the time, the land was transferred to the Ingonyama Trust, with the understanding that the Ingonyama Trust Board would later transfer ownership to the claimants' legal entities.

However, this came with the condition that they would not physically occupy the land, with the land-use remaining restricted to conservation in perpetuity under EKZNW's management (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2009). The Ingonyama Trust is a legal body responsible for administering land on behalf of traditional leaders in KwaZulu-Natal, managing both the land rights and the community's interests in a manner that balances tradition with modern legal frameworks for land usage and conservation (Ingonyama Trust, 1994).

4.4 TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK

The Tembe Elephant Park (TEP) was first established in 1983 on Tembe communal lands, under the authority of the Tembe Traditional Authority. It serves as a key conservation area within the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife protected area network and is part of the Combined Lubombo Conservancy-Goba and Usuthu-Tembe-Futi Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), formerly known as the Usuthu-Tembe-Futi TFCA. The park is located in the Umkhanyakude District Municipality (DC 27) and the Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipality (KZ 271) within KwaZulu-Natal Province. Tembe Covers 30,013 hectares and is positioned on the northern border of KwaZulu-Natal, close to Mozambique. The park lies about 500 km north-northeast of Durban, approximately 30 km west of KwaNgwanase. Its northern boundary is defined by the international border with Mozambique, while its eastern boundary adjoins the Tembe Traditional Area. The southern boundary is along the main tar road between Jozini and KwaNgwanase, and the western boundary is marked by a district road extending from the tar road to the Mozambique border. As a water-scarce region, the park does not host any major rivers, although certain sections are recognized as National Freshwater Ecosystem Priorities, particularly the Muzi swamps, which are a series of important wetlands (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2018).

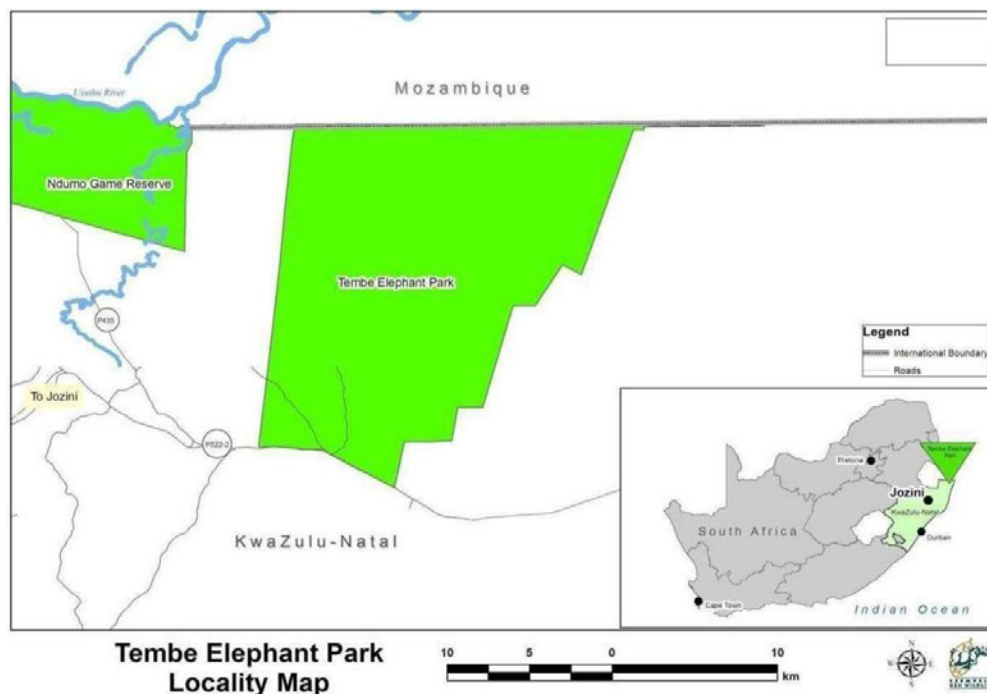


Figure 4.4: Regional location of Tembe Elephant Park.

Source: EKZNW (2018)

4.4.1 Historic Background

The management of the TEP falls under the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Board, which was established by the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Management Act No. 9 of 1997. This board, appointed by the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, oversees all protected areas in the province, with EKZNW as the implementing agency. Ezemvelo plays a vital role in ensuring that the park's management upholds the ecological, cultural, and aesthetic value of the area. The governance of TEP is structured to include regular reporting to the provincial Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) and the Premier, fostering collaboration between provincial departments, district and local municipalities, ensuring coordinated efforts in park management.

This ensures that the park is not only conserved but that any arising issues are dealt with through the necessary governmental channels (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2018). Tembe Elephant Park's official proclamation began in October 1983. This was after years of negotiations with the Tembe Traditional Authority, marking a significant moment for both conservation and the local community. During this period, the government proposed that communities living within the park's future boundaries relocate to designated areas, either

as chosen by the Tembe Traditional Authority or by the community members themselves.

The affected communities were compensated for their land improvements, and assistance was provided for transporting their belongings and building materials. The move was tied to a commitment by the KwaZulu Government to provide vital services, such as water, clinic services, and educational facilities, in the new settlement areas. The relocation process was to be completed in June 1984, before the park was fenced off. In addition to compensation, the Tembe Traditional Authority was granted 25% of the park's net profits and representation on the management board overseeing the park. Surplus game meat and by-products were to be first offered to the people of the area through the Tembe Traditional Authority, ensuring that the local community continued to benefit from the park's resources (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2018).

Following this, the park's boundaries were surveyed, and another proclamation was made in 1993 under KwaZulu Government Notice No. 17 of 1993. This proclamation included a more precise description of the park's boundaries and specified its size as 30,013.32 hectares. This re-proclamation officially aligned the park with the national system of protected areas, as outlined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and classified TEP as a Category II protected area, equivalent to a national park. The legal framework under the Protected Areas Act solidified TEP's status as a protected area, cementing its place within the national conservation system (Mahlaba, 2020). The significance of TEP has grown beyond its original function and contributes to South Africa's broader conservation efforts. It is now an integral part of the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife protected area network and is recognized within the context of Transfrontier conservation areas, such as the Usuthu-Tembe-Futi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area.

4.4.2 Socio-Economic Context of Tembe Elephant Park (TEP)

The most recent census data from STATSA (2021) revealed that the district consists of 128,195 households, totaling 625,846 individuals, with 33,857 households and 156,736 people in the Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipality. The unemployment rate stands at 43%, contributing to the district's widespread poverty. A large portion of the land in uMkhanyakude falls under the jurisdiction of the Ingonyama Trust. Umhlabuyalingana's strengths lie in its rich biodiversity and an ecosystem that has maintained its ecological functionality. However, this is overshadowed by poverty and a heavy reliance on natural

resources. The potential for eco-tourism and involving the local community as both guardians and beneficiaries of conservation and eco-tourism was emphasized in the analysis.

The district faces significant challenges in terms of water availability, making water management and conservation crucial priorities. According to the uMkhanyakude District Municipality Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2014) unemployment, inequality, and poverty remain the primary economic hurdles. These interconnected issues require targeted interventions from the government and development partners. Tourism is viewed as a key solution to these challenges and is considered a vital growth sector in the district's economy. The majority of the population surrounding the TEP consists of impoverished rural communities and subsistence farming is the main land use in the area. The community produces Ilala Palm wine, sells Ilala Palm fronds, and a collection of reeds and medicinal plants that are becoming commercially significant (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2018).

4.4.3 Tembe Elephant Park land claim

In March 1998, the Tembe community successfully lodged a land claim under the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994, seeking redress for land lost due to past dispossession. The claim was successful, and this led to the signing of a Settlement Agreement in February 2008, acknowledging the community's rightful claim to the land. The settlement stipulated that the land will be transferred to a legal entity representing the dispossessed community, the Sihangwana Trust, which will hold the land on behalf of the community members. While the Sihangwana Trust legally owns the land, there are specific conditions attached to the transfer: the land will remain a protected conservation area, with no physical occupation or alteration in its land use, ensuring its ecological integrity is maintained in perpetuity.

As part of the restitution process, a Co-management Agreement was signed between the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service and the Tembe Community Trust. This agreement formalises a collaborative approach to managing the park, ensuring that the community benefits from the land's conservation status while Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife continues to oversee its protection (Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, 2018; Tembe Safaris (Pty) Ltd v. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife & Endangered Wildlife Trust, 2018).

This agreement is based on the provisions of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003, which allows for co-management partnerships in managing state-protected areas. The agreement acknowledges the constitutional rights of individuals and communities, particularly in terms of restitution for land lost due to past discriminatory practices, with the Tembe Community Trust lodging a land claim on behalf of the claimants in the area within TEP. Both parties recognize the principles of resolving land claims on protected areas and agree to manage TEP in a way that respects these rights.

4.5 ITHALA GAME RESERVE

Ithala Game Reserve, located in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, spans 30,000 hectares and was established in 1972. It is situated approximately 60 kilometers northeast of Vryheid, with access through Louwsburg. The reserve is bordered to the north by the Pongola River, which flows into the Manzama River in the northwest. Ithala's landscape is characterized by rugged mountains, including the Nkwambase, Nkangala, and Madibe hills to the west, steep valleys, and high ridges, with the Ngotshe Mountain reaching an altitude of 1,450 meters above sea level. The reserve is fenced along its southern, eastern, and western boundaries, while the Pongola River forms an unfenced border to the north (See Figure 4.5).

The reserve's varied topography and climate, influenced by its altitude, create diverse habitats. The highest point in the reserve reaches 1,393 meters above sea level, while the lowest point lies along the Pongola River at 407 meters above sea level. The climate features hot summers with rainfall and cooler, dry winters, particularly at higher altitudes. Ithala receives an average annual precipitation of 750 to 850 mm, with distinct rainfall patterns shaped by local geography. The game reserve is demarcated into the Zululand District Municipality and three local municipalities, which are uPhongolo Local Municipality, Abaqulusi Local Municipality and eDumbe Local Municipality. The Game Reserve plays a significant role as a conservation area in KwaZulu-Natal (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2013).

several mines, including the Wonder Mine and the Vergelegen (later Eureka) Mine, operating intermittently until the 1960s. However, these mining ventures were largely unsuccessful, producing minimal gold yields.

Preceding the reserve's proclamation, the farms in the area were predominantly labor or tenant farms, which led to severe overgrazing and soil erosion, issues still visible today. The initial establishment of Ithala as a reserve covered 8,000 hectares, and conservationists recognised the reserve's ecological significance due to its diverse habitats. Efforts were made to restore the damaged environment by reintroducing game species that had been locally extinct. By 1982, the reserve had expanded to approximately 30,000 hectares. Today, Ithala is considered as one of KwaZulu-Natal's premier wildlife destinations, home to 23 reintroduced mammal species, including the white and black rhino, buffalo, kudu, giraffe, leopard, and elephant (Ithala Game Reserve, 2024).

4.5.2 Socio-Economic Context of Ithala Game Reserve

Ithala Game Reserve is situated within the Zululand District Municipality and falls within three local municipalities, uPhongolo Local Municipality (KZ262), Abaqulusi Local Municipality (KZ263), and eDumbe Local Municipality (KZ261). This region is predominantly rural and characterised by a low socio-economic condition. In terms of income levels, a significant portion of the population in the district earns less than R400 per month, with only a small percentage reaching income levels up to R1600 per month. This low income is compounded by a high unemployment rate and limited access to full-time employment opportunities. The education profile further highlights the socio-economic conditions of the region, with a high percentage of the population having education levels below Grade 12, which limits access to more skilled and higher-paying job opportunities (Zululand District Municipality, 2019; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2013).

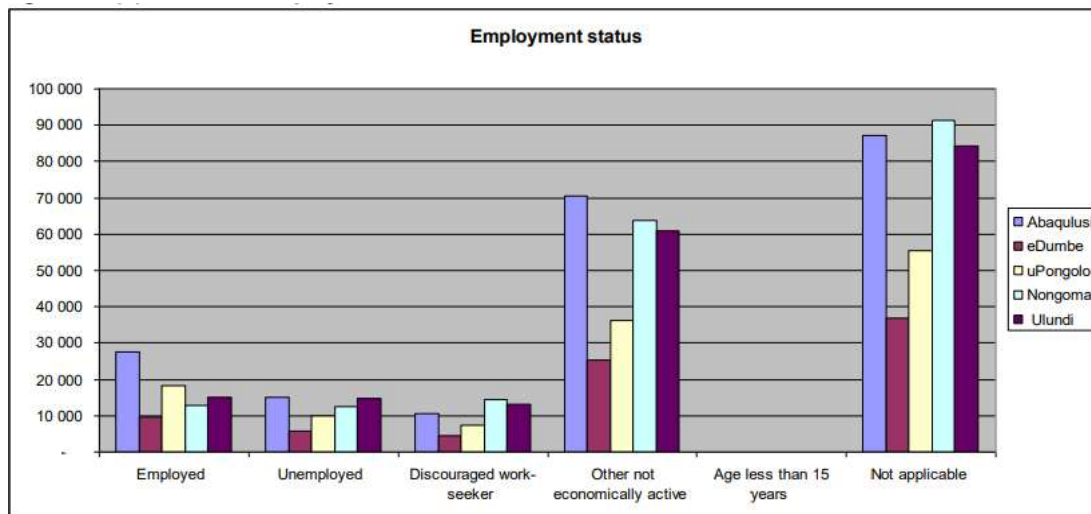


FIGURE 4.5.2: Levels of Employment.

Source: Census (2011)

The Zululand district forms approximately 16% of the geographical area of the KwaZulu-Natal and accounts for 8.5% of the province's population. However, the economic contribution of Zululand remains relatively low. Historically, sectors such as mining and agriculture have been key contributors to the local economy. However, the region has experienced a decline in these sectors since the 1990s. The HIV/AIDS epidemic remains a pressing concern, particularly for the economically active population (ages 18-45), as the disease can reduce labour productivity and lead to outward migration to rural areas (EDTEA, 2021). The population dynamics, coupled with the challenges in economic sectors, underline the need for development initiatives that can stimulate local economic growth. In this context, the role of nature-based tourism and the conservation sector becomes critical in providing employment opportunities and fostering local economic development (Zululand District Municipality, 2019).

4.5.3 Ithala Game Reserve Land Claim

The Ithala Game Reserve has a complex history of land dispossession and subsequent land claim. Originally, the land was used for farming and hunting and belonged to Dutch Settlers who were granted rights to the land by Zulu King Dinizulu in the late 1800s. In the 1970s, the Natal Parks Board secured the land for conservation purposes, subsequently establishing Ithala as a game reserve in 1972. Following the adoption of the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22 of 1994) in South Africa, the original residents and their

descendants sought to regain their ancestral land. A successful land claim was lodged, and full ownership rights were eventually restored to the claimant communities. Importantly, the claim does not involve human residential occupation nor any changes in the current land use, which remains dedicated to conservation. This approach aligns with national policies, particularly the Cabinet Memo of 2001, which advocates for a "win-win" situation in land restitution, allowing for the transfer of title while maintaining conservation goals (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2013).

As part of the restitution process, a co-management agreement was established between the claimants and EKZNW, the provincial conservation authority responsible for managing the Ithala Game Reserve. This agreement allows the claimant communities to be involved in the joint management of the land, guided by national and international conservation laws. The co-management structure aims to achieve sustainable land use and compliance with conservation goals while providing opportunities for local communities to benefit from tourism and conservation initiatives. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, as the designated management authority, is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the reserve. The management authority works in close coordination with the Zulu and Buthelezi communities (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021).

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provided an overview of EKZNW, an organisation mandated to manage protected areas in KwaZulu-Natal. The focus of this study is on four protected areas: Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, and Ithala Game Reserve. These protected areas have existing co-management agreements with local communities, following successful land claims made by various communities. These agreements require active community involvement in conservation efforts, ensuring that the land remains dedicated to conservation while also supporting local development through eco-tourism. Additionally, the chapter addresses the history of land dispossession, the socioeconomic context of the communities, and the land restitution process following the successful land claims. The next chapter presents the methods used for data collection and analysis in this research.

Chapter 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Conducting scientific research requires a systematic approach involving a well- planned design and methodological execution for the findings to comply with demands of scientific validity (Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard, 2022; Garg, 2016). Trafford and Leshem (2008) refer to this chapter as the research ‘architecture’ and ‘blueprint’ because it provides a visible shape of how the project was undertaken. This chapter is considered the most informative because it provides important elements of any scientific research study (Kallet, 2004). These elements include the research paradigm, study design, methodological procedures, population, and sample size, as well as how data were collected and analysed to conclude (Fox & Jennings, 2014). In this chapter, the researcher described and provided justification for the research strategy, including the paradigm, design, methods, population, sampling techniques, and sample size, as well as data collection and analysis techniques and tools. The chapter further addressed issues of ethics, anonymity, confidentiality, and finally validity and reliability.

5.1.1 Research Paradigm: Exploratory and Interpretivist Approach

The foundation of research is the pursuit of knowledge, achieved through systematic methods that define, analyse, and explain a given problem (Antonius, 2003). Research employs well-structured techniques to collect, organise, and interpret data, ultimately contributing to knowledge production, raising awareness, or offering solutions to practical problems. There are three primary research approaches: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Given the nature of this study – examining the effectiveness of collaborative governance in reconciling socio-economic needs with conservation in protected areas – an exploratory research design within an interpretivist paradigm was deemed most appropriate. Exploratory research is particularly useful when a problem has not been extensively studied or when existing theories are insufficient to explain the phenomenon under investigation (Denscombe, 2010).

In this study, the complexities of collaborative governance within EKZNW protected areas

required an open-ended approach to uncover underlying structures, stakeholder dynamics, and institutional effectiveness. Exploratory research allowed the researcher to examine real-world governance challenges and propose an integrated framework for improved collaboration. This study also adopted an interpretive approach, which emphasised the subjective meanings, experiences, and perspectives of the various stakeholders involved in protected area governance. Interpretivism acknowledges that social realities are constructed through human interactions and are context-dependent (Creswell, 2013). Since this research investigated how different actors – local communities, conservation authorities, and institutions – perceived and experienced collaborative governance, an interpretivist lens was essential for capturing nuanced understandings of governance effectiveness and local participation.

To achieve an in-depth understanding of governance mechanisms, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. Yin (2018) suggested that case studies were particularly effective for exploring governance models as they allow for a holistic analysis of policies, stakeholder roles, and institutional frameworks. This study examined collaborative governance within EKZNW by analysing policy documents, interviews, focus groups, and literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of governance structures.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Akhtar (2016) describes research design as a comprehensive blueprint that outlines the plan, structure, and methods of investigation to effectively address research questions while managing variability. Similarly, Hakim (2020) explains that research design involves defining the objectives, purpose, and intended use of the study within practical constraints such as time, budget, location, and the researcher's availability. Asenahabi (2019) adds that research design represents the researcher's conceptual framework, serving as a unifying guide that organizes all key components of the study to systematically address the research questions and minimize confusion. This study used a qualitative approach. The research approach is appropriate because the study is socially oriented with community members as respondents, together with managers of tourism establishments and local economic development managers in the area. The selected research approach will provide valuable insights, experiences, and opinions of the population, especially those who are

directly involved in the operations of tourism. Aspers (2019) notes that qualitative research often involves using multiple methods and focuses on understanding people's experiences within their natural environments. It is useful when researchers aim to interpret how individuals make meaning of the world around them. Furthermore, Ugwu and Eze (2023) stated that the aim of the qualitative research approach is to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural environments. They continued by stating that "it relies on the direct experiences of people as meaning-making agents in their daily lives and focuses on the why rather than what of social phenomena. For the study of human phenomena, qualitative researchers employ a variety of systems of inquiry, such as biography, case study, historical analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, as opposed to logical and statistical methods."

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posited that qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials, such as case studies, personal experiences, introspectives, life stories, interviews, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts, that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is particularly well-suited for investigating complex social issues such as collaborative management. Qualitative research emphasises the exploration of human experiences, emotions, and behaviours in their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The goal qualitative data is to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their worlds, rather than to quantify these experiences (Patton, 2015). This is particularly important when examining issues within such diverse communities, where subjective perspectives are integral to the understanding of local dynamics. The flexibility in qualitative research allows the study to adapt to the complexities of the participants' responses and the evolving dynamics of the research context. This iterative process ensures that the findings reflect the realities of the participants' experiences and their local environmental challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on in-depth interviews with key informants, the research allows for the collection of data that is rich in detail, providing insights that are both contextually grounded and theoretically significant.

5.3 TARGET POPULATION

The target population of this research study is a critical component, as it defines the specific groups from which data is collected. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2019), the target population refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that a researcher intends to sample for the study. In this research, the target population consists of two main groups: protected area managers (including conservation managers) and local people living in communities adjacent to these protected areas. These groups are central to understanding the interplay between biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development, which forms the core focus of the study.

The research took place within protected areas managed by EKZNW, the provincial authority responsible for biodiversity conservation in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife oversees 120 protected areas, of which 60 actively engage in recreational tourism and conservation-related economic activities such as game viewing, eco-tourism, and outdoor experiences. These protected areas are distributed across two key regions, West and East, each with unique ecological, cultural, and economic characteristics.

- **West Region:** This region is dominated by the Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site, covering 260,000 hectares and incorporating 12 game and nature reserves. Known for its mountainous landscapes, rare species like the Cape vulture and Drakensberg rock jumper, and strong emphasis on eco-tourism, this region plays a crucial role in environmental education and conservation.
- **East Region:** The East Region, particularly Zululand, is renowned for its big game reserves, including Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, Tembe Elephant Park, and Ithala Game Reserve. These areas are significant not only for wildlife conservation but also as drivers of eco-tourism and local economic development, providing employment and business opportunities for surrounding communities.

Although EKZNW manages a large number of protected areas, only 60 actively engage in tourism and conservation-related economic activities. These activities serve as crucial mechanisms for socio-economic development, creating employment, supporting small businesses, and fostering entrepreneurship. Given this context, the study focused specifically on protected areas that engage in such activities to assess their economic

contributions to local communities. Key factors analysed include job creation, entrepreneurial ventures, and community partnerships. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study concentrated on protected areas with active land claims, those where local communities have successfully lodged claims and entered into co-management agreements with conservation authorities. These areas are particularly relevant for understanding the intersection between land rights, conservation, and community development.

The study targeted communities recognised as beneficiaries of protected areas, including those with established co-management agreements. This approach ensured that insights were drawn from local leaders, community representatives, and residents directly involved in or impacted by conservation and economic activities. Their perspectives were essential in understanding the socio-economic dynamics and community-conservation relationships in the region. By selecting a diverse range of protected areas and focusing on claimant communities, the study provided a holistic view of the economic and conservation dynamics in KwaZulu-Natal. This approach helped to identify both the benefits and challenges of balancing conservation objectives with socio-economic development in local communities.

5.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

There are two primary forms of sampling methods: probability and non-probability sampling. According to Sa'id and Madugu (2015: 52), probability sampling involves selecting items or subjects randomly, ensuring that each element in the population has an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample. Techniques under this category includes systematic, random, stratified, and area/cluster sampling. In contrast, non-probability sampling does not use random selection, meaning not all elements have an equal chance of being chosen. Common non-probability sampling techniques include convenience, snowball, purposive, and quota sampling. Effective sampling is crucial in research as it directly influences the quality and reliability of findings.

5.4.1 Purposive Sampling

This study employed a purposive (or judgmental) sampling strategy to select participants

from both Protected Area Management and the local community. The sample included one Protected Area Manager and one conservation official from each selected protected area. Additionally, community participants comprised both Community Leaders and local members, considering both those actively involved in protected area management and those who were not. This inclusive approach aimed to provide valuable insights into governance by incorporating diverse perspectives. The selection process was carefully designed to ensure a broad range of views, thus minimizing bias, as emphasised by Lune and Berg (2017).

For the study, two protected areas from each of the three regions within KwaZulu- Natal, under the purview of EKZNW, were selected. This approach was intended to provide a holistic perspective, capturing the unique characteristics and dynamics of each region. The study involved interviews with six managers representing their respective protected areas and six community leaders or representatives from the surrounding communities. To further enhance the depth of understanding, focus groups were conducted with a total of 180 community members across the study areas. These focus groups consisted of 8-10 participants each, with 30 individuals from each of the six communities.

This multi-layered approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of various perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's subject matter. According to Lopez and Whitehead (2013), the primary objective of sampling is to select suitable populations or 'elements' that align with the research focus. In this study, purposive sampling was deemed appropriate due to its effectiveness in targeting respondents who actively participate in developmental activities. Elmusharaf (2012) stated that researchers using purposive sampling aim to obtain a sample that is representative of the population based on specific criteria rather than random selection. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003a) further described purposive sampling as a method that selects certain units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly. Purposive sampling was selected for this study due to its relevance in ensuring that respondents could provide detailed and relevant data to answer the research questions. Additionally, it was chosen for its suitability and cost-effectiveness in gathering meaningful insights from knowledgeable participants actively engaged in conservation and community development.

5.5 DATA COLLECTION

According to Kabir (2018), data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. The study used semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups to collect data from the respondents. Data collection process:

The data collection process began by seeking permission from EKZNW through email to conduct interviews with managers in the respective protected areas. Once permission was granted, managers were contacted via email and phone to secure their participation. A letter of information was sent to inform them about the study's nature, purpose, risks, and benefits. For local communities, representatives or leaders were contacted by phone and visited in person to seek permission from chiefs or community elders. Traditional protocols were followed, and chiefs were informed about the interviews and gatherings within the community. Community leaders played a key role in facilitating consent and inviting local residents to participate in the broader community.

The recruitment process involved community representatives identified through protected area managers, who supported the researcher in recruiting focus group participants. Interviews with managers and local leaders took place at their workplaces, with prearranged appointments made telephonically. The researcher travelled to each protected area at an agreed time to conduct the interviews. Focus group discussions were held in community halls, churches, or schools, with the most accessible and convenient venue selected for each community.

This comprehensive approach ensured proper engagement, informed consent, and respect for cultural protocols throughout the data collection process. Ethical approval was meticulously obtained, safeguarding participant rights and confidentiality through informed consent forms outlining study intentions, procedures, and voluntary participation. The researcher obtained Gatekeeper's letters from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, local leadership, and community representatives.

5.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Further details on how these two methods were carried out are as follows.

5.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this study are a hallmark of qualitative research. They enabled the researcher to collect rich, descriptive data while maintaining the flexibility to explore new areas as they emerge in the course of the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when studying people's perceptions and experiences, as they allow the interviewer to probe deeper into responses and follow up on emerging topics (King & Horrocks, 2010). In this study, interviews were conducted with community leaders, representatives from the Hluhluwe imfolozi Trusts, Tembe Elephant Park Trust, Ndumo Game Reserve Trust, and the Ithala Game Reserve Trust, all key local stakeholders involved in conservation and development efforts of the areas.

By focusing on these role players, the research aims to uncover the multiple partners and stakeholders in co-management and the dynamics between the parties. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research for their flexibility and ability to allow researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth. According to Elham and Khoshnevisan (2022), semi-structured interviews involve open-ended questions, providing the researcher with an opportunity to probe more deeply into participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives on the issue under study. These interviews enabled the researcher to gather detailed, context-specific insights into the subject of the study. The semi-structured interview format allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, particularly with regard to the challenges and solutions related to mismanaged solid waste in their community.

According to CIn (2013), maintaining a conducive environment for interviews is crucial for encouraging open participation and ensuring the comfort and safety of the participants. This was achieved by creating a relaxed atmosphere and reassuring participants of the

confidentiality of their responses. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the study, emphasising the significance of the participants' involvement and the potential benefits to their community. The researcher also outlined the study's objectives and assured participants that their contributions would help inform strategies for improving waste management and community engagement. In accordance with ethical research practices, the researcher sought approval from the gatekeeper at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, which facilitated access to participants on the ground and the various regions. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by key stakeholders, including:

A. Managers of Selected Protected Areas

Individuals holding managerial positions within the specified protected areas as they possess critical insights and decision-making authority crucial for understanding the operational dynamics and strategic direction of these areas.

B. Local Community Partners

- Community Leaders: Individuals serving in leadership roles within the local community.
- Trustees or Community Representatives: Individuals representing the community's interests in partnerships with protected areas.

C. Community Members Actively Involved in Protected Areas

- Employees: Individuals employed within protected areas.
- Business Owners: Members of the community involved in business ventures linked to protected areas.

D. Members with Diverse Levels of Involvement

This includes individuals with varying degrees of engagement with the partnerships, ranging from active participants to those with minimal involvement; this largely comprises of the beneficiaries of the protected areas. In terms of sampling, the study targeted both protected area managers (or conservation managers) and local residents from claimant communities. The population under consideration includes the 120 protected areas managed by EKZNW. For the purposes of this study, four protected areas were selected from the two regions in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The selected protected areas had successful claims lodged against them and currently have active co- management agreements in place.

The selected semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into the role of local communities in conservation and resource management, as well as the challenges they face in implementing waste management and environmental rehabilitation efforts. The data collected from these interviews were integral to understanding the complex social-ecological dynamics at play in the selected study areas and informed the analysis of the research problem. Eliot and Associates (2005) stated that a focus group is a small group of six to ten people led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. “The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out”.

5.6.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups are a widely used data collection method in qualitative research, where a small, purposefully selected group of participants engages in a discussion about specific questions posed by the researcher (Cloke et al., 2004). For this study, focus group discussions played a crucial role in understanding the complexities surrounding the impact of conservation practices and co-management agreements in protected areas on local communities' livelihoods. These discussions provided valuable insights into community members' perceptions of conservation and their relationship with governing institutions managing protected areas.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight (Eliot and Associates 2005). Focus groups are group interviews that give the researcher the ability to capture deeper information more economically than individual interviews and questionnaires. Furthermore, group interaction between members of the target population during focus groups may encourage participants to make connections to various concepts through discussions that may not occur through the dissemination of individual questionnaires (Silverman 2016; Creswell and Poth 2018). The focus group sessions were held with members of the local communities surrounding Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, and Ithala Game Reserve. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a technique that identifies individuals with specific knowledge relevant to the research topic (Cloke et al., 2004). In this case, participants were grouped by age to ensure diverse perspectives: one group consisting of younger community members (approximately 18-25 years old) and another group consisting of older

community members (30 years and above). This approach allowed the study to capture a broad range of perspectives from two distinct generations within the community.

The primary goal of the focus group discussions was to explore the community's views on conservation, co-management, and the governance of protected areas. By engaging with these groups, the study sought to understand the power structures within the community and the external power dynamics influencing local livelihoods. Two focus group discussions were conducted during the field visit to the study area. The process began with communication with a local key informant who acted as a liaison between the researcher and the community members. The researcher facilitated logistics and ensured that the community was well informed about the purpose of the study. The focus groups were held on the same day, with the first session (FG1) taking place in the morning and consisting of 6 participants. The second session (FG2) was conducted in the afternoon with a different group of participants. These discussions helped gather in-depth insights into community perspectives on the impact of conservation and governance in the context of local livelihoods.

5.7 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documentary analysis is a qualitative research method used to examine documents in order to understand and interpret information, cultural norms, and social practices. This method is widely utilised in fields such as history, sociology, education, and political science, enabling researchers to analyse existing records for insights into human behaviour, societal changes, and historical events (Hassan, 2024). For this study, document analysis was used to explore key organisational records from the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife archives.

These archives contained a range of documents, including annual reports, management plans, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), community engagement reports, land restitution documents, co- management agreements, and ecological monitoring records. These documents provided essential information on the policies, management practices, and outcomes related to the conservation of protected areas and their interactions with local communities. The documentary focused on understanding the governance structures, land restitution processes, and community involvement in conservation efforts. Co-management agreements were reviewed to identify the roles and responsibilities of both

EKZNW and local communities.

5.8 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Ashirwadam (2010), data analysis is the process of organising facts and figures to address the research problem. It is essential for answering research questions and involves interpreting data, drawing inferences, and reaching conclusions. Raw data can often be difficult to interpret directly, necessitating analysis to extract meaningful insights. Moreover, the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis (2014) stated that the first aim of data analysis is to describe a phenomenon in detail, which may involve examining the subjective experiences of individuals or groups. The second aim is to identify the conditions underlying differences in experiences, and the third aim is to develop a theory of the phenomenon under study based on empirical analysis (Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, 2014).

5.8.1 Thematic Analysis Approach

This study employed a thematic analysis approach to analyse the qualitative data collected from community focus groups, Protected area managers, and local community leaders. According to Ibrahim (2012), thematic analysis is particularly suitable for studies that rely on interpretation. It provides a structured approach to data analysis, allowing the researcher to associate themes with the broader content, thereby enhancing accuracy and depth of understanding. Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset.

Being a qualitative research project, data analysis began during data collection. Data were coded into different themes as they emerged, guided by the research questions (Simons, 2009). The analysis followed a thematic approach, wherein the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by identifying recurring themes. This facilitated the development of a thematic framework for deeper exploration. With the aid of this framework, data were indexed using descriptor texts and subsequently charted to reorganise them, providing a

distilled summary of the recurring themes (Flick, 2018).

Using mapping, the researcher was able to identify relationships between these themes, which assisted in the interpretation of the findings. This mapping and interpretation process was highly influenced by the research objectives and themes emerging from the data. Integrating the assortment of emerging categories formed a “story line” that became an integral part of data analysis. Once the major themes that emerged from the data had been identified, the names of these themes were transcribed on different pages, and appropriate quotes were entered on their corresponding pages. By this, it was intended to report direct phrases and sentences, as it was important to be faithful to the exact words used by the participants (Simons, 2009).

5.9 DATA STORAGE AND SECURITY

To reinforce data security, the researcher activated lock out functions for screen savers. This implies that any computer used for data analysis was configured to “lock out” after five minutes of inactivity. This reduces the risk of theft or unauthorised use of data in situations where the researcher working with confidential data leaves her desk and does not log off immediately. Digital versions of qualitative data were held in a number of forms, including digitally recorded voice files (of interviews or fieldwork notes) held in MP3 format or similar and transcriptions of voice files held in word- processed documents. The researcher used Protect+ Voice Recorder with Encryption, which is a full-featured audio/voice recording app which offered recording and encryption of the digital data. All non-digital data was locked away. Paper documents such as consent forms, printouts, or case tracking sheets that contained personal identifying information were stored securely in locked file cabinets when not in use and were only handled by the researcher. Any physical data was destroyed by shredding.

5.10 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The main purpose of anonymity and confidentiality is to assure participants that they are protected from public exposure when providing sensitive information (Kuzhabekova, 2017). An informed consent letter accompanied the questionnaire during the empirical data

collection process. This letter assured participants that their personal details were not required when completing the questionnaire and that their responses would be kept confidential. The researcher only generalized average responses when analyzing the collected data. All participants and stakeholders in this research were provided with information and a letter of consent before their participation.

The letter of information outlined the rights of participants, and efforts were made to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. Data were securely captured and stored electronically on a virtual drive managed by the supervisor. Access to this drive was restricted to the supervisor and the researcher, both of whom had a password. Physical copies of data were also stored securely in password-protected storage for five years, after which they would be shredded and disposed of. Furthermore, respondents were not required to provide their names, addresses, or phone numbers for written documents or recorded interviews, ensuring the anonymity of their responses.

Mittelstadt (2019) asserts that maintaining a formal and structured approach helps in addressing ethical concerns effectively. Key ethical considerations included voluntary participation, ensuring that no harm came to participants, and maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no form of compensation was offered to individuals who took part in the study. To further protect participants' identities, names and identifying details of businesses were not collected. Instead, participants were assigned identification numbers for data analysis purposes. They were assured that their identities, as well as those of their businesses, would remain confidential, thus preventing potential legal repercussions. During data analysis, responses were aggregated to ensure individual participants or businesses could not be identified, except in the case of interviews. After data analysis, all transcripts were stored securely in a password-protected folder. In accordance with the ethical guidelines of Durban University of Technology (DUT), these transcripts will be retained for five years before being permanently deleted.

5.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Ensuring validity and reliability is critical in qualitative research to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. Reliability refers to the dependability and consistency of

the measuring instrument (Neuman, 2007: 196). While an unreliable instrument will lack validity, a reliable instrument does not necessarily ensure valid results. To strengthen reliability in this study, member validation was conducted, where findings were taken back to participants to confirm whether they accurately reflected their experiences.

Validity, on the other hand, ensures that the research measures what it intends to measure. To enhance validity, direct quotations from participants were included to demonstrate how interpretations were derived from the data (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013). Additionally, triangulation was employed as a validation strategy (Lee & Lings, 2008). This included:

- **Method Triangulation:** Comparing findings from different data collection methods to ensure consistency.
- **Triangulation of Sources:** Cross-checking data from multiple sources to identify consistency.
- **Analyst Triangulation:** Using different analytical perspectives to verify findings.
- **Theory/Perspective Triangulation:** Applying multiple theoretical frameworks to interpret the data. By combining multiple theories and data sources.

5.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are essential to the integrity of any research, ensuring that studies are conducted in a way that respects the rights and dignity of participants. A key ethical principle is obtaining informed consent, which ensures that participants are fully aware of the study's objectives, the nature of their involvement, and any potential risks or benefits associated with their participation (Babbie, 2016). To adhere to ethical standards, the researcher obtained full ethical clearance prior to beginning the data collection process (IREC 086/22, Appendix A). All participants were provided with an information letter and an informed consent form (Appendix B), which outlined the study's details, clarified that participation was voluntary, and emphasized that they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Additionally, participants were given contact information for both the study's principal investigator and the research ethics office in case any ethical concerns arise during the

study. Before commencing the research, the researcher completed. he researcher also secured a letter of approval from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of EKZNW (Appendix D), granting permission to proceed with the study. Further permission was sought from the traditional authorities in the selected communities (Appendix E, F, G). The next chapter will be a report on the findings of the study by providing and analyzing the data that was collected during the interviews and elaborating on the interpretation of the research results.

5.13 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has systematically outlined the research methodology adopted in this study, serving as the structural blueprint that guided the research process. It has provided a detailed discussion on the research paradigm and design, justifying the chosen approach to the study's objectives. The chapter has also described the target population and the sampling techniques employed to ensure the selection of a representative sample. Additionally, the methods of data collection have been thoroughly explained, detailing the tools and techniques used to gather relevant information. The processes of data analysis have been outlined, highlighting how the collected data were processed, interpreted, and presented to generate meaningful findings. The study further addresses ethical considerations, emphasizing adherence to principles such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the ethical treatment of participants. Issues of validity and reliability have also been discussed to demonstrate the study's credibility and trustworthiness. Lastly, the limitations of the study have been acknowledged, providing transparency regarding potential constraints that may have influenced the findings. The following chapter will present the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, offering critical insights based on the research outcomes.

Chapter 6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis of the research findings, structured in alignment with the research problem outlined in Chapter One. The data analysis followed a qualitative approach, incorporating thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights. The process involved coding, concept mapping, categorisation, and theme generation to break down and examine the data systematically. Data was grouped into meaningful sets, categorised, and analysed for patterns and themes. These sets were also used to identify propositions that explain the data. Given the study's focus on collaborative governance in protected areas, the chapter explores the perspectives of protected area managers and local communities, particularly those involved in co- management agreements. The study collected data from four distinct groups of participants using tailored interview guides to capture the views and experiences of key stakeholders in the management and governance of the protected areas. The groups and the respective interview guides used are as follows:

- Interview Guide 1: Directed at the managers of the four protected areas, namely Ndumo Game Reserve, Tembe Elephant Park, Ithala Game Reserve, and Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park. This guide focused on gathering insights regarding governance structures, management practices, and community engagement strategies within the protected areas.
- Interview Guide 2: Directed at the chairpersons of the co-management, traditional council leaders, and used in focus group discussions with community members who are beneficiaries of the trusts. This guide, available in both English and isiZulu, aimed to understand the community's perspectives on governance, conservation efforts, and socio-economic impacts.
- Interview Guide 3: Directed at the Traditional Council, including the Chief, Chief's King's Man, and traditional counsellor. This guide aimed to capture insights from traditional leadership regarding their role in governance and community decision-making. To maintain coherence in analysing the findings, key themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews and focus groups with participants were identified and presented. The analysis examined how these themes aligned with the study's objectives. While the

research is primarily qualitative, quantitative elements were incorporated in some instances to summarise large volumes of data and enhance clarity on socio-economic trends within the study areas (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). Collaborative governance in conservation requires an in depth understanding of current management structures, the challenges and opportunities, and their socio-economic impact on local communities.

Therefore, this chapter carefully constructed themes that aligned with the study's objectives, ensuring a structured and coherent analysis of the findings. The theoretical developments in this study informed the data presentation structure, demonstrating how emerging themes interconnected and contributed to broader discussions on community involvement in conservation, economic benefits, and governance effectiveness. These analytical approaches provided a foundation for discussing the implications of the findings and their relevance in shaping future conservation policies and management strategies.

6.1.1 Data Collection: Fieldwork Experience by Researcher

The data collection process involved extensive investigatory fieldwork conducted by the researcher alongside an assistant researcher. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Before fieldwork commenced, formal permission was sought from the CEO of EKZNW. Upon approval, the researcher was assigned a contact person within the organisation, who facilitated introductions and provided connections to key stakeholders. This included managers from the two districts under study, who further assisted in linking the researcher to conservation managers working directly with communities within the protected areas. Due to the field-based nature of their work, conservation managers were primarily contacted via WhatsApp to schedule appointments. Interviews were conducted at their respective workstations, based on their availability. This process spanned over two months, with careful planning to arrange visits within the same locality to minimise travel costs. The logistical challenges of conducting these interviews were significant. In some instances, the research team had to commence travel as early as 3:00 AM to reach locations for early meetings. Despite these challenges, the experience with conservation managers was overwhelmingly positive. They were open and receptive to the research process, engaging freely on

various topics and demonstrated a willingness to facilitate further data collection.

Additionally, these managers played a crucial role in connecting the researcher with relevant community leaders, including Indunas (traditional leaders) and trustees of co-management structures. In certain cases, they provided meeting spaces for the researcher and trust chairs to coordinate further engagements. Their introductions to traditional leaders significantly improved access to community members, as they helped establish trust and legitimacy, making participants more receptive.

Focus group discussions were arranged through the Trustees, who facilitated access to community members and assisted in organising meeting venues and logistics. In some instances, they even provided refreshments for participants, enhancing the overall participation experience. However, coordinating these sessions posed considerable challenges. Meetings had to be rescheduled on several occasions, particularly when they coincided with South African Social Security Agent (SASSA) grant payment dates, as many participants were unavailable on those days.

To ensure the accuracy of data collection, the researcher initially invested in a voice recorder. However, it became evident that mentioning recordings changed the participants' demeanour, making them less comfortable and open. As a result, the research team had to adapt to relying on detailed notetaking. The assistant researcher took notes during interviews, and immediately afterward, both the researcher and assistant would review and consolidate their observations, ensuring consistency and accuracy in capturing participant responses.

Despite the challenges, the fieldwork experience was instrumental in gathering rich, qualitative insights. The engagement with managers, traditional leaders, and community members provided a nuanced understanding of the governance dynamics within the study areas, contributing significantly to the overall research findings.

6.2 THEMES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The following themes were identified. These themes aligned with the objectives of the study and theoretical framework, providing a structured approach to understanding collaborative governance in the selected protected areas. The findings are presented based on each protected area to highlight contextual variations and site-specific challenges.

Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs – Examining the extent to which collaborative management policies address the socio-economic needs of local communities.

Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness – Assessing the roles of various stakeholders, including public agencies, local communities, and private entities, in governance processes and institutional efficiency.

Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision-Making – Evaluating how communities are integrated into conservation governance structures and decision-making processes.

Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement – Analysing mechanisms to build local capacity for meaningful participation in protected area governance.

6.3 The Case of Tembe Elephant Park

This section introduces the case of Tembe Elephant Park and presents an analysis of key themes that emerged from the data. Drawing on qualitative insights gathered through focus group discussions and socio-economic profiling, the analysis explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and concerns of local community members in relation to their engagement with the park. Establishing the socio-economic context is critical for understanding how conservation objectives intersect with local development needs, and how co-management strategies are perceived and experienced at the grassroots level.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs

Prior to focus group discussions a series of questions regarding socio-economic

conditions were asked by individual participants. These questions addressed factors such as age, income, employment status, education level, and household income. Table 6.3.1 summarises the responses from the Tembe community, who are the beneficiaries of the protected area. Establishing the socio-economic context was crucial for understanding the demographic profile of the community, as it helped to analyse the potential impacts of the protected area on their livelihoods and well-being, forming an essential foundation for this study.

Table 6.3.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups

Characteristic	Details
Age Distribution	18-39 years: 4 Participants (24%) 40-49 years: 3 Participants (18%) 50-59 years: 5 Participants (29%) 60-70 years: 5 Participants (29%)
Education Level	No formal education: 5 Participants (29%) Primary education: 8 Participants (47%) Secondary education: 4 Participants (24%)
Employment Status	Unemployed: 10 participants (59%) Employed in Tembe Elephant Park: 2 Participants (12%)
	Family members employed in the park: 3 Participants (18%) Employed elsewhere: 2 Participants (12%)
Household income	Below R1,500 per month: 9 Participants (53%) R1,500 - R3,000 per month: 5 Participants (29%) Above R3,000 per month: 3 Participants (18%)
Community Involvement directly with the park	Direct employment: 2 Participants (12%) Indirect employment (family members): 3 Participants (18%) No direct involvement: 12 Participants (71%)

Source: self-generated by author

6.3.1.1 Socio-economic conditions

The socio-economic data gathered from the Tembe community highlighted several

key aspects of the population's demographic and economic conditions. The age distribution showed that the community is predominantly older, with 58% of participants falling between the ages of 50 and 70. A substantial portion of the community has limited formal education, with 47% having only completed primary school and 29% with no formal education. Employment data revealed a high unemployment rate, with 59% of the participants unemployed. Only a small fraction of the population was employed directly within the TEP (12%), while 18% have family members there. Household income data further reflected financial challenges, with 53% of households earning less than R1,500 per month, which is well below the poverty line. Only 18% of households earned above R3,000 per month. Lastly, regarding involvement with the park, 71% of the respondents reported no direct involvement, and only a small percentage benefited from indirect employment through family connections.

6.3.1.2 Views on Socio-Economic Benefits

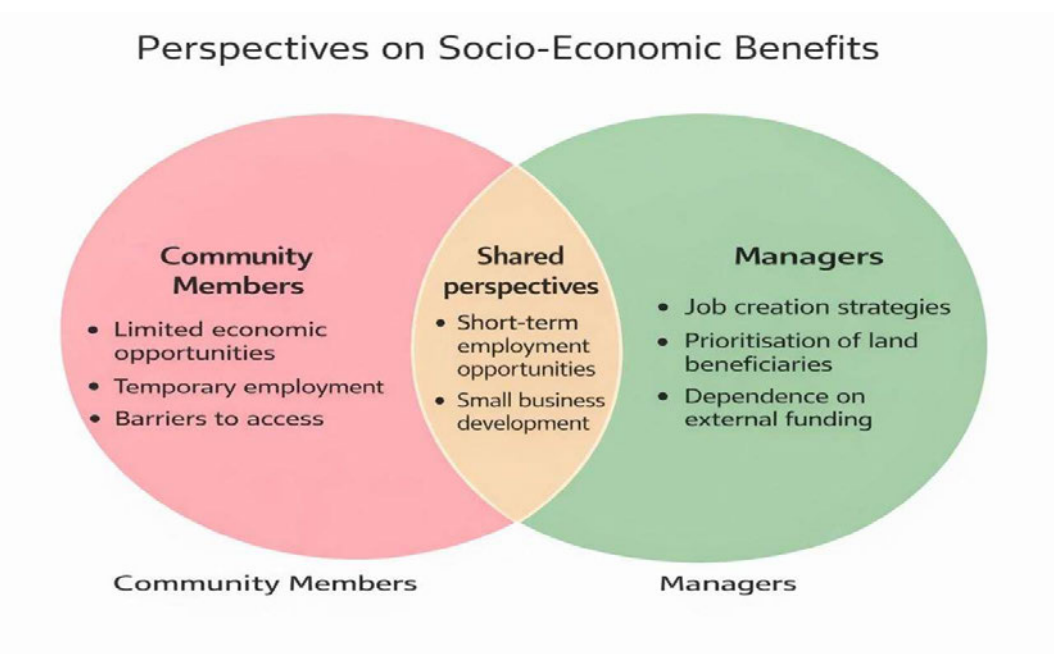


Figure 6.3.1.2: Views on Socio-Economic benefits

Source: self-generated by author

Respondents were asked about their views and experiences regarding the socio-economic benefits that co-management provides for the community. Figure 6.3.1.2

illustrates the differing and overlapping perspectives of community members and managers on the socio-economic benefits of co-management at the TEP.

a. Community Members

Some community members reported limited but positive socio-economic benefits from collaborative management initiatives. One participant stated, *"There are jobs for a few of us, but they're mostly short-term and not enough to support everyone in the community."* Others mentioned small business opportunities related to eco-tourism; however, they noted that these opportunities were only available to a limited number of people.

b. Managers

Managers highlighted that job creation and small business opportunities form part of EKZNW's strategies. They noted that while a few seasonal job opportunities existed for local people, these were often temporary. When such opportunities arose, priority was given to local community members, particularly the land beneficiaries. These jobs typically involved alien plant control projects and reserve maintenance activities, such as controlled burning. However, managers acknowledged that while local community members were often employed in lower-level positions, skilled positions were advertised through the head office, and a formal HR recruitment process needed to be followed. Community members who were interested in these positions were required to apply and compete with other candidates. One manager explained, *"We do create job opportunities, but they depend heavily on seasonal funding and projects, which aren't always reliable."* Another manager added, *"Unfortunately, we have no control over the recruitment process for permanent positions."*

6.3.1.3 Perceived Challenges in Addressing Socio-Economic Needs

Respondents were asked to share their perspectives on the challenges associated with addressing socio-economic needs within the park.

a. Community Members

A significant concern raised by community members was the lack of long-term employment strategies and sustained support for community-based enterprises. Many participants expressed frustration over the short-lived nature of employment and business opportunities, which failed to provide lasting economic security. One community member explained, *“There are no real opportunities for us to sustain ourselves. The programmes are short-lived, and once a project ends, we are left without any means to support our families.”*

Others highlighted that while some temporary jobs, such as reserve maintenance and alien plant control, provided short-term relief, they did not translate into long-term career growth or financial stability. The absence of permanent positions for local people was seen as a major gap in the co-management approach. Additionally, some participants noted that community-based enterprises linked to eco-tourism or conservation faced challenges such as limited access to resources, markets, and financial support, making it difficult for these initiatives to thrive.

b. Managers

Managers acknowledged the difficulties in integrating sustainable, long-term employment strategies into conservation programs. While they recognised the need for stable employment and stronger community participation, they pointed to external factors that limited their ability to implement lasting solutions. Funding constraints, shifting conservation priorities, and broader political influences were among the key barriers cited. One manager explained, *“There’s a need for more stable funding models to ensure these opportunities last longer. Many of our employment programmes rely on project- based or seasonal funding, which makes it difficult to sustain long-term jobs.”* Some managers emphasised that while local community members were often given priority for lower-skilled roles, more specialised positions require formal recruitment through the head office, limiting direct influence over hiring decisions at the local level.

Furthermore, managers mentioned that efforts to develop small business opportunities, such as eco-tourism ventures, required greater collaboration between government, private investors, and conservation agencies. Without such partnerships, it remains challenging to create a sustainable economic framework

that benefits local communities in the long run.

c. Community Leaders

Community leaders expressed deep concerns about the perceived prioritisation of wildlife protection over the socio-economic needs of local communities. Many felt that conservation policies often placed restrictions on land use and resource access, which negatively impacted their livelihoods. One leader remarked, *“We understand the importance of conservation, but it cannot come at the expense of our livelihoods. Our people need jobs, access to land, and opportunities to build sustainable businesses.”*

Leaders also raised concerns about the lack of meaningful engagement with communities in decision-making processes. While some consultation took place, they argued that community voices were often not given sufficient weight in shaping conservation strategies. They called for a more inclusive approach that balanced conservation goals with the economic well-being of local populations.

6.3.1.4 Impact of Conservation Policies on Local Livelihoods

Respondents were asked about their views and experiences regarding the impact of conservation policies on their daily lives and economic activities.

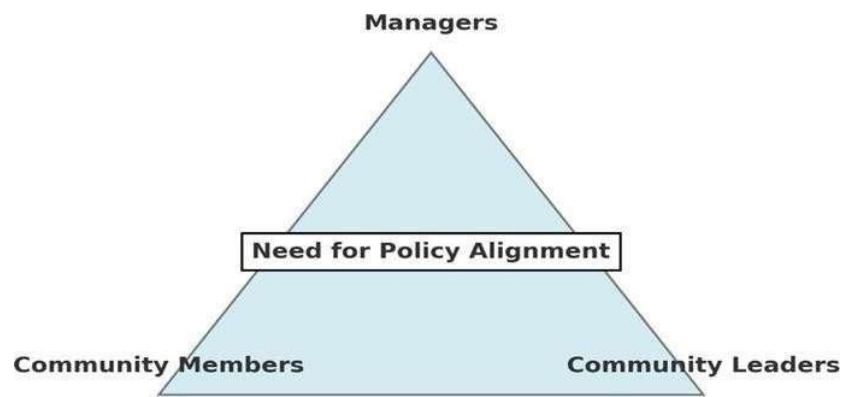


Figure 6.2: Perspectives on policy

Source: self-generated by author

a. Community Members

Many community members perceived a misalignment between EKZNW's policies and their socio-economic needs. One participant stated, *"They don't listen to us when we tell them what we need. The policies are made in offices far from here and don't consider our daily struggles."* Others expressed concerns about restrictions on land use and traditional activities such as farming. One community member explained, *"We can't farm the way we used to because of conservation laws. It's hard to feed our families now."* These responses highlighted a general sentiment that conservation policies limited economic opportunities and did not sufficiently address local realities. These responses highlighted a general sentiment that conservation policies limited economic opportunities and did not sufficiently address local realities, as illustrated in Figure 6.2.

b. Managers

Managers acknowledged the challenges that conservation policies create for local communities but emphasised the importance of balancing conservation objectives with development needs. One manager explained, *"We try to align our policies with local needs, but there's a gap between what we can provide and what the community expects."* Another manager noted that while conservation regulations do impose restrictions, they are necessary for maintaining ecological balance. *"It's a delicate balance. We need to conserve, but we also need to ensure that people can still*

access resources,” they added. Managers highlighted that, despite these challenges, there were efforts to mitigate negative impacts through controlled access to resources and community engagement initiatives.

c. Community Leaders

Community leaders were more vocal in expressing dissatisfaction with how EKZNW policies were implemented. One leader stated, *“The policies don’t reflect what the community truly needs. The government seems to forget the people living here when they make decisions about our future.* While leaders recognised the long-term ecological benefits of conservation, they stressed the importance of policies that take local livelihoods into account. One leader explained, *“People need to eat and support their families, and conservation policies often ignore this.”* Their responses suggested the need for more inclusive decision-making processes that consider both environmental sustainability and community well-being.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness

Respondents were asked about the role of local actors and institutions in facilitating collaborative management within Tembe Elephant Park and the challenges they face in ensuring effective stakeholder engagement.

6.3.2.1 The Role and Effectiveness of Local Actors

Local actors involved in the management of TEP included Traditional Leadership (Chiefs and Induna), the Conservation Local Board, the Co- management Committee, Community Trust Leaders, and Community Conservation Officers. These actors play a role in conservation governance; however, their effectiveness is often undermined by internal conflicts, governance challenges, and limitations in decision-making power.

a. Traditional Leadership (Chiefs and Izinduna): Chiefs are part of the community trust and are overseers of the land and community at large, however they are not part of the Co-management Committee. The Izinduna (headmen)

are registered under Department of Co-Operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) but do not hold decision-making power within co-management structures. One respondent explained, “The Chief has a seat in every meeting because of the proclamation agreement, but the Izinduna are not part of co-management; they are under COGTA.

- b. Community Trust Leaders:** The trust plays a central role in managing community-owned land within the park. However, trust structures frequently change due to conflict, mismanagement, and allegations of corruption. A respondent noted, *“The problem with the structure is that they always fight. Some say the trust eats the money, and the community does not benefit.”*
- c. Co-management Committee:** The Co-management Committee is an agreement-based structure and not a legislated institution. This means its authority is often questioned. One community member expressed concern, *“They change the co-management committee all the time because of internal conflicts.”*
- d. Local Board:** The Local Board is a critical stakeholder as it is legislated and reports directly to EKZNW. It plays a formal oversight role but is separate from the trust and co-management structures.

6.3.2.2 Institutional Support for Community Engagement

Institutional structures exist to support community engagement, including co-management agreements, the trust, and the Local Board. However, their effectiveness is hindered by governance weaknesses and funding constraints. Trust Governance Challenges: Trust leadership is often questioned due to allegations of financial mismanagement. In some cases, interim trustees have been appointed to investigate corruption claims. One participant shared, *“There was a trust chairperson who misused money. When the community demanded financial transparency, the trust refused, saying it was confidential.”* The role and accountability of trust has been a point of contention. The Tembe community trust is responsible for representing the landowners and while the co-management committee is involved in managing the Park. Trust, however, does not have direct accountability to the broader community.

Instead, it reports to the Master of the High Court and the Chiefs. This structure has

created a disconnect between the community and the trust. As noted by a respondent, financial transparency and community involvement have been particularly problematic: *“The trust receives R375,000 annually, but the community doesn’t see the benefits, nor do we receive a report on how the funds are used.”*

This lack of direct reporting and oversight means that community members feel excluded from decision-making processes and have limited influence over the management of their resources. Particularly, the community perceives that they are not benefitting from the funds allocated to them.

6.3.2.3 Barriers to Effective Collaboration

Figure 6.3.2.3 depicts the complex dynamics and governance challenges characterising the relationship between Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the Community Trust involved in the co-management of a protected area. The diagram traces the sequence of events beginning with the land claim settlement, followed by the election of trustees and the formation of a co-management committee. It highlights critical issues such as inadequate training, mistrust, leadership instability, internal conflict, and poor collaboration, which have collectively undermined effective governance. The figure demonstrates how these intertwined challenges have contributed to community frustration and weakened the overall functionality of the co-management structure.

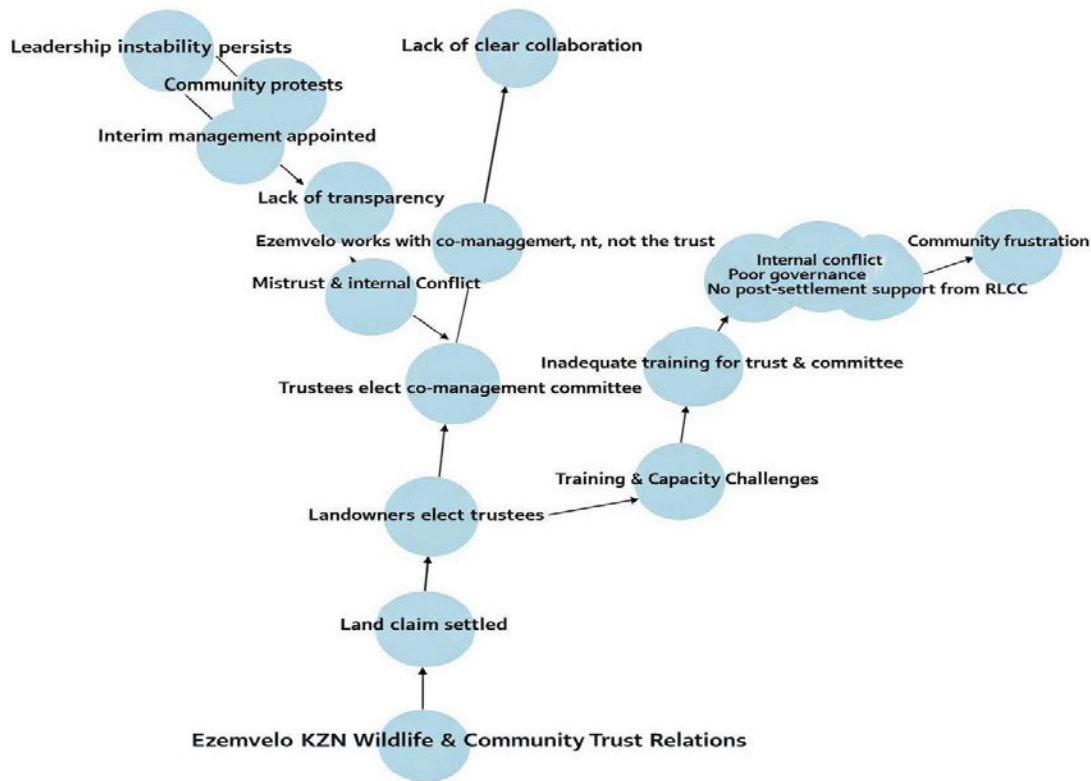


Figure 6.3.2.3: Co-management Challenges

Source: Self-generated by author

6.3.2.4 Mistrust and Internal Conflict

A significant challenge in the co-management of TEP is the persistent internal conflict within the trust, which has undermined its credibility and effectiveness. The lack of transparency, especially regarding the management of funds, has led to frustration and protests among community members. One manager explained that the community's frustration stems from misuse of funds that were meant for community projects but were instead diverted, leading to failed initiatives. In such cases, community members demanded accountability, and as a result, an interim management committee was appointed to investigate the allegations, *"The people we elected once misused funds that were meant for a project, and it failed. The community protested and demanded accountability, leading to the appointment of an interim management committee."*

The failure of the trust leadership to answer for these discrepancies has further exacerbated the mistrust. Leadership changes within the committee have been

frequent, but the underlying issues of conflict and mismanagement remain unresolved. The frustration over these issues is evident in statements like. This culture of secrecy and lack of financial transparency has led to continued instability within the trust, with leadership being replaced frequently, but the core issues around accountability and management remain unchanged.

6.3.2.5 Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Community Trust Relations.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife plays a critical role in the management of the park, but there is some confusion about their role in relation to the community and the trust. Ezemvelo does not work directly with the trust, but rather with the co- management committee, which is elected by the landowners. One manager clarified, *“Once the land claim is settled, the landowners elect the trust. Ezemvelo works with the co-management members, who are elected by the trustees. We only work with the co-management committee members, not the trust itself.”*

Ezemvelo’s role as a management organisation has been questioned. Although Ezemvelo is responsible for biodiversity management, there seems to be little collaboration or clear communication between Ezemvelo, the trust, and the broader community. This separation of roles and lack of direct engagement with the community has led to the perception that Ezemvelo is working for the state, rather than in true partnership with the local communities.

6.3.2.6 Training and Capacity Challenges

The lack of adequate training for both the co-management committee and the trust members has further hindered effective collaboration. While both groups have received some training, it has not been sufficient to address the complexities of co-management or to ensure effective governance. The trustees have received workshops from Ezemvelo, while the co-management committee was trained by NGOs. However, the trustees’ lack of understanding of their role and responsibilities as contributed to the internal conflicts that plague the management structure.

Furthermore, there is a general lack of post-settlement support from the Land Claims Commission, which does not assist in building a stronger relationship between the trustees, the beneficiaries, and the park's management. This gap in institutional support further perpetuates the ineffectiveness of the management structure and created a cycle of frustration and disillusionment among local community members. Once the claims are settled, there is a lack of continued support and oversight from the RLCC, leaving the beneficiaries feeling abandoned and unsupported. One of the most significant concerns raised by the community is the absence of guidance and post-settlement support from the RLCC. As one respondent noted, *"Once the land claim was settled, we were left to figure things out on our own. There's no real support from RLCC anymore."*

6.3.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision Making

This section presents the results focusing on the level of commitment demonstrated by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) to involve local communities in decision-making processes.

6.3.3.1 The Degree of Local Involvement in Decision-Making

The results revealed that local community involvement in decision-making at Tembe remains largely top-down, with limited opportunities for meaningful community input at the early stages of planning or in strategic decision-making. A common theme observed in the responses is that community involvement is often solicited only late in the processes, if at all. One manager noted, *"The involvement should be on strategic decisions, but the issue is there is no continuity. By the time the current committee understands how things work, a new one is elected, and we are starting over."* This illustrates the lack of continuity within community leadership. The frequent turnover of the co-management committee and leadership structures means that decision-making is constantly restarting, preventing the establishment of long-term, sustainable collaboration between the community and EKZNW.

As a result, strategic decisions are often made without adequate community input, and decision-making authority remains concentrated in the hands of EKZNW or

other external authorities. Furthermore, representation in decision-making forums is seen as tokenistic rather than substantive. Although there are community leaders who engage with EKZNW, this representation does not always lead to genuine community involvement. One manager emphasised that, “We used to work very well with the Izindunas before the new co-management agreement, but now roles are unclear, and we are fragmented.” This statement points to a breakdown in the previously functional governance structures that allowed for effective community participation. The co-management agreement introduced new dynamics, but without clear roles.

6.3.3.2 Barriers to Community Involvement

A few barriers to meaningful community involvement were identified from the responses, these included limited access to decision-making forums, power imbalances, and a lack of awareness about available opportunities for participation. One manager discussed the challenge of involving the broader community in decisions; *“There are 1512 families who are claimants, and further a larger community that surrounds the park but are not claimants. Active involvement can only be through community leadership structures.”* Additionally, power imbalances between EKZNW and the local community contributed to the barriers to meaningful participation. Despite efforts to involve the community in projects and employment, there was a general feeling that the community’s voices were not genuinely considered in major decisions.

A respondent expressed: *“We do not have a seat at the table when strategic decisions are made. We are just consulted when the decision is already made, and by then, it’s too late”*. This perception reflected the limited and often late-stage involvement of the community, where their input came after key decisions had already been finalised. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife retains most of the decision-making authority, with little room for local voices to shape outcomes at a strategic level.

While training programmes and information sessions have been offered by EKZNW to empower the community, these efforts appear insufficient in fostering genuine empowerment or in facilitating deeper engagement in decision-making. One

manager described: *"We offer training programmes, but the turnover in leadership means that the training is not effective. By the time the committee members understand their roles, they are replaced with new ones."* Community leadership is recognized as a key avenue for participation, the lack of continuity in the co-management committee means that leadership structures are often ineffective. There is further, limited scope of community training and engagement, available training programs do not adequately address the broader need for consistent and adequate community involvement in strategic decision-making.

6.3.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Tembe Elephant Park

When respondents were asked about community engagement and capacity-building at TEP, they highlighted several key challenges that hinder active participation in the park's management. These challenges included limited training opportunities, a lack of qualifications, and difficulties in assessing higher management roles

6.3.4.1 Capacity-Building Programs and Initiatives

Data indicated that while the park management had provided workshops and motivational sessions, these programmes were irregular and were not part of a structured, long-term capacity-building strategy. As one community member observed, *"It's not formal training, just workshops. I'm not sure, but I haven't seen anybody new coming in to provide training."* This suggested that although some efforts existed, they were not sustained or designed to develop lasting skills within the community. Many of these initiatives are project-based, making them temporary and ineffective in fostering meaningful engagement in the park's management. Skills development in conservation-related fields remained minimal, with no clear pathway for local community members to acquire qualifications that would allow them to progress into higher positions.

While roles such as security guards, cleaners, and receptionists were available to locals, these positions typically did not require formal qualifications. In contrast, management positions were often occupied by outsiders due to qualification

requirements. One manager explained, "*The locals don't have qualifications, so they can't get higher positions. The hiring policies require formal qualifications, so outsiders fill these roles.*" This highlighted a significant gap in community capacity, limiting their ability to participate actively in decision-making and through employment at all levels of the organisation. Several barriers were noted including limited access to education, resources, and mentorship opportunities. Without these foundational elements, local community members struggled to develop the skills necessary for more advanced roles. Additionally, the absence of structured training programs in conservation further widened the skills gap. The high turnover of trained individuals exacerbated the problem, as those who did receive training often left for better opportunities elsewhere, leaving the community with little long-term benefit.

6.3.4.2 Effectiveness of Capacity-Building Efforts

Capacity-building efforts at Tembe Elephant Park have been limited in scope and impact. Many training programs are short-term, with little to no follow-up or long-term support. While some community members received initial training, there were no structured opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills over time. One community leader highlighted this challenge, stating, "*The training is not effective because by the time we start understanding how things work, we're replaced with new people, and we start all over again.*" The frequent turnover in leadership, coupled with the absence of continuity in training, significantly weakens the overall effectiveness of these initiatives. A recurring concern is the need for more practical, hands-on training.

As one respondent emphasised, "*We need more practical training. It's one thing to hear about something in a workshop, but it's another to do it.*" This reflected a broader sentiment that theoretical workshops alone are insufficient; and training should be action-oriented, directly addressing the real-world tasks involved in park management. The sustainability of these capacity-building efforts was another major challenge. Most initiatives relied on external funding and were not embedded within a broader, long-term community development strategy. Without consistent investment, these efforts remained temporary and often failed to create lasting change. A local leader noted, "*If the funding runs out, the programs stop. There is*

no plan to keep them going long-term, so we keep losing the skills that we managed to build.”

This dependence on external resources undermined the potential for sustained community empowerment. Lastly, there was a reliance on outside expertise and trainers which further complicated efforts to develop local leadership in park management. While external training may provide short-term benefits, it did not contribute to building an independent, community- led approach. One respondent explained, *“The training programs don’t seem to build up over time. We need a sustainable approach that ensures we keep developing.”* Without a structured, long-term commitment to capacity building, the community remained excluded from meaningful participation in park management and decision-making.

6.4 Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park

The case of Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park offers a distinct perspective on the complexities of co-management and community engagement within a historically significant conservation landscape. This section examines the evolving relationships between park authorities and neighbouring communities, particularly in the context of land restitution, governance, and benefit-sharing. Through a thematic analysis of qualitative data, the discussion focuses on four central issues: perceptions of benefit distribution, power dynamics in decision-making, persistent conflict and mistrust, and institutional and capacity limitations.

6.4.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs

Respondents were asked a series of questions to establish the socio-economic conditions, Table 6.4.1 presents the characteristics of 30 focus group participants.

Table 6.4.1: Socio-economic Dynamics of the community

Characteristic	Details
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Age Distribution	- 18-39 years: 6 participants (20%) - 40-49 years: 8 participants (27%) - 50-59 years: 10 participants (33%) - 60-70 years: 6 participants (20%)
Education Level	- No formal education: 9 participants (30%) - Primary education: 12 participants (40%) - Secondary education: 7 participants (23%) - Tertiary education: 2 participants (7%).
Employment Status	- Unemployed: 15 participants (50%) - Employed in HiP: 6 participants (20%) - Family members employed in HiP: 4 participants (13%) - Employed elsewhere: 5 participants (17%)
Household Income	- Below R1,500 per month: 12 participants (40%) - R1,500 - R3,000 per month: 10 participants (33%) - Above R3,000 per month: 8 participants (27%)
Community Involvement with HiP	- Direct employment: 6 participants (20%) - Indirect employment (family members): 4 participants (13%) - No direct involvement: 20 participants (67%)

Source: self-generated by author

6.4.1.1 Socio economic conditions

Table 6.4.1 presents a demographic overview of the participants, including age composition, education, employment, income and community involvement. In terms of age, participants are primarily distributed between 40 and 59 years, with 33% in the 50-59 age group. The education level indicates limited access to advanced education, as the majority have only primary education or no formal education. Unemployment is notably high, with half of the participants unemployed, although 33% are employed directly or indirectly by HiP. Household income reflects significant poverty, with 40% earning below R1,500 per month. In terms of community involvement, most participants (67%) have no direct engagement with HiP.

6.4.1.2 Views on Socio-Economic Benefits

Respondents were asked about their views on the economic opportunities derived from HiP Park by locals. Several benefits were mentioned by both the local people and managers. These included financial support, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities. One significant economic benefit is the annual contribution of R375,000, which is paid into the trust accounts of the three trusts that represent the claimants in HiP. *"The fund increased from 275000 to 375,000, and it is divided among the three trusts that represent beneficiaries,"* one stakeholder explained. This fund is used for the development of the broader communities from which the beneficiaries come from.

The distribution of these funds is aimed at improving infrastructure, education, and other community development initiatives. However, the allocation of the money among the trusts raises concern for beneficiaries over the appropriate use of the funds. Secondly, there is a local craft market that is fully owned and managed by the community, where local artisans are provided with a space to create and sell their traditional crafts. This market presents an opportunity for local people to earn income from their artistic skills. As one local participant explained, *"Yes, the artwork around the park is done by locals, and they feed their families with profit."* This initiative supports the local economy and further empowers community members improve their livelihoods.

Thirdly, managers noted that employment opportunities within the park were available, but they tended to be limited to lower-level positions, such as housekeeping and administrative roles. These positions, while helpful for providing jobs, are primarily filled by individuals with limited education. One community manager remarked, *"The locals don't have qualifications, so they can't have lower positions like security, cleaners, or receptionist."* This highlighted a key challenge in the community of limited access to higher education, hindering their access to higher-paying jobs within the park. Another benefit that the community received is the provision of game meat. This practice is a way of distributing park resources to local people, providing them with access to meat that might otherwise be out of their

reach. While this is a valuable resource for the community, it does not address the long-term needs for more sustainable economic opportunities.

Despite these noted benefits, there are several challenges to accessing opportunities that were raised by respondents. One significant issue is the application process, which can be complex and difficult for some members of the community to navigate. *"Some do not follow the instructions when applying, and they get disqualified,"* one manager mentioned. This failure to comply with application instructions can result in locals losing out on job opportunities. Furthermore, the process of submitting applications through local leaders, such as Izindunas, has led to complaints about unfair practices. *"The positions are advertised through Izindunas, and there have been complaints of certain applications not reaching park management due to sabotage and unfair selection processes by local leaders,"* one respondent stated. This adds another layer of complexity and frustration to those seeking employment in the park.

6.4.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness

Exploring the structure and functioning of stakeholder engagement in Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park, this theme examines the roles of key institutions such as community trusts, traditional leaders, employment committees, and conservation boards. It considers how these stakeholders interact within the co-management framework and assesses their effectiveness in representing community interests and supporting inclusive governance.

Table 6.4.2: Key local stakeholders

Stakeholder	Role
Mlaba Trust	Represents local claimant interests.
Zungu Trust	Represents local claimant interests.
Corridor of Hope	Represents local claimant interests.
Co-Management Committee (Chairperson)	Facilitates collaboration between local communities and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Chiefs & Izinduna	Custodians of the land represent broader community interests (non-beneficiaries).
Employment committees	The Employment Committees represent the community by facilitating the recruitment process and ensuring community members have access to employment opportunities within the park.
Local Conservation Boards	Provides opportunities for community involvement in conservation efforts.

Source: self-generated by author

6.4.2.1 The Role and Effectiveness of Local Actors

Respondents were asked about available local institutions and stakeholders that support the facilitation of co-management, and their responses highlighted a range of stakeholders as well as the strengths and challenges of co-management structures in HiP. See Table 6.4.2. The park works with three community trusts that represent the claimant's community, these are the Mlaba Trust, Zungu Trust, and Corridor of Hope. These trusts represent local interests, with one chairperson elected to lead the co-management committee. This structure is intended to facilitate collaboration between local communities and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. However, concerns exist regarding the effectiveness of these local actors.

Chief and Izinduna were also identified as key actors. They are the custodians of the land and represent the boarder community interests in the park. This is important to note as not all the community members that reside around the park are claimants or beneficiaries of the land, While Chiefs and Izindunas play a significant role in decision making, some respondents expressed concerns about their influence, with one stating, *"The Chiefs sometimes prioritise their family's interests over the entire community."* Additionally, there are employment committees and local conservation boards who are responsible for providing community members with opportunities for involvement in the park.

6.4.2.2 Barriers to effective engagement

The co-management approach in HiP Park, designed to create collaboration between local communities and park management, is faced with several barriers. One of the key barriers identified by the respondents is administrative inefficiencies, which affected the overall functioning of the co-management structure. While co-management aimed to encourage inclusiveness, the implementation process has faced challenges that undermined its success. One critical issue that emerged during the research was the unfair hiring practices and a lack of transparency in the recruitment process. As one participant explained, *"The positions are advertised through Izinduna (headsmen), and there have been complaints of certain applications not reaching park management due to sabotage and unfair selection processes by local leaders."*

Another respondent added that *"sometimes we see people working and we were not even aware that there were available opportunities and when we approach the park, we are informed that information was sent to our leaders."* These practices promoted exclusion of broader members of the community, who may not have had a close relationship with the people in the leadership structures. It was also noted that in some instances there are certain families where more than one member was employed directly in the park while other beneficiaries were not involved, this discourages involvement in meetings and other activities that may take place in the park. A respondent added that *"It is very discouraging to even apply at times because we know which families get opportunities."*

Such unfair hiring practices foster mistrust between local community members, the park management, and community leaders, as they feel that opportunities are not being distributed equitably. This undermines the core principles of co-management, which sought to establish fair collaboration and partnership between all stakeholders. Furthermore, when local leadership, such as Chiefs and Izindunas, prioritised certain individuals over others, this deepened community divisions and eroded the effectiveness of collaboration. Another significant barrier noted is the limited authority of local actors in decision-making processes. Local leaders, such as Chiefs, Izinduna, and community trust representatives, are positioned to support the local people and advocate for their interests, their decision-making power is constrained by the agreements made with EKZNW.

One local leader expressed the frustration of being caught between community expectations and the restrictions imposed by the co-management framework: "*Yes, we own the land, but the agreement we signed stipulates that we cannot do as we please in the park. Ezemvelo is there to ensure that everything is done according to the rules. As much as we want to understand community needs and advocate for our people, everything has to be within the rules, and we don't have the authority to make major decisions.*" This statement highlighted the tension faced by local leaders, who are tasked with representing the community's needs but are constrained by the terms of the co-management agreement. It is noted that despite owning the land, local leaders do not have the final say in the park's operations.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife retains the ultimate authority, meaning that while local leaders may understand and empathise with community concerns, they feel powerless to effect change without approval from the park management. This perceived lack of autonomy seemed very frustrating for community leaders. One respondent explained. "*The people expect miracles from us at times, but there is only so much we can do. We can't make decisions without following the rules set by Ezemvelo.*" This quote reflects the disconnect between the community's expectations and the reality of the co-management structure, where local leaders are limited in their ability to directly influence key decisions.

6.4.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision-Making

One of the objectives was to assess the commitment to community involvement in decision-making, as well as the challenges that may hinder the meaningful inclusion of local voices in the management of the park. Several key issues emerged from this theme as illustrated in Figure 6.4.3, including the availability of incentives for involvement, limited authority of local leaders, the lack of mentorship opportunities, and ego and power struggles within the management structure.



Figure 6.4.3 Views on community involvement

Source: self-generated by author

The findings showed that there are means to involve local people in decision making at HiP. The representation of local people is through the local board and management committees who sit in meetings and other decision-making forums. Managers added that there was a sitting fee for the committees every time there was a formal engagement to ensure that they have the means to attend and represent the local people, a manager added that: *"financial support is intended to make it easier for local representatives to participate without incurring personal costs"*. It was added that there were also clear lines of communication between the co-management committee and the park management to ensure effective involvement. However, community leaders noted that although they were involved and attended meetings, power dynamics existed. Local leaders often felt that they lacked the necessary expertise to fully engage in discussions that required specialised knowledge of conservation practices. The absence of formal training for these local representatives contributed to feelings of intimidation and disempowerment during meetings. One respondent mentioned: *"We are appointed to represent the people, but we are not conservation specialists. We're here to voice our community's concerns, but we often feel intimidated because everyone else in the room has qualifications related to the job."* Respondents noted limited authority by community representatives to influence outcomes of meetings.

They often felt ill-prepared and not fully equipped to contribute meaningfully to decisions about the park's operations. This assertion revealed the limited amount of meaningful inclusion. Local representatives often felt like observers rather than active participants, which undermined the core goal of co-management, and shared responsibility for the park's management between local people and the park authorities. Another critical issue that was voiced was absence or limited mentorship agenda to ensure that local leaders and community representatives were effectively empowered to make informed decisions. One example was made with regards to the community wanting to influence hiring decisions for permanent and skilled employment opportunities.

They expressed frustration over the fact that **Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife** continued to control hiring practices for these **positions**. While in the past, the park management identified and could train local people to become rangers and tour guides. However, the current employment system required specific certifications for these positions, which local community members often could not access. A community manager noted: *"The hiring practices remain those of EKZNW for permanent positions. In the past, the park authority could train people to be rangers, but today, people need certification. We don't have the authority to revert this practice to the original one, which would greatly empower our people."*

Another issue that emerged is the dynamics between local leaders and park managers which seemed to contribute to limited meaningful involvement. Local leaders noted that they often met with egos from some managers who felt that they did not have to answer them. This created a barrier to open communication and effective decision-making, as it could be difficult to foster mutual respect when there was a perceived lack of cooperation. A manager noted that as much as they respected and understood that the community were the landowners, they were also still guided by EKZNW policies in terms of what they could support.

One manager noted: *"According to the policy, we are supposed to meet with the co-management committee four times a year. Most of the involvement is us reporting on what we've done during each period. It's impossible to involve them in every decision, as they often do not even agree or have the same view. We do have a lot*

of work, and this is an added responsibility to an already demanding job." This comment revealed the limitations in the depth of involvement with community representatives being largely relegated to a reporting role rather than a decision-making one. This lack of genuine collaboration and involvement leaves local representatives feeling like their roles were more about rubber-stamping decisions than influencing them.

6.4.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at HiP

This theme examines the capacity-building efforts implemented at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) to support meaningful community engagement in conservation. It explores how training programmes, business support initiatives, and leadership development have been used to empower local stakeholders. The analysis highlights both the successes and limitations of these efforts, particularly the need for structured, long-term mentorship and development strategies to ensure lasting impact and genuine co-management.

6.4.4.1 Capacity-Building Programs and Initiatives

Data indicated that HiP has implemented various capacity-building programmes aimed at enhancing community involvement. These initiatives included the recruitment and training of Community Conservation Monitors, who played a crucial role in tracking wildlife and addressing conservation challenges within the park. Their involvement ensured that local community members actively participated in conservation efforts. HiP also supported 45 local businesses by providing workshops, mentorship, and access to business opportunities, contributing to the local economy through tourism and park-related activities.

Additionally, the park facilitated the operation of a community-owned lodge within its boundaries, equipping locals with the necessary skills to manage and sustain a tourism business. Other hands-on training programmes focused on alien plant control and reed grass harvesting, offering practical conservation skills that benefited both the park and community livelihoods. Furthermore, HiP provided

conservation training to local leaders, enabling them to effectively represent their communities in decision-making processes. While these programmes have made notable strides in empowering local communities, gaps remain in long-term mentorship and continuous support. As a result, community leaders often struggle to fully engage in decision-making and assume leadership roles within the park. Although these efforts demonstrate HiP's commitment to capacity-building, the absence of a structured, sustained training strategy limits their long-term impact. Without ongoing support, skill development remains inconsistent, and opportunities for community members to progress into higher positions within conservation management remain scarce.

6.4.4.2 Effectiveness of Capacity-Building Efforts

Respondents highlighted the importance of capacity building at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) for empowering local communities and enhancing their involvement in conservation efforts. However, while some capacity-building initiatives are in place, there was a consistent concern about the need for more long-term, structured programs rather than the current ad-hoc approach. Many respondents noted that the capacity-building efforts at HiP are often periodic and driven by immediate needs or available funding, rather than by a clear, long-term strategy.

One local leader remarked, *"We attend training facilitated by head office to equip us with the knowledge needed to represent our people and contribute to the park's management, but these trainings are often occasional and do not provide long-term mentorship or a clear pathway for growth."* This highlights the reactive nature of current capacity-building initiatives, where training is provided when needed, but there are no structured, ongoing programs for continual development. Respondents emphasised the need for well-planned, continuous capacity-building initiatives with clear objectives and long-term goals.

One participant explained, *"The training we get is not enough to make us effective leaders in the park. There's no structured follow-up or mentorship to ensure we can apply what we've learned and grow in our roles."* This reveals that while initial training may provide knowledge, without a follow-up structure, community leaders are left to navigate challenges without the support they need to grow into their roles.

Local leaders expressed frustration with the lack of mentorship to help them apply their learning and take on more responsibilities. The absence of clear goals and consistent development pathways leads to limitations in the decision-making power and influence of local leaders.

One respondent noted, "We are involved in decision-making, but the power dynamics are challenging. While we represent the community, our influence is limited because the final decisions rest with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. We want to understand the needs of our community, but there is only so much we can do." This highlights that capacity-building programs must not only provide skills but also empower local leaders to become effective decision-makers, with a clearer sense of ownership over park management. Respondents have recently called for a more proactive, strategic approach to capacity building. Local people emphasised that capacity-building should be planned with long-term objectives, clear outcomes, and measurable milestones. As one respondent put it, *"We need structured programs that not only address current needs but also build leadership capacity over time. This will ensure we are truly ready to manage the park together, not just react to issues as they arise."* This indicates the widespread belief that capacity building should be about sustained growth rather than short-term fixes.

6.5 Indumo Game Reserve

6.5.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio-Economic Needs

This analysis focuses on how collaborative management structures at Ndumo Game Reserve interact with the socio-economic conditions of surrounding communities. Attention is given to employment opportunities, income levels, and community participation in conservation-related initiatives. The discussion highlights both the intended benefits of co-management and the ongoing challenges in meeting local development needs through current governance arrangements.

Table 6.5.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups

Characteristic	Details
Age Distribution	18-39 years :5 participants (17%) 40-49 years : 9 participants (30%) 50-59 years : 11 participants (37%) 60-70 years : 5 participants (16%)
Education Level	No formal education :10 participants (33%) Primary education :11 participants (37%) Secondary education : 6 participants (20%) Tertiary education :3 participants (10%)
Employment Status	Unemployed :14 participants (47%) Employed in Ndumo GR : 7 participants 23%) Family members employed in Ndumo GR :5 participants (17%) Employed elsewhere :4 participants (13%)
Household Income	Below R1,500 per month :13 participants (43%) R1,500 - R3,000 per month : 9 participants (30%) Above R3,000 per month : 8 participants (27%)

Source: self-generated by author

6.5.1.1 Socio economic conditions

Table 6.5.1 displays the socio-economic dynamics of participants in Ndumo Game Reserve. It includes a breakdown of participants' age distribution, where the majority are between 40-59 years (67%). The education level indicates limited access to advanced education, with 70% having no formal or only primary education. Employment status shows a high unemployment rate (47%), with a notable portion working directly or indirectly for the Ndumo Game Reserve (40%). Household income data reflects widespread rural poverty, with 43% earning below R1,500 per month. Finally, community involvement reveals that 60% of participants have no direct involvement with the reserve, while 23% are directly employed. This type of analysis helps to contextualise the socio-economic challenges faced by the community and informs us of the broader implications for development programs and policies.

6.5.1.2 Views on Socio-Economic Benefits

The community's views on the socio-economic benefits of Ndumo Game Reserve revolved around the impact of the park on local livelihoods, primarily in terms of employment and community development. According to community leaders, job opportunities were available, but they were often temporary, suggesting a reliance on short-term work rather than sustainable employment. While temporary positions offered some financial relief, they did not meet the long-term needs of the community, particularly for young people. Another respondent noted, “*There are no business opportunities for locals,*” which suggests a lack of avenues for entrepreneurship or income generation beyond low-wage jobs within the park.

Furthermore, the respondents noted that a lump sum amount was paid to the community trust to be distributed to them; although efforts were made to distribute compensation funds following the land claim, the fairness of these distributions was questioned. One respondent mentioned, “*It was not distributed fairly, and there was no transparency,*” highlighting concerns over unequal access to benefits. This underscores the need for better systems to ensure that all community members benefit equitably from the park's operations. The community further noted that there were inconsistencies in the registration of beneficiaries, where certain families that were removed from the park would have more than one family member lodging claim instead of choosing a representative, this greatly increased the number of beneficiaries, making the distribution of funds even less substantial.

6.5.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness

This theme explores the roles, relationships, and performance of various institutional actors involved in the management of Ndumo Game Reserve. It considers how stakeholder engagement processes are structured, the extent to which they are inclusive and transparent, and how effectively institutions represent community interests within the co-management framework. Particular attention is paid to coordination challenges, power dynamics, and the capacity of local structures to influence decision-making.

6.5.2.1 The Role and Effectiveness of Local Actors

The following key local actors were identified in Ndumo Game reserve, each playing a distinct role in community representation, decision-making, and engagement with conservation.

- **Chiefs and Izinduna:** Traditional leaders represent the interests of the local community, though their authority is limited in conservation-related matters. The Chief plays a significant role in approving decisions that affect the community, but their influence does not extend to enforcing long-term benefits. As one respondent explained, *"The Chief did approve the first compensation, but he was not much involved in ensuring the local community benefits."* Izinduna (headsman) serves as an intermediary between the Chief and community members, ensuring that local concerns are voiced. However, their power is constrained, especially in matters directly linked to conservation policies.
- **Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Management:** The primary authority overseeing the park's operations and conservation efforts. Despite the involvement of local actors in decision-making forums, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife retains control over final decisions. A participant noted, *"Local leaders can't do as they please in the park,"* reinforcing the limited authority of traditional leaders within the park's governance structure.
- **Community Trustees and Co-Management Committees:** These are individuals chosen to represent community interests in discussions with park management. These representatives act as a bridge between Ndumo's local population and conservation authorities. However, their effectiveness is minimal as they have limited influence on park policies, which remains a challenge given the dominant role of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.
- **Local Business Owners:** Entrepreneurs who depend on Ndumo's tourism economy, including craft sellers, transport operators, and accommodation providers, face significant economic challenges due to the low number of visitors to the park. The reserve is not operating at full capacity, with some chalets remaining non-operational due to deteriorating facilities. This decline in infrastructure and limited tourism flows directly impact local businesses, reducing

their opportunities to generate income and benefit from the reserve's potential as a key economic driver.

6.5.2.2 Barriers to effective engagement

A few barriers were noted that hindered the effectiveness of local actors in the decision-making process. One significant issue raised by respondents is the lack of formal training for those in leadership roles within the co-management structure. Local leaders highlighted the challenges of engaging in technical discussions with park management, as they may not possess the necessary expertise to effectively manage the park. This sentiment reflects the need for more targeted capacity-building programs that would equip local leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to make informed decisions. Furthermore, the power dynamics between local leaders and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife officials further complicate effective engagement. One manager pointed out that while local actors are supposed to be involved in decision-making, "Ezemvelo doesn't involve the co-management in final decisions," leading to feelings of marginalization among local leaders. This suggests that, despite the willingness to engage local stakeholders, there is insufficient implementation of inclusive decision-making processes, which limits the effectiveness of co-management efforts.

6.5.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision-Making

The commitment to community involvement in decision-making was evident in the establishment of co-management committees and efforts to include local actors in park management. However, a clear limitation is the extent to which these actors can influence decisions. One local leader noted, "Co-management must be given the chance to play their role and be more involved," indicating the desire for more active participation. Although local leaders receive compensation for their involvement, the current engagement seems more symbolic than substantive. A respondent shared that, "Most decisions seem to only come to us to get our buy-in, rather than us being part of the decisions," reflecting frustration with the lack of meaningful influence in the decision-making process. While there have been efforts to integrate the community, "Respect" and "more budget" were cited as critical needs

to improve the engagement process. These issues highlight that while there is a framework for community involvement, the practical application is hindered by a lack of sufficient resources and respect for local contributions.

6.5.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Hip

While there have been some capacity-building programmes aimed at empowering local communities, these efforts have been largely inconsistent and insufficient in addressing the long-term needs of the community. One respondent mentioned that *"Ezemvelo did train us and hosted some workshops,"* acknowledging the training provided. However, there was a clear gap in terms of sustainability and comprehensive training for community members. For instance, a respondent noted that the community had been trained as rangers and guides in the past, but *"now they just hire them from other places because the training programmes have ended."* A key initiative mentioned was the Alien Plant Control project, which employed 250 locals. However, there is no ongoing mentorship or structured development for the community.

As one respondent shared, *"The funds run out,"* pointing to the lack of sustainable financial and developmental support for local initiatives. Despite some positive aspects of the capacity-building programmes, their effectiveness has been limited by the lack of long-term planning and clear goals. The respondent's comments reflected the need for a more structured approach: *"Capacity must be planned with a clear end goal,"* as opposed to ad-hoc initiatives. Without clear planning, many programs, such as the training for park rangers and the alien plant control project, fail to yield lasting changes for the community. Responses also revealed that the lack of formal training and mentorship for local leaders and committee members left them feeling unprepared for the complex demands of park management.

6.6 Ithala Game Reserve

Collaborative management at Ithala Game Reserve takes place within a complex socio-economic landscape shaped by high unemployment, limited formal education, and income disparities. Analysis of focus group data highlights the role of the reserve

in creating employment and supporting local livelihoods, while also revealing gaps in broader community involvement. The demographic and economic context provides a foundation for understanding both the opportunities and limitations of co-management in fostering inclusive development and equitable benefit-sharing.

6.6.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Management and Socio- Economic Needs

Collaborative management at Ithala Game Reserve takes place within a complex socio-economic landscape shaped by high unemployment, limited formal education, and income disparities. Analysis of focus group data highlights the role of the reserve in creating employment and supporting local livelihoods, while also revealing gaps in broader community involvement. The demographic and economic context provides a foundation for understanding both the opportunities and limitations of co-management in fostering inclusive development and equitable benefit-sharing.

Table 6.6.1: Socio-economic Dynamics in the Focus Groups

Characteristic	Details
Age Distribution	30-39 years: 5 participants (17%) 40-49 years: 9 participants (30%) 50-59 years: 11 participants (37%) 60-70 years: 5 participants (16%)
Education Level	No formal education: 10 participants (33%) Primary education: 11 participants (37%) Secondary education: 6 participants (20%) Tertiary education: 3 participants (10%)
Employment Status	Unemployed: 14 participants (47%) Employed in Ndumo GR: 7 participants (23%) Family members employed in Ndumo GR: 5 participants (17%) Employed elsewhere: 4 participants (13%)
Characteristic	Details

Household Income	Below R1,500 per month: 13 participants (43%) R1,500 - R3,000 per month: 9 participants (30%) Above R3,000 per month: 8 participants (27%)
Community Involvement with Ndumo Game Reserve	Direct employment: 7 participants (23%) Indirect employment (family members): 5 participants (17%) No direct involvement: 18 participants (60%)

Source: self-generated by author

6.6.1.1 Socio economic conditions

The socio-economic structure of the community can be inferred from the demographics of people associated with the Ithala Game Reserve. According to the age distribution, 37% of participants were between the ages of 50 and 59, and 30% were between the ages of 40 and 49. This meant that the majority of the local population was middle-aged, indicating a workforce with considerable expertise and involvement in ongoing community initiatives. Participants' educational backgrounds suggested potential barriers to pursuing further education. A sizable percentage (33%) had no formal education, with 37% having only completed primary school. This suggested that educational development programmes may be necessary to promote skill improvement and enhance chances for post-secondary education.

Initiatives to improve educational accessibility may be beneficial to the community, given that just 10% of participants had completed postsecondary education. Employment status further illustrates the economic difficulties faced by the community, as 47% of participants were unemployed. However, Ithala Game Reserve serves as an essential employment provider, with 23% of participants directly employed by the reserve and an additional 17% having family members working there. This suggested that the reserve contributes to job creation and has a broader economic impact that extends beyond direct employment. While 43% of participants earned less than R1,500 per month, another 30% earned between R1,500 and R3,000, with only 27% earning above R3,000.

This income distribution reflects a community with limited financial resources despite the employment opportunities provided by the reserve. Community involvement with Ithala Game Reserve appeared to be limited, with 60% of participants reporting no direct engagement. This lack of involvement may stem from restricted access to employment opportunities or participation in decision-making processes. However, with 23% of participants working at the reserve and 17% having family members employed, there was evidence of some degree of community integration with the reserve's operations.

6.6.1.2 Views on Socio-Economic Benefits

Ithala Game Reserve creates job opportunities for local community members in various roles, including park rangers, hospitality workers, administrative staff, and other support positions. Management at Ithala noted that all non-skilled positions were filled by locals, who were identified through the Headsmen (Izinduna) and the co- management committee. However, a notable challenge is that the community closest to the park was relatively new, having been established on land that was previously protected and served as a buffer between the town and the reserve. Additionally, the beneficiaries of the park were spread across northern KwaZulu-Natal rather than being concentrated near the reserve. This presented difficulties in balancing employment opportunities between the immediate community surrounding the park and the claimant community.

One manager explained, *"There is zero economic activity in the area, as you may have observed." The town of Louwsburg has one street, so the reserve tries to employ as many people as possible, but we can't solve all the economic problems.* This suggested that while economic benefits were available to local people, the reserve cannot fully address all their socio-economic challenges. Tourism revenue is also noted to play a crucial role in boosting the local economy in IGR, as a significant portion of the reserve's revenue is allocated to the community trust account. However, the distribution of these funds remains the responsibility of community leaders, as the reserve does not interfere in this process.

The reserve pays an annual fee derived from tourism activities and the auctioning of

the game, which contributes to community development. These funds are further linked to several Community development efforts within the communities, relating to improvements in infrastructure and providing school supplies, roads, and food parcels for those in need. These developments enhance the quality of life for residents

6.6.2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Effectiveness

Exploring how local stakeholders participate in the governance of Ithala Game Reserve, this theme focuses on the roles, influence, and effectiveness of institutional actors involved in co-management. The analysis considers the nature of engagement and the broader institutional environment shaping decision-making processes.

6.6.2.1 The Role and Effectiveness of Local Actors

Table 6.6.2.1: Effectiveness of Local Actors in Decision-Making

Actor	Role in Engagement	Effectiveness	Challenges
Traditional Leadership	Community representative and Co-management committee member	High-valuable local insight.	Political affiliations create tensions
Local Leaders Community Trust Representatives and Co-management Committee	Represent communities, provide feedback	Medium – Occasionally lack clarity in communication	Fragmented local leadership
Local Conservation Board	Facilitate local development projects	Medium - some mistrust of the government	Limited capacity for large-scale projects

Source: Self-generated by author

6.6.2.2 Barriers to Effective Engagement

Respondents at Ithala Game Reserve noted the presence and effectiveness of local stakeholders. However, this is not without challenges. Respondents reported several issues, including a lack of transparency, political differences, and limited access to information. Respondents expressed frustration over the lack of transparent communication, with some community members feeling excluded from key decisions, particularly those related to the use of funds. One respondent noted that communities often only become aware of plans after they have been implemented, leaving them feeling unheard in the decision-making process. Political affiliations also played a significant role in shaping engagement, as some leaders struggled to cooperate due to differing political views. While co-management structures exist, respondents acknowledged that political differences sometimes influenced decision-making, raising concerns about whether community representatives genuinely prioritise the needs of locals broadly or only those aligned with their own political views. Another notable challenge mentioned was the limited education and awareness provided to beneficiary communities regarding land claims and co-management agreements. Many felt that decisions were made too quickly, with little effort to equip them with the necessary information to participate meaningfully. Despite these challenges, some respondents recognised that having local actors in leadership positions does offer a degree of representation, even if the overall system requires improvement to be more inclusive and transparent.

6.6.3 Theme 3: Commitment to Community Involvement in Decision Making

The commitment to community involvement in Ithala Game Reserve's management appears inconsistent. While respondents generally recognised the importance of engaging local communities, there was widespread frustration over the challenges this presented for managers on the ground, who were already struggling with staffing shortages. At least 30% of positions remained vacant due to the organization's limited resources. As one manager noted, *"I am currently managing three essential roles on my own, while several other key positions in the reserve remain unfilled."* This highlighted that, despite a willingness to involve locals, the capacity to do so is limited.

Community engagement becomes an additional burden on managers who are already overwhelmed with their primary responsibilities. The co-management agreement at Ithala mandated four meetings per year; however, due to time constraints, the committee only managed to hold two meetings annually at most. While there was a general understanding among respondents that local involvement is important, competing responsibilities often take precedence. As one respondent observed, *"People are more concerned about the fact that we are able to generate a profit and pay their dividends than they are about holding meetings and engaging with us."*

6.6.4 Theme 4: Capacitation for Active Community Engagement at Ithala

The results revealed that several training programmes have been implemented and are in progress; however, their success has been mixed. These programmes targeted various groups such as community members, park rangers, local leaders, and local farmers, but participation remains inconsistent, limiting the overall effectiveness. One of the key challenges identified is the limited reach of these programs. Not all local residents and leaders have access to them, which diminishes their overall impact. The first programme mentioned is the environmental management training, which is aimed at community members and park rangers, and has had a significant positive impact, improving local conservation practices.

A second programme is co-management training for local leaders, which has had more moderate success, with low participation in training sessions. Lastly, the sustainable agriculture programs aimed at local farmers and residents have seen limited success due to insufficient infrastructure to support the training. These challenges highlight the need for a more inclusive and accessible approach to capacity building. In terms of overall effectiveness, the impact of these programs has varied. Environmental management training has demonstrated high effectiveness, leading to enhanced local conservation knowledge and positive impacts on park management.

On the other hand, co-management workshops have seen mixed participation, suggesting that while there is some involvement in decision-making, the level of

engagement remains inconsistent. As one participant noted, *"It's unfortunate, like, it's done too quickly with too little information and education beforehand."* This feedback showed the need for more comprehensive and sustained training efforts. The consensus is that for community engagement to be sustainable, capacity-building programs must be continuous and adaptable to the evolving needs of the local population.

Table 6.6.4 Capacity-Building Programs and Effectiveness

Program	Target Group	Outcomes	Challenges	Effectiveness Level
Environmental Management	Community members	Improved understanding of conservation practices	Limited reach to all stakeholders	High
Co-Management Education	Local leaders	Better involvement in management decisions	Low participation in training sessions	Medium
Sustainable Agriculture	Local farmers and residents	Enhanced agricultural practices	Limited infrastructure to support training	Low

Source: Self-generated by author

6.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the results of the study, examining the socio-economic conditions of local communities surrounding protected areas, their perceptions of the socio-economic benefits derived from conservation initiatives, and the roles of various stakeholders in the governance of these areas. The findings provided insight into the demographic composition of respondents, revealing challenges such as high unemployment rates, low educational attainment, and financial hardship within these communities. The study further identified economic benefits, including employment

opportunities, community projects, and financial contributions through community trusts.

Additionally, the chapter explored stakeholder engagement and institutional effectiveness, highlighting the key local actors involved in conservation governance. The results indicated that while structures such as community trusts, traditional leaders, and co-management committees exist to facilitate local participation, several barriers limit effective collaboration. Issues such as administrative inefficiencies, lack of transparency in employment processes, and limited decision-making authority of local leaders are identified as major challenges that undermine the principles of inclusive and equitable governance.

The next chapter built upon these findings by engaging in an in-depth discussion of the results. It critically examines the key themes in relation to the research objectives, providing a comparative analysis of the study's findings and existing literature on governance in protected areas. The discussion will further explore the implications of these results on conservation efforts and community livelihoods, offering a balanced understanding of the governance dynamics within the studied protected areas.

Chapter 7 DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Building on the analysis presented in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the key findings of this study in relation to the research objectives. The findings reveal that the governance of protected areas plays a pivotal role in shaping both conservation outcomes and the livelihoods of local communities. While collaborative governance frameworks exist, challenges persist in effectively balancing conservation priorities with the socio-economic needs of local populations. The analysis further indicates that although conservation authorities demonstrate a strong understanding of governance mechanisms, community participation and awareness remain uneven, often influenced by structural and institutional barriers. The purpose of this chapter is to critically engage with these findings by integrating key elements of data analysis, including stakeholder perspectives and policy implications.

By drawing connections between these elements, the discussion provides a comprehensive interpretation of how governance structures facilitate or constrain collaboration between conservation stakeholders and local communities. The chapter aligns existing literature on protected area management with the research findings, highlighting key patterns and similarities. Additionally, the findings emphasize the significant role of stakeholders and local actors in fostering inclusive decision-making. They also highlight persistent challenges such as socio-economic constraints, limited resource access, and policy implementation gaps that continue to hinder effective collaboration. This discussion summarizes the key results and takeaways, underscoring the need for further efforts to ensure that conservation initiatives do not come at the expense of local livelihoods.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS SUMMARISED IN RESPECT OF THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

The key study objectives are as follows:

- To ascertain the extent to which collaborative management policies of EKZNW address the socio-economic needs of local communities.

- To assess the effectiveness of local actors and institutions that are put in place to facilitate collaborative management of EKZNW Wildlife protected areas.
- To ascertain the level of commitment on the part of the Protected areas authorities to involve the local community in decision-making.
- To explore the extent to which communities are capacitated to take an active role in the management of the study areas.
- To develop an integrative framework that will facilitate collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas.

The summarised findings in respect of each key objective that guided this study are as follows:

7.2.1 Objective 1: To ascertain the extent to which collaborative management policies of EKZNW address the socio-economic needs of local communities.

The socio-economic conditions of communities living around protected areas play a crucial role in determining their level of benefit and engagement with conservation initiatives. The findings from the four reserves, Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve, and Ithala Game Reserve highlight significant socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment, low levels of education, and limited income generation opportunities. These findings align with previous research indicating that communities bordering conservation areas often experience economic marginalization despite their proximity to natural resources (Spenceley & Snyman, 2017). This marginalization is often driven by historical land dispossession, limited access to decision-making processes, and structural inequalities that persist despite conservation-based economic opportunities (Anthony, 2019).

Additionally, Spenceley and Snyman (2017) argue that conservation efforts must go beyond merely providing employment and revenue-sharing; they should incorporate targeted capacity-building programs to ensure meaningful economic inclusion of local communities. Across all four reserves, the dominating age group falls between 40 and 59 years, indicating that a significant portion of the population is composed of working-age individuals. However, the lack of formal education among these

individuals remains a key barrier to accessing skilled employment within the reserves. In the case of Ndumo Game Reserve, 70% of respondents have no formal or only a primary education, limiting their ability to secure higher-paying jobs.

This is consistent with studies highlighting how educational limitations restrict local communities from benefiting from conservation-based employment opportunities (Roe et al., 2015). The high levels of unemployment, ranging from 47% in Ithala Game Reserve to 50% in HiP, indicate that employment within protected areas is insufficient to address local economic needs. Although reserves offer job opportunities, these are primarily low-skilled positions such as housekeeping, security, and administrative support. According to Snyman (2020), many protected areas prioritize local hiring but are constrained by the limited qualifications of applicants, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and underemployment.

Across all four reserves, the dominating age group falls between 40 and 59 years, indicating that a significant portion of the population is composed of working-age individuals. However, the lack of formal education among these individuals remains a key barrier to accessing skilled employment within the reserves. In the case of Ndumo Game Reserve, 70% of respondents have no formal or only primary education, limiting their ability to secure higher-paying jobs. This is consistent with studies highlighting how educational limitations restrict local communities from benefiting from conservation-based employment opportunities (Roe et al., 2015). The high levels of unemployment, ranging from 47% in Ithala Game Reserve to 50% in HiP, indicate that employment within protected areas is insufficient to address local economic needs.

Although the Parks provide job opportunities, these are primarily low-skilled positions such as housekeeping, security, and administrative support. EKZNW protected areas prioritize local hiring but are constrained by the limited qualifications of applicants, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and underemployment. Income levels within the communities remain low, with a significant proportion of households earning below R1,500 per month. This highlights the need for diversified economic opportunities beyond direct employment in reserves. In HiP, for example, 33% of participants are employed either directly or indirectly by the park, but this has not

substantially improved economic conditions in surrounding communities.

Similar findings were reported in a study by Boudreaux and Nelson (2019), which suggested that conservation-driven employment must be supplemented with broader economic development programs to achieve meaningful poverty alleviation. Although several challenges were noted, various economic benefits associated with the reserves were also identified. The financial contributions made by reserves to community trust funds serve as an essential source of revenue for local development. In HiP, an annual contribution of R375,000 is distributed among three trusts representing land claim beneficiaries.

While these funds are intended to support community development, concerns about fairness and transparency in fund allocation persist, mirroring concerns raised in literature about governance challenges in community-based conservation projects (Büscher & Dressler, 2012). Employment remains a primary benefit, with varying levels of direct and indirect job creation across the reserves. In Ithala Game Reserve, 23% of participants are directly employed by the park, while an additional 17% have family members working there. This suggests that protected areas do contribute to local livelihoods, although on a limited scale. Research by Mbaiwa (2017) supports the argument that conservation areas generate employment but often fail to provide long-term economic security for surrounding communities.

Entrepreneurial opportunities also emerged, although to a limited extent. For example, the local craft market in HiP provides artisans with a platform to sell traditional crafts, thereby creating income-generating opportunities outside formal employment. This is similar to beneficiation models that have been observed in other African conservation contexts, where ecotourism-linked enterprises offer alternative livelihood strategies (Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). Despite the economic benefits offered by the reserves, several barriers hinder equitable access to these opportunities. One key issue is the complexity of application processes for jobs and funding. In HiP, it was noted that many applicants fail to follow instructions correctly, resulting in disqualification.

This aligns with previous research indicating that bureaucratic barriers often prevent marginalized communities from accessing conservation-related economic benefits (Bennett et al., 2019). Furthermore, concerns about nepotism and favouritism in the hiring process have been raised. In both HiP and Ndumo Game Reserve, the reliance on local leaders (Izinduna) to facilitate job applications has led to complaints about unfair selection practices. Studies by Dressler et al. (2010) emphasize that elite capture and favouritism are common in community-based conservation initiatives, often undermining the intended economic benefits for broader populations.

Tourism generated revenue is a significant contributor to community trust funds, in the case of Ithala Game Reserve, where funds from game auctions and tourism activities are directed toward local development projects. However, the effectiveness of these funds is often contingent on local governance structures. As noted by Lindsey et al. (2013), revenue-sharing mechanisms in protected areas frequently face issues of mismanagement, limiting their potential impact on poverty reduction. Furthermore, the distribution of tourism revenue often lacks transparency, leading to inequitable benefit-sharing among community members. According to Snyman (2020), in many protected areas across Africa, community trust funds intended for local development projects do not always reach their intended beneficiaries due to weak institutional frameworks.

The situation in these case studies reflects these concerns, as community members have raised issues regarding fund allocation and the accountability of those managing the trust funds. While tourism contributes significantly to employment, these jobs are often seasonal or low paying, limiting their long-term impact on poverty alleviation (Mbaiwa, 2017). Research by Spenceley and Snyman (2017) emphasizes that for tourism revenue to drive meaningful economic transformation, local communities must be actively involved in decision-making processes and benefit-sharing agreements. Strengthening local governance mechanisms and ensuring transparency in revenue allocation could enhance the socio-economic benefits derived from protected areas.

The findings from the four Parks depict the complex socio-economic dynamics surrounding protected areas. While employment opportunities, financial

contributions, and entrepreneurial ventures offer some benefits, significant barriers persist in ensuring equitable access to these opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a more integrated approach that includes capacity-building initiatives, improved governance of community funds, and diversified economic development strategies. As emphasized by Spenceley and Snyman (2017), sustainable conservation efforts must align with socio-economic development goals to foster community support and long-term success in protected area management.

7.2.2 Objective 2: To assess the effectiveness of local actors and institutions that are put in place to facilitate collaborative management of EKZNW Wildlife protected areas.

Effective stakeholder engagement and institutional collaboration are essential for the successful co-management of protected areas. In the case of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW), various local actors and institutions have been established to facilitate governance, conservation efforts, and community engagement. The effectiveness of these actors remains a subject of debate due to governance challenges, power imbalances, and institutional limitations. Community trusts play a critical role in representing the interests of local land claimants. These trusts are tasked with ensuring that landowners benefit from conservation-related initiatives. However, governance issues and internal conflicts hinder their effectiveness.

Leadership disputes within the trusts have led to instability, posing a challenge for communities to engage meaningfully in conservation and economic activities linked to protected areas. The Co-management committees act as an intermediary between the trusts and EKZNW and they face similar challenges. In the case of these committees, local communities expressed concerns about the lack of accountability and the limited decision-making power of these committees. This undermines the potential benefits of co-management agreements, as decisions affecting local communities are often made without their full participation.

Traditional leaders, including Chiefs and Izinduna, serve as custodians of the land and representatives of broader community interests. They play an advisory role and are expected to advocate for equitable benefits for their people. However, their involvement in co-management structures is limited, and their influence is often

contested. Some respondents noted that Chiefs occasionally prioritize the interests of their own families over the broader community. Additionally, Izinduna, though registered under the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), there is a lack of formal decision-making power within conservation governance frameworks. This limits their ability to effect meaningful change, despite their proximity to community concerns. Sundström et al. (2021) highlight how structured stakeholder engagement fixed in transparent decision-making frameworks can bridge the gap between traditional leadership and institutional conservation authorities. Integrating these principles could enhance the role of Chiefs and Izinduna in conservation governance, ensuring that they contribute more effectively to policy implementation and community mobilization. There are also employment committees that are responsible for ensuring fair hiring practices and facilitating local employment within protected areas. However, research findings indicated that recruitment processes are often marred by nepotism and a lack of transparency. Some community members reported that job opportunities were not widely advertised, with Chiefs and Izinduna controlling access to employment-related information.

This has led to allegations of favoritism, where certain families benefit disproportionately while others are excluded. Such practices weaken trust in conservation authorities and discourage broader community participation. Local Conservation Boards also exist and aim to promote community involvement in conservation efforts, facing similar challenges. While they provide a platform for engagement, their effectiveness is constrained by funding limitations and governance weaknesses. Respondents highlighted the need for greater community representation in decision-making processes to ensure that conservation benefits are equitably distributed. The Conservation Measures Partnership (2020) asserts the importance of transparent governance structures and adaptive management in conservation initiatives. Implementing a standardized approach to recruitment and decision-making processes could enhance trust, equity, and effectiveness within these institutions.

A recurring theme in stakeholder responses was the pervasive mistrust between local actors and conservation authorities. This mistrust is fueled by governance

failures within community trusts, allegations of financial mismanagement, and perceived exclusion from decision-making processes. Internal conflicts among trust members have led to frequent leadership changes, disrupting the continuity of conservation initiatives. Community members expressed frustration over the lack of financial transparency, particularly regarding funds allocated for community development projects. These findings align with broader literature on community involvement in conservation governance. Lindsey et al. (2013) emphasize that one of the biggest challenges facing community engagement is the lack of trust between conservation authorities and local actors.

Similarly, Chigumira (2017) notes that internal leadership disputes within community-based organizations often weaken their ability to negotiate effectively with conservation authorities. This suggests that governance mechanisms within EKZNW's protected areas require structural reforms to enhance transparency and accountability. Despite being landowners, local communities have limited control over conservation management decisions. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife retains significant authority, and community leaders must operate within pre-defined agreements that restrict their decision-making power. Some respondents noted that while Chiefs and trust leaders understand the needs of their communities, they lack the autonomy to implement changes without EKZNW's approval.

This disconnect between local expectations and conservation governance structures has led to disillusionment among community members, reducing their willingness to engage in collaborative management efforts. The governance challenges faced by local actors in EKZNW align with Wight's (2004) continuum of stakeholder participation, which identifies various levels of involvement, from basic consultation to joint planning. Most community actors within EKZNW's protected areas operate at the consultation level, where their views are acknowledged but rarely influence final decisions. This limited role of communities in decision-making is further highlighted by Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, which critiques tokenistic engagement strategies that fail to grant communities genuine control over governance processes.

As Margoluis et al. (2019) argue, conservation initiatives that embed adaptive co-management principles focusing on iterative learning and stakeholder-driven

solutions are more likely to yield long-term success. The lack of training and capacity-building initiatives for local actors has further weakened the effectiveness of collaborative management structures. While some training programs have been implemented, they have not been sufficient to address the complexities of governance and conservation management. Additionally, the absence of sustained post-settlement support from institutions such as the Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC) has left many local actors without the necessary resources and guidance to effectively manage conservation-related responsibilities.

Sundström et al. (2021) highlight how targeted training initiatives aligned with adaptive conservation strategies can equip local stakeholders with the necessary skills to engage meaningfully in governance structures. Integrating such training approaches could significantly strengthen the role of community actors in EKZNW's conservation landscape. Across all four parks, a similar theme emerges: while there is a framework for community involvement through co-management structures, the practical application of these structures often falls short of achieving meaningful participation. The involvement of local leaders is typically confined to symbolic roles, with limited influence over key decisions. In all four parks, power dynamics play a crucial role in limiting local participation, with local representatives feeling marginalized and ill-equipped to engage in technical discussions due to a lack of training and expertise.

A key difference between the parks lies in the level of resource constraints and staffing shortages, which are particularly pronounced in the Ithala Game Reserve. These constraints further limit the capacity of park managers to engage with local communities and foster meaningful co-management. In contrast, while HiP, Tembe, and Park 4 also face power imbalances and leadership turnover, the resource challenges in Ithala appear to exacerbate these issues, as park managers are overwhelmed with competing responsibilities and have limited time to dedicate to community engagement. While the presence of local actors and institutions within EKZNW's protected areas is crucial for fostering collaboration, various challenges hinder their effectiveness. Governance issues, mistrust, and limited decision-making power undermine co-management efforts, reducing community engagement and conservation success. Addressing these challenges requires greater transparency,

capacity-building initiatives, and a re-evaluation of co-management agreements. Embedding structured governance models, such as the Open Standards for Conservation, presents an opportunity to enhance institutional effectiveness and empower local communities in conservation governance.

7.2.3 Objective 3: To ascertain the level of commitment on the part of the Protected areas authorities to involve the local community in decision- making.

Co-management structures were created in the four parks to distribute power between local communities and park authorities, facilitating more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. However, the practical application of these structures falls short of achieving genuine community involvement, which is characterized by the meaningful influence of local voices on decision-making processes. In all the parks, the community is involved in formal meetings and decision-making forums through local representation on the co-management committees. While sitting fees are provided to ensure that community representatives can attend meetings without incurring personal costs, however, the monetary incentive does not necessarily lead to meaningful participation but rather ensure attendance.

As the literature suggests, financial support can be crucial in reducing barriers to participation, but without the empowerment of local leaders through training and capacity building, this involvement risks being tokenistic (Christie et al., 2017). A respondent's comment "*We are appointed to represent the people, but we are not conservation specialists*" highlights the challenge of engaging non-specialists in complex conservation discussions, an issue that has been identified in the literature as a barrier to effective community participation (Armitage, 2005). Another significant challenge to meaningful community involvement identified in this study is the power imbalance between EKZNW and the local communities. While locals are included in decision-making forums, their authority is often limited to symbolic roles rather than positions of power where they can influence key decisions.

This observation is in line with findings from previous studies, which have shown that local community representatives are often invited to meetings only to "rubber-

stamp” decisions made by park managers or external authorities (Roe et al., 2009). The perception that local leaders lack the necessary authority to impact decision-making is further compounded by the absence of formal training and capacity-building initiatives. As noted by several respondents, local leaders often feel intimidated and unprepared to engage in technical discussions on conservation practices. This mirrors the findings of Christie et al. (2017), who emphasize that training local leaders is essential for building their confidence and expertise in conservation decision-making.

The lack of specialized knowledge among local representatives and the absence of a mentorship agenda means that participation often remains limited to a tokenistic level, as they cannot meaningfully challenge or contribute to discussions that require technical expertise (Berkes, 2009). This sense of inadequacy is a significant barrier to creation of truly collaborative governance structures, which rely on the active and empowered participation of all stakeholders. Another critical challenge to effective community involvement is the strained relationship between local leaders and park managers, which often results from power struggles and unmet expectations. Local leaders expressed frustration over the egos and attitudes of some park managers who do not perceive themselves as answerable to the community.

This is consistent with the findings of Nelson and Agrawal (2008), who argue that power imbalances and hierarchical management structures often lead to ineffective community participation in co-management arrangements. Managers also felt constrained by the policies and procedures set by EKZNW, which limit their ability to fully integrate local perspectives into decision-making. This highlights the difficulties in balancing the need for local involvement with the practical constraints of park management, as discussed by Cronkleton et al. (2015), who note that operational demands often take precedence over participatory processes in conservation management.

At Ndumo and Tembe Reserve, the commitment to community involvement was further complicated by significant resource constraints. Managers faced a staffing shortage of at least 30%. This shortage is compounded by the competing demands

of generating revenue and paying dividends to stakeholders, which further limits the capacity to engage with local communities meaningfully. As one manager stated, “I am currently managing three essential roles on my own,” illustrating the overwhelming burden placed on park staff, which leaves little time for community engagement. This issue aligns with the findings of Wali et al. (2015), who argue that resource constraints often undermine the effectiveness of community-based conservation efforts by limiting the ability of park authorities to invest in meaningful engagement.

Additionally, the co-management agreements only have four meetings per year, and due to time constraints, there were instances where these meetings did not occur. The limited frequency of these meetings and the competing demands of financial sustainability further exacerbated the difficulty in fostering meaningful local involvement. This conforms to the findings of Mahanty et al. (2007), who argued that while community-based conservation initiatives may be well-intentioned, they are often stymied by conflicting priorities and insufficient resources to implement long-term, sustainable participation.

7.2.4 Objective 4: To explore the extent to which communities are capacitated to take an active role in the management of the study areas.

The capacity-building initiatives within Ithala Game Reserve, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Ndumo Game Reserve and Tembe Elephant Park revealed varying levels of success in empowering local communities to participate actively in the management of these protected areas. Although all four parks have undertaken training programs designed to enhance community involvement, the effectiveness of these efforts has been inconsistent, shaped largely by structural barriers, the absence of long-term strategies, and insufficient support mechanisms. These findings align with the broader literature on community-based conservation, which emphasizes that sustainable engagement requires not only initial training but also continuous, context-specific capacity-building efforts (Berkes, 2009; Fabricius et al., 2004).

The initiatives at Ithala have demonstrated some successes, particularly in environmental management training, which has positively impacted local

conservation practices. The training, though limited in terms of reach, enhanced the understanding of local conservation issues, equipping both community members and park rangers with essential knowledge to manage the park effectively. However, as with the other parks, the main challenge at Ithala was the inconsistency in participation. While environmental management training proved effective, co-management education for local leaders saw lower engagement, with participants citing issues such as poorly structured training sessions and a lack of prior information. This reflects the findings of Kempe (2008), who argues that co-management programs can fail when there is insufficient preparation and ongoing support for local stakeholders.

Furthermore, the sustainable agriculture programs aimed at local farmers have faced challenges, including insufficient infrastructure to support training, further highlighting the limitations of short-term capacity-building programs without a broader, long-term strategy. In Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, several capacity-building initiatives targeted different community groups, including business workshops for local enterprises, conservation training for community leaders, and the recruitment and training of Community Conservation Monitors. These programs had positive short-term outcomes, such as the growth of local businesses and increased involvement of community members in conservation efforts. However, similar to Ithala, the major barrier in HiP was the lack of a structured, sustained capacity-building strategy. While initial training was beneficial, there was a noticeable absence of long-term mentorship and follow-up, leading to a situation where community leaders feel inadequately prepared to engage in decision-making processes. Respondents expressed frustration over the ad-hoc nature of the training, with one local leader noting that while they attend training sessions, there is no clear pathway for growth or continued support. This observation aligns with the broader literature, which highlights the importance of structured, continuous capacity-building efforts for empowering local leaders and enabling them to take on more significant roles in park management (Roe et al., 2009). The lack of long-term development strategies echoes the criticism that many community-based

conservation programs are reactive rather than proactive, responding to immediate needs without clear, long-term goals (Berkes et al., 2007).

Tembe Elephant Park, in contrast, faced more significant challenges in terms of community capacitation. While the park conducted various workshops and motivational sessions, these were often irregular and unstructured, making them less effective in fostering lasting skills and leadership within the community. The main issue in Tembe lies in the absence of formal training programs, particularly in conservation management, which leaves community members with limited opportunities to engage meaningfully. The lack of formal educational pathways and the absence of structured training programs further contributed to the significant skills gap, limiting the community's ability to take on more complex roles within park management.

Furthermore, the reliance on external trainers and the high turnover of trained individuals intensifies the challenge, as many of those who receive training often leave for better opportunities, leaving the community with little long-term benefit. This pattern mirrors findings in the literature, which emphasize that community capacity-building efforts must be embedded within a long-term strategy to ensure sustainability and retention of trained personnel (Fabricius et al., 2004). Despite the differences in the specific challenges faced by each park, several common themes emerge across the four case studies. First, all parks struggled with the short-term nature of capacity-building programs, which are often not sustained beyond the initial training sessions. This reflects a broader trend in community-based conservation, where programs tend to be project-driven and reactive, rather than part of a long-term, comprehensive capacity-building strategy.

The lack of continuous support and mentorship for local leaders has been identified as a significant barrier to meaningful engagement in decision-making and management roles. Without structured pathways for growth and leadership development, community members are often left with only limited involvement in park management, despite initial training. These findings are consistent with the work of Berkes (2009), who highlights the need for ongoing training, mentorship, and development to ensure that local communities are empowered to take on leadership roles in conservation and park management. Another commonality

across the parks is the limited focus on building practical, hands-on skills, particularly in conservation-related fields.

While some programs have provided theoretical knowledge, respondents across the parks emphasized the need for more practical training that directly addresses the real-world tasks involved in park management. This reflects a broader critique of community-based conservation programs, which are often criticized for providing abstract knowledge without the necessary skills to apply it in practice (Roe et al., 2009). Practical, action-oriented training is essential for ensuring that community members are equipped with the skills needed to address the challenges of park management on the ground. The absence of formal educational pathways for local communities in all three parks limits their ability to progress into higher management roles, further reinforcing the exclusion of local people from meaningful decision-making.

7.2.4.1 Policy frameworks and community involvement

South Africa has strong laws that encourage communities to help manage protected areas. However, what happens on the ground in four KwaZulu-Natal parks; Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, Tembe, Ndumo and Ithala—shows a clear gap between policy and practice. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) says its Integrated Management Plans are participatory and will share benefits with local people. Decisions still follow a top-down style. Community members attend meetings, but they rarely set the agenda or approve final choices. They have little say over valuable activities such as eco-lodges or hunting quotas. Participation is therefore more symbolic than real. The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) tries to widen decision-making through co-management agreements. Such agreements exist in Tembe and Ndumo, but they give communities only an advisory role. EKZNW usually leads the talks, so it acts as both referee and player, which undermines trust. Most agreements also lack clear ways to resolve disputes or check progress, so accountability is weak.

The Biodiversity Act and the Protected Areas Act show the same problems. Section 42 of the Protected Areas Act permits co-management, yet the national government has not issued clear rules on how much tourism income should reach communities or how to handle overlaps between traditional leaders and elected councils.

Communities enter talks with little money or legal help, while park authorities can use bureaucracy or “conservation risk” to limit local demands. As a result, benefits often flow to a small elite instead of to most households. Ecotourism revenue is a major flashpoint. Policies promise that tourism will help neighbours of the parks, but people near Hluhluwe-iMfolozi and Tembe say the benefits are minimal. EKZNW collects fees and profits at provincial level and sharing them depends on ad-hoc negotiations rather than a clear formula. Without a predictable link between conservation success and household income, local support for park rules remains fragile.

Overall, South Africa’s legal framework for collaborative governance is strong, but the tools to put it into action are weak. Communities are invited to participate but not empowered to decide; policies are broad but practical guidance is thin; benefit-sharing is promised but rarely measured. Closing this gap will require binding rules for co-management contracts, funding and legal aid for community bodies, transparent systems for sharing tourism income, and independent reviews that feed into adaptive management. Without these steps, conservation may continue to protect biodiversity while leaving neighbouring communities—many of whom were historically displaced—without a fair share of the gains.

7.2.5 Objective 5: To develop an integrative framework that will facilitate collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas.

Ansell and Gash (2007) note, collaborative governance involves the voluntary participation of multiple stakeholders who come together to address complex problems through joint decision-making processes. For EKZNW-protected areas, which involve multiple stakeholders, including local communities, governmental bodies, conservation organizations, and private sector entities, the need for a framework that encourages collaboration is critical. The integrative framework developed in this study is based on multi-level governance and adaptive co-management theories, as well as the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which focuses on enhancing the capacity of local communities to participate in governance processes while ensuring long-term sustainability.

As Berkes et al. (2003) explains, adaptive co-management emphasizes the dynamic

and evolving nature of governance, recognizing that local communities and other stakeholders play a central role in managing natural resources. Therefore, the framework is designed to empower local communities by ensuring that they are active participants in decision-making processes, as well as in the development and implementation of policies related to protected area management. The Integrated framework for Collaborative governance in protected areas in figure 7.2.5.1 was developed based on the outcomes of this study.

7.2.5.1 Integrated Framework for Collaborative Governance in Protected Areas

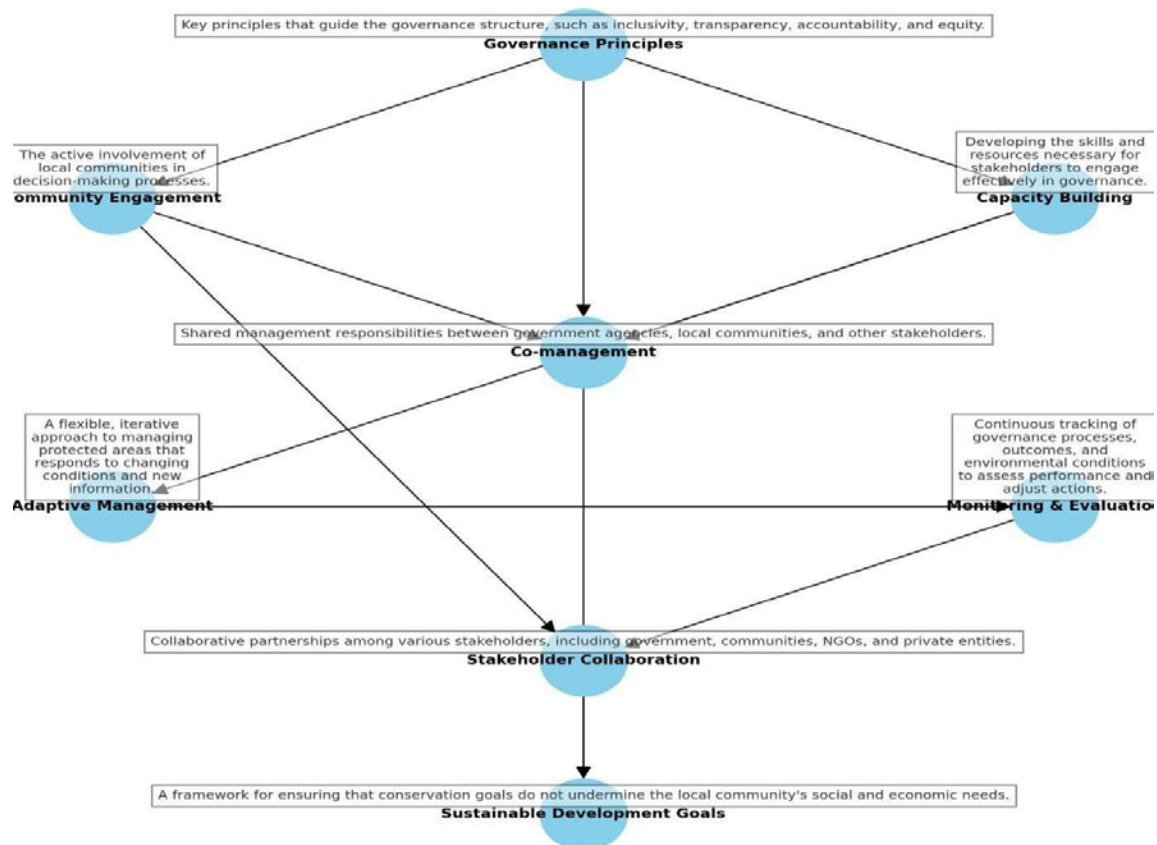


Figure 7.2.5.1: Intergrated Framework for Collaborative Governance in Protected
Source: Self-generated by author

Key governance principles such as transparency, Inclusivity, and accountability are emphasized in constructing this framework. A core element of the framework is joint decision-making, where local communities are not merely consulted but are integral partners in the governance structure. The integration of these principles addresses challenges identified in previous studies, such as limited local involvement in

management decisions and a lack of accountability in the decision-making process (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Through the establishment of structured governance arrangements, the framework facilitates the creation of partnerships between EKZNW, local communities, and other stakeholders, ensuring that each group has a clear voice in the management of protected areas. To implement the framework, institutional arrangements and stakeholder participation mechanisms are critical. The framework incorporates a participatory approach, where community-based organizations (CBOs) and local leaders are empowered to take part in the decision-making processes related to the management of natural resources. Lebel et al. (2006) stress the importance of clear institutional roles, responsibilities, and resource-sharing agreements in ensuring the effectiveness of collaborative governance. For EKZNW-protected areas, this means defining the roles of community members, conservationists, and government representatives in a way that facilitates cooperation and trust.

The framework also draws from the Governance and Resilience Theory (Folke et al., 2005), which underscores the need for flexibility and adaptability in governance structures. Protected areas, by their nature, are subject to dynamic changes, whether due to environmental factors such as climate change, shifting community needs, or evolving policies. Therefore, the integrative framework incorporates mechanisms for continuous feedback, monitoring, and adaptation, ensuring that governance processes remain responsive to the needs of local communities and changing environmental conditions. Empirical findings from the study reveal that collaborative governance efforts in EKZNW-protected areas have shown positive results in fostering greater community involvement, especially in areas like alien plant control, wildlife monitoring, and ecotourism development.

However, challenges persist, such as power imbalances between different stakeholder groups, limited access to decision-making processes for marginalized communities, and insufficient capacity-building programs for local leaders. These challenges emphasise the need for an integrative framework that not only formalizes the roles of stakeholders but also addresses the systemic barriers to equitable participation. One of the key components of the framework is the establishment of community steering committees, which serve as platforms for dialogue and decision-making. These committees enable local community members to directly engage with

conservation authorities, facilitating the negotiation of land-use policies and the establishment of shared objectives. The inclusion of traditional knowledge systems in these discussions also plays a critical role in ensuring that governance processes are culturally appropriate and contextually relevant (Davidson-Hunt & Berkes, 2003).

This integration of local knowledge enhances the adaptive capacity of the governance system, allowing for more nuanced and effective management strategies. The integrative framework also incorporates capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the skills and knowledge of community members, particularly in areas like natural resource management, sustainable livelihoods, and conflict resolution. As Dawson et al. (2010) argue, capacity building is central to successful collaborative governance, as it enables stakeholders to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes and effectively manage natural resources. These programs ensure that communities are not passive recipients of governance but active participants who can shape the future of their protected areas.

The development of this framework is in line with the best international practices in collaborative governance, which highlight the need for clear communication, trust-building, and mutual respect among stakeholders. By integrating these principles into the governance structure of EKZNW-protected areas, the framework aims to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable approach to protected area management. It also ensures that local communities have the resources, knowledge, and authority to manage natural resources in a way that benefits both conservation efforts and community livelihoods. Empirical findings highlight the positive impact of collaborative governance in EKZNW-protected areas, particularly in wildlife monitoring, alien plant control, and ecotourism development. However, challenges such as limited access to decision-making for marginalized communities and insufficient capacity-building programs persist (Dawson et al., 2010).

This framework mitigates these barriers by integrating targeted training programs, equitable representation, and clear institutional agreements, ultimately fostering more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable conservation practices. By addressing the limitations of existing governance models, the framework offers a roadmap for equitable conservation governance that benefits both biodiversity conservation and

7.3 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Although collaborative governance frameworks exist for protected areas, the findings of this study indicate that there are significant challenges in effectively balancing conservation goals with the socio-economic needs of local communities. The outcomes of the study reveal that governance structures in place are not fully able to support sustainable livelihoods, primarily due to gaps in community participation and the uneven distribution of resources. The research highlights that while conservation authorities have a strong understanding of governance mechanisms, there are still barriers to implementing inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. The study also points to the impact of socio-economic constraints, institutional limitations, and gaps in policy execution, all of which hinder the successful collaboration between conservation authorities and local communities.

Additionally, the findings suggest that the lack of a comprehensive approach to local engagement and capacity-building further complicates the long-term sustainability of both conservation efforts and community livelihoods. The research outcomes aligned with broader literature on governance in protected areas, underlining the critical need for more effective mechanisms to reconcile conservation with local community needs. These findings also underscore the importance of fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the success of conservation initiatives. The following chapter, which will serve as the concluding chapter of the study and provides a summary of the key findings, discusses the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for further research in collaborative governance in protected areas.

Chapter 8 CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the dissertation by providing a comprehensive summary of the study, highlighting the key findings, drawing conclusions, and offering recommendations for future research. The purpose of this final chapter is to reflect on the aims of the study, the insights gained, and to provide an overall synthesis of the study. The chapter revisits the key findings and examines their implications for both conservation and community livelihoods. This dissertation began with a focus on the governance of protected areas and the role of collaborative governance in reconciling the competing goals of conservation and community livelihoods. This was achieved through a thorough investigation of the governance model implemented in the four protected areas, specifically studying the relationships and interactions between conservation authorities, local communities, and other key stakeholders. Through analysing the governance mechanisms in place, the study sought to explore both the challenges and opportunities of the model in promoting effective conservation outcomes and the socio-economic well-being of surrounding communities.

Throughout the previous chapters, the study examined the various dimensions of governance in protected areas. This included the role of policy frameworks, the level of stakeholder engagement, the challenges to effective collaboration, and the socio-economic outcomes for local communities living adjacent to these protected areas. By gathering data from interviews and focus group discussions, the research provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of collaborative governance structures and their capacity to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders. The findings from this study were not only crucial in terms of identifying the challenges faced in the governance of protected areas, but they also revealed the significant potential of collaborative governance to improve conservation efforts and provide tangible benefits to local communities. The study shows that when governance structures are inclusive, transparent, and supportive of local participation, they can lead to more sustainable conservation practices and improved livelihoods for surrounding communities. However, it was also established that without adequate resources,

trust, and commitment from all stakeholders, these collaborative models are unlikely to be successful in achieving long-term goals.

This chapter will revisit the key findings from the research, providing a detailed discussion of their implications for the governance of protected areas. It will also offer recommendations based on the conclusions drawn from the study, suggesting areas for further research that can build on these findings and contribute to more effective governance frameworks in protected areas. Through this study, the researcher aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how governance frameworks in protected areas can be enhanced, with particular emphasis on the role of collaborative governance in achieving both conservation and socio-economic objectives.

8.2 SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the governance of protected areas, focusing specifically on the impact of collaborative governance in balancing conservation objectives and local community livelihoods. Below is a summary overview of the study, structured around the eight chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 1

The introduction provided a foundation for the study by outlining the research problem, objectives, and significance of the investigation. This chapter highlighted the importance of governance structures in protected areas, especially considering growing concerns over the tensions between conservation goals and local community livelihoods. The research questions were formulated to explore how collaborative governance can improve outcomes for both conservation and local communities. The chapter also sets out the scope and limitations of the study, emphasizing the need for effective governance frameworks to address the complex challenges facing protected areas.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of existing literature was presented to contextualize the study within broader academic discourse on governance,

conservation, and community development. The literature examined key concepts, theories, and empirical findings related to governance models in protected areas, with a particular focus on collaborative governance. The review also highlighted the role of stakeholders in decision-making processes, the challenges and benefits of community participation, and the socio-economic impacts of conservation policies. The chapter established the theoretical and empirical gaps that the study aimed at addressing.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provided the theoretical underpinnings for the study, focusing on the concept of collaborative governance and its application to protected areas. The chapter explored various governance theories, including the Collaborative Governance Theory and the Social Ecological systems framework. These theories provided a lens through which the study analyzed the relationships between different stakeholders and the effectiveness of governance structures in reconciling conservation and community needs. The chapter discussed how these theoretical frameworks were applied to the case study and guided the research methodology.

Chapter 4

This chapter described the study area, which included four protected areas, providing detailed contextual information about each park. The chapter outlined the geographical, socio-economic, and environmental characteristics of the protected areas, as well as the specific conservation challenges faced by each area. The context of the study was critical for understanding the complexities of governance in these protected areas, particularly in terms of local community engagement, resource use, and the role of tourism. This chapter also provided insights into the historical background of the protected areas and their governance structures.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 outlined the research methodology employed in the study. The chapter discussed research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used to investigate the governance of protected areas. A qualitative approach was adopted, using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to gather data from key stakeholders, including conservation authorities, local community

members, and tourism operators. The chapter also addressed ethical considerations, limitations of the study, and the steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Chapter 6

In this chapter, the results of the study were presented. The findings were organized around key themes, such as stakeholder engagement, socio-economic factors, community participation, and capacity building for local communities. The chapter provided a detailed account of the data collected, using quotes and examples from interviews and focus groups to illustrate the key findings. The results showed both the successes and challenges of collaborative governance in the protected areas studied, highlighting the complexities of balancing conservation and socio-economic interests.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 provided an in-depth discussion of the study's results, interpreting the findings considering the literature and theoretical frameworks presented in earlier chapters. This chapter analyzed the implications of the findings for governance practices in protected areas, with a particular focus on the role of collaborative governance in achieving sustainable outcomes. The discussion highlighted the key barriers to effective governance, such as power imbalances, resource constraints, and mistrust among stakeholders. It also explored the benefits of collaborative governance, including enhanced community engagement, improved conservation outcomes, and the potential for sustainable livelihoods.

Chapter 8

The final chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key findings, drawing conclusions, and offering recommendations for future research and policy development. The chapter revisits the importance of collaborative governance in reconciling conservation goals with community needs, emphasizing the need for inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. It also outlines the policy implications of the study, suggesting that effective governance frameworks should incorporate the perspectives and needs of local communities while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of protected areas. The chapter concludes by identifying

areas for future research, particularly in the context of climate change, adaptive governance, and the scaling up of successful collaborative governance models.

8.3 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section provides a detailed summary of the key findings of the study, organized under various subheadings that address different aspects of governance in protected areas, the role of collaborative governance, challenges faced by stakeholders, and the implications of these findings for conservation outcomes and community livelihoods.

8.3.1 Governance Frameworks and Collaborative Efforts

One of the primary findings of the study was the identification of the governance frameworks currently in place in the protected areas studied. These frameworks are designed to facilitate collaboration between conservation authorities, local communities, and other stakeholders. The research found that, while these frameworks exist, there are significant gaps in their implementation. In some cases, collaborative governance mechanisms were merely theoretical, with insufficient resources and institutional support to ensure their success. Stakeholders involved in the study expressed concerns that governance structures were not fully inclusive, with local communities often sidelined in decision-making processes.

Even where community participation was formally incorporated into governance frameworks, the level of involvement was often limited to consultations rather than active decision-making. This lack of genuine collaboration undermines the potential for achieving long-term conservation goals while addressing the socio-economic needs of local communities. Additionally, the study revealed that the effectiveness of governance mechanisms varied across the different protected areas, largely due to differences in the capacity of local authorities to enforce policies and engage stakeholders effectively. While some protected areas had made strides in fostering collaboration, others struggled to integrate local communities into the decision-making process. The findings emphasize the need for more robust and flexible governance frameworks that can adapt to local contexts and challenges.

8.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation

A critical finding of the study was the uneven nature of stakeholder engagement, particularly in terms of community participation. While all respondents acknowledged the importance of community involvement in the governance of protected areas, the level of actual participation was often limited. The study found that many local community members felt disconnected from governance processes, with limited opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making. This lack of engagement is particularly pronounced in communities that are socio- economically disadvantaged, where residents often felt that their needs and priorities were not adequately addressed by conservation authorities. The research also highlighted that, even when communities are included in governance processes, their voices are often marginalized or ignored in favor of more powerful stakeholders, such as conservation authorities. Interestingly, the study found that local communities are often more interested in the economic benefits of conservation, such as employment opportunities or access to tourism revenue, than in the environmental or ecological aspects. This highlights the need for conservation initiatives to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of local people, ensuring that they are not just beneficiaries of conservation efforts but active participants in the governance process.

8.3.3 Barriers to Effective Collaborative Governance

Several barriers to effective collaborative governance are identified in the study. One of the key challenges was the lack of resources and capacity to meaningfully engage communities in protected areas effectively. Both conservation authorities and local communities reported challenges related to inadequate funding, staff, and infrastructure, which hindered their ability to carry out joint projects or initiatives. Another significant barrier was the lack of trust between stakeholders, which was frequently cited as a hinderance to collaboration. Conservation authorities and local communities often had different priorities and goals, leading to tensions and conflicts. For example, conservation authorities were focused on maintaining biodiversity and protecting wildlife, while local communities were more concerned with securing their livelihoods, including access to land, resources, and economic

opportunities. The study also found that inadequate policy frameworks and weak enforcement mechanisms contributed to the ineffective implementation of collaborative governance. In some cases, policies designed to facilitate collaboration were poorly formulated or lacked the necessary legal backing to ensure compliance. This highlights the need for stronger, more coherent policy frameworks that can support and promote collaborative governance.

8.3.4 Impact of Collaborative Governance on Conservation Outcomes

The study explored the relationship between collaborative governance and conservation outcomes, particularly in the context of protected areas. The findings suggest that when collaborative governance structures were effectively implemented, conservation outcomes tended to improve. However, the study also identified that the success of collaborative governance was highly contingent on the willingness of all stakeholders to cooperate and work towards common goals. Where stakeholders were not fully committed to the governance process, or where governance structures were weak, community conservation outcomes were less favourable. This highlights the critical importance of fostering a shared vision among stakeholders and ensuring that all parties are equally invested in achieving sustainable conservation goals. The research also indicated that collaborative governance could lead to positive social outcomes, such as improved community livelihoods and stronger social cohesion. For example, in some cases where local communities were actively involved in decision-making, there were reported higher numbers in employment opportunities and the development of sustainable tourism initiatives that benefited both conservation and local economic development.

8.3.5 Socio-Economic Implications of Governance on Local Communities

Another significant finding of the study was the impact of governance structures on the socio-economic well-being of local communities. In many cases, the governance models in place did not adequately address the economic needs of the communities living in and around protected areas. As a result, there was a sense of disenfranchisement among community members, who often felt that the economic benefits of conservation were not reaching them. The research showed that local

communities often relied heavily on tourism and other economic activities associated with the protected areas for their livelihoods. However, the failure to adequately integrate local economic development into governance structures often led to missed opportunities for community development. In particular, the study found that while tourism has the potential to be a major driver of local economic growth, the benefits were not always equitably distributed. Additionally, the study revealed that many local community members lacked access to the decision-making processes that influenced how tourism revenue was allocated or how resources were distributed. This lack of transparency and accountability contributed to feelings of alienation and frustration among local people. For effective collaborative governance to succeed, governance models must be designed to promote equitable distribution of economic benefits and ensure that local communities can derive tangible benefits from conservation activities.

8.3.6 Implications for Sustainable Protected Area Management

The findings of the study explore the importance of adopting more sustainable and inclusive management practices in protected areas. Effective governance is not only essential for ensuring the long-term conservation of biodiversity but also for supporting the livelihoods of local communities. The research highlights the need for a balanced approach that considers both conservation objectives and the socio-economic needs of local people. The study concludes that for protected areas to achieve sustainable outcomes, governance structures must be designed to foster meaningful collaboration among stakeholders. This includes providing communities with the tools, resources, and opportunities to actively participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that conservation efforts contribute to local economic development, and addressing the underlying social and economic inequalities that can undermine the success of conservation initiatives. The findings also point to the need for more flexible and context-specific governance models that can be adapted to the unique challenges and opportunities of each protected area. Such models should prioritize community engagement, ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process, and foster trust and cooperation among stakeholders to achieve shared conservation and development goals.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON CONCLUSIONS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of effective governance in protected areas and highlight the complex dynamics involved in balancing conservation priorities with the socio-economic needs of local communities. Drawing from these conclusions, the following recommendations are provided for improving the governance of protected areas through enhanced collaborative governance practices and the strengthening of community participation.

8.4.1 Strengthening Collaborative Governance Frameworks

The findings reveal that successful governance in protected areas depends on the establishment of collaborative structures where all stakeholders, including local communities, conservation authorities, local conservation boards and traditional leaders, have a voice in decision-making processes. However, the study also highlighted significant barriers to effective collaboration, including power imbalances, mistrust among stakeholders, and insufficient resources. Based on these insights, it is crucial to develop and implement clear and transparent governance models that specify the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes of all stakeholders. These models should be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs and interests of stakeholders and should be regularly reviewed to ensure their continued relevance. For collaborative governance to be effective, stakeholders must trust one another. It is recommended that long-term efforts be made to foster trust among local communities, conservation authorities, and other stakeholders through regular communication, joint problem-solving, and transparent decision-making processes. Furthermore, strengthening the capacity of stakeholders, particularly local communities, is essential for effective participation in governance. Local communities should be provided with training in governance structures, decision-making processes, and the importance of sustainable conservation practices. Similarly, conservation authorities and traditional leaders should be trained in community engagement strategies and the importance of incorporating local perspectives into decision-making.

8.4.2 Enhancing Community Participation in Decision-Making

One of the study's key findings was the critical importance of community involvement in governance structures for both conservation success and improving local livelihoods. However, barriers such as limited access to decision-making processes and a lack of trust in government institutions remain prevalent. To address these challenges, local communities must be meaningfully included in the decision-making processes regarding the management of protected areas. This can be achieved through the establishment of advisory boards, community consultations, and participatory planning workshops. Decision-making processes should not be top-down but should encourage collaboration and co-management with local communities.

Additionally, in many protected areas, local communities rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. However, conservation efforts often restrict access to these resources, leading to tensions between conservation goals and community needs. It is recommended that alternative livelihood programs, such as ecotourism and sustainable agriculture initiatives, be developed in partnership with local communities to provide economic opportunities while minimizing environmental impacts. These programs should be designed to be both financially viable and culturally appropriate for local communities. Lastly, the study found that women and marginalized groups within local communities often have less access to decision-making processes and the benefits of conservation efforts. To address this, governance frameworks should ensure gender and social equity, with specific strategies to empower women and marginalized groups, including targeted capacity-building programs and representation in governance structures.

8.4.3 Improving Institutional Capacity for Effective Governance

Effective governance of protected areas requires strong institutions that can manage both the conservation and socio-economic aspects of these areas. The study found that many governance structures suffer from a lack of institutional capacity, which hampers their ability to implement effective conservation and community development strategies. To address the fragmented approach to governance, it is

recommended that conservation authorities, local governments, and other stakeholders coordinate more effectively. Collaborative platforms or networks should be established to ensure that information, resources, and responsibilities are shared across institutions. These platforms should facilitate communication and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as between different sectors such as tourism, conservation, and local development.

Another key barrier to effective governance in many protected areas is the lack of financial resources. Governments must allocate sufficient funds for the implementation of governance structures and conservation projects. Furthermore, alternative funding mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships, ecotourism revenues, and donor funding, should be explored to ensure the sustainability of governance activities. Additionally, to ensure the effectiveness of governance frameworks, it is critical to establish systems for monitoring and evaluating governance processes and outcomes. These systems should track the progress of collaborative governance efforts, assess the impact on conservation outcomes, and measure the socio-economic benefits for local communities. Regular evaluations can help identify weaknesses in governance structures and provide insights for improvements.

8.4.4 Policy and Legislative Reform

The study revealed that the policies governing protected areas often fail to adequately support collaborative governance or local community participation. In many cases, policies are either too rigid or fail to recognize the importance of local knowledge and community engagement in conservation efforts. To address this, existing policies governing protected areas should be reviewed and reformed to better accommodate collaborative governance approaches. Policies should be flexible, recognizing the need for joint management between conservation authorities and local communities. Furthermore, policies should encourage the integration of socio-economic factors, such as livelihoods and community development, into conservation planning. The legal frameworks governing protected areas should be reformed to support co-management arrangements. This includes formalizing agreements between conservation authorities and local communities,

which can help clarify roles and responsibilities and provide legal recognition of local rights and interests. It is essential that stakeholders, including NGOs, local communities, and researchers, advocate for policy changes that support the principles of collaborative governance and sustainable community development. Advocacy efforts should focus on raising awareness about the benefits of inclusive governance models and the need for policy reforms to address the challenges identified in this study.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, several areas for future research can be explored. These recommendations aim to expand upon the current understanding of collaborative governance in protected areas and its implications for both conservation outcomes and local community livelihoods. Further exploration in these areas will contribute to the development of more effective governance frameworks and sustainable management practices in protected areas.

8.5.1 Comparative Studies Across Different Contexts

Future research could explore comparative case studies of collaborative governance in protected areas across different regions and countries. By analysing the similarities and differences in governance structures, community participation, and conservation outcomes, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the success or failure of collaborative governance. This comparative approach could also highlight region-specific challenges and opportunities, offering valuable insights into how governance models can be adapted to local contexts.

8.5.2 Longitudinal Studies on Governance and Sustainability

This study focused on a snapshot of the governance structures and their impact on conservation and livelihoods. However, the dynamics of governance and its effects may evolve over time. Future research could employ longitudinal approaches to track the changes in governance practices, conservation outcomes, and community

livelihoods over extended periods. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of collaborative governance and the sustainability of conservation efforts.

8.5.3 In-depth Exploration of Power Dynamics

One of the key findings of this study was the presence of power imbalances among stakeholders, which can hinder effective collaboration. Future research could focus on understanding the specific power dynamics that shape decision-making processes in collaborative governance. By examining how power is distributed and exercised among conservation authorities, local communities, and other stakeholders, researchers can identify strategies to mitigate power disparities and promote more equitable participation.

8.5.4 Investigating the Role of Climate Change in Governance

As climate change continues to affect ecosystems and communities, its impact on the governance of protected areas warrants further investigation. Future research could explore how climate change is influencing the governance structures of protected areas, particularly in terms of adaptation and resilience-building. Research could also examine how collaborative governance models can incorporate climate change considerations into decision-making processes and enhance the adaptive capacity of both conservation areas and local communities.

8.5.5 The Impact of Tourism on Collaborative Governance

Tourism is often a significant economic driver in protected areas, but it can also create tensions between conservation and community needs. Future studies could explore the role of tourism in collaborative governance frameworks, investigating how tourism stakeholders are involved in decision-making and how tourism revenues are shared among local communities and conservation efforts. Understanding the interplay between tourism, conservation, and local development could provide valuable insights for balancing these competing interests.

8.5.6 Enhancing Community Capacity for Governance

A critical element of effective collaborative governance is the capacity of local communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Future research could examine how community capacity-building initiatives can be integrated into governance structures to empower local communities. Research could f o c u s on identifying effective training programs, resource-sharing mechanisms, and knowledge transfer strategies that enhance the ability of local communities to engage in governance activities and contribute to sustainable management practices.

8.6 CLOSING REMARKS

This research sets out to investigate the governance structures of protected areas, focusing on the interplay between collaborative governance, conservation outcomes, and local community livelihoods. Through this study, significant insights have been gained into the complexities of balancing conservation efforts with socio-economic needs in the context of South Africa's protected areas. The research highlights the critical importance of governance in shaping both the future of conservation and the well-being of local communities, particularly in areas where resource dependency and environmental conservation intersect. The study contributes significantly to the body of knowledge on collaborative governance, particularly within the realm of ecotourism and conservation management. By examining the roles of key stakeholders such as conservation authorities, local communities, and local conservation boards the research has highlighted the barriers and opportunities for effective collaboration, identifying areas where governance structures either succeed or fail in achieving sustainable outcomes. The findings of this study are relevant not only to South Africa but also to other countries facing similar challenges in managing protected areas and reconciling the competing interests of conservation and community development. As detailed throughout the preceding chapters, collaborative governance in protected areas is a multi-dimensional issue that requires careful consideration of diverse stakeholder interests, power dynamics, and the socio-economic realities of local communities. The findings have shown that while collaborative governance offers significant potential for improving conservation outcomes and community livelihoods, it remains

challenged by issues such as unequal power distribution, inadequate capacity for local communities, and conflicting priorities among stakeholders. The research also revealed that, despite the existing governance structures, the full potential of collaboration remains not realized, and much work remains to be done in addressing the underlying barriers to effective participation. Sustainable governance models must be adaptable, inclusive, and supportive of both conservation goals and local community development. Without such balanced frameworks, the future of protected areas could be compromised, undermining the ecological and socio-economic benefits they provide.

Finally, the findings of this research emphasize the importance of continuing to refine governance approaches in protected areas, particularly in the context of collaborative governance models. If governance models are to be effective, they must be built on strong, equitable partnerships, transparent decision-making processes, and inclusive participation. As the world's conservation areas face challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and land tenure issues, the need for effective governance becomes even more urgent. The implication of this study emphasizes the need of fostering more dynamic collaborative mechanisms to ensure the long-term sustainability of both conservation areas and the communities that depend on them.

Looking forward, it is the researcher's view that the issues addressed in this study will continue to evolve, requiring ongoing adaptation of governance structures to respond to new challenges. Collaborative governance models must remain flexible, responsive, and rooted in the principles of equity and sustainability, ensuring that both conservation and community development goals are met in the face of changing environmental and socio-economic conditions. As the tourism sector and local communities continue to evolve, the strategies and frameworks developed from this research could serve as a foundation for future studies and policy initiatives aimed at fostering greater resilience and sustainability in the management of protected areas.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Ethical Clearance Letter
Appendix B	Letter of Information and Consent
Appendix C	Research Tree Diagram
Appendix D	Gatekeeper's Letter
Appendix E	Interview Guide for Conservation Officials
Appendix F	Editing Certificate
Appendix G	Turnitin Report

Appendix A



22 March 2024

Ms Z Qwatekana
22 McKay Drive
Ashburton
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Ms Qwatekana

A framework to facilitate collaborative governance as a mechanism for reconciling conservation and local community livelihoods in protected areas
Ethical Clearance number IREC 161/23

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

It is compulsory for a student or researcher to apply for recertification on an annual basis. The failure to do so will result in withdrawal of ethics clearance. It is the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor to apply for recertification.

Please note that you are required to submit a Notification of Completion of Study form together with an abstract to the DUT-IREC office on completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

Appendix B

Annexure A: Letter of Information



INCWADI YOLWAZI

Isihloko Socwaningo Locwaningo: Uhlaka lokusiza ukubusa ngokubambisana njengendlela yokuvumelanisa ukongiwa kwemvelo kanye nempilo yomphakathi wendawo ezindaweni ezivikelekile.
Umphenyi Omkhulu/umcwaningi: Zikho Qwatekana
Umphathi: UDkt NS Chilli

Isingeniso Esifushane kanye Nenhloso Yocwaningo

Izindawo ezivikelekile (ama-PA) zingenye yezindlela ezibaluleke kakhulu emhlabeni zokongiwa kwezinhlobonhlobo zezinto eziphilayo. Zihlala ziyithuluzi elibalulekile lokongiwa kwemvelo eliyasebenziswa kabanzi eNingizimu Afrika ukuze kuvikelwe amagugu emvelo namasiko esizwe. Ukuphathwa kwalezi zindawo zokongiwa kwemvelo kudinga ukulingana phakathi kwezidingo zokuthuthukiswa kwabantu nomnotho kanye nalezo zokulondoloza izinhlobonhlobo zezinto eziphilayo. Nokho, izinga lokuhambisana kwemvelo nenhlalo yokuphatha ama-PAs lihlala liyinselelo enkulu. Ababhali abaningana baqaphele ukuthi umbuso wokubusa okhona kuma-PA amaningi uwuhlobo oluphethwe uhulumeni, lapho ukuthathwa kwezinqumo kubekwe endaweni eyodwa futhi indlela ikakhulukazi "an indlela ekhethekile." Le ndlela ibeka iprimiyamu ephezulu ekucatshangelweni kwezinhlobonhlobo zezinto eziphilayo kunenhlalakahle yomphakathi. Kukhona futhi ingcindezi ekhulayo yokuthi izindawo ezivikelekile zivumelane nezinhlobo zokuphatha ezivumelanisa nezidingo zokongiwa kwezinhlobonhlobo zezinto eziphilayo nezidingo zomphakathi. Ngakho-ke lolu cwaningo luhlola isimo sokubusa ezindaweni ezivikelekile kanye nemithelela yaso ekusimameni kwezenhlalo nezemvelo. Lokhu kuzofezwa ngenhloso eyodwa ebanzi; Ukuhlola ngokujulile izinga imiphakathi yendawo ebambisana ngayo ekuphathweni kwezindawo ezivikelekile nokuthi uhulumeni kulezi zindawo uyithonya kanjani imibono yendawo kanye nesimo sengqondo ngokongiwa kwemvelo.

Ukubingelela

Sawubona,

Njengamanje ngibhalisele Iziqu zobuDokotela kwiSayensi Yokuphatha egxile kwi-HOSP-ECO/I-ENV eNyuvesi yaseThekwini amandla kanye nezinsalelo zokubusa ngokubambisana njengendlela yokuhlazisa ngendlela edidiyelwe yokuphathwa kwendawo evikelekile: Icala le-Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife of Technology. Ukufeza izidingo zalezi ziqu, ngenza ucwaningo nge

Isimemo kulowo ongase abe umhlanganyeli

Ngithanda ukukumema ukuthi ubambe iqhaza ocwaningweni olumayelana nokuphathwa kwendawo evikelekile. Ucwaningo luhlose ukuhlola ukusebenza kahle kokubusa ngokubambisana ezindaweni ezivikelekile ekuhlanganiseni izidingo zenhlalo-mnotho yemiphakathi yendawo nokongiwa kwezinhlobonhlobo zezinto eziphilayo. Lolu cwaningo luzophenya izinqubomgomo ezikhona zokuphatha ngokubambisana, luhlale ukusebenza kahle kwabalingisi bendawo nezikhungo futhi luphakamise uhlaka oluhlanganisayo lokuthuthukisa ukubusa ngokubambisana. (. . . Usizo lwakho lungabongwa kakhulu.

Luyini Ucwaningo?

Ucwaningo luhazwa njengosesho oluhlelekile lolwazi olusha olujwayelekile. Ucwaningo luyindlela yokuqoqa ulwazi emithonjeni ehlukeni ehunyushwa ngendlela ehlelekile ngenhloso ecacile yokuthola ulwazi olusha. Idatha kufanele iqoqwe ngendlela ehlelekile futhi ihunyushwe/ihlaziye ngokufanele,

Appendix C

	Zertifikat Certificat	Certificado Certificate
Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants		
Certificat de formation - Training Certificate		
Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that		
	Zikho Qwatekana	
a complété avec succès - has successfully completed		
Introduction to Research Ethics		
du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation		
Release Date: 2022/04/25 CD - 02858/01/25		
Professeur Dominique Sprumont Coordinateur TRREE Coordinator		
		
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(REV : 3/22/0217)		

Appendix D



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Ms Z Qwatekana
22 McKay Drive
Ashburton
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Ms Qwatekana

PROJECT TITLE: A FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AS A MECHANISM FOR RECONCILING CONSERVATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS IN PROTECTED AREAS

RESEARCHER/PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR: Mr. Zikho Qwatekana
SUPERVISOR: Dr. NC Chili
APPLYING INSTITUTION: Durban University of Technology
FACULTY / DIVISION: Management Sciences

Ms. Qwatekana has been formally granted authorization to conduct her research within Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. In alignment with our organization's commitment to upholding the highest standards of research ethics and integrity, Ms. Qwatekana is required to diligently adhere to the ethical and integrity procedures outlined in her Letter of Information. These procedures encompass a comprehensive framework designed to ensure the responsible conduct of research activities, including but not limited to data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Furthermore, it is imperative that Ms. Qwatekana remains vigilant in promptly notifying the organization of any changes or updates to the information initially provided. Such changes may encompass modifications to research protocols, study methodologies, or any other relevant details. This proactive approach to communication is essential as it enables Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to stay informed and to appropriately address any implications arising from such alterations.

To facilitate seamless collaboration and access to necessary resources, Ms. Qwatekana will engage directly with Mr. Mulla, the designated executive overseeing the eco-tourism division. Mr. Mulla will serve as a key point of contact, assisting her in navigating the organizational landscape and facilitating access to pertinent officials and resources essential to the research process within Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Sincerely,

.....
MR SIHLE MKHIZE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Thursday, March 07, 2024

Appendix E

Interview Guide for Managers of Protected Areas

Opening Questions:

- Can you briefly describe your role in managing the protected area?
- How long have you been involved with the management of this protected area?
- What are some of the main goals of the management strategies currently in place?

1. Community Engagement Strategies

- What strategies or initiatives do you use to involve the local community in decision-making about the protected area?
- How do you measure whether these strategies are working to build collaboration with the community?

2. Addressing Socio-economic Needs

- What socio-economic needs do local communities have around the protected area?
- How well do you think current management policies are addressing these needs?

3. Socio-economic Impact Assessment

- What socio-economic impacts have you noticed from management policies in the protected area?
- Are there ways you monitor and address the community's socio-economic needs?

4. Community Capacity and Involvement

- What steps have you taken to help local communities participate in conservation activities?
- Can you share examples where community involvement significantly helped with management goals?

5. Effectiveness of Local Actors and Institutions

- Can you give examples of local institutions or groups that have helped with collaborative management?
- How have these groups contributed to the area's management and the community's well-being?

6. Commitment of Protected Area Authorities

- How would you rate the level of commitment by protected area authorities to involve the community in decision-making?

- Have there been specific instances where authorities actively engaged the community?

7. Capacity of Communities

- How well-prepared do you think the local communities are to participate in managing the protected area?
- Are there any programs that have successfully increased community capacity?

8. Reinforcing Collaborative Governance

- What changes could be made to improve collaborative governance and better meet community needs?
- Can you suggest strategies to strengthen collaboration within the protected area?

9. Reflection on Collaborative Governance Impact

- How do you think collaborative governance has affected the balance between conservation goals and community well-being?
- What successes or challenges have you experienced in implementing collaborative governance?

Closing Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences managing the protected area?
- Do you have any recommendations for other managers looking to improve community collaboration?

Appendix F

EDITOR'S LETTER

Researchers Beyond-Borders (PTY) LTD
Umhlanga, Durban
South Africa
16 May 2025

To whom it may concern

Editing of Masters Dissertation: Zikho Qwatekana (Student number -20821405)

Title of dissertation: A framework to facilitate collaborative governance as a mechanism for reconciling conservation and local community livelihoods in protected areas

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned dissertation has been language edited.
Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.



Regards

Maleni Pillay
Researchers Beyond-Borders (Pty) Ltd
consult@researchersbeyondborders.com
www.researchersbeyondborders.com

Appendix G

Qwatekana-A FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AS A MECHANISM FOR RECONCILING CONSERVATION

ORIGINALITY REPORT

14% SIMILARITY INDEX	9% INTERNET SOURCES	9% PUBLICATIONS	5% STUDENT PAPERS
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Student Signature
Date: 22 Dec 2025

Supervisor Signature
22 DEC 2025