Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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“Conservation Influences on Livelihood Decision-making: A Case Study from Saadani National Park, Tanzania”

Department of Geography

Friday, May 29, 2015
11:00 A.M.
David Turpin Building
Room A144

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Dr. Leslie King, Department of Geography, UVic (Member)
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Abstract

This research explores the influences affecting livelihood decision-making of community members in rural Tanzania. Of particular interest is the relationship between the decision making process and conservation related actions and behaviours. The Theory of Planned Behaviour is used as a framework to investigate such linkages. The selection of three villages within a study area which includes a formal conservation mechanism, Saadani National Park, provides a context for conservation policy, documented impacts on typical resource based rural livelihood activities and opportunities for livelihood diversification. The research documents the range of contextual and internal influences and their importance to people through reflection on both recent and potential future livelihood decisions.

This research study employs a phenomenological qualitative research approach applied to a case study. Key informant interviews were conducted with two community leaders from each village, twelve senior tourism industry representatives from the three major local lodge operations and two representatives from the national park senior management team. Focus group discussions were also held in each village with a total of 82 participants over the three villages. The groups were established to provide a forum for elders within the community separate from younger adult community members. Focus groups were also segregated by gender although due to logistical circumstance one village had a non-segregated group of village elders. Semi-structured interviews were held with thirty household representatives in each of the three study villages. Field data were supplemented with document analysis of materials related to local and regional community development and conservation initiatives. Results provided considerable insight into livelihood decision-making. In this resource based livelihood context, attitudes and perceived behavioural control emerged as the dominant influences on intended behaviour in part due to the importance of past experience on livelihood decisions. Participants expressed a lack of perceived behavioural control resulting from few livelihood options and changes in the environment resulting from external forces. Such perceptions of control, reinforced by past experience, led to attitudes that tended to be pessimistic or fatalistic. Secondary influences were a range of social norms including livelihood activities as hereditary occupations, notions of individual versus collective approaches to livelihood endeavours, and impacts of, and adaptations to, cultural and social change. Together these primary and secondary influences demonstrate how the Theory of Planned Behaviour could be augmented to reflect a focus on livelihood decision-making.

Conservation of natural resources had little direct influence on livelihood decision-making. The dominant attitude was one seeking to maximize returns from resource harvesting reflecting a priority on short-term necessity rather than long term sustainability. People generally did not feel that their use of resources played a significant role in the capacity of the resource to yield livelihood benefits, certainly not relative to other external influences they identified as being significant. However, people did recognize environmental change and adapted their livelihood activities accordingly so that their benefits could be maintained or maximized. While not directly acknowledged as conservation such adaptations provide the basis for improving conservation behaviour through a broader understanding of the resource base and a wider range of livelihood options.

Livelihood decision-making was also found to be highly constrained by the nature and scale of the local village economies. Scale restricts potential growth and limitations on land, and resources constrain outside private sector investment thus limiting expansion of wage employment. Significant influences from cultural and social norms were also found, especially with respect to the pursuit of hereditary occupations, the preference for individual versus cooperative enterprises and adaptations reflective of societal change. Information systems and flow were found to be relatively insignificant in the livelihood decision-making process of local villagers.