

Local Community Involvement in Trekking and Residents' Perceptions of Implications of Tourism and Proposed Mining Operations: A Case of Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between the extent of local community involvement in trekking operations in Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea and the residents' perceptions of the implications of tourism and the proposed mining operations. Using a quantitative method, with a semi-structured questionnaire as the main tool of gathering data, supplemented by interview and observation, the study involved 90 residents of six villages along the track of Kokoda. Spearman coefficient of correlation was used to determine the relationship between variables. The results of the survey clearly indicates that the level of residents' involvement in trekking activities in Kokoda Track affects their overall perceptions on the implications of tourism and the proposed mining operations. Seemingly, the extent of local community participation and involvement in tourism determines the outcome of any tourism projects that will take place in Kokoda and will serve as the driving force to sustainable development.

Keywords: Local community, extent of involvement, trekking, Kokoda Track and implications of tourism and proposed mining operations

Suggested citation: Rayel, J.J. (2012). Local community involvement in trekking and residents' perceptions of implications of tourism and proposed mining operations: A case of Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea. *TEAM Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 9(1), 27-38.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors with a record 982 million tourist arrivals and a total of USD1.030 billion in export earnings for 2011 (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2012). Tourism is also expected to create an additional five million new jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012).

Tourism as an industry is sensitive to the needs of local people to ensure that sustainable development will be achieved. Local involvement in tourism has been regarded as a positive force for change and passport to development (Claiborne, 2010). It could be the key tool for finding a balance between tourism development and the local inhabitants (Sanchez, 2009).

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is known to be the land of mystery. It lies just south of the equator and is part of a great arc of mountains stretching from Asia, through Indonesia and

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into the South Pacific. This fascinating land boasts of more than 600 islands and more than 800 indigenous languages and is home to the largest area of intact rainforest outside of the Amazon (PNG TPA, 2012). The country, being blessed with unique natural attractions with vast endemic flora and fauna species and a very diverse culture, attracts various types of travelers.

PNG has a relatively small dual economy. The formal economy is dominated by large-scale resource projects, particularly in mining and petroleum, which provides a large proportion of government revenue. Gold, copper and silver are the main mineral products in PNG which hosts some of the largest copper/gold ore bodies in the world. The informal economy supports 85% of the people through semi-subsistence agriculture whilst 15% are employed in a formal sector. With all these abundant natural resources, PNG has a huge potential to develop both tourism and mining as industries that will move the country forward in realising economic growth and advancement.

The Kokoda Track is one of the world's great treks and is the country's treasure and heritage area. The Kokoda Trail links the Southern and Northern coast of Papua New Guinea. The Track was the scene of a bloody, chaotic battle between Australian and Japanese troops in 1942 during World War II. The 96-kilometer track passes through rugged, mountainous country with dense rainforest. During the battle, many Australian soldiers were dependent on local villagers who were affectionately known as 'fuzzy wuzzy angels' (Global Education, 2010).

It is not only trekkers who are interested in Kokoda Track. Mining companies are also eyeing this historical landmark for business opportunities. The track has vast deposits of mineral resources namely gold and copper. The availability of these mineral resources makes landowners support mining over trekking because of economic gain. However, residents' views on this issue need to be determined since they are the most affected. Determining the extent of involvement of local residents in trekking will disclose the manner of execution of tourism plans and programs of the stakeholders and their overall feeling towards tourism and mining.



Figure 1. Map of Kokoda Track

Source: Reilly (2013)

This scenario prompted the researcher to conduct an investigation to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the extent of involvement of the local community in trekking?
- How does the local community perceive the impacts of both tourism and the proposed mining?
- Does the community's involvement in trekking affect their overall perception on the impacts of tourism and the proposed mining?
- What are the plans and programs of the stakeholders in developing Kokoda Track as a tourist destination and in encouraging local residents to participate in tourism activities?

This research concludes with viable recommendations to (i) enhance the quality of life of the local people, (ii) protect and preserve the Track, and (iii) develop tourism in Kokoda in the most sustainable manner.

Literature Review

Tourism is now regarded as the world's largest industry (UNCTAD, 2007). To realise the full potential of tourism as a positive and sustainable economic, environmental and socio-cultural force, it requires sophisticated management (Weaver & Lawton, 2006). Managing tourism means applying a holistic approach that engages all stakeholders that have both direct or indirect participation and involvement in tourism activities and operations. Some studies (Poon, 1994; Murphy, 1985) emphasised the importance of participatory planning as an effective mechanism in tourism development and that in order to rectify tourism planning weaknesses, priority and emphasis of the community of a destination needs to be identified. Positive attitudes are essential for tourism development that takes a participatory approach since development of tourism in a community is not only a matter of matching supply with demand; local acceptability must also be considered (Andereck & Vogt, 2000).

Some authors define community participation as a process of empowerment that helps involve local people in the identification of problems, decision-making and implementation which can contribute to sustainable development (France, 1998; Reid, 2000). It is one of the factors which can affect the processes of tourism development and without community participation, sustainable tourism development is not likely to be achieved (Bopp *et al.*, 2000; Mbaiwa, 2004). Local people could participate in tourism through the policy and planning process, through benefits sharing or owning community projects (Vincent *et al.*, 2011).

Determining the residents' perceptions of tourism development is the most important consideration to understand the significance and worth of local participation (Pearce, Moscardo & Ross, 1996). Cooper (1997) disclosed that the community wants development of tourism if it is of a sustainable nature. Community participation is an important way to gain positive attitudes among residents; informing locals and letting them being part of planning would give them a sense of responsibility by contributing resources in order to implement the plan (Yen & Luong, 2008).

Alexander (2002) and Poon (1996) believe that involving local people is one of the missing ingredients undermining the success of many tourist destinations and that the success of any tourism development projects depends heavily upon the participation of local residents. For the local community to participate, there should be compelling factors. Al-Shaabi & Sobiah

(2010) identified several factors and issues to be considered in order to get the local community more involved in tourism development. These are awareness, consultation, empowerment, collaboration, decision-makers, culture and place attachment.

Policy and institutional mechanisms are lacking to encourage local participation in the design, implementation and management of tourism projects and local use of tourism resources. Local communities need to be empowered to determine what forms of tourism facilities they want developed in their respective communities and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders (Akama, 1996; Tosun, 2002).

Stronza & Gordillo (2008) cited in Sanchez (2009) believe that community participation has a catalysing effect as it can build skills in leadership as well as reinforce local institutions while ensuring that local people can achieve broader goals through economic benefits. Community participation increases people's sense of control over issues affecting their lives and sense of community in taking responsibility for their own development and to improve their decision-making power (Nampilla, 2005; Aref, 2011). Involving local communities in decision-making will lead to better decisions which are more appropriate and sustainable because they are owned by the people themselves (WHO, 2002).

Pretty (1995) postulated one of the widely accepted models in community participation in tourism development. This model has been used by researchers (Aref, 2011; Bejrananda, 2009; Sanchez, 2009) who conducted an investigation into local community involvement in tourism. According to Pretty (1995), there are seven levels of participation- passive participation, participation in information giving or manipulative participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentive, functional participation, interactive participation and self-mobilisation.

Community participation through employment brings more economic benefits directly to the household level which, in turn, can be used to alleviate widespread poverty (Michael, 2009). However, community participation does not only serve the economic purpose of tourism development in a destination. Lacy, Battig, Moore & Noakes (2002) stated that community participation in tourism development processes could preserve and sustain tradition and culture and promote pride in community heritage. There are many different types of tourism and consequently a wide variety of tourists and purpose of travel. One thing for certain is that a significant portion of tourism involves some degree of resident-visitor interaction. This interaction can bring both benefits and costs which may affect social sustainability of tourism in a particular destination (Rayel, 2005).

Methodology

Using a quantitative method of research, a survey was conducted on 90 residents from six villages (Iorobawa, Nauro 1, Nauro 2, Menari, Efogi 1 and Efogi 2) along Kokoda Track. Participation in this study was voluntary and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Purposive-convenient sampling technique was employed so as not to put pressure on those adamant residents and maximise the output during the data gathering phase. These resident-respondents were the heads of their households. Data were generated through a self-administered questionnaire. The items in the survey instrument were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 with 3 as the mid-point to determine the extent of involvement of the residents in trekking and the perceived implications of tourism and the proposed mining.

Validation of the research instrument was carried out to examine the appropriateness and reliability of the instrument. The main instrument was supplemented with an informative

interview to validate and clarify the responses and to solicit additional information from the respondents that might be of significance to the study conducted. Information was also sourced from concerned stakeholders. Representatives from the different agencies and organisations were provided with an interview guide questionnaire seeking information on the programs and projects currently undertaken to develop and promote Kokoda Track as well as their views on the proposed mining operations at Mt.Kodu.

Spearman coefficient of correlation was used to determine the relationship between the extent of involvement of the local community and to determine their perceptions on the impacts of tourism and the proposed mining.

Results

Demographic Profile of the Resident-Respondents

Large proportions (53.33%) of the respondents have lived in their respective villages since birth and have become aware of their natural and cultural wealth; they have also witnessed the transformation and developments that have occurred along the Kokoda Track. Most of

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Years of residence in their village	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Since birth	48	53.33
Below 10 years	2	2.22
10-20 years	9	10
21-30 years	13	14.44
31-40 years	17	18.88
41 years and above	1	1.11
TOTAL	90	100
Number of persons in every household	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 5	27	30
5-10	62	68.89
11-15	1	1.11
16-20	0	0
21-30	0	0
31 and above	0	0
TOTAL	90	100
Educational attainment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	39	43.33
Secondary	20	22.22
Certificate/Diploma	0	0
College graduate	1	1.11
Never attended any school	30	33.33
Others, please specify	0	0
TOTAL	90	100

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Table 1. Continued from page 31

Family income per fortnight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 100K	4	4.44
101-200K	24	26.67
201-300K	7	7.78
301-400K	0	0
401-500K	0	0
501-600K	6	6.67
601-700K	23	25.56
701- 800K	17	18.89
801-900K	7	7.78
901-1000K	2	2.22
TOTAL	90	100
Job/Mean of livelihood	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Working in the government	7	7.78
Working in private company	0	0
Own a business/entrepreneur	0	0
Farmer	29	32.22
Working as guide/porter in KT	53	58.89
Vendor/trader	1	1.11
Labourer	0	0
Others, pls. specify	0	0
TOTAL	90	100

Source: Field survey (2010)

the households (68.89%) have an average family size of 5-10 members with the father (70%) as the head of the family. Deprived of the basic facilities and services, most of the respondents (43.33) are less educated with only primary education while others (33.33%) never attended school.

In terms of family income, village people have varied earnings which they receive fortnightly depending on their means. Twenty-three of the respondents have an income of K600 and above while 24 of them earn K101-K200. Those with a higher income level (58.89%) are very involved in trekking either as a guide or as a porter. Guides are paid K100 per day while porters receive K80 per day (KTA, 2011). At the time of the study, 1USD was equivalent to about K3. The respondents are paid by the trekkers depending on the number of days they provide assistance and services. Some local families are into farming (32.22%), vending food crops and crafts (1.11%) and working for the government (7.78%).

Extent of Involvement of the Residents in Trekking Activities

Results of the survey revealed that the respondents have moderate involvement in trekking activities with an overall mean of 3.02 for the four variables presented - promotion and marketing, tour guiding, hosting and product planning and development (Table 2).

It can be inferred that the village people manifest appreciation of the industry and are aware of the economic gains of tourism. The extent of their involvement reflects their

Table 2. Summary of the extent of involvement

Areas	Mean	Interpretation
Promotions & marketing	2.86	Moderate
Tour guiding	2.89	Moderate
Hosting	3.53	High
Product planning and development	2.83	Moderate
Overall mean	3.02	Moderate

Source: Field survey (2010)

understanding of the parameters and complexities of the industry. Industry and product knowledge by the village people has triggered participative tourism in the areas where the local community has developed a sense of ownership and commitment in what they do.

Residents are highly involved in hosting with a mean rating of 3.53. This is the area where villagers normally exude local hospitality to visitors. Interpreting it in a broader context, this represents the normal and frequent flow of trekkers to their villages that they encounter with visitors becoming a part of their way of life despite the varying tangible economic benefits they obtain from trekking.

In the area of promotions and marketing, the residents are moderately involved with a mean of 2.86. The village people along Kokoda Track may find promotions and marketing to be confined within the work boundaries of Kokoda Track Authority and Tourism Promotion Authority. Unknowingly, residents themselves are marketing tools during the delivery of services. The quality of their encounter affects the total experience of the visitors. This may influence trekkers in planning future trips and travel and may also influence the decision of potential visitors through word of mouth.

In terms of tour guiding, residents rated this aspect as ‘moderately involved’ with a mean of 2.89. In Kokoda Track, some residents act as tour guides. They provide a sense of direction and information to trekkers. Residents also show concern to the trekkers by keeping them safe from any danger inflicted by animals and opportunist residents. Indeed, residents’ participation is not limited to providing direction but rather expanded to looking after the well-being of the visitors while they are on the track.

Residents in product planning and development are moderately involved with a mean of 2.83. The findings imply that village people have not been fully tapped for tourism planning and development of Kokoda Track. According to Vincent *et al.* (2011), local people could participate in tourism through policy and planning process, benefits sharing or owning community projects. Community approval and involvement is of paramount importance for effective implementation of tourism plans and programs. Without community support, the identified tourism goals will not be achieved.

Perception on the Implications of Tourism versus Proposed Mining

Economic Impacts

The table shows that the overall mean for tourism is 3.40 whilst for mining, it is 3.19, that is, both have a moderate impact. The overall response gives an impression that villagers gain

economic benefits from trekking. A similar perception was observed for the proposed mining although tourism is still viewed as providing residents more economic opportunities primarily because tourism is currently existing in Kokoda.

Socio-cultural Impacts

As seen from Table 3, the socio-cultural impact of tourism to the residents is viewed as creating a higher impact with an overall mean of 3.64 compared to mining with a mean of 2.64 (moderate impact). Tourism is a social event that requires cognitive and communicative functions. Perhaps, residents' participation and involvement in the trekking activity provides them the opportunity to meet people of different nationalities. This encounter gives them the chance to develop their sense of pride and identity. Mining, however, may provide the same opportunities like tourism but to a lower extent.

Environmental Impacts

It can be gleaned from Table 3 that the overall mean for tourism is 4.23, that is, it has a high impact whilst mining has a low impact as it was rated 2.31. From the results of the survey, it can be inferred that the respondents are optimistic about the long term benefits of tourism to the environment. Accordingly, the trekking activity does not only provide employment for

Table 3. Perceptions on the implications of tourism versus mining

Impacts	Tourism	Interpretation	Mining	Interpretation
Economic	3.40	Moderate impact	3.19	Moderate Impact
Socio-cultural	3.64	High impact	2.64	Moderate Impact
Environmental	4.23	High impact	2.31	Low Impact
Overall Mean	3.76	High impact	2.71	Moderate Impact

most of them but most importantly protects their habitat and its endearing environmental wealth. The support accorded by the community to the trekking industry is a manifestation of their interest and concern in preserving Kokoda Track as a historical site along with its abundant and diverse natural resources.

On the contrary, residents view mining as an industry that creates environmental damages. Most of the respondents vehemently opposed mining because of the serious threats to the ecosystem of Kokoda and the possible health problems it may cause to the local communities.

All the indicators from the table were assessed to have low impact for mining. This implies that local people realise the repercussions of mining on the environment. Hence, they have become more vigilant in safeguarding their habitat from more damaging intrusion that may result in greater devastation of their land.

Significant Relationship between the Extent of Involvement of Local Community in Trekking and Their Perception of the Impacts of Tourism and the Proposed Mining

There is a very high positive correlation result (0.982954) from the local community's involvement in trekking and their perception on the impacts of tourism. This means that the higher the

Table 4. The correlation between the extent of involvement and their perceptions on tourism

Extent of involvement in trekking vs. perception on tourism	Tourism	
	Perception	Involvement
Perception	1	
Involvement	+0.982954	1

Table 5. The correlation between the extent of involvement and their perceptions on mining

Extent of involvement in trekking vs. perception on mining	Mining	
	Perception	Involvement
Perception	1	
Involvement	-0.80961	1

involvement of the residents in the major tourism activity in Kokoda Track which is trekking, the higher their perceptions of the impacts of tourism. The result also implies that local community's participation in tourism from planning to decision-making creates understanding and awareness of the benefits tourism can bring to the destination.

Based on the results, there is a very high negative correlation between the local community's involvement in trekking and their perception of the impacts of the proposed mining (-0.80691). This can be interpreted that the higher the involvement of the community in trekking operations in the Kokoda Track, the lower their perceptions of the proposed mining. In addition, the more the people are involved in the trekking activities, the more their disapproval of mining in their place.

Plans and Programs Initiated by the Stakeholders

Stakeholders have been supporting the trekking industry and the Kokoda communities and would want to maintain the Track's image as the country's cultural landmark. Stakeholders are keen on initiating programs and projects that will preserve the trail, develop more tourist friendly activities and promote trekking activity and improve quality of life of the local residents. They value Kokoda Track as a cultural heritage of Papua New Guinea and its binding significance with Australia. Preservation and conservation of the Track for its cultural and historical values is their major aspiration; they oppose mining for ecological reasons

With the aim of improving the quality of life of the local residents, projects are geared towards delivering the needs of local people in terms of health, education, communication and infrastructure. Stakeholders are coming up with pilot projects in promoting local employment through capacity building. Project initiators launched several training sessions to provide skills to local people like tour guiding, cooking, sewing and the alike. There are projects set off in the area of micro business that aim to help communities along the track earn an income from the trekking industry. A detailed discussion was held with the local people on the importance of investing in the tourism industry rather than mining. Financial

schemes have been established for those willing to start their business with no or limited capital. However, it has been emphasised that the mining issue is for the government to resolve since they do not have power and authority to make decisions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, most of the residents in six villages along the trail of Kokoda generate income from trekking and earn a limited amount of money from farming and vending as alternative sources of livelihood. The extent of involvement and participation in tourism activities is limited to certain areas. Residents are more involved in visitor hosting as compared to promotions and marketing, product development and tour guiding. This can be addressed through rigid capacity training programs to provide competencies to village people. Residents' understanding of other areas of tourism will enable them to actively participate and contribute to tourism development of Kokoda. The findings indicate that residents perceive tourism as having much greater positive implications than the proposed mining in terms of economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects. The results clearly show that local residents support trekking as their major economic activity as trekking is perceived to preserve their cultural heritage and protect their natural environment. Landowners, government and other stakeholders should take these views seriously and take these as bases in crafting future plans and programs for Kokoda Track and its people. Developing other tourism products within the track will augment the limited income derived from trekking. Participative tourism will empower host-community and develop their sense of ownership of their resources and sense of community through involvement in decision-making. This research affirms that the more the local community is involved in trekking activities in Kokoda Track, the more they appreciate the benefits of tourism over mining. Local residents' involvement in tourism gives them the opportunity to participate in the crucial stages of development, making them the key stakeholders that determine the success and failure of any tourism project in their community. The results of the survey indicate that the concerned stakeholders have initiated programs and projects to protect and preserve the Track, develop Kokoda Track as the leading tourist destination in PNG, promote trekking activity to a wider international market, enhance the capacity of local residents and develop facilities to improve quality of life. This should be implemented in a manner where tangible results are achieved. Strengthening partnership among stakeholders through resource sharing will result in more beneficial projects in Kokoda Track. To conclude, Kokoda Track is a cultural wealth and heritage of Papua New Guineans and the need to preserve it is imperative. Local community involvement in tourism development projects in Kokoda should be encouraged to ensure the best results. A regulatory body should be formed to regulate trekking industry and to assure that local people are the ultimate beneficiaries. Further, future studies are encouraged to look at the gaps in this study and engage in an investigation that will bring more useful ideas and strategies for implementation.

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