

## **LOCAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THIMLICH OHINGA AND SEME-KAILA CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES FOR ECOTOURISM PROMOTION**

Ecotourism flourishes on cultural preservation, community participation, awareness creation, and tourism benefits to the communities, is a recent practice that has received less community participation in the Lake Victoria region, thus how can the local communities participate in the management and conservation of Thimlich Ohinga and Seme-Kaila in Migori and Kisumu Counties respectively. Value Theory was used to assess community perception and participation in the conservation and management of the sites for ecotourism promotion. The first objective was to identify cultural identity of the sites and its influence on community participation in their conservation and management, which was examined by testing the first hypothesis using Linear Regression that showed a significant relationship between community perception of cultural identity and community participation in conservation and management of the sites. The second objective was to determine cultural value of the sites and its significance on community participation in site management and conservation, and was achieved by testing the second hypothesis using Paired Samples T-test, which indicated a significant relationship between cultural value of the sites and community participation in their conservation and management. The third objective was to assess sites' values as ecotourism destinations, and was realized by testing the third hypothesis using Pearson Correlation that revealed a significant relationship between community perception on sites' values and community participation in their conservation and management. The fourth objective involved an assessment of the level of community participation in the conservation and management of the sites using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data, which indicated high level of community participation at Thimlich Ohinga while low level of community participation at Seme-Kaila. The study had a target population of 650 households from, which a sample size of 241 respondents were drawn using Krejcie, & Morgan (1970) method of determining sample size. Data collection and analysis involved quantitative and qualitative methods with quantitative data being analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data was analysed through content analysis. A five Likert Scale questionnaire was used to generate data from 241 respondents. The conclusions of the study were high level of community perception of cultural identity of the sites is indicative of high community participation in their management and conservation. Low community perception of cultural identity is a reflection of lack of community participation in the management and conservation of the sites. High community perception of cultural value of the sites is a manifestation of high community participation in their management and conservation. Low community perception of cultural value is indicative of lack of community participation in the management and conservation of the sites. High community perception of site values is a manifestation of high community participation in the management and conservation of the sites. There is high community participation in the management and conservation of Thimlich Ohinga as shown in focus group discussions and oral interviews. There is absence of community participation in the management and conservation of Seme-Kaila. The study recommends the conservation and management of the sites by the host communities; capacity building and sensitization of local communities on site values is necessary to enhance their perception and participation at the sites; the national and county governments need to develop tourism infrastructure and assist in the branding and image creation of the sites. The researchers need to carry out research on site archaeology, anthropology and environment.