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Tourism and community well-being: The case of the Maasai in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) proposes tourism as a tool through which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be accomplished yet the goals have been criticized for their top-down conceptualization of well-being. Critics further argue that long-term improvements in the livability of indigenous communities require the MDGs to account for indigenous interpretations of well-being and development. This inquiry adopts a bottom-up approach to examine indigenous conceptions of well-being and to understand how tourism influences indigenous experiences of well-being. Informed by the body of work on community well-being, this study focuses on two Maasai communities, Esilalei and Oltukai, in Tanzania. The findings highlight the need for dialogue between the externally defined universal measures (*i.e.*, MDGs) and localized conceptions of well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were implemented in the early 2000s by the United Nations (UN) to improve human well-being vis-à-vis development within less economically developed countries (LEDCs) (Gough, 2004; Jain & Sharma, 2008; Nelson, 2007; Roe, 2004; UNDP, 2012; World Tourism Organization., 2010). Eight goals with measurable indicators were devised. The “MDGs aim to improve human well-being by reducing poverty, hunger, child and maternal mortality; ensuring education for all, controlling and managing diseases, tackling gender disparity, ensuring

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sustainable development and pursuing global partnerships by 2015” (UNEP, 2012). It is important to note that the genesis of the MDGs occurred out of attempts by international agencies “to provide a more holistic alternative to the single dimension of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita as the key international comparative measure of human well-being or quality of life” (Taylor, 2008, p. 112).

A look at the history of international development indicates that econo-centric definitions characterized development agendas since the 1950s wherein well-being was strictly defined through GDP (Sen, 1999; Sumner, 2004). Well-being continued to be defined through economic parameters until the 1980s but by the 1990s non-economic conceptions of well-being entailing human development and sustainability were incorporated (Sumner, 2004). In the 2000s, economic parameters were ‘deemphasized’ and elements such as “universal rights, livelihoods, [and] freedom” were adopted and incorporated by the UN in the MDGs as a universal measure of well-being (Sumner, 2004). The UN led discourse on universal well-being that surfaced in the 2000s has generally been applauded but the emergent MDGs, associated with this discourse, have been criticized for a number of reasons (Taylor, 2004).

Critics argue that the process through which the goals were conceptualized was exclusionary and imperialistic, to say the least, because only certain groups were granted the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue regarding how the MDGs would and could contribute to human well-being (Taylor, 2004). A close look at the group with decision-making privileges indicates that the MDGs were developed by

the triad (the United States, Europe, and Japan), and were co-sponsored by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. All of this has raised the question of whether they (the MDGs) are mainly an ideological cover (or worse) for neoliberal initiatives (Amin, 2006, online).

Marginalized groups particularly indigenous communities located in the world’s LEDCs, for whom the MDGs were designed, were “deprived of influence over the discourses and debates about universal... goals” as well as “discourses about local and place specific means and policies” (Gough, 2004, p. 291). Furthermore, critics argue that institutionally driven international development agendas devised to improve well-being for LEDCs (i.e., MDGs) adopt universalist definitions that capture a ‘one size fits all’ conception of what constitutes well-being; such conceptualizations exclude accounts of local specificities and indigenous perceptions of well-being (Gough, 2004).

In 2004, the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), a group initially established to compile statistical data on the world’s indigenous groups, recommended that the MDGs “should be assessed with a view to incorporating greater recognition of indigenous concerns, interests and interpretations of development and well-being” (Taylor, 2004, p. 112). UNPFII’s recommendation was based on the argument that the MDGs and similar indices of well-being (e.g., Human Development Index) exclude a multitude of “criteria that are considered essential for the well-being of Indigenous peoples... [including criteria like] control of land and resources, equal participation in decision making and control over their own development process” (Taylor, 2004, p. 112). The aforementioned criteria are important to consider because they are often related to emergent socio-political problems that result from external economically centered development agendas, like those related to tourism, which are ‘imposed’ on indigenous communities.

Tourism development is still relevant to the discourse on development in LEDCs principally because the industry represents approximately 45% of exported services produced in these nations (World Tourism Organization, 2010). It is worth noting that “the selection of tourism as an engine of growth by many LEDC’s may be a result of lack of alternatives, rather than preference” (Reid, 2003, p. 70). Needless to say however, numerous LEDCs have established tourism sectors to promote economic development. According to Hawkins and Mann (2007),

80% of the 56 countries with poverty reduction strategies cite tourism as one option for economic growth, employment, and poverty reduction. Several (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, Kenya, Cambodia, and Honduras) give it equal weight with agriculture and manufacturing (p. 353).

Moving beyond an econo-centric approach, it should be noted that as an often-proposed development tool, tourism has itself sustained detrimental impacts on the well-being of indigenous communities worldwide.

In some cases, the costs produced by tourism development have outweighed the benefits for local populations (Saarinen, Rogerson, & Manwa, 2011). For instance, in some LEDCs, tourism resources tend to be controlled by Westerners who aim to increase their own profits rather than contribute to long-term well-being of the areas in which they operate (Akama, 1999; Manyara & Jones, 2009). Alternatively, some indigenous groups may show positive increases in tourism-generated revenue yet concurrently experience negative impacts in other areas of well-being. For example, the Maasai of Tanzania, a group on which this study is centered, are a highly popularized indigenous group for international tourism. A strictly economic approach reveals that Maasai communities often benefit from tourism generated revenue by engaging in cultural performances, selling souvenirs, offering guided tours and providing general tourism services (for Maasai tourism in Kenya see Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994; Ondicho, 2010). However, promotions across vertical ranks of the industry are rare, particularly, for Maasai males who are more likely (than males of other Tanzanian ethnic groups) to be employed as tourism security guards. Affixing Maasai to certain industry jobs reinforces the stereotype that

since they live in the wilderness areas, where they share habitats and interact with dangerous and deadly wild cats they are thus best suited to provide security and protection to tourists and hotel workers, against any form of real or perceived danger (Akama, 2000, p. 48).

A critical look at the influence of tourism reveals that the Maasai community has endured human rights violations and land conflicts as a result of stringent tourism conservation policies that govern the nature protected areas within which many Maasais reside (see Goldman, 2011; Ondicho, 2010). Furthermore, the Maasai have had to deal with the psychological challenges of being on display for tourists and maintaining, at least on the surface, a timeless and primitive look in their cultural performances for authenticity seeking international tourists (Akama, 2000; Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994). Lastly, although tourism is not the only culprit, the “vices of mass tourism have been noted in Maasailand. . . [t]hey include incidents of prostitution, alcoholism, smoking, and drug taking” (Akama, 2000, p. 48).

Cognizant of the multitude of impacts, beyond those related to the economy and induced by tourism in a given community, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) has proposed *sustainable tourism* as the most viable and responsible way through which the MDGs can be accomplished. This is certainly a step in the right direction, however it can be argued that the focal point should not be on the type of development but rather on aligning the parallel discourses on the nature of well-being as perceived by the groups in question and the institutional discourses/policies on well-being. Pointedly, scholars argue that it is crucial to incorporate the voices of indigenous groups worldwide in order for any meaningful discussions on well-being to occur. It is important to understand culturally situated meanings of community well-being prior to creating criteria and indicators to measure it. As Beeton (2006) noted, “before we even consider community development, we need to understand what is actually meant by ‘community well-being’ and why it is important” (p. 79). Once the situated meanings are understood it then becomes feasible to develop indicators that are depictive of the local situation and that contribute to “the equity dimension of development” (Hall, 2011, p. 112) without “threaten[ing] the well-being of residents” (Ritchie, 1993, p. 381). Such an understanding of wellbeing is premised on the idea that the goal of development is not about wealth accumulation but rather a focus on quality of life (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1999).

Despite the centrality of local understandings of well-being to the development debate, few studies within tourism scholarship and the private sector at large, have focused on analyses of well-being as interpreted by indigenous groups located in tourism active LEDCs. Certainly, as mentioned earlier, scholarly critiques on the global development debate and MDGs have been replete. However, according to Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008), the next step is for critical inquiry to go “beyond rage” (which was necessary to create awareness) and rather focus on the “theory and methods [needed] to address the issues that matter to oppressed, colonized persons” (p. xii). Similarly, UNPFII calls for scholarship that focuses on “the criteria that are considered essential for the well-being of Indigenous groups”

(Taylor, 2008, p. 112). In response to these calls, this inquiry adopts a bottom-up approach with the goal of exploring indigenous conceptions of well-being and examining the influences, if any, of tourism on indigenous experiences of well-being. Three research questions guide this study: How do locals perceive well-being? What attributes comprise well-being? How do locals perceive the relationship, if any, between tourism and well-being? This research focuses on two tourism Maasai communities in Tanzania, East Africa, namely, Esilalei and Oltukai.

THEORIZING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND INDIGENITY

This inquiry draws on theoretical linkages to scholarship on community well-being which regards well-being as related to the economic, social, cultural and political components entailed in maintaining a community and fulfilling the various needs of its residents (Kusel & Fortmann, 1991). From this perspective, well-being is regarded as a state of being, be it for individuals or groups, and it is often evaluated against a set of socially and locally determined ideals (Teghe & Rendell, 2005). Scholarship on community well-being centres on the “the social, cultural and psychological needs of people, their family, institutions and communities” in order to understand the various elements that constitute, enhance and hinder well-being (Wilkinson, 1991, as cited by Heininen & Southcott, 2010, p. 121). Christakopolou and Dawson (2001) state that “the welfare of a community as a whole requires that these different parts function well and there is a balance between them” (p. 323).

The term community (within the phrase community well-being) does not deny differences and exclusion, or suggest that universal agreements exist within groups; rather, it highlights the importance of understanding the shared connections between groups of people (Anderson, 1991). Community well-being is ontologically premised on the view that it is paramount for development to meaningfully incorporate local indigenous perspectives on issues of community well-being, and to empower the community to draw on local indigenous knowledge in order to devise long-term sustainable solutions. In this sense the literature on community well-being is closely related to the *theory of participatory development* which emphasizes local decision making in the development processes and advocates for meaningful involvement of locals and indigenous knowledge. Such orientations are valuable because they empower marginalized groups and aid eventual emergence from poverty (Rahman, 1995).

Organizations, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), have been instrumental in advancing talks on indigenous knowledge and community well-being. UNPFII recognizes that “[i]ndigenous peoples’ own perceptions and understandings of well-being are seen to extend beyond and sometimes conflict with conventional reporting frameworks” (Taylor, 2004, p. 111). The need to involve indigenous voices in the global development and well-being discourse is an issue that is resonating within a number of arenas. According to Bicker, Sillitoe, and Pottier (2004):

... a growing number of governments and international development agencies are recognizing that local-level knowledge and organizations offer the foundation for new participatory approaches to development that are both cost effective and sustainable, and socio-culturally sound... agencies increasingly accept that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into programs and projects will advance development agendas (p. xi).

Undoubtedly recognition and incorporation of indigenous concerns and interests into the MDGs requires situated knowledge of the former.

Dei (2000) argues that society “urgently need[s] to rethink the processes of producing knowledge about ‘development’” and well-being (p. 70) (also see Sen, 1999). Accordingly, further inquiry is needed to contribute to community relevant development policies that meaningfully enhance local well-being needs. There are various schools of thought on community well-being. Some scholars have examined community well-being by using individual attributes such as satisfaction/happiness, quality of life, individual efficacy/agency, and/or social support (Andereck, Valentine, Vogt, & Knopf, 2007; Jurowski & Brown, 2001; Kersetter & Bricker, 2012; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999). Other scholars are increasingly emphasizing emic definitions that account for cultural conceptualizations and by so

doing move away from western characterizations of well-being (Panelli & Tipa, 2007; Suhail & Chaudhry, 2004).

Research emergent from the latter school of thought departs from a focus on the individual to a collective understanding of well-being, particularly within indigenous communities. For instance, focusing on a Thai community, Ingersoll-Dayton, Saengtienchai, Kespichayawattaba, and Aungsuroch (2004) state that conceptualizations of well-being encompass:

... harmony (experiencing peaceful and happy interaction with others), interdependence (providing assistance to and receiving assistance from family members and others), acceptance (relinquishing upsetting thoughts and accepting life's circumstances), respect (feeling one's advice is heeded and one's wisdom is appreciated), and enjoyment (2004, p. 598).

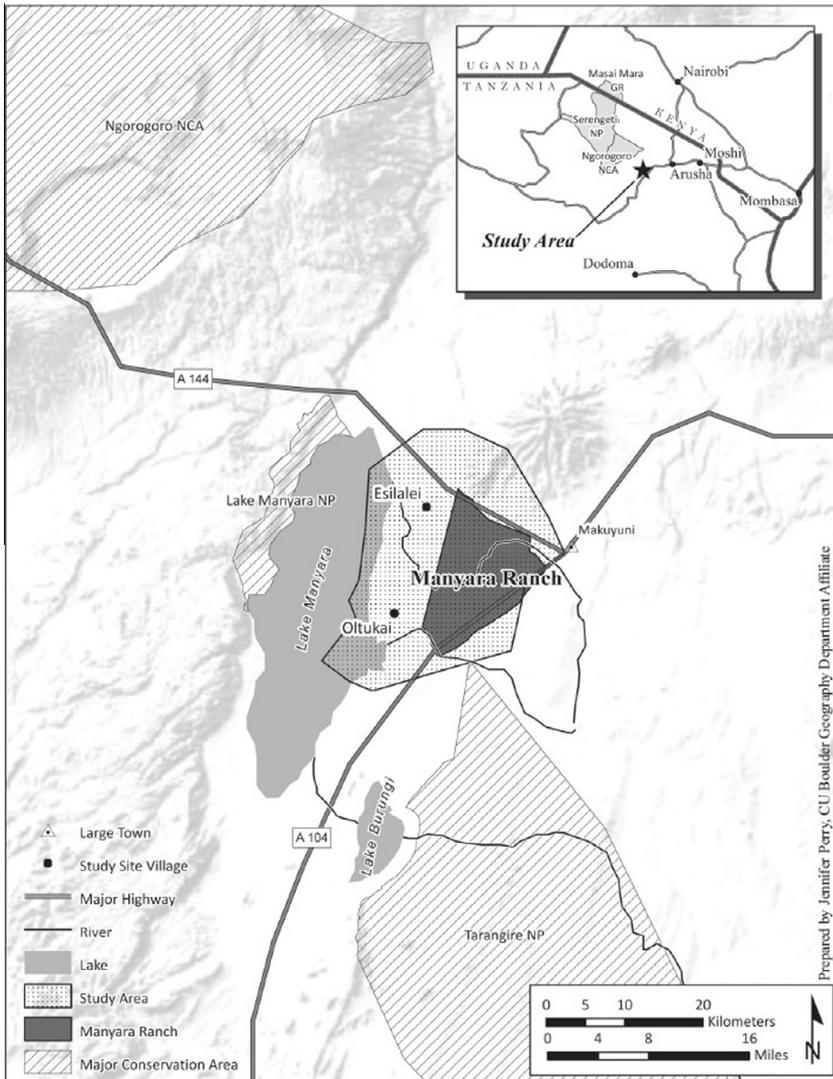


Fig. 1. Map of Study Sites Source: Goldman 92011) http://www.conservationandsociety.org/viewimage.asp?=&ConservatSoc_2011_9_1_6_5_79194_ul.jpg.

A study by [McGregor, Morelli, Matuoka, and Minerbi \(2003\)](#) which focuses on a Hawaiian community reveals five elements of well-being that are important to the community, namely, individual, family, community, nation and *Aina* (which is an eco-spiritual term uniting humans to nature). The notions of family and community also resonate with an indigenous community in Australia, Nywaigi traditional owners; notably, the community views these two concepts as

...the single most important domain, followed by 'health and health services' and 'country and culture'. The third tier of domains included 'education and training' and 'employment and income'. The fourth tier included recreation, housing and infrastructure, transportation, crime and justice and civil society ([Greiner, Larson, Herr, & Bligh, 2005, p. 48](#)).

Research on the Matsigenka community of Peru indicates that attributes of well-being entail "productivity, goodness, and maintaining harmony with...social, physical and spiritual environment" ([Izquierdo, 2005; p. 776](#)). The connection between human and natural systems as related to well-being resonates with a number of indigenous groups ([McGregor et al., 2003](#)). For instance, [Dyall et al., \(1999\)](#) work with Tongan communities indicates that land, mutual obligations, spirituality, and family are key elements constituting community well-being. Although occurring in different geopolitical locations, a commonality within the aforementioned studies is that they illustrate that articulations of well-being are multifaceted and culturally informed. Hence, efforts to positively affect well-being undoubtedly require a multidimensional approach but also a grounded understanding of the concept as defined and experienced by the groups in question.

Methods

Maasai Sites of Investigation: Esilalei and Oltukai

The two communities, Esilalei and Oltukai on which this study is based, are located in Tanzania approximately 107 km west of the town of Arusha (see [Figure 1](#)). Both communities are situated in the Monduli administrative district and they are strategically located close to a major highway that transports international tourists from Arusha to world-renowned national parks like Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) and Serengeti National Park. Manyara Ranch borders the eastern boundaries of both communities (see [Figure 1](#)). The land on which Manyara Ranch is situated originally belonged to the Maasai (they abandoned it due to a tsetse fly infestation) before it was taken over by private investors and later by the Tanzanian Government under the National Ranching Corporation (NARCO) ([Goldman, 2011](#)). In the late 1990s when Tanzania undertook efforts to liberalize its economy, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) established the Tanzania Land Conservation Trust (TLCT) to seize an opportunity to buy Manyara Ranch from the Tanzanian State ([AWF, online](#)).

TLCT's successful acquisition of the land in question was facilitated by funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); TLCT currently has a ninety-nine year lease on the land, which commenced in 2001 ([Sachedina, 2008](#)). TLCT is managed by a steering committee that has to work in collaboration with a board of trustees with the goal of conserving the land "on behalf of the villages of Esilalei and Oltukai;" ([Goldman, 2011, p. 69](#)). TLCT's goal is to "protect the needs of pastoral communities as well as preserve the integrity of these areas for wildlife conservation" ([AWF, online](#)). However according to [Goldman \(2011\)](#), locals "resent what they see as an outside-run conservation area on land taken away from them" (p. 69). A recent census indicates that Esilalei has a population of 2,370 people and it benefits from over-flow tourism from the Manyara ranch through leasing of land to tour operators for campsites and through cultural tourism activities (e.g., handicraft selling, cultural performances, and employment as game scouts and guides at tented lodges).

Maasai people comprise 99% of the residents in Esilalei and most are pastoralists. The population in Oltukai entails 100% Maasai residents and most of its 2,312 habitants are pastoralists. Like their neighbors in Esilalei, Oltukai residents are occasionally employed at the Manyara Ranch as service workers in the tented lodges. In 2004, Oltukai signed a contract with an investor company, Luca Limited (Bishop Corbet Safaris), to lease some village land for tourism purposes. Lease funds were used to build four classrooms, a clinic, a doctor's house, and a village office. The company also donated a car to the village (personal communication with village chief). Select members from both villages in question

serve on the Manyara Ranch steering committee however locals have little power to influence committee decisions (Goldman, 2011). The land conflict and power issues that plague the Maasai communities in questions are unfortunately evidenced within other indigenous communities in Africa (see Ondicho, 2010 on Maasai communities in Kenya).

Data Collection: Focus Groups

Community assessments on well-being adopt various approaches. One is to focus on a priori attributes affecting well-being, such as environmental degradation or poverty (see Kusel, 2001). Another approach is to adopt a holistic view of well-being that aims to uncover key aspects of well-being as perceived by community members (see Kusel & Fortmann, 1991). According to Riabova (2010):

There are two well-being indicator approaches: qualitative-subjective and quantitative-objective. Subjective measures often require individual/community self-assessment (by selected informants or through surveys). Objective measures are based on data sets that document social structure variables (p. 121).

Many of the widely available measures of well-being have been developed by international aid organizations which not only tend to favor quantitative approaches but also often assume predefined (Western) articulations of well-being.

By contrast, this study adopts an interpretive approach to understanding well-being as perceived by citizens of LEDCs, in this case, members of two Maasai communities in Tanzania.

Utilizing focus groups as the primary method of data collection, this study commenced with an examination of how well-being is perceived by Maasai residents followed by inquiry into the factors influencing well-being. This study adopted Dombroski's (2006) strategy of asking participants to *define* well-being as well as to list what they believe to be the factors that *influence* well-being. Three focus groups were conducted in each village. Recruitment was initiated through the community chairperson who contacted residents via their cell phones; thus, a snowball sampling approach was used. The use of cellphones is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa (Aker & Mbiti, 2010) so the adoption of this medium to recruit participants was fitting of the rural yet technologically attuned geopolitical context.

Each of the three focus groups in each community comprised a distinct age and gender group: older males (*Irpayani*); younger to middle-aged males (*Irmurran*); and, a mixed age group of married and unmarried women (*Intoyie and Inkitwaak/Intasati*). The abovementioned age categories were adopted because the Maasai do not adhere to the same social constructions of chronological age used in Western society. That is, rather than regard age as a number the Maasai refer to particular cultural events like circumcision or marriage. Notably, the older males have power over all other groups. Additionally, women, unless considered to have lived for numerous years (*i.e.*, western equivalent of senior citizens), tend to have a lower social status in comparison to their male counterparts be they younger or older. Interestingly, in-group relations between older and younger Maasai females are not constrained by power issues although, as is the case in many indigenous societies, the latter often exhibit reverence for the former.

The above age/gender breakdown by which the focus groups were designed thus abides by Maasai social strata (divisions of power and authority) as well as local communication clusters. Each focus group comprised ten participants (in one case eleven) yielding a total of sixty-two informants. Group discussions lasted two to two and a half hours and they took place outdoors, often under a large shade tree. Circular seating helped to facilitate dialogue. All focus groups were conducted in Maa with the assistance of two trained Maasai colleagues, namely, the third author and an independent scholar. A focus group guide with multiple questions and probes was available for facilitators. Issues addressed included: how locals defined well-being; whether tourism impacted well-being; how tourism affected culture, environment, and the economy of the Maasai; as well as the challenges and benefits of tourism. *In situ* translation would often take place, informing researchers not fluent in Maa about an interesting issue addressed by participants, and ensuring that the right direction, in terms of the discussion, was being pursued. The data were translated into English from Maa, transcribed, and crosschecked by the third author and the independent scholar, both of whom are proficient in Maa and English.

Within the focus groups, consensus was achieved by asking participants to each voice their opinion about a particular question posed or issue discussed. For instance as relates to the indicators, participants were asked to engage in an 'exhaust your opinions' exercise which resulted in the creation of a list of indicators. This list was then collectively narrowed down and the group collectively agreed (with the probing for participation from all by the facilitator, third author) on the rank ordering by removing some indicators and retaining others. The study commenced in May 2009, however data was not collected until March 2012 due to delays in obtaining research clearance from two Tanzanian foreign research boards (Tawiri and Costech). In addition to obtaining research permits from the aforementioned boards, this study is also approved by the first and second authors' university institutional review board (IRB#32627). The subsequent section presents the findings and it discusses indigenous articulations of well-being as well as perceptions of tourism's influence on well-being.

Findings

Perceptions of Well-being: Male Elders

As indicated in [Table 1](#), male elders in both villages generally agreed on the majority of the attributes that encompass the notion of well-being but there were slight differences in the rankings of the attributes. Male elders from Esilalei ranked well-being attributes in the following order: livestock; children and wives; green pasture (arable) and land resources; and good health and physical fitness. Generally, male elders regarded the aforementioned four attributes of well-being as interconnected. This particular group of participants regarded livestock as wealth, hence its placement as the first of many attributes representing well-being. Explaining the positioning of livestock, participants indicated that "being Maasai is defined by possession of livestock. . . how do you tell of (or speak of) a Maasai if no cattle are kept in a kraal?" Offspring were viewed as the second most important attribute, generally because children, particularly male progeny, play an important role in the day-to-day care and maintenance of livestock. Participants believed that "[i]f children are well-being, then the more you have the better your well-being." Although this group celebrated the abundance of offspring, they were also cognizant that more was not necessarily better.

Offspring were regarded as necessary "to a certain point because the increase in number of children is beneficial. . . but they (children) reach a point where they generate financial problems" for a family. Some examples, shared by male elders, of financial issues to consider in relation to the number of children one desired were: the cost of provision of food, material goods, and dowries as well as tuition expenses that might be incurred to school children who are unable to carry out traditional (mandatory) pastoral duties. Additionally, as a polygamous group, the possession (cultural translation) of multiple wives to run a homestead and bear children (who aid with pastoral duties) was also regarded as an important well-being factor for male elders. Also significant was the availability of green pasture to graze livestock, and natural resources such as water, rain, and land. Fertile grazing land allowed for the health of cattle and the possession of offspring to enact the role of herders were all elements that contributed to male elder's well-being. Lastly, good health and physical fitness were viewed as enabling one to oversee and enjoy all other attributes of well-being.

Table 1
Rank Ordering of Well-being Attributes Identified By Participants from Esilalei and Oltukai

	Male elders	Male youth	Women
Esilalei village	(1) Livestock (2) Children and wives (3) Green pasture Natural resources (4) Good health and Physical fitness	(1) Money (2) Livestock (3) Children and wife (4) Health and schooling	(1) Children (2) Livestock (3) Schooling of children (4) Green pasture and Natural resources
Oltukai village	(1) Children and wives (2) Livestock (3) Money (4) Green pasture and Natural resources	(1) Children and wife (2) Livestock (3) Money (4) Green pasture and Natural resources	(1) Children (2) Livestock (3) Green pasture and Natural resources (4) Money

Unlike their neighboring comrades, male elders from the Oltukai community considered the possession of offspring to be the most important attribute of well-being, principally because children represent an important “part of the [paternal] blood line and they assist with [pastoral] duties.” Male elders in Oltukai ranked offspring as the first attribute because they believe that having children before augmenting the number of livestock one owns ensures that one has helpers (herders) to assist with herding and other pastoral chores. Additionally, the possession of children was regarded as affording male elders the luxury of free (leisure) time, as evidenced by this comment: “We are seated here because our children are looking after the cattle; they are our right hand.” The Oltukai community, unlike Esilalei, does not have a flourishing tourism sector, accordingly, male elders residing in Oltukai felt there was a need for more revenue generating endeavors. Lastly, Oltukai elders agreed that the availability of green pastures and natural resources was a vital well-being factor that contributed to the long-term existence and health of Maasai people and their livestock.

Perceptions of Well-being: Male Youth

Male youth (*Irmurran*) in the Esilalei community were the only group that regarded money as an important attribute that contributed to well-being and members of this group ranked money as the number one most vital facet. Money was certainly mentioned by participants in the Oltukai community but it tended to occupy the third (for males) or fourth (for females) slot in terms of ranking. Male youth residing in Esilalei prioritized money because funds earned from tourism enabled them to purchase cattle and it also afforded them the opportunity to cover costs associated with marriage (ceremonies/events and dowry) as well as child rearing. There was a consensus amongst male youth that one could not “marry and have kids unless you have the resources... with money you can buy cattle and food... without money you cannot marry.” Hence, members of this group felt that money was vital in allowing them to proceed with the various stages associated with coming of age (*i.e.*, possession of livestock, marriage, parenting, settlement, health, and schooling).

Within the Esilalei community, other gender/age groups regarded male youth as the most mobile population for they were constantly travelling in search of novel ways to make money. Members of other gender/age groups blamed tourism for fostering the ‘young males’ obsession’ with money. They argued that through tourism, young males have learnt to depend on monetary handouts from tourists. During low tourism seasons, many young Maasai males searched for temporary employment in nearby Tanzanite mines. They shared the traditional Maasai belief that livestock equated to wealth. As a result, they used their monetary gains to purchase cattle, as well as to pay dowry and child rearing expenses. Much to the chagrin of their elders (male or female), young males did not espouse the traditional belief in polygamy; instead young males regarded polygamy as an unnecessary monetary expense and a hindrance to their perception of love as only occurring between two people.

Community elders (male and female) regarded young male's espousal of monogamy as the result of Western ideals, propagated by tourists, encroaching upon Maasai way of life. Unlike their male elders, young males preferred fewer children and one wife in order to keep expenses manageable. Young males regarded health and vitality as important attributes, but so too was the opportunity to further one's education. These young men bemoaned the fact that international organizations generally gear educational initiatives/opportunities towards Maasai girls. They spoke of the predominance of educational sponsorships by philanthropic tourists who, more often than not, tended to favor education for Maasai girls and/or female-only schools.

Young males claimed that such educational initiatives/opportunities often resulted in a long-term exodus of educated Maasai girls from the village, leaving their male counterparts with fewer options as relates to mate selection. Furthermore, young males claimed that educated Maasai girls rarely returned to the village and often married educated, non-Maasai males. Given this gender divide, young males prioritized education not so much for its intellectual benefits but rather for its role in equalizing the playing field in terms of attracting educated Maasai mates whose values would most likely (unlike the uneducated Maasai female) align with young males' espousal of monogamy and savings (money). Young males felt they had to fend for themselves, unlike members of other age/gender groups like elder males and females who are (in ideal situations) fully cared for by the male head of a household. Young males in Esilalei thus felt that an individualist approach best suited their contemporary existence versus the traditional collectivist perspective.

By comparison, male youth from the Oltukai community agreed with their male and female elders that possession of a mate and children as well as livestock were two of the most important attributes of well-being. Young males in Oltukai rank ordered attributes contributing to well-being as follows: children, livestock, money, and natural resources. In this particular case, there was absolute consensus between male elders and younger males from Oltukai regarding perceptions of community well-being (see Table 1). Notably, male youth from Oltukai village, unlike their Esilalei counterparts, did not *overly* value money; the former rank ordered money as the third attribute. Attempts to explain this factor during the focus group were not successful however we assume the ranking can be explained by the fact that Oltukai is more remote in comparison to Esilalei, and money although needed is not as readily useable in the former community.

Perceptions of Well-being: Women

As shown in Table 1, female participants (*Intasati*) from the Esilalei community identified the following rank ordering of well-being attributes: children, livestock, schooling, and land resources. The first two attributes mentioned by female participants in Esilalei were similar to those identified by female participants in Oltukai. Women in Oltukai ranked natural resources and money as third and fourth on the list, respectively. In both communities children were regarded as vital to women's perception of well-being for reasons slightly different to those presented by their male counterparts. For women, offspring were valued not so much for their labor and aid with pastoral duties but for the elevated status and security that a wife in a polygamous family attains when and if she bears children. Female participants argued that women who are unable to conceive or those whose children had passed away tend to occupy a lower status and could easily be evicted from a homestead. Within both communities, women regarded the bearing of offspring as "their duty and reason for being on earth."

Some women mentioned that children often acted as arbiters; for instance, "in the case of an argument between a husband and a wife, a son could help resolve the issue." In both villages, women rank ordered livestock as the second most important well-being attribute however they justified its importance slightly differently in comparison to their male counterparts. Women argued that livestock was vital because it facilitated the provision of food (*i.e.*, milk) and sustenance for the children of a household. Notably, female participants in Esilalei valued education because it allowed their children to learn basic reading skills, but schooling was generally viewed by mothers as possessing little value to the community beyond the benefit of basic literacy. In fact, there was consensus that "the educated were the most useless in the Maasai community." In clarifying this statement, participants stated that children who are unable to handle the arduous tasks characteristic of a pastoral lifestyle tended to be the ones sent to school and the ones encouraged to pursue post-secondary education.

Upon completion of their studies such children return to the community as educated adults but female participants argued that the attained scholastic knowledge did little to nothing in terms of problem solution at the community level. Female participants from Esilalei rank ordered natural resources, as the fourth attribute because one of the main duties allocated to Maasai women is the gathering of firewood and fetching of water from local wells. Thus, the availability and proximity of these resources affects women's well-being. By contrast female participants from Oltukai rank ordered money as the fourth attribute arguing that money was necessary for purchasing items not readily available in the village (*e.g.*, salt, sugar, and cigarettes). It is important to note that in both communities female participants regarded the presence of all attributes of well-being as fostering a sense of *eseriani* (peace of mind). They claimed that "when you have children, are in good health, cattle are getting water and pastures, children can go to school, and you are not in stress, you have *eseriani*, [and] that is well-being."

Perceptions of the Relationship between Tourism and Well-being: Esilalei and Oltukai

Participants in both communities, be they young, old, male or female, generally agreed that tourism positively as well as negatively impacted community well-being. Negative impacts are place specific, principally because both Esilalei and Oltukai are situated adjacent to protected areas wherein numerous conservation efforts have been undertaken by AWF to reintroduce and monitor wildlife diversity. Residents in both villages attested to the effectiveness of such conservation initiatives, given the

increase in wildlife and the continued frequency of nature tourists. Conservation efforts yielded environmental and economic benefits (see [Sindiga, 2010](#)), however, as described by participants, a closer look at the situation revealed hidden costs. Locals spoke of frequent attacks by wildlife predators on livestock; this is a problem that plagues many other indigenous communities in Africa (see documentary [Milking the Rhino, 2009](#)). Participants argued that the “increase in wildlife... zebras and elephants destroy crops and trees, and the lions eat the cattle. The hyenas have invaded cultural bomas. And fences... are not available.” Some blamed these problems on conservation: “Because of conservation, the population of wildlife—especially elephants—has increased... invading farms and killing people.” Participants expressed dismay over livestock killed by wildlife and they bemoaned the fact that no suitable compensation was awarded to herders.

In the past, Maasai traditions supported the killing of wildlife predators that attacked/killed livestock based on the premise that cattle is sacred. Following Maasai traditions, the predator would be hunted and killed by herders and a ceremony/ritual would be held to honor the departed souls of the animals and to make peace with nature. “Killing a predator which preys on livestock was the best way to sooth your heart [revenge]... but with biased laws (pro-conservation), killing has become difficult, as you may be accused [of a crime] and get no compensation.” Participants mentioned that regulations granted some monies to herders who had lost livestock due to wildlife attacks; but locals who applied for compensatory funds had to prove that the attack was not due to the herder’s own negligence. Participants claimed that in the absence of clear definitions of what constitutes negligence coupled with the existence of numerous unsuccessfully tried wildlife attack court cases, many had abandoned all hope for compensation.

Attacks on livestock occurred in both villages; however residents in Oltukai had also experienced incidents of wildlife predators invading residences. Imminent threats of wildlife predators negatively impacted the communities’ sense of well-being and matters were further exacerbated by the fact that wildlife is protected at all costs by AWF for tourism purposes. According to the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), which oversees human-wildlife conflict in the areas surrounding Tanzania’s national parks, including Oltukai and Esilalei, measures have been taken to safe guard residents, livestock and wildlife ([AWF, online](#)). AWF has counseled residents to improve the enclosures that shelter livestock at night by using chain-link fences. Cognizant of the high expense, to locals, of such precautionary measures, AWF has allegedly implemented a cost-sharing approach to the matter ([AWF, online](#)).

Some positive tourism related contributions to well-being were also mentioned by participants. For instance, participants in Esilalei cited tourism as contributing to the availability of jobs for locals. There was a consensus that women were the main beneficiaries of tourism dollars, principally because they were more likely (in comparison to their male counterparts) to work in the designated cultural centers (*bomas*) where staged performances are featured on a daily basis for tourists. Participants noted that, “women benefit more due to handicraft business,” because they sell directly to tourists. Additionally, some female participants claimed that “women are the main beneficiaries of income derived from tourism [especially] when tourist organizations bring (sponsor) female-led development projects.”

Some foreign tourists erroneously assumed that the common courtesy of asking for permission before entering a stranger’s house is not applicable to indigenous communities and this perception, according to locals, has often resulted in conflict between tourists and locals. To remedy this problem, Maasai communities created *bomas* (pseudo villages) where tourists can get a glimpse of Maasai culture without trespassing on personal property. Women and their children who are in need of financial assistance populate the cultural *bomas* on a rotational basis (six months to a year); young males travel to the *bomas* to aid with cultural performances during daylight hours. Locals maintained that the funds obtained from tourism at the *bomas* are equally distributed amongst all residents of the *boma*. According to participants, the attained revenue tends to be spent on the purchase of livestock; to the point that those employed in the *bomas* often “buy over 50 goats and sheep” each.

The elevation of women’s status in the community was yet another positive tourism related contribution to well-being. Female participants noted that revenue earned from tourism was changing the role of women in the Maasai community: “unlike the past, women can now support the family by buying animals as they get money from tourists... Women used to be under men’s feet... depending on them for food and other basic needs... with the money we collect from the cultural *bomas* we can buy

our things.” Women mentioned that traditionally a woman’s status could only be elevated under two circumstances: when she bore children and once she was considered an elder citizen of the community. In the wake of tourism, Maasai women now enjoy status elevation owing to their tourism-generated earnings that grant them considerable economic power to positively impact certain aspects of well-being. Female participants thus cited tourism as a contributor of *esirani* (peace of mind) because it enables them to accumulate wealth (livestock is the utmost symbol of a Maasai’s wealth) to feed the family (milk, meat and cheese from livestock) and to liquidate wealth (sell a cow) when funds are necessary.

With time, however, increased numbers of livestock in the protected area has become problematic because it has been coupled with reduction in pasture. During drought periods herders have to travel further out in search of pastures to graze their livestock rendering them more vulnerable to wildlife attacks. The increase in livestock has also been accompanied by reduction in deadwood in nearby areas. As a result, women also have to travel long distances than normal in search of deadwood, as a fuel source for meal preparation:

deadwood is not as available as it was in the past. Bylaws to conserve the environment are harsh. One now has to go the distance to the Irigabolo River bank to collect firewood.

The mentioning of bylaws in the above excerpt is related to the increase in conflicts over the use of non-designated areas for grazing or collection of firewood. These non-designated areas often belong to conservation agencies or individual private investors: “Investors have grabbed people’s land, resultantly limiting the availability of pasture land.” According to locals, investors are initially oriented to the area as tourists *vis-à-vis* guided tours: “investors come as tourists—at entrance point they use sweet words as they look for land—after they settle they push you (the community) away, and this is [an] unacceptable form of tourism.” Generally, investors are white foreigners who purchase nearby land to build safari lodges or private residences. Investors tend to privatize public areas by so doing restricting Maasai communities to smaller residential/grazing areas.

Participants mentioned that matters were made worse as Maasai who had previously migrated to the metropolitan areas in search of employment returned to the community upon realizing that more job opportunities were available in the villages. Competition for pasture created conflict amongst herders and neighboring families: “grazing land is scarce due to increase in human population.” There was a consensus that:

[p]asture land is scarce because of farming and settlement and the fact that there are more [Maasai] people in the village now than before. The environment has been damaged due to population increase and demand on natural resources.

Locals also bemoaned particular encounters between tourists and young male herders, which occur when safari jeeps loaded with nature tourists traverse the rugged village roads *enroute* to nearby nature reserves. Some tourist convoys encounter young male herders dressed in traditional attire while herding and the tendency has been for tourists to throw candy and/or money *at* the children in exchange for a photograph.

Participants lamented the fact that young herders had developed the habit of pacing the main roads, awaiting the opportunity to receive candy or money; in the case of Esilalei, this early exposure to cash may partly explain young males’ prioritization of money over livestock. Local adults noted that, “tourists give young herders sweets...causing some (children) to line along the road waiting...abandoning the herds (livestock).” The provision of sweets to a population of children that may never have access to dental care is problematic, but the act of throwing an edible object *at* a human being is considered demeaning within African culture. Thus, while tourism has resulted in the accumulation of wealth and the elevation of Maasai women’s status, it has also led to the loss of cultural values.

Discussion

Participants had similar perceptions of the elements constituting well-being however the prioritization of these components differed. Members of both communities discussed the importance of having children and livestock to well-being; possession of the latter was regarded as the ultimate

affirmation of one's Maasai identity and symbol of wealth while the presence of the former ensured the availability of livestock caretakers. The notion of children as valuable to experiences of well-being resonates with other indigenous groups such as Hawaiians (McGregor et al., 2003), the Ngwaigi of Australia (Greiner et al., 2005) and the Tonga (Dyall et al., 1999). In addition to livestock and offspring, land was another vital facet of well-being identified by participants. In fact, land is a well-being attribute that is discussed by other indigenous groups, be it as related to utilitarian or spiritual purposes (Dyall et al., 1999; McGregor et al., 2003).

According to Menchu (2007), many indigenous groups exhibit a “relationship of harmony with the land, [and] with Mother Earth. [These ideals] cannot be found in the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” (p. xi). Consequently, some scholars are increasingly advocating for more emphasis on place-based approaches to well-being that take into account human/nature relationships and related ethno-environmental issues (Airey, 2003; Curtis, 2004). According to Panelli and Tipa (2007), the place “where one lives, and the sociocultural and environmental contexts of that life will vary across populations and produce different experiences of well-being” (p. 448). In the case of the Maasai, well-being is linked to the availability of pasture for livestock grazing and the obtainability of deadwood as a fuel source for meal preparation. Social relations are compromised as families compete for pastures and deadwood. Thus, the case of the Maasai highlights the “significance of [a] human-environment approach to understanding well-being” (Panelli & Tipa, 2007, p. 449).

Maasai culture is patriarchal and exhibits norms based on gender. Males are generally the breadwinners, while women are responsible for child rearing and domestic work. However, women's engagement in tourism has altered women's status within the Maasai community in a number of ways. Firstly, as recipients of tourist donations, many Maasai women have been afforded educational opportunities. Secondly, income generated through cultural performances and the sale of souvenirs has granted women the power to economically contribute to family income. Hence, by engaging in tourism women's status is elevated (UN Women, 2011). The flexibility that characterizes informal tourism sector jobs is also desirable to women with children allowing them to continue with childcare while concurrently gaining monetary compensation (Schevyens, 2002). This is particularly important in places like Esilalei and Oltukai where formal childcare services are non-existent.

While employment through tourism has enabled locals, particularly women, to gain monetary benefits from tourism, with the exception of male youth in Esilalei (the only group that mentioned money in Esilalei), money tended to be ranked as a third or fourth attribute by all groups in Oltukai. The relative importance of money is perhaps explained by Menchu's (2007) claim that “economic growth, or increased income, is the primary objective in conventional development. For rural and urban-based marginalised [sic] people in many cultures of the world, however, income is not always the major parameter in defining well-being” (p. xi). The findings of this study have practical applications to the global discourse on the politics and policies of well-being, particularly as relates to the relevance of the MDGs to indigenous communities.

Critical scholarship has long indicated that the discourse “on the nature of well-being and [the discourse] on the institutions, processes and policies that affect well-being in developing countries—are disconnected” much to the detriment of LEDCs (Gough, 2004, p. 240). Scholarship on this matter indicates that the articulation of *universal needs* for well-being through measures like the MDGs is vital but unfortunately, such universal approaches tend to overlook the fact that “*need satisfiers* [such as those captured by the Maasai participants] are place-and time specific” (Gough, 2004, p. 291). For instance, education as a MDG is an important universal goal but as was indicated in the findings participants do not see how education, beyond basic literacy (reading and counting), contributes to the solving of any imminent community problems.

Similarly, the MDGs identify environmental sustainability as a universal need for well-being but the co-existence of humans, in this case Maasai, within nature protected areas is not properly accounted for. Menchu (2007) argues that the MDGs should be regarded as “a reference, a pretext... upon which [local policy makers] base their agenda... [MDGs] are not sufficient to transform poverty into well-being... [because they] have been designed and developed from above and not thoroughly a bottom-up participatory approach” (Menchu, 2007, p. xi–xii). Along the same lines,

Gough (2004) points to the ineffectiveness of ‘one size fits all’ policies that decenter “people’s own self-interpretation . . . people’s values and knowledges [and] the ‘understanding of [local] understandings’” (p. 290) related to well-being.

Global policies on well-being thus need to incorporate multi-level engagements between the universal and the local in order to meaningfully influence long-term change as related to the Maasai community or LEDCs at large (Gough, 2004). Whether dealing with the Maasai or other indigenous communities, there is a need for what Gough (2004) refers to as a dual strategy of social policy formation wherein internal and external stakeholders are equally engaged in planning and policy. The UN-PFII is attempting to bridge the local and the global firstly, by lobbying the UN to account for indigenous interpretations of development and well-being and secondly, by urging researchers to further investigate this matter from an indigenous perspective (Taylor, 2008). The current study responds to this call by actively engaging indigenous interlocutors on the matter of well-being and tourism development in the hope of unveiling attributes that ought to be accounted for in universal measures of well-being.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry adopted a bottom-up approach to well-being to examine indigenous conceptions of well-being and to understand how tourism influences indigenous experiences of well-being. The body of work on community well-being informs the theoretical assumptions on which this study is conceptualized. Three research questions guided this study: How do locals perceive well-being? What attributes comprise well-being? How do locals perceive the relationship between tourism and well-being? This research focuses on two tourism active Maasai communities in Tanzania, East Africa: Esilalei and Oltukai. Drawing on focus group data, the findings indicated that a variety of factors informed local perceptions of well-being.

Children, livestock, and land resources were the most prevalent factors of well-being articulated by participants in both villages. Money was the other factor; however, it resonated only with male youth in Esilalei and was ranked as a third or fourth factor by groups in Oltukai. Revenue generated from tourism contributed to the elevation of women’s status in the community and it also allowed for the affordability of livestock accumulation for families (a symbol of wealth and Maasai identity). By the same token tourism conservation policies facilitated growth in wildlife numbers to attract nature tourists but this very policy was intricately linked to the increase in wildlife attacks on Maasai homesteads and livestock as well as reduction in pasture for livestock grazing. Additionally, young males were abandoning their pastoral duties for the opportunity to earn money or candy from safari tourists who wanted to take pictures of the traditionally dressed Maasai herders; resultantly, abandoned livestock were more prone to wildlife predatory attacks.

Generally, participants regarded tourism as a form of development that positively but also negatively influenced well-being. The findings are important because knowledge of locally defined attributes of well-being can properly inform global and local policies so as to maintain and enhance elements that complement well-being while reducing and/or eliminating components that detract from it. Furthermore, the meanings emergent from this study’s grounded approach highlight the fact the Maasai, much like other indigenous groups worldwide, are critical interlocutors who should be actively engaged in the global/local discourses on well-being to ensure long-term viability and sustainability of the communities in question.

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