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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evolving motivations for participation in community-based conservation: A relational perspective

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Abstract Successful outcomes of community-based conservation, both ecological and social, rely on local actors being motivated to engage at the outset of the programme and to sustain their motivation over time. Using semi-structured interviews, we explore the motivations of 22 community Conservation Officers who have participated in marine turtle conservation in Tanzania for more than two decades. We focus on factors that motivated initial participation, as well as those that contributed to sustaining their participation over the past 20 years. Our study reveals the intricate dynamics of motivational processes, including the influence of values, identities, autonomy, agency, and power, which are shaped by relationships between nature, people, and place. With these findings, we challenge dominant assumptions about economic motivations and highlight the risk of over-reliance on monetary incentives to drive participation in community-based conservation.

Keywords Community-based conservation · Marine turtles · Motivation · Participation · Relational · Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Participation in community-based conservation can incur a range of costs for local actors including access restrictions, increased workloads, and the risk of social conflicts (Thondhlana et al. 2020). It is also common for community-based conservation programmes to be implemented in countries with a history of colonial occupation, where experiences of historical alienation from natural resources may disincentivise participation or even motivate resistance to local conservation efforts (DeCaro and Stokes 2008). Although participation is assumed to improve outcomes due to the diverse knowledge and experiences that are brought into the process (Fish et al. 2016a), in practice, policymakers and conservation practitioners have long struggled to understand the core dynamics of participation—what people value, what motivates them to engage, and how motivations evolve as participation progresses. Various policies and practices that have been designed to enhance participation have not always been successful (Ruano-Chamorro et al. 2022) and there are remarkably few examples of sustained participation over time (Méndez-López et al. 2015). To add further complexity, the process of participation can be understood in a variety of ways (e.g. Arnstein 1969; Pretty 1995; Reed et al. 2018), while the concept itself is contested due to tensions between its promises of inclusivity and power redistribution and its tendency to reproduce existing power relations (e.g White 1996; Few et al. 2007). In the context of this study, we use the term 'participation' to refer to active and direct involvement of individuals in stewardship actions that contribute materially to conservation and social outcomes. Given that stewardship actions hinge, in part, on the motivations of local actors (Bennett et al. 2018), examining the underlying drivers of participation can provide important theoretical and practical insights into conservation behaviour and provide a strategic leverage point for promoting long-term involvement in community-based initiatives.

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Motivation for participation involves a combination of economic, cognitive, and social factors (Ruiz-Mallén et al. 2015). However, global conservation policy tends to rely on the assumption that local actors are driven primarily by economic motives. Given that conservation policy shapes practice (Hampton-Smith et al. 2024), assumptions about economic motives are commonly embedded in the design of community-based conservation programmes. This has resulted in the dominance of market-based approaches (e.g. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes) where participants are constructed as rational actors who calculate the costs and benefits of their choices and act out of self-interest (Peterson and Isenhour 2014). Rooted in economic theory, the notion of a rational actor may be useful for understanding human action in some contexts (Eyster et al. 2022), but it is problematic for understanding participation in conservation, which is an inherently social, cultural, and political process (Brechin et al. 2002). For example, in market-based approaches, small-scale fishers are typically characterised as self-interested exploiters of the ocean, yet a large body of literature illustrates that fisher's actions are deeply embedded in the social and cultural dynamics of their communities and are often based on the principle of reciprocity (e.g. Jentoft 2020; Baker et al. 2021). Therefore, efforts to motivate participation in conservation by appealing solely to economic logics are unlikely to be successful. Furthermore, economic theories cannot fully explain the motivations of local actors who participate in the conservation of species or habitats that do not deliver direct livelihoods benefits.

Psycho-social features, including values, beliefs, identities, and emotions are where motivations take shape and are therefore a major driver of behaviour. A focus on these 'inner worlds' of individuals (Ives et al. 2020) can provide insights into the ways in which people interact with the natural world, revealing who is participating in conservation and why. For instance, an individual who understands nature as having intrinsic value beyond any utility to humans is likely to be motivated by moral and ethical concerns (Batavia and Nelson 2017). In contrast, an instrumental value orientation may motivate participation as a way of ensuring nature continues to provide economic and social benefits to humans (Van Den Born et al. 2018). Motivations may also be shaped by relational values, which are constituted through human-nature interactions, as well as human-human interactions that involve nature, and are expressed in diverse relationships, responsibilities, and identities (Chan et al. 2016). Relational values drive motivation, local stewardship, and collective action by foregrounding ideas of care, reciprocity, and responsibility (West et al. 2018). By encompassing plural values of nature, relational values offer a more nuanced understanding of people-nature relationships (Pratson et al. 2023) and recognising them in policymaking can help to amplify the voices of individuals and rural communities that are often marginalised in decision-making processes (Dajka et al. 2025). To date, there has been inadequate recognition of the value-systems of local communities that are involved in conservation (Guibrunet et al. 2021), as well as the diverse range of values that influence how people engage with conservation issues (Pascual et al. 2023). Conservation policy continues to focus on the external worlds of commodities and markets (Calfucura 2018), which aligns with the values and priorities of powerful exogenous actors (e.g. international environmental NGOs) who are primarily responsible for the design of participatory conservation programmes and whose worldviews and conservation narratives are often imposed on rural communities (Kashwan et al. 2021). As a result, there are missed opportunities for using underlying values towards nature as a leverage point for change (Abson et al. 2017).

Community-based conservation is essentially a place-based endeavour (Kothari et al. 2013), meaning that individual values, identities, beliefs, and emotions are situated. The material conditions of community life are a complex mix of kinship structures, social identities, relations, networks, and spaces, which can generate pro-social motivations for participation. Research suggests that individuals (or groups) may be motivated to act as a means of fulfilling social obligations and responding to the needs of important others (Markus 2016). For example, in Bolivia, strong integration into social networks and compliance with social norms of reciprocity has been shown to influence the likelihood and intensity of participation in forest and water conservation programmes (Authelet et al. 2021), while participation in Marine Protected Area management in Indonesia has been related to a perceived expectation to participate from peers and community leaders (Gurney et al. 2016). Similarly, a desire to serve their communities was revealed as a key motivating factor for volunteers participating in forest conservation in Cameroon (Ewane 2024). These examples demonstrate that motivational factors can be embedded in social relationships with significant others and are likely to be highly context-specific due to the ways in which social norms define acceptable behaviour, guide action, and reinforce expectations (Schultz et al. 2007). Therefore, understanding motivations requires particular attention to the social setting and the culturally sanctioned view of the self in relation to others (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Empirical studies of motivation for participation in community-based conservation have tended to focus on contexts where biodiversity and livelihoods are inextricably linked, such as the conservation of common pool resources, including forestry and fisheries (e.g. Isyaku 2021; Luswaga 2023), or conservation in and around

protected areas (e.g. Ruiz-Mallén et al. 2015; Gurney et al. 2016; Cetas and Yasué 2017). While these studies have provided crucial insights into motivations for participation, scholars of community-based conservation have paid insufficient attention to contexts where local actors engage in conservation efforts without direct livelihoods benefits. Where the link between biodiversity and livelihoods is less explicit, there are likely to be different motivational factors at play. Furthermore, due to a paucity of long-term studies of participation, the ways in which motivations shift over time remains largely unexplored. The few long-term studies that do exist have relied on indicators to model people's *willingness* to sustain their participation (e.g. Salam et al. 2005; Mazón et al. 2021) or have focused on environmental outcomes rather than the evolution of participation itself (e.g. Charoud et al. 2023). Therefore, there is a need to bring the voices and lived experiences of participants in community-based conservation to the fore. Our study responds to this need through an exploration of the motivations of community 'Conservation Officers' in Tanzania who have participated in a conservation programme for more than two decades. Their conservation efforts have focused on marine turtles, which are a global conservation priority (Wallace et al. 2025), but do not provide direct livelihood benefits. Grounded in the narratives of the Conservation Officers, we demonstrate the risks of over-reliance on economic theories of human action and reveal the diverse human and non-human relationships that can motivate action. Overall, we argue that motivation for sustained participation is rooted in relationality. From this perspective, motivation is not solely produced through individual actions, technical interventions, or fixed outcomes, but emerges from dynamic relationships among nature, people, and place that are inseparable from their specific context (Carstens and Preiser 2024).

We begin with an overview of historical and contemporary theories of motivation and present our case study context and approach to data collection and analysis. We go on to explore the Conservation Officer's initial motivations for participation in community-based marine turtle conservation and reveal how their motivations were sustained over the course of two decades. In bringing our findings together we illustrate and emphasise how relational thinking can further animate our understanding of community-based conservation and provide insights into new ways of engaging people and motivating local stewardship.

THEORIES OF MOTIVATION

Motivation can be defined as *"any internal process that energises, directs, and sustains behaviour"* (Reeve 2016, p.31). Due to the complexities of human behaviour, there has been a long history of scholarship that theorises the biological, psychological, and social processes that influence motivation in a range of contexts. Early theories focused on motivational drives to meet biological and psychological needs (e.g. Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Maslow 1943), while later theories proposed new ways of explaining motivations from a cognitive perspective (e.g. Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura 1986). One of the most well-known theories of motivation, Self-determination Theory (SDT, Deci and Ryan 1985) makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation arises from the interest or enjoyment value of the behaviour itself and is therefore highly autonomous. In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of behaviours to obtain a separable outcome such as material rewards or avoidance of penalties or sanctions. In SDT, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are situated at either end of a continuum of motivation types, characterised by the extent to which the reasons for acting have been internalised and integrated into the sense of self, i.e. valued and accepted as personally important. The theory proposes that integration occurs when an individual's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, leading to a variety of health and wellbeing outcomes (Ryan and Deci 2000). SDT has been applied in a diverse range of settings, including education, sports science, and public health (Bandhu et al. 2024) and is being increasingly recognised as a valuable framework for understanding conservation behaviours (e.g. Cooke et al. 2016; Cetas and Yasué 2017) and for developing conservation programmes that have positive benefits for wellbeing and participation (Smith et al. 2024).

In practice, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation do not operate in isolation. External rewards or incentives that are intended to induce motivation may undermine and reduce intrinsic motivation for participation by disrupting pro-social motivations (Gurney et al. 2016). This phenomenon, known as 'crowding-out', is well documented in biodiversity conservation (see Rode et al. 2015). Concerns about crowding-out of conservation related behaviours have arisen due to the shift towards market-based approaches such as PES (Chan et al. 2017; Cinner et al. 2021). Critics of these approaches argue that they commodify nature and make it challenging to return to values-based conservation if such programmes come to an end (e.g. McCauley 2006; Martin et al. 2008). Adding to this complexity, under some circumstances, external incentives can 'crowd-in' intrinsic motivation through a variety of mechanisms (Akers and Yasué 2019). For example, Lliso et al. (2022) found that motivational crowding-in occurred when PES framing aligned with pre-existing values and relationships with nature. Within an indigenous community, framings

consistent with relational values enhanced motivation for forest conservation, whereas instrumentally framed schemes crowded-in motivations amongst a small-scale farming community. Somerville et al. (2010) found that external incentives crowded-in motivations by improving attitudes towards conservation and increasing social acceptance of conservation measures. In another study, Smith (2018) noted that external incentives, embedded in a collectively designed and locally implemented groundwater commons project, crowded-in motivation by shifting social norms of reciprocity. The application of a pumping fee reduced fears of free-riding and signalled a collective commitment and shared responsibility for conserving water. As these cases demonstrate, fostering motivations for long-term stewardship action requires an in-depth understanding of the 'inner worlds' of local actors as well as their social and cultural context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study context

The United Republic of Tanzania is one of the most biodiversity rich countries in the world (Mittermeier et al. 2011) and approximately 40% of its terrestrial and marine spaces have protected status (Fig. 1). In parallel, approximately 70% of the population is reliant on natural resources for food and livelihoods (World Bank 2019). Decentralisation has been one of the key policy responses to manage dependency related challenges, marking a key departure from the highly centralised system of governance under Tanzania's post-colonial *Ujamaa* policy (Lal 2012). The rights of local resource users are now recognised in fisheries, forestry, and wildlife policies.

Decentralisation led to the uptake of new models of marine resource management (Levine 2002a). Since the 1990's, several Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have been established across mainland Tanzania and the semi-autonomous region of Zanzibar, which incorporate state-led marine parks and reserves, MPAs managed by NGOs and private companies, and locally managed marine areas. Many MPAs are managed as multi-use areas (Katikiro 2016), recognising that coastal communities residing within MPA boundaries are heavily dependent on marine and coastal resources for their income and food security. Managing for multi-use is intended to recognise user rights and provide a mechanism for local participation in MPA management. However, in practice, multi-use MPAs in Tanzania have frequently failed to achieve meaningful participation of coastal residents. Instead, top-down approaches persist (Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Gustavsson et al. 2014; Raycraft 2019), giving rise to power struggles between MPA managers and community members (Levine 2007; Katikiro 2020), as well as active and passive resistance to MPA operations (Mwaipopo 2008; Moshy et al. 2015; Raycraft 2020). Thus, the setting aside of land and seascapes for conservation continues to shape contemporary human-environment relations in Tanzania (Gizachew et al. 2020).

Similar challenges are evident within decentralised fisheries management, which was introduced into policy in 1997 and provided for the establishment of community-based institutions known as Beach Management Units (BMUs). BMUs have the legal mandate for fisheries co-management in partnership with district government authorities and operate at village level. However, BMU establishment is driven by top-down forces, while decision-making is undertaken at ministerial level and enforced by district fisheries departments (Onyango and Jentoft 2010). Furthermore, the dependency of BMUs on external funding agencies raises broader questions about whether marine conservation initiatives in Tanzania are responding to local priorities or to the agendas of external actors (Levine 2002b; Mwanjela and Lokina 2016).

It is within this context that a community-based marine turtle conservation programme was established in 2001 as a partnership between a Tanzanian non-government organisation (NGO) and coastal communities. Exploitation of marine turtles and their eggs occur worldwide and has been a prime cause of population declines, together with bycatch in fisheries, marine pollution, coastal development, and climate change impacts (Wallace et al. 2011). Community-based approaches have been widely adopted as a strategy for conserving marine turtles, with conservation actions at nesting beaches being the most common approach due to their cost-effectiveness in restoring depleted populations compared to at sea conservation efforts (Gjertsen et al. 2014). In Tanzania, green *(Chelonia mydas)* and hawksbill *(Eretmochelys imbricata)* turtles nest at multiple sites along the coast, with up to 500 clutches laid each year (van de Geer et al. 2022). The Tanzania coast is also an important foraging ground and migratory route for green turtles nesting elsewhere in the south-west Indian Ocean region (Bourjea et al. 2013). There are long historical cultural associations between marine turtles and Tanzania's coastal communities (Frazier 1980), with a history of exploitation of hawksbill shell dating back to the first century A.D. However, trade ceased once the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) came into force in 1975. Today, marine turtles and their habitats are protected in Tanzania by national fisheries laws and regulations. However, enforcement is weak (West 2010).

The conservation programme was established in response to high rates of egg harvesting and direct take of

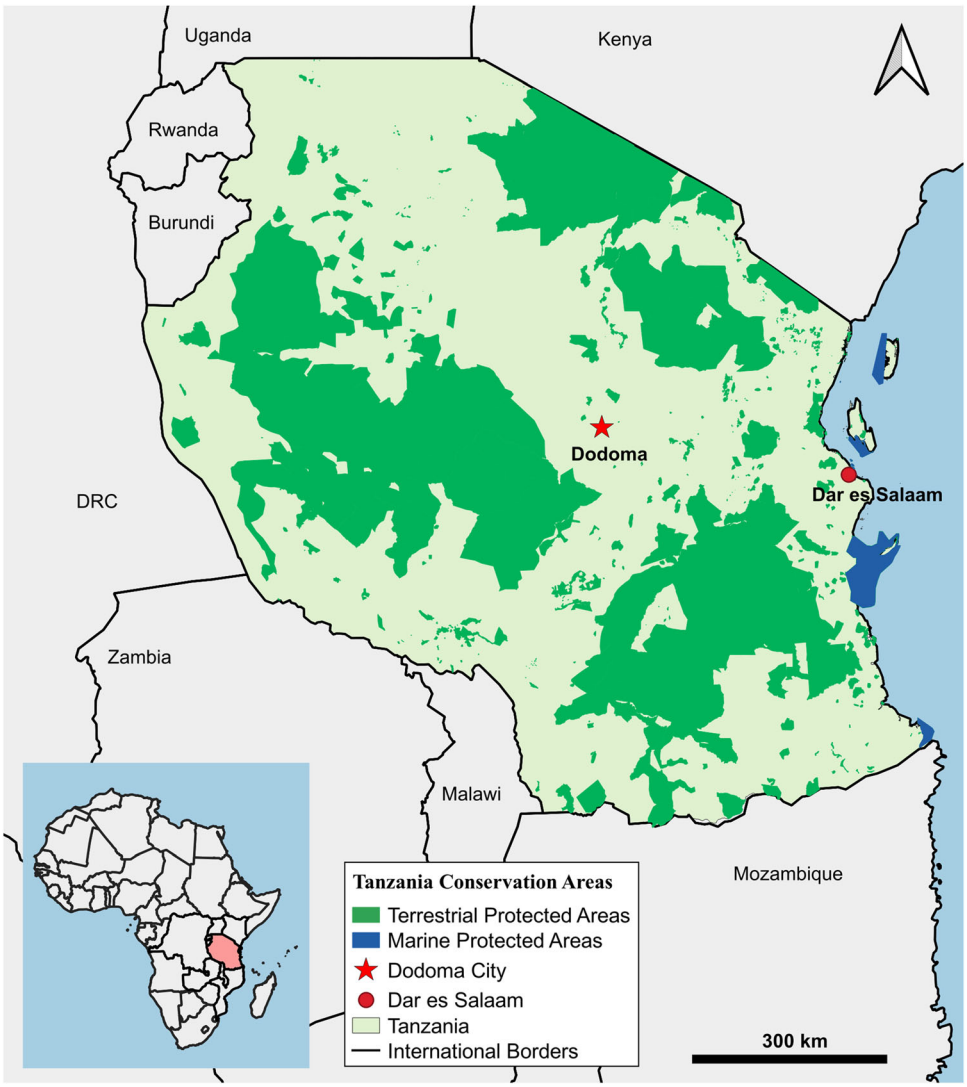

Fig. 1 Location of Tanzania in East Africa and its protected area coverage (UNEP-WCMC 2023)

nesting females within Mafia Island Marine Park. Turtle monitors, known locally as Conservation Officers, were recruited from communities adjacent to turtle nesting beaches and trained in field protocols for monitoring nesting activity and protecting eggs from beach-based threats (West 2017). The programme expanded in 2004, 2006, and 2008 to include additional coastal districts with evidence of marine turtle nesting activity. For more than two decades, Conservation Officers have led marine turtle conservation efforts, participated in marine turtle research, and delivered education and outreach activities in their communities. They received no direct economic benefits for the first two years of their participation but started to receive a small monthly payment as the programme became more established. However, for a period of approximately two years (2014–2015), Conservation Officers received irregular payments due to funding challenges. Despite this, the Conservation Officers continued to participate in marine turtle conservation activities. Hence, we purposefully explored the role of non-monetary factors in motivating initial participation, as well as personal and contextual factors that may have influenced the nature and extent of their ongoing participation over the past two decades.

Data collection

Five coastal districts were selected for inclusion in the study (Fig. 2), based on the longevity of the community-based marine turtle conservation programme in these areas. The programme was first established in Mafia District in 2001 and expanded into Kilwa and Kibiti in 2004 and into Mkuranga and Kigamboni in 2006. All 22 Conservation Officers residing in these districts were invited to

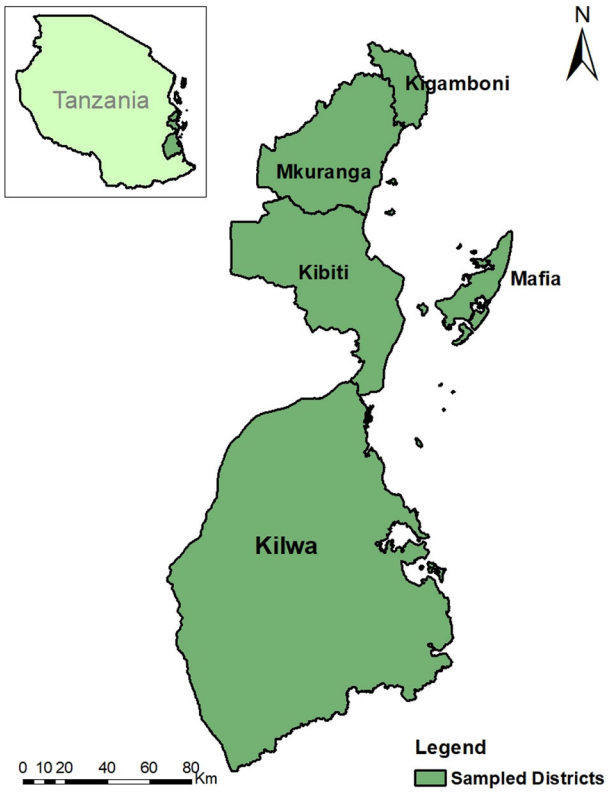

Fig 2 Location of five coastal districts included in the study

participate in semi-structured interviews due to their direct participation in the marine turtle conservation programme over an extended time period. The selected Conservation Officers were identified via the NGO. Years of participation ranged from 6 to 20 years (mean: 16 yrs). Participants were all male and aged between 33 and 68 years (mean: 50 yrs). All were native to the village where they were working, except one who had moved to his village 17 years earlier due to family connections. Of the 22 participants, 18 were engaged in small-scale fishing, three were subsistence farmers, and one was involved in small-scale trading (Table S1, Supplementary Information).

Data were collected by two Tanzanian research assistants experienced in social science methods. In advance of field data collection, the research assistants held meetings with district administrators and village chairpersons at each location to explain the research aims and objectives. The role of the Conservation Officers as research participants was stated explicitly, to ensure that permissions were secured in an open and transparent manner.

We used an interview guide (Table S2, Supplementary Information) that included a series of open-ended questions and associated probes: Section 1: Life before becoming a Conservation Officer; Section 2: Experiences of being a Conservation Officer; and Section 3: The Conservation Officer and his community. The interview guide was pre-tested with three Conservation Officers to assess the flow of questions, detect errors in cross-cultural language relevance and word ambiguity, and identify questions that may be unclear to the participants. Subsequently, minor changes to the questions related to the concept of 'self-perception' and 'social identity' were made and an additional question related to the roles of the Conservation Officers was added. Questions were deliberately framed around the conservation of 'marine wildlife' to capture experiences related to both marine turtles and dugongs *(Dugong dugon)*. The interview transcripts from the pre-testing stage were included in the analysis.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in June 2021. Prior to the start of the interviews, each Conservation Officer was issued with a Participant Information Sheet (PIS), which outlined the research aims and objectives, included information about the expected duration of the interview and the types of questions that would be asked, and provided guidance if a participant wanted to avoid answering a particular question or if they wanted to terminate the interview. The PIS also included the name and contact number of a member of the research team as well as the Executive Director of the local NGO so that they could raise any concerns about the research or their participation. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (written) was obtained before the interviews commenced. To uphold respect for the right to privacy and confidentiality, none of the participants were asked to disclose personal details at any point in the study. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim by trained researchers, and then translated from Kiswahili to English by a bilingual translator with experience in qualitative research. A subset of transcripts was cross-checked independently by a second translator to ensure fidelity. Anonymised transcripts were shared with the first author for analysis.

Data analysis

We constructed themes that portrayed the Conservation Officer's motivations for participation in marine turtle conservation following the six-phase approach to Thematic Analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). We utilised a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive codes related to the concept of relational values were developed *a priori* and focused on seven features of relational values identified by Chan et al. (2016): cultural identity, social cohesion, social responsibility, moral responsibility to non-humans, individual identity, stewardship eudiamonic, and stewardship principle. We chose to explore relational values because of the links between values and motivation identified in the literature, and because Conservation Officers had initially participated

without economic incentives, which suggested that non-material values were being expressed. Additional codes relevant to the study were generated inductively. Initial coding was undertaken by the first author and reviewed by a second member of the research team. Queries were addressed through iterative discussions that focused on exploring interpretations of the data and revealing implicit assumptions. Codes were also revisited to clarify code definitions and boundaries. Coding was conducted in NVivo (version 1.3) software.

Researcher positionality

The first author was responsible for leading the research. She is a white British woman with an interdisciplinary academic background (marine biology and marine social sciences). Prior to her career in academia, she worked in marine and terrestrial biodiversity conservation in the public and NGO sectors. The co-authors are two female Tanzanian research consultants who specialise in qualitative research in community development and public health, and a white British male scholar whose research expertise lies in the social and cultural dimensions of natural resource management.

During the period 2006–2018, the first author lived and worked in Tanzania. For some of this period, she held the position of Executive Director of the NGO that established the marine turtle conservation programme. Therefore, she came to the research with prior knowledge and understanding of the context in which community-based marine turtle conservation takes place, as well as an emotional connection to the research participants. The research idea developed from many years of working alongside coastal communities in Tanzania and a genuine desire to better understand why people make the choices and decisions they do in relation to their environment. The first author's experiences in Tanzania deepened her understanding of the legacies of fortress conservation, the power dynamics that play out via global conservation policies, and the frequent characterisation of local actors as the cause of environmental degradation. She links these experiences directly to her decision to study the social and cultural dimensions of community-based conservation.

The first author's positionality influenced different aspects of the research process, including the design of interview questions, which included some inherent assumptions, and the initial stages of data analysis due to her sensitisation to certain dimensions of the data. Understanding the responsibilities that come with interpreting other people's words, she practiced reflexivity throughout all stages of the research as a way of identifying these assumptions and responses, and for monitoring their impact. Her reflexive practices enabled her to stay vigilant but also use her emotions as a way of understanding the Conservation Officer's world. This vigilance was checked periodically with the co-authors who had no prior knowledge of or contact with the research participants or the local NGO.

Research ethics

The research was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee, School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent (Ref. No. 4-PGR-20/21) prior to any data collection. A research permit (No. 2021-206-NA-2021-54) was secured from the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), and a letter of approval was obtained from the Prime Minister's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government.

To remain attentive to power dynamics and avoid influencing participant responses, it was agreed that the identity of the first author would not be disclosed to the research participants. Instead, they were issued with the name and contact numbers of other members of the research team so that they could raise any concerns about the research or their participation. This decision was made with the intention of enhancing participant autonomy rather than limiting transparency. Importantly, non-disclosure of the first author's name did not compromise informed consent. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, the voluntary basis of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

The study was designed and funded solely by the first author to ensure there were no conflicts of interest with the NGO, their funding agencies, or sponsoring organisations. During the planning and design stages, details of the research were not disclosed to the staff, Executive Director, or Advisory Board members of the NGO to ensure that the research was not influenced by organisational priorities or interests. The Tanzanian research assistants had no previous relationship with the first author.

RESULTS

Initial motivations for participation are driven by value congruence

Conservation Officers were initially motivated to participate in marine turtle conservation because the goals of the programme (protecting the ocean, the local environment, and marine biodiversity) aligned with their existing instrumental, moral, bequest, and relational values. The Conservation Officers described different aspects of their lives, including their livelihoods and food security, as

being inextricably linked to the ocean. Their experiences of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss triggered instrumental concerns as they recognised the potential impacts on their friends, families, and wider social networks who relied on fisheries-based livelihoods. One Conservation Officer described how he felt compelled to apply for the position:

> *"If we don't protect the environment, it will mean death. When this* [opportunity] *came up, I decided to dive inside and fight a bit. I used to say, if I can, I will get inside. I compared the kind of fish we used to have then and the kind of fish we have now and the number of people, and I said we are going to face challenges".* [Interview #20]

The goals of the marine turtle conservation programme aligned with the Conservation Officer's moral values, which were expressed in terms of a perceived responsibility to care for marine turtles. These values were guided in part by a belief that marine turtles are equal to humans because they are living beings with the same needs for survival, *"That was among the things that made me take this job. I was thinking, "This is a living thing, and I am also a living thing. Why don't I defend my fellow?"* [Interview #22]. Several of the Conservation Officers referred back to the times when trade and consumption of marine turtle meat was commonplace in their communities and described feelings of distress and pity at the sight of marine turtles being publicly slaughtered for their meat and oil, despite that most of the Conservation Officers had themselves consumed turtle meat in their youth, *"If you went to a slaughtering area, you would see them taking a knife, putting it upside down and splitting it. It would make you feel so much pity. You can shed tears"* [Interview #19]. Identifying with marine turtles in this way generated feelings of empathy and concern and a desire to alleviate their suffering by participating in conservation.

During the interviews, the Conservation Officers talked extensively about the importance of conserving biodiversity for the benefit of future generations, indicating the existence of bequest values. They believed that they had inherited a healthy marine environment from their ancestors, who had taken care of it for the generations coming after them. They felt a responsibility to participate out of respect for their ancestors, but also out of fear that their children and grandchildren might never see or experience marine turtles without concerted conservation efforts. The Conservation Officers talked about their youth when another marine species, the dugong, was sighted regularly in coastal waters. However, dugongs are now extremely rare in Tanzania due to decades of subsistence hunting. One Conservation Officer reflected on the prospect of his children having to travel far to see a dugong, stating *"That pains me a lot"* [Interview #10] and feared the same fate for marine turtles, knowing that they had also been harvested for generations. Hence, the loss of marine biodiversity was not something that they had been told, it was real to them.

Most of the Conservation Officers had been born and raised in the coastal community where they were conducting their marine turtle conservation activities and had also married and raised their own families there. Hence, they had a strong sense of place, which was formed and maintained through meaning-based and practice-based ties. These place-based relational values were reinforced by the fact that marine turtles also share an attachment to place (i.e. they return to the same nesting site over multiple nesting seasons). This aspect of marine turtle behaviour created a clear connection between marine turtles and their village, *"They* [marine turtles] *will go far but they will come back there. So when you eat a* [name of village] *marine turtle, you harm the environment there and I was very pained by that. That's why I was motivated in order to protect these living things".* [Interview #21].

The Conservation Officer's place attachment contributed to their sense of personal competence for the role because they were able to draw on their knowledge of the local environment, *"I applied when they announced in the village because I am a fisherman and I have been to different coasts. I have seen these animals* [marine turtles] *and I understand their environment".* [Interview #01]. They also referred to the fact that they knew and understood the behaviours of the people in their communities, which gave them a feeling of *"knowing where to start"* [Interview #06] with tackling some of the threats to marine turtles. The Conservation Officers also believed that as a resident of the village they would be more easily accepted into the role compared to someone from outside the local area, *"I went to school at that village. So, people from that village know me as a humble person and he doesn't quarrel with anyone. That acted as a motivation".* [Interview #02]. These perceptions of personal competency reflected the Conservation Officer's agency in deciding to apply for the position. Although they were invited into a pre-defined participatory space by a conservation NGO, they had complete autonomy over their initial decision to participate, even though some of them experienced pressure from their peers to reject the opportunity so as to avoid interference with trade and consumption practices. Thus, value alignment reinforced their internal beliefs about the importance of marine conservation and contributed to feelings of personal competency. Combined with recognition of their own agency and autonomy, value alignment generated intrinsic motivation to participate at the outset of the programme.

Sustained motivation is rooted in relationships with others

At the time of the interviews, most of the Conservation Officers had been participating in marine turtle conservation for more than two decades. While the scope of their participation remained largely unchanged, motivational drivers had evolved and become increasingly relational as their participation progressed.

Through their practice of care, the Conservation Officers developed strong relational ties with marine turtles. Several Conservation Officers recounted stories that exemplified how seriously they took their responsibilities, including one who admitted to sleeping at the beach while a turtle nested so they could escort it back to the ocean safely. The Conservation Officers recalled these actions fondly and did not regard them as extreme actions or expect any personal reward from them. Instead, they were actions taken out of genuine compassion and concern, *"They are living beings just like us. They need to live, to breathe, and eat like normal beings. So, it is like when you harm them, it's like you are harming me"*. [Interview #9]. As well as caring for individual turtles, Conservation Officers understood the broader ecological value of marine turtles, including their role in maintaining the structure of coral reefs and seagrass meadows that support inshore fisheries, *"When these creatures are there, the fish will be there. It is a very important thing"*. [Interview #19]. An understanding of the interdependencies between people and nature encouraged their practice of care and contributed to sustaining their motivation.

Strong relational ties with marine turtles underpinned the construction of a stewardship identity, which was evidenced by the way the Conservation Officers described their marine turtle conservation work, *"Now that thing* [being a Conservation Officer] *is already in my blood. Today if I see a marine turtle there dead, my heart aches. I don't care if I'm going to be paid or not, this job is already in my soul"*. [Interview #11]. The Conservation Officers found meaning in their stewardship identity because it increased their confidence and feelings of competency and self-worth, *"That knowledge you receive to conserve the endangered creatures helps you understand how the world is and how to live"*. [Interview #02]. Furthermore, participation in marine turtle conservation had enabled new friendships to develop. The Conservation Officers made regular phone calls to greet each other and to inquire about the wellbeing of their families. They also provided a place to stay if a Conservation Officer was visiting from outside the local area. A shared stewardship identity and the close bonds that formed through the practice of caring for marine turtles were a valued source of motivation to continue their participation.

Public acknowledgement of the Conservation Officer's stewardship identity signalled that their conservation work was accepted by their communities, *"Doing this job alone is a representation of me to the community, for the villagers and other people. It represents me"*. [Interview #10]. A desire to nurture community relations motivated the Conservation Officers as they understood that without local support it would be impossible for them to undertake their work. They made special efforts to protect valued social relations and turn conservation participation into an opportunity for community-building, *"I cannot quarrel with anyone. If I take someone to the village government or the authorities, I will follow them after some days to ask them to let it go and forgive each other"*. [Interview #05]. The Conservation Officers took advantage of strong social connections in their communities and believed that their efforts had contributed to increased social cohesion around the issue of marine turtle conservation, *"If we build these people well, then there is no problem. So, one of the things that I am happy about is that we are really together with the people in the community"*. [Interview #03]. The fact that many members of their communities had become allies in the pursuit of marine turtle conservation goals was a source of great pride. Social acceptance generated feelings of connectedness to their community and reinforced a sense of belonging. It offered the Conservation Officers reason to believe that they were working towards a shared goal, which gave meaning and purpose to their daily routines of patrolling beaches and seeking to influence social norms around trade and consumption of marine turtles:

> *"The thing that I've done can be seen in the community, that's my biggest happiness. What I've done can be seen in the community and is accepted in the community. The animals that were disappearing are coming back and the people are accepting of this, and so for me I'm happy"*. [Interview #03]

The Conservation Officers had earned the trust and respect of their wider communities. The monthly conservation payments enabled the Conservation Officers to access credit at local shops because shop owners deemed them to be trustworthy for repayment at the end of each month. As well as contributing to their material wellbeing, a regular monthly income provided an opportunity to contribute to community development projects more generously:

> *"Our village is very small, so I talk to everyone. We meet at the football pitch. Although we are not playing but we mobilise the teams and even ask for donations. They will tell me 'Mr. Conservation Officer, we are collecting 1,000 shilling donations!' I contribute 5,000 shillings because I'm a big person*

now. I can't donate 1,000 shillings. So, they become very happy". [Interview #09]

The trust and respect that they gained was attributed to the environmental education they had received and the subsequent perception of them as environmental knowledge holders. The Conservation Officers took advantage of different opportunities and spaces to discuss conservation issues with their peers and placed extremely high value on these interactions as a mechanism for social learning:

"I feel respected because for now, when I go down to the coast, people know that the person coming here is a Conservation Officer. This is because we have spoken to fishermen about conservation issues. So when I go there, they respect me, and they know who I am. It's different from the past when I was just a fisherman". [Interview #07].

The Conservation Officers viewed their environmental knowledge as a tool for persuasion and negotiation, rather than as a way of demonstrating dominance and superiority, and frequently referred to the need for humility when interacting with members of their community:

"As one person, you cannot do it alone without educating the community, loving the community, and making them your friends. If you are harsh, they won't tell you anything. You have to love them, involve them, and involve yourself in other village activities. That's how it's supposed to be, and you will be given a lot of information. You cannot be given anything if you brag about yourself because you are the Conservation Officer". [Interview #02].

Gaining trust and respect from their communities motivated ongoing participation because it enhanced their social status and generated additional opportunities to engage in civic life. Conservation Officers were commonly approached for advice from their peers on a diverse range of topics. One Conservation Officer reported that he was regularly asked by a village savings group to provide advice on financial matters, while another described being approached for advice on community development projects such as the construction of a village dispensary. Several Conservation Officers had been elected to other local leadership positions in village governments and BMUs, while external actors sought their participation in academic research and peer-to-peer capacity building programmes. These opportunities facilitated the formation of new alliances, including with actors in positions of authority such as police officers and district officials. One of the Conservation Officers acknowledged that relationships with authorities could not have been established without his reputation as a local conservation leader:

"The fact that I could get the police to work with me in the patrol duties made people understand me, that if they didn't do what they are required to, I had other means to make sure that they do so. So that made me very popular, and I am thankful. If I was not in [the role] *I don't think if I could have been that popular".* [Interview #07]

The Conservation Officer's desire to maintain their elevated social status and new relational ties acted as a strong motivational driver for sustained participation so they could avoid being "just a fisherman" [Interview #07] again. Without their social status and ties to authorities, they feared a widespread return to traditional practices (trade and consumption of marine turtles), which would be unbearable for them to witness, *"The village will be behind again on conservation matters, and that is why I am fighting. With or without* [payment] *I must be there".* [Interview #12]. Their fears were driven by periodic acts of resistance to marine turtle conservation, which manifested in the continuation of a banned practice, i.e. covert trade and consumption of marine turtle meat, as well as direct acts of aggression towards the Conservation Officers, including verbal abuse and threats of violence. Several of the Conservation Officers admitted that relationships with some people in their village had completely broken down since they took on the Conservation Officer role. However, they were very pragmatic about the resistance they faced and accepted that it was not possible to change the behaviour of everyone in their community. They acknowledged the performative nature of their role, which required them to act in a friendly and humble manner, despite the hostility they faced, *"You can laugh with them every day, but they are not happy with you. You cannot win the hearts of everyone in the village. It is impossible. There has to be people who hate you internally".* [Interview #09]. Conservation Officers recounted experiences of being questioned about their views on the harvesting of marine turtles as a means of assessing the likely response to resistance. Some fishers made persistent inquiries about why they were not allowed to harvest marine turtles, while others tried to negotiate a harvesting quota. Despite these tests of their commitment, the Conservation Officers believed that they had a responsibility to persevere with their efforts and reduce the risk of people returning to traditional practices:

"There are also challenges where you find a turtle has been slaughtered when they were going to lay their eggs. You can also quarrel with people who use bad words towards you when they say 'you are prohibiting us from eating marine turtles'. It will be like this and that, so you just face them, and life continues". [Interview #06]

There was recognition amongst all Conservation Officers that changing the attitudes of people who harvested marine turtles opportunistically was more straightforward than changing the attitudes and behaviours of people that were deeply attached to their traditional practices. They understood that their work was interpreted by some to be a restriction of the rights of coastal people to exploit marine biodiversity. Resistance to giving up traditional practices was also assumed to be a result of negative feelings towards the Conservation Officers themselves, which they attributed to envy of their income from conservation work. They shared experiences of people deliberately littering the beach with marine turtle carcasses and carapaces to demonstrate that marine turtle meat consumption was ongoing and to make it visible to others that the Conservation Officers could not control it. The Conservation Officers felt that this public act of resistance jeopardised their reputation and risked them losing their position as a Conservation Officer.

The perceived risk of return to traditional practices was exacerbated by inadequate political support for their work. The Conservation Officers depended on support from authorities to enforce laws prohibiting marine turtle meat consumption, yet some village and ward councillors and BMU leaders were reported to be involved in trading marine turtle meat. Two of the Conservation Officers had experienced pressure from village leaders to step down from their position so that traditional practices could continue, *"I have recently met one person who has told me "You have now worked for 15 years, and the councillor is planning to influence the members of the town council to get you out of this position"*. [Interview #18]. The Conservation Officers acknowledged the difficulties involved in trying to change behaviours and emphasised the importance of building trust as a way of gathering support for marine turtle conservation and changing social norms around trade and consumption. They described it as a long, slow, and challenging process that required a long-term commitment.

DISCUSSION

Understanding what motivates people to participate in conservation is essential for the design of conservation programmes that prioritise the values, needs, and interests of rural communities (Bennett et al. 2017). However, the mixed outcomes of community-based conservation suggest a disconnect between policies that are designed to encourage participation and the motivations of local actors. Our study reveals the complex and temporally dynamic nature of motivational processes amongst long-term participants in a community-based conservation programme. Initially, Conservation Officers were motivated to participate because the goals of the programme were aligned with their self-held values and they experienced feelings of personal competence, which generated autonomous motivation to act. Motivations were sustained over time as their experiences of participation became entangled in relationships with nature, people, and place and the multi-dimensional (material, subjective, relational) wellbeing outcomes that these relationships produced. Positive and valued relationships emerged through their practice of care for marine turtles and through increased social cohesion and cooperation on conservation issues. The accrual of these positive relational benefits was countered by experiences of personal conflict and social tensions arising from resistance to their conservation efforts, yet these hostilities appeared to reinforce their commitment to the role. Thus, we conceptualise motivation as a relational and continually unfolding process rather than a purely static, cognitive phenomenon.

The Conservation Officer's initial motivations for participation were largely personal and value driven and can be understood within the framework of Self-determination Theory in which needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met in order to drive intrinsically motivated behaviour (Deci and Ryan 2000). The Conservation Officer's need for autonomy was met through control over their initial decision to participate and because they were acting in accordance with personal values (instrumental, moral, bequest, and relational), while value congruence contributed to feelings of competence. Relatedness refers to a sense of belonging and connection to others. Here, we extend the concept of relatedness to include non-human others and argue that a need for relatedness was met through the practice of care for marine turtles and place. By meeting these needs, participation in marine turtle conservation was internalised as a self-valued pursuit. Motivations that originate from within the self are associated with personal growth and wellbeing outcomes (Smith et al. 2024), as well as persistence, despite the presence of obstacles or barriers (Lee et al. 2022).

Over the course of their participation, the Conservation Officer's practice of care for marine turtles deepened into a relationship based on reciprocity, whereby the Conservation Officers cared for marine turtles and the turtles became a source of subjective and relational wellbeing. These wellbeing outcomes played a key role in sustaining motivation and were co-produced through the Conservation Officer's interactions with the ocean ecosystem (Fish et al. 2016b). The ocean was perceived not only as a source of subsistence and economic activity, but also as integral to their individual stewardship identity and their cultural identity as Swahili coastal people. This embodied relationship with the seascape was continually reaffirmed by

the rhythms of nature, visible in the annual emergence of marine turtles onto the shores of valued places. Thus, the interplay between instrumental and relational values (Riechers et al. 2025) was evident in their conservation work, reflecting the dynamic relationships between people, place, and nature. Reciprocal human-nature relations act as a strong motivational force for stewardship (Ojeda et al. 2022) and are aligned with indigenous worldviews where nature is both a care giver and a care receiver (Jax et al. 2018). Viewed through this lens, conservation participation is a meaningful practice, rather than one that is characterised by burden and personal sacrifice. The construction of a stewardship identity and reciprocal ties to marine turtles may explain why the Conservation Officers were not deterred by the disruption to direct conservation payments. In fact, it is possible that financial uncertainties may have prevented crowding-out of intrinsic motivations because they enhanced the Conservation Officer's feelings of control and autonomy over their behaviour. Continuing to participate in the absence of payments may also have been an intentional act to send signals to their communities that rewards are not a pre-requisite for participation in conservation. Underhill (2016) notes that incentives and rewards can disrupt information signals about the value of a task, which may diminish social capital if it signals to others that moral or social responsibilities are less important than financial rewards. In practice, the mechanisms for motivational crowding are context-specific, with the social meaning attached to an incentive likely to differ amongst populations and cultures (Rode et al. 2015).

Over time, the need for relatedness extended into the social sphere. The Conservation Officers developed a strong sense of responsibility to each other, with the Conservation Officer network evolving into a community of practice based on common interest, shared work, and mutual support (Wenger et al. 2002). Public support, exemplified by community members reporting nesting turtles and eggs at risk of subsistence harvesting, took considerable time and effort to secure, but further solidified the perception of shared routines and collective challenges, fostering trust and mutual recognition and gradually embedding the Conservation Officers within a social collective. Acts of public support and the social validation of their stewardship identity became increasingly salient for the Conservation Officers, playing a pivotal role in sustaining long-term motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000; Chan et al. 2016). Our findings suggest that, for this group, the need for relatedness may have been a more important motivational driver than needs for autonomy or competency. Emerging research with Indigenous communities also suggests the importance of relatedness, while autonomy needs are thought to be more important in individualistic cultures (Winkler-Schor et al. 2025), further highlighting the role of social and cultural context in driving motivation for participation.

The Conservation Officers perceived an increase in their social status, which was a valued although unexpected benefit of participation and contributed to their subjective wellbeing. They were motivated to maintain their status due to the scope for influence that it provided, both in terms of meeting their personal goals and interests, as well as the perceived interests of their communities. To achieve their goals, the Conservation Officers mobilised their resources of knowledge and access as social power, but also relied on more subtle tactics of persuasion, negotiation, and alliance building as a means of reconstituting social norms around marine turtle trade and consumption. Thus, the Conservation Officer's social power can be viewed in a relational sense, in that it was bound up in social interactions rather than a property of the Conservation Officers themselves. This interpretation is aligned with a Foucauldian approach to power, whereby power is relational and only exists when it is enacted through interactions amongst actors with differing capacities to act (Foucault 1982). Discussions of power in community-based conservation usually focus on relationships between communities and state actors, yet the impacts of implicit forms of power on the practice and outcomes of conservation are less understood (Quimby and Levine 2018). Here, we conclude that participation in conservation can create a valued source of social power. While this power is at risk of misuse, it can also be a vital resource for sustaining motivation since a positive perception of one's own social standing relative to others can contribute to wellbeing (Navarro-Carrillo et al. 2020).

Achieving wellbeing outcomes for local actors is a major goal of global conservation policy (McKinnon et al. 2016), and there is often an emphasis on material wellbeing outcomes as a means of motivating participation. However, our study shows that subjective and relational wellbeing outcomes were also important motivational drivers for the Conservation Officers and that the three wellbeing dimensions (material, subjective, and relational) are interrelated, making clear separation both conceptually and practically difficult, if not problematic. Coastal communities are characterised by a complex set of social relations, which are frequently based on obligation, reciprocity, dependency, or support (Jentoft 2020). These kinds of social relations may explain why the Conservation Officers viewed their material wellbeing in a relational sense by referring to the benefits it provided to others. This conclusion is consistent with work by Baker et al. (2021) and Wilson Fadiji et al. (2021) who found that wellbeing arising from the fulfilment of individual needs extended into the social sphere. The relational benefits that the Conservation Officer's material wellbeing generated could

also explain why their intrinsic motivation was not crowded out by the direct conservation payments.

Managing the risk of traditional practices becoming more widespread generated a strong source of motivation for the Conservation Officers to continue participating in marine turtle conservation. Prior to the establishment of the programme, there were no measures in place to restrict access to turtle meat and eggs, and hence, historically, marine turtles were not a source of local tensions. However, since taking up the role, the Conservation Officers experienced repeated acts of resistance that were consistent with the everyday resistance described by Scott (1985), in that the acts were frequently opportunistic and designed to avoid direct confrontation with the Conservation Officers, while testing the limits of their conservation practices as well as their authority. Subtle forms of everyday resistance have been observed elsewhere (e.g. Clements et al. 2013; Mukono and Faustine Sambaiga 2022), and contrast with more overt acts such as property damage (e.g. Campbell 2002) and vandalism (e.g. Raycraft 2020). Resistance to conservation presents a specific set of problems for community-based approaches due to the strong family and social networks that often characterise local communities. Rule-breaking by local leaders also sends signals to the wider community that resistance is tolerated. Rohe et al. (2017) noted that valued social relationships often constrained reporting of infringements, although in this study, several of the Conservation Officers indicated that they reported non-compliance regardless of their social relationships with offenders. While the persistent harvesting of marine turtles, experiences of personal abuse, and attempts to remove some Conservation Officers from their positions did not appear to negatively impact their autonomous motivation, these actions highlight the complex micropolitics that underpin the practice of community-based conservation (Wilshusen 2009). They also expose the performative nature of participation, whereby motivation is generated through performances of cooperation, conflict, and negotiation.

The motives for resistance to marine turtle conservation were unclear but could be related to a perception of unequal costs and benefits of conservation, which frequently accrue at the individual level (Cooney et al. 2017). The dynamic nature of coastal communities in Tanzania, shaped by historical patterns of in and out migration, may also contribute to local resistance. Newcomers may not feel bound by existing agreements, while shared conservation norms and values become harder to maintain amid ongoing societal change. Protected area restrictions, amplified by the legacy of colonial exclusion, have also hindered the social acceptance of community-based approaches (Katikiro et al. 2015). Dominant conservation narratives commonly interpret resistance and conflict as symptoms of knowledge gaps or coordination problems, framing them as obstacles to implementation that can be addressed through enforcement, incentives, or behaviour-change interventions. Such framings tend to depoliticise conflict, recasting it as a technical challenge amenable to better planning, participation, or communication, rather than a response to injustices arising from unequal power relations, or as meaningful expressions of agency or contested values. For example, it could be argued that upholding cultural traditions that involve turtle meat consumption is part of living a meaningful life, a core element of relational values (Chan et al. 2016), yet these relational values were a source of tension and conflict because they contrasted sharply with the relational values of the Conservation Officers. Hence, recognising conflict as relational can create space for more inclusive and adaptive approaches to conservation practice.

In our study, Conservation Officers participated in a conservation programme that was largely decoupled from local livelihoods. In contexts where livelihoods depend directly on the resource being conserved, motivational processes may differ, particularly at the outset when instrumental concerns such as access, risk, and potential short-term losses are being considered. However, because collective action is a central feature of community-based conservation (Berkes 2007), we suggest that motivational processes in livelihood-dependent contexts are also likely to be relationally embedded, with responsibility to community members, care for shared places, and trust and reciprocity within social networks playing an important role in shaping motivations. Nevertheless, these processes may be more sensitive to the inequitable distribution of conservation costs and benefits due to the material vulnerabilities they can create. Sustained motivation in such contexts may be contingent on the perceived compatibility between conservation and livelihood objectives, as well as on the social relationships that support relatedness need satisfaction and generate wellbeing outcomes.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

All research participants were male, reflecting the absence of women from formal Conservation Officer roles in the five target districts at the time of the study. This is likely attributable to structural barriers, including safety concerns associated with remote beach patrols and gendered divisions in seascape use (de la Torre-Castro et al. 2017), rather than a lack of motivation. Hence, the findings should be understood as specific to men occupying a formal conservation role.

The study is also subject to survivorship bias, as all participants remained engaged in the programme for more than two decades. Since 2001, approximately 20

Conservation Officers have ceased in their role in the five districts, most through retirement or restructuring, with only one voluntary resignation and two formal suspensions. The findings should therefore be interpreted as illustrative of sustained participation amongst a highly committed group, rather than representative of all participants or of motivations for community-based conservation more generally.

The possibility of social desirability bias cannot be ruled out, as Conservation Officers may have overstated feelings of connection to marine turtles or levels of community support. While the research design incorporated measures to reduce this risk, including non-disclosure of the first author's identity to participants and the use of independent research assistants, the findings rely on self-reported accounts. The first author's positionality, discussed above, represents a further limitation that reflexivity cannot fully resolve. Although emotional responses were understood not only as a potential source of bias but also as a valuable analytical resource that enriched the interpretive process, the risk remains that prior relationships with the Conservation Officers and the NGO may have inclined the analysis towards interpretations that emphasise intrinsic and relational motivations.

CONCLUSION

Through our account of a community-based marine turtle conservation programme in Tanzania, we have sought to demonstrate the complex array of factors, including values, identities, autonomy, agency, power, and relationships that play a decisive role in either motivating initial engagement or sustaining long-term participation in conservation. The Conservation Officer's motivations changed over the course of two decades of participation, and their motivational processes became consistently dominated by stories of relationships with others, both human and non-human. A relational perspective allows us to view motivations as socially constructed through meaningful relationships (Eyster et al. 2023) and tempers understandings of participation as primarily, if not exclusively, reducible to economic factors. Attending to relationality demonstrates how participation is often motivated by the desire to maintain valued relationships, foregrounding the role of trust, reciprocity, care, and collective responsibility in sustaining participation over time. As such, relational approaches shift analytical focus from isolated behaviours and rationalities to the social and relational conditions through which stewardship practices are enacted and sustained.

The Conservation Officer's practice of care co-existed with ongoing harvesting of marine turtles, indicating the presence of diverse values of nature amongst members of coastal communities in Tanzania. With these insights, our research contributes to current debates about the importance of providing pluralistic accounts of values in decision-making in support of a more inclusive and socially just approach (see IPBES 2022). A logical extension of the arguments advanced here involves a deeper interrogation of the social and cultural processes through which motivations for conservation participation are not only formed but continuously constructed. Furthermore, structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequity require specific attention in studies of motivational processes. We suggest that such dynamics are best illuminated through concerted engagement with personal life histories, which offer access to the relational and temporal dimensions of motivation as they unfold across the shifting terms of lived experience.

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Data availability The data that support the findings of this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest. The first author's relationship with the marine turtle conservation programme has been declared in the researcher's positionality statement.

Ethical approval The research was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee, School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent (Ref. No. 4-PGR-20/21) prior to any data collection.

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