Episode 101: Ian E. Munanura

# KL: Katie Linder

# IM: Ian Munanura

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode one hundred and one.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I’m joined by Dr. Ian E. Munanura, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society at Oregon State University. He earned a Doctorate in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at Clemson University in South Carolina. Ian also earned a Master of Science degree in Tourism and Wildlife Conservation from the University of Kent in the United Kingdom. He teaches courses on ecotourism and sustainable communities, sustainable tourism planning, and a study abroad course on international perspectives of ecotourism and political ecology. His scholarship seeks to identify the human resilience and wellbeing constraints, which could create livelihood vulnerability, human dependence on forest resources for livelihoods, and loss of biodiversity. He also seeks to identify the potential of community-based tourism to mitigate human resilience and wellbeing constraints, which could influence biodiversity loss. His geographical area of scholarship interest is the Pacific Northwest, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. Previously, Dr. Munanura has worked in Rwanda as a field project director and country director for the Wildlife Conservation Society. He also led a $5 million project funded by the US Agency for International Development in Rwanda, designed to integrate and promote sustainable tourism, biodiversity conservation, human health, and economic development.

Thanks for joining me in the studio today, Ian.

**IM:** It’s a pleasure to be here.

**KL**: So I am really interested in your work on ecotourism. But I thought we should first start with a definition. Because some of your listeners might not know exactly what it is. What is ecotourism?

**IM**: Well tourism, the definition of ecotourism is not universally accepted. Everybody you see in literature we have different definitions of tourism and they are not all um convergent, because we have from earlier on we thought ecotourism is about environment. So some people define it as an environmental travel where you go to natural areas and enjoy them. So it’s a tour that actual is designed around natural areas, that is you know tourist that is managed for the environment that contributes towards the preservation of the environment. That is educative to the traveler, the traveler goes to these natural areas for travel then comes back educated about the environment. But over the years people have incorporated the human dimension to the environment and actual it’s a tourism were these travelers go to these natural areas or destinations. And in additional to contributing to the environment they also contribute towards the economic and social world, being what this community is. So that is a tourism that integrates host communities with the traveler as well as the natural areas. That attract those travelers so the most current definition of tourism integrates those three aspects. Tourism or traveling actually it is the traveling to learn about the environment and places they visit. But at the same time tourism that constitutes towards the social and economic world being of those communities that they visit. Hardly what the tourism promotes of that or those resources that they visit. In brief those are three areas that make up ecotourism, the ways to define currently.

**KL**: So I am wondering if you could give an example or something that would be like an ecotour. If someone was going to go and participate in this.

**IM**: So an ecotour would be you know like going traveling for an overnight travel to a region in say Africa. And you go there to a destination I come from Rwanda we have mountain gorillas an ecotourist would go to Rwanda to visit mountain gorillas. That’s an attraction based on nature right? But around that natural area you have community that live near this resource so that links you now in addition to the mountain gorillas you visited the communities that are in that protect that lead with this wildlife species. So you know when you travel and spend money during your trip that money some of that money goes into those communities. So it is hope that by doing that, that money empowers communities to have a sense of livelihood, than those livelihoods actually threaten wildlife. So when you do that and you travel and spend your money in those communities that directly protects mountain gorillas because that money provides extensive livelihoods to the community and by then they avoid those livelihoods that actual threaten wildlife. Such as poaching or hunting for food gathering medicine from the pac rather than having access to health centers. So it really the travel that integrates the human needs of you know places that we visit with the conservation goals as well.

**KL**: So I would imagine the way you have just described it, it’s kind of indirect. Like it might not always be clear when you are infusing money into your ecotourism where it is going, how it is being made and indirect ways impacting these communities. So I am wondering if you can talk to us about the areas of ecotourism that you are researching. Like are you looking at these indirect connections or are there other pieces you are really tackling?

**IM**: It is really indirect and that’s the value of education piece for ecotourism, because the ecotourist doesn’t see the direct link between conservation and human wellbeing [**KL:** Right]. So you spend money to buy a service right a serve that connects you to nature to wildlife, but it is not clear that that service is closely linked to the community or human communities that live very close to these natural areas. But because the nature of ecotourism it allows a visitor to learn. So people who guide tours people who live in these communities there job is actual to make that link clear to tourists. And that’s one of the aspects of ecotourism, they learn from these interactions from interaction from the local community guides and tell them how that links and how the community benefits from that travel. And we have seen over time; actually, tourists have requested to engage with the local cultures to spend more time in this community. In addition to visit the mountain you know for example mountain gorillas or safari tours in east Africa, and other places. They have requested to have additional time in these communities to spend more time learning about these communities and how they react with nature. But also to spend money directly in these communities is because they understand the value of when you spend your money in these communities when, for example, you sleep in the community on village rather than a three star foreign owned hotel. That money helps to secure wildlife, that money you know strengthens this community. Instead of leaking out, it stays within this community. And that embraces the sustainability of the natural area or wildlife. As a ecotourist, you are primarily interested in [*indiscernible*].

**KL**: So I mean this also sounds incredibly interdisciplinary. You have defiantly mentioned the economic aspect of this and the environmental aspect of this. What is your research focusing on? In terms of these different areas.

**IM**: So my research interests is really looking at how to contribute to the social economic world being in a community. At the same time I want to get an understanding to what extent is that benefit is that actually contributing to the conservation of wildlife. You know the reason I am interested is because that we have these natural areas we have these wildlife species that are threaten by human activates. And the assumption is the reason that these communities are received towards natural areas is because they don’t have no alternatives to livelihoods. So they go to the forest to look for food to look for livelihood. So we believe that if you provide tourism has the potential to provide alternative livelihoods and provide social and economic benefits to this community. So we have if that happens there will not be any need for them to go into the forest. But my research hasn’t covered the time and challenged those assumptions. For example we thought people go to the forest because they don’t have food the people who live very close to the forest especially in developing countries. But over time we have learned that actually they don’t, the most aggressors is resources people who have food who are well off. It has challenges in the sense that we have noticed that as people become more empowered and have resources to produce food then the need for forest resources actually increases. For example when you have one of the indicators for well-being for example is ownership of cattle, ownership of God. When that happens when people get access to those resources then they need to feed them. Guess what the source of cattle fed is in the forest because they don’t have enough land to grow to eat and graze cattle. When they have get access to resources they want to build houses and then another house for the second wife then another house for probably third wife because that is how that is a sign of wealth. Then that means you will need resources to construct a second house and a third house. And you will need more resources to actual feed your family. And I have seen in my research actually the narrative that people go to the forest, because they don’t have food and want to get food is actually a bit challenged. And it seems to suggest that the more we have in power of our communities through income generation and generating projects. Perhaps we might be actual contributing towards the problem in terms of human threats to wildlife conservation. So now you know we are beginning to actually examine aspects of people who are well off that is actually creates that you know aggression towards the wildlife.

**KL**: Okay this is really interesting. We are going to take a brief break when we come back we will hear a little bit more from Ian about some of his work researching royal communities. Back in a moment.

[Music playing in the background]

**KL:** As many of you know, I work as the research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, which produces the “Research in Action” podcast. I’m excited to share with you that Ecampus has been ranked as the top ten in the nation, for the fourth straight year, but U.S. News and World Report. As leaders in online education, Oregon State provides students worldwide with access to innovative learning experiences to help them advance their careers and improve their lives. You can learn more by visiting ecampus.oregonstate.edu**.**

# Segment 2:

**KL**: Ian as you kind of touched on in this first segment a lot of your research has focused on rural communities. And I am wondering, what lead you to research in that area?

**IM**: It’s a very interested question I have, I joined wildlife conservation right after my undergraduate education in Rwanda and I wasn’t a biologist but I had a hard love for nature. I started working in the rain forest and the challenges we had at the time was our job was to monitor wildlife and the illegal activities of communities that live very close to the forest. But our average was, you know, restrictive so we didn’t want anybody coming into the forest you know. It was a national park it was a protective area so our job was to keep people away.

**KL:** And this was kind of help with things like poaching and damaging the area things like that?

**IM:** Yes, yes.

**KL:** Okay.

**IM:** And people because they thought about [*indiscernible*] forest as a source of food, or survival hood a source of resources. And our job was to keep people away from there so wildlife can thrive, right. But over the years when we weren’t very successful the trend of wildlife threats did not change at all, it did not reduce, in fact it increased. So during my time in the forest I didn’t realize we actually aren’t address the win here the problem is outside the park. The problem is food, so if you don’t have food. You know the respect of guns are the forest and protecting the forest, you will go to the forest to get food. And that comes from my personal experience because I grew up in a home that had little resources and I knew how desperate that could be. And that’s when I shifted my approach to approach conservation to a community perspective rather than from within the forest. From the idea of understanding the ecology of the forest. We protect the forest. But from what we know about integrating what we know about the forest our work within the forest. With the social dimensions of the social aspects of life outside the forest because the influence directly. What we do and what we can achieve in life conservation over the years. And that’s how I got to learn about for example issues like food security as one of the potential drivers of wildlife threats. And then later on we also you know learn that it’s not only food security it is health security issues. Lack of education and those you know constrains you know of human wellbeing constraints interact to influence negative have a negative influence on the forest as well. So that’s how I ended up you know integrating you know my work with the communities and wildlife. And particularly using tourism as a potential tool to integrate social and ecological wellbeing. Because without tourism then there is no linkage for the communities to actually contribute towards conservation because tourism provides access to markets. And provides this community with the markets that they can target tourism and see the connection direct with wildlife. In where I use to work we tried to reinvest with tourism so that we could poach the tourist market for tourism and then by doing so we created a community based enterprises. Such as handcraft making enterprises you know like local guiding services as well. So that people or communities can be organized in social enterprise groups. So they can have access to this market. That has always been secluded from them that has always been in foreign to them, now they have access to this market. In this market they see the direct relationship between their livelihood and forest conservation. That forest conservation is actually a good thing for them, because it maintains the market for which they draw direct benefits from, from wildlife.

**KL**: So I am curious and I feel like you touched upon this a little bit in the first segment. Like there is a whole industry that has grown up around ecotourism that is benefiting off these communities and the local wildlife that is around these communities. And I think about even like when I was in Boston there was a chocolate company that would take people to wear the cacao beans where grown and it was a big part of their brand, and their mission. But there wasn’t much more that was coming out of it for this company in addition to the local community. I am wondering if you can talk a little bit about how you have engaged local communities, in this research in the sense of there are also these competing interests. In these vendors or companies that are using ecotourism for their own benefit and maybe not thinking about the communities best interest. But you seemed to have really zeroed in on the communities so how are you engaging them in this research and really focusing in on there?

**IM**: It’s a very difficult subject because tourist or ecotourism, but nature is a private enterprise and business, corporation [KL: Right, right]. And it conflicts with those, those two intersect and conflict. In conflicting the communities interests are social in nature they are a collective group, and benefits as a collective interests. The private sector interests in business is money is profits. So we kind of try to force private sector and profit into private sector to actual impress the idea about social benefits to the community you know. Sometimes it doesn’t work out. So what we have done is without a community that is organized, without organizing a community social groups within a community to be able to tap into the opportunities of tourism. The opportunity if tourism to create a benefit for the whole community is limited. So it comes down to you know for private sector to have meaningful relationship and engagement in the communities there must be a trusted patented within the community. And that trusted patented in the community must be must contribute something to the table, must bring. For example we had some of the social groups the women groups that make handcraft or youth group that walk as guides. They must have skills that end unemployment in the private sector lead in the tourism industry they must have a service they provide tourist so they can actual tap into the benefits from tourism. To be clear what we found out in the community is that without getting into resources into building skills within the community empowering these communities. To be able to have not only the skills, but also have the power to participate have the confidence to be able to speak up during those meeting. To be able to speak up for their own communities and know that they have a stick in this and most of the time these communities have gatekeepers. Who are the elites within the community and when they have decisions and business impressions going on in a community. Those are the people who actual represent it the community who interact with the private sector [KL: The elites are representing it], the elites yeah. Mostly the private sector are individuals who are foreign to the community and are invested in the community because they have seen potential for tourism success. So these gatekeepers these elites have their own personal interests. Often times those interests are not shared by the bigger the larger community. So what we do then is to you know educate different groups of the community that could benefit from tourism. Enable them to be able to you know if for example there is a tourism investment coming into town. Then you organize different groups and make sure oh you have guides you have agriculture groups the farmers that will produce. Enable the linkage between local farmers and local produce with the markets within tourism like hotels and restaurants. So that you have that direct link between a local farmer and the restaurant owner or hotel owner. Without those small organized groups then the gate keepers the elites of the community will direct the trend of tourism investment, but also even revenue. And the dream of having tourism revitalization of this community, is we be illusive because it is controlled by few in the community. And the larger community will be will not feel inclusive in the tourism business. And that has been the case in developing countries where tourism was caught in a place that you know the host communities aren’t ready for this investment. And you know tourism takes time you know, access to revenue. Being creating that ability within a community to top tourism and take advantage of it takes time. You need to train and develop human capital, you need financial capital to be able to invest in it that informal sector. So that informal sector can actual take time in the tourism business. Into operations, you know government policy sometimes you know government policy doesn’t support small informal sector, to thrive. Partnerships stakeholder partnerships less powerful than poor members of the community are not typically you know involved in decision making. Actually in policy formation and decision making, they are not. Then how do you create the social activism within the community. That we allow in power a community member who is typically disempowered typically ignored. To actually be able to question a leader, to question people who are leading these groups. That’s how we have been working with the community to be able to create at best forms reach they can actively engage tourism. They will always be at the fringes of tourism oppression.

**KL**: Well you have peeled apart so many layers of this, it’s very complicated. We are going to take another brief break when we come back we will hear a bit more from Ian. Back in a moment.

[Music plays]

# Segment 3:

**KL**: Ian I am curious you have been educated all over the world in Rwanda and the UK and here in the U.S. as well. And I am wondering how this has impacted your view on ecotourism. What are some of the things you are learning as you have been in these different geographical areas?

**IM**: See that’s a very interesting. You know Katie I growing up in Rwanda dealing with these ecotourism issues. And I thought you know these issues we face in times in protecting wildlife and using ecotourism to generate benefits social and economical benefits for the community. So that we can provide have a sustainable conservation of wildlife and I thought there were issues that are limited to the African developing countries particularly in Africa where I come from. But even in Southeast Asian you know and Latina America, Ecotourism we view it as a type of tourism that helps us to prompt wildlife conservation, but also helps us to generate economic and social benefits for the communities. So I thought that was limited to us in developing countries. So in my you know my travels and seeking education through Europe and here in the states. I came to learn we actually share these issues. And that was for me that was surprising and educating, because we look at the developing counties as you know counties that do not have these issues that we are struggling with. And I wish most of my counterparts in Africa and most other parts of the world would come here as well and learn about this. That we share as human beings we share these issues, about resources and how we conserve resources. For example here in Oregon when I came here I thought I was not going to use ecotourism, because my work is not applicable. But when I came to Oregon I realized oh tourism is based around wildlife, its nature based. You know most especially here in Oregon. Two Oregon is trying to look at tourism as a source of you know as an economic convergence of these communities. For example you know the employment in tourism has grown by 35% in Oregon, over the past ten years. The income learned from tourism over the past ten years has grown by 80%. That’s Oregon and most of that tourism is based on wildlife. And that’s an opportunity for these rural countries, rural counties, and rural towns to really tap into a sector that is growing. At the same time some of these rural counties or rural towns lost livelihood from the loss of a team or industry. They lost jobs, they lost livelihoods. And now they are looking at tourism to revitalize as these communities like Sweet Home, Oakland, Coos Bay. Those are towns that survived and thrived on timber industry. Now they are looking at tourism opportunities now a days these are on the travel Oregon plans. These are you know tourism gateways that looking at these rural towns are gateways for nature travelers, nature based travelers. Guess what that’s exactly what it is like in Africa we rely on these natural areas and we rely on these communities as gateways for tourists. The potential for tourism to create we get benefits social and economic benefits for the community. Is based on how well those communities are empowered, are supported, are encouraged and engaged to benefit from tourism. If it doesn’t happen then tourism will continue to benefit those who um you know powerful, those who are, who have resources because tourism requires financial capital. Tourism requires skills you know human capital skills. So without human capital then employment would be open to people who are foreign in that community. Because the hotel owner will not want to spend money training local, you know labor market, but rather be more comfortable hiring somebody from out of Oregon who already has those skills. You know what I mean. So there is a lot of tourism you know there is a lot of investment that needs to be in these communities to support them to benefit from tourism. To be respected of the growth within these communities without organizing without there aren’t social organizations, without empowering these communities groups to be able to have skills through short time training programs. Having access to capital that they can invest into in a normal way in a sector. Supporting small businesses to invest in tourism challenges. Tourism will not make a huge difference for the community. So the same issues we have in Africa as well. So as I you know I learn about tourism and the potential for tourism to make a difference in Oregon. It’ so surprising that we have similar issues. You know I see the mirror image of what I go through every day in Rwanda. What my colleagues are trying to address in Rwanda the same issues here. Even though the tourism as a concept is not embraced the way we embrace it in developing countries. But the underlining aspects of tourism just like I told you the world being of host communities the conservation and sustainability of these natural areas so that tourism can be sustainable. Those are the issues we grew up with in Africa similar issues of being considered in a pursuit here in Oregon.

**KL**: These are really interesting questions Ian. I want to thank you so much for coming here, sharing a window into the work you are doing. Um thank you so much for coming and talking about your work.

**IM**: Your welcome, thank you.

**KL**: Thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of Research in Action. I am Katie Linder and we will be back next week with a new episode.

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# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode 101 of the Research in Action podcast, Dr. Ian Munanura discusses tourism as a way to strength emotional wellbeing and resilience. Take a listen:

**IM:** In one way I am fortunate to actually have found out that you know as human beings and respective as who you were. You can contribute and I was fortunate to learn that I you know my work could contribute towards some of those you know revealing some of those you know community based issues. And how tourism can be used to make a difference in this community, empower communities to tap into the tourism opportunities in Oregon. And I hope that we will continue this. I am being to work with travel Oregon and I previously worked with the forest service here in Oregon. To look at what could be some of the major human wellbeing constraints that could be influenced by tourism growth in this community. Because we tend to typically focus on financial aspects of tourism potential especially jobs, income, and you know revenue from selling goods and stuff and services in tourism. But tourism also has potential to grow and create social wellbeing, to create to empower communities in a way that not only adds to income, but the resources from tourism and emotional strengthen. Because they are part of something larger than what they use to be a part of they are considered part of this community a part of the new and thriving community. That social empowerment that emotional empowerment of this group and I am hoping that that could be why one of the areas we have not typically considered that could be one of the key aspects of ecotourism in the next generation. For example there is a problem of drug addiction and dependency. Most of that people have suggested is typically coming from the loss of jobs and opportunities in the entertainment industry. So to what extent can tourism contribute towards strengthen the emotional, address some of the emotional constraints. That result in drug dependency and drug use and issues. What is the final breakdown. So my research now is moving towards that direction you know because those are kind of particular factors. So we assume that people go into the forest to aggressive this forest because they want resources. Because they have been stressed by loss of jobs or something in the family can be occurred. That destabilized their wellbeing. And then they are looking for natural areas that has changed their livelihoods and their wellbeing. But in-between you have their protective factors for example you know a family might be resilience because towards these threats that come. For example loss of jobs because they are emotionally strong what creates the strength, what separates two families. One family that is experienced the same problems, but one family is able to survive and not have you know family breakdown that sort of issues that occur. And the other family is much more vulnerable and the other one is actually resilient. Must be some of these protective factors with it that we have. For example our world view how the outlook is it positive or negative. Are we emotional strong and able to view the stress that is coming our way, much more positively? And in that case then we are able to survive those stressful events, but at the end of the day we are much more stronger and much more resilient. And that resilience occurs in this instance when people are vulnerable you suggest that community is actually weak. And then tourism will not make a difference. But when the community is much more resilient then they are able to take advantage of tourism. But is that true? How can actual tourism change that dynamic an actually you know empower these families and these communities. To be much more resilient changing by strengthening their emotional wellbeing. Because we cannot predict stressful livelihood events you know hurricane, loss of jobs. Those are things that are foreign news to us that we cannot control. What we can control though is our ability to survive. To view these threats that come to us and survive them over time. So how can ecotourism open opportunities to engage tourism? How can tourism help us to plug in those holes and strength the emotional, the emotion wellbeing. But also provide you know resources that we could actually use to be much more resilient. What we have done typically is that we emphasize that tourism provides resources, tourism provides income, tourism provides these physical assets but we have forgotten that tourism provides to strengthen the emotional wellbeing. And that link has been missing and I am hoping to tap into that.

**KL**: You just heard a bonus clip from episode 101 of the Research in Action podcast with Dr. Ian Munanura discussing tourism as well a way to strengthen emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Thanks for listening

[Music playing in the background]

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