Chapter 4

Smiling vs. Frowning Faces:
Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism in Ghanaian Communities

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ABSTRACT

Participatory development has become an integral strategy for achieving sustainable tourism in view of the varying impacts brought by mass tourism. Community participation ensures local control of the pace of tourism development and the creation of a more personalised tourism product. However, some studies have stated tension between governments and locals, which has hindered tourism development. This study, thus, sought to explore the extent to which communities are involved in decision-making and how useful the outcome has been. To achieve the study objectives, two tourism sites in Ghana implemented based on participatory principles, namely Kakum National Park and Afadjato Mountain, were compared. Results of the study suggest there is a fair degree of community involvement at the Gbledi Traditional Area (Afadjato) leading to satisfaction (smiling-faces), rather than Abrafo-Odumase (Kakum), which exhibited dissatisfaction (frowning-faces). The policy and research implications relate mainly to the challenge of achieving sustainable tourism development at the community level.

INTRODUCTION

The varying impacts brought about by mass tourism has made the issue of sustainable tourism more popular. Community participation and sustainability has been a concern to major international bodies such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO), United Nations (UN) and other international bodies. This has also been the main focus of Ghana's 15-year National Tourism Development Plans i.e., 1996-2010 and 2013-2027. According to Ghana's 1996-2010 tourism national policy framework, tourism was to be developed on a sustainable basis and the socio-economic benefits well distributed in the country and society, giving emphasis to community-based tourism especially in rural areas. Subsequently, one of the main objectives of the Ghana National Tourism Development Plan (2013-2027) is to 'promote sustainable and responsible tourism in such a way as to preserve the historical, cultural and natural heritage' of the country (p.5). These objectives are in line with the UNWTO sustainable development goals 1, 12 and 15, which focus on developing tools that alleviate poverty, create jobs, promote local culture and products as well as conserving and preserving biodiversity in relation to tourism. Additionally, the national tourism plan emphasizes community involvement in the tourism sector in that, communities should be represented in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

According to Mugizi, Ayorekire and Obua (2017), tourism has many social, economic and environmental benefits however, in order to realize the full benefits of tourism it is important to involve the local people and incorporate their expectations into tourism planning and development. Community-based tourism is an essential approach to ensuring sustainable tourism development as exemplified by the Banteay Chhmar community in Cambodia where there was active participation due to free flow of information and collaboration (Ellis & Sheridan, 2015). Mensah (2017) argues that misunderstandings and conflicts among host communities, tourists and park authorities are reduced when there is community participation. Additionally he argues that through community-based tourism a more sustainable way of managing natural resources is achieved by involving local communities to ensure conservation, which in turn provides economic incentives to the communities. Chang et al. (2018) mention that although tourism development can bring about positive impacts, it can also lead to the adulteration of local culture, damage to the natural environment and conflicts with tourists. Yang, Ryan & Zhang (2013) assert that tourism development basically kindles social conflict as it brings together various stakeholders leading to a change in culture and social structure in communities. They state that conflicts occur between the indigenous community and external entrepreneurs over economic benefits derived from tourism. This has hindered tourism development in certain communities due to the negative impacts experienced in these developing countries.

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