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Ecotourism and Community Participation: The Case of Liati Wote in Ghana's Afadzato South District

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Abstract:

Community participation in the development and management of ecotourism is an essential component that has been thoroughly examined in scholarly publications. Local community participation in ecotourism enhances the long-term viability of the tourism initiative by ensuring sustainable development and equitable benefit distribution (Xu et al., 2022; Utama et al., 2021; Kiper, 2013). Scholars widely agree on the significance of participation in ensuring the long-term viability and success of ecotourism efforts (Kiper, 2013; Gumede & Nzama, 2021; Maria et al., 2021; Hasana et al., 2022). Thus, "community participation in ecotourism projects leads to a more equitable distribution of financial benefits and a greater appreciation of natural resources among local residents (Stronza, 2007)". The academic community is generally aware of the benefits that comes when locals in destinations take part in ecotourism projects, particularly with regard to the possibility for long-term success and sustainability that these programs offer. These benefits of community participation in ecotourism projects and their sustainability holds true especially within the context of educational institutions and institutions of learning.

The case

This study utilizes Tosun's normative typology of community participation to assess and categorize the level of involvement of the people of Liati Wote in the development and management of ecotourism in the Afadzato South District of the Volta Region, Ghana. Tosun's (1999) typology consists of three stages; Spontaneous Involvement is defined as

active involvement in which the community has an important role in decision-making and implementation. Induced Involvement is described as task-oriented involvement in which the community's role is limited to following predetermined procedures and benefiting from predefined possibilities; Coercive involvement is defined as non-participation with low community input, and is frequently characterized by manipulation and limited options. Pretty (1995). Self-mobilization and interactive involvement constitute true and engaged participation; practical involvement, motivated by tangible benefits; and consultative participation. Passive and manipulative participation with minimal true engagement. Arnstein (1969). Citizen power comprises the maximum level of involvement, such as citizen control, delegated power, and collaboration. Citizen tokenism consists of token gestures such as placation, consultation, and informing, whereas non-participation includes forms such as treatment and manipulation. Tosun's typology was used because it provided the framework and basis of analysis for the research as Liati Wote serves as a classical example of Community- Based Ecotourism that is suitable for such an inquiry.

The research is focused on assessing the extent of local involvement for particular reasons. The Volta Region of Ghana is comprised of eighteen (18) unique districts, each possessing its own particular individuality. The Afadzato South District, also known as the Afadzato Anyigbe District, is referred to interchangeably, reflecting its dual nomenclature. In addition to its geographical position in the eastern portion of Ghana, the region is characterized by its distinctive natural and cultural attributes. The town of Ve-Golokuati, which serves as the district capital, is located about 200 kilometers from Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The 2021 population and housing census of Ghana conducted in the district indicates a total population of 73,146 individuals, with 36,081 males and 37,065 females recorded. Liati Wote is inhabited by around 600 individuals, the majority of whom are smallholder farmers engaged in area agricultural activities. The district was named after Mount Afadzato, a prominent mountain in Ghana with an elevation of around 885 meters above sea level. The district boasts of diverse landscapes, encompassing low-lying valleys, majestic towering peaks, and expansive flatlands, creating a picturesque and varied scenery. These three different types of terrain combine to define the district's geography. The Afadzato South District experiences a tropical climate characterized by two distinct seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. Forests form a significant portion of the district's flora, playing a critical role in preserving the area's rich biodiversity and ecological stability.

The significance of the study lies in bridging the gap on community participation in ecotourism for development and has policy as well as research implications for the

achievement of sustainable ecotourism development at destinations. A total of sixty-five (65) household surveys were conducted in the village of Liati Wote to obtain data for this study. In addition, a total of six (6) comprehensive interviews were conducted with individuals who are part of the Tourism Management Team at the Afadzato Tagbo Falls Ecotourism Center, officials from the Afadzato South District Assembly, and the Ghana Tourism Authority. These interviews were conducted to collect information about the location, tourism development and management, community participation, and benefit distribution. To enhance the data, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted, involving members of the youth group in the community who were invited to engage in a conversation. One method that was also used to get further information was participant observation where the researcher observed the everyday phenomena within the community in relation to the study. The chosen research methods generated insights that were similar to the results of the Tosun's typology which served as the framework of analysis. The quantitative data gathered were analyzed using SPSS version 28 while the qualitative data gathered were analyzed utilizing thematic analysis.

The community members have actively participated in the development and management of ecotourism initiatives while also reaping financial gains from these endeavors. A statistical analyses utilizing Chi-square testing led to the conclusion that there is a significant correlation between community involvement features (decision making process, employment of local people, local people in managerial roles, revenue sharing, revenue used for development, community interest factored) and the level of participation in ecotourism activities. The analysis of the correlation between the two variables resulted in the identification of this finding. Promoting more community participation, particularly in decision-making, revenue allocation, and employment prospects, are crucial factors in building positive community perspectives and fostering participation in ecotourism projects at destinations. This study revealed that the Liati Wote community is placed at the level of induced participation on Tosun's (1999) typology, which tallies with degrees of tokenism on Arnstein's (1969) typology. Ecotourism initiatives encompass environmental preservation, socio-economic advancement, and community involvement, as well as the tourist being informed and amenable to supporting such initiatives. The efficacy and long-term viability of these projects are contingent upon their ecological ramifications and the degree of consciousness and engagement within the communities they strive to serve.

The study has investigated the perspectives and extent of involvement of the local people in ecotourism projects in the Liati Wote region. The research findings offer valuable insights into the intricate relationship between community engagement levels

and the overall effectiveness of ecotourism projects. The correlation and interaction between ecotourism and local communities can be generalized to suggest that greater community involvement leads to more sustainable and equitable ecotourism outcomes. The findings from the Liati Wote case study establish a strong framework for comprehending how local participation, economic incentives, and stakeholder collaboration collectively drive the success of ecotourism projects. The research conducted on community participation in ecotourism in Liati Wote elucidates essential aspects, including empowering local communities, advocating for sustainable tourism practices, and fostering economic and social benefits through tourism. The themes of community empowerment, ecological conservation, and urban and rural rehabilitation through education and tourism are all closely interconnected.

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