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Factors that hinder local participation of ecotourism in Ghana: case study of WLI

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting natural areas in the remote wilderness or urban environments. The purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which local people of Wli Traditional area participate in ecotourism. The study examined the extent to which locals of Wli Traditional area are empowered by relevant authorities to participate in ecotourism and also to identify the factors that hinder effective participation in the ecotourism business by the local people of Wli Traditional area. The study showed that, most of the people expressed support for the eco-tourism business, and its related activities, but majority of the interviewees including the paramount chief of the area expressed grave displeasure in the conditions that make participation by the locals difficult. The study again maintain that, the Hohoe Municipal Assembly has not done much in empowering or building the capacity of the locals to enable many people to effectively participate but are quick in demanding for the Assembly's share of the proceeds. The chief even further blamed the Assembly for not ensuring that, the road from Hohoe to the Wli community is tarred or put in a better shape than it has been for all the years. It is therefore recommended and suggested a research on economic impact assessment needs to be conducted by other researchers of ecotourism management in identifying the relationship between the local people's perception of economic benefits and cost, and the actual reflection of the impact on their standard of living.

Keywords: Ecotourism, factors, local participation, WLI traditional area, tourism

Introduction

Ecotourism defies one clear definition. The World Tourism Organisation in 1997 estimated that, some 10%-15% of global tourism could be classified as ecotourism. Ecotourism under whatever definition is an instigator of change which is desired by the players in the industry many of whom would like to see what they regard as an improvement of the existing condition.

The definition and principles established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 1990) indicates 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people'. Generally, eco-tourism could be defined as travelling to relatively undisturbed or virgin natural environments with specific objectives that may include studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery with its flora and fauna, as well as any existing unique cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas. By this definition, nature-oriented tourism calls for a scientific, aesthetic or philosophical approach to travel. Invariably, there are varied proponents of ecotourism definitions, but the underlying features in all the definitions put forward feature prominently the principles and dimensions of ecotourism as alluded to by Honey (1999) [7]. The situation of Wli Traditional area, in my view, fits into the various definitions as far as its Waterfall (Agumatsa fall) is concerned, hence, our quest to find out the level of community participation in tourism by the local residents of Wli Traditional area in the Hohoe Municipality.

The need for community involvement in tourism planning and development has caught the attention of many authors in the tourism literature (Murphy, 1985 and Swarbrooke, 1999) [12, 19]. This is obviously so because, community neglect is one of the major reasons why many tourism projects fail in achieving much. According to Pearce *et al.* (1996) [15],

If local communities are not involved, a backlash against tourism may develop. This condition among others, contributes to reducing security for both local communities and tourists combining with other factors to inhibit the growth of tourism.

One can then say that, until active community participation is actually practiced, proper tourism development would remain a mere academic term or an illusion. Consequently, Murphy (1985) ^[12] further attests to the fact that, the product and image that intermediaries package and sell is a destination experience, and as such, creates an industry that is highly dependent on the goodwill and co-operation of the host communities. This view supports the notion that, local communities do not only live close to tourist attractions but they also own the attractions or resource. As owners of the attraction, local residents must be actively engaged in decision-making, planning and development of the attraction. However, for the residents to be able to participate meaningfully in the ecotourism industry, they need to be empowered financially and in entrepreneurial skill and knowledge.

It is becoming very necessary to consider why community participation in tourism development is enjoying wide spread attention and emphasis as far as its literature is concerned. It has become so persistent and which is actually getting tourism practitioners and academicians all over the world increasingly aware, but the placation and leakages, which are mostly inimical to the local people and its unfavourable outcomes make one wonder whether the developmental schemes carved for the tourism communities are anything to write home about. Evidently, the tourism industry has great potential to affect the lives of host community residents (Bartholo, Delamaro, & Bursztyn, 2008) ^[2] conducted a study on two successful cases of community-based tourism in northern Brazil, where not only a fair and environmentally responsible model was well grounded, but the communities' quality of life improved tremendously. In their opinion, the concept of situation-centred approach to development is very crucial and hence should receive much attention to promote responsible tourism. This notion of development according to them, goes beyond economic considerations, adapts to the locality, reinforces the centrality of local knowledge and recognises ordinary people as actors in the process of transforming their territories (Bartholo *et al.*, 2008) ^[2].

Interestingly, Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) argue that, community-based tourism (CBT) can be a misguided quest. Their research, situated in Latin America, show that, CBT rarely reduces poverty and that, communities should instead try to access mainstream tourism markets, which may have a more beneficial impact than traditionally thought. They further maintain that, many CBT projects have failed and initiatives collapsed when it comes to achieving pro-poor benefits. This is mostly attributed to the lack of financial viability; poor market access and poor governance. Many CBT cases are not participatory in local power structures and decision-making, and as a result the solution, according to Mitchell and Muckosy (2008), would be to link poor communities with major tourist flows, rather than pursuing alternative tourism. However, we think, rather than relying on multinational corporations, we should aim largely at fostering indigenous skills, creativity and innovativeness. This may lead to communities managing to take a degree of control and exercise power over tourism developments in

their localities (Mowforth & Munt, 2009) ^[11]. In view of the discussion above, we deemed it fit to conduct this study to determine the level of involvement of Wli community in eco-tourism development in the area.

According to Poon (1994) ^[16], participation of local people is a criteria often agreed on as an essential condition for development and sustainability of any new form of tourism. But, another study revealed that, it is the combination of the two words 'local' and 'participation' that is paradoxically implying local residents being so often left outside of the planning, decision-making and managing of tourist development (Mowforth & Munt, 2009) ^[11]. Notably, the ideal situation would be for communities to decide the form and function of tourism developments and have full control over any tourism schemes in their location. But most studies conducted into this issue has revealed that, local residents often lack the experience, and resources, therefore, even interest is crucially needed to establish successful tourism ventures (Scheyvens, 2002) ^[18]. It must however be noted that, a host community can be made up of lifelong indigenous residents and recent domestic as well as international residents. One should therefore, not lose sight of the fact that, society is not homogenous, for that matter, fair access to communal property is quite impossible.

In our candid view all the arguments raised against community participation may sound great, but it is worth concluding with this expert view that, "The presence of local involvement does not guarantee successful interaction with other economic sectors but it may also be argued that, its absence is very likely to result in unsuccessful integration with other economic sectors" (Butler, 1990 pp147) ^[4]. In this current study, therefore, an attempt was made to determine the extent to which the locals of Wli Traditional area are involved in the planning and development of ecotourism.

It has been observed in many parts of the world and especially in the developing countries that, tourism has been developed and controlled mostly by identifiable international companies, who hardly have any regard for local socio-cultural and economic conditions (Timothy & Loannidas, 2002) ^[20]. This could be attributed to the fact that, most tourist destinations do not have the required wealth and political power, which often puts them at the mercy of decision-making processes that are far beyond their control (Timothy & Loannidas, 2002) ^[20].

Wilkinson (1987) maintains that, many decisions governing domestic matters are made elsewhere by foreign tour companies and services, who in countless situations do not regard or have the destination communities at heart (Timothy & Loannidas, 2002) ^[20]. It is also an observable fact that, sometimes, even countries that are in control of tourism development stand the risk of losing the power of decision-making to selected few prominent individuals who control the wealth and political strength (Bianci, 1999:273) ^[3]. This and many more developing trends lend support to the call by many including the researcher for frantic efforts to be put in place to empower the local people to effectively participate in the tourism business.

According to Timothy (1999), some autocratic power systems have kept grass root involvement from flourishing in some parts of the world where representation of democracy has been discouraged. Consequently, tourism management and development shaped by local entrepreneurs have less chance to see the light of the day in

the long-term. The situation makes tourism less attractive to locals who feel marginalized and in such cases; the best option left for them is to disengage from the business. This way, the host communities are denied the chance of partaking in and reaping the fruits of tourism which include provision of sustained employment, social infrastructure, regular income and others.

Notably, Tosun (2000) ^[22], in organizing the fact related barriers of community participation in decision-making process of tourism development in developing countries, captured them under the following three headings:

1. Operational limitations
2. Structural limitations
3. Cultural limitations.

In fact, it is important to admit that, most of these limitations are common in developing nations, although they are not evident in every tourist site. The *operational* limitations in his view include; decentralization of public administration of tourism, lack of co-ordination and lack of information. For *structural* Limitations, they include; attitudes of professionals, lack of expertise, elite domination, lack of appropriate legal system, lack of trained human resources and relatively high cost of community participation and lack of financial resources. Last but not least, *cultural* limitations. They cover the area of limited capacity of poor people and apathy, and low level of awareness in the local community.

Tosun (2000) ^[22] again asserts that, the limitation may be due to political, social and economic structure in developing nations, which prevent them from achieving higher levels of development. Omondi and Kamau (2010) ^[14] supported this view, when they opined that, all barriers of community participation as laid out by Tosun (2000) ^[22] were proven in their study in Kenya, which led to poor community participation in tourism development. It is evidently clear that, community participation in tourism development is often hindered by many factors ranging from economic, social, cultural and others as enumerated above. This definitely calls for the empowerment of host communities like Wli Traditional area, which play host to the Agumatsa fall and its side attractions, through vigorous capacity building.

In fact, issues of local community neglect or at best placatory on the part of tourism developers have not received the needed attention in research. Keogh (1990) concluded his research presentation on the topic; "Public Participation in Community Tourism" by stating that, "Clearly, further research is needed to substantiate the findings of the present research". This confirms the fact that, to date, reported records on the impediments to local community involvement in tourism development and management remain lacking or at best inadequate.

To fill this gap, the researchers decided to find out the level of participation of the people of Wli Traditional area in the development and management of tourism activities. It is also worth noting that, too much reliance on tourism renders an area susceptible to seasonal and economic fluctuations. Hence, care must be taken not to place excessive emphasis on economic value of tourism as this can lead to decision makers believing that ecotourism exists for economic profit only. Ecotourism establishment such as that of Wli waterfall area alters the local economic structure and has often led to reduced access to resources for local residents. In some

cases, residents are faced with pressure due to resource use restrictions and in the process lose their jobs or lands and make it difficult to make a living.

In Ghana, host community participation and perception of the economic importance of tourism development is relevant when considering the development of the phenomenon. Tourism has since the mid-1980s emerged as a significant sector of the Ghanaian economy as the fourth highest foreign exchange earner, and also leading to conservation and preservation of natural environments. There are a number of ecological attractions spread across the entire country and it is believed that, it provides economic benefits to the nation.

The fact is that, ecotourism has its own attendant problems such as leakages, poor sanitary conditions due to littering of the environment by visitors, and social problems such as the spread of diseases through unprotected casual sexual activities between the local people and the visitors. Consequently, there is the recognition that, ecotourism is neither entirely good nor bad (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Again, there is still the wide spread of conflicting issues regarding ecotourism activities in Ghana which bothers on understanding of the concept as one thing and its practice as another. By extension, Hohoe Municipal Assembly, the hub of tourist attractions in the Volta Region is no exception. The question as to the issues of local community participation and benefits of tourism and challenges as perceived by host communities remain unanswered. Therefore, this research work seeks to address these questions as far as the Agumatsa Wildlife Sanctuary and its related side attractions including the Waterfall are concerned.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which local people of Wli Traditional area participate in ecotourism. Specifically, the objectives of the study include the following;

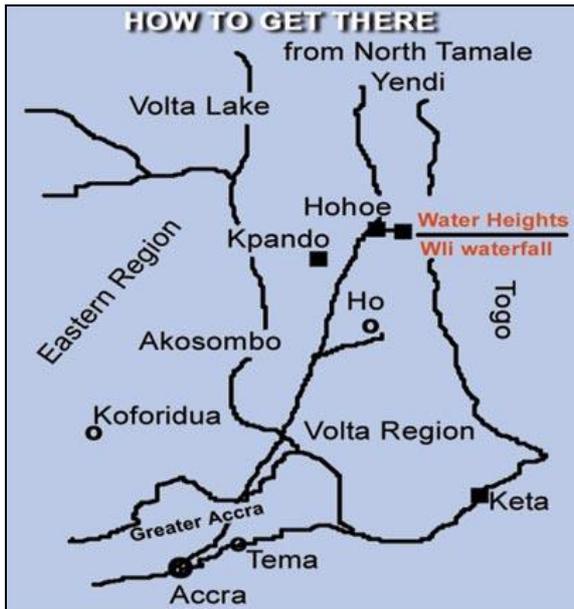
1. Find out the extent to which locals of Wli Traditional area are empowered by relevant authorities to participate in ecotourism.
2. Find out the factors that hinder effective participation in the ecotourism business by the local people of Wli Traditional area.

Significance of the Study

Tourism has emerged as a major growth industry in many national economies and Ghana for that matter is no exception. An increasing proportion of the world's population is dependent upon continuous growth of tourism for employment and income (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997) ^[6]. Consequently, many local communities including Wli traditional area have to cope with the increased intensity of eco-tourism and its economic impacts, both positive and negative. This study, therefore, could serve as a baseline for the Hohoe Municipal Assembly to evaluate the tourism in the Wli traditional area. The outcome will enlighten the Wli community in the creation and exploitation of alternative livelihood measures to reduce poverty. Furthermore, it may be useful to the Ghana Tourist Board (GTB) as a guide for designing programmes aimed at promoting community-based tourism in Ghana. Lastly, it will serve as a reference for future studies on related areas.

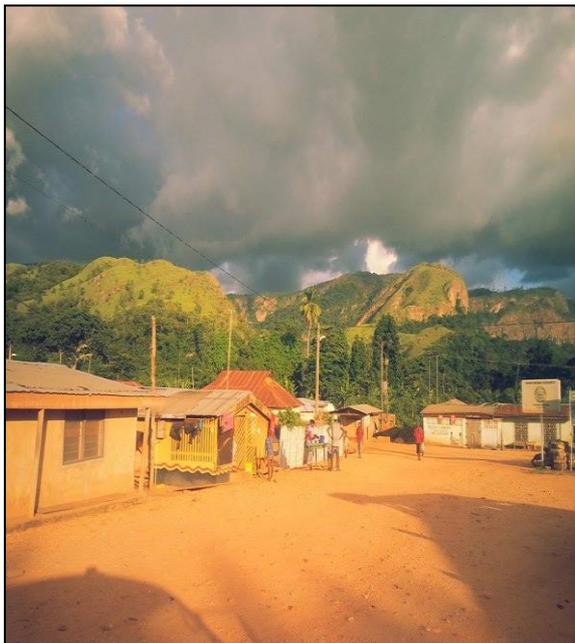
Materials and Methods

Study Area



Source: Wikimedia Foundation Inc. (15/03/2016)

Fig 1: A sketch map showing various directions to the Wlifalls in Hohoe Municipality



Source: Wikimedia Foundation Inc. (20/03/2016)

Fig 2: Picture showing parts of Wli Township

Wli is a predominantly farming community located in the Hohoe Municipality. The waterfall is very close to the Republic of Togo. The Akwapim-Togo range provides the perfect setting for what is to become arguably, the most impressive waterfall in Ghana. The Wli people like all other Ewes of Ghana originated from the city of Notsie in what is now Benin. The Wli people were led by their King named Togbe Ametornu I and Togbe Afaladze.

Legend has it as narrated to me by an elderly in the Wli community that, Togbe Ametornu I, after fighting some many wars and haven prevailed in most cases over their enemies, decided to take his fighters around to look for food and water. After several attempts through the wood, the

King and his subjects came into contact with a river that was pure and much to their taste. They therefore decided to trace the source of the water that saw them crossing the same river at eleven different locations until they finally heard loud splashing water from the apex of the surrounding chain of mountains.

Being adventurous as they were, they decided to climb the mountain to look for the source of the water. It is believed that at the peak of the mountain, they saw beautiful water falling from the mountain. They named it Agumatsa, "let me flow through", describing the force with which the water is trying to escape from the "throat" of the mountain. This spectacle amazed the people to a great extent that they decided to worship the waterfall as their god (personal interview with an elderly man in Wli Afegame during field work).

Accounts have been given as to how the river god refused to be photographed until some rituals were performed not only to allow for its photography but to allow women to come closer to it. The day on which the ritual was performed is celebrated as Agumatsa festival which falls on Easter Monday each year (classified document, Wli tourism centre). The Municipality is one of the endowed in the Volta Region as far as tourism is concerned. Geographically, the area lays between latitudes 7.3° North and 7.8° North and between longitudes 0.33° and 0.38° east. Again, it is situated approximately 22km East of Hohoe and 3km South of Likpe Bakwa, bordered to the north by the Republic of Togo and lies to the west of Gbledi (Afadzato area). The area is made up of four units: Agorviefe, Afegame, Todzi and Dzogbega. The Wli waterfall is becoming very popular with its beautiful water cascades. It is located at the edge of the Agumatsa Wildlife Sanctuary, which has hundreds of fruit bats and a few monkeys and antelopes. Most of the people in the area are subsistence farmers. Other economic activities in the area include; quarrying, sand-winning and weaving of the Ghanaian traditional 'kente' cloth.

Ewe is the main language spoken by these people. Utilities and amenities commonly shared by the community members include; electricity, water from a stream, bore holes and a health centre. Primary and Junior Secondary schools can also be found in the area. I chose the area because of its rich ecotourism potential, couple with the significant role local people's participation plays in the development of ecotourism.

Research Design

The research design adopted for the study is Case Study, using the qualitative approach. The Qualitative research, according to Experiment Resource (2009) cited in Seidu, (2012) ^[17], aims primarily at providing a complete, detailed description of the subject of the study, with the purpose of uncovering prevalent trends and patterns in thought and in opinion. We chose this design because it mostly takes interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. In qualitative design, the researcher 'explores a social or human problem, builds a complex holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural settings' (Creswell, 1998) ^[5].

Population, Sampling and Instrumentation

The target population for the study comprised all the artisans, land owners, chiefs and officials from the Hohoe Municipal Assembly. The estimated number of people in the

area is 2,500. Ten (10) participants were however drawn from the Wli Traditional area (Wli waterfall area) for this current study (Kumi, Kumah & Afetorgbor, 2018) ^[9]. Interview as an instrument was used in collecting data was Face-to-Face: one-on-one, in-person interview. Both open ended and close-ended questions were used. A major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. Under this instrument, we, being part of the community under study, concealed my real identity and intention and closely observed and kept notes on the participatory levels of the locals of Wli community. We therefore participated in the activities of the fall especially on National Holidays and on Easter Monday in particular. We went through all the processes on this year's (2015) Easter Monday which saw hundreds of people from all walks of life visiting the Wli Waterfalls.

Presentation of Analysis and Discussions

The study revealed that, only a handful of the locals were involved in management decision-making. This situation goes sharply against contemporary views of managing common or communal property. In the view of the paramount chief and 6 (six) of the other interviewees, indigenous knowledge and expertise in such an exchange relation should not be neglected because, such knowledge does not only come about through several years of practice, but through several years of experience as well. Indeed, only 3 (three) of the interviewees were really involved in the management of the resource.

Most of the interviewees lamented over the issue and called for a change in order to include more locals in the development and management of the attraction to the benefit of all. They further conceded that, local peoples' decisions are mostly solicited by the Management of the tourist resources but most often, it is a mere placation (pretending to please locals). We think that, this circumstantial evidence of non-involvement as the study has revealed, can be a source of threat to effective development and management of the resource, which may result into withdrawal of support by the local people who view the resource as communally owned. According to Pearce *et al* (1996) ^[15], if local communities are not involved, a backlash against tourism may develop. This situation, among others, contributes to reducing security for both local communities and tourists and combine to inhibit the growth of tourism. We can therefore say that, until active community participation is actually practiced, proper tourism development would remain to be an illusion. Thus, making the Social Exchange theory modified by Ap (1992) ^[1], a reality.

The study further showed that, most of the people expressed support for the eco-tourism business, and its related activities, but majority of the interviewees including the paramount chief of the area expressed grave displeasure in the conditions that make participation by the locals difficult. According to them, non-participation is not based on personal discretion, but comes as a result of external forces such as dominance by local management team and lack of financial support including lack of adequate capacity building programmes.

Some of us as you can see are interested in doing more but we lack the funds. This has been our challenge over the years, but all the attempts we have so far made to secure some financial aid had

not been fruitful. So we are just doing the little we can. (A local trader, Wli Tourism Centre)

Am very much interested in doing business here, but I don't have money to start, I'll be very happy if you can let the government come to our aid, we really need cash that we can do real business. (Smiling). (A local resident, Wli community).

The Assemblyman for the area said, many of the people are not actively involved due to lack of relevant education, skills and financial support. The local woman interviewed blamed the Tourist Management Team (TMT) for their dominance over activities. She accused the team of consciously creating opportunities to a few land owners and other power brokers only to the neglect of the majority of the people.

The Tourist Management Team (TMT) has hijacked everything as far as the management of the fall is concerned without adequately consulting us on issues before taking decisions on our behalf. Personally, I think what concerns us all must be decided on by all. In fact, they only know how to share the proceeds with the few so called land owners (A dissatisfied local woman, Wli Community).

7 (seven) other interviewees collaborated this view when they identified nepotism and favouritism as common features of the exchange relation. 1 (one) of the 2 (two) artisans spoken to indicated that, even the few of them daring the tourism business in the area are struggling to survive in the business due to inadequate financial support, he further opined that, he is sure that is the reason why many others though possess some skills are not able to join in the business. The situation in my view is not the best because, for any effective local participation to be practiced, effective and holistic empowerment must be ensured. This should cover economic, psychological, social and political empowerment. This view confirms the assertion that, knowledge is power which suggests that, People...who can credibly claim to be in accord with current scientific thinking or those who know what is practically achieved in some real world situation are usually more convincing and thus have more power in negotiations. The majority of residents in Wli traditional area lack such strengths. In fact, locals should be provided, first with basic education and literacy if they are to benefit. They should be provided with the opportunity to voice their heartfelt needs, fear, and even disagreement. Secondly, training programmes which cover skills training in management and administration should also be provided to local people. Thirdly, financial aid and alternative livelihood can also help the community. Fourthly, the activities of eco-tourism should not dominate the development of other economic activities.

This is why the locals of Wli community need to be empowered by relevant authorities such as the Hohoe Municipal Assembly to enable them participate more in the eco-tourism. My assertion was proved right when 1(one) interviewee, a former member of the Tourism Management Team cited an instance where applicants to one of the hotels for consideration for employment were supposed to pass a test for fluency in the English language which most of the

locals failed, and thus, were not employed, giving advantage to people from outside the Wli community over the indigenes.

Another issue raised by the 2 (two) artisans and the local woman interviewed is the disappointment of many people in the way proceeds from the tourism business were being disbursed and embezzled by those put in charge. They maintained in their responses that, benefits of the business end up in the pockets of just a few selfish individuals. The power brokers in any society will always have considerable influence over who shares in the benefits of tourism projects. This, I find unhealthy to effective eco-tourism development. The Assembly man for the area also intimated that, one important factor that seems to contribute to the low participation by locals is inability of the locals to identify available opportunities to make economic gains. He therefore called for conscious efforts to be initiated by relevant agencies to promote capacity building for an enhanced participation by many people to improve upon their lives. In my view, there is the need to develop the human resource base, particularly the indigenous personnel, to deliver quality services for tourists and to enhance general skills of locals of Wli Traditional area

The study again showed that, the Hohoe Municipal Assembly has not done much in empowering or building the capacity of the locals to enable many people to effectively participate but are quick in demanding for the Assembly's share of the proceeds. The chief even further blamed the Assembly for not ensuring that, the road from Hohoe to the Wli community is tarred or put in a better shape than it has been for all the years. It can therefore be realized from the study that, the capacity of the local people of Wli community is very low as far as the tourism business is concerned. They also lack the requisite skills they need to fully participate whether as groups or individuals in the development of the Waterfall in their area which has received so much publicity both internally and internationally. There is the need for the relevant stakeholders in the industry to mount programmes that would provide the necessary capacity in terms of skills and money to promote and or increase the participation levels of the locals of the Wli community.

Conclusion

The study established clear-cut evidence that, the people of the area have a fair knowledge of the resource (the Agumatsa Waterfall) and its related economic activities, but not well involved due to several barriers to effective participation. The majority is however ready to support the industry into the future but are calling for equity and fairness in the disbursement of proceeds and development of eco-tourism in their area to ensure a win-win situation for all the industry players. The general view in the area suggests that, the people put in place to see to the utilization of the resource are not doing much as expected of them. This is gradually creating apathy among residents which has resulted into low participation by the local residents.

The study revealed that, the length of stay in the area was not a matter of concern to the people since most of them were found out to be natives. It was however realized that, participation by the local people is relatively low. Some of the causes cited for the low participation include; lack of requisite skills, inadequate funds, conflict over the true ownership of the resource, and mismanagement of proceeds

among many others. The situation prevailing currently does not fully promote mass participation by local residents. There are however traces of some form of placation which is visited on the local people as appeasement. This is evident in the findings of the study that indicated some community assets and facilities which are donations by a philanthropist rather than direct benefits of tourism in the area. These things which include an ambulance for the clinic in the area are all benefits which are eco-tourism related.

Alternative livelihood should be provided to locals to economically empower them to effectively participate in the eco-tourism business in the Wli Traditional area. Entrepreneurial ventures should be undertaken by the relevant stakeholders to build the capacity of locals for enhanced performance and participation. A research should be carried out to find out the true owners of the lands involved and compensation paid to them so they will stop their nefarious activities in the Agumatsa wildlife Sanctuary.

Limitation

The following occurrences affect the quality of the data gathered; hence generalization cannot be made until further studies prove otherwise: Material for data collection, sample size of the representatives, time and fund

Ethical Issues

In the conduct of this study to a very large extent, we did not take sides or contribute to any discussion that relates to the conflict that ensued between the local people of the study area and the people of Togo over the ownership of the Wli Agumatsa Waterfall. Also, any local who insisted on money before responding was tactfully left out. The anonymity of all interviewees was held highly as names of respondents were not required of which the interviewees were made aware before the commencement of each interview session; neither was anybody identified with the views that were expressed except for the paramount chief. Furthermore, those who declined to respond for personal reasons were not in any way forced to do so against their will.

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