

Involvement of Stakeholders in Transforming Untapped Landscapes into Touristic Landscapes based on Ecosystem Services; A Look at The Volta Lake – Ghana.

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Abstract

Effective planning of ecotourism provides better linkages, reduces leakages of benefits out of a country, creates local employment, creates the multiplier effect, and fosters sustainable development (Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2019; Amuquandoh 2010; Mandić 2020). Nature and culture are pillars of the tourism product and often the main pull factors for tourists to visit a country. Ghana is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Sub-Saharan Africa due to its all-year-round attractions (Amoako-Atta, Dayour, and Bonye 2020). Despite Ghana's wealth of landscapes with enormous potential for sustainable tourist development, the industry has been unable to reach its full potential. Stakeholders' involvement in tourism planning and development is yet to be investigated and understood in Ghana. The specific forms of engagement related to the subject matter, as well as the activities engaged in by stakeholders, have not been explored or understood in other parts of the world. Thus, this study aims to unpack the role of stakeholders in sustainable tourism planning and development, with an emphasis on Volta Lake and its ecosystem services. The study employed a mixed but qualitatively skewed research design, comprising 50 participants, who engaged in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The results show that primary stakeholders participate in tourism planning and development through the services they offer to guests and compliance with laid down rules regarding the use of the lake, but in most instances, they get little support from the secondary stakeholders (National, Regional, and District government officials; non-governmental organizations; institutions of learning and traditional authorities). Also, there was unanimity regarding the extent of engagement among the kinds of stakeholders identified in ecotourism planning within the Lake region. This interaction was shown to be mostly induced and coercive in nature and to reflect a top-down participation approach between secondary and primary stakeholders, which has a negative influence on tourism development. In dealing with this challenge, the study recommends that the central government/local authorities provide an enabling environment for the effective engagement of all stakeholders to sidestep any possible mistrust in the tourism development process. Also, the central government should provide in-service training programmes for stakeholders to enable them to contribute meaningfully to issues concerning tourism planning and development within the region. Future studies will look at the character, function, sensitivity, and vulnerability of the landscape under study.

Introduction

Ecotourism is viewed as a cooperative interaction between tourists, host communities, and other stakeholders interested in eco-touristic activities. If an ecotourism destination/project is to be successfully implemented, genuine and active stakeholder participation and control from the

ideation phase through implementation, monitoring, and assessment is required (Beltramo, Peira, and Bonadonna 2021). The most widely used definition of ecotourism from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) was utilized for this study. "Responsible travel to natural places that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people," they described ecotourism as (TIES 2020).

Ghana is one of Sub-Saharan Africa's most popular tourist destinations, because of its year-round attractions such as a warm temperature, white sand beaches, historical landmarks, and a diverse culture. The ecotourism ideology aims to safeguard natural landscapes, protected areas, and endangered species, as well as to improve rural people's livelihoods, build local economies, and assure local accountability (Mandić 2019; Kim and Xie 2019). As a result, the goal of this research is to examine the role of stakeholders in long-term tourist planning and development, with a focus on the Volta Lake and its ecological services.

Background and Literature Review

Stakeholders are those with a vested interest in resolving a problem or issue, and they include all persons, groups, or organizations who are "directly" influenced by the activities of others (Gray 1985). These stakeholders are autonomous because they retain their independent decision-making powers while adhering to shared rules within the collaborative alliance, despite the fact that choices are taken jointly on a consensus basis (Wood and Gray 1991). Thus, the success of a potential greenway network is heavily reliant on the support of local stakeholders, and ecotourism is no exception to this rule (De Souza et al. 2021). Local stakeholders contribute perspectives that are complementary to those of the experts and are incorporated into the plan. As a result, proposals that are more connected and coherent with the local reality and more likely to be implemented are developed and implemented (Amoako-Atta, et al. 2020). Due to the interdependencies among numerous stakeholders in a tourist destination, community ecotourism planning is arguably crucial.

The ecotourism sector is made up of a variety of players from all over the world. Stakeholders are divided into two categories by (Mayers 2005), those who influence decisions and those who are affected by decisions. Primary stakeholders are seen as valid and moral stakeholders in ecotourism development (Mastronardi and Romagnoli 2020), as their interests influence and are influenced by key policymakers' actions. "Local tourism development requires individuals who are impacted by tourism to be involved in both the planning process and the implementation of policies and action plans," according to (Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2019). This guarantees that development meets the community's perceived demands."

Several schools of thought have tried to theorize numerous typologies of stakeholder participation in ecotourism planning. Despite the fact that the types of stakeholder participation (Table 1) differ by author (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; Tosun, 1999), the basic elements that identify the stages within the typologies remain consistent. As a result, these proponents' theories about the forms of stakeholder participation in ecotourism will be adapted for the purposes of this study.

Table 1: Arnstein's and Tosun's Typologies of Stakeholder Participation in Ecotourism

Arnstein's Typology	Relation	Tosun's Typology
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Degree of citizen power	1	Citizen control	➔	<u>Spontaneous Participation</u>
	2	Delegated power		
	3	Partnership		
Degree of Citizens Tokenism	4	Placation	➔	<u>Induced Participation</u>
	5	Consultation		
	6	Informing		
Non-Participation	7	Therapy	➔	<u>Coercive Participation</u>
	8	Manipulation		
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom-up; • Active & Direct Participation • Participation in Decision Making • Authentic Participation • Self-Planning
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-down; Passive; Formal • Indirect; Degree of Tokenism • Manipulation; Pseudo-participation • Participation in Implementation and sharing benefits; choice between proposed alternatives and feedback.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-down; Passive; Indirect; Formal • Participation in Implementation but not necessarily sharing benefits • Choice between proposed alternatives or no choice; Paternalism, non-participation, high degree of tokenism and manipulation

Source: Adopted from (Pretty 1995; Arnstein 1969; Tossun 1999)

They share similar perspectives on the degree to which stakeholders have or are given the ability to make their own decisions. Pretty proposed seven types of community participation in tourism development in 1995. They include Passive Participation, Participation in information giving, Participation by consulting, Participation for material incentives, Functional participation, Interactive Participation and Self-mobilization.

In Table 1, Tosun's 1999 model emphasizes the provision of full managerial responsibility and authority to the host community, implying an ideal mode of stakeholder participation in tourism development that is similar to (Arnstein 1969) model's degrees of citizen power and Pretty's (1995) model's self-mobilization and interactive participation. Pretty's (1995) and Tosun's (1999) models of tourism development allow primary stakeholders to have a voice regarding tourism development through an opportunity to hear and be heard. In this type of participation, primary stakeholders are often only partially involved in the decision-making process. They have no power to ensure that their views are considered by secondary stakeholders such as governments, multinational corporations, and international tourism organizations. This leaves coercive participation as the least preferred form of stakeholder participation.

Method and Data

The descriptive qualitative research method and the case study approach were used in this study (Kumar 2011). Representatives from the Traditional Council, the Asuogyaman District Assembly, Ghana Tourism Authority, the association of hotels and recreational facilities, the Volta River Authority, community members, and the Eastern Regional Coordinating Council are among those who provided information about the development of ecotourism in the region. Using purposive sampling, informants were identified, and data was gathered through non-participatory observation, in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), library study, and documentation review. The qualitative data analysis was carried out using an interactive model of analysis, which consisted of three components: data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusions (Miles et al., 1992). Mayer's classification (2005) was used to find the participants, and Arnstein's (1969), Pretty's (1995) and Tosun's, (1999) analysis technique was used to do an analysis of stakeholder participation. Additionally, the SWOT analysis was used to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in order to generate recommendations (De Souza et al. 2021).

Results

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter in light of the objectives. The relationship between stakeholders identified for the study, their forms of participation, barriers to their participation, and challenges associated with each category are examined in this section.

History of the Volta Lake/Akosombo Dam

The Akosombo Dam (Figure 1) has long been regarded as one of Ghana's most popular tourist destinations. The Volta River Project began in 1965. The dam is 132 meters tall and 660 meters long from its foundation. It has constructed a 780-kilometer-square-surface-area water reservoir with a total storage capacity of 148 million cubic meters. This dam produces hydroelectric power for both internal and export use, which is important for Ghana's growth.



Figure 1: Image of the Akosombo Dam/Volta Lake

Source: Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

The Volta Lake is the world's largest man-made lake. It stretches 400 km from Akosombo to Yapei and holds 148 ml of water. It is said to have 114 different fish species in its waterways, with a fish population of 35,000 to 40,000 fish per year. The months of July and August are the busiest for tourists visiting the dam/lake. The Dam, on several counts, has been named the Best Tourist Attraction in the Eastern Region by the Ghana Tourist Board since 1997.

Stakeholder Involvement in Tourism Planning and Development in Asugyaman

Table 2: Roles of Stakeholders Involved in Tourism Development

Stakeholders	Roles	No. of Informant
1. Association of Hotels and Recreational facilities	They are mostly the first point of call for tourists. They provide accommodation and recreational services.	30
2. Community Members (Akwamu/Anum/Boso)	They bear the brunt of tourism's effects, whether positive or negative. They typically act as hosts and guides for tourists and also operate businesses that cater to tourists.	12
3. Eastern Regional Coordinating Council	This institution acts as a link between the national and district levels, ensuring that district programmes correspond with the national agenda.	1
4. Asuogyman District Assembly	The planning institution responsible for conducting government business at the local level.	2
5. Volta River Authority	This development authority was institutes to design and implement the development of the Volta Lake, including the construction and operation of a dam, a power station, and a transmission system.	3
6. Ghana Tourism Authority	They serve as the implementing agency of the Ministry of tourism at the national regional and district levels	1
7. Traditional Authority	Traditional leaders are the guardians of community lands, culture, customary laws, traditions, and history of their domains. They also help to keep law and order in their communities and initiate development through development partners.	1
		50

Key: Stakeholders 1 & 2 represent “**Primary**” while 3-7 represent “**Secondary**”

Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

As illustrated in Table 2, tourism planning and development involve a diverse range of stakeholders. So, for this study, a number of different groups were identified and interviewed in order to figure out how they work together to make the Volta Lake and its surrounding slopes a popular tourist attraction.



Figure 2: Photographs of some of the District's Hotels and Recreational Facilities

Source: Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

Travelers and tourists can choose from over 30 modern hotels and resorts (Figure 2). The following was mentioned in an interview with a representative from the Asuogyman District Assembly regarding tourism planning and development:

The need of aggressive district marketing and the Assembly's implementation of measures to raise the necessary money cannot be overstated. Despite the fact that tourism employs a large number of people, its full potential is yet to be realized in the district....

The association of hotels and tour operators in the district (primary stakeholders) whose activities are regulated by the Asuogyman District Assembly (ADA) and the Volta River Authority (VRA) as indicated above, were examined on their perception about their involvement in the design and implementation of ecotourism development based on the three types of stakeholder engagement (spontaneous, induced, and coercive participation) propounded by (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; Tosun, 1999). They were asked to agree or disagree with a set of fundamental features that were framed as statements in each type of their involvement.

Table 3: Forms of Stakeholder Participation in Ecotourism Planning and Development

Forms of Participation	Total	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Rank
1. Coercive	N 30	20	2	8	1
	% 100	(65)	(8.3)	(26.7)	
2. Spontaneous	N 30	18	2	10	2
	% 100	(59.2)	(6.8)	(34.0)	
3. Induced	N 30	12	2	16	3
	% 100	(40.3)	(4.9)	(54.8)	

Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

Four important criteria of coerced involvement were adapted and phrased as statements for respondents to agree or disagree with in order to determine this. These were: (a) we are only informed about tourism development decisions after they have been made by top management, (b) we have no say in the district's tourism development agenda, (c) external organizations and the government take the lead in developing the district's tourism plan, and (d) we have no say in how tourism development grants received from international donor agencies are spent. 65% of the 30 participants polled consented to this type of engagement (Table 3) followed by spontaneous and induced participation.

Also, in a focus group discussion held with a group of purposively selected community members, from Akwamu, Anum and Boso to assess their roles in tourism development, the study discovered that residents are generally grateful for the gift of a beautiful landscape. When we asked participants to share some of the roles they play in tourist development, the following roles stood out: Follow the laws and regulations set out by the VRA and the ADA to protect the environment, communal labor, sell items to tourists and visitors provide tour guide services. They also provide tourists and visitors with entertainment and, on occasion, serve as hosts to them. To explain their involvement in the decisions associated with tourism planning and development, this was revealed;

VRA has failed to achieve the goal for which we were relocated. They transport tourists from the dam site to Dodi Island, although there is nothing for tourists to do on the island. We have knowledge of the area's history, which we can share to add to the overall story but we have been sidelined.... (57 years old woman, New Dodi)

In an interview, the Chief of Akwemu, who is involved in tourism planning and development, stated that the Akwemu Traditional Council works extensively with domestic and international development partners to promote culture and tourism values in the district. Notable achievements he said include their involvement in the Akwamu George Conservation Trust (AGCT), charged with the responsibility of developing and managing the Akwamu Gorge and the refurbishment of the Akwamuman Museum & Tourist Receptive Center.

SWOT Analysis

At the conclusion of their participation in this study, all fifty participants were asked to summarize the tourism sector's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Asuogyaman, as well as the interactions between its stakeholders. Table 4 below were views of represents regarding strengths and weakness;

Table 4. Strengths and weaknesses of Stakeholder Relationship for tourism development

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Biodiversity, as well as a vast unexplored landscape	1. The local government has limited resources to promote tourism development
2. Traditions, culture, and authenticity	2. Regional communication, promotion, and enhancement for tourism development are lacking.

3. Artistic-historical resources	3. Lack of a sector-related coordinating body at the local level
4. Historic buildings	4. Poor collaboration among local development authorities (secondary stakeholders)
5. Positions of strategic importance	5. Despite conservation efforts, the district lacks a long-term strategy for ecotourism development.
6. Volta Lake	6. Participation of the local community in tourist planning and development is ineffective.
7. Akosombo Dam	
8. Large arable land capable of supporting large-scale agriculture	

Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

The above responses on strengths and weaknesses were followed by that of opportunities and threats in table 5 below;

Table 5. Opportunities and Threats of Stakeholder Relationship for tourism development

Opportunities	Threats
1. Tourist arrivals are increasing at the national, regional, and local levels.	1. National policy focuses less on community-Based ecotourism development
2. Growing interest in issues related to sustainable tourism.	2. Poor decentralization of tourism-related planning institutions at the local level
3. Strategic geographic location to attract tourists.	3. The presence of more well-known and established neighbouring areas from a tourist point of view
4. The presence of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in conservation and tourism development	

Source: Preliminary Field Visit, 2021

Discussion and Conclusion

Ecotourism is widely regarded as an important instrument for poverty reduction and landscape management (Beltramo, et al. 2021). However, evidence from the study showed a great opportunity for ecotourism development within the district, including; a vast unexplored biodiversity and beautiful landscapes, with specific reference to the lake, community forest and surrounding slopes, which are home to approximately 20 species of medium-to-large mammals. Therefore, failure to identify and involve key stakeholders early on in landscape planning for ecotourism development within this area, can result in project failure as well as potential conflicts (De Souza et al. 2021). On the other hand, allowing a wide range of stakeholders, including local

communities, to participate would encourage knowledge sharing and the acquisition of new skills, all of which would foster a better understanding of regional issues and the generation of new and innovative solutions (Christofakis and Papadaskalopoulos 2011; Ponte et al. 2021). Findings from the study are in contrast with the above accretion as the most common form of interaction between primary and secondary stakeholder was mostly coercive.

Prior to the Regional Reorganization, Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), the implementing agency for the Ministry of Tourism, had 11 Regional Offices, with the number of regions increasing to 16 — this number is expected to rise. As required by ACT 817, the Authority must establish District Offices and Regional Committees in all regions. Despite the fact that the Tourism Act mandates that the GTA collaborate with the District Assemblies in each district, this is not the case as evidence of weaknesses and threats raised by secondary stakeholders confirmed that the local government lacked the resources necessary to promote tourism development initiatives due to the abundance of untapped tourism potentials. Also, it was found that there isn't enough communication, promotion, or collaboration between local development authorities in the region, and there isn't a long-term plan for ecotourism development. As a result, obtaining sole administrative representation at the district level would necessitate a minimum of 216 additional workers (this is exclusive of support staff). Again, referring to the Tourism Plan, the Authority will look into the possibility of employing over 1,000 people at the district level as support workers before 2027. As a result, the current condition may render the authority's work ineffective, as eco-cultural tourism is the main attraction at the local level (Ministry of Tourism 2012). The above affirms Souza's conclusion that greenway planning will be impossible unless the government machinery responsible for it is well structured at the local level (De Souza et al's. 2021).

The study concludes that, while there may be a diverse range of stakeholders across sectors, this does not guarantee an ecotourism project's long-term viability. As a result, in order for an ecotourism project to thrive, all project stakeholders must collaborate to ensure the project's guaranteed success, which any effective stakeholder participatory system ensures. As a result of this conclusion, the study recommends that the Asuogyaman district Assembly and allied secondary stakeholders strategically streamline operations in order to include all stakeholders in the district and ensure that they have an equal opportunity to participate in the development process. This when properly done, will foster an environment that supports effective collaboration among all stakeholders, thereby avoiding any potential mistrust in the tourism development process. Additionally, the central government should offer in-service training to stakeholders to enable them to participate meaningfully in regional tourism planning and development.

Second, the study recommends that secondary stakeholders avoid coercive methods of engaging primary stakeholders in tourism development. One could argue that stakeholder roles are critical for ecotourism and community development. As a result, the ecotourism project's failure may be a result of the project's inability to incorporate the values, interests, and culture of key stakeholders. Thus, the more effective the method of participation, the greater the success of the tourism initiative. Lastly, sustainable tourism cannot be achieved unless local tourism planning is well structured and effectively integrated with regional and national planning systems. As a result, the government should concentrate its efforts on developing and implementing the planned

restructuring of the district-level tourism planning machinery. Following that, local planning institutions will have the option of receiving technical assistance to ensure the success of landscape planning and ecotourism development. Future research will concentrate on the character, function, sensitivity, and vulnerability of the landscape.

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