



EXPLORING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AT ECOTOURISM SITES IN THE UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA

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Abstract

This paper explores the extent of community participation at four selected ecotourism sites focusing on local control, personal benefits, community-based benefits, and personal involvement. A mixed method approach was adopted. Results revealed locals participated with little personal benefits (i.e. personal incomes, employment, consultations, meeting attendance, policy formulation and decision-making). Tourism development was locally controlled yet a few tourism committee members and tour guides carried out its activities except at Gunwoku in Sirigu. The study recommends information sharing with all community members and tourism authorities. Government must improve existing infrastructure as well as the skills and financial capabilities of local residents.

Keywords: Community, Ecotourism, Participation, Tourism, Sustainability

Introduction

Community participation (CP) is an effective way to achieve success in development projects. Thus, many governments and NGOs adopt it as a development strategy. The earliest introduction of CP in tourism research dates back to the early 1970's (Pretty, 1995; Chifamba, 2013). CP refers to local participation in tourism and includes decision-making and sharing of benefits, consultations, planning and policy making (Kurniawan et al., 2021). CP in tourism leads to positive economic, socio-cultural and environmental changes and also the welfare of community members. Some of the positive impacts are employment, improved education and access to capital (Purnomo et al., 2020). However local marginalization, low capacity, inadequate capital and requisite knowledge limits CP (Tichaawa & Moyo, 2017).

Many third world countries have adopted tourism as a development approach and also recommend its implementation by their communities (Sharma & Thapar, 2016). If CP is to improve local well-being, at what level should it be in order to engage many people? CP studies have also produced varied results

(Amoako-Atta et al., 2020). In Ghana, CP research in tourism are skewed in favour of the southern parts of the country with terse attempts in Northern Ghana (Amoako-Atta et al., 2020; Boasiako & Yeboah, 2021). These reasons justify further studies of CP in tourism and its positive impacts on local well-being at different tourism sites and different geographical areas like the Upper East Region (UER) which Magigi and Ramadhani (2013) described as the second poorest in Ghana.

This study synthesizes data from different sites by exploring issues like personal incomes, employment, consultations, meeting attendance, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, community benefits, environmental preservation, quality of goods, quality of life, cultural exchange, cultural activities and infrastructure.





Conceptual Review of Literature

The first proposed model of CP (Arnstien, 1969) ignited research desire to explore its meaning and the extent to which community members are included when initiating development projects. Generally, it refers to

local participation in problem identification, planning, decision-making and execution of projects that affect their well-being or livelihoods (France, 1998 as cited in Head, 2007). it is therefore a crucial element for a democratic and transparent system of power redistribution thus enabling the poor who are often excluded from both the political and economic spheres. According to Arnstien’s model, it first has eight levels and later grouped and both describe the extent to which local populations participate in development projects. The first comprised manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen

control. According to Mark (2012), the second grouping puts them into “Bottom”, “Middle” and “Top” as indicated in Figure 1. The bottom also known as non-participation comprises (i) manipulation and (ii) therapy. The middle refers to tokenism and comprises (iii) informing, (iv) consultation, and (v) placation because locals are informed with their views sometimes included into tourism projects. The topmost level is Citizen Power namely (vi) partnership, (vii) delegated power, and (viii) citizen control and it is real participation. At this level, stakeholders undertake negotiation among themselves while responsibility for decision-making is on the community.

Figure 1: Typologies of Community Participation

7. Self-Mobilization		8	Citizen control	Degree of citizen participation
		7	Delegation	
6. Interactive participation		6	Partnership	
5. Functional Participation		5	Placation	
4. Participation by material incentives		4	Consultation	
3. Participation by consultations		3	Informing	
2. Passive Participation		2	Therapy	
1. Manipulation		1	Manipulation	
Pretty (1995)			Arnstein (1971)	

Source: Author’s Construct (2024).

CP seeks to improve local welfare, their support for conservation of tourism resources and the sustainability of the industry at the micro level. It thus allows communities to effectively participate in decision-making, planning, benefits sharing and determine the type and scale of tourism development to be implemented (Pretty, 1995). Pretty’s model (1995) aligns with that of Arnstien but with seven sequential ones comprising manipulative participation; passive participation; participation by consultation; participation for material incentives; functional participation; interactive participation and self-mobilization. From Pretty’s model, “participation for material

incentives” allows residents to provide land, receive tourists and become workers without necessarily gaining knowledge, while “functional participation” is about local people taking part in activities or functions organized by external bodies. With “Interactive participation”, locals analyse problems, make plans, strengthen local groups and take decisions on resource use. Finally, with “Self-mobilization residents take their own initiatives to change the system and link with external institutions who serve as sources of technical advice (Aryasih, 2019).

Tosun (2000 in Ketema, 2015) describes CP with three typologies (i.e. spontaneous,

coercive and induced participation) and provides a clearer understanding of the levels. In spontaneous participation, locals take full managerial responsibilities and authority for tourism development. At this stage, local residents are expected to adequately benefit from tourism. For induced CP, they may have a say in tourism development but decisions are taken by higher authorities while coercive participation is seen as manipulative as it gives only information to avert local opposition to tourism development. Some justify this with the reason that local participation leads to inefficiency and laboriousness. Some scholars argue that CP should not only centre on residents getting jobs, making decisions and equitable distribution of resources among others but also guaranteeing knowledge transfer, better local facilities, environmental conservation and real empowerment to influence decisions regarding livelihoods (Okazaki, 2008; Stone, 2015). This discourse suggests that CP research in tourism should not only be about individuals' involvement in tourism development but how tourism generally benefits many community members.

Some advantages of CP are that it allows free expressions of both group and individual opinions to bring changes, settle varied interests, generate acceptable decisions for entire communities, tap knowledge of local experts and ensure local support for tourism projects (Adu-Yeboah & Obiri-Yeboah, 2008). For these reasons, Amoako-Atta et al. (2020) concluded that CP is a necessary ingredient in tourism development as local communities are the ones who bear the brunt of the industry.

Empirical Review of Literature

Previous studies have revealed mixed results regarding tourism's role in ensuring economic benefits to communities. In the Okavango Region of Botswana, a study showed that majority of the people depended on tourism for their livelihoods (Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2010) while for Othman and Rosli (2011) people in the Malaysian islands had impetus in tourism entrepreneurial businesses. In a related study in the Bwejuu village of Tanzania, Magigi and Ramadhani (2013) found that residents participated in tourist activities (i.e. 44%

implementation, use of attractions and the benefits of tourism, 11% gave information to on attractions 9% consulted, 9% operated tourism ventures, 17% exchanged material for incentives, 6% joint hotel ownership, 6% planning and 5% decision-making and control). For studies in Ghana, economic benefits are limited with indirect gains being substantially higher than direct ones (Akyeampong, 2011). According to a study by Ishmael (2016), majority of respondents in Cape Coast never or rarely had tourism income (87.6%), benefited (94.5%), provided services (81.4) and employment (82.5%). Mensah and Adofu (2013) in the Ashanti region also revealed non-participation in entrepreneurial activities due to low finances. With respect to the non-economic areas, there is evidence of poor local participation at many tourists' sites globally. For example, while studies found decision-making in Sichuan Province of China and Kenya to be weak (Kibicho, 2003; Li, 2005;), others revealed non-consultations in Turkey as well as low local involvement and acceptance of views (Tosun, 2006; Wilai, 2000 in Wetchunyagul, 2008). The situation was attributed to lack of time, self-confidence, lack of information and less knowledge by residents. Sometimes, tourism's benefits can be in respect of whole communities. Examples include the donation of revenue by a tourism organization in Uganda to construct projects (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001), protection of wildlife (94.8%), protection of natural environment (77.4%) and preservation of culture (67.8%) in Ghana (Ishmael, 2016). Despite the advantages of CP, it is often difficult to ensure equity in CP with large populations (Sewell & Philips, 1979). This could be due to three things namely scope of participation, intensity of participation and degree of consensus.

Methodology

Study Setting

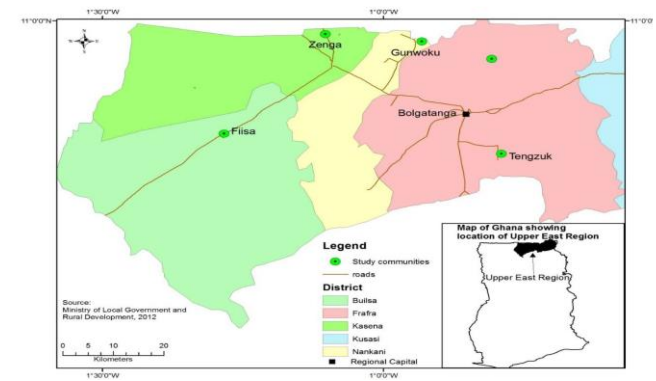
The land area of Upper East Region is 8,842 sq. km, representing 4% of Ghana's total land mass. The main ethnic groups are the Gurenese,

Talensis, Nabdams, Kassenas, Nankanis, Builsas, Kusasis and Mampruis (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021). The region borders Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, Sissala District to the west and East Mamprusi District to the south. The tourism sector is underdeveloped due to scarce information that can help in its planning and development. There are many and unique cultural resources that can be used for tourism and related ventures to minimize reliance on agriculture.

Selected Communities in UER

Four communities were selected purposively (i.e. Tengzuk, Gunwoku, Zenga and Fiisa) because they were considered as active tourism sites in the region as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Map of studied communities



Source: Author’s Construct (2024).

Research Design

A mixed method comprising questionnaire, focused group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were used. Data was collected from selected household members aged 18 years and above. The data required types of CP in tourism development, local control of the tourism, economic benefits (i.e. incomes, employment and entrepreneurship), involvement (consultations, attending meetings and policy formulation) and community benefits.

Sample Size Determination and Distribution

The questionnaire was administered to four hundred household (400) members using Eq. 1 adopted from Fisher et al., (1998 cited in Yakholmes et al., 2009).

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2} \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq. 1}$$

$$d^2$$

where, n is the desired sample size (i.e. $\geq 10,000$), z is the standard normal deviation, often set at 1.96 and corresponds to 95% confidence level, p is the proportion (i.e. 0.52) in the target population; q = 1-p (i.e. 0.48) and d is accuracy desired (usually set at 0.05 or occasionally 0.02) (Yakholmes et al., 2009). The household sample was proportionally divided among the four communities and later adjusted to bridge marked differences (as illustrated in Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of various sample sizes for each selected community

Community	Population	Sample based on population	Adjusted sample size
Tengzug	1011	133	120
Zenga	428	52	66
Fiisa	366	44	64
Gunwoku	1419	171	150
Total	3224	400	400

Source: Author’s Construct (2024).

Sampling Procedure

The study used a multi-stage sampling procedure to select respondents. A list of numbered houses were derived from community leaders and with simple random sampling, houses and households were selected. With help from local leaders, purposive sampling was used to identify participants for FGDs and IDIs in the communities and district assemblies. Each community had male and female FGDs comprising 9 to 12 people. Twenty-four (24) people participated in the IDIs.

Study Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires

A questionnaire which was administered to 400 respondents combined close-ended, open-ended and multiple-choice questions. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was pretested with consistent wording and formatting with questions aligned to objectives.

Interview Schedules for FGDs and Key Informants

A semi-structured interview guide was designed and used for FGDs and IDIs. The same themes were presented to heads or representatives of District/Municipal Assemblies to respond.

Data Processing and Analysis

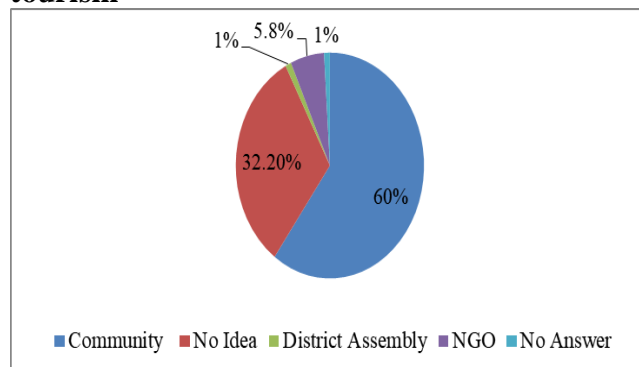
With quantitative data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to generate percentages, cross tabulations, bar graphs and pie charts. Qualitative data were discussed with relevant quotations from FGDs and IDIs to support household data.

Results and Discussion

Control of Tourism Development

From the findings, 60% of respondents agreed locals controlled tourism, 32.2% said they had no idea who controlled it, 5.8% said NGOs, 1% said District Assemblies and 1% did not answer as in Figure 3.

Figure.3: Organization and control of tourism



Source: Author's Construct (2024).

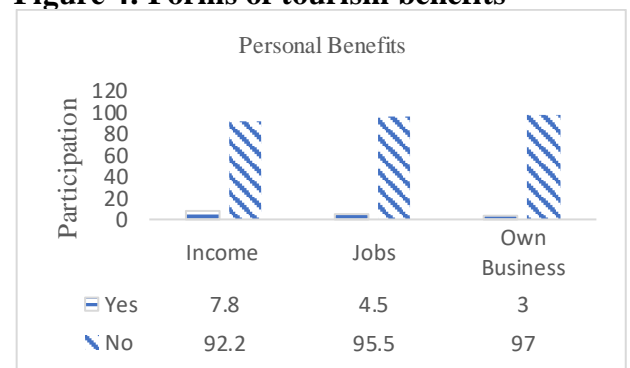
Data from IDIs and FGDs, supported the majority view as an official of Talensi District Assembly (TDA) said: "These places are designated as ecotourism sites and the heritage resources are for the local people. However, per responses from IDIs and FGDs tourism activities were done by few residents from certain sections of the communities. An IDI participant at Tengzug said "Look, there is a Tourism Development Committee, but it is those who own the shrine who control the major activities" (33 years old, male). In addition, a FGD participant at Zenga said: "It is not all of us who are in control. It is done by

that house (pointing to the chief's palace) and book people" (42 years old, male). Similarly, at Fiisa, a participant said "We don't know anything about how the strangers come and go" (53 years old, female). According to a participant from Tegzug, not all sections are allowed to control tourism because they equally have shrines but prevent their use for tourism unlike the Bunchiug community. One participant from Kpataare explained why others refused to allow their shrines for tourism purposes: "We are not prepared to desecrate our shrines and our gods for people to come in because we are eager for money. Take a look at our shrine, the vegetation is green even in this dry season". Besides, others in Sakpeah saw it as an abomination against the spirits to disturb their gods with strangers. At Gunwoku, a participant said "Our own sister promoted tourism here so we can all show people what our fore fathers left to visitors. The wall decorations and pottery are made by many people" (55 years old, female).

Personal Economic Benefits

The findings revealed that 92% of respondents did not obtain income by serving tourists, 96% had no tourism-related jobs and 97% did not own tourism businesses as indicated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Forms of tourism benefits



Source: Author's Construct (2024).

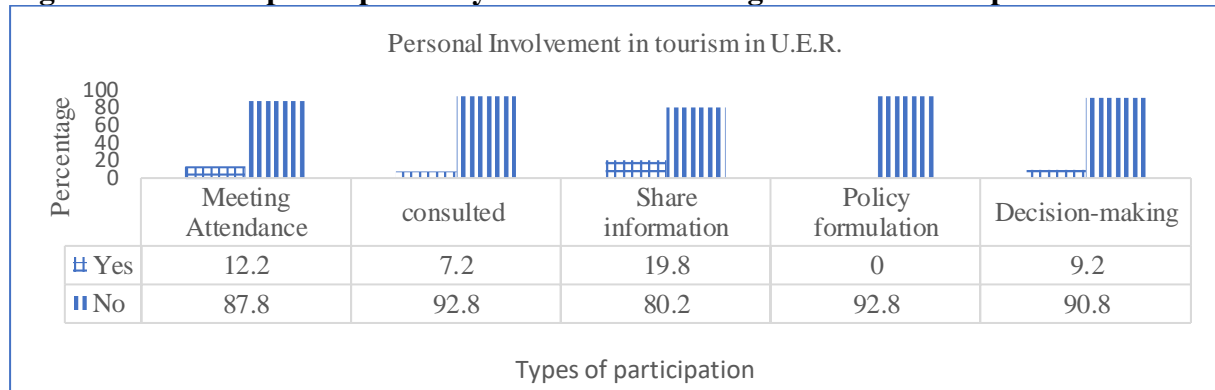
FGDs at Tengzug, Zenga and Fiisa also showed low benefits from tourism. An IDI participant at Tengzug said "Look! Nothing is happening. People's jobs are not related to tourism" (33 years old, female). A 48 years woman at Zenga said "Most of our children do not have work that take advantage of tourism". Such situations were due to inadequate finance,

nonexistence of overnight stays and the use of public or private transport that denied jobs for local drivers. With poor linkages of businesses to tourism, residents paid more attention to other livelihood activities. For participants at Gunwoku, while some residents were employed in areas such as catering, accommodation, display rooms, accounting sections as well as training tourists in pot making and wall decoration, other women received loans to set up businesses.

Other Forms of Participation

This section considered participation in terms of meetings, consultations, information sharing, policy formulation and decision-making. The results revealed that 12% attended meetings, nearly 20% had information while less than 10% participated in the others as in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Mode of participation by residents in heritage tourism development



Source: Author’s Construct (2024).

FGDs and IDIs results from Tengzug and Zenga also suggested minimal participation in these areas. The discussants in the two communities said, only TDC members attended meetings. Majority of discussants were prepared to attend meetings if assured of economic gains. At Gunwoku it was said that regular durbars were organized by a management team to disseminate and solicit information. However, attendance was poor and participants did not do meaningful contributions due to inadequate knowledge. At Fiisa, items including gun triggers, spear heads and stone bangles were seen but with no meetings. It is believed other relics are buried beneath the Azagzuk shrine, which sits on a giant granitic rock.

For consultation, almost 93% of respondents were never consulted (See Figure 5). Discussants at both Tengzug and Zenga said it was due to residents’ inadequate knowledge about tourism and the failure of TDCs to disseminate information. A TDC member at Zenga said: “Even if we consult all community members, they cannot contribute meaningfully. The reason is that they do not even understand

the processes of tourism development.” (39 years old, male).

With information sharing, the results revealed 88% of respondents were not given information. The FGDs noted students and researchers as people who frequently got information. At Tengzug, participants said they never get any information because of the assumption that they could not make any significant contribution to tourism.

On the issue of policy formulation and decision-making, findings revealed 92.8% and 91% of respondents did not take part respectively. These findings were corroborated by FGDs and IDIs as participants at Tengzug, Gunwoku and Zenga said such roles were limited to TDCs due to community members’ low levels of education and inadequate tourism knowledge. An IDI participant at Zenga said : “This problem is caused by both central and local governments’ inability to provide training programmes for the TDCs and community members as a whole”. (52 years old, male).

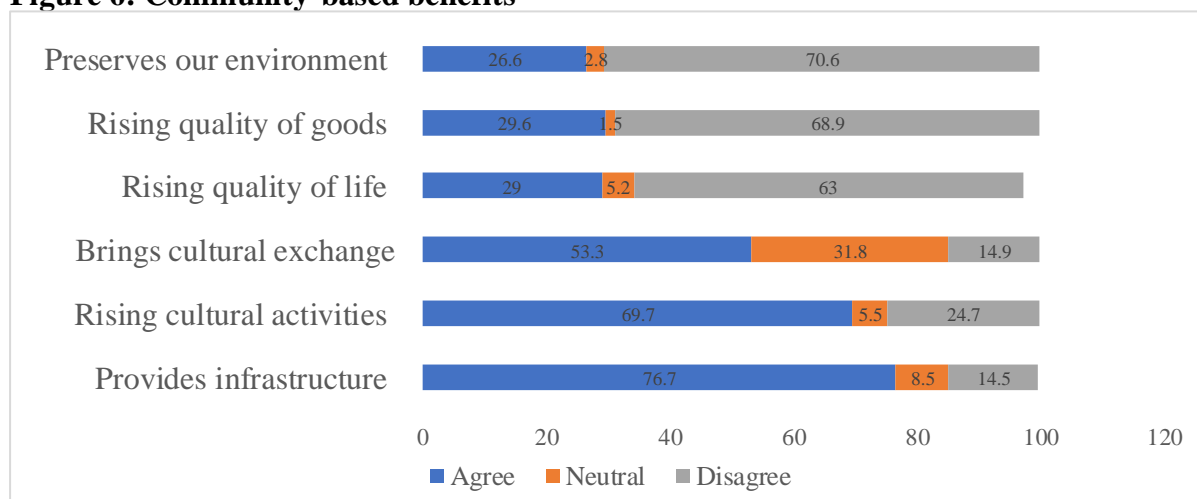
Community-Based Benefits

The study revealed that there were other benefits that the community enjoyed collectively with the presence of tourism. According to majority of respondents, tourism promotes cultural exchanges (53%), encourages cultural activities (69.7%) and provides infrastructure (77%). However, less than 50% believed it preserved the environment (26.6%), induced quality goods (29.6%) and raised quality of life (29%) as in Figure 6.

Results from FGDs and IDIs supported that of the household surveys indicating that communities benefited from infrastructural development, cultural exchange and promotion of cultures. At Tenzuk, a discussant said “As a community, we have benefited several things from tourism”. Some of the things mentioned included a tarred road leading to the community, dug-out wells, donations received to re-roof a school block that was ripped off and to cater for needy school children as well as visitors’ information center. During the FGD at Gunwoku, a discussant said: *Some white visitors sometimes stay in our homes and try to speak the local language. They also eat our food and learn*

how to make traditional products like wall decorations and pot making. We also learn from them (45 years old). Other benefits discussants mentioned comprised tarred road from Kandiga Junction to Sirigu, a visitors’ centre, tourist accommodation, ten public toilets, five boreholes, a community library, a school block and SWOPA Women’s Loans Scheme. Another person at Zenga explained why he believed tourism promoted cultural activities. He said: *“Some young groups of dancers are formed because of tourists. This is because such cultural things attract visitors. Some residents, though a very minute proportion of the population; still make traditional artefacts because tourists form the market. A 52 year old man had this to say “Without the tourists, some of the cultural items would have vanished.* Discussants attested to the fact that their community benefited from a well-decorated wall around the main Paga Crocodile Pond, a traditionally painted catering/rest place, privately owned eco-museum, a visitors’ centre, restaurant, information office, summer huts at the pond and entertainment area where cultural performances could take place.

Figure 6: Community-based benefits



Source: Author’s Construct (2024).

Discussions, Conclusions and Implication for Policy

Discussions

Tourism development was locally controlled in all the four selected communities and for that matter the Upper East Region of Ghana

and corresponds with citizen’s participation postulated by Arnstein (1969). Despite the local control, most tourism activities were carried out by the few tourism committee members and guides in the region as residents barely had personal benefits, except Gunwoku

in Sirigu. These findings of low CP is similar to studies in related studies in Sichuan Province of China, Kenya and Ghana where residents did not have actual involvement in decision-making and were not consulted on tourism development issues (Kibicho, 2003; Li, 2005; Acheampong, 2011) but in contrast to Mbaiwa and Stronza, (2010) in the Okavango Region of Botswana where tourism is the main source of livelihoods. The reasons for the low CP in UER include tourism being a secondary economic activity, does not give opportunities to many, low education levels, local leaders keeping others out of the sector, no information sharing, poverty, inadequate tourism skills, the fear of tourism taking over traditional livelihoods and the religious nature of resources. The low CP participation can cause apathy for tourism development. The findings in UER means many people may not be supportive of tourism development and this will be a challenge for sustainable tourism. The ambiguity is who and how many should participate to meet the criterion of adequate CP?. Though the culture-nature based sites do not guarantee wide CP, the symbiosis between the two in the study area serves as an important pull factor for tourists. On community-based benefits, majority of the population said though tourism has instigated cultural exchange, rising cultural activities, and improved tourism infrastructure, it did not promote general quality of life, goods and environment preservation. Contrary to the models used, the study reveals that merely having local control without adequate finances, skills and knowledge does not inure to the general well-being of the residents (Arnstein 1969; Pretty, 1995).

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the communities have control over tourism development. This per the model in Figure 1 should mean community ownership and participation in all forms and should lead to sustainable tourism experiences. Notwithstanding this, there were low levels of community participation. The study therefore concludes that mere local control of tourism does not guarantee that many residents will personally benefit from tourism development. This is contrary to

Pretty's (1995) model which postulates that the highest form of participation is citizens' control of tourism where majority of people derive the maximum benefits. The reasons attributable to low local participation include low levels of skills, financial muscle, absence of employment opportunities and discrimination against some people as the attractions used are religious in nature and belong to particular sections of the communities. Secondly, the findings revealed that where the resource is not based on religion or beliefs while management is also in the hands of people with skills, local participation is likely to be significant as in the case of Gunwoku in Sirigu. Thirdly, the local people acknowledge the existence of community-based benefits.

Policy Implications

There is the need to bring all people from all sections of a community to take part in tourism development. This requires that sections whose religious resources are used as attractions are convinced to accept sections without resources. In the case where some sections refuse for their resources to be used as attractions, they should be convinced to change their minds. Tourism Development Committee members at the tourism sites should be encouraged to share deliberations with all community members. Community members should be empowered financially and through training and education to be able to participate. Tourism infrastructure should be improved to take care of the needs of community members and potential tourists. There should be further studies to consider both gender and spatial perspectives of community participation in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

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