

## An Examination of Ecotourism Development in Ghana: Case Study of the Kakum National Park

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### Abstract

This study examines ecotourism development in Ghana. For the purpose of investigation, the researcher uses the ecotourist destination of Kakum National Park as case study to evaluate the involvement of the local community in the decision making and its impacts/benefits to the communities. Two communities, Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomagor were chosen for this study. In order to develop a credible framework, the available related literature was reviewed. Primary data was mainly used for the study to gather data from the indigenous people and staff of Kakum National Park. Interviews were the main instrument employed to carry out for the study. A total of sixty nine people were interviewed and discourse analysis was used for the study. In sum, it emerged from the study that the indigenes were not involved in decision making and that ecotourism activities can be negative and positive. The researchers recommend that all stakeholders should work to ensure that there is grass root participation among all indigenes and appropriate revenue sharing scheme should be put in place.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Kakum National Park, Conservation, Wildlife Division. World Tourism Organisation, Indigenes, Forestry commission

### Introduction

The concept of conservation is the wise utilization and maintenance of the earth's resources. It involves plan resources management based on accurate inventory and protective measures to ensure that resources do not become degraded. In view of rapid development and population increase in many tropical areas of the world, and the greater extent of natural resources depletion, there is a considerable urgency in establishing adequate protected area. This is to achieve the objectives in line with the World Conservation Strategy. (Mackinnon and Thorsell, 1986 as cited in Songorwa, 1999).

A common approach to protecting biodiversity has been the creation of Parks and other protected areas that exclude livelihood activities of rural communities. This policy of exclusion resulted in denial of local people's customary user rights to the land and has become focal points of bitter protest. This is because the local people asserted their historical rights to the land and resources.

The establishment of protected areas is considered as the most important ways of ensuring that the world's natural resources are appropriately conserved to meet the material and cultural needs of our future generations. Most of the natural areas in protected areas provide relatively an undisturbed environment conducive to ecotourism activities. Such protected areas include National Parks, State Parks, Recreational Parks, Marine Parks and Wildlife Resources and Sanctuaries (Sivananthan, 2000 cited in Zhou and Ritchie, 2007)

In Ghana, Kakum National Park was established as a means of generating benefits for local communities and achieving conservation. (WD, 2004).

Kakum National Park is an island habitat for several globally endangered species including forest elephant, bongo and white breasted guinea fowl. It also contains the headwater of four major rivers that supply water for more than 30,000 people (Teye, 2004).

The park was a forest production reserve established between 1925 and 1926 (WD, 2004). It was under the management of Forestry Department until 1989 when its management status was transferred to Wildlife Division.

In 1992, the Kakum Conservation Area was formed, consisting of the Kakum National Park and the nearby Assin Attandaaso Resource Reserve. It was a programme to create a national park and conservation area in Central Region of Ghana as an integral part of an economic growth initiative linking the growing tourism to the conservation of natural resources (WD, 2004). It is located in the Central Region of Ghana, about 20 kilometres north of Cape Coast. It covers 360 square kilometres of Ghana's rapidly dwindling rainforest. The government of Ghana officially opened the park in 1994. (Ghana Tourist Board, 2006).

Kakum National Park has been the driving force behind the tourism development in Ghana and has won international recognition since its establishment. The Kakum National Park was chosen as the ecotourism of the year by the travel magazine Conde Nast Traveler and won the 1998 Ecotourism Award in 1998. In 1999, Kakum National Park was awarded the British Tourism for Tomorrow Award. These awards not only promoted Kakum National Park as a leading ecotourism destination in African but also boosted revenue generation at the park (WD, 2004).

Kakum National Park is boast of a unique canopy walkway, Africa's first and only rainforest walkway, is composed of 350 metres of suspended bridge and six tree platforms that reach the height of 30 metres above the forest floor. The walkway was carefully designed to depend upon trees for support, no nails or bolts were used. Instead, steel cables were carefully wrapped around trunks to provide the necessary stabilization. From the treetops, visitors experience a unique and a spectacular view of the rainforest ecosystem and the opportunity to see flora and fauna, which could never be viewed from the ground. Hundreds of species of butterflies and birds can be viewed from the Walkway early in the morning and if visitors are lucky, they may catch a glimpse of the Spot-nose, Campbell's and Columbus. (Forestry Commission 2006)

Besides, the walkway, visitors can learn the secrets of the forest. With an experienced guide, you can learn about the various medicinal and practical uses of the forest plant species while hiking along the Kakum trail. This tour of nature's pharmacy also passes through some beautiful areas of the rainforest and occasionally you may run into a troop of Campbell's or a pair of duikers

(Forestry Commission 2006).

However, Kakum National Park in spite of its impressive ecotourism resources has not shown appreciates degree of tourism development so far. The answer to the question of whether KNP has a comprehensive and specific plan for local communities participation in tourism development and whether local communities appreciate the immerse tourism potential remains uncertain. The study therefore seeks to evaluate the involvement of the local community in the decision making and its impacts/benefits to the communities.

## **Methodology**

### **The study area**

The Kakum River originates within the park, and hence the park is named after the river. Its tributaries which flow through the park are Obuo, Kakum, Afia, Sukuma, Nemimi, Aboabo and Ajuesu. Geographically, Kakum National Park is located 33 kilometres north of Cape Coast and Elmina near the small village of Abrafo. It is easily accessible by taxis from the town center, and through organised tour buses. The park's welcome center contains a restaurant, lodge, picnic area, camping area, and a wildlife education center. The park is surrounded by 33 villages and also agricultural lands where food crops and cocoa are grown.

The park lies within an elevation range of 135–250 metres . The reserve which borders this park is the Assin Attandanso Resource Reserve . Its habitat consists mainly of moist evergreen forest and also seasonal dry semi-deciduous forest. The habitat is formed of 90% forest area, 3% artificial terrestrial landscape while the remaining area has not been categorised. The park area receives an annual average rainfall of 1380 mm. (Forestry Commission, 2006).

### **Rational for selecting the community for the study**

The study was carried out in two selected communities (Abrafo –Odumase and Mesogomor).

The communities (Abrafo –Odumase and Mesogomor) selected for the study were purposively selected because they were the earliest to be developed and easily accessible. Hence they were due for evaluation.

### **Research design**

The research design was a case study that examines community participation in the management and development of ecotourism project as well as it impacts. Two selected communities (Abrafo –Odumase and Mesogomor) were used as a case study in order to have a better insight into real ecotourism development in Ghana. It also allows emphasis on details and therefore provides valuable insight into problem solving, evaluation and strategy.

### **Study population**

Target population for this study, was the people in the (Abrafo –Odumase and Mesogomor) communities fringing the Kakum National Park as well as workers of the park. Male and female who were above 18 years were chosen, since the researcher believed that at that age the respondent are mature enough to express their views well and were among the economically active population in the study area.

### **Research instruments**

A semi – structured interview guide was used for the in- depth interview which includes open as well as close questions.

The key informants interviewed were the staffs of the Park. These people were chosen because they constitute the policy makers. The interview took place in their various offices and it took about an average of 25 minutes to conduct the interview.

Furthermore, Chiefs and Assembly man of Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomagor communities were interviewed. Also, interviews were conducted with local people either involved or not involved in ecotourism

activities at Abrafo – Odumase and Mesomagor communities. The reason for chosen these people was to evaluate their involvement and its benefits to the communities. The interview took place at their various abodes of residents.

### Data collection

In this study, primary data was collected from the indigenes of Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomagor communities near the park and staffs of the park using an in-depth interview.

### Research ethics

Individuals' anonymity and confidentiality was maintained and every finding was treated with outmost confidentiality and care for the purpose of the research only. The rationale for the study was explained to respondents before the study commenced. The respondents were not forced to take part in the research. All these activities were done to ensure the research is free of value judgment on the part of the researcher.

### Limitations of research

Ideally the study should have covered all the surrounding communities to give a clearer picture of the outcome of the study. However, the findings of this study were limited to Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomagor communities. However, this does not negate the relevance of the study as conditions prevailing in one community do not differ much from the others.

In addition, some of the indigenes were not willing to be interviewed as they see it testing their intelligence and hence some of them remain silent to some of the questions asked. Even though the researcher assured them of confidentiality but they see it as waste of time and encroaching on their privacy and rights since they had an experienced of researchers visiting them on similar issues without realized any positive changes from many studies done. A problem of the technique is that, respondents are most likely to identify other potential respondents who are similar to themselves (Saunders et al., 1997:147). These affect the sample size.

### Data analysis

Notes were written on the interview guide whilst respondent talk and it was subjected to a continuous process of coding and categorization from a lager perspective to a smaller version in order to acquire attributes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH

**Table 1 overview of respondent characteristics in communities**

Characteristics	Abrafo-Odumase		Mesomagor		Total
Number	41		28		69
Gender	No	%	No	%	
Female	14	34.0	6	22.0	20
Male	27	66.0	22	78.0	49
Age class					
10-19	4	9.7	0	0.0	4
20-29	4	9.7	8	28.5	12
30-39	10	24.4	5	17.9	15
40-49	13	31.8	10	35.7	23
50 and above	10	24.4	5	17.9	15
Marital status					
Married	37	90.2	28	100	65
Not married	4	9.8	0	0.0	4
Level of education					
High	14	34	5	17.9	19
Middle	19	46.6	17	60.7	36
Low	4	9.7	1	3.5	5
None	4	9.7	5	17.9	9

Table 1 show that a total number of sixty nine (69) respondents were interviewed. The results show that 62% of respondents are males whiles 38% are females. 5% of the respondents are young falling within the age class of 10-19, 74% adults within the age class of 20-49 and 21% are old within 50 and above. Out of the respondents, 85% are married whiles 5% are not married because they are students and young.

Education of respondents was categorised into primary, elementary, secondary and post secondary schools. These were further categorised into high (i.e. Secondary and post-secondary school), middle (i.e. elementary school) and low (i.e. primary school) education levels and none for those who have not had any formal education. It was observed that 26% of the respondents have high education level, 53% of them fall in middle level, 8% within low level and 13% of the respondents have no education.

### **History of Kakum National Park**

This study deemed it necessary to look into the history of the park. The interviewees were asked to give a brief history of the Park. The respondents gave a range of views but have common ideas of the origin of the park. Majority of the respondents were not able to give the specific date but they made an assumption of its origin that it used to be a forest for extraction of timber, hunting of animals, gathering of snails, tortoise, mushroom, yam and fruits. It was also a habitat for several globally endangered species including forest elephant, bongo and white breasted guinea fowl. Some of the respondents were able to say that it contains the head water of four major rivers that supply water to Cape coast. However, majority (86%) of the respondents were able to say that it was declared as a national park in 1992 by President Rawlings. Two of the respondents were able to say that it was established by the government to create a national park and conservation area in Central Region as integral part of an economic growth initiative to link the growing tourism industry to the conservation of natural resources. Thus, it is evident that a majority of the indigenous people used to depend on the resources in the park for their basic needs.

Also, Fennel (2006), supports this findings that ecotourism has been with us for some time, in many regions around the world and represented through a number of different types of activities.

### **Community view on decision making and managing of Kakum National Park**

The reality is always important in every research work; thus the researcher, interviewed the two selected communities to find out whether they are involved in decision making and managing of the park. Subsequently, a closed question was posed to the interviewees. Do you involve yourself in the decision making and managing of K.N.P? Yes or No? If yes, in what way do you contribute your quota? The study revealed that majority of the respondents (86%) do not involve themselves directly in the managing of the park. Surprisingly, the Chiefs and Assembly men in the Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomakor community do not even have an idea of how the Park is managed. The remaining (14%) respondents who are involved are just tour guides, cooks, caterers, and waiters, bar man and security men. Ironically, these community people who are involved do not know much about how the Park is managed owing to their level of education. As Ross and Wall (1999b:130), said management policies and organisations are critical to achieve outcomes in ecotourism. Contrary to the opinion of Honey (2003), that real ecotourism should be run by or in partnership with communities surrounding a National Park. This research has found out that the communities surrounding the park do not directly involve in the running of the park. The research also revealed that, Wildlife Conservation Division and Ghana Heritage Conservation are mainly responsible for managing the Park.

### **Employees views on roles of the local communities in ecotourism development**

Community participation in the development and management of ecotourism project has become indispensable for the survival of ecotourism projects. Hence employees of the K.N.P. were interviewed to give their views on the role played by the communities.

The study revealed that, a total of (91%) of the staff were of the view that locals play a role by giving information on illegal activities such as encroachment, and poaching. (Table 2) However, one interviewee said that, local communities were involved in the daily administration and management of tourist activities. (Table 2). Ribot (2004) recommended that to ensure efficiency, equity and sustainability of tourism programmes, local communities should be involved in tourism activities.

**Table 2: Employee views on roles locals play to ensure ecotourism development**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Giving information on illegal activities in the park	10	91
Administration and management of tourist activities	1	9
Total	11	100

### **Visitor's management techniques**

The researcher deemed it necessary to find out how the site is maintained. As said by (Cleere, 1989 in Shackley 1998), that visitor pressure should be controlled to avoid physical impact on cultural sites. Also according to Marion and Farrell (1998: 173), visitor impacts need to be managed so that it does not affect vegetation, soil, water and wildlife resources as well as the quality of visitor experiences. Subsequently, a question was posed to the interviewees on what visitor's techniques do they use to manage the park. Majority of the respondents (86%)

said that tour guides and sites workers are there always to instruct visitors where to go, how to behave and control parking. Minority of the respondents (14%) also mentioned about the sign posts, washrooms, visitors centre and the placement of bins at the vintage points for disposal of rubbish. This research has found out that visitors are guided by a compulsory tour guides. A possible reason is that the tour guides do not want visitors to go astray or endangered themselves especial on the use of the canopy. However, the World Heritage Committee feels that visitors should be allowed to move about freely without a compulsory tour guide (Shackley, 1998).

### **Community benefits**

There was the need to take a look at the benefits which the communities derived directly or indirectly from participation in the activities of the park. It was the aim of this study to assess the benefit derived from the park. These impacts were categorised into (financial, social, and human assets) and where possible into positive, negative and direct and indirect impacts for the purpose of clarity.

### **Financial benefits or impacts**

The financial impacts categorisation fall into wages (for those earning income from ecotourism through full or part-time employment), casual earnings (income from selling to tourists) profit (for providing accommodation services) and none (for those who claim having no financial gain from ecotourism. Generally, out of the total respondents, 23% have wages, 13% have casual earnings, 3% have profit and 61% have no financial benefits. The study revealed that most of the respondents in Abrafo-Odumase receive wages while minority can be observed from in Mesomagor. Differences in wages were apparent. Respondents in Abrafo –Odumase are employed under wildlife or Ghana Heritage while in Mesomagor , they are involved in providing cultural entertainment and guided tour. Also, 24% of the respondents in Abrafo –Odumase and 22% in Mesomagor benefit financially in terms of casual earnings. They are sellers involved in food services or artefact production. Only one respondent (4%) provide accommodation services to tourists (categorised under profits) in Abrafo-Odumase. Some respondents claim not benefiting financially. 24% of them can be observed in Abrafo-Odumase while 37% are observed in Mesomagr. These represent people not involved in ecotourism.

### **Social benefits or impacts**

Respondents were asked the question in what way has ecotourism impacted on your social networks and what has been gained or lost? Responses were categorised into positive for making contact for friendship with tourists and negative for respondents who claimed making no profit on such contact. Generally, majority (59%) of the respondents have made friends with tourists while minority (41%) indicated making no such contact.

The result indicates that 57% of the respondents in Abrafo-Odumase and 61% in Mesomagor had positive contact. This was characteristically apparent with respondents involved in ecotourism as they are in contact with tourists by virtue of their activities. However, this featured predominantly in Abrafo-Odumase where visitation of tourists is relatively high and respondents come into contact and make friends frequently. It is not surprising to make such an observation because Abrafo-Odumase is the main gateway into the park and with major attractions, making contact with tourists relatively frequent.

In Abrafo-Odumase, these contacts have been beneficial as respondents claimed benefiting in many ways such as : information exchange(i.e. corresponding with tourists); receiving gifts (cash and in kind); credit for purchase of equipment; becoming happy as a result of chatting and laughing with them, given advice when problems are shared and child sponsorship. In a particular case, one respondent entered into partnership with a tourist, providing accommodation services to tourists. Besides, she has built a school from the proceeds and offering free education to some needy students in the community. On the contrary, benefits indicated in Mesomagor were typically information exchange and receiving gifts. Only one respondent claimed gaining job in teaching tourists dancing and drumming in the city. The results also, indicate that 43% of the respondents in Abrafo-Odumase and 39% in Mesomagor made no contact. Indications of lack of interest or not being involved in ecotourism account for this.

It can be concluded that people in Abrafo-Odumase value contacts with tourists and have benefited more from such contact than people in Mesomagor. The reason accounting for this basic difference is frequent contact with tourists and benefits noted.

### **Impact on human asset**

Different types of tourism training were given to respondents involved directly in ecotourism. These range from hospitality, tour guiding and interpretation, first aid administration, communication, conflict resolution, traffic management, financial management (i.e. booking), cookery and hygiene, facility maintenance and dancing and drumming (i.e. entertainment). These were categorised into training for responses indicating tourism training and none for responses indicating no training. Generally, majority (61%) of the respondents indicated being trained while a minority (39%) had none of the trained listed. These represent respondent not involved directly in

ectourism.

The study revealed that 57% of the respondents in Abrafo-Odumase and 67% in Mesomagor were trained. However, there was difference regarding training. Training such as tour guiding and interpretation, first aid administration, hospitality, knowledge in tourism and conservation, facility maintenance, traffic management and conflict resolution were prominent in Abrafo-Odumase. In Mesomagor, training such as dancing and drumming, cookery, soap-making and booking featured. As part of the training, they were given exposure tour to other community involved in ecotourism. The cultural aspect (i.e. dancing and drumming with bamboo) of the local people of Mesomagor which was directly linked to ecotourism accounts for different type of training given. The attractions and facilities are managed by the community, accounting for training in financial management which to enable them manage their finances. Respondents who did not receive any form of training, 43% can be observed in Abrafo-Odumase while 33% in Mesomagor can also be observed. They are people not involved directly in ecotourism but predominantly farmers.

### **Actual impact on natural asset**

Regarding natural asset, certain critical issues were revealed in the study. The issues include loss of access, poaching, imprisonment, fines, crop raiding by elephants and lack of compensation for farm damage, conflict with neighbouring community and limited access to farmland. These were categorised into forest and land. They were further categorised as negative impacts. Other issues categorised as positive were communities acting as watch dogs.

Loss of access to forest resources was a dominant issue raised by respondents in both communities. This is obvious because the forest was an important livelihood support system when they had access. In one case, a respondent claimed she was supporting her education in 1960s with income made from snails gathered from the forest. Though, respondents acknowledged the consequences of infraction (such as imprisonment and fines), they expressed contempt for the manner in which Wildlife Division personnel handle people for infraction. They claim being aware of incidences of imprisonment, fines and maltreatment for entering the park or poaching. Consequently, these incidences have contributed to the development antagonistic attitude towards WD personnel.

Crop raiding by elephants was also a critical issue because of its persistence. This was attributed to persisting farming activities along the boundary of the park which attract wildlife. Respondents claimed that incidents of raiding are reported to WD personnel but they receive no compensation for farm damage. It was indicated that their livelihoods are severely disrupted. One respondent claimed his farm is often destroyed by the elephants. Expected incomes are lost, making it difficult for him to support his children education. It was apparent that, there was no policy addressing issues of compensation. Cases of crop raiding and lack of compensation also contribute to antagonistic attitude of the local people.

In contrast to negative impacts, respondents acknowledged the conservation importance of the park. They indicated that conservation of the forest was essential in terms of preventing damage of cocoa farms through timber exploitation, preventing indiscriminate killing of wildlife, forest degradation and consequent drying of rivers and improving rainfall for farming activities in the area. Also, the park will be of benefit for the future generation. The awareness of conservation significance of the park was also reflected when respondents noted that the communities assist in the protection of the park by preventing or reporting potential poaching cases to WD. It was not surprising when it was noted that there is conflict between Mesomagor and some neighbouring communities. These communities perceive that Mesomagor benefit from ecotourism and serving as watchdogs reporting poachers from other communities to protect its interest.

The study reveals that people have access to land for farming. Despite having access to land, respondents claimed that the park limits access to more land for farming. Also, the study reveals that some people in Abrafo-Odumase community benefit in terms of rent from leased land for hotels development. People in Abrafo-Odumase have ownership right over lands than in Mesomagor who are recognised as migrant with only user right.

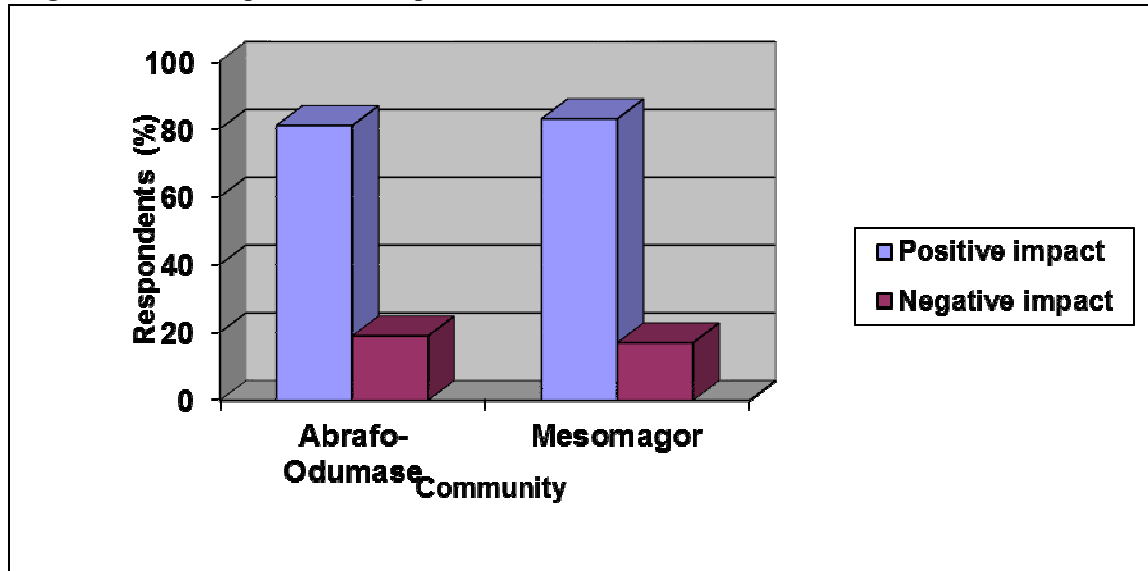
### **Future expectation of impacts**

The result shows that respondents expect more benefits (positive impacts) while some have no expectation, when question “what are your expectations from ecotourism as long as it exists?” was posed. The benefits range from employment, sustained revenue generation in the park for payment of wages, wage increment, tourism training, gifts, increase social network, sponsorship for children, compensation for farm damage, infrastructure development and invitation of the orchestra to perform abroad. These were categorised into positive for responses indicating expectation and negative for responses indicating no expectation.

Figure 1: below indicates that most (81%) respondents in Abrafo –Odumase and (83%) in Mesomagor expect more benefits from ecotourism. However, there were differences in expectations. It was surprisingly noted benefits such as tourism training, employment, wage increment, gifts, increase social network and sponsorship for children. Infrastructure developments featured prominently in Abrafo-Odumase. They are

optimistic that with the development of hotels in the community, more employments would be created. On the contrary, emphasis was on sponsorship of the orchestra group to perform in cities and abroad. This expectation was influenced by promises made by some tourists. Even though disappointment was expressed for failure to fulfil these promises, they still hold this expectation.

**Figure 1: Future expectation of impacts**



### Conclusions for overall findings

The findings revealed that the park used to be a forest for extraction of timber, hunting of animals, gathering of snails, tortoise, mushroom, yam and fruits. It was also a habitat for several globally endangered species including forest elephant, bongo and white breasted guinea fowl.

The findings revealed that the Abrafo-Odumase and Mesomagor communities' leaders were not involved directly in decision making and managing of the Park.

In general, ecotourism creates employment and ecotourism related livelihood activities, impacting positively on the financial asset of local people. However, relatively few people benefit as many do not gain financially or perceive the financial benefits as insufficient. Also, local communities do not benefit from the revenue generated from ecotourism which they expected.

Ecotourism promotes training of local people who have gained employment. The training enhances their skills for quality delivery of services. But, relatively few people are given this opportunity. There are other benefits that accrue to local people as they find other uses for training acquired. People in Abrafo-Odumase benefit with regard to this aspect. However, it favoured and revitalised the culture of people in Mesomagor.

### Recommendations

The Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission should develop a plan aimed at integrating local communities in all the planning and management of KNP. All stakeholders should work to ensure that there is grass root participation among all indigenes. This when put in place will go a long way to promote the concept of community participation in nature conservation for ecotourism project.

Revenue sharing scheme. Expedite action on policy supporting revenue sharing or disbursement to communities. This should come in the form of development needs as identified by the communities. This scheme should also provide for compensation for farm damage or relocation of farmers along park boundary. Farms should be converted into plantation before final relocation.

For an ecotourism operation to meet its goal of providing a return on investment to the local population, the machinery to allocate and disperse funds must be created. Unfair allocation or perceived unfairness will lead to conflict between community members and the enterprise. Community and enterprise relationships must be reciprocal and fair.

The Ministry of Tourism and Forestry Commission should come along with marketing and promotional campaign to showcase and advertise the tourism potential of Kakum National Park so as to attract much tourist to visit the area. This is in the view that, it will help maximize the potentials of tourism resources found in the park.

There should be transparency in the distribution of tourism benefits to the community. If the locals see that they are not benefiting from the proceeds generated from tourism they will not participate in the

development of tourism.

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