

Residents' Perception of Tourism Development in Rural Ghana: Insight from Three Ecotourism Villages in the Volta Region, Ghana

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Abstract

It is almost axiomatic to state that tourism's image determines to a large extent its allure and subsequently, its level of support. Though perception can be formed either by tourism planners or from the experiences of the hosts, it is the impressions of the hosts which appear to give a true and a more plausible representation of what pertains in the destination. In this regard, post tourism development perceptions are important to understanding the perspective of the residents. This paper aims at collating these views and exploring the underpinning dynamics. In the study, three hundred and eighty-four (384) residents from three ecotourism villages were chosen using the stratified random sampling method and their views on their inclusiveness and benefits from ecotourism were solicited. Views were also sought from officials of the Ghana Tourist Authority at *Ho* and the Local Tourist Information Office at *Hohoe*. Interviews and Descriptive analysis results show that host perception of tourism was favorable and shaped by tourist activities and benefits to the community. It is recommended that the relevant stakeholders in tourism should further sensitize attraction community dwellers on how they can take advantage of the attractions to establish community tourism businesses.

Keywords: Perception, Tourism Development, Rural Ghana

1.0 Introduction

In the last few decades, the tourism industry has expanded very considerably globally to become an internationally recognized economic and social sector (WTO, 2007). It has become one of the most dynamic industries over the years (WTTC, 2003). Tourism pursuit prior to the Second World War was not wide-reaching globally, stylish and diversified in terms of demand but narrowed mostly to the standardized sun-sea-sand package form of activity. Regarded generally as temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work or residence for recreational pursuits (Mathieson and Wall, 1995), tourism demand evolved and changed after the Second World War especially over the past two decades. Although the standardized, sun-sea-sand package holiday remains the most popular form of tourism, at least among tourists from the industrialized Western world, there has been a shift to more participatory forms of tourism affording a broader fulfilling experience (WTO, 2002), against established trend-orders.

Tourists are also known in recent times to be increasingly becoming environmentally sensitive and adventurous as well as more flexible; travelling increasingly to untouched and more distant destinations (Asiedu, 1999; Dei, 2006). This has led to the focus on environment and wildlife-based tourism and poverty-reducing tourism which have less impact to the environment and more benefits to the poor. Nature-based tourism was established in developing countries in the mid 1980s (Rolfers 2009). The essential part of this tourism is visiting relatively undisturbed natural areas especially in rural areas. It is mainly organized in the form of guided –tours.

TafiAtome, LiatiWote and Wli are the most visited natural areas in Volta Region of Ghana (GTB, 2013) tours to Afadjato South are organized by individuals and groups. This idea of eco tourism is a means of creating awareness of the plight of the natural environment to domestic and foreign tourists. According to Mowforth (2008), the intention is to encourage natural environmental preservation as a long term measure using tourism business and poverty-reduction by engaging the rural folks to participate in tourism development and deriving net benefits from tourism as a short term measure to the local community. Most scholarship on tourism perceptions in Ghana has been on tourist's post trip perceptions of destinations (Abanga and Abane, 2003, Amenumey 2003, Boakye 2009). Little academic work has been done in the area of assessing residents' post tourism development perception: How are they engaged in developing tourism? What are the net benefits to them? This paper seeks to examine local resident impression of tourism in the Afadjato –South district of Ghana

1.1 Literature Review

It has long been recognized that rural tourism's image determines its appeal to potential hosts (Brown 2010, Holycomb and Pizam 2014). Of particular importance are its natural landscape preservation and net benefits in its operation, (Crotts 2006). Consequently it is not uncommon to observe most tourism planners stressing environmental sustainability and collective benefits.

Generally, tourism image can be formed from two main perspectives: first can be created by (either by

tourism planners and policy makers) and it can emanate from lessons from other tourism areas (Mayo, 1973; Henkel et al, 2006). Of the many factors that affect host's formation of image, experiences of host societies and stereotypes appear to be dominant. Zaher and Kim (2013), for example, found significant differences in tourism image between residents who have stayed in a tourist region and those who have no such experience. They further observed that past tourism community residential experience has an effect on perception. Holycomb and Pizam (2010) however, did not find any such link. Asli, Selma Meydan and Tamer Cavusgil (2013), found from their study of Turkey that image is shaped more by stereotypical conceptions than by factual information.

Residential status also appears to have some influence on perception. Henkel et al (2013) reported differing perceptions between resident and nonresident local Thai residents. While non-residents locals saw cultural integration as a key attribute to tourism promotion local residents felt business opportunities were the most important considerations.

In their bid to attract support for tourism development, African countries are mostly confronted with the difficult task of dealing with a negative image (Teye, 1988, Ankomah and Crompton, 2010) in a bid to draw locals into tourism development.

The literature offers divergent opinions on the time of image formation. While some authors, led by Goth (2007), believe the image is formed before the actual practice of tourism, others (e.g., Go and Gover, 2003) assert that it is difficult for tourist to form a clear image of tourism without the actual experience. Schofield et al (2010) found that one's image of tourism tends to be more favorable with increasing encounter with tourists. They also observed that though residents' tourism image was less positive than absentee residents, socio-economic and behavioral variables did not influence image perception.

Regardless of when or where it is formed, perception of tourism is an important contributor to any country's successful foray into the tourism arena. Unfortunately, studies which address post tourism development perceptions are underrepresented in the literature.

1.2 The Case of Ghana and the Importance of Tourism

The Importance of tourism to the local economy appears to be growing with time. Since 1985, tourist arrivals in Ghana have grown more than 200% to the current 851000. Tourism is currently the 4th highest contributor to the nation's foreign exchange and contributes some 6% to GDP while employing more than 250000 people, both directly, indirectly (Ghana Statistical Service, 2006). The similar picture when considering receipts which have also grown to the current 1.5 billion dollars. Furthermore the sector is becoming increasingly important to the local economy for three main reasons. First, incomes from the country's two main export items, cocoa and gold tend (at best) to fluctuate, thereby rendering expected income from them unpredictable. Secondly, receipts from tourism have shown a steady 7-10% increase over the past 10 years. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, tourism is the only one of the country's top four foreign exchange earners whose contribution to gross domestic product and government revenue has increased consistently over the past five years (Bank of Ghana, 2006) Added to these is the fact that revenue from hotels and restaurant customers' tax grew from GH 24 million in 2000 to GH 65.3 million (approximately \$7m) in 2003, a 173% increase. Also the number of hotels in the three plus category has grown by almost 50% with increasing occupancy rate over the past five years (Ghana Tourist Board, 2008). These figures coupled with increasing arrivals, paint the picture of an expanding sector. As a destination, Ghana markets itself as a country with a rich, diverse culture and hospitable people. Other attractions include the famed Kakum National Park (KNP) and its canopy (which won the British Airways Eco tourism for Tomorrow award for sustainable tourism development in 2000) and the Cape Coast & Elmina castle which are designated by UNESCO as world heritage sites because of their importance in the Trans Atlantic Slave trade. Monkey sanctuaries, waterfalls and beaches are among the other attractions. Assessing residents perception of tourism development therefore becomes imperative in the light of the growing importance of tourism to the Ghanaian local economy.

Since local residents constitute major stakeholders in the sustenance tourism, it is important that continuous monitoring of their perceptions be done to inform both policy makers and industry of their (the hosts) conception of Tourism. Understanding host conception of tourism is central to establishing the performance and sustainability of tourism developments. Given the increasing level of competitiveness it is essential for destination management authorities to understand the main factors causing satisfaction/dissatisfaction for hosts (Korzay & Alvarez, 2010, Henkel et al, 2013)

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Location of the study

This study was carried out in the Afadjato South District of Ghana (acclaimed ecotourism hub of the country). It lies in the middle-blanket of the Volta region of Ghana between longitudes 0.15 E to Latitude 0.45N of the Greenwich meridian and Latitude 6.45N to 7.15N of the Equator. The district has a landmass of 1172 square kilometers (Afadjato South District, 2010) as well as an estimated population of 140, 284 and is made up of 109,

223 farm families (PHC,2010). Most of the people in the district are farmers while inhabitants of the mountainous area engage in conservation as their important secondary occupation. Afadjato South District experiences two distinct tourist seasons, holiday seasons which begins in November and ends in March and festive seasons. Afadjato-South District is acclaimed the Nations tourism hub because of its diverse natural tourism products which includes waterfalls, the highest mountain in the country, wildlife sanctuaries and natural scenery among others.

2.2 Method of data collection

The target population of the study was residents in the Afadjato-South District who live in three (3) attractions communities, Officials of the Regional office of the Ghana Tourism Authority and the Tourism Information Center of the District Assembly. The natural attraction communities were targeted because that is where most of the eco tours have been taking place (Bormann, 2011). Ghana Tourism Authority employees were involved in the study because they are knowledgeable as results of researches they have conducted as well as they market tourism products. In the absence firms offering touring services to eco-villages, the Tourism Information Center is currently offering such service and the employees are therefore knowledgeable in the area of study and therefore would give important information that would be helpful in achieving the research objectives.

2.3 Sampling Techniques

There were three categories of population comprising attraction community residents, Ghana Tourism Authority employees and Tourist Information Centre employees. Disproportionate stratified random sampling was used to choose 160 residents for the questionnaire survey with a total of 50 from each site. The sample was stratified to ensure that the socio-economic characteristics in the population are represented in the sample (Kotey, 1998). A simple random sampling was used to select 384 respondents in the villages. Respondents were located in their houses, on the streets, at their work places and the natural sites. It is random because every individual in the sample had an equal chance of being selected so that the findings could represent the views of the whole community. The subjects from the Ghana Tourism Authority were selected using simple random sampling while all subjects from the Tourist Information center participated in the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 The status of ecotourism in Afadjato-South District

Respondents from the three categories overwhelmingly confirmed that tourists visited the Afadjato South District, as only 2% of the respondents from the communities indicated that tourists did not visit the area. This implies that tourists were interested in visiting Afadjato South Attractions and majority of residents had interacted with them. This implies that natural attributes of the area are tourist attractions.

Attractions in Afadjato south were identified. According to Copper (2005), attractions provide a single most important reason for touring a destination. Therefore, it was important to identify the possible main attractions in Afadjaton South. Table 1 below shows the responses on the tourist attractions in the communities.

Table 3.1 Tourist Attractions in Afadjato South Communities

| ATTRACTION | PERCENTAGE (%) |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Natural Formations | 32.0 |
| Residents Activities | 28.4 |
| Natural Scenery/Wildlife | 23.4 |
| Transport System | 7.6 |
| Local Food | 6.8 |
| Entertainment | 1.8 |
| TOTAL | 100% |

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

Tourists, once in a destination, they get involved in various activities. According to the views of respondents, tourists who visit Afadjato South communities get involved in the activities portrayed in Figure 3.2

Highest proportion of Afadjato residents (95%) indicated that the main activity of the tourist was sightseeing of the natural features, followed by observing residents activities (93%) and giving donation (17%). Officials of Tourism in the locality and the region also identified sightseeing as the most popular tourist activity in the areas.

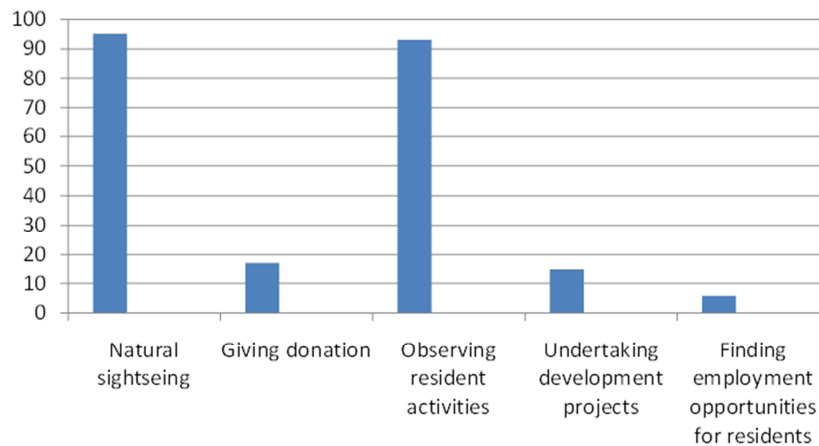


Figure 3.2 Activities undertaken by tourists during visits to Afadjato South District

3.2 Involvement of residents in eco tourism

Majority of the residents (56%) reported themselves as being involved in the tourism activities undertaken in the communities. They cited four ways in which this was done. These were provision of accommodation in the form of home stays, and other services as motorcycle drivers, security and eco tour guides. This was confirmed by the Tourist Information Center employees. It was therefore clear that locals' participation in management was passive, and therefore did not participate in decision making. This results tally with Dweks (2004) analysis which found out that most of the tours are actually managed by outsiders, while residents act as guides.

Participation by residents in eco tours

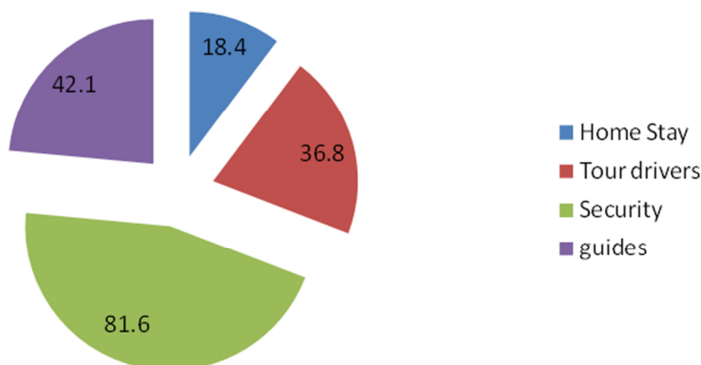


Figure 3.3 Participation of residents in offering tourism services

According to Rolfers (2009) a strong involvement of the residents in the tours has to be achieved because the interaction between residents and the tourist is a central aspect which determines the benefits of the residents from the whole exercise. It also allows residents to participate in decision making on what should be done which in turn rules out the possibility of residents being forced into humiliation. Rolfers (2009) recommends that communities in rural areas should be deeply involved in arrangements and offering eco tours to participate in decision making and should be allowed to take part in management of tour firms to fulfill the needs of the local population. The ability of the local people to take their own decisions related to tourism development, according to their own policies without being manipulated by business people in the tourism sector or other multinational companies will concentrate benefits of the eco tours to the community.

3.3 Benefits accrued from the eco tourism

The residents agreed that ecotourism had benefited them in number of ways (Figure 3.4) A larger proportion of Afadjato respondents strongly agreed (57%) and agreed (37%) that the venture is beneficial in improving sanitation in the community. They also strongly agreed and agreed that the venture was of benefit in the following areas: creation of employment (45%, 36%), housing development (52%, 35%), Setting self help groups (53%, 38%), donations (59%, 39%) improvement of infrastructure (53%, 35%) and setting business (52%, 34%)

Opinion of respondents on benefits of eco tourism

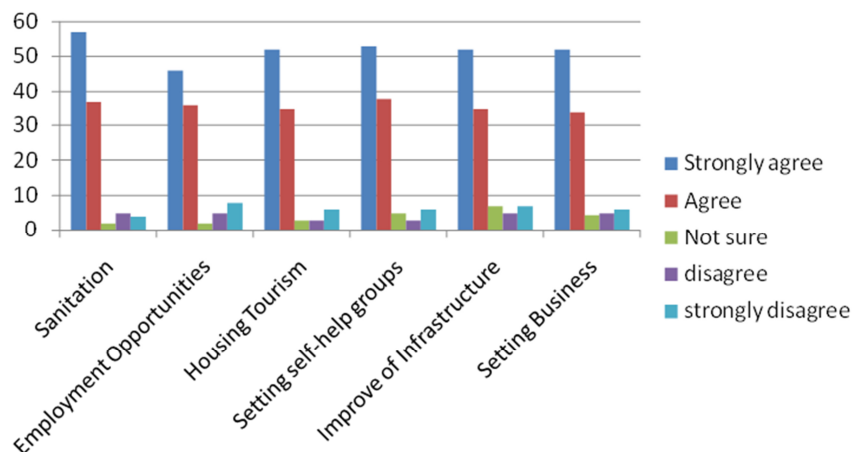


Figure 3.4 Opinion of residents on Areas of Benefit from Eco Tourism

The community residents view eco tourism as a beneficial venture. This is because when asked whether they had benefitted, majority (53.6%) responded in the affirmative while a proportion of 46.4% indicated that they had not benefitted.

3.4 Perceptions on the tourist visits in Afadjato south communities

Results presented in table 3.2 indicates that the opinion of the majority of Afadjato respondents (88%) were in favour of tourism in their communities as evident from those who indicated that they 'strongly like'(38.5%) and 'like' (49.5%) the tours.

| Respondents | Responses | | | | | Total |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| | Strongly like | Like | Not sure | Dislike | Srongly dislike | |
| Afadjato Respondents | 148 (38.5%) | 190 (49.5%) | 20 (5.2%) | 21 (5.5%) | 5 (1.3%) | 384 (100%) |

These results conform to those reported by Dweks(2004) as quoted by Mowforth (2008) who establish that most eco residents viewed the tours in an extremely positive light and some residents gained financially from the venture.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1 Conclusion

The research came up with the following conclusions:

- Afadjato South District is an eco tourist destination, where the main activities include: observing the natural attributes and activities of residents and donation.
- Eco tourism is economically beneficial to the residents of Afadjato south as it created employment and business for them and so it is perceived positively.

4.2 Recommendations

The following are recommended for policy and practice of eco tourism

- Tourism stakeholders should work towards involving Afadjato South residents in planning and offering eco tours.
- Stakeholders should create awareness among residents so that they can carry the business of eco tours themselves as a way of creating employment for them directly
- Afadjato south residents should come together and form a formal association to attract significant funding for their involvement in tourism services

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