

## **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM IN PARK-FRINGE COMMUNITIES: THE CASE OF *MESOMAGOR* OF KAKUM NATIONAL PARK, GHANA**

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Community-based ecotourism (CBE) is seen as a viable model for achieving conservation and improved livelihoods for park-fringe communities. In view of that, many communities in Ghana, including *Mesomagor*, have embraced the concept. Yet, most studies have employed quantitative methods and failed to examine the challenges of community participation in ecotourism development. Therefore, this study employed qualitative methods to analyze the benefits and challenges of CBE in the *Mesomagor* community of the Kakum National Park. This involved key informant interviews of 15 stakeholders using a semistructured interview guide. The results of the study show that though the community had made some modest economic gains, especially in infrastructural development, the project was confronted with a number of challenges including apathy towards participation, limited employment and revenue-sharing opportunities, lack of local capacity to manage the project, and destruction of farms by stray elephants from the park.

**Key words: Community-based ecotourism (CBE); Community; Revenue sharing; Kakum National Park (KNP); Ghana**

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### Introduction

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) projects have become a two-edged sword for achieving natural resource conservation and improved livelihoods of host communities (Spenceley & Snyman, 2012). For rural communities, whose main sources of livelihood are natural resources such as forests, there is the risk of overexploitation of these natural resources. Because most of the people are farmers, loggers,

miners, hunters, and gatherers, the pursuit of their economic activities could eventually result in the depletion of natural resources. However, CBE provides a more sustainable way of managing these natural resources by fostering conservation through the involvement of local communities, which in turn provides economic incentives to the communities.

Agenda 21, which is a blueprint for action by host communities introduced by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, calls for tourism–community interactions

that are essential for sustainable development strategies. In view of this, there was recognition of the need to link conservation of resources with the development needs of rural population at the inception of the concept of sustainable development (Gilmour, 1995). In response to this, CBE projects have become popular all over the world. Also, growing awareness of the need for more “resident-responsive” tourism or a more democratic participation in tourism decision making by grassroots members of a destination has occasioned the growth of community-based tourism (Moscardo, 2008). CBE has been defined as “tourism which focuses on travel to areas with natural attractions (rather than, say, urban locales), and which contributes to environmental conservation and local livelihoods” (Nelson, 2004, p. 3). It represents a bottom-up approach to tourism development and natural resource management (Koster, 2007).

According to Gray (2003), ecotourism offers a market-based approach for the pursuit of both conservation and development. It promotes sustainable use of biodiversity in order to provide opportunities for revenue generation and employment (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). This is particularly the case with CBE because the host community takes part in the decision-making processes relating to ecotourism development (Dei, 2000; Tosun, 2000; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). Active local participation in decision making is a prerequisite if benefits are to reach communities (Li, 2006). The underlying principle of CBE is that the natural environment must pay for itself by generating economic benefits for the local community and the economic benefits derived should foster proenvironmental attitudes and behaviors (Kiss, 2004).

Available evidence supports the fact that CBE promotes biodiversity conservation. Kruger (2005) reported that in a study of 57 projects, conservation occurred in 17% that had communities involved in decision making. World Wide Fund (2001) has also observed that through participatory approach to ecotourism development and management, sustainable use and collective responsibility of the natural resources have been achieved and individual initiatives within the community have been embraced.

In Ghana, the government through the Forestry Commission and nongovernmental organizations like

the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC) have promoted CBE projects through some interventions (Mensah & Adofo, 2013). The legal mandate of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana includes assisting local communities to develop and manage their own forest reserves as well as the promotion of ecotourism in protected areas. To this end, the agency is actively collaborating with some communities in the development and management of CBE projects. These include *Boabeng Fiema*, *Agumatsa*, and *Tafi Atome* wildlife sanctuaries. Additionally, a model of CBE developed by the NCRC, an environmental NGO, has proven to be successful in 14 communities around Ghana including *Paga*, *Sirigu*, *Tanoboase*, *Amedzofe*, and *Bobiri*. Aside the CBEPs, Ghana has some seven national parks including Mole, Digya, Bia, and Kakum, which serve as primary tourism attractions.

The Kakum National Park (KNP) is undoubtedly the most popular national park in Ghana—it attracts thousands of visitors each year even though tourist arrivals have been declining since 2012 (Fig. 1). This drop in visitor arrivals has been attributed to the deplorable state of the 13 km road from Cape Coast to the park. The road has become a death trap as huge trenches had developed on the surface of the road, putting the lives of visitors who ply the road in danger. The history of KNP dates back to 1925 when it was first declared a forest reserve, but due to ineffective supervision it was heavily exploited for a very long time and remained a pale shadow of a rainforest until it was gazetted as a national park in 1992 by Legislative Instrument 1525 and officially opened to visitors in 1994 (Ghana Wildlife Division, 1994).

The use of the CBE approach is very relevant to the conservation of the KNP. This is because the park shares boundaries with a number of rural communities. The park is surrounded by 52 villages and over 400 hamlets within the first 5 km from the Park’s boundary. These communities existed before the creation of the national park and have carved their livelihoods out of the forest resources by engaging in hunting, logging, and harvesting of other forest products. Currently, most of the inhabitants are farmers who grow cocoa, oil palm, coffee, citrus, or coconut, often in close proximity

### Number of visitors

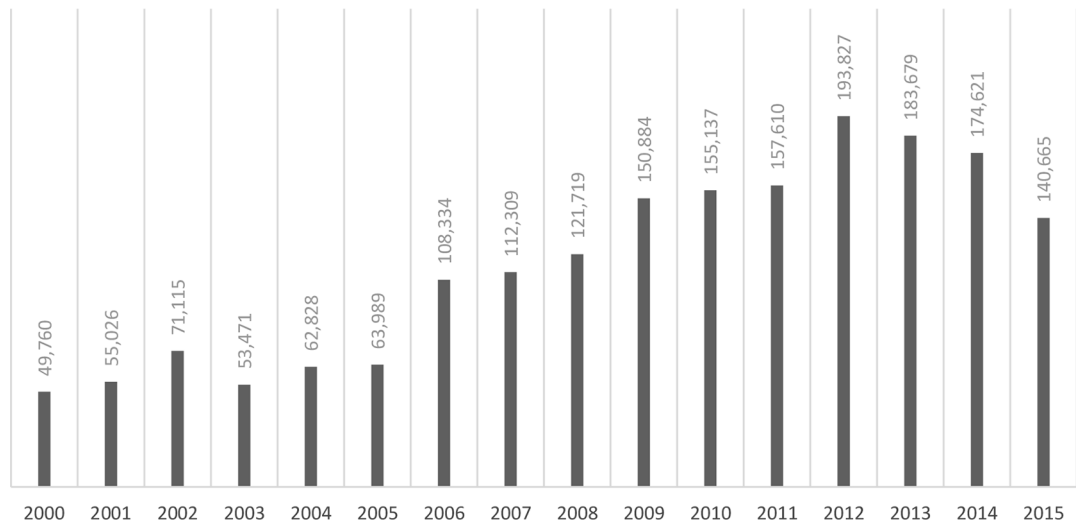


Figure 1. Tourist arrivals at the Kakum National Park. Source: Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust (2016).

to the park. As such efforts at conserving the forest could prove futile if the fringe communities are not actively involved as conflicts are bound to occur between park authorities and the communities. According to de Sherbinin (2008), national parks have both contributed to marginalization and poverty in rural communities that have been excluded from parks by modifying the boundaries of such communities and through the control of land use.

The establishment of the national park in 1992 was to bring to an end the exploitation of the forest and its resources. The energies of the local communities were to be channeled profitably into the conservation of the forest. To this end, the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana developed the Collaborative Wildlife Management Policy, which sought to ensure more active participation of local communities in wildlife management. The principle behind the Collaborative Wildlife Management Policy is that when natural resources are given value and the communities are given the authority and motivation to manage them, it will result in improved livelihoods, enhanced wildlife protection, and greater democratization and accountability at the local level (Wildlife Division of Forestry Commission, 2004). In spite of this intervention, it appears the

lofty environmental and socioeconomic gains that community participation in ecotourism development is supposed to engender in the communities fringing the KNP are far from being achieved as community members live in abject poverty (Akyeampong, 2011). The KNP has attracted some research interest. These include studies on crop raiding by elephants (Barnes et al., 2003; Monney, Dakwa, & Wiawe, 2010) and economic valuation of the park (Nanang & Owusu, 2010; Twerefou & Ababio, 2012). However, most of the studies have been on community livelihoods (Abane, Awusabo-Asare, & Kissi, 1999; Akyeampong, 2011; Appiah-Opoku, 2011; Cobbinah, 2015). Generally, these studies on the livelihoods of fringe communities have provided evidence to the fact that the majority of community members have not experienced improved livelihoods as a result of ecotourism. However, the challenges to the achievement of improved livelihoods resulting from CBE have not been examined. Moreover, most of these studies have employed a quantitative approach thereby ignoring the fine details of the personal experiences of community members. Therefore, this study employs qualitative methods to examine the benefits and challenges of CBE in the *Mesomagor* community of the KNP.

## Literature Review

### *Community Participation*

Community participation as a model of tourism development has received considerable attention within the tourism literature. It is seen as a bottom-up approach to tourism planning and development and premised on the inclusion of local people in the development of the tourism industry (Koster, 2007). Participation by local people means that they have a great deal of control over the activities that take place at the destination and a significant proportion of the economic benefits accrue to them (Scheyvens, 2002). Thus, the characteristics of community participation include local control of development, community involvement in planning, equitable flow of benefits, and incorporation of resident values (Koster, 2007). According to Asker, Boronyak, Carrard, and Paddon (2010), often, community-based tourism is developed on a small scale and involves interactions between visitors and residents and is particularly suited to communities in rural areas. Manyara and Jones (2007) are also of the view that it is a sustainable, community-owned and community-based tourism initiative that boosts conservation and in which the local community is fully involved throughout its development and management and are the main beneficiaries through the development of their communities.

The community-based tourism model is a common approach to tourism management in park-fringe communities and usually covers community-owned lodges, guiding, concessions, and other tourism services and for which economic benefits are retained in the local communities (Scherl & Edwards, 2007). However, community participation in tourism development can be observed from two different angles: participation of the local community in the decision-making process and participation in the sharing of the benefits of tourism (Wijesundara & Wimalaratana, 2016). On account of the foregoing, community participation in tourism could be seen as a model of tourism development whereby local communities take an active role in the management of tourism in their communities, are empowered to take control over the entire tourism development process, and are direct beneficiaries of the resultant benefits of tourism development.

However, there are different degrees of participation. Participation is seen as a ladder indicating different degrees of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Bretty, 2003; Pretty, Guijt, Thompson, & Scoones, 1995). Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, which identifies eight levels of citizen participation, ranges from manipulation or therapy of citizens, where participation is a sham, through consultation, to citizen control, which is regarded as real participation. Tosun's (2000) model of community participation relates specifically to community-based tourism development. The model classifies the types of community participation into three, namely: spontaneous participation, coercive participation, and induced participation. Spontaneous participation is a bottom-up to participation where ideas and decisions regarding tourism development in the community are made at the local level. Coercive and induced participation are both top down. With the former, the local community has no control at all over tourism development, while with the latter, community members have limited choices regarding tourism development in their community.

### *Benefits of Community Participation*

Many authors have highlighted the benefits of community participation in tourism to host communities and the environment. A range of studies about community-based tourism initiatives have confirmed its potential benefits to communities, especially "commercially grounded" initiatives (Dixey, 2005; Epler Wood & Jones, 2008). According to Li (2006), many researchers believe that when local communities are involved in decision making, then they can derive benefits and the traditional lifestyles and values of the communities can be respected (Li, 2006). Thus, through the participation process actual negative impacts as well as negative perceptions of tourism can be lessened and the overall quality of life, whether real or perceived, of all stakeholders can be increased (Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009).

Scheyvens (2002) is of the view that the ultimate goal of community-based tourism is to empower the host community at four levels: economic, psychological, social, and political.

However, the much talked about benefit of community participation is improvement in the

economic fortunes of host communities in the forms of income and employment (Walpole & Goodwin, 2001; Wunder, 2000). Wunder (2000) argues that ecotourism has a greater potential to cause large changes in the household economy more than the other kinds of tourism because it usually occurs in relatively isolated areas of the world where people are distant from markets and have little income. Evidence from a study in Nicaragua on community-based tourism projects indicated that tourism had created employment and income for host communities (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, 2011). However, the benefits need not always be financial because usually the intangible benefits such as skills development, increased confidence, growing trust, and ownership of the project may be of greater value to the community (Clarke, 2002). Other intangible benefits are that it may help to build skills in leadership among community members and strengthen local institutions (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008).

Another important benefit of community participation in ecotourism, which is somewhat related to the economic benefits, is conservation. The argument put forth is that incomes from ecotourism could serve as incentive for conservation and thereby discourage other socioeconomic activities that have greater impacts on natural resources. CBE by its nature ensures the sustainable use of biodiversity and this offers the opportunity for host communities to derive revenue and employment (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Bhanoo (2015) has also argued that CBE leads to conservation through rural development because villagers and local people are more inclined to support biodiversity conservation and follow park rules if they were involved in it. Sustainable management of natural resources is most likely in a situation where local users are able to manage and extract benefits from those resources (Jones & Murphree, 2001; Kull, 2002). Thus, ecotourism can be used as a tool for conservation so long as the locals derive economic benefits and it does not endanger or interfere with their main sources of livelihood (Walpole & Godwin, 2001). Kiss (2004) also points to the fact that conservation organizations fund CBE projects as a means of reducing local threats to biodiversity, which is the result of expanding agriculture, unsustainable harvesting of wild plants and animals, and killing of wildlife

that threaten peoples' crops, their livestock, or themselves. Mogaka, Simons, Turpie, Emerton, and Karanja (2001) are also of the view that improvements in local welfare, and the provision of visible local benefits from forests, will engender community support for protected areas and reduce unsustainable or illegal forest activities.

Waithaka (2002), in an assessment of the Il Ngwesi Ecotourism Project in Kenya based on vegetation sampling and animal sightings along transects, found higher numbers and densities of tree and herbaceous species, and 93% more sightings of wildlife inside the sanctuary than on similar ranch land outside the project area. R. Taylor (2009) points to the Communal Areas Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) project in Zimbabwe where the assignment of *de facto* rights to occupiers of titled land as custodians of wildlife, fish, and plants by the legally mandated authority responsible for wildlife management in the country led to a reduction in resource degradation. Stronza and Pêgas (2008), in a study on the link between ecotourism and nature conservation in Brazil and Peru, found out that ecotourism creates strong links between economic benefits and nature conservation. The Brazil case indicated that economic benefits alone stimulated conservation, while the Peru case illustrated that the participation of local community in tourism management stimulates collective actions in nature conservation. A more successful example of community-based tourism and conservation has been found at Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, where a US-based environmental NGO, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, has promoted tourism to replace income earned through a marine turtle harvest (Campbell, 2002).

It has been further argued that community participation helps to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings among host communities, park authorities, and tourists. Hardy, Beeton, and Pearson (2002) indicated that community participation is believed to reduce opposition to tourism development, minimize negative impacts, and revitalize the economies of host communities. Another way by which it helps to reduce conflicts is through improvement in people-park collaborations, which contributes to the understanding of local issues and promotes knowledge sharing (West, Igoe, & Brockington,



2006). Zhang, Inbakaran, and Jackson (2006) have also indicated that ignoring community input in tourism development could lead to soured host–tourist encounters and the eventual decline of tourism in the destination.

In spite of the much-touted benefits, there is also a school of thought that community participation in ecotourism may not deliver the supposed economic and environmental benefits (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Stronza & Godillo, 2008). The argument for community participation is sometimes put across as if all members of the local community derive the same benefits. However, previous studies have shown that not all local people will be equally involved in or affected by tourism activities and impacts resulting from involvement may vary by gender, class, or other characteristics (Stronza 2001). Brody (2003) has argued that participation may not necessarily improve the quality of outcomes due to the interaction of competing interests. This is against the backdrop that communities are usually heterogeneous with different interest groups who may seek their own interests. These include local elites who may dominate the entire process (Tosun, 2000).

Tosun (2000) also observed that opportunities for local communities to participate in ecotourism may vary over time with the type and scale of tourism development, thresholds of entry, and the market served. In fact, under certain circumstances the local communities could be worse off with CBE such as when they suffer crop, livestock, and property damage, while deriving little benefit from park activities (Wells, 1996). Around the KNP, damage to crops by straying elephants is a constant problem confronting the communities around the park (Barnes et al., 2003; Boafo et al., 2004; Monney et al., 2010). In the years 2001 and 2002, one third of the farms within one km of the park boundary were raided by elephants (Barnes et al. 2003).

Also, the argument for ecotourism as a tool for conservation has also been contested. Research has shown that ecotourism hardly replaces other relatively destructive activities and that it rather becomes an add on that exacerbates degradation. In this regard, new income can ultimately worsen habitat loss by increasing the buying power of local residents for more labor, technology, and capital, which they use to expand resource use (J. A. Taylor,

Yunez-Naude, & Ardila 2003). Increased income from ecotourism may allow people to invest in new technologies such as shotguns, chainsaws, or tree-climbing equipment and thereby intensify their farming and foraging (Stronza, 2007).

#### *Challenges of Community Participation*

Many authors are of the view that the problems encountered with the community-based tourism approach stem from the methods and techniques used in their implementation (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). For instance, Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin (2001) identified the lack of human capital, lack of financial capital, lack of organization, location barriers for the people who live far from tourism sites, lack of market power resulting from difficulties of ownership or control over resources, low bargaining power against foreign tourism investors, and limited capacity to meet tourists' requirements as the constraints to community participation in tourism. Evidence from a critical study on community-based tourism in Latin America by Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) showed a lack of financial viability, poor market access, and poor governance as obstacles. According to Goodwin (2009), although the poor can benefit from ecotourism and CBT, there is rarely any connection with the mainstream industry, and they remain small in scale and often lack a market and commercial orientation.

Cole (2006) indicates that community participation is inhibited by institutional factors such as centralized decision-making processes, unwillingness to include host community residents in decision making, and lack of knowledge about how to participate among host communities. The ignorance and knowledge deficit on how to participate, which stem from insufficient training and educational opportunities for local communities, has also been highlighted by Mbaiwa (2005) and Salazar (2012) as barriers to community participation. Manyara and Jones (2007) also found lack of skills and knowledge, elitism, leakage of revenue, lack of transparency in benefit-sharing, and lack of an appropriate policy framework for the development of community initiatives to have significant impacts on community participation in the tourism industry. Cole (2006), on the other hand, identified lack of ownership, capital, skills, knowledge, and

resources as barriers to active local community participation. However, Tosun (2000) provides three broad categories of limitations that encapsulate all the challenges, namely: operational limitations (centralization of authority, lack of coordination, lack of information, etc.), structural limitations (lack of expertise, elite domination, lack of trained human resources, etc.), and cultural limitations (limited capacity, apathy and low level of awareness of local people, etc.).

Blaikie (2006) found out that community-based natural resource management programs in central and southern Africa failed substantially to deliver on the expected and theoretically predicted benefits to both communities and the environment. In the Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust (KRST) Central District of Botswana, Sebele (2010) found out that residents were unhappy because they had lost a number of valuable natural resources including communal land as a result of the community-based tourism project. In this regard, community members believed that they had incurred more costs than benefits. Stone and Stone (2011), in a related study in the same area (Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust, Botswana), also found out that the communities faced challenges and constraints such as loss of cattle grazing and other land-related benefits, lack of communication with the community, lack of benefits, low levels of employment, and slow progress of the project, which hindered their participation in community-based enterprises. Cobbinah, Black, and Thwaites (2015) discovered that in the communities of *Abrafo* and *Mesomagor* in the Kakum Conservation Area of Ghana, only a limited number of people were employed from the host communities and the lack of qualifications among community members was an impediment to assuming supervisory positions for the few local people employed. Manyara and Jones (2007), after examining six CBET initiatives in Kenya, concluded that “outsiders” promoted neocolonialism, enforced western environmentalism, and reinforced dependency.

## Methodology

### *The Study Area*

The KNP, together with the Assin Antandanso Resource Reserve, is known as the Kakum

Conservation Area (Fig. 2). It is located in the Central Region of Ghana, specifically the Twifo Heman Lower Denkyira District and Assin District at approximately 35 km north of Cape Coast, the capital city of the Central Region of Ghana. It lies between latitudes 50 20' and 50 40' north and longitudes 10 30' and 10 51' west covering 366 km<sup>2</sup> with a boundary length of 102 km, which stretches from *Abrafo Odumase* to *Twifo Praso*. It is an isolated fragment of the Upper Guinea forests that once covered southwestern Ghana.

According to Agyare (1995), it is a forest island in a landscape mosaic of cultivations comprising farm bush, secondary forest, and swampland. It serves as a home for more than five globally endangered mammalian species, namely forest elephant, yellow backed Duiker, black and colobus monkey, Diana monkey, and Bongo. In addition, it houses many birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians as well as insects and butterflies. However, what makes the park truly unique is a Canopy Walkway which allows visitors to explore the rainforest by walking on suspended bridges and tree platforms rising above the forest.

Among the communities fringing the KNP is *Mesomagor*, the study area. It is located on the eastern corridor of the park, about 40 km northwest of Cape Coast. Typical of rural communities in Ghana, the people of *Mesomagor* are predominantly farmers and have limited formal education (Cobbinah, 2015; Mensah, 2016). The choice of *Mesomagor* as the study area was due to the fact that among the communities fringing the KNP, it is one of the communities with a CBE project, which is the subject of this study. Appiah Opoku (2011) avers that among the communities on the boundaries of the KNP, *Mesomagor* is the only community that has been innovative in creating a CBE plan to attract tourists and generate revenue. In 1994, Conservation International (CI) initiated a CBE project in the community as part of the Natural Resource Conservation and Historic Preservation Project. The goals of the project were to provide a unique overnight tropical forest experience for adventurous tourists and generate economic benefits for conservation efforts in Kakum in general and the *Mesomagor* community in particular. An aspect of the project was capacity building through training to empower community members to eventually

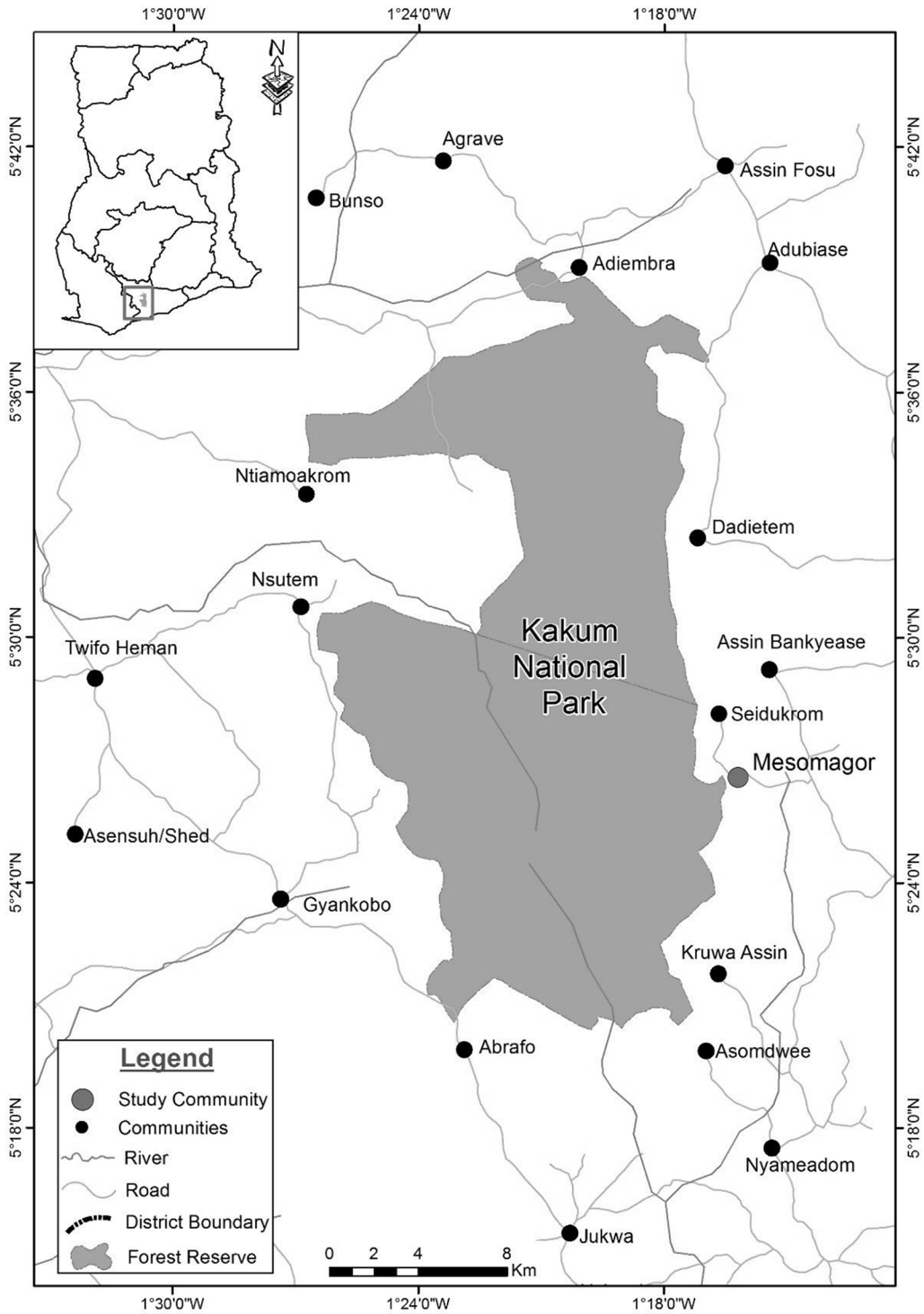


Figure 2. Location of Kakum National Park showing the study area. Source: GIS and Cartography Unit, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, UCC.



take control of the project. The project afforded tourists who visited the community the opportunity to sleep overnight in a treehouse, hike through the forest, embark on farm tours, watch cultural performances by the Bamboo Orchestra, and to be accommodated in a guesthouse. One notable development as part of the project is the Bamboo Orchestra (*Kukykyeku*), which performs regularly at the KNP as well as entertain visitors who visit the *Mesomagor* community.

#### *Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

This study followed the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research methodology was employed involving in-depth semistructured interviews of key informants. Qualitative research shares the theoretical assumptions of the interpretative paradigm, which is based on the notion that social reality is created and sustained through the subjective experience of people (Morgan, 1980). The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enables researchers to obtain a more realistic feel of the world that cannot be achieved with numerical data and statistical analysis normally used in quantitative research. This study sought the perceptions and lived experiences of community members with regard to their participation in ecotourism in the community.

The semistructured interview guide was developed based on the available literature on community participation in ecotourism as well as benefits and challenges of community participation in ecotourism. To ensure the validity of the research design, a pretest of the instrument was undertaken on September 22, 2016 in *Abrafo Odumase*, another community on the southwestern corridor of the KNP and the main entrance to the park. The pretest involved in-depth interviews with three key informants, namely the Chief, assemblyman, and a community elder. The actual fieldwork was undertaken in *Mesomagor*, employing purposive sampling. A total of 15 key informants were interviewed. These represented the broad spectrum of stakeholders in the CBE project in the community. They included the chief of the community, village elders, clan heads, members of the tourism development committee, farmers, a community tour guide, leader of the Bamboo Orchestra, as well as officials of Ghana

Heritage Conservation Trust and Wildlife Division of the forestry Commission.

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Chief and elders of the community during which drinks were presented to the Chief as tradition demanded. There is an *Akan* adage that “one does not go to the chief’s palace with empty hands.” The interviews were conducted by the researcher between October 6 and October 25, 2016. Because respondents were mostly farmers, arrangements were made by the researcher to conduct the interviews on Tuesdays and Sundays when they did not go to farm. Interviews were conducted in *Twɔ*, the local dialect, and lasted for 1 hour on the average. The interviews were recorded with the permission of respondents.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phase approach to thematic analysis. It began with transcription and translation of the recorded interviews in verbatim. This was undertaken by the researcher who could read and write in *Twɔ*. This was followed by generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, defining and naming themes, before the write up and discussion of findings.

#### Findings

Themes that emerged from the analysis of data indicate that though the *Mesomagor* community had derived a modicum of benefits from the CBE project, there are some challenges to their realization of the full benefits of their participation in tourism. Most respondents were also of the view that the CBE project had generated more environmental benefits in terms of conservation as compared to the socio-economic benefits to the community. The benefits are education, enhancement of the image of the community, business opportunities, infrastructural development, and conservation of the forest. The challenges are apathy, lack of employment opportunities, lack of benefits-sharing opportunities, lack of capacity to manage the CBE project, deprivation of access to forest products, and destruction of crops by elephants. These are discussed in detail below.

#### *Education*

The main benefits of CBE to the community was in the area of education. They particularly referred

to the support that the school in their community had received as a result of tourism. They indicated that through tourism the community was able to secure support from World Vision, an NGO which led to the construction of six classroom blocks for the community school. Also as a result of tourism, some community members had received training. At the inception of the project, a number of training programs were rolled out for community members as indicated by a top official of GHCT:

We had to do a whole package of training for everyone in the community because everyone was going to be part of it. We had the chiefs, sellers, cooks, those who will be trained as tour guides etc. So, a whole lot of training programmes were put in place so that those who could not speak English at the time were taught how to speak basic English so that they will be able to communicate.

The training programs were geared towards building capacity among community members so that they could cater for the tourists who visited the community and eventually take full control over the management of the project. Some community members had also acquired knowledge through their interactions and relationships with tourists. One of the village elders recounted how a lady who visited the community sponsored a visit by some selected community members to *Tafi Atome*, a community that had made significant strides in CBE. According to him, the lady wanted to afford them the opportunity to learn first hand some good practices in CBE so that when they returned to their community, they could put them into practice. Upon their return from *Tafi Atome*, they also imparted the knowledge they had acquired to their people. A community tour guide also indicated that he had gained a lot of knowledge from the tourists who visited the community even though he had very little formal education.

#### *Enhancement of the Image of the Community*

Another benefit of tourism to the community was the enhancement of the image of the community. Officials of GHCT and Wildlife Division as well as some community members were of the opinion that tourism had projected the image of *Mesomagor* and placed the community in the limelight. But for

tourism, many people would not have heard about *Mesomagor* because it is a remote village. “For now, Mesomagor is on the world map. People know Mesomagor and they go straight to Mesomagor. They receive volunteers who go there directly and work with them” (Top official, GHCT). “Because of tourism Mesomagor is now recognized. There are over 400 communities around the park, many of which are bigger than Mesomagor yet it is more recognized due to the treehouse and Bamboo Orchestra” (Officer, Wildlife Division).

#### *Business Opportunities*

Moreover, tourism had brought business opportunities to the community. The presence of tourists in the community has provided a ready market for petty traders, food vendors, craftsmen, and operators of tourist accommodation facilities. This had also helped to diversify the local economy, which used to be solely agrarian. The presence of tourists in the community provided an opportunity for some women to engage in petty trading as well as catering for the dietary needs of the tourists. There was a women’s group that was organized and trained to prepare quality foods for tourists who stayed in the community. This afforded the women the opportunity to earn some additional income:

When tourists come they buy drinks, bread and pure water, biscuits, whatever is sold that they like, they go to town and buy. We also have a women group who prepare food for the tourists who spend the night. The women do not buy all the items they use for cooking from Nyankumasi but also from this community. So, it’s not only the authorities that benefit from them but also the people in the community. (Leader of Bamboo Orchestra)

#### *Infrastructural Development*

One area that the community had seen some tangible improvement since the advent of tourism was infrastructure. A school, teachers’ accommodation block, roads, a guest house, and a health post among others had been constructed. The personal contributions of some philanthropic tourists, support from NGOs, as well as contribution of a percentage of proceeds from the Bamboo Orchestra had facilitated this. By the arrangements put

in place by CI, the Bamboo Orchestra contributes 10% of earnings from performances while 2.5% of entrance fees is given to the community towards community development projects. The leader of the Bamboo Orchestra recounted how the 10% contribution by his organization was used to pay artisans who were contracted to build a teachers' accommodation block in the community. Also, the District Assembly conscious of the fact that *Mesomakor* is an important tourist destination in the district always ensures that the roads were in good shape for tourists who travel to the community:

When the tourists come we talk to them about our problems and what we need so that they can help us. I remember when the chips zone (health post) was being constructed, the council asked us to look for a land. We had to pay for the land. The government paid part of the cost of the land but we could not pay the rest. I remember a white man who was a tourist came here and we spoke to him about it. He agreed to help pay the remaining amount which was GH¢1,500. (Clan Head)

#### *Conservation of Forest*

One major benefit of CBE was conservation of the forest. According to a 60-year-old village elder, since 1988 when the Wildlife Division came to their village to inform them that the government had taken over the forest and so nobody should enter the forest for hunting, no member of the community has entered the forest. This was corroborated by a Clan head:

When you go to the wildlife office, there is no record that shows that any member of this community has been caught in the forest. It is rather the people who live outside this community who sneak into the forest and are caught. (Village elder)

With the creation of the KNP, there was a total ban on hunting and harvesting of other forest products such as cane, rattan, and bamboo from which some community members eked out a living. The result is that both the flora and fauna have largely remained intact. Prior to the establishment of KNP, the forest was logged and some timber merchants pitched their camp at *Mesomakor*. However, since 1994 the commercial logging has ceased. "In terms of the conservation of the forest, I would

say the concessions given to timber contractors to cut down the trees and export them has ceased. Now no one goes into the forest to cut down trees" (Farmer). The conservation of the forest, according to officials of GHCT and the Wildlife Division, has invariably resulted in improved weather conditions, which is necessary for improved crop yield. The area experiences enough rainfall necessary for farming activities due to the conservation of the forest.

#### *Apathy*

One of the major challenges to community participation in ecotourism development in *Mesomakor* is apathy due to the fact that the anticipated benefits by community members have not been achieved to a large extent. Though the community as a whole had derived some modest socioeconomic benefits, the contention was that this had not trickled down to the individual and household levels. Some of the community members interviewed put it bluntly that tourism had not been beneficial to the community. This a top official of GHCT attributed to high expectations from the KNP: "From the beginning I talked about high expectations but the point is that you are talking about over 400 communities around the park, there is a limit to the number of people we can employ."

It appeared the expectations of the people were hyped in terms of the benefits to be derived from the project. The high expectations were fueled by promises of improved livelihoods and benefits sharing, especially at the inception of the project. Therefore, when the anticipated benefits were not forthcoming, many community members became apathetic towards tourism development. In an attempt to reignite community interest in the ecotourism project, more promises were made as recounted by a clan head:

About a month ago, the boss of wildlife at Abrafo came here. According to him, he had not been around for some time but he realized that there were some benefits the community had to enjoy from Kakum National Park but he had seen that the community had been deprived of that benefit. He had also seen that the tree platform needed to be repaired so he was pleading with us to continue to repair it and he would ensure that whatever benefit the community is supposed to enjoy

is made available to us. So, we are waiting and anticipating he will come back. He was the one who made it known to us that we were supposed to get those benefits.

### *Lack of Benefits-Sharing Opportunities*

The community has been deprived of a fair share of tourism revenue from both the KNP and the treehouse for developmental projects. Community leaders insisted that the community had not received any share of revenue from the KNP. Also, under the arrangements with CI, a percentage of the entrance fees paid by tourists who visited the community was supposed to be given to the community for developmental projects, but this had ceased for some time. "When the tourists come, there is an entrance fee they pay but for over six years, we have not received anything from the tour guides" (Village elder).

With regards to the community's share of revenue from the KNP, the cabinet of Ghana had approved a formula for revenue sharing in 2006. The formula was that 10% of revenue from the park should go to central government, 20% to district assemblies, 20% to traditional authorities and communities, while the remaining 50% goes into a Maintenance Fund for the management of the park. However, this has not been implemented because there was no legal instrument backing this decision. The result is that revenue from the park is not shared with the communities. Instead, GHCT takes 45% while government takes 55%. It is GHCT's share of the revenue that is used for maintenance of the park and support of projects in the communities including that of *Mesomagor*.

Another source of revenue to park-fringe communities is royalties. Though royalties had not been paid to any of the over 400 communities fringing the park, it was not likely *Mesomagor* will receive any royalty if park authorities start paying because the people are not landowners but settler farmers. The land does not belong to them so they are not entitled to royalties. In fact, they rather pay royalties to the traditional authority at *Abease* who are the owners of the land.

### *Limited Employment Opportunities*

Evidence on the ground also pointed to the fact that community participation in ecotourism

development had not provided enough employment opportunities to community members. Though, some modicum of employment had been provided to some community members in the areas of tour guiding, forest guarding, and cultural performances through the Bamboo Orchestra. However, the reality on the ground was that an insignificant number of community members were either fully or partially employed by the tourism industry. Only one tour guide was still practicing at the time of the study. There was only one forest guard from the community who had been engaged by the Wildlife Division. The highest number of people who were employed albeit partially by the tourism industry were performers in the Bamboo Orchestra; a total of 15 performers. Additionally, GHCT had employed the services of one man from the community at their ICT center in *Abrafo Odumase*:

At GHCT for instance, the guy at our ICT centre at *Abrafo* is from *Mesomagor* and the members of the Bamboo orchestra indirectly because the Orchestra can go anywhere and perform. In all these, the women we train are given some kind of employment. (Top official, GHCT)

This is rather ironic because one of advantages of community participation in tourism is job creation. However, the people interviewed bemoaned the lack of employment opportunities in the tourism industry. "Since 1988 when tourism was introduced here, no member of this community has been employed. It was last year that one boy was employed. After training, they are not even selected to be employed" (Clan head).

The people were at risk of losing even the limited jobs that tourism offered due to lack of prospects. Some members of the community had to quit their jobs in the tourism industry due to poor prospects. Some members of the Bamboo Orchestra had left the group in the past and relocated from the community in search of greener pastures. Initially, four tour guides were trained for the treehouse project but only one remained at the time of the study because it was not rewarding as indicated by the community tour guide:

Four tour guides were trained but now I am the only one left. If a tourist goes to spend the night there, he or she is charged GH¢30. This money



has to be shared among the reception manager, the tour guide, the community, wildlife as well as part for maintenance. After this, the tour guide needs a battery for his torchlight. The tour guide is left with almost nothing. So they quit when the tourists stopped coming and I am the only one left.

#### *Lack of Capacity to Manage CBE Project*

There is also the lack of capacity within the community to manage the CBE project. In 2010, GHCT handed over the management of tourism in the community to the community and ceased to be directly involved in the day to day operations of tourism. Though a bold attempt to empower the community, it rather resulted in a decline in tourism activities:

At the time we said they had come of age so why don't they manage the thing themselves. "A member of the community" was able to complete a course at the Institute of Adult Education. When he completed we knew that he will be able to manage it. (Top official, GHCT).

We had a tourism development committee but a man once said that if something comes from the city into the village, it is not able to last, it gets destroyed. Because we did not go to school, it is very difficult for us to understand certain things. At the time CI was present here, they came here every week to train us so the committee was in existence. When CI left, the market collapsed. (Leader of Bamboo orchestra)

It is apparent that the transition from CI through GHCT to the local community was not smooth. The community was used to the project being managed by external agencies such as CI and the Wildlife Division. It appeared they were ill equipped to undertake the marketing, operations, monitoring, and evaluation of the project. It also appeared they had not understudied these NGOs and generally lacked the capacity to manage the project on their own. The resultant effect was the decline in tourism activities and tourist arrivals in the community compelling some tour guides and other community members to lose interest in the project.

#### *Deprivation of Access to Forest Products*

Moreover, almost all the community members interviewed decried the lost opportunity to harvest

and use some forest products. Like all forest-fringe communities, the people of *Mesomagor* had become dependent on the forest for their sustenance. With the establishment of the national park, it became illegal to exploit the forest products. However, tourism had not provided the alternative livelihoods that were promised. One major loss to the people was building materials such as bamboo and cane, which they obtained from the forest:

We used to go into the forest to pick some herbs and cane to weave baskets and sell. We also used to hunt some animals and sell them for money but when the government came to take over the forest, we accepted and gave it to them because it may help my children in the future. Because the forest has been taken, we do not have coconut branches to roof our buildings. (Village elder)

#### *Destruction of Crops by Elephants*

The problem of marauding elephants straying into and destroying the farms of community members is a long-standing problem that predates the establishment of the KNP but it had grown from bad to worse. Respondents indicated that though they report such incidents to the Wildlife Division, nothing is done about it. Also, they had not received any form of compensation for their losses:

Another issue is that there is a season that elephants come into our farms and destroy everything. We report to the wildlife authorities but we do not get any kind of compensation from them. We have not received any kind of compensation since the park was created. (Farmer)

However, an official of the Wildlife Division indicated that they had initiated steps to address the problem and this was corroborated by a top official of GHCT and some community members. Through the Collaborative Resource Management Unit of the Wildlife Division, farmers had been trained on how to ward off the elephants using clothes smeared with a mixture of grease and spices as a fence around their farms. However, community members were of the view that such interventions were not successful. They also appeared disappointed with the fact that each time they reported incidents of elephant raids on their farms to the Wildlife officers, they only accompanied them to the farms to



inspect the damage and write reports but no action was taken thereafter:

Wildlife brought some group from Canada and Brazil from 2000 to 2002. They were known as Elephant Control... they put measures in place to prevent the animals from coming outside. They brought some ideas; mixed grease, pepper and apply the mixture on an old cloth and erect pillars with sticks around the farm, then tie the cloth with the mixture all around the farm. So that when the elephants come around and they smell the pepper, they will run away. We tried it but it didn't work the elephants still came to destroy our farms. (Leader Bamboo orchestra)

### Discussion and Conclusion

Undeniably, community participation in ecotourism development has offered some modicum of socioeconomic benefits largely in the area of infrastructural development to the *Mesomagor* community. Tourism in the community had brought about infrastructural development in the area of roads, classrooms, and a health facility. However, with the handing over of the project entirely to the community, the modest economic gains had declined to a very low level. The jobs, income, and revenue that were promised to the people at the inception of the project had largely remained unfulfilled. This reinforces the concerns of Goodwin and Santilli (2009) and Stronza and Godillo (2008) that community participation in ecotourism may not deliver the supposed economic benefits. The lack of economic benefits had resulted in community members becoming apathetic towards tourism development.

The handing over of the project to the community was a conscious attempt by GHCT to foster greater participation by the community in tourism development. It could be seen as a migration from Tosun's (2000) induced participation to spontaneous participation. At the start of the project, the people were consulted and allowed to express their opinions and concerns; however, it was the plans and decisions of more powerful external agencies like CI and Wildlife Division that mattered the most and they ultimately dictated what was done. Then in 2010, GHCT have inherited the project from CI and decided to hand the project over to the community. A tourism development committee made up of community members were to take full

control of tourism development in the community. But it turned out that this move rather resulted in a decline in the fortunes of the project. Though spontaneous participation is the most ideal form of participation, surrendering total control of a tourism project to a rural community without building sufficient capacity and instituting appropriate structures and systems is a recipe for failure.

Also, results of this study indicate that community participation in ecotourism at *Mesomagor* has yielded more conservation benefits than economic benefits to the host community. The success at conserving one of the very few remaining vestiges of the tropical moist semideciduous rainforest is a significant achievement. However, conservation of the forest had been achieved at a cost to the communities fringing the park including *Mesomagor*. Among the costs are loss of livelihoods and destruction of farms by elephants. When the benefits are weighed against the costs, it appears the community is worse off, as suggested by Wells (1996), that communities could be worse off with CPEPs in a situation where they suffer crop, livestock, and property damage while deriving little benefit from park activities.

The lack of economic opportunities could erode the gains made in the area of conservation as community members could be compelled to return to their traditional occupations including hunting and logging in order to eke out a living. Brechin, West, Harmon, and Kutay (1991) argued that "Protected areas will not survive for long whenever local people remain impoverished and are denied access to needed resources inside" (p. 26). Brechin et al.'s argument is even more relevant in a situation where the protected areas cannot be completely protected by park authorities as in the case of the KNP. The sheer number of communities and people living on the fringes of the park makes it virtually impossible for trained forest guards of the Forestry Commission to keep surveillance of the entire area.

Cole (2006), among other things, pointed to lack of ownership, skills, and knowledge as challenges to CBE and this has been evidenced by this study. Although the project had been handed over to the community to manage, they did not see themselves as owners of the project. Apparently, the project was the brainchild of CI. The conceptualization and planning of the project was done without the active involvement of the community members.

Thus, the practice of external agencies developing projects for communities without the involvement of community members is a recipe for the failure of such projects. It is also evident that the local people lacked the skills and knowledge needed to successfully manage the project. This explains why, when CI handed over the project to them, tourism activities declined in the community. As one respondent pointed out, when CI was present, they were in the community almost every week to train them and the tourism development committee was vibrant, but when they left, the tourism business declined.

#### Recommendations

The absence of a revenue-sharing regime between government and park-fringe communities needs to be urgently addressed. Revenue generated from the park was not shared between KNP authorities and the *Mesomagor* community, although the ecotourism project in the community provided some revenue that was used to provide basic infrastructure in the community. Ironically, economic empowerment of the park-fringe communities is normally judged by the trickle-down effect of park revenue and incomes on fringe communities. Communities like *Mesomagor* should be made direct beneficiaries of park revenue through transparent and equitable revenue-sharing regimes. Tourism revenue sharing (TRS) programs promote tourism development and ensure that local communities enjoy tangible benefits from the industry while participating in wildlife conservation (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001). However, the issue of revenue sharing is a tricky one especially within the Kakum Conservation Area in view of the numerous communities surrounding the park coupled with the local geopolitical dynamics. This presents a dilemma as to how revenue could be shared fairly and the formula to use. The 2006 cabinet approved revenue-sharing formula has not been implemented due to a lack of legislative instrument and the blanket nature of the proposition. Allocation of percentages of revenue to different stakeholders without any law backing it could be problematic. What is needed is a law and policy on revenue sharing.

It is practically impossible for the over 450 communities to have a significant share of the revenue every year. The best approach would be to identify

the pressing needs of each community through a local consultative process and assist these communities with part of the revenues in meeting their most pressing needs. This should be done in succession and based on the characteristics of the communities such as population, size, and nearness to the park. Experiences around the world, in places like Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania, suggest that when it comes to revenue sharing, handouts are rarely given out to individual community members, instead revenues are invested in social infrastructure for the benefit of all.

From the study, employment opportunities from tourism were very minimal. The reality of the situation is that the KNP cannot employ the bulk of community members. The lack of employment opportunities was compounded by the fact that tourism activities were at a lowest ebb in the community. Therefore, there is the need to provide more employment opportunities for community members. One way of doing this is through the promotion of agrotourism because almost all community members were farmers. Another way is through training in alternative livelihood activities. Skills training programs in animal rearing, crafts making, and honey production should be introduced to equip community members to take advantage of the market offered by tourism.

It is further suggested that in the short term people who had their crops damaged by stray animals from the park should be compensated so long as they did not encroach on the forest or the buffer zone. Through the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Forestry, Lands, and Natural Resources, KNP should propose to government payment of compensation to community members for crop damage by stray elephants. This has been successfully implemented in Eastern and Southern Africa, and it resulted in payment of compensation in park-fringe communities for wildlife attacks on humans and damage to crops (Pathak & Kothari, 2003). In the absence of such payments, community members will continue to regard the KNP authorities as taking them for granted and that could result in open confrontations and attacks on staff and management of the park. However, park authorities should seek a long-term solution to this problem through research and collaboration with international experts.

Finally, it is obvious that entrusting the management of tourism in the community in the hands of the local people was premature because they lacked the capacity and the structures for marketing and managing the project. It is recommended that GHCT should train and mentor some of the community members to play various roles such as marketing, operations, monitoring, and evaluation. Also, the Tourism Development Committee should be reconstituted and strengthened by including representatives from the Wildlife Division and GHCT. The reception manager should be trained in record keeping on tourists who visit the community. This will help to monitor tourist arrivals and ensure that the community gets its accurate share of revenue generated from tourism.

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