



Dimensions of the Impacts of Ecotourism

A Case Study in the Kakum Conservation Area of Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is being promoted as a means to secure local peoples support and the financing of biodiversity conservation particularly in the developing world. In spite of perceived benefits of ecotourism, there are associated problems (costs) to the local people. On site observations indicate that the impact of ecotourism is quite variable. However, there is a lack of practical assessment of the ecotourism status and the real impacts at specific destination areas. This study, therefore sets to analyse the dimensions of the socio-economic and environmental impacts of ecotourism in communities adjacent to the Kakum Conservation Area (KCA) in Ghana.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

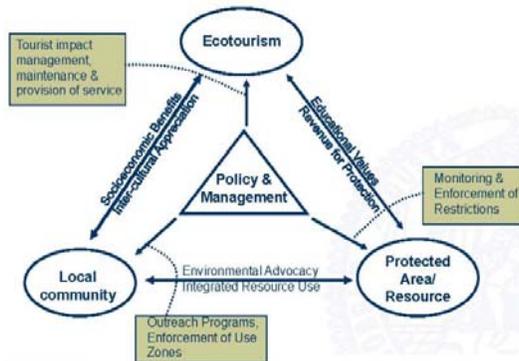


Fig. 1: A Conceptual framework for analysing the impacts of Ecotourism. (After Ross and Wall, 1999)

The ecotourism concept is founded on a dynamic interaction between local people, natural resources and tourism. The study applies a framework (Fig. 1) which considers ecotourism in terms of synergistic links and uses indicators to determine if the existing relationships are operating in a way to allow each to make positive contribution to the other.



Plate 1: Tourists going to the canopy walkway, A tourist on the Canopy walkway, the main attraction in KCA, and a view of the forest from the canopy walkway

QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

The study is driven by questions Q1-4 to achieve objectives O1-4 :

Research Questions:

- Q1:** Has ecotourism development improved or encouraged conservation of wildlife species within and around KCA?
- Q2:** Are the interests of the local people and communities incorporated in the management of KCA?
- Q3:** Are there changes in livelihood activities of local people due to ecotourism development?
- Q4:** Are the expectations of tourists being met in KCA?

Objectives:

- O1:** To determine the administrative authorities' and communities' interests and values for the KCA and their expectations concerning ecotourism;
- O2:** To determine the contribution of ecotourism to conservation of KCA as well as the improvements in livelihood of adjacent communities;
- O3:** To assess the ecotourism-community-resource interaction in KCA;
- O4:** To offer planning and management recommendations to facilitate conservation, tourist satisfaction, and sustainable development initiatives in the adjacent local communities.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a case study approach and combines both, quantitative and qualitative methods for an effective assessment of the multi-dimensional impacts of ecotourism within and between selected communities in the KCA.

Research Area

KCA is the most visited among the wildlife conservation areas used as ecotourism destinations in Ghana (Fig. 3). It covers about 350km² of moist evergreen forest in the Central Region. A tree canopy walkway (Plate1) and walking tours through the forest provide excellent opportunity to see much of Ghana's indigenous plants, rare butterflies, birds and game (incl. the Bongo and forest elephant).

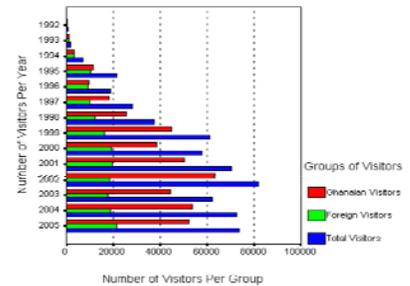


Fig. 3: Kakum Visitation Records 1992 - 2005



Fig.2: Map of the Kakum Conservation Area in the Central Region of Ghana showing some key village communities

Data Collection

Socio-cultural and economic data will be collected through interviews and group discussions in selected communities adjacent to KCA.

Data on wildlife will be sourced from existing inventory records and official reports.

Data Analysis

The data analysis will explore the socio-cultural and economic differences between and within different communities due to ecotourism development, the contribution of ecotourism to conservation activities, local support for conservation and ecotourism as well as the influence of tourist activities on the distribution of wildlife species in KCA.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The study aims at contributing to understand the natural resource-community-ecotourism interrelationship and help to bridge the knowledge gap that hinders biodiversity conservation initiatives

The findings will be used as a base for further development of ecotourism and will recommend alternative management options where necessary for the study area (KCA),

The findings is also expected to open up new areas for further research investigation to improve on knowledge and management practices, and Contribute to improving ecotourism development Policy in Ghana



Plate 2: The Exhibition Center at Kakum, A cultural group performing at the visitor centre and a section of tourists at the visitor center in KCA

References

Ross, S. and Wall, G. 1999: Ecotourism: towards congruence between theory and practice. *Tourism Management* 20: 123-132

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