

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
The Case of the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary in the Wa West District of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The paper reports an investigation on how community-based tourism can be used as a development strategy for the efficient and sustainable use of tourist resources in seventeen (17) communities within the Hippopotamus (hippo) Sanctuary of the Wa West District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Specifically, it explores three interrelated questions with regard to the promotion of rural development in the Wechiau Traditional Area where the Sanctuary is located. These are: (i) whether the development of the Wa West District, particularly the catchment communities, are being impacted by community-based tourism and how; (ii) whether there is a high level of beneficiary participation in the management of the Hippo Sanctuary and; (iii) whether there have been any challenges at all and what strategies can be adopted for the sustenance of the Sanctuary. The investigation was done using probability and non-probability techniques to select participants for a survey and data collected from both primary and secondary sources. Based on the findings, the study concludes that, though community-based tourism is gaining prominence, the tourism development and promotion area is beset with ownership and participation challenges. Therefore, recommendations have been made for exploring more dialogue between and among the stakeholders of the Sanctuary in order to deepen community participation for the sustainable management of the Sanctuary.

KEY DESCRIPTORS: Community-based Tourism, Nature Conservation, Eco-system maintenance, Participatory Planning; Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION

The decline of natural forests, loss of species, global warming and increasing land degradation has heightened public support for nature conservation. These have made conservation issues

assume a central place in policy documents and plans. It is no accident that the interest in ecotourism and nature-oriented tourism has coincided with this world-wide concern.

Tourism is positioned as the world's largest service industry and ecotourism happens to be its fastest growing sector with estimates of annual growth from 10% to 30% (Wearing & Neil, 1999). By nature, ecotourism helps to maintain ecosystems and as a result provides longer lasting economic opportunities than extraction industries, which remove part of the system (Weaver, 1997). Apart from inadequate financial resources, the inability to promote direct benefits from Community-Based Tourism projects for the people is of concern to planners. To address some of these issues, development strategies have shifted from centrally managed and supply-driven approaches towards bottom-up and demand-based approaches that place local stakeholders at the heart of the process (World Bank, 1991; Chambers, 1983).

Under extractive planning, the traditions of sustainable environmental management are being lost due, inter alia, to the lack of alternative economic options for the people and the supplanting of traditional systems by centralized state institutions (GWD/IUCN, 1994). Alongside current thinking on community-based development initiatives is the growing interest in community-based participation in tourism in recent years (Murphy, 1985). Even though various development agencies in the Wa West District of the Upper West Region have adopted and pursued several approaches such as the provision of social services and amenities, increased agricultural and industrial output and productivity, decentralization of responsibilities and resources, among others, the goal of rural development has not been achieved. The Wechiau Traditional Area has been caught up in this situation in its efforts to promote its development. It is faced with challenges such as inadequate social, economic and physical facilities and services. This paper reports the results of an investigation on the extent to which community-based tourism can serve as a strategy for rural development, using the case of Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS).

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Definition of Concepts

This section attempts to define three key concepts used: Community-based Tourism, Beneficiary Participation and Rural Development. This will help clarify usage and pave way for the analysis of the issues of concern in this paper.

Community-based tourism as used in this paper means, local initiatives in support of tourism attraction, growth and development in a given locality. The concept of community-based tourism is based on the principle of bottom-up approach, without sacrificing partnerships between central authorities and local people. Community-based tourism seeks to foster development from "below" (Chambers, 1997), which is consistent with the Consensus Model of Planning. Consensus eliminates the concept of "commoditization" often associated with external development of community property. It is based on two necessary conditions: that internal regime arrangements work successfully, and externally, that the community property is indeed property that must be defended against excesses or exploitation by outsiders (Laban, 1995 cited by Dei, 2000). The model is basically based on consensus at every level. Hence, a tourism facility that develops from consensus should be devoid of litigation and conflict. In support, Dei (2000), observes that community-based tourism is reserved for ventures that require high degree of community control (and where communities command a large proportion of the benefits) rather than those almost wholly controlled by outside operators. He further argues that, community-based tourism provides the needed conditions for responsible and sustainable tourism, which Lane (1991: cited in Dei, 2000: pp.287.289), defines as "satisfying jobs without dominating the local economy. It must not abuse the natural environment and should be architecturally respectable.....the benefits of tourism should be diffused through many communities, not concentrated on a narrow coastal strip or scenic valley." The issue of sustainable tourism is linked to ecological sustainable development.

Warburg (1998) stressed that, the participatory approach enhances collective action of the target group, staff and partners, which come to bear on policy formulation, plan preparation, implementation and evaluation of development projects. Midgely (1989) viewed the participatory approach as the expression of the populist theory of development, which accepts the positive role of the community in mobilizing themselves to address some community problems.

A policy paper prepared by the World Bank (1975) saw rural development as a growth strategy for a particular target population, the rural poor. It involves extending the benefit of development to those whose futures lie in the pursuit of a livelihood in rural areas. According to Todaro and Smith (1997) rural development is a broad spectrum of development activities including small agricultural projects, the provision of physical and social infrastructure, the development of rural non-farm industries; and the capacity of the rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of these improvements overtime. Rural development, as identified by Chambers (1983), is thus a strategy that enables a specific group of people such as poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of development. The group also includes small-scale farmers, tenants, and the landless.

Community-based Tourism and Rural Development

Community-based tourism offers a legal avenue by which people living in rural communities can derive economic benefits from wildlife. Fees from accommodation and food services for tourists, as well as for limited tour guiding, represent sources of income directly related to wildlife viewing and nature-based tourism. Tourism creates quick jobs especially as it is a labour intensive service industry while modern manufacturing tends to be labour saving. This advantage can be negated through over staffing which has the potential of pushing up costs, undermining efficiency and compromising on labour relations. Many African countries have little money but abundant labour reserves which could benefit from not only employment created directly in hotels and restaurants but also indirectly in agriculture, manufacturing, construction and maintenance as well as the services supporting the tourism industry through careful and conscientious planning. In spite of the argument by Dei (1997), that in Africa, the creation of national parks for use as reserves, means the curtailment of legal access to wildlife and the deprivation of the best agricultural land, tourism in no small means, increases the demand for the products of agriculture and local crafts. Compared to manufacturing industries, tourism is less dependent on high technology. It is also perceived as a 'clean' industry using in-exhaustible local resources and might contribute to conservation of national heritage and traditional/cultural heritage sites (Gamble, 1989).

In 1967, U Thant, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, introduced the International Tourism Year by declaring that tourism fosters a better understanding among people everywhere and leads to better prospects for peace (Gamble, 1989). Other socio-cultural reasons for tourism promotion are grouped into three (3) by Gamble (1989) as follows:

- Tourism shows people of developing countries the material wealth, values and consumer preferences of the inhabitants of the developed countries. This contributes to the removal of traditional attitudes such as fatalism and unwillingness to introduce change. This is known as the Demonstration Effect;
- Tourism projects a favourable image of little known or supposedly misunderstood countries and villages. This is the Image Formation component;
- Tourism encourages people to take pride in their heritage. The ancient civilization, sculpture, textiles and music of Africa have become better known through tourism and are now widely appreciated and copied. This creates a more positive and complete image of Africa and counteracts the stereotype picture of poverty.

Evidently, existing documents establish value in tourism promotion and community-based tourism, especially ecotourism. It is in view of such optimism that investigations for this paper were conducted, especially, against the growing popularity of the Wa West area due to its Hippo Sanctuary at the Wechiau community.

METHODOLOGY

Data Source and Collection

Primary data gathered through a survey were used for the study. Data from this source were gathered from the respondents using questionnaires, focus group discussions and observation (Wilkinson, 1999; Mckay, 2002). Questions were both structured and semi-structured and focused in social, demographic and economic issues. Also, the questions were based on knowledge on community participation, tourist attraction and the benefits or significance of the Sanctuary. Focus group discussions were held in three (3) selected communities, namely: Kantu, Talawona and Dochere. This involved individual household members, clan heads as well as workers and management staff of the Sanctuary. Issues discussed centred on opinions about the sanctuary and culture, development of agriculture and traditional craft, attitude of inhabitants towards tourists and perception about the community and management board of the Sanctuary. The focus group discussions were useful for data triangulation with other tools, namely structured and semi-structured questionnaires (Morgan, 1997). Secondary data used involved the review of available literature on community-based tourism and rural development. These included tourist brochures, development plan of the management board of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) project, and monitoring and evaluation report of the project.

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted (Kumar, 1996; Vandana & Potter, 2006). The study area was clustered into three (3) zones. The zones were north, south and central zones. Simple random sampling was then used to select three (3) communities (one community for each zone) for collection of field data. These communities were Kantu (north), Talawona (central) and Dochere (south). A total of 53 households were randomly and proportionally selected from the three (3) communities based on their population sizes for the administration of the household questionnaires. Purposive sampling was used to select the key informants for detailed discussions and information on the Hippo Sanctuary (Twumasi, 1986). In order to get the views of tourists about the sanctuary, fifteen (15) tourists who were identified at the study area within the period of data collection were interviewed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

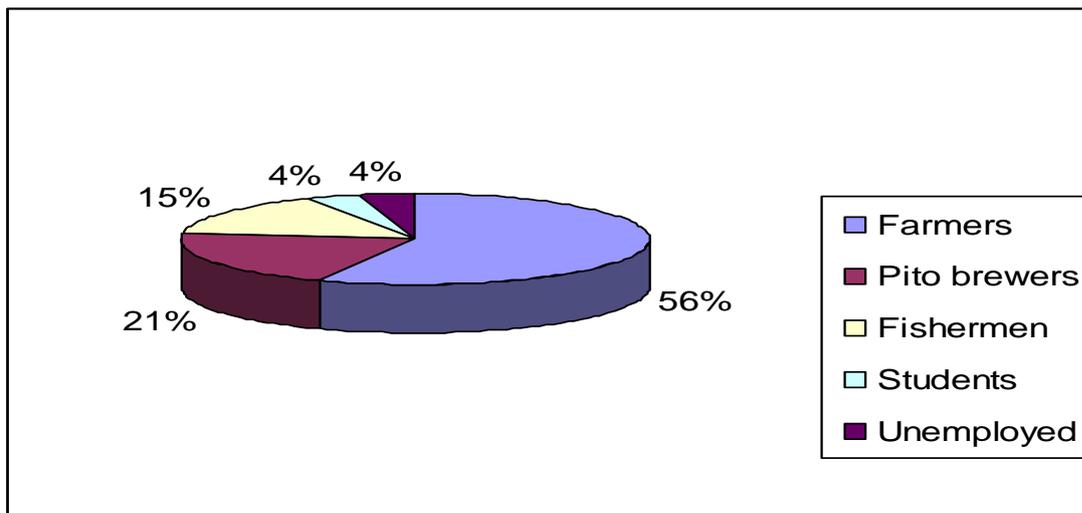
Analysis of field data from the fifty-three (53) respondents indicates that eighteen (18) people, comprising thirty-four percent (34%) of the total had no formal education. The remaining thirty-five (35) respondents, comprising sixty-six percent (66%), have ever had formal education and hence were literates. However, this is not encouraging because out of the sixty-six percent (66%) who had formal education, only five percent (5%) have ever had middle school education, twenty-one percent (21%) attained secondary education and thirty-eight percent (38%) had primary education.

Notwithstanding the fact that most of the respondents (66%) have had formal education, they did not see the threat posed by bushfires on environmental conservation as it (bushfires) remains a perennial affair in the Sanctuary. This suggests that any attempt to undertake

development activities by using tourism in the study area may not yield the desired results if not accompanied by some kind of public education about bushfires.

Figure 1 below shows that 56% of the respondents, comprising thirty people were farmers. The second highest of 21% were engaged in pito brewing. About 15% of the respondents engaged in harvesting of fish for a living, while students and the unemployed comprised the remaining 4% (two people). These results confirmed that the communities were predominantly agrarian. Therefore, any decision to make the sanctuary more beneficial than it was demanded the effective collaboration and involvement of the communities since the tourist resources were once used by people in the pursuance of their livelihood activities on the principles of 'common pool resources.'

Figure 1: Occupational Distribution

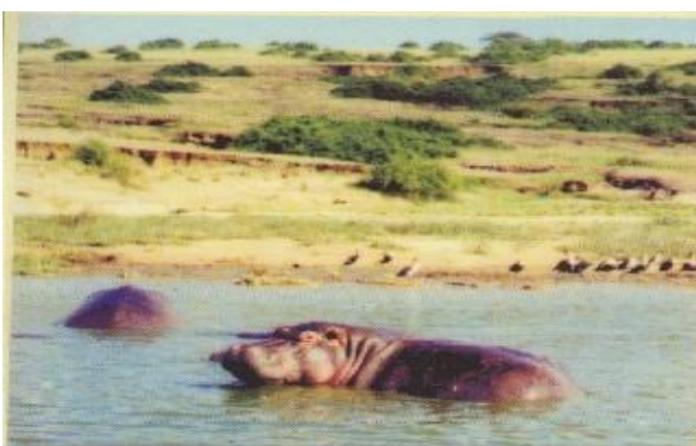


Source: Field Survey, 2007

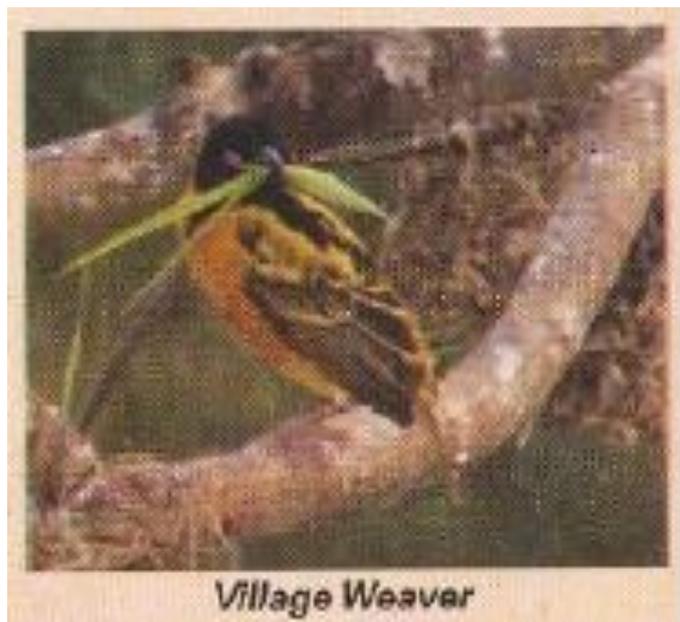
Tourist Attraction

In terms of attraction of tourists to the study area, 87% of the tourists attributed their attraction to wildlife (such as the hippopotamuses, primates, bats, reptiles, birds and over twenty-five species of rodents). However, it was only 13% of the tourists who were attracted by the unique culture of the communities, especially those visiting the area for more than once. This indicates that the architectural and distinct aesthetic design of the Lobi communities of Wechiau can also provide an opportunity for the tourists to enjoy a cultural tour. The implication is that, a proper coordination and harnessing of the Sanctuary and potential cultural attractions can provide an integrated tourism heart of the Wa West District if not the Upper West Region. Figure 2 below gives an idea about some of the cultural and wildlife attraction sites at the study area.

Figure 2: Tourists Attraction Sites



Hippos



Forest Reserve

Source: Management Board, WCHS, 2007

Tourists Perception about Services/Facilities

Results of field discussions on tourists' perceptions about services and facilities of the Sanctuary show that 60% of the tourists either perceived accommodation to be fair or not good while 67% of them rated the wildlife and cultural attractions as very good. Regarding tourist security, 60% felt that the security they enjoyed was good. While seven (7) of the tourists perceived transportation and catering to be either very good or good, eight (8) of them felt that transportation and catering services were fair or not good. The perceptions of tourists about the services/facilities in Table 1 below shows that on the whole tourists were not satisfied with the accommodation, transportation and catering services/facilities. It is therefore important to upgrade and re-organize these services of the sanctuary to meet the expectations of tourists so as to create a lasting impression and sustain attraction to tourists.

Table 1: Tourists perception About Services and Facilities

Services & Facilities	Tourists Perceptions								Total	%
	Very Good	%	Good	%	Fair	%	Not Good	%		
Accommodation	0	-	6	40	5	33	4	27	15	100
Wildlife/Cultural Attractions	10	67	3	20	2	13	0	-	15	100
Security	2	13	9	60	3	20	1	7	15	100
Transportation	1	7	6	40	8	53	0	-	15	100
Catering	2	13	5	33	4	27	4	27	15	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007.

Participation of Community Members in the Tourism Industry

The level of involvement of respondents in managing the Hippo Sanctuary is not encouraging as majority of them were passive participants. Data in Table 2 below indicate the responses of the interviewees. In all, 36% of the interviewees acknowledged their active participation in the affairs of the sanctuary whereas 57% saw their level of participation to be passive. Three (3) of the respondents, representing 5% did not see any form of participation, whilst 2% could not tell whether or not community participation was being practiced. About 73% of the interviewees who saw themselves as either active or passive participants said that, they were mostly given information on revenue and expenditure of the sanctuary and since most of them were illiterates, verification became difficult. According to Lane (1991, cited in Dei, 2000), this situation does not provide the needed conditions for responsible and sustainable tourism.

Table 2: The Nature of Participation by Sanctuary Communities

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Active	19	36
Passive	30	57
No Participation	3	5
Cannot Tell	1	2
Total	53	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

The issue of non-participation of communities is retarding the development of the Sanctuary. This makes them (communities) disenchanted and alienated from the tourism resources at the Hippo Sanctuary. Table 3 below captures reasons identified by respondents for their non-participation in management of the Sanctuary Project.

The study revealed that respondents who were illiterates (i.e. no formal education) recorded high rate of non-participation (Table 3). Other reasons were: time of meeting (28%), lack of sensitization (23%) and lack of interest in the Sanctuary Project (4%). Many of the people still oppose the project with the perception of corruption and misappropriation of funds by some officials of the management board. The principle of evolving development from “below” (Chambers, 1997) is therefore being sacrificed.

Table 3: Reasons for Non-participation

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Illiteracy	24	45
Time of Meeting	15	28
Lack of Sensitization	12	23
Not Interested	2	4
Total	53	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

Benefit from the Tourism Industry

Although not consistently, the Sanctuary has witnessed an increase in both tourist visits and revenue levels, between 1999 and 2004. Tourist visits increased between 1999 and 2000 by 37.7%. Within the same period, tourist revenue level also increased by about 17.2%. There were 53.2% and 35.3% increases in arrivals and revenue in 2002 over 2001, 55.2% and 44.3% increase in 2003 over that of 2002 while the sanctuary recorded a respective reduction in visits and revenue by 4% and 5% between 2003 and 2004. A drastic reduction of about 62.6% and 74.0% in both tourist inflow and revenue to the sanctuary was recorded between 2004 and 2005. This situation was attributed to the high inflow of students (research teams) in 2004 over that of 2005(see Table 4 below). However, there were no visits by any student research teams as tourist arrivals in 2005. This situation indicates the low level of promotion, particularly beyond the borders of Upper West Region and the poor planning strategies and plans, which focus on tourism promotion and development by the WCHS Management Board and Wa West District Assembly, as critical inputs to attract both local and foreign tourists to the Sanctuary area.

Table 4: Tourists Arrival and Revenue.

Year	Arrival	Revenue (¢)-Old cedi	Revenue (GH¢)-New cedi
1999	17	97,000	9.70p
2000	45	563,000	56.30p
2001	227	4,261,000	426.10p
2002	427	12,087,000	1208.70p
2003	773	27,267,000	2726.70p
2004	1,504	69,314,500	6931.45p
2005	941	51,310,000	5131.00p
Total	3,934	164,899,500	16489.95

Source: Ghana Tourist Board-Wa, 2006.

Employment Generation

Data from the field survey indicates that, the establishment of the Hippo Sanctuary has created employment opportunities for some of the people within and around the study area. Out of thirty-nine people employed by the WCHS project, 31% were employed as guides, 10% engaged as rangers while caretakers and store operators were 8% each. The highest employment category- artisan (crafts works), engaged 40% while cooks has as low as 3% of the thirty-nine people employed (see Table 5). This confirms the World Bank (1975) assertion that rural development is a growth strategy (and in this case through tourism) for a particular target population, the rural poor. It could be deduced that tourism employment generation analysis can therefore be used to diversify livelihood and the economy of the study area.

Table 7: Employment Generated by the Hippo Sanctuary

Employment Category	Total	Percentage (%)
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Guides	12	31
Caretakers	3	8
Cooks	1	3
Rangers	4	10
Store operators	3	8
Artisans (crafts)	16	40
Total	39	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007.

Community-Based Tourism and Education

In an effort to raise the poor educational status of the people, as indicated earlier, the Sanctuary has helped in the financial and material promotion of education in the study area. The views of interviewees about the promotion of education since the establishment of the Sanctuary in 1999 have been captured in Table 6 below. Nineteen (19) respondents, representing 35% did not see any improvement in the educational enrolment and infrastructure due to the establishment of the Sanctuary Project whereas sixty-four percent (64%) indicated that there has been an improvement in educational status through the construction of school buildings and a scholarship package for needy but brilliant children by the Sanctuary Project as one of its social responsibilities. The study further indicated that none of the respondents' accessibility to educational facilities has worsened. This implies that the sanctuary communities have been offered educational opportunities. Therefore, an efficient management of the tourist facilities is likely to trickle down to affect the educational system and status of the people, which is a necessary tool for fighting poverty.

Table 6: The Hippo Sanctuary and the Promotion of Education

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Worse off	0	0
The Same	19	36
Better	34	64
Total	53	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

The Sanctuary and Environmental Sustainability

On sustainability of the environment, the conservation and utilization of the unique flora, fauna and land that extends along the 40 km stretch of the Black Volta was found to offer protection to the environment. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the respondents agreed that the sanctuary has helped to conserve the environment, which supports the view of Gamble (1989) that tourism is a 'clean' industry using inexhaustible local resources, which contributes to conservation. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the respondents indicated that there is no link between the project and environment protection. This was not surprising because out of the twenty-one percent (21%) who could not see the link between environmental conservation and the Hippo Sanctuary, fifty-five percent (55%) saw the restriction on the use of fire for hunting as an opportunity for rodents to destroy their crops. The river, land and forest resources provide

suitable habitat for endangered plants and animal species. Wildlife such as birds, snakes, chameleons and pythons, native to the area, were being conserved. Brundtland (1987, cited by Dei, 2000) observed that, tourism, particularly community-based tourism, produces the necessary condition for sustainable tourism. The restriction of farming in the core zone had created a forest reserve that enriches the beauty of the natural vegetation along the sanctuary area. Hence, the Sanctuary ensures the use of natural resources in a way that will not compromise the use of the Sanctuary by future generations and thus, fosters the sustainable development of the area.

CONCLUSION

The concept of community-based tourism is gaining prominence and plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the Wa West District. The Hippo Sanctuary has been able to increase the provision and improvement of infrastructure in the area of education, health, water and feeder roads. The sanctuary communities have equally benefited from some form of employment that has been generated by the tourism resources; a latent benefit of showcasing the local culture of the people and the conservation of the natural fauna and flora for posterity. However, the effective delivery of tourism services as a way of unearthing potentials for development has been beset with some challenges which include: low participation or passive nature of participation of the communities-given rise to by low level of formal education, lack of sensitization and low operation of the consensus model of planning and unsatisfactory delivery of tourism supporting services and facilities. The findings further revealed the lack of continuous and consistent inflow of tourists and tourism revenue, which is directly related to the problem of low/poor publicity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a way of using community-based tourism to facilitate rural development, tourism resources should be managed in a sound fashion to ensure sustainable practices. Not only should tourism be socio-culturally, economically and environmentally friendly, but also self-sustaining within the 'social carrying capacity.' Drawing from the above, the following recommendations have been made to promote rural development by the use of tourism in the Wa West District:

- There should be a 'bottom-up' strategy of decision-making in the administration of the sanctuary project, which will permit a greater degree of local control over the direction of tourism development of the Hippo Sanctuary. This will equally increase the employment and economic benefits to the communities.
- There should be a comprehensive tourism policy or plan by the Wa West District Assembly, which will cover services, facilities and upgrading to make the Sanctuary preferred destination for both local and international tourists. The Sanctuary Management Board should organize frequent workshops to train local entrepreneurs to take full advantage of the industry. This can promote and strengthen the backward linkage with other sectors of the economy.
- There should be a promotional package that markets effectively the Sanctuary by way of media advert, an up-to-date brochure and creation of a website to give it international visibility.
- The unique and indigenous culture of the people, which has not been given much attention, should also be given adequate planning and promotion. This is important for providing integrated tourism attraction, which offer maximum satisfaction to tourists. Prestige, which is a psychological benefit of the cultural promotion, enhances ethnic co-existence.
- Finally, there should be increased collaboration and coordination between and among all stakeholders (communities, sanctuary management, donors and Wa West District Assembly) to sustain their interest for sustainable management of the sanctuary. This will help establish permanent machinery for dialogue, consultation and collaboration - a critical input to enhancing participation of varied needs of people at the Sanctuary area. This has to be preceded by effective public education.

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