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Making Ecotourism more Supportive of Rural Development in Ghana

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Abstract

The paper explores the potential role of community-based ecotourism in the development of rural areas of Ghana. A review of past and current experiences in rural development and an assessment of the status of ecotourism in Ghana were undertaken. Potential challenges that are likely to confront the sector in the future were isolated and discussed, and measures to overcome them proposed. Some of these measures include improvements in the planning and management of ecotourism destinations and the provision of a more diversified and enhanced ecotourism product. The study showed that the community-based empowerment framework proposed initially by Friedman (1992) provides an appropriate mechanism for assessing the extent of community participation in ecotourism ventures, a factor that is very critical not only for the future survival of these projects but also for the general development of rural areas.

Introduction

Tourism has been cited variously as offering the potential for addressing spatio-temporal inequities in development. Foremost in this regard have been the seminal contributions of Christaller (1964) and Friedmann (1980) (cited in Pearce, 1989). Christaller, for example, has alluded to the fact that tourism provides the economically disadvantaged regions the chance to develop themselves as these are places that attract the tourists most. Friedmann was more emphatic when he recommended tourism "as a development option for particularly problematic regions that have otherwise little developmental potential".

However, it was not until the post second world war era, when rapid growth of recreation and tourism was experienced on the global scale, that tourist visitations to rural areas assumed significance. Because rural areas offer unusual opportunity for the organization of nature-based tourism that is particularly sought after by the affluent

and modern, urban-based individuals, they became magnets for attracting streams of these "short term" migrants. According to Bramwell (1994), this trend has continued and even intensified because the very discerning contemporary tourist wants to find something different and learn about the character of place, its people and traditions, and can do this in destinations where tourism draws on and reflects their distinctive local sense of place, a description that aptly fits rural settings.

Tourism has developed to become the mainstay of many rural economies, bringing in its wake drastic changes in rural settings. The effects of tourism upon the social-cultural and economic patterns of destinations have been very profound. Butler (1998) has attributed the growing importance of recreation and tourism in rural areas, especially in the developed world, to a number of interrelated factors. These include the spectacular rise in leisure activities, major changes in agriculture,