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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF TOURISM: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FROM NORTH WESTERN GHANA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Community-based tourism has, for over four decades, been promoted as a means of poverty reduction in developing countries. This study sought to investigate the social and economic effects of community-based tourism using the Wechiau Community-based Hippo Sanctuary located in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The research relied on both qualitative and quantitative approaches using household questionnaires as its primary data collection instrument. The study reveals the ever increasing tourists arrival, with its attendant revenue, as the major economic benefit of the sanctuary. Other benefits are the expansion of small-scale business activities and employment opportunities. Meanwhile, the study observes that the over-emphasis on economic benefits tends to down-play the overall socio-economic value of the sanctuary. Although locals gain income and skills needed to pursue more opportunities through cultural exchange, both parties stand to benefit socially.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced a consistent growth and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world with an annual growth rate of around 7.4% (Vlahovi, 2000; Asker *et al.*, 2010; WTO, 2010; WTO, 2014) and a major contributor to gross domestic product (GDP) in many developing countries (Kuvan and Akan, 2012). The contribution of tourism to an economy and the growth of that economy have been described by many authors as being enormous, including providing many employment avenues and constituting an important part of the production process that takes place within the economy (Kester, 2003; Surugiu *et al.*, 2011; Kareem, 2013). The economic growth and development from the tourism sector has been identified in its export value (Surugiu *et al.*, 2011; Kareem, 2013). According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2006), the sector contributed over 40% of all services export in 2005, making it the largest category of global trade.

Other estimates put it at 3% to 10% of GDP in developing countries in that same year (WTO, 2005). The contribution of tourism to economic activity worldwide is estimated at some 5%, and to employment it is estimated in the order of 6-7% of the overall number of jobs worldwide (WTO, 2010). The tourism sector is directly and indirectly accountable for 8.8% of the world's jobs (258 million); 9.1% of the world's GDP (US\$6 trillion); 5.8% of the world's exports (US\$1.1 trillion); and 4.5% of the world's investment (US\$652 billion) (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2011). Furthermore, international tourist arrivals grew by 5% worldwide in 2013, reaching a record 1087 million arrivals after topping the 1 billion mark in 2012. Also the international receipts reached US\$ 1159 billion in 2013, up from US\$1078 billion in 2012 (WTO, 2014). According to the WTO (2014), despite occasional shocks, international arrivals have shown virtually uninterrupted growth from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995 and 1087 million in 2013. In Africa, tourism has been perceived as a means of enhancing economic growth and development as well as launching the continent to the outside world (Kester, 2003; Olayinka and Gbadebo, 2007). According to Christie *et al.* (2013), tourism is the one service sector in which African countries have a trade surplus.

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The contribution of tourism to GDP and exports in Africa has been improving overtime (Christie and Crompton, 2001). Though Africa's potentials in tourism is significant, its endowments have been underdeveloped and underutilized (Naude and Saayman, 2005; Kareem, 2013). Kareem and Bello (2010) are of the view that for Africa to reap the potential embedded in the tourism sector, governments must stabilize their macro economics, provide functional infrastructure, maintain peace and political stability, and reduce crime rates in their tourism destinations. Despite this, in 2013 Africa enjoyed sustained growth, attracting 5% more of international tourist arrivals corresponding to an increase of 3 million and recording a total of 50 million tourists (5% of the world) after surpassing the 50 million mark in 2012 (WTO, 2014). Health (2002) estimates that by 2020, international tourist arrivals in Africa will reach 77 million, about four times the 20 million recorded in 1995. Furthermore the WTTC approximates that 3.8 million jobs (2.4 million indirect jobs) might be generated by the tourism industry in sub-Saharan Africa over the next 10 years (Christie *et al.*, 2013).

Since 1985, when tourism was regarded as a priority sector in the Ghana Investment Code (PNDC Law 116, 1985), there has been a stable rise of tourism arrivals and receipts. Tourist arrivals rose from 92,000 in 1985 to 146,000 by 1990, with associated rise in receipts of US\$ 20 million to US\$ 81 million (GOG, 2012). By 1994 arrival records stood at an absolute total of over 271,000 and grew by 5.4% in 1995, a year prior to the introduction of the 1996-2010 Development Plan. The progressive trend in growth continued from the initial year of the plan, 1996, through to the first phase. The second and third phases of the 1996-2010 Plan, however, experienced some negative growth rates in some years including 2002, 2004, 2009 with 2005 recording the lowest growth rate (-33%) due to factors including recession in the originating countries, instability of the cedi and, probably, election and/or political instability concerns. The period's average outcomes indicate that the third phase (2006-2010) of the 1996-2010 Plan was the most successful, with the sector recording an average growth rate of 14.1%, compared to the 10% and -0.1% for the first (1996-2000) and second (2001-2005) phases respectively (GOG, 2012). In terms of investment flow in tourism, especially foreign direct investments (FDI), Ghana attracted the highest in West Africa, with US\$ 270 million amounting to 4% of total investment (WTTC, 2011).

Tourism has emerged as a significant development option (Binns and Nel, 2002) and has become a powerful engine for fast-tracking socio-economic development and safeguarding biodiversity and cultural heritage in developing countries (UNDP, 2011). The sector is also identified as a key strategy that can lead to community development, economic growth, poverty reduction and safeguarding a sustainable future (Binns and Nel, 2002; Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012; Cobbinah *et al.*, 2013). According to Vlahovi (2000), tourism creates the opportunity for local populations to actively take part in the economic life of their communities, to enable the development and flourishing of traditional crafts and folklore so that the hosts might have some profits of all this. Consequently, the sector has become an export-oriented economic growth approach for the creation of employment and the reduction of abject poverty (Kareem, 2013). In addition to the potential of

tourism to create employment avenues and foreign exchange in any economy, tourism is also a means to enhance a destination's infrastructure and further promote cooperation and understanding among peoples all over the globe (Kareem & Bello, 2010). Although tourism has been hailed as an engine of economic growth and prosperity for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, concerns have been raised about the real impact of tourism to growth and development. Here the combined message is that the negative socio-cultural consequences of tourism far outstripped any positive economic considerations (Jafari, 1989). For instance, in Ghana, concerns have been mounting about the negative impacts of the industry on domestic economies, social, cultural and natural resources (Segbefia, 2008). However, the debate on the relationships between tourism and development has been in existence for over 50 years (Ashley and Goodwin, 2007; Telfer, 2009; Harrison, 2010). But advocates of the industry insist that tourism, in its various forms, has a role to play, not only in economic development, but also in development more broadly defined (Telfer, 2009). Health (2002) also indicated that the industry is increasingly becoming dynamic and competitive in nature and is also seriously affected by various global issues.

The perceived economic impact of tourism has received much emphasis and discussions as well as a growing interest among academics in interrogating the consequences of tourism activities from a more comprehensive perspective (Kuvan and Akan 2012). However, still missing from the current debate is the significance of community-based tourism – one without well developed catering and accommodation establishments and still characterized by euphoria (Doxey, 1976) – in the development of host communities. It is in this light that this study sought to investigate the effects of tourism on the host communities within the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary communities located in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study assessed the host communities' perceptions on how tourism affects the social and economic life of people in the sanctuary's catchment area, and the benefits the communities have derived from the sanctuary since its establishment.

### **Tourism Development in Ghana: An Overview**

Tourism is an industry driven primarily by commercial interests and thus has limits to its pro-poor potential. It has a number of characteristics and advantages over other sectors in terms of poverty reduction (Rogerson, 2006). Also, tourism offers a wide scope for participation, especially by operators in the informal sector (Bah and Godwin, 2003; Thomas, 2000). However, tourism is an industry that is highly dependent upon natural capital and cultural heritage (Forstner, 2004; Gordwin, 2001). It is a complex system embodying a set of networks between various key and other stakeholders (D'Angela and Go, 2009). This system is marked by discord stemming from shared resource use, multiple interests and conflicting opinions. But the tourism system is not a uniform entity in itself because it encompasses two distinct subsystems: the policy makers and the commercial tourism industry, which is managed by different forces (March and Wilkinson, 2009; Kuvan and Akan, 2012). Traditionally, two forces have been at work in tourist areas: promotion of the industry by those who are concerned with maximizing its economic returns; and agencies concerned with protecting the local areas and its

inhabitants from the pressures of tourism (Murphy, 1982). But there is no successful tourism without elements of local culture (Vlahovi, 2000). In the 1980s and early 1990s, attention on tourism development was focused on alternative community-based and small-scale tourism. But at the turn of the new century, pro-poor tourism became the focus of concern (Gordwin, 2008). Pro-poor tourism sought to harness the industry as a whole in contributing to poverty reduction (Hummel and van der Duim, 2012) and has considerable potential to contribute to pro-poor growth in several ways (Ashley and Mitchell, 2005; Gerosa, 2003). To derive the needed benefit that comes with tourism development, the concept Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerged in the mid-1990s (Asker *et al.*, 2010). However, according to Telfer (2009), Community-Based Tourism can be traced back to, and associated with, alternative development approaches formulated during the late 1970s, which were concerned with issues beyond strict economic reasoning such as empowerment and self-reliance. Furthermore, Telfer (2009) argued that development began to focus on community-based initiatives stressing local participation and self-reliance.

In line with Telfer's (2009) view, Singh (2008) infers community-based tourism as a strategy able to foster natural and cultural resource conservation and community development, contribute towards more opportunities for the improvement of community livelihoods, provide alternative sources of income in rural areas and open a variety of skill-based job opportunities. Based on this, Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012) indicate that the original concept of community-based tourism must be understood as linking the concepts sustainability, empowerment and self-reliance. Community-based tourism has been at the forefront of the promotion of rural development in developing countries (Storey, 2004; Honey, 2008). Hence, tourism development has followed many of the concepts associated with alternative development paradigms with respect to empowerment and sustainability. One of the pillars of these paradigms is local empowerment which has been the focus of research on indigenous tourism, community-based tourism, ecotourism and the empowerment of women through tourism. Ghana's tourism development has followed a somewhat similar trajectory.

The development of the tourism sector in Ghana can be traced to the colonial era, where the colonial authorities built some chalets for relaxation and recreation (Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008). The period after independence also saw a tremendous increase in the provision of tourism related infrastructure, but the primary aim was administrative infrastructure than tourism-oriented. This period saw the building of catering rest houses in all the regional capitals (Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008). Over the last three decades, the tourism industry in Ghana has developed from a home-grown, craft-run business into a modern industry with significant involvement of large-scale enterprises (Akyeampong, 2011). Ghana's tourism sector has been envisaged as a key potential engine of growth and development since the 1970s. The industry has since the mid-1980s emerged as a significant sector in the Ghanaian economy and society (Akyeampong and Asiedu, 2008). However, attempts to thoroughly offer the enabling environment for its development never materialized

economically until the 1996-2010 Plan was formulated and launched (GoG, 2012). Since then, the expansion of the tourism industry in the country seemed to induce more urban-based, large establishments seen in the emergence of local hotel chains and spatially concentrated in the urban areas, and the construction of various state-owned hotels (Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008; Akyeampong, 2011). Furthermore, the development of the industry was focused on the provision of infrastructure and publicizing the country externally to attract international tourists to the neglect of domestic tourism. In the 1990s the natural resource conservation and historic preservation project (NRCHP) was established to boost domestic tourism in Ghana. Also, the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations developed a 5 year strategic plan in 2002 aimed at encouraging domestic tourism (Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008). Moreover, the Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006-2009) identified tourism as a potential for employment in addition to becoming the country's main foreign exchange earner in the near future (Ghana, 2005a).

Furthermore, to offer a new path that will guide and develop the tourism sector over the next 15 years (2013 – 2027), the national tourism development plan was developed. The 2013-2027 plan is designed to update the 1996-2010 plan and emphasis is placed on identifying opportunities to enhance and progress tourism in Ghana as well as address the obstacles and constraints that are hampering its development while building on the recommendations made in the 1996-2010 plan. The key goal of the 2013-2027 National Tourism Development Plan is to ensure that tourism achieves its full potential in a sustainable and responsible manner and that it contributes to the country's GDP, reduces poverty, ensures that its operation is not detrimental to the environment and the culture and traditions of Ghanaians and attracts a wide range of markets (GOG, 2012). The plan also aimed at properly positioning tourism and helping to achieve the core objectives of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA).

In Ghana, the key goals of tourism development is to ensure that as many opportunities as possible will be created for the involvement in and benefit from tourism by local entrepreneurs and communities in terms of employment, income generation, training and awareness and access to better social infrastructure. Also, it is envisaged that tourism will be one of the pillars of productive and sustainable source of decent employment and poverty reduction (Ghana, 2005b). An examination of Ghana's tourism policy during the last three decades indicates that besides macro-economic objectives, governments have sought to exploit the potentials of the industry for the attainment of other socio-economic goals for regional development and poverty reduction (Akyeampong, 2011). However, the industry in Ghana is hinged on the participation of the private sector where there is the active involvement of companies, communities and individuals through micro, small, medium and big businesses that provide various services to tourists (Segbefia, 2008).

## STUDY AREA

**The Study Area:** Wechiau is the district capital of the Wa West District (Figure 1), one of the eleven districts that make

up the Upper West Region. It was created in 2004 by Legislative Instrument 1751. The tourism potential of the Wa West District is found in its rich natural, cultural, historical and man-made attractions. These, however, have not received the needed support and development to exert their competitiveness within the private sector. The most significant of them is the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, which is about 18 km north-west of Wechiau. The Hippo Sanctuary is an innovative venture which has, within less than 15 years, delivered dramatic results for conservation, community development, and poverty reduction. The Hippo Sanctuary is now one of Ghana's leading conservation initiatives.

to a local legend, began a special bond with the hippos during the pre-colonial era. It is reported that:

*..... during the slave trade the people of the area were running away to avoid being captured. They reached the Black Volta River and didn't know how to cross. They saw the hippos which let the people go onto their backs and carried them across safely. When the slave raiders approached, they could only see water and rocks. They tried to cross on the rocks, but the rocks were, in fact, hippos. Once a good number of the slave raiders were standing on the "rocks", the hippos moved and the raiders fell into the river and perished.*

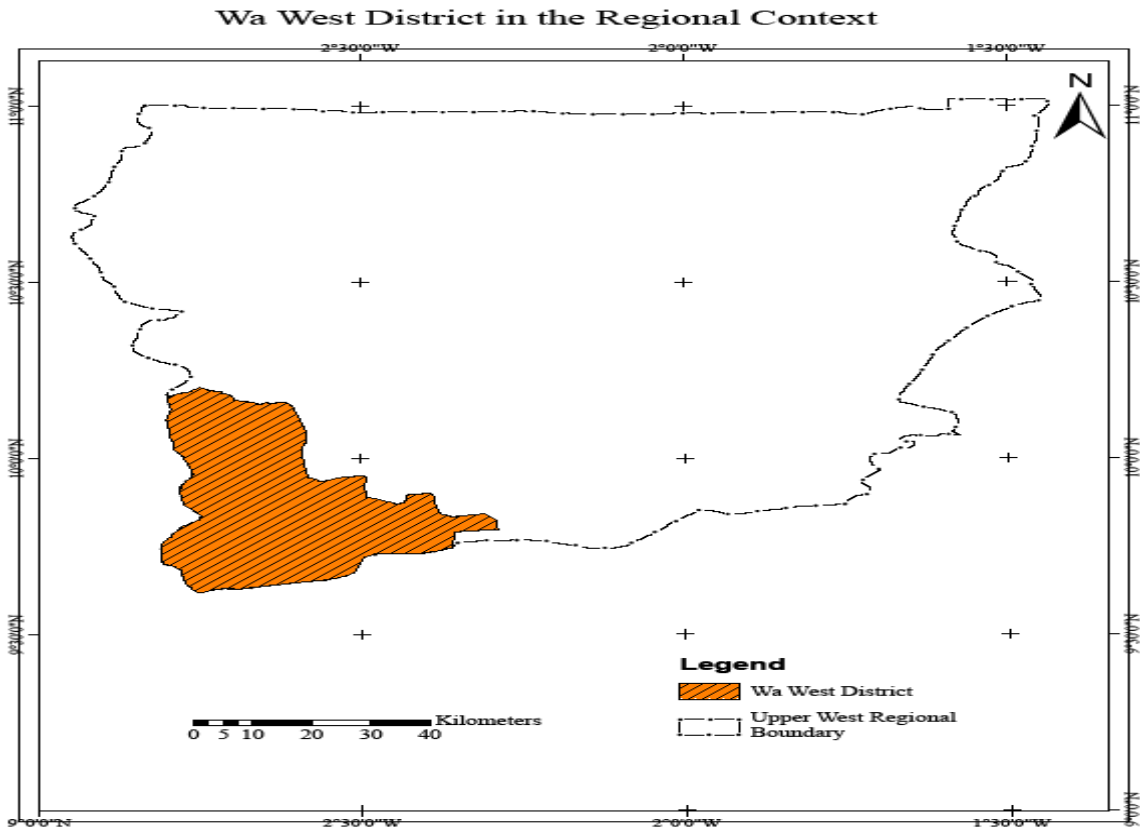


Figure 1. The study district

The Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary is a community-based conservation initiative aimed at providing the inhabitants with a source of revenue and improved quality of life while simultaneously offering protection to the flora and fauna found within the designated lands. Established in 1999, the sanctuary consists of a 40 km stretch of riverine forest, floodplain, and savannah woodland running the length of the Black Volta River, which forms the Upper West Region's boundary with Burkina Faso. Marketed as an eco-tourism destination, of particular interest is the hippopotamus population resident along this stretch of the river. Being one of only two remaining hippo populations within Ghana, the group consists of approximately 20 individuals representing an important conservation priority in the country. The sanctuary is a community operated eco-tourism project established to conserve and protect the hippo ponds in the area. The history of the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary dates back to the decade before the 1990's. However, the people of Wechiau, according

*As a result, the hippo has become a sacred animal. Thus, the ancestors of both the people of Wechiau and hippos created a bond that required mutual efforts in protecting one another (based on a local legend).*

In 1996 the Chiefs and people of the Wechiau Traditional Area began the processes of establishing the Wechiau Community-based Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS). To protect the hippos and their habitat, the people made great sacrifices, with many of the villages within the sanctuary moving away from the river to create a feeding/buffer zone for the hippos. The sanctuary is divided into two zones – the Core Zone and the Development Zone (Figure 2). The Core Zone is the most important conservation area for the sanctuary and extends about 1.5 km from the river. The Development Zone, on the other hand, is where farming activities are allowed. This zone possesses savanna vegetation and extends about 20 km east and includes 17 project communities and farmlands.

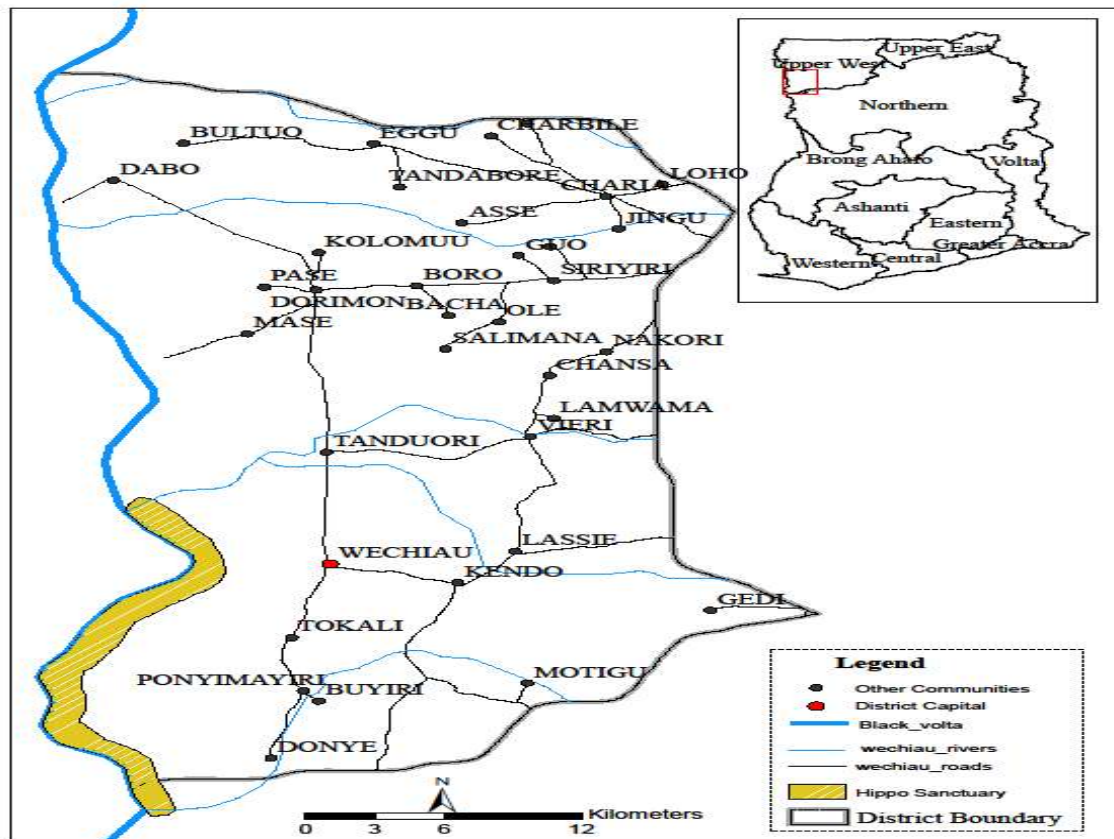


Figure 2. Map of the WCHS

Since its establishment, the WCHS has benefited from partners/investors such as the Calgary Zoo Conservation Outreach (CZCO) in Canada and Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC) in England. Other potential tourist sites that could provide income to the district are the Ga crocodile pond, the Lobi Architecture, a three hundred year old Mosque and indigenous grinding mills. Besides these natural and man-made sites, the culture of the people is also captivating. When coordinated well, these attractions could make the Wa West District a good tourist destination for local and foreign tourists.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aside the use of documented sources, the research generated first-hand information from the field. The research relied on both qualitative and quantitative approaches taking into consideration the data demands. Household questionnaires were used as the primary data collection instrument. This approach is deemed appropriate when the object of the research is to explore attitudes or reactions of a group or community in response to some commonly experienced aspects of their environment (Ulinet *et al.*, 2005). Through such interactive discourse, participants are able to offer insights on the perspective of the enterprise, revealing clues to the social contexts that shape their opinions (Scammell *et al.*, 2009). In all, One hundred and fifty respondents were interviewed using the household questionnaires. A two-stage sampling methodology was adopted in the selection of households for the interviews.

The first stage was the clustering of residential areas into three core zones. Zone one covered mainly the traditional settlements while zone two was made of the planned suburbs, which have most government bungalows and private residential apartments occupied mainly by high and middle class households. Zone three comprised the Newly Developing Areas, part of which is made of the surrounding villages. Since households in zone one are more extensive than in zones two and three, 40% of the total sample was apportioned to that zone and 30% each to zones two and three. Within the selected residential areas, blocks were created based on the number of houses.

The interviewers selected households to interview by systematically walking through the blocks and interviewing one household in every tenth (for zone one) and twentieth (for zones two and three) house. The questionnaires were administered to household heads or their representatives. In a house where there were multiple households, only one household was interviewed. In addition to the household surveys, in-depth interviews were organized with Chiefs and elders, tour guides, some visiting tourists, tourism ancillary service providers in the communities, some management team members of the sanctuary, and officials of the Wa West District Assembly. The interviews covered themes on the social and economic effects of the sanctuary and tourism sites and their distribution within the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary to enable the spatial mapping of the facilities, as well as their detailed knowledge about the enterprise.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Tourist Sites and Visitation Trends

The Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary falls within 17 communities along the Black Volta River (Figure 3). These communities are Tokali, Bulinche, Teme, Peplinkpari, Talawonaa, Tambligie, Dogberipari, Tankara, Dodobe, Donpire, Dornye, Dochere, Nwaaleyiri, Kantu, Wechiau, Kpanfa, and Tuole. The sanctuary office is located in Wechiau and all tourists who wish to see the Hippo Sanctuary have to stop at Wechiau first. Of these communities, only four – Wechiau, Kpanfa, Kantu and Talawona – are often visited by tourists. The distances from Kantu, Kpanfa and Talawona to Wechiau are 6 km, 4 km and 18 km respectively.

that most visitors have come from Europe with a percentage of 46%, while tourists from the African continent and the Americas constituted 36% and 18% respectively. The study further revealed that the sanctuary, in 1999, the year of its inception and commercialization, recorded the least number of visitors with only 17 tourists visiting the site. On the other hand, the highest number of visitors to the site was recorded in 2009 with a total of 2,270 tourists. However, the year 2013 recorded the highest revenue of GHC 26,485.80 while 1999 recorded the lowest of GHC9.70 (see Table 1). The trend of visitation appears to be seasonal, with many tourists visiting the sanctuary during the dry season (November to May) when there are little or no rains (see Table 2). This is because during that time of the year, the water level of the Black Volta is very low and the Hippos can be seen.

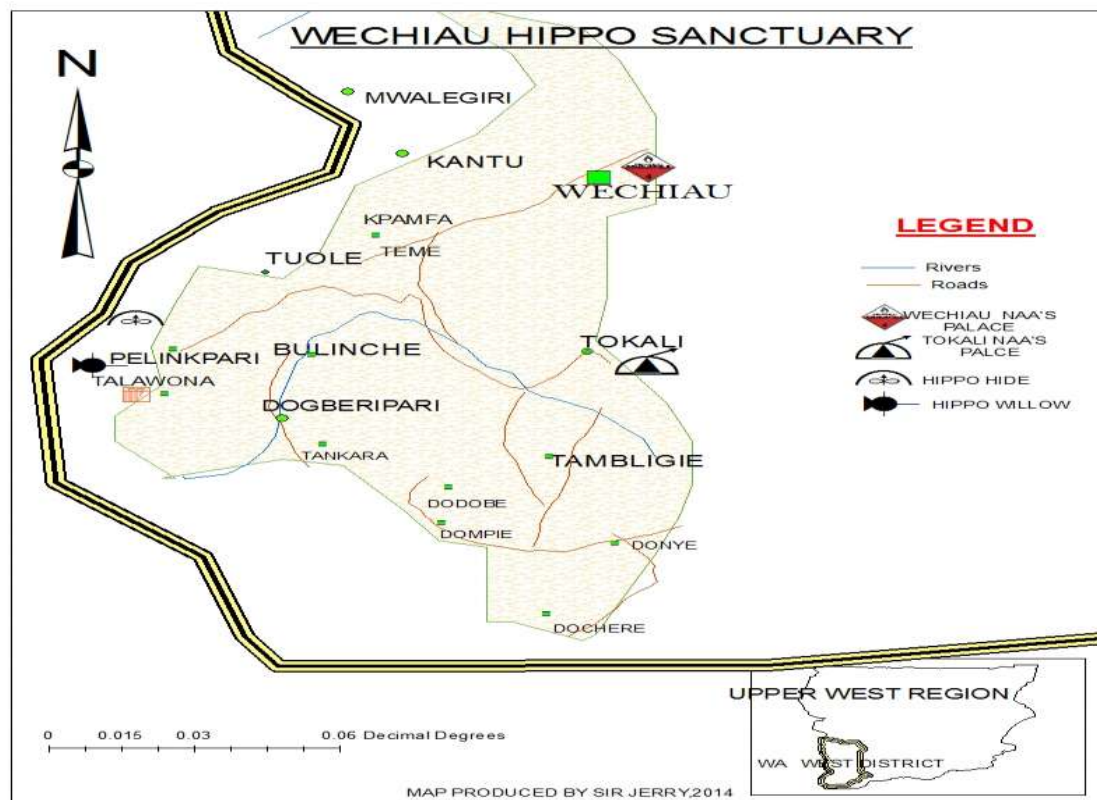


Figure 3. Distribution of Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary Sites

However, because of the bad nature of the road network to these communities, it takes about 25 minutes, 18 minutes and 1 hour 25 minutes to Kantu, Kpanfa and Talawona respectively. Wechiau is by far the most visited community because it serves as the visitor's centre for all tourists who wish to visit the sanctuary to spend the night. Also, Kantu, Kpanfa and Talewona are visited most because these locations have the river safari and accommodation facilities for tourists. Besides these considerations, accessibility to the sites accounts for visitors' choice of sites. Although the roads from Wechiau to Kantu, Kpanfa and Talewona are generally bad, they are nonetheless accessible by motor bikes and vehicles. The other communities are not often visited because the roads are practically not accessible, especially during the rainy season when they are usually cut off from Wechiau. The sanctuary has, since its inception, received visitors from various walks of life and from different parts of the world. The study revealed

Table 1. Visitor numbers and income from 1999 – 2013

Year	Residents	Non-residents	Total arrivals (residents and non-residents)	Revenue (GHC)
1999	-	-	17	9.70
2000	-	-	45	56.30
2001	-	-	227	426.10
2002	145	297	442	1397.70
2003	329	444	773	2726.73
2004	870	634	1504	8114.45
2005	391	550	941	5073.30
2006	1144	512	1656	7551.85
2007	1183	673	1856	11725.30
2008	1018	797	1815	15867.15
2009	1339	931	2270	25695.05
2010	1236	678	1914	14493.50
2011	825	759	1584	23300.00
2012	961	694	1655	21561.00
2013	965	943	1908	26485.80

Source: Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, 2014.

**Table 2. Monthly Visitor Numbers, 2012**

Month	Residents	Non-residents	Total (Residents & Non-residents)	Revenue
January	90	64	154	2,011.00
February	86	79	165	2,600.00
March	161	66	227	1,765.00
April	216	68	284	3,347.00
May	48	79	127	3,245.00
June	57	42	99	970.00
July	65	67	132	1,703.00
August	31	55	86	1,125.00
September	35	16	51	334.00
October	13	24	37	485.00
November	92	75	167	1,854.00
December	67	59	126	2,122.00
Total	961	694	1655	21,561.00

Source: Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, 2014

Also, the roads to the sites are easily accessible in the dry season than in the rainy season. Tourists visiting the sanctuary received information about the site from various sources including the internet, friends, travel agencies as well as educational and research books. As many as 45.5% of the tourists interviewed indicated that they heard of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary from various sites on the internet and 28.1% said they got to know of the tourist site through travel and tour agencies. Another 18.2% heard of the Hippo Sanctuary through friends and acquaintances and a further 8.2% of the tourists became aware of the site from other sources such as educational and research works, newspaper articles, on the airwaves, and on television.

The evidence from the tourists interviewed showed that 54.5% of them were visiting the sanctuary for the first time, 27.3% had visited the place between two to five times while 18.2% had visited the sanctuary more than five times. Again, as much as 54.5% of the tourists maintained that they were not willing to return to the sanctuary, citing various reasons including the poor road network from Wechiau to the sanctuary communities, high entrance fee (GHC8 for Ghanaians and GHC10 for foreigners), and high transportation costs. It costs GHC3.50 from Wa to Wechiau by road. The fare from Wechiau to the other sanctuary communities ranges from GHC15 to GHC20 depending on the location and remoteness of the particular community. Refreshingly, 27.3% of the tourists indicated their willingness to return in the near future to see the hippos again but 18.2% of them did not know whether they would be visiting the hippo sanctuary again. One tourist remarked:

*..... though I will be coming back to the Upper West Region to see whether projects (building of schools and boreholes for communities) we have invested in have been completed and are in use. I cannot wait to visit this place again to see the hippos.*

### Social and Economic Dimensions of the Sanctuary

Unlike the economic benefits, which can be measured objectively and serve as support for further development (Cohen, 1972), tourism's social benefits appear to be somewhat subjective. However, social impact arises when tourism brings about changes in value systems and behavior in

both the tourist and the host. One of the key social impacts identified in this study was the influence of the customs and traditions on tourists' behavior. The Wechiau area is endowed with many customs and traditions. The tourists interviewed indicated that they had learnt many customs including the knowledge that the shea and the dawadawa (local spice) trees belong to the chiefs of the communities and that anyone found felling them is answerable to the chiefs. They further indicated that they have also been informed that the baobab and ebony trees are preserved for sacred reasons.

Another cultural norm mentioned by the revelers was that the people of Wechiau are forbidden from killing or eating doves. The dove is the totem of the community and it is believed that anyone who disobeys this custom will contract leprosy. Adultery was also found to be a practice that is highly frowned upon in all the sanctuary communities. Also, it was gathered from the tourists that the Wala ethnic groups within the various communities do not use the "Kongdau" (trees found near water bodies) for firewood because it is believed to bring hunger to the people. All these views of the tourists were confirmed by the natives interviewed. Most of those who tend to learn about the customs and traditions are tourists who usually stay within these communities, especially Wechiau for some days so as to acquaint themselves with the historical development of the sanctuary as well as the people. For instance a tourist had this to say:

*... we were told to squat when greeting the chief and elders of the community: this they say symbolizes the kind of respect the people have for their chief and elders.*

A few tourists, however, indicated that they were not learning the customs and traditions of the area. To this minority, their principal aim there was to see the hippos and not to stay and learn about the host community. The unwillingness of some tourists to stay in the host communities could directly be attributed to the absence or inadequacy of tourism support facilities, especially high standard guest houses, easily accessible road networks, good telecommunication networks, among others. The Wa West District, which houses the Hippo Sanctuary, is one of the very new districts which were carved out of the then Wa Municipality and as such is yet to fully benefit from improved social amenities and infrastructure. This development indeed has a direct link with the overall low patronage of the facility in spite of its potential.

Tourists visiting the site mostly engage in a number of social activities in the communities, especially when they are in groups, which affect the lives of the indigenes. These activities include organizing football matches, cultural dance displays, and small durbars where they mostly interact with the elders and opinion leaders to gather information regarding the historical development of the communities. During such durbars and gatherings, tourists make donations, both in the form of cash and in kind to the people. There were, however, disagreements among the host respondents on the effects of these activities on them, with 15.4% saying they get entertained whereas 10.8% were concerned about the lifestyle of tourists, especially the females, complaining about the mini-skirts and shorts that female tourists wear (Table 3).

**Table 3. Social Activities Tourists Engage in**

Social Activities/ lifestyle	Frequency	Percentage
Football match	34	22.7
Durbars and donations	80	53.3
Culturaldance display	21	14.0
Indecent dressing/smoking	15	10.0
Total	150	100.0

To that extent, 63% of the residents maintained that the social activities and practices of tourists have had positive effects on them, whereas 11% were of the view that the effects have been negative. To the remaining 26%, the social activities of the tourists over the years have had no effect on them as hosts. One positive impact identified was the promotion of peace and unity among the indigenes and between tourists and hosts (see Table 4) emanating from the improved socialization between the indigenes, especially the youth, and the tourists. This unity could go a long way to contribute immensely to the growth and development of the communities. Other positive effects are the transmission of culture among tourists and hosts, and learning new ways of life including dressing and eating local foods. The negative impacts mainly concerned the dressing and smoking habits of tourists, especially the females. Some respondents claimed their youths were copying the way some of the tourists dress with one of them saying:

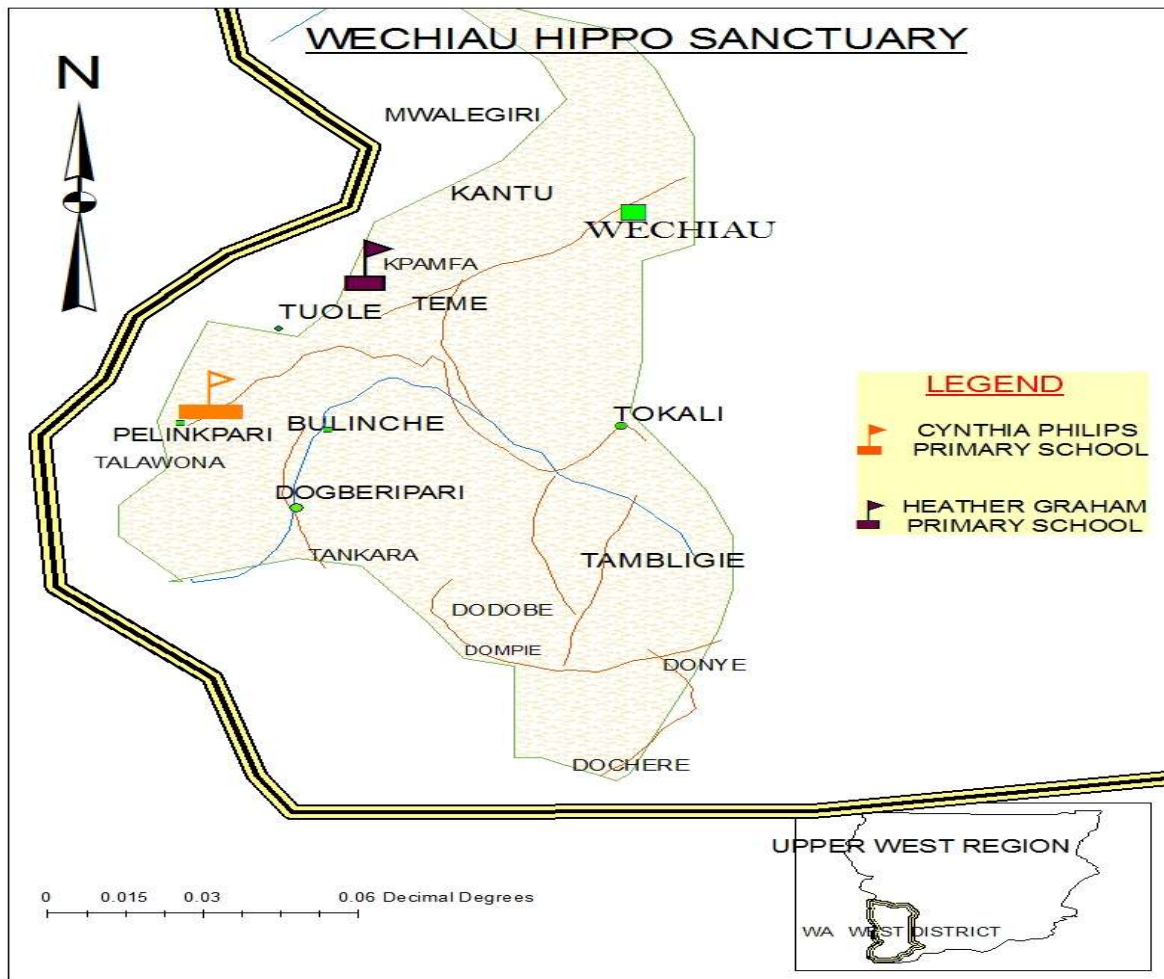
*.... it is against the tradition as women are not allowed to dress half naked in a Muslim dominated community.*

The findings on the negative social effects of tourists on the people living within the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary area lends credence to the views of Sharley (1994) that the behavior of some tourists can have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of the people in the host communities such as drugs and alcohol problems. This finding was, however, contrasted by 26% of the respondents who indicated that these tourists and their way of life have no effect on the lives of hosts. To them the communities have their own rich and unique culture that has withstood the test of time and hence cannot be adulterated by anyone in way.

**Table 4. Effects of the Activities of Tourists on the Communities**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
promotes unity/ promotes socialization	47	49.5
Improvement in the quality of education and health	23	35.8
leads to cultural transmission	14	14.7
Total	95	100.0

Some tourists have contributed immensely to the educational development of the communities due to the huge and significant donations they have made to the communities they visit. These donations include teaching and learning materials for the schools. Also, some pupils, especially females who stay at far distances from their schools, have been provided with bicycles to enable them commute easily between their residences and their schools.



**Figure 5. Schools built by tourists in the communities**



Evidently, the Cynthia Philip Primary and Heather Graham schools (shown in Figure 4) in Kpanda and Pelinkpari respectively were constructed solely by tourists for the communities. Similarly, as many as 15 brilliant but needy students each from Talawona, Teme and Wechiau had been given scholarship packages by a group of tourists as at June, 2014. In the area of health, a lot of assistance has come from the tourists through the provision of first aid equipment for the Wechiau hospital. The first aid provided to the hospital has helped to reduce maternal and child mortality in the community and its surrounding villages. A total of 14 boreholes have also been drilled for the communities by tourists to improve access to potable drinking water in the sanctuary's catchment area (see Figure 6). This has greatly helped to reduce incidences of water borne diseases in the area.

activities in the area, by opening up the small-scale service sector of Wechiau and the adjoining communities. Particularly mentioned were increases in trading activities, especially selling of food and general groceries. For example, it was observed that six food vending and 12 grocery shops have been opened in Wechiau alone since the inception of the Hippo Sanctuary. The presence of these shops was attributed to tourists coming to the community because they as natives do not generally patronize the goods and services provided by these businesses, though, in recent times, some residents have found the items handy. Moreover, the businesses of craft men and artisans have gone up and indeed are flourishing because most of their wares are bought by the tourists. Along with the increase in trading activities is increase in employment. The respondents maintained that lots of jobs have been created in the communities as a result of the presence of the tourists.

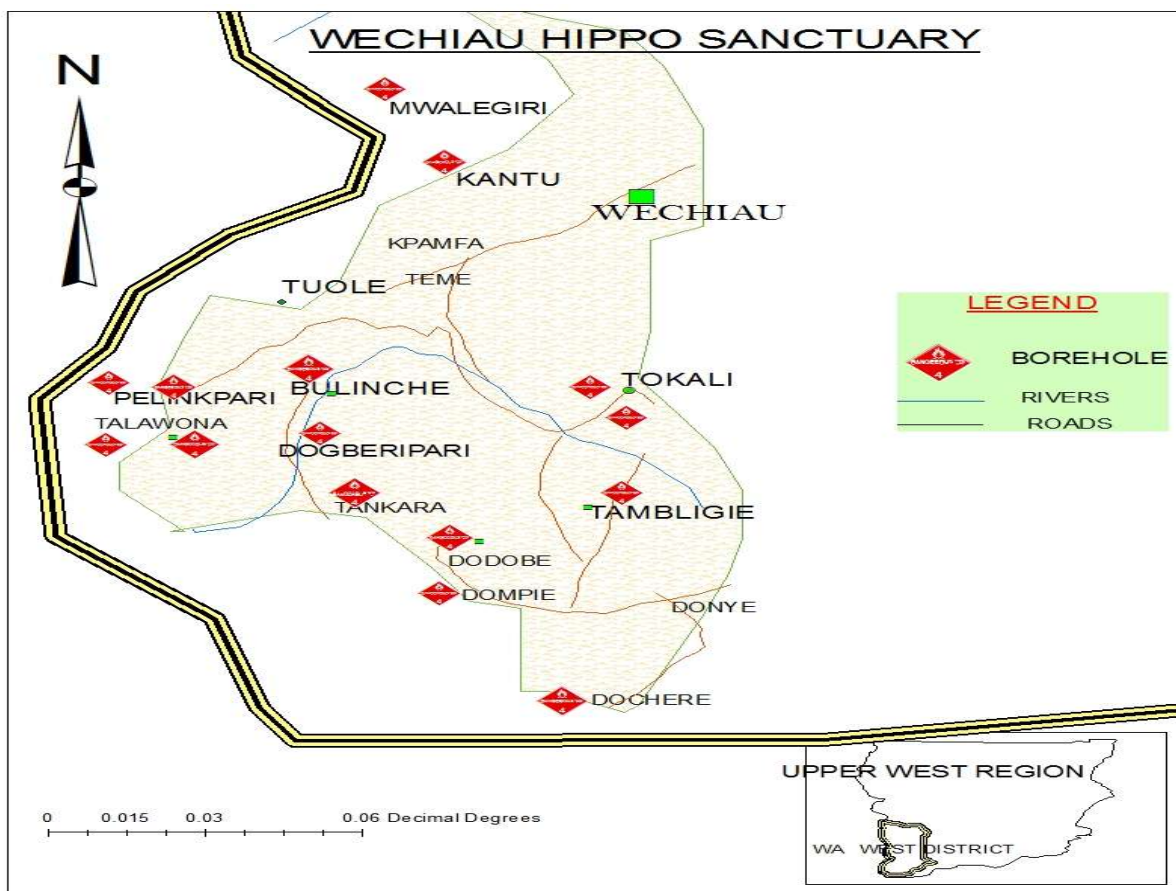


Figure 6. Boreholes built by tourists in the communities

On a wider scale, the indicators of economic benefit of tourism to a nation or region's economy would be measured by a few methods that include income generated and contribution to Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), foreign exchange, local employment generated, the multiplier effect (i.e., the effect of initial tourist spending in generating other economic activities in the economy), and contribution to government revenues through various taxes and duties (Yacob et al., 2007). However, as for the impact of ecotourism development on the local economy, it is usually measured in terms of income or profit received by local tourism operators, local enterprises and local employment generated. In this study, 95.3% of the respondents alluded to the fact that there have been great changes in economic

Many of the youth, after completing junior high or senior high school, are engaged as tour guides and security men after training. Others are employed as cooks, rangers, caretakers and boatmen. Also, motorbike and motor tricycle riders, who transport tourists commuting between the communities and tourist sites, are visibly present in Wechiau. Although the road from Wa to Wechiau is not in the best of conditions, many transport operators now ply the route because of the influx of tourists, especially during the dry season, thus leading to an increase in transport services and mobility of goods and services between Wa and Wechiau. Apart from the employment opportunities created, there has been the upgrading of the skills of some community members. For example, the project's development partners (NCRC and the

Calgary Zoo of Canada) have provided 200 solar electrification units to some fisher folks and craftsmen to boost their activities. The solar enables the fisher folks to smoke their fish even at night while their children use the solar lights to read their books at night. Craftsmen, such as carpenters and weavers, are able to engage in their activities at night while they undertake farming in the day. These economic activities that have evolved as a result of the influx of tourists in the communities, according to the respondents, have greatly enhanced the economic wellbeing of most youths in the host communities, thereby reducing youth delinquencies and social disorder. The findings from the study communities within the hippo sanctuary catchment area agree with the conclusion of Sharpley (1994) that there are employment opportunities in the host communities of tourist sites and the presence of tourists lure younger people to areas of tourism development.

## Conclusion

Community-based approaches to tourism development have, for over four decades, been promoted as a means of poverty reduction whereby the social, environmental and economic needs of local communities are met through the offering of tourism products and services. There is also enough evidence to suggest that development of commercial ecotourism can increase public support and the total amount of investment available for nature conservation, which can equally be a positive contributor to the conservation of nature. This study of the Wechiau Community-based Hippo Sanctuary demonstrates a wide range of social and economic dimensions of community-approach to eco-tourism development. The study concludes that the major benefit of the sanctuary is the ever increasing tourist arrival with its attendant revenue. Apart from revenues, which accrued to the sanctuary in the form of fees and licenses, many other economic benefits included the expansion of small-scale business activities, creation of more employment opportunities and the upgrading of the skills of some community members. Meanwhile, when the economic dimension is over-emphasized the holistic picture of socio-economic value is lost. Although, locals gain the funds and the ability to pursue more education of their own, giving them a better understanding of world issues like environmentalism, through cultural exchange, both parties stand to benefit socially.

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