STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCES IN TOURISM COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders in collaborative governance initiatives in Ghana. Through a qualitative approach in research, descriptive research design and purposively selected 14 participants from public and private sector tourism organizations and local communities, using interviews, where data was analyzed inductively, the benefits, challenges and factors influencing effective collaboration among stakeholders were investigated. Findings reveal that while stakeholders' value collaborative governance for its potential to address complex challenges, they face significant barriers, including trust deficits, power imbalances and inadequate representation etc. Key factors that influence effective collaboration, including leadership, communication, and capacity building etc. were identified. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of stakeholder experiences in collaborative governance in Ghana and provides practical recommendations for improving stakeholder engagement and outcomes. The study findings have implications for policy practice, highlighting the need for inclusive and sustainable collaborative governance approaches that prioritize equity, transparency and accountability.

Keywords: Stakeholder, Stakeholder experiences, Collaboration, Collaborative governance

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative governance has become a widely accepted approach to addressing complex social and environmental challenges in Ghana (Nalumu, 2021). This approach brings together diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector organizations, civil society groups, and local communities, to share knowledge, resources and decision-making responsibilities (Lovan, 2017; Waddell, 2017). While collaborative governance has shown promise in addressing complex challenges, its effectiveness depends on the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved (Gash, 2022).

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Despite the growing adoption of collaborative governance initiatives in Ghana, the is a significant gap in understanding the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in these initiatives (Nalumu, 2021). While collaborative governance has the potential to address complex challenges, its effectiveness is hindered by: lack of trust and poor relationships among stakeholders; inadequate representation and participation of marginalized groups; insufficient communication and information sharing; power imbalances and conflicting interests and limited capacity and resources for effective collaboration. These challenges lead to: inequitable distribution of benefits and resources; ineffective decision-making and implementation and limited scalability and sustainability of collaborative governance initiatives.

Ghana, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse stakeholder landscape, provides an ideal context to explore stakeholder experiences in collaborative governance (Atsakpo, 2024). This study aims to investigate the experiences of stakeholders in collaborative governance initiatives in Ghana, with a focus on their perceptions of the benefits, challenges and factors that influence effective collaboration.

By exploring stakeholder experiences, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of collaborative governance in Ghana and provide insights for improving the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in addressing complex challenges in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholder Experiences in Collaborative Governance

Stakeholder experiences are emotional, internal conditions shaped by personal feelings, memorability, and behavior. They can be positive or negative, and can be influenced by various factors.

Positive Experiences in Stakeholder Collaboration

D'Angella, (2007) emphasizes the benefits of collaboration identified by Bramwell and Sharman (1999), including avoiding conflicts, legitimizing collective actions, enhancing policy coordination, and acquiring knowledge. This argument is based on stakeholder theory, which defines stakeholders as groups or individuals affected by an organization's objectives.

Negative Experiences in Stakeholder Collaboration

Inadequate collaboration in tourism management often results from negative experiences such as unclear goals, lack of commitment, neglect of partners, and lack of trust (Rybnicek, 2020). These barriers can hinder collaboration and hinder the management of tourism destinations. Conflict between stakeholders often arises from differing values and perceptions, and the power balance within the public, private, and community triad is challenging to achieve. Other inhibitors include lack of funding, interest, commitment, and competition for resources. These experiences can make decision-making more complex and time-consuming, and stakeholders should

generate mutual trust and respect (Ali & Haapasalo, 2023). Power dynamics among stakeholders can also hinder participation, and unequal voices can lead to unequal relations, especially when power distribution is disproportionately favored by authority rather than residents.

Relational Factors Facilitating Stakeholder Collaboration

Collaboration in tourism planning is a complex process involving relational factors such as relationship orientation, trust, communication, learning, leadership, power, reciprocity, and commitment (Ghanem, 2022). Effective communication facilitates idea flow, while leadership guides stakeholders through rough patches (Koiwanit & Filimonau, 2023). Learning and reciprocity involve acquiring new knowledge. Transparency is crucial for open conversations and preventing sub optimization. Recognizing interdependence among stakeholders and trust is essential for successful collaboration. A strategy of 'social inclusion' allows for joint activities, stable relations, and lasting collaboration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Factors Impacting Stakeholder Engagement -Lally et al. 2013

Stakeholder engagement in tourism governance is crucial for creative debate, diverse perspectives, and innovation (Lalicic & Weber-Sabil, 2022). The structure of interactions and governance of relationships affect engagement effectiveness. Leadership is essential for effective engagement, requiring vision, courage, and persistence (Murphy, 2022). Identity is crucial for successful collaboration, and membership, decision-making, power relations, and norms of behavior are important (Charness, & Chen, 2020). Relational factors, alignment, cohesion, and diversity among stakeholders are also important. Power differentials significantly impact collaborative activity. Stakeholder engagement is influenced by the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Authority's activities, policies, and practices. Effective communication is essential, and collaboration practices should support mutual learning and adaptation. Public sector and municipal authorities should adopt a collaborative approach to tourism governance **(Figure 1)**.
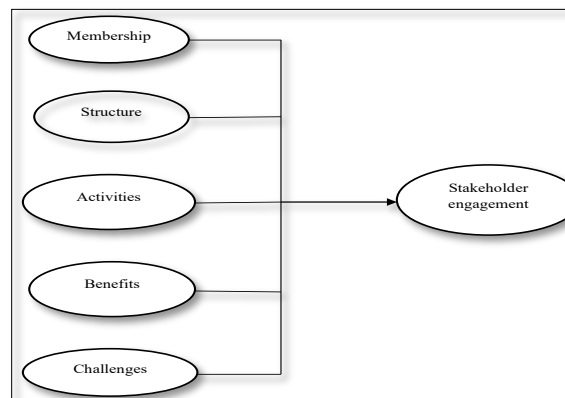

Figure 1. **Factors impacting stakeholder Engagement (Collaboration).**
Source: Adapted from Lally et al. (2013).

METHODOLOGY

Study Context

Ghana's tourist industry was chosen for this study, in part because to its dispersed and fragmented structure, which includes various regulating bodies and is a significant cause of cooperation

Research Perspective

The interpretivist paradigm, the foundation of qualitative research in social science, was employed by the study. According to Saratakos, (2005) this serves as the foundation for qualitative research in social science. This paradigm aims to comprehend occurrences based on the interpretations that individuals give them (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In order to see the world from the viewpoint of the stakeholders in this study, the researcher must put himself in their shoes (Jennings, 2010). Accordingly, the goal of studying lived human experience is to describe the meaning of a concept from the perspectives of multiple people who have experienced it, as well as from the social situations in which the experience occurred (Titchen & McCormack, 2008).

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design to investigate the problems of cooperation in tourism governance. According to Patton, (2002) descriptive research is predicated on the idea that when asked to explain their actions and decisions in detail, people (in this case, stakeholders) are better able to do so. The only way to accomplish this is to let people share their stories without being constrained by what the researcher has read in the literature. Consequently, a descriptive research methodology would offer the required framework for a more thorough investigation of the phenomenon that is, stakeholders' cooperation in the regulation of the tourism industry.

Target Population

Eleven (11) significant stakeholders from the public, business, and local communities involved in the tourist sector were chosen through the use of the stakeholder concept and the purposive sample technique. The Ghana Tourism Authority, the Ghana Tourism Development Company, the Ghana Tourism Training Institute, the Ghana Tourism Federation, the Ghana Heritage Trust Conservation, the Wildlife Society of Ghana, the Hotel Association of Ghana, the Travel and Tour Association of Ghana, the Tour Guides Association of Ghana, the Traditional Authority of Ghana, and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture were among the stakeholders interviewed **(Table 1).**

Table 1. Target Population for the study.

Categories	Actual Stakeholders	Management Positions
Public	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture	Director for PPME
		Director for Protocol
	Ghana Tourism Authority	Deputy Executive
		Director (Operations)
	Ghana Tourism Development Company Limited	Chief Executive Director
	Hotel and Catering Training Institute	Administrator (Representative of the Executive Director)
Private	Ghana Tourism Federation (GHATOF)	President (GHATOF)
		President Elect (Ghana Hoteliers Association)
		President (Tour Guides Association of Ghana)
		Secretary (Travel and Tour Operators of Ghana)
	Ghana Wildlife Society	President
	Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust	Programs Director (Representative of the Executive Director)
Local Community	House of Chiefs	Secretary (to the President of House of Chiefs)
		Development Chief 1
		Development Chief 2

Sample Technique and Size

Purposive sampling was used in the study. This is due to the fact that it facilitates the identification and selection of pertinent stakeholders who possess expertise and knowledge regarding a phenomenon of interest (Etikan, 2016). Along with expertise and experience, it's important to emphasize the value of being accessible and eager to participate, as well as having the capacity to share ideas and experiences in a clear, thoughtful, and expressive way. The heads of these organizations and, if feasible, their deputies up to the third level of management made comprised the interview sample. A total of fourteen (14) people were chosen to make up the sample size **(Table 2).**

Table 2. Sample Size.

Category	Actual Stakeholders	Number
Public	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts (2 Respondents)	5
	Ghana Tourism Authority	
	Ghana Tourism Development Company Limited	
	Hotel and Catering Tourism Training Institute	
Private	Ghana Tourism Federation (GHATOF)-(4 Respondents)	6
	Ghana Wildlife Society	
	Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust	
Local Community	Traditional Rulers	3
Total		14

Research Instrument

Stakeholder cooperation activities and procedures were taken into consideration while using an in-depth interview guide to extract the necessary information from respondents about the nature of stakeholder collaboration. A preference for an in-depth interview (IDI) guide stemmed from the fact that IDI provides rich data while granting the interviewee some latitude to respond to questions in their own way (Bryman, 2015). The English language interview questions were written with the presumption that heads of different institutions are literate.

Data and Sources

The primary data was mainly sourced from in-depth interviews conducted with the stakeholders of the tourism sector.

Data Collection Procedure

Interview guides, informed consent forms, and letters of intent outlining the study's purpose and target respondents were distributed. Following a phone call to confirm the meeting's day and time, the stakeholders were met at their workplaces. The English language was used for the interview. Due to respondents' hectic schedules, the interviews were done whenever stakeholders had free time. With the exception of one interview where a responder objected to being taped, all interviews were recorded, and notes were collected. In each instance, the average interview lasted roughly fifty (50) minutes.

Data Processing and Analysis

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not easily produce quantifiable results. To ensure rigor, methods for gathering and analyzing the data had to be developed. A digital voice recorder was used to electronically capture the data, which was then manually transcribed. The method of inductive content analysis was applied. To identify the themes that emerged from the interview data, a three-tier coding scheme was created based on the recommendations made by Groenewald, (2004), Patton, (2002); Attride-Stirling, (2001).

Extracting the text's lowest-order premises or otherwise defining its meaning units (basic themes) was the first step in the process. Grouping the fundamental themes or clustering the units into abstract themes (organizing themes) was the second step. The last level, which connected the text's major and distinctive ideas overall (global themes), included excerpts from this level.

Inductive analysis was used to examine the global themes that emerged from the interview data (Patton, 2002). The focus of the analysis was the study's research questions. Issues were the focus of the analysis; some were specific to each case, while others applied to all organizations.

Pre-testing of Research Instrument

To verify the applicability of the research instrument and to elucidate areas of ambiguity, complex questions, and potential practical challenges, a pre-test of the instrument was carried out at the regional level (Cape Coast) in Ghana's Central Region. Interviews were conducted with the Ghana Tourism Authority and the Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust. Because the regional level is similarly run on a public-private partnership framework, it was chosen for the pre-test. Before the real field work started, the required adjustments were made following the pretesting. Both inserted and subtracted content analysis were used to manually analyze the collected data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Stakeholder Experiences in Collaboration in Tourism Governance

The research was to examine stakeholder experiences in collaboration in tourism governance. This aspect took into consideration relational factors that facilitate stakeholder collaboration, the negative and positive experiences of various stakeholders in collaborative governance.

Relational Factors in Collaborative Tourism Governance

The study explores relational factors in collaboration in the tourism sector governance, focusing on trust, communication, commitment, learning, transparency, support, relationship orientation, power, adaptation, and good leadership, which are identified as facilitators in the Ghanaian context.

The study highlights the importance of communication in collaboration processes, as it facilitates the dissemination of ideas, roles, and responsibilities among stakeholders. Communication is seen as the transfer of information and is a critical element of engagement and pre-requisite for collaboration (Scoular & Otieno, 2024). It also helps build a cohesive team, enabling partners to work together effectively for the tourism sector and its stakeholders.

Again, Trust is a crucial core factor for collaboration, ensuring reliability and reassurance. It is evident in relationships, work processes, communication, and results, and without it, collaboration can quickly and irreparably fail, opined by one stakeholder.

Also, the study highlights the importance of commitment in facilitating collaboration. It emphasizes that commitment is crucial for success and can lead to the realization of goals. The success of a collaborative venture depends on the level of commitment among stakeholders and the new forms of commitment the venture generates (Van Mumford & Zettinig, 2022).

More so, Stakeholders believe learning and reciprocity are crucial for collaboration, leading to cross-fertilization of ideas. Learning involves acquiring new knowledge or modifying existing ones, while reciprocity involves exchanging things for mutual benefit, especially privileges. This aligns with Bingham, (2014) findings in Frameshifting: Lateral thinking for collaborative public management.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of support in collaboration, where each entity takes on responsibilities and roles to achieve the objectives. This support, as per Ginn, (2013) reduces work load by allowing each stakeholder to perform part of the tasks, ultimately leading to successful collaboration.

Transparency is crucial for collaboration, honesty, and openness in the tourism sector. It allows for open conversations, mutual understanding, and removing barriers to access information. Lack of transparency can lead to sub-optimization, duplicate work, poor decision-making, and inability to innovate, negatively impacting the bottom line and an organization's ability to compete and survive (Hossain, 2022). Transparency in collaboration promotes honesty and openness in governance.

Finally, effective collaboration in tourism governance relies heavily on strong leadership. A good leader should be well-informed, focused, and possess the necessary skills and expertise. They must also have high levels of vision, courage, and persistence. Leadership is crucial for bringing parties to the table, setting ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue, and exploring mutual gains (Kosonen & Ikonen, 2022). It is also essential for embracing, empowering, and involving stakeholders, mobilizing them to move collaboration forward, and promoting broad participation, influence, group dynamics, and process scope.

Negative Experience of Stakeholders in Collaborative Governance

The study analyzed the negative experiences of stakeholders in collaboration, identifying factors such as financial constraints, lack of motivation, non-engagement, lack of trust, ineffective communication, inadequate labor force, cost, and no one-stop shop.

Stakeholders argued that financial constraints hinder collaborations, as the government's inability to fund projects is a significant issue. The decline in the Tourism Development Fund and the generation of Government Consolidation Fund has further strained the ability to finance tourism activities.

Again, Lack of Incentives and Motivation, Stakeholders in developing countries like Ghana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia lack motivation and incentives to participate in collaborative governing. Past promises and corruption hinder stakeholder interest. Motivations can be tangible or intangible, and the tourism sector's lack of incentives hinders collaboration. Incentives and vested interests are crucial for successful partnerships, and lack of these can hinder participation.

Non-Engagement of Stakeholders, the study reveals that local communities are often neglected in the tourism industry, with no input from major stakeholders one stakeholder said. This contradicts Hall's, (2011) opinion on community involvement, Tosun, (2000's recommendation for local community involvement in tourism planning, and Trembly, (2000)'s emphasis on preserving natural, social, and cultural resources.

Ineffective communication systems in the tourism sector hinder collaborations and contribute to complexity in problem-solving. Stakeholders highlight the need for clear, pertinent information to be effective. Effective communication is crucial for organizations to secure open interaction, manage communication processes, and create an adaptive system. This can lead to large-scale organizational benefits, such as delayed feedback and program cancellations.

The study highlights the negative impact of lack of trust on collaboration, as it disrupts the process. Trust is a crucial aspect of collaboration, as it develops over time through cooperation and mutual understanding. Building and retaining trust among stakeholders is essential for long-term success in collaboration.

The study found that lukewarm attitudes of partners in collaboration negatively impact an entity's progress. Attitudes are predispositions that influence an individual's response to stimuli and can hinder collaboration (Yanti,2020). These attitudes distort the progress of development in a sector, aligning with Ajzen's definition of attitude as an individual's disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to certain aspects.

The study reveals that the tourism sector's collaborative ventures are ineffective due to a lack of logistics, hindering effective monitoring and

evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for identifying success and continuously improving the process. The absence of appropriate logistics can deter collaborative ventures, as van Wilgen & Wannenburgh, (2016) argue.

Stakeholder collaboration in the sector is hindered by the multiplicity of taxes on services, particularly in the hospitality sector. High prices lead to low patronage and disrupt collaboration, as noted by Stokes, (2014) making it difficult for individual entities to provide services.

Stakeholders argue that time and money are being wasted in collaboration due to delays and difficulties in obtaining results. These resources are valuable in any active venture, and their loss can hinder the success of the collaboration, as highlighted by Huxham & Vangen, (2013).

Stakeholders' express concerns about an inadequate labor force in agencies, affecting effective stakeholder collaboration and governance processes. Hislop, (2018) argue that a competent workforce is crucial for organizational operations, ensuring services align with operational requirements.

The study reveals that there is no one-stop shop in the tourism sector, offering all services at one location, making it difficult for customers to access all their needs at one location, instead of having to drive to different stores.

Positive Stakeholder Experience in Collaborative Governance

This section also sought to examine the positive stakeholder experiences in collaboration. The study found one positive experience in collaboration between stakeholders. That is, acquisition of knowledge. The study highlights the importance of cross-fertilization of ideas in the tourism sector, where stakeholders learn from each other and collaborate with private and public entities. This process leads to innovation and enhances the value of tourism governance, enhancing its adaptability and innovation in a dynamic competitive industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective collaborative governance, there should be:

Established Clear Roles and Responsibilities by defining each stakeholder's role to minimize conflicts and enhance accountability. A well-structured framework with set responsibilities helps reduce confusion and prevent power imbalances.

Enhance Communication and Feedback Mechanism by creating multiple channels for regular feedback and open communication among stakeholders. Periodic check-ins and facilitated discussions can help keep all parties aligned and mitigate misunderstandings.

Promote Transparent Decision-Making Processes: Transparency should be a fundamental aspect of collaborative governance. Ensure that all

stakeholders have access to information on decision-making processes, allowing them to feel informed and included.

Build Capacity for Conflict Resolution by investing in training for conflict resolution skills among stakeholders can improve the group's ability to manage disagreements. External facilitators may also be beneficial for ensuring that discussions remain balanced.

Foster Trust through Incremental Achievements: Initial small-scale goals or pilot projects can help build trust among stakeholders by demonstrating the benefits of collaboration. Successful early wins can encourage long-term commitment and deeper cooperation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder experiences in collaborative governance in Ghana. The findings highlight the importance of trust, effective communication, and inclusive decision-making in fostering successful collaboration. While challenges persist, stakeholders remain committed to collaborative governance acknowledging its potential to address complex challenges.

The study's recommendations, tailored to specific stakeholders, aim to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative governance in Ghana. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can foster a more inclusive, transparent and accountable collaborative governance framework.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the global discourse on collaborative governance, emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches that prioritize stakeholder experiences and perspectives. As Ghana continues to navigate complex development challenges, the insights from the study can inform policy and practice, ensuring that collaborative governance becomes a cornerstone of sustainable development in the country.

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