



Power, Participation, and Decision-Making in Community-Based Ecotourism Projects in Ghana

Peterkin Senanu Kofi Danyo 

Department of International Management, Graduate School of Economics and Management, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Email: dsenanu57@gmail.com

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Abstract

Community-based ecotourism is widely promoted as a strategy for combining biodiversity conservation with rural development, yet its transformative potential depends on how authority, information, resources, and benefits are distributed among stakeholders. This paper compares governance, participation, and benefit-sharing across Kakum National Park, the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary, and Mole National Park. It uses a structured evidence synthesis of the reported 327 peer-reviewed publications on Ghanaian ecotourism from 2000 to 2025, supplemented by policy and management documents and site-specific empirical studies. Lukes' three-dimensional conception of power and Arnstein's participation ladder provide the principal theoretical lenses. Six analytical lenses—decision-making, agenda setting, resource control, discourse, networks, and outcomes—were applied to site evidence, while seven observable forms of power were coded as coercive, economic, expert, legitimate, informational, network, and discursive power. The revised analysis finds that formal participation frequently coexists with concentrated substantive authority. It also shows why headline revenue-sharing percentages should not be interpreted as direct measures of equity without examining control over collection, allocation, disclosure, timing, and accountability. Importantly, Boabeng-Fiema is no longer classified as community-wide delegated power or citizen control: its relatively strong local control is more accurately characterized as customary/traditional authority with substantial local autonomy but internal concentration of decision-making. The paper distinguishes binding legal provisions from reported practice and avoids treating unverified site-level numerical estimates as harmonized statistics.

Subject Areas

Environmental Sciences

Keywords

Community-Based Ecotourism, Power, Participation, Benefit Sharing, Governance, Ghana, Protected Areas, Political Ecology

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Problem

Community-based ecotourism is frequently presented as an alternative to state-centred conservation because it seeks to connect biodiversity protection with local livelihoods and participation. Yet participation is not equivalent to empowerment. A community may attend meetings, serve on committees, or receive a share of tourism revenue while remaining unable to influence the decisions that determine land access, tourism development, revenue allocation, or conservation rules [1]-[4].

Ghana provides a useful comparative setting because ecotourism and community-based conservation operate through different institutional configurations. Kakum is predominantly state-managed; Boabeng-Fiema relies heavily on customary institutions; Wechiau developed through an NGO-facilitated community trust; and Mole remains strongly state-dominated. The cases, therefore, provide variation in governance arrangements within a common national legal and policy environment [5]-[8].

The paper asks how different forms of power shape participation across the four sites, how governance arrangements affect the distribution and accountability of tourism benefits, and what institutional conditions are associated with stronger community influence.

1.2. Contribution

The paper makes three contributions. First, it provides a reproducible account of how the reviewed literature was assembled and coded at the site level. Second, it separates evidence about governance practice from claims about formal legal rights and policy. Third, it refines the comparison of the four sites by treating traditional authority as a form of institutional power rather than automatically equating it with community-wide empowerment.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Power and Participation

Luke's three-dimensional framework distinguishes visible decision-making power, agenda-setting power, and ideological power [2]. Arnstein's ladder treats partici-

pation as a continuum ranging from manipulation and tokenism to partnership, delegated power, and citizen control [1]. These frameworks are used as interpretive devices rather than as claims that every empirical case can be assigned to one uncontested category. **Table 1** maps the rungs of Arnstein's ladder onto the forms of participation observed across the Ghanaian sites.

Table 1. Participation ladder applied to Ghanaian ecotourism governance.

Rung (Arnstein, 1969)	Observed Form in Ghanaian Ecotourism	Illustrative Site(s)
Manipulation/Tokenism	Community representatives appointed to committees without real authority	Kakum; Mole
Consultation	Focus groups and surveys that extract views but do not guarantee influence	Kakum; Mole
Placation	Advisory roles allow communities to be heard but not to decide	Kakum; Wechiau
Partnership	Joint management with genuinely shared decision-making; rare/emerging	Wechiau
Delegated Power/ Citizen Control	Traditional management systems retain substantial community autonomy —revised interpretation: customary autonomy, not automatically inclusive citizen control	Boabeng-Fiema

Note: Adapted from Arnstein [1].

2.2. Institutional Governance and Benefit Sharing

Governance arrangements distribute authority among state agencies, traditional authorities, community organizations, NGOs, private operators, and other actors. Benefit sharing is therefore treated as both an economic and an institutional process. The relevant question is not only how much revenue is nominally allocated to local actors, but who controls collection, allocation, disclosure, timing, and accountability.

The Wildlife Resources Management Act, 2023 (Act 1115), establishes the Forestry Commission as the implementing agency and provides for Protected Area Management Advisory Committees with community, traditional-authority, district, private-sector, and women's representation. It also requires consultation with local authorities and landowners before the establishment of a protected area. These provisions establish participation and consultation requirements but do not amount to a general statutory right of community control [9]. **Table 2** summarises the principal stakeholder categories and the resource or power base each brings to site governance.

2.3. Analytical Proposition

The paper proposes that governance outcomes are better explained by the interaction of decision rights, resource control, information, accountability, and internal social differentiation than by participation labels alone. Ecotourism itself is understood here, consistent with standard usage in the field, as tourism to natural areas that aims to conserve the environment and sustain the well-being of local people [10]. This framing also draws on institutional bricolage perspectives, which

Table 2. Principal stakeholders in Ghanaian ecotourism governance.

Stakeholder Category	Representative Actors	Primary Resource/Power Base
State Agencies	Ghana Tourism Authority; Forestry Commission/Wildlife Division; District Assemblies; Environmental Protection Agency	Statutory Authority; Regulation; Enforcement
Traditional Authorities	Chiefs, Queen Mothers, Traditional Councils, Earth Priests	Customary Legitimacy; Land Stewardship; Historical Continuity
Local Communities	Fringe-Community Residents; Farmers, Fishers, Hunters; Women'S and Youth Groups; Migrant Populations	Local and Ecological Knowledge; Labour; Residency; Cultural Authenticity
Private Sector	Domestic and International Tour Operators; Lodge/Hotel Owners; Transport Providers; Craft Vendors	Capital; Market Access; Service Delivery
Civil Society/NGOs	International Conservation Organisations such as NCRC and Conservation International; Local Development NGOs; Universities	Technical Expertise; Advocacy; Research Capacity
Development Partners	USAID; GIZ; UNDP; World Bank; International Foundations	Funding; International Networks; Agenda-Setting Influence
Tourists	International Visitors; Regional West African Tourists; Domestic Tourists	Market Demand; Revenue Generation

Note: The table directly supports the reviewer-requested power analysis.

emphasise that natural-resource governance arrangements are assembled from overlapping formal and customary institutions rather than designed from a single coherent blueprint, so authority in practice can diverge substantially from authority on paper [11].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Case Selection

The study uses a comparative secondary-data case-study design covering Kakum National Park, Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary, and Mole National Park. The sites were purposively selected because they represent contrasting governance arrangements: state management with formal benefit-sharing at Kakum; customary/traditional management at Boabeng-Fiema; NGO-facilitated community governance at Wechiau; and highly state-dominated management at Mole. **Table 3** summarises the key characteristics of the four sites.

3.2. Evidence-Synthesis Protocol

The review covers 2000-2025 and uses the reported corpus of 327 peer-reviewed publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. The available research record does not preserve the original database export or complete database-specific search histories; consequently, this revision does not invent a retrospectively exact Boolean query. The reproducible conceptual search strategy combines ecotourism/community-based tourism/nature-based tourism with community participa-

tion/community engagement/governance/power/benefit sharing/empowerment/sustainability and Ghana, supplemented by searches for Kakum, Boabeng-Fiema, Wechiau, and Mole.

Table 3. Site characteristics.

Characteristic	Kakum	Boabeng-Fiema	Wechiau	Mole
Region	Central	Bono East	Upper West	Northern
Established	1992	1975 (traditional); 1995 (formal)	1999	1958
Size	360 km ²	4.77 km ²	40 km river stretch	4577 km ²
Main attraction	Canopy walkway; rainforest	Sacred monkeys	Hippopotamus	Savanna wildlife
Governance model	State-managed; revenue-sharing	Community-managed; traditional	NGO-facilitated community trust	State-managed; limited involvement
Annual visitors (approx.)	150,000	25,000	15,000	30,000
Annual revenue (approx.)	US\$1.2 M	US\$150,000	US\$90,000	US\$600,000
Formal revenue share to communities	40% (frequently delayed)	~100% direct retention	Shared via trust fund	~20%

Note: Visitor, revenue, and revenue-share figures are author-reported estimates from the underlying literature and must be paired with the original source/year in the final submission. They are not harmonized cross-site survey statistics.

Eligibility required English-language scholarly publications within 2000-2025 that addressed Ghanaian ecotourism or closely related community-based natural-resource/tourism governance and contained evidence relevant to participation, governance, power, benefit sharing, livelihoods, or sustainability. The screening sequence consisted of identification, duplicate removal, title/abstract relevance screening, substantive assessment, and thematic synthesis. Because the original screening log is not preserved, exact stage-by-stage counts are not reported as independently verified.

Site-level coding extracted governance structure, decision authority, participation mechanisms, benefit mechanisms, accountability, employment, inclusion/exclusion, conflict, and documented outcomes. Numerical claims were retained only when an identifiable source was available; otherwise, they were converted to qualitative findings or explicitly labelled as unverified estimates.

3.3. Relationship to the Companion Bibliometric Study

An earlier draft of this paper listed bibliometric analysis as a fourth data source alongside the literature synthesis, policy documents, and site-level case evidence, but reported no bibliometric findings anywhere in the text. That inconsistency is corrected here. A separate bibliometric mapping exercise was conducted on a larger,

independently assembled corpus of 498 Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed records (2000-2025) on community engagement, power dynamics, and benefit sharing in Ghanaian ecotourism, using Bibliometrix/R for performance analysis, VOSviewer for co-occurrence and collaboration mapping, and CitNetExplorer for citation-network analysis [12] [13]. Because that corpus (498 records) is distinct from the 327-publication set synthesised qualitatively for the present site-level comparison, the two should not be conflated or treated as a single harmonised dataset.

Bibliometric analysis is therefore not listed as a data source for the site-level findings and comparative analysis reported in Sections 4 and 5 of this paper, since no bibliometric performance indicators, cluster maps, or network statistics are presented as evidence here. Readers seeking the quantitative mapping of the wider research field—publication trends, thematic clusters, leading institutions, and collaboration networks—should consult the companion bibliometric study, which reports those results in full. This paper instead relies on the qualitative, source-verified synthesis and site-level power coding described in Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4.

3.4. Site-Level Power Coding

Six analytical lenses were applied to the site evidence. Decision-making examined who participates in formal decisions, who holds binding authority, and whose preferences prevail. Agenda setting examined who defines priorities and which issues can be excluded. Resource control examined control over land, capital, revenue, information, and expertise. Discourse examined whose knowledge and framing of conservation and development are treated as authoritative. Network analysis examined access to donors, government, private operators, technical institutions, and markets. Outcome analysis examined who receives benefits and who bears conservation and tourism costs.

These lenses were translated into seven observable forms of power: coercive, economic, expert, legitimate, informational, network, and discursive power. Each form was coded qualitatively as low, medium, or high when evidence permitted. Low means limited documented control; medium means shared, conditional, or contested control; high means concentrated or decisive control. The coding is interpretive and evidence-based, not a statistically estimated scale. The full coding matrix, including the coding question and the low/medium/high criteria applied to each lens, is provided in **Appendix A**.

3.5. Methodological Limitations

The study relies on secondary evidence. Underlying studies differ in sampling, dates, measures, and definitions. Site-level percentages, therefore, cannot be treated as directly comparable statistics unless derived from harmonized instruments. The comparative design also cannot fully eliminate ecological, regional, historical, and market differences among sites.

4. Findings

4.1. Kakum National Park

Kakum is characterized by strong state authority and formal participatory structures. Existing research documents community expectations and participation constraints and indicates that formal consultation does not necessarily translate into substantive decision-making influence [5] [6].

The previous categorical statement that 40% of revenue is legally earmarked for communities is removed. Historical evidence shows that Kakum revenue-sharing formulas have changed. A 2009 parliamentary report described a then-applicable formula allocating 20% to traditional authorities and communities, 20% to district assemblies, 10% to the central government, and 50% to a maintenance fund, and also reported implementation difficulties [14]. The defensible conclusion is therefore that Kakum has operated with formal revenue-sharing arrangements whose effects depend on the applicable formula, implementation, timing, transparency, and community influence.

The former manuscript's exact claims concerning universal six-to-nine-month disbursement delays, 42% elite capture, and 34% satisfaction are not presented as harmonized facts unless the underlying original empirical sources are supplied (see **Appendix B** for the verification status of each claim).

4.2. Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary

Boabeng-Fiema differs because customary institutions play a central role in conservation and tourism governance. Historical research documents traditional conservation associated with the sanctuary [15]. However, strong customary authority should not be equated with community-wide citizen control.

The revised classification is 'customary/traditional authority with substantial local autonomy.' Key decisions are concentrated among chiefs, elders, spiritual authorities, and related customary institutions. This can produce strong local ownership while simultaneously excluding women, youth, migrants, or less influential lineages.

Empirical fieldwork at the sanctuary documents that tourism revenue is divided between customary beneficiaries (including chiefs, landowners, and fetish priests) and other institutional stakeholders (including the District Assembly, the Traditional Council, and the Wildlife Division), rather than being retained entirely by the community as a single, undifferentiated body [16]. The more defensible conclusion is that a substantial share of benefits has historically been retained or allocated locally through customary and sanctuary institutions, with the exact distribution depending on the arrangement and period (see **Appendix B**).

4.3. Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary

Wechiau represents a hybrid governance model involving community institutions and NGO facilitation. The NGO contributed financial, technical, organizational,

and external-network resources, while community structures were established to participate in management and benefit allocation.

The central issue is dependency. NGO support can strengthen local organizational capacity while also creating asymmetry because external actors may control funding, expertise, donor relationships, and agenda-setting. Wechiau is therefore coded as a medium community influence with shared or contested authority rather than fully delegated community power.

4.4. Mole National Park

Mole represents the most state-dominated of the four cases in the original comparison. The Wildlife Division retains primary management authority, while surrounding communities face restrictions on access to park resources. Existing literature identifies tensions associated with livelihoods, conservation restrictions, human-wildlife interactions, and limited local benefits [7] [8].

The previous exact claims of a 20% community revenue share, a 10% employment quota, and 18% benefit satisfaction are not retained as established facts unless their original empirical sources are verified. The robust finding is qualitative: Mole exhibits weak formal community influence and strong state control. A summary of the verification status of every site-level numerical claim discussed above is provided later in the paper (See **Appendix B**).

5. Comparative Analysis

5.1. Governance and Power across Sites

Building on the six analytical lenses introduced in Section 3.4, **Table 4** compares five core forms of power side by side across the four sites, applying the coding scheme set out in **Appendix A**. The complete seven-form comparison, including network and discursive power, is provided in **Appendix B (Table B1)**.

Table 4. Forms of power across sites.

Dimension	Kakum	Boabeng-Fiema	Wechiau	Mole
Primary authority	Wildlife division/state	Chiefs, elders/customary institutions	Community committee + NGO	Wildlife division/state
Community influence	Low-medium; advisory	Substantial local autonomy; Internally concentrated	Medium; shared/contested	Low
Revenue governance	Formal sharing; formula varies by period	Customary/local allocation	Trust/community fund	Predominantly state controlled
Coercive power	High	Low-medium	Medium/shared	High
Economic power	High state/institutional	High customary	Medium/shared	High state
Expert power	High park management	Low-medium	High NGO	High park management
Legitimate authority	Statutory	Customary/spiritual	Hybrid	Statutory
Information power	High	Medium	Medium-high	High

The comparison shows that no governance model automatically produces inclusive empowerment. State systems may institutionalize consultation without transfer of authority; customary systems may create local autonomy while concentrating authority internally; NGO systems may strengthen participation while generating dependency; and highly centralized systems may leave communities with minimal influence. **Table 5** extends this comparison to decision-making authority, revenue control, and inclusion outcomes.

Table 5. Comparative power analysis.

Dimension	Kakum	Boabeng-Fiema	Wechiau	Mole
Primary decision-maker	State (Wildlife Division)	Traditional authority	NGO-community committee	State (Wildlife Division)
Revenue control	State/formal sharing arrangement	Community/customary institutions	Trust fund (shared)	State/formal sharing arrangement
Community influence	Low (advisory)	Substantial local autonomy; internally concentrated	Medium (committee)	Very low (minimal)
Benefit satisfaction (reported)	34%	68%	52%	18%
Elite capture	High	Medium-high	Medium	Very high
Gender inclusion	Low	Low	Medium	Very low
Youth inclusion	Low	Low	Medium	Very low

Note: Satisfaction and elite-capture values are study-specific reported estimates and should not be interpreted as directly comparable statistics without harmonized instruments. Boabeng-Fiema's former "High (traditional)" empowerment label has been revised to recognize substantial local autonomy alongside an internal concentration of authority.

5.2. The Participation-Power Gap

Participation quality depends on whether communities can influence agendas, control or co-control resources, obtain relevant information, and hold decision makers accountable. A meeting, committee seat, or revenue percentage is therefore insufficient evidence of empowerment by itself. **Table 6** outlines the short- and long-term effects of this gap for each stakeholder domain.

Table 6. Effects of power imbalance by stakeholder domain.

Domain	Short-Term Effects	Long-Term Effects
Local communities	Limited income; livelihood restrictions; social conflict	Persistent poverty; out-migration; cultural erosion; conservation opposition
Traditional authorities	Elite benefits; challenges to authority legitimacy	Legitimacy loss; intergenerational conflict; weakened customary governance
State agencies	Control maintained; revenue collected	Rising enforcement costs; community hostility; conservation failures
Private operators	Profit maximisation; low labour costs	Supply-chain insecurity; reputational risk; community conflict
Conservation outcomes	Formal protection; species preservation	Illegal resource use; habitat degradation; unsustainable practices

5.3. Benefit Sharing and Accountability

Benefit sharing should be assessed as a governance chain: collection, recording, allocation, disbursement, disclosure, monitoring, and grievance procedures. This explains why nominal percentages alone may be poor indicators of equity. The proposition remains to be tested with harmonized financial and household-level data.

5.4. Intra-Community Inequality

The term community conceals internal differences. Traditional authority can redistribute power away from the state without distributing it equally among all residents. Women, youth, migrants, poorer households, and less influential lineages may remain excluded.

6. Legal and Policy Context

6.1. Binding Wildlife Governance Provisions

The Wildlife Resources Management Act, 2023 (Act 1115), establishes the Forestry Commission as the implementing agency and the highest administrative authority over protected areas. It provides for Protected Area Management Advisory Committees and specifies representation from the Wildlife Division, traditional authority, District Assembly, community-based structures, private sector, and a women's group. It also requires consultation with local authorities and landowners before the establishment of protected areas [9].

These provisions should not be paraphrased as a statutory grant of general community veto power or citizen control. The legal architecture is better described as participatory advisory governance within a system retaining central administrative authority [9].

6.2. Community Rights and FPIC

The previous categorical statement that Ghana has no FPIC requirement is revised. Ghanaian law does not generally use FPIC as a universal protected-area requirement. However, consultation, land, compensation, and participation provisions may overlap with some FPIC principles. The appropriate claim is therefore that no general statutory FPIC requirement has been identified for all protected-area decisions, rather than asserting an absence of all consent-related protections. The Wildlife Resources Management Act expressly requires consultation with local authorities and landowners before the establishment of a protected area [9].

6.3. Revenue-Sharing Claims

Revenue-sharing percentages are treated as site- and instrument-specific. Each numerical percentage retained in a final submission should be accompanied by the exact legal instrument, management agreement, administrative record, parliamentary statement, or empirical study from which it is drawn.

7. Discussion

7.1. Rethinking Boabeng-Fiema

The revision of Boabeng-Fiema is theoretically important. Traditional authority can generate local legitimacy and conservation commitment without producing inclusive democratic control. Because authority is concentrated among chiefs and elders, describing the arrangement as citizen control overstates the evidence. The case is better understood as customary institutional autonomy with internal hierarchy.

7.2. Power as Multi-Dimensional

The six analytical lenses show why visible committee structures are insufficient. Decision-making may be shared while agenda setting remains concentrated. Communities may possess local knowledge while external actors control technical expertise and donor networks. Revenue may be nominally shared while information about collection and allocation remains inaccessible.

7.3. Accountability over Headline Sharing Rates

Future evaluations should record the legal or contractual share; actual amounts received; timing of transfers; decision rights over allocation; public disclosure; beneficiary coverage; grievance procedures; and distribution within the community.

7.4. Policy Implications

Policy reform should prioritize enforceable participation rights, transparent revenue information, representative local institutions, and mechanisms for women and youth to participate independently of elite gatekeepers. The current wildlife law already provides a basis for community representation and community-based wildlife governance; the challenge is translating representation into meaningful influence and accountability [9]. This challenge is consistent with a broader pattern in Ghanaian tourism policy, where national plans articulate ambitious community-development goals [17] but implementation reviews report persistent gaps between stated objectives and enforceable practice [18]; closing that gap is as much a matter of institutional accountability as of policy design. **Table 7** sets out priority reform areas, proposed changes, and their expected impact.

Table 7. Policy reform priorities.

Reform Area	Current Situation in the Source Manuscript	Proposed Reform	Expected Impact
Land rights	State ownership of protected areas	Co-ownership or long-term leases to communities	Enhanced tenure security; investment incentive
Revenue sharing	20% - 40% reported arrangements with delays and elite-capture concerns	Higher community control and transparent allocation; the exact statutory target should be established through evidence	Increased benefits; reduced leakage

Continued

Decision-making	Advisory roles	Enforceable decision rights on major decisions	Genuine influence; accountability
Employment	Informal quotas; discrimination concerns	Transparent quotas with enforcement and skills development	Fair employment; skills development
FPIC	No general universal protected-area FPIC requirement identified	Assess project-specific consent requirements and consider stronger consent standards where community land/rights are affected	Community voice; reduced conflict

Complementary capacity-building needs for each stakeholder group are summarised in **Table 8**.

Finally, **Table 9** summarises the verification status of every site-level numerical claim discussed throughout the paper, consolidating the evidence flags raised in Sections 4 and 6 together with the claim-by-claim revision record set out in **Appendix B**.

Table 8. Capacity-building priorities by group.

Group	Capacity Needs	Support Strategies	Success Indicators
Women	Leadership skills; financial literacy; business management; technical tourism skills	Women-focused training; mentorship; childcare provision; flexible scheduling	40%+ women in leadership; women-owned enterprises; equal pay; reduced time poverty
Youth	Entrepreneurship; digital skills; conservation knowledge; customer service	Innovation labs; internships; start-up capital; peer-learning networks	Youth employment; youth-owned businesses; youth representation; reduced out-migration
Traditional Leaders	Modern governance; financial management; gender equity; tourism management	Leadership exchanges; technical training; peer learning; exposure visits	Inclusive decision-making; transparent financial management; gender-balanced councils; community satisfaction
Community Members	Tourism awareness; basic business skills; conservation knowledge; advocacy skills	Community workshops; information campaigns; participatory planning; rights education	Participation rates; benefit awareness; conservation support; reduced conflicts

Note: The 40% women's leadership indicator is a proposed success benchmark, not a reported current condition.

Table 9. Evidence-status matrix for site-level numerical claims.

Claim	Status in Revised Manuscript	Required Action before Submission
Kakum: approximately 150,000 annual visitors	Author-reported estimate	Cite original source and year
Kakum: approximately US\$1.2M annual revenue	Author-reported estimate	Cite original source and year
Kakum: 40% revenue share	Historical/arrangement-specific claim; not a universal permanent legal entitlement	Cite exact legal/administrative instrument and period
Kakum: six-nine-month disbursement delay	Reported in the source manuscript	Cite original empirical source

Continued

Kakum: 42% of benefits captured by 15% of households	Attributed in the source manuscript to “Cobbinah <i>et al.</i> (2018)”; no such publication with this exact figure could be located	Remove, or replace with the verified source; do not cite as Cobbinah <i>et al.</i> (2018)—see reference [19] for the closest related, verified study
Kakum: 34% benefit satisfaction	Study-specific reported estimate	Cite original survey/source and measurement year
Boabeng-Fiema: 68% benefit satisfaction	Study-specific reported estimate	Cite original survey/source and measurement year
Wechiau: 52% benefit satisfaction	Study-specific reported estimate	Cite original survey/source and measurement year
Mole: 20% revenue share	Author-reported estimate	Cite exact administrative/legal source and period
Mole: 10% employment quota	Author-reported claim	Cite applicable policy/management document
Mole: 18% benefit satisfaction	Study-specific reported estimate	Cite original survey/source and measurement year

8. Conclusions

This comparative review demonstrates that participation structures do not by themselves establish community empowerment. Across Kakum, Boabeng-Fiema, Wechiau, and Mole, authority is distributed through different combinations of statutory, customary, NGO, economic, informational, and expert power.

The revision makes three methodological corrections: it transparently distinguishes the reported 327-publication corpus from unverifiable screening details; it separates bibliometric context from site-level evidence; and it removes or qualifies numerical and legal claims that cannot be tied to an identifiable source or instrument.

The evidence suggests that accountability over benefit allocation may be more informative than nominal revenue-sharing rates, but this remains a proposition for future testing. Boabeng-Fiema should likewise not be classified as citizen control simply because local customary institutions retain substantial autonomy. Local control can coexist with internal exclusion.

Future empirical research should measure decision authority, agenda setting, resource control, information access, accountability, benefit distribution, and intra-community inclusion separately.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix A. Power-Coding Matrix

Each site/lens assignment should be supported by an explicit statement in at least one reviewed source. The coding is qualitative and comparative.

Power Lens	Coding Question	Low	Medium	High
Decision making	Who holds binding decision authority?	Advisory only	Shared/contested	Decisive control
Agenda setting	Who decides what is discussed?	Open/contested	Shared	Dominant actor controls agenda
Resource control	Who controls land, capital, revenue, information, or expertise?	Limited access	Shared/conditional	Concentrated control
Discourse	Whose knowledge/framing defines legitimate solutions?	Plural	Mixed	Dominant framing
Network	Who controls valuable external relationships?	Few links	Shared links	Central actor controls key links
Outcomes	Who receives benefits and bears costs?	Broadly distributed	Uneven/contested	Concentrated benefit/cost burden

Appendix B. Author-Reported Site Claims Requiring Source Verification

Claim in Earlier Manuscript	Revision Status
Kakum: 150,000 annual visitors; US\$1.2 m annual revenue	Do not retain without original source/year; treat as site-specific estimate.
Kakum: 40% legal community share	Removed as a universal legal claim; historical formulas varied [14].
Kakum: 6 - 9 months' disbursement delay	Remove unless the underlying empirical source is supplied.
Kakum: 42% benefits captured by 15% of households	No publication matching "Cobbinah <i>et al.</i> (2018)" reporting this exact 42%/15% split could be located. The closest identifiable related source is Cobbinah, Amenuvor, Black & Peprah (2017) [19], which documents inequitable ecotourism benefit distribution at Kakum but does not report this specific figure. The statistic of 42%/15% should be removed unless its exact original source is supplied and verified.
Kakum: 34% satisfaction	Retain only with the original empirical source and measurement year.
Mole: 20% revenue share; 10% employment quota; 18% satisfaction	Treat as reported study-specific estimates only after source verification.
Boabeng-Fiema: 100% direct community retention	Removed; historical evidence shows multi-institutional allocation [16].
Boabeng-Fiema: delegated power/citizen control	Reclassified as customary/traditional authority with substantial local autonomy.

Table B1. Forms of power observed at each site.

Form of Power	Kakum	Boabeng-Fiema	Wechiau	Mole
Coercive (enforcement authority)	High (wildlife division)	Low (social sanction)	Medium (shared)	High (wildlife division)
Economic (capital/revenue control)	High (state/district assembly)	High (traditional council)	Medium (trust fund)	High (central government)

Continued

Expert (technical knowledge)	High (park management)	Low-Medium (limited technical input)	High (NGO)	High (park management)
Legitimate (recognised authority)	State statute	Customary/spiritual	Hybrid (statute + custom)	State statute
Informational (control of data)	High (park management)	Medium (council)	Medium-High (NGO/committee)	High (park management)
Network (external connections)	Medium	Low	High (donor networks)	Low
Discursive (framing of issues)	State/conservation professionals	Traditional council	NGO	State/conservation professionals

Note: These qualitative classifications operationalize the seven forms of power used in the analysis.