

Impacts of Paragliding Festival on The Socio-Economic Settings of Kwahu Residents in Ghana

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Abstract: The paragliding festival of the Kwahu people in the Eastern Region is one of the most exciting festivities in Ghana. This is due to the fact that a multitude of people all over Ghana and abroad attends these festivities. Many socio-economic impacts are felt by the residents of the area certainly both negatives and positives. This article examined the impacts of paragliding festival on the residents of Atibie and Mpraeso in the Eastern region of Ghana. The study employed a qualitative led mixed method with 110 participants randomly and purposively selected from Atibie and Mpraeso Kwahu. Statistical Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS) version 26 was used to disaggregate and show data. To portray the data for interpretation, tables were used. The study finds socialization, entertainment, and infrastructural development as positive social impact, and positive economic impacts as employment, business linkages, and new business opportunities, income and increased land price and rent. Other negative socio-economic impacts include high crime rate, increase income disparity, increase, high price of essential commodities, and services as well as seasonality effect. The study recommended that Local cultures and native lifestyles should be preserved, and these initiatives should come from the local community itself, as they will bear the brunt of the consequences of such development. Also, Tourism Authority and other stakeholders such as the security services should be part of the event to check on all negative impacts such as crime and drug trafficking while maintaining peace, serenity and visitor interest in the event.

Keywords: Atibie, Festival, Paragliding, Socio-economic, Kwahu, Mpraeso

I. INTRODUCTION

Local communities have been involved in tourism activities since time immemorial (McIntosh *et al.*, 1995), but their serious involvement in tourism development is only about two decades old (Brohman, 1996). Nonetheless, the participation of local communities in tourism is seen as a positive force for change, acting as a catalyst for development (Claiborne, 2010). Kreag (2001) argues that regardless of community involvement, tourism can have either a positive or negative effect on a host community, and these effects will invariably differ among communities. Thus, tourism affects local communities through economic, social, cultural, ecological, environmental, and political forces (Singh *et al.*, 2003). Tourism, as the fastest expanding sector of the services industry, has become a vital economic activity in the majority of countries throughout the world. It has grown to be a substantial source of employment and personal income, as

well as a source of tax revenue and foreign exchange for governments. (Murphy, 1997). In recent years, Ghana's tourism industry has expanded rapidly. International tourist arrivals and receipts have more than doubled since 2005 (Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, 2012). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) stated that, the number of international visitors expected across the globe by 2030 is estimated to be 1.8 billion (WTO, 2013). Tourism can be an economic engine for historic towns if it is done with a focus on sustainability, indigenous culture, the environment, and tangible and intangible socioeconomic and cultural heritage. Sustainability requires a rational relationship between man and nature; changes that affect the natural environment impose limits that must be assessed before they cause disturbances in that environment. (Ruiz, 2015).

Over ten years ago, festival tourism was dubbed as "emerging giant," and Mair and Whitford (2013) emphasized the global interest in the role of festivals in national economic development. Despite this increased interest, there appears to be a small and disparate body of literature on the subject, particularly in the Ghanaian and Kwahu contexts. Adu-Ampong (2019), Akyeampong (2019), Imbeah *et al.*, (2016), and Okyere (2017) conducted research in the national context on the role of tourism, particularly festival tourism, in enhancing national development. However, while there are research outputs from the Ghanaian context that highlight the attributes and outcomes of festivals, there is a need to deepen understanding of the district context of tourism in Ghana, as seen in European and American research.

One of the fastest growing segments of tourism is adventure tourism. For the reason that they are located in natural settings, often on ridges, those journeys allow tourists to interact with nature by participating in a variety of activities such as climbing, cycling, paragliding, and so on. Those journeys are often "searching for excitement," which creates a stark contrast to daily life. (Buckley, 2007).

Paragliding is an adventure sports in which the pilot sits in a lightweight suit suspended by hollow fabric that acts as a wing as air flows in and around it. The paragliding festival in Ghana is sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ghana Tourist Authority which takes place during Kwahu's popular four-day Easter celebrations. Year after year except during the covid-19 pandemic, the event's popularity has grown. Since its

inception in 2006, the paragliding event has attracted more than 20 pilots from countries such as the United States of America, Norway, France, Brazil, Japan, South Africa, and Australia (Ofori, 2012). The paragliding event has now become an integral part of Kwahu's Easter holiday celebration, establishing a tourism niche and putting the area on the international tourism map. Apart from South Africa and Kenya, Ghana is the only West African country that hosts this event (Ghana Tourist Authority, 2010). As a result, many Kwahu local communities organize well-planned festivals and homecoming events to raise resources for local development. Festivals are appealing to host communities because they help to foster local pride and identity (Amoako, 2001). Therefore, if these festivals are well-structured, they can be used as a tool for tourism promotion. However, academic research on the true touristic and socioeconomic benefits of transforming a purely traditional festival into an international tourist product is scarce.

Given the current inadequate of research and the gap in the study area, the purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the socioeconomic impact of paragliding in the Kwahu area, as the Ghana Paragliding Festival has become an integral part of the annual Kwahu Easter Festivities.

History of Kwahu Paragliding Festival

Kwahu Paragliding event resurrected from the long-dormant Kwahu Easter festival and elevated Ghana's Easter celebrations to international prominence. Mr. Jake Tonka Obetsebi-Lampsey, then Minister of Tourism and Modernization of the capital city Accra, visited the Kwahu ridge as part of his familiarization tour of the country in March 2003, and by chance crossed paths with the festival's organizer. (Ministry of Tourism.,2011). H.E. Alhaji Aliu Mahama, then Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, launched the first Ghana Paragliding Festival in 2005. (Tourism Ministry, 2011). Under the leadership of the Ghana Tourism Authority's Chief Executive (Julius Debrah) and in collaboration with Adom FM (a local FM station and member of the Multimedia Group) (Ministry of Tourism,2011). The Kwahu Easter Festival was renamed in 2010 and has since, incorporated a variety of activities such as hiking the Odweanoma Mountain, Walking race (Walkerton), Telescope viewing from the Mt. Odweanoma Observatory, Jams, Dubar of Chiefs and People of Kwahu, music album lunches, and so on.

For four days of spectacular aerial fun, ceremony, and music, the Kwahu Paragliding Festival attracts both Ghanaians and foreigners. Tandem paraglider pilots from around the world have gathered for the last five years to fly local Ghanaians and foreign visitors. The festival is also open to solo pilots, and it promotes consistent flying conditions that begin around mid-morning and last until late in the day. The thermals on the plateau or the ridge are consistently large and mild, providing an excellent opportunity for both newer pilots to gain valuable experience and airtime and for seasoned pilots to enjoy hours

of "stress free" flying. The image below depicts the entrance of the Kwahu paragliding site.

Plate 1. Paragliding Site entrance at Kwahu Atibie



Source: Field Survey,2022

Plate 2: A pilot with a passenger in the air



Source: Field Survey,2022

Plate 3: Flight take-off point on Mt. Odweanoma



Source: Field Survey, (2022)

Objectives of the study

The study seeks to;

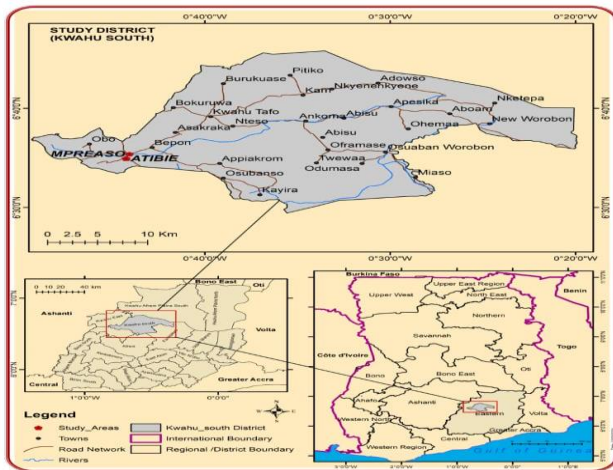
1. ascertain the socio-economic impacts of the paragliding festival.
2. recommend strategies to improve the Kwahu paragliding event to maximize the benefits for the local community.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

The Kwahu South Municipality is bounded to the north by Kwahu East, to the west by Asante-Akim South, to the south by the Kwahu West Municipality and to the east by the Fantessakwa District. The Kwahu South Municipality is roughly located between latitudes 6°35" N and 6°45" N and longitudes 0° 55" W and 0° 20" W. Atibie and Mpraeso cannot be ruled out under the municipality. (Ghana Statistical Service., 2021).

Figure 1: Map of Kwahu South District showing the study area in the national and regional context.



Source: Authors construct, (2022)

III. DATA COLLECTION

Individual residents of Atibie and Mpraeso were used as the study's unit of analysis. This study focused on Atibie and Mpraeso because it was the most popular path or route used by tourists during the paragliding event. A sample size of 100 respondents was drawn from the two communities using a simple random sampling method. Some opinion leaders were consulted in identifying such natives when selecting respondents who had lived in the area for at least 5 years. The number of natives exceeded the sample size required for the study, simple random sampling under the probability sampling technique was used to select the required population.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was also used to select (10) key informants for the study. The questionnaires were distributed in the Kwahu Twi language. The structured questionnaire was completed by residents of Atibie and Mpraeso, while the interview guide was completed by stakeholders including Community chief and elders, an officer from the Environmental Protection Agency, and the District Director of Ghana Tourism Authority. The study's demographic was heavily weighted toward indigenous peoples who had lived in the study communities for at least 5 years. This demographic structure exists because they have lived in the area for a longer period of time and can determine whether paragliding activities have had an impact on their

economic and social lives. To disaggregate and display data, the Statistical Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS) version 26 was used. Tables were used to visualize the data for interpretation.

Pretesting, Validity and Reliability

Following the determination of the research topic and intended objectives, as well as the techniques and methods used, the researcher scheduled pre-testing of the data collection instruments. The questionnaire and interview guide were piloted on 20 respondents at Atibie and Mpraeso, and as a result, issues such as unclear wording in the questionnaire and interview guide were corrected.

To ensure accuracy and validity, the proposed instruments were and consistently across all parts of the measuring instrument. The degree to which a measurement of a phenomenon produces stable and consistent results is referred to as its reliability (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Age category of respondents

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-30	49	46
31-59	37	37
60 and above	24	17
Total	110	100

Source: Field Survey, (2022)

Attempts were made to select respondents aged 20 and up who could recognize all or most of the aesthetic values in the locations shown in Table 1. The majority of respondents (46 percent) were between the ages of 20 and 30, followed by those between the ages of 31 and 59 representing (37 percent). Respondents aged 60 and up made up 17% of the total, putting them in the minority. The elderly's ability to provide an artistic assessment of Atibie and Mpraeso Kwahu makes age an important variable in this type of investigation.

Table 2: Sex distribution of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	60	54
Females	50	46
Total	110	100

Source: Field survey, (2022)

These characteristics significantly aided comprehension of the study. The gender analysis shows the number of males and females who took part in the survey. Paragliding is a difficult and energy-sapping sport which requires one to climb into higher heights, hence more men participated in the study than women participating. With reference to table 2, males made up 54% of all respondents, while females made up the remaining 46%.

Table 3: Education background of respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage %
No Formal Education	50	45
Basic School	40	36
Secondary	15	14
Tertiary	5	5
Total	110	100

Source: Fieldwork, (2021)

It was hoped that education would improve people's understanding and perceptions of the Kwahu Paragliding Festival's aesthetic effects. Education leads to understanding. As a result, the higher one's level of education, the greater one's understanding of aesthetic ideals. Table 3 depicts how this assumption was validated by a study of the respondents' educational backgrounds. 45 percent of all respondents had never attended school, while 36 percent had received only a basic education. Furthermore, individuals who attended secondary school and tertiary institutions accounted for 14% and 5%, respectively.

Social impacts of Paragliding festival in Kwahu

One of the research objectives was to investigate the effects of the paragliding festival on residents' social activities. This section discusses some of the effects of the paragliding festival. Socialization, entertainment, and infrastructure development are all factors to consider. According to Kim, once a community becomes a tourist destination, tourism has an impact on the lives of its residents (2002).

Table 4: Positive Social Impact of paragliding festival in Kwahu

Positive Social Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Socialization	31	31
Entertainment	24	24
Infrastructural Development	45	45
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, (2022)

Socialization

According to the survey results, 31% of the respondents agree that the paragliding festival promotes socialization. Natives from far and wide travel home for the occasion of meeting kith and kin, resolving disputes, and contracting marriages. Furthermore, the occasion is used to remember the souls who have passed away. The majority of respondents agreed that the paragliding festival was an opportunity to renew friendship ties, which was often accompanied by sitting together to eat and drink. This is most likely consistent with Gyasi's assertion (2013). Festivals are important because people now go to participate in these festivals because they want to return to their place of birth and see old friends and relatives again, as well as join them in making merry. Again, the paragliding festival serves as a platform for family

members to eat from the same large family bowl and drink from the same calabash in order to promote the desired level of unity within the family setup. Socialization as a benefit of Kwahu paragliding festival is summed in the expressions below:

"On this occasion, most of my family members from abroad and within the country come for family re-union and discussions aimed at improving our family." We usually prepare and eat food together. During times like this, it is common for family misunderstandings to be addressed. It also denotes the point at which family yearly dues are accounted for and presented to the entire family". (Family Opinion leader, Mpraeso Kwahu)

Entertainment

Twenty Four (24%) of the respondents believe that the Easter paragliding festival provides entertainment opportunities for local residents. Atibie and Mpraeso, the nerve centers of the Kwahu Paragliding Festival celebration, are overflowing with jubilant celebrants, attracting many famous artistes from all over the country for Gospel, Highlife, Hiplife, and Dancehall activities. To name a few, A.B. Crensil, Amakye Dede, Ofori Amponsah, Kwame Eugene, Sarkodie, Shatawale, Yaw Sarpong, and Asomafo, Kwadwo Ampong. Furthermore, the festival is distinguished by other activities, some of which are touristic in nature. During the paragliding festivals, health walks, adventure hikes, musical shows, highlife bands, and street carnivals are among them. The statements below affirm these assertions made by respondents:

"We enjoy this paragliding festival because it entertains us in a variety of ways." The majority of Ghanaian musicians come to perform. It always allows us to make use of our free time and relieve stress. Adom Tv and Adom FM host a number of concert events. There are numerous football competitions in which many participants benefit greatly. We usually go jogging and enjoy street carnivals to pass the time."

(Female participant, Atibie)

Infrastructural Development

Infrastructure improvements at Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso including roads, parks, hotels and restaurants, accrued the highest response of 45% of the respondent's view. With increased numbers of tourists, the demand for services increases, thus additional local services must be provided. This social positive effect provides benefits to the local community. This finding supports previous findings that community's benefit from tourism due to subsequent improvements in social infrastructure; such as schools, libraries, health care institutions, and Internet cafés (Gyasi, 2013).

According to a 45-year-old male respondent, Gidi (pseudonym) at Mpraeso, there has been significant investment in the development of tourism infrastructure in

Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso over the last 6 years. These ideas are summed up in the expressions below:

"Tourism has a positive impact on local economic development and infrastructure development." It generates new business opportunities and job opportunities. In the last decade, I've witnessed many changes. Tourism has completely transformed this location. Investment is on the way, and new businesses are opening up all the time. The quality of communication has improved. The government has expanded and built a new road that connects the paragliding site to the other towns in Kwahu Beposo."

The preceding comment supports the argument of (Archer, Cooper, and Ruhanen, 2005) that infrastructure such as highways are built to facilitate tourism development but ultimately facilitate access to a larger market for local products.

Negative Social Impacts of the Paragliding Festival at Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso

Tourism development can have a positive impact on a local community, but it can also have a negative impact on the social and cultural aspects of a community (Andereck *et al.*, 2005). Tourism development can have a negative impact on the host community's value systems and manners by affecting the identity of indigenous people, whose way of life changes as a result of the effects of tourism on their community structure, family relationships, morality, and ceremonies. (Nillahut, 2010).

Table 4: Negative Social Impact of paragliding festival in Kwahu

Negative Social Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Crime	86	86
Drugs	10	10
Prostitution	4	4
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, (2022).

Inappropriate tourism development and growth can have a negative social impact on the tourist destination, such as exposing the local community to unfamiliar behaviors and lifestyle changes. However, the majority of respondents in this study disagreed with the negative effects of tourism. As a result, the results regarding the negative social effects of tourism, such as crime, drugs, and prostitution, from the perspective of residents.

The findings indicate that 86% of the respondents attest to the fact that crime rate is always high during the Kwahu Easter Festival. 10% and 4% of the respondents indicated that visitors get involved in deviant acts such as drug trafficking and engaged in many sexually immoral acts respectively. The findings of this study indicate that tourism has significantly increased residents' social vices.

Economic Impacts of the Paragliding Festival at Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso

Positive Economic Impact

Table 5: Positive Impacts of tourism

Economic Impacts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employment	65	65
Business Linkages and New	5	5
Income	30	30
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, (2022)

Employment

Ghana has a growing population and increasing unemployment, so tourism provides an opportunity to reverse the trend by creating jobs. According to Cukier (2002), tourism can generate three types of job opportunities: direct, indirect, and induced. One of the most compelling arguments for tourism development in developing countries is that it provides opportunities for local people to work and earn more money (Diagne, 2004; Akma and Kieti, 2007). Thus, based on the data obtained, it can be stated that the development of tourism in Atibie and Mpraeso Kwahu has been successful in terms of job creation. An employee of a nearby hotel makes a comment. These are illustrated in the remarks below:

"I have a job here because of the paragliding festival." We rely on tourism for 80% of our income in this town. We are very fortunate to have the paragliding festival, which has resulted in the emergence of many hotels, and as a result, tourism is developing here. If there is no tourism, I will have to relocate to the city to find work."

(35-year-old male participant, Atibie)

Another respondent backed up a common submission about the positive impact of the Kwahu Easter Festival.

"I am a retired individual." I am not involved in tourism, but I benefit from it. My income is generated by renting out a flat during these paragliding festivals. All of my tenants are either directly or indirectly related to tourism, and the rent is significantly higher during the paragliding festival, so I can attest to the fact that I am benefiting."

(69-year-old male participant, Mpraeso Kwahu)

Business Linkages and New Business Opportunities

One of the most significant outcomes of tourism development in Kwahu Areas has been the diversification of business and the establishment of links with the formal tourism sector. Tourism creates new types of opportunities for investment, resulting in reduced revenue leakage. As a result of tourism development, many new business organizations have emerged in Kwahu Areas (Kwahu Easter Paragliding Festivities). Aside from the establishment of accommodation services,

new business organizations to provide services have been established. However, it should be noted that this expansion of business receives little or no support from the government and or international organizations. These new businesses not only create jobs, but they also help to keep some tourism revenue in the area.

Income

According to the findings of this study, some residents of Atibie and Mpraeso Kwahu earn a lot of money, especially during the Paragliding festival. For example, a male stakeholder at Mpraeso explained:

"From my own experience, during the Paragliding Festival, sellers in these communities generate a lot of income because a lot of people normally visit and thus their ins and outs are associated with patronizing the locally sells products."

(61-year-old Male participant, Mpraeso Kwahu)

The preceding expression backs up the assertion made by (Singh *et al.*, 2002). A region's or society's economic development is linked to rising revenues or income, as well as related increases in savings, investment, and consumption.

Negative Economic Impact

Table 6: Negative Economic Impact of paragliding festival in Kwahu

Negative Economic Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Increased Land Price and Rent	28	28
Increased Income Disparity	40	40
High Price of Essential Commodities and Services	17	17
Seasonality Effect	15	15
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, (2022).

The Kwahu Paragliding Easter Festival has undoubtedly played an important role in economic development, but it has also had some negative economic consequences. The following negative effects of tourism are identified by respondents as impeding the well-being of the local community.

Increased Land Price and Rent

According to the study, some significant negative economic impacts of tourism include increased land prices, land grabbing by influential people, and high rent. Several tourism impact research studies have revealed a similar scenario (Diagne, 2004; Archer, Cooper and Ruhanen, 2005; Akama and Kieti, 2007). The rapid expansion of tourism infrastructure has resulted in a high demand for land on which to construct tourist facilities. As expressed by a 47-year-old male respondent, Zador (pseudonym) at Mpraeso:

"I owned property next to a designated hotel. When people began to build new hotels, businessmen came to my house and offered me a large sum of money for land, and I couldn't say no. I sold my property. But I couldn't buy enough land in this town because the price of land in other parts of the town had also risen. My main source of income used to be vegetable cultivation on my land. Now that I am practically landless and unable to cultivate, my income has decreased".

Increased Income Disparity

According to Harrison (1992), the benefits of tourism development in LDCs are primarily enjoyed by local elites, while the majority of the population receives only marginal benefits. This study uncovers a similar scenario. For the last six years, it has been the main economic sector of Atibie and Mpraeso, but this has coincided with increasing income disparities. As labour is abundant and there is no restricted minimum wage rate set by the government, many private employers take the privilege to offer low wages to the local people and hardly offer any other benefits. An employee, Mr. DD (pseudonym) at Mpraeso says:

"We are helpless. there are few jobs here but lots of unemployed people. Hence what can you do? We have accepted whatever money they offered".

High Price of Essential Commodities and Services

In Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso, the researcher discovers that one of the most visible and widely discussed negative effects of tourism is the increased cost of common commodities. The locals are concerned and critical of the high prices of food, transportation, and housing. They blame the price increase on tourists and immigrant workers. A local community stakeholder, Mr. Yidi (pseudonym) at Atibie says:

"Almost everything is quite expensive here." Much more costly than Nkawkaw. People with limited income have a difficult time making a living in Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso."

This confirms the findings of Akama and Kieti (2007) and Sebastian and Rajagopalan (2009), who discovered that as tourism develops, the price of essential goods rises.

Seasonality Effect

Seasonality's effects on tourism are well documented in the literature (Butler, 1999b; Wilton, 2003; Wall and Mathieson, 2006). According to the researcher, Kwahu Atibie and Mpraeso are also affected by the seasonality effect, which has a negative impact on the livelihood of the local community as well as investors and tourists.

An entrepreneur, Mr. Mireku (pseudonym) at Mpraeso said this:

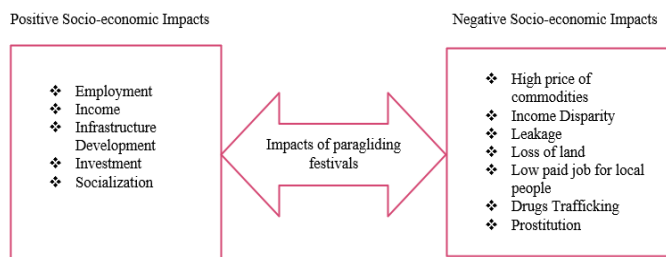
"We want to diversify our business because tourists tell us that, in addition to visiting paragliding sites, they want to enjoy other activities such as casinos. But we are afraid to

invest because we will not be able to keep it open during the off-season due to lower income”.

Seasonality also puts pressure on the service quality and it validates the finding of Butler (1994) and Baum (1999).

The model explains that paragliding festival has both positive and negative socio-economic impacts on the host communities.

Model of Paragliding Festival impacts based on Research Findings



Source: Authors construct, (2022).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the key findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The paragliding festival, according to the findings above, is a significant catalyst in the tourism industry and should be given more attention. Particular consideration should be given to the factors that can adequately facilitate key stakeholders' contributions to the development of the industry.
2. Tourism development provides economic and social benefits to the local community in the form of job opportunities, socialization, increased income, the development of small and medium-sized businesses, and an increase in land prices, as discovered during the research.
3. More importantly, government and stakeholder attention should be focused on some of the study's key findings, particularly the negative consequences of festival tourism, such as High price of commodities, Income Disparity, Low paid job for local people, Drugs Trafficking and Prostitution and anti-social behavior, and their potential to discourage initiatives among other tribes and ethnic groups.
4. Finally, the paragliding event has helped popularize Kwahu Easter holidays, and it is critical that it continue in order to promote the Kwahu tourism industry in general.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings from the study and the conclusions that were drawn, the following recommendations were made according to the research objectives:

Local governments should determine the scope of tourism development and identify a carrying capacity that is appropriate for the tourist destination.

Local cultures and native lifestyles should be preserved, and these initiatives should come from the local community itself, as they will bear the brunt of the consequences of such development. However, the government may still develop plans to reduce the burden of tourism on locals and to leverage tourism development in the Atibie and Mpraeso Communities, allowing locals to live prosperous and harmonious lives.

In addition, the Tourism Authority and other stakeholders such as the security services should be part of the event to check on all negative impacts such as crime and drug trafficking while maintaining visitor interest in the event.

Finally, it is critical that event organizers, local governments, and other stakeholders maximize event trade-offs, reduce negative visitor impacts, and maintain visitor interest in the event.

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