

# The Role of Local Communities in Tourism Development: Grassroots Perspectives from Tanzania

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Journal of Human Ecology

Volume 41, 2013 - Issue 1

## Abstract

One of the core elements of tourism development is to encourage local communities' participation as it is central to the sustainability of tourism industry. While the literature suggests a number of roles local communities could take in tourism development, little emphasis has so far been given as to how local communities themselves feel about this. As a result, there has been little evidence, especially from the grassroots, on what communities really think of their role(s) in tourism development. Using a case study of Barabarani village in Tanzania, this paper contributes to the understanding of community participation in tourism development by examining local communities' views on their role in tourism development. The paper triangulates both quantitative and qualitative data to bring together perspectives from the grassroots based on household questionnaire survey with some members of the local community and a two-month period of field observations in the study area, coupled with the researcher's experience with the wider community. The findings revealed that local communities want to be involved when tourism policies are being made to enable policymakers to prepare a policy that meets stakeholders' needs and addresses their concerns. They also want to be part of tourism development decisions to ensure their needs are incorporated. Furthermore, local communities want to have a voice in development issues (not necessarily tourism development) to enable them to protect community interests, and increase transparency and accountability, and wipe out embezzlements and abuse of offices, which are rampant acts amongst decision-makers. Similar to previous studies, they rejected the statement 'local people should not participate by any means' in tourism development. It is clear from the findings that people are against the prevailing top-down approach in decision making when it comes to tourism development in their areas. It also depicts the nature of the central government which controls all the forms of decision making when it comes to development and policy formulation. The study emphasizes on small scale methods in analysing and assessing the role of local communities views of participation from the communities themselves rather than what has been normally imposed on them.

**Key Words:** Local Communities, Participation, Tourism Development, Mto wa Mbu, Tanzania