

# Community Capacity Strengthening for Inclusive Community-Based Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism (CBT) has been widely advocated as an avenue for communities to participate in and benefit from tourism development. Due to community limitations, Community Capacity Building (CCB) interventions have been initiated to improve the ability of communities to participate and derive benefits from CBT. In this paper, we argue for the adoption of Community Capacity Strengthening (CCS) interventions to help address the challenges facing CBT. This would in turn ensure the achievement of inclusive CBT, a situation in which a broad array of stakeholders especially the marginalized contribute to the creation of opportunities as well as share in the potential benefits from tourism.

**Keywords:** Community-based tourism; Inclusivity; Community capacity building; Community capacity strengthening

## INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) was initiated as a model of tourism development that could lead to the flow of benefits and inclusion of communities in tourism development. CBT has been embraced as an effective tool for providing socio-economic opportunities to rural communities in several developing countries. In particular, CBT has been promoted for its perceived contribution to livelihood improvement and biodiversity conservation WWF [1] in many a rural destination of the developing world. Advocates of CBT argue that it has the potential to create an avenue for communities to have a stake in tourism [2,3], and the potential for a win-win outcome for conservation and development [2].

Though widely lauded for its socio-economic and conservation benefits, literature on CBT also point to some of its limitations. Examples include the oversimplification and misconception of concepts such as 'community', 'participation', and 'empowerment' leading to failure of projects [4], competing policy objectives of conservation and development [2], limited attention to specific contextual aspects [5], power struggles [6], lack of consensus and unrealistic expectations [7]. In an attempt to address limitations, and enhance CBT outcomes, Community Capacity Building (CCB) and capacity strengthening initiatives have been adopted.

However, CBT can have enhanced outcomes if it embraces inclusive tourism principles. It is worth noting that, despite the relevance of issues related to CCB in CBT, there has been limited attention on linking them to inclusive tourism. In this paper we therefore briefly review literature on CCB to establish its application for the achievement of inclusivity in CBT. We further argue that Community Capacity Strengthening (CCS) interventions, which follow similar dimensions and levels of CCB, if well planned and well implemented, can lead to inclusive CBT which is characterized by enhanced participation and sustainable benefits to the marginalized in the community.

## The concepts of community capacity building and capacity strengthening

The concept of community capacity (CC) draws on the community development [8,9], and participatory development [10], discourse which advocates for granting people more control in the handling of local issues [11,12]. CC is about enabling marginalized groups to articulate and guard their interests more efficiently, both within their immediate locality and beyond [13]. Thus, community capacity building (CCB) is viewed as a way to strengthen communities, equipping them with knowledge and skills in order to effect positive change and reduce the challenges [14,15]. It focuses on enabling all members of the community, including the poorest and the most disadvantaged, to develop skills and competencies in order to take greater control of their

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own lives and to contribute to inclusive community development [16].

Moreover, in extant literature [17-19], CCB is described as taking place at 3 levels: individual, organizational, and community level. At the individual level, it is concern with the establishment of conditions that enable individual members of the community to engage in learning to acquire knowledge and skills and to adapt to change [20]. The organizational or institutional level involves supporting existing institutions to form sound policies, organizational structures, and effective approaches to leadership and control of budgetary resources [21]. Community level characteristics are broader than individuals or single organizations and form the link between organizations as well as between individuals and organizations in the community.

In an attempt to classify the characteristics of CCB, some scholars have identified the dimensions of CCB [15,17,22-27]. Some of the dimensions of CCB outlined in literature include: participation, leadership, structures, resource mobilization, external support, skills and knowledge, power, sense of community, asking why, problem assessment, social network, shared vision, control and communication. Additionally, a number of concepts have been used to assess community capacity and propose essentials for strengthening local capacity. Among these are: education and training [28], communication [29], positive attitudes [30], knowledge and information [29,31], conflict resolution [32], access to resources [33,34], participation and community involvement [34,35], a shared vision [32], and social networks and collaboration [18,36].

Similarly, in tourism development literature, some of the concepts that have been identified as being critical to CCB are: link to cultural heritage [37], leadership [38], education and training [39], planning and coordination [40], tourism infrastructure and facilities [41], positive partnerships and collaborative arrangements between NGOs, the private sector (e.g., travel trade organizations), government agencies and local people [42-45], and a local awareness of tourism [43,46].

Though widely used, [47] opines that CCB is riddled with challenges which include but are not limited to limitations of communities to act autonomously and the creation of power imbalances between the 'builders' and the 'beneficiaries'. Moreover, Imbaya et al. [48] point to the complexities of implementing CCB interventions due to challenges of governance, culture, politics and power relations. Smyth [47] therefore advocates that instead, we should embrace a 'community organizing' approach which is more political and provides a form of analysis and leadership skills for communities to tackle the underlying conditions that provide inequalities. The argument is that the inequalities are socially, politically and economically constructed and therefore solutions should be sought for the underlying contexts under which the inequalities happen.

According to Cass [49], there is a need to address the underlying market and policy causes of the unequal distribution of income, capital and employment opportunities. Brown [50] further advocates for 'relational community building' which addresses

exclusion among others, embraces diverse ideas and strategies, addresses historical injustices and acknowledges that all stakeholders (not just communities) have a role to play. In the recent past, scholars and practitioners have also advocated for Community Capacity Strengthening [51-53], in place of CCB since CCB has the impression that communities totally lack capacity which is not the case. Community Capacity Strengthening (CCS) interventions, adopt similar dimensions and levels of CCB, but are focused on strengthening the existing community capacities.

## The concept of Inclusive tourism

Scheyvens [54] noted that calls for inclusion arose due to the fact that certain groups or communities are often 'left out' of the tourism development process on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or poverty. According to Butler [55], inclusive growth incorporates low and middle-income groups and has a distributional aspect to reduce inequality. They further argue that tourism development can be inclusive if a broad array of stakeholders contribute to the creation of opportunities as well as share in the potential benefits from tourism.

Scheyvens [56] opine that inclusive tourism can be understood as the involvement of marginalized or less powerful groups in the production of tourism and the sharing of benefits of tourism. Moreover, the UNWTO [57] describes inclusive tourism as tourism that integrates disadvantaged groups so that they can participate in and benefit from tourism. For Kadi et al. [58] inclusive tourism helps overcome barriers to disadvantaged groups to access tourism as producers or consumers, challenges dominant power relations, and widens the range of people who contribute to decision making about tourism development. Kadi et al.[58] further argue that inclusive tourism requires among others the creation of opportunities, eliminating reasons for exclusion especially shortage of skills knowledge and capabilities, aspects which can be achieved through capacity building.

Rogerson et al. argue that tourism development can be inclusive and assist towards poverty reduction if a broad array of stakeholders contribute both to the creation of opportunities as well as sharing potential benefits [59,60]. Advise on the need to identify the drivers and constraints for achieving inclusivity. Biddulph [61] further advise that the quest for inclusion should investigate the structural limits to inclusion.

## Community capacity strengthening for inclusive CBT

Ideally, well implemented CBT yields more benefits for the local communities than costs as it is aimed at enhancing community participation and potential benefits to the community. It denotes all-inclusive community participation in tourism planning which results in shared decision-making, equitable distribution of resources, consensus over community's direction, sharing of local knowledge about local assets and issues [62,63].

Since the objective of CCB is empowering communities to participate in and derive benefits from tourism, if well implemented CCB initiatives can be instrumental in the delivery or achievement of inclusive CBT. However, we argue in

support of the application of Community Capacity Strengthening (CCS) for the achievement of inclusive CBT in favour of CCB [64,65]. This is partly because CCB has been criticized on the premise that it is based on the notion of communities being “deficient” – in skills, knowledge and experience instead of focusing on the capacities that they do have [11].

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that communities need to have their capacities enhanced through CCS for them to participate and benefit from CBT in order to make it ‘inclusive’. There is however need to implement CCS interventions which address power imbalances, contextual issues of inequalities and exclusion of the marginalized.

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