



## Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies

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### Paragliding and ecotourism in Kwahu: a panacea for conservation or Pandora's box

#### Tourism potentials in Kwahu

Tourism is the most sustainable venture all over the world. In recent years, Ghana has seen phenomenal growth in the tourism industry. International tourist arrivals and receipts have more than doubled since 2005 (ISSER, 2011). Domestic tourism is also becoming popular.

The Kwahu area is endowed with a variety of tourist attractions. These are: the prominent Kwahu mountains revealing horizontal beds of sandstones; the panoramic view by the summit of mountains (Mt. Odweanoma); the luxuriant forest at the foothills of the mountains; the bracing climate; and the famous Easter festivities of the people among others.



*The Kwahu mountains, Mt. Odweanoma*

An assessment and evaluation of tourism potentials in the area by the Ghana Tourist Board (GTB) in 2002 noted that, the mountain slopes offer one of the best eco-tourism destinations for holiday makers. It is not surprising therefore that the area was chosen by the Government of Ghana for paragliding sport.

#### The paragliding sport

Paragliding is an adventure sport where the pilot sits in lightweight material suspended by hollow fabric which serves as the wing as air enters and blows around it.

The paragliding festival which is held during the popular 3-days Easter festivities of Kwahu is sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and Ghana Tourist Board. The popularity of the event has been growing year after year. Since its inception in 2006, the paragliding event has been attracting over 20 pilots from several countries notably, USA, Norway, France, Brazil, Japan, South Africa and Australia.



*Flight take-off point on Mt. Odweanoma*

Tandem flights are growing among Ghanaians and the event attracts thousands of spectators from all parts of the country. The paragliding event has now become an integral part of the Easter holiday celebration in Kwahu, thus creating a tourism niche for the area which has placed it on the international tourism map.



*A pilot with a Ghanaian female passenger in the air .*

## Benefits and challenges

There is no doubt that the paragliding festival has shown some positive trade-offs to the local economy. There is increased incomes to businesses in the form of patronage of commodities including prepared foods, transport and other services. Over the past decade 15 hotels have sprung up in the area which offer accommodation to the teeming visitors during the period.

However, the paragliding festival is confronted with a number of challenges which need to be addressed in order to ensure its sustained growth. First, the pristine forest of the mountain slopes is threatened as farmers continue to clear the lands for the cultivation of crops. The forest also face the threat of bush fires during the dry season.



*A farmland along on the mountain slopes*

Second, the road leading to the summit of the mountain has over the years deteriorated due to poor maintenance. The surface of the road is graded few weeks to the event and this induces erosion in view of the steep slopes. Fortunately, the flight take-off point is now covered with grass.

Thirdly, event participants long hours in traffic at the central townships of Mpraeso and Atibie before making their way to the summit of the mountain un view of heavy vehicular traffic the characterise the Easter holiday period. Finally, existing infrastructure and facilities at the mountain summit are not well developed and waste generated by visitors is poorly managed.

## Conclusion and recommendations



*Viewing platform at the flight take-off point . The ground now covered by grass. In the background is Nkawkaw*

The paragliding event has helped popularize Kwahu Easter Holidays and there is there is the need sustain it with the view to promoting the tourism industry in Kwahu in general.

First, the Local Authorities ought to take steps to halt the gradual but imminent destruction of the forest of the foothills and along the slopes of the mountains in order to minimize erosion and prevent landslides, and to conserve biodiversity. The value of the forest could also be enhanced by the introduction of some species animals such as monkeys.

The authorities ought to plan towards development of alternative routes in the central townships to help ease traffic during the festive period instead of the adhoc traffic control measures which have proved ineffective in view of the growing number of holiday makers.

Finally, it is important that event organisers, local authorities and other stakeholders manage visitor impacts maximize trade-offs from the event, reduce adverse visitor impacts and sustain visitor interests in the event.

### References and Further Reading

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