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Context matters: Investigating the individual social capital and empowerment links of community-based ecotourism

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Highlights

- In general residents with higher access to social capital show higher levels of empowerment from ecotourism than those with less access to social capital
- The social capital and empowerment links are less apparent among residents more involved in ecotourism.
- The relationship between social capital and empowerment depends on the empowerment dimension under analysis.
- Women, and members of non-local ethnic groups tend to have less access to social capital and empowerment.

Abstract

The growing interest in social networks and social capital as analytical tools for understanding community based natural resources management challenges reflects a growing recognition of the close links between social connections and community empowerment. This article contends the need to critically examine these links in different context and at the individual level. In this study we consider subpopulations within communities and diverse empowerment and social capital measurements to begin to unpack the complexity inherent in the exploration of these two socio-cultural phenomena. Drawing upon survey and network data from two community ecotourism cases in Ghana, results show that although residents with greater access to social capital reach greater levels of empowerment, those links are markedly conditioned by involvement, gender and ethnicity. Implications of the differing relationship between cognitive and structural social capital vis-a-vis several empowerment outcomes are discussed from theoretical, methodological and practical standpoints.

Key words: Community, Ecotourism, Empowerment, Ethnicity, Gender, Ghana, Networks, Social Capital.