

Towards sustainable livelihoods: A study of the contributions and challenges in tourism handicraft trade in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Sustainable livelihoods,
Tourism,
Handicraft trade,
Pro-poor tourism,
Ghana.

This study explores the dynamics of tourism handicraft trade in Ghana, shedding light on the contributions and challenges faced by individuals engaged in this economic activity. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and Principles of Pro-Poor Tourism, this study investigates how tourism handicraft trade serves as a multidimensional source of livelihood, impacting social, economic, and physical capital. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study collected data from 22 tourism handicraft traders in Cape Coast, Ghana, through in-depth interviews. This study reveals the transformative role of handicraft trade in advancing economic and educational opportunities and underscores tangible assets and financial resources as pivotal for sustainability. By embracing Pro-Poor Tourism principles, handicraft trade has emerged as an essential means of poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, and sustainable development, fostering social networks and cultural exchanges. However, persistent financial challenges necessitate external support, especially during off-seasons, financial stress, and increased costs. The study concludes with an emphasis on consistent stakeholders' support, highlighting the need to navigate financial constraints and seasonal fluctuations to ensure the long-term sustainability of handicraft trade and livelihood support in the Cape Coast Metropolis and Ghana.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, poverty has remained a pervasive global issue garnering significant attention from policymakers and scholars. According to World Bank estimates, the number of individuals living in extreme poverty, defined as those surviving on \$1.90 a day or less, has declined from 1.9 billion in 1990 to approximately 736 million in 2015 (Mehrotra, 2019; World Bank, 2021). As a pronounced global challenge, various strategies have been devised for the multifaceted battle against poverty, with tourism emerging as the most prominent and effective (Mehrotra, 2019; Scheyvens, 2017). Widely advocated by development economists and governments, tourism is recognized for its substantial economic contributions and potential to alleviate poverty and has become the highest-earning sector in 46 of the 49 poorest nations (Mehrotra, 2019). This proclamation is expected, given the significant economic impact of tourism. In addition, tourism is noted to present an appealing prospect for underdeveloped regions of the world, including Africa, as the development of many of these regions relies primarily on the environmental and cultural assets favored by tourism (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). Consequently, in the context of developing regions such as Ghana, tourism is being used

as a promising avenue for achieving desired economic advancement and empowerment.

As a livelihood option, however, different types and forms of tourism contribute differently to poverty alleviation or the economic enhancement of groups and destinations. Many scholars have identified that pro-poor tourism is effective and contributes to poverty alleviation most adequately in local communities, where tourism practice is usually small-scale, community-based, and involves the use of environmental, cultural, and local resources and skills (Mehrotra, 2019; Wen et al., 2021). One such form of tourism is the informal production, trade, and sale of handicrafts, especially in culturally engrained underdeveloped regions, such as Africa. Tourism handicraft trade involves the production, sale, and buying of locally made craft and artisanal products within the context of tourism destinations (International Trade Centre [ITC], 2015; Jonker, 2019). This form of tourism comprises marginalized groups such as artisans and handicraft producers involved in the tourism handicraft business. These groups constitute a significant portion of the global population and require sustainable measures to improve their livelihood (Medina-Muñoz et al., 2016). Relatively small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), including those in the tourism handicraft trade, continue to

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emerge as pivotal players in the employment generation, especially in developing nations. In countries such as Ghana, SMEs employ approximately 22% of the adult population and contribute substantially to the export economy (Akumbomi, 2011). SMEs in the creative tourism sector, which encompasses handicrafts, demonstrates notable employment growth at 15.5 % and 14.09% in Ghana and Malawi (Parker et al., 1995 as cited in Kusi et al., 2015).

At present, consistent handicraft production and a focus on sales within the tourism sector are more profound in Ghana, underscoring its potential for economic empowerment. They are products that often showcase the cultural heritage, traditional craftsmanship, and artistic talents of the local community (Rogerson & Collins, 2019). Tourists frequently purchase these handicrafts as souvenirs or gifts, contributing to the local economy and providing income opportunities for artisans and craft producers (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019). Tourists' significant expenditure on locally crafted souvenirs contributes to the growth of the informal handicraft sector, positively impacting the livelihoods of local communities (Owusu-Mintah, 2013; Segbefia, 2009). Consequently, tourism handicraft trade has become a mainstay livelihood option for many local people in tourism destinations or tourism-fringed communities worldwide (Wen et al., 2021). It plays a vital role in promoting cultural exchange, preserving traditional skills, fueling economic liberations, and fostering sustainable tourism development (Battour et al., 2017). Thus, as part of the tourism value chain, handicrafts can significantly contribute to cultural maintenance, income generation, employment creation, community empowerment, and poverty reduction (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019).

However, these traders face many barriers to participating in tourism entrepreneurship. Mehrotra (2019) and ITC (2015) noted that despite the potential of handicraft trade for poverty alleviation, informal craft traders encounter many challenges, including neglect from the government, private investors, NGOs, and even researchers. These are further coupled with tourism craft traders' lack of capital, market development strategy abilities, resource limitations, lack of skills, and limited access to both general and entrepreneurial education (Aref & Redzuan, 2010), which impede their business potential and heavily impact their livelihoods (Scheyvens, 2017). Moreover, the growing infiltration of mass-produced goods into local markets threatens the livelihood of craftspeople, both producers and traders, in developing countries (Dana et al., 2022). However, studies examining the contributions and challenges within marginalized groups in tourism value chains are scarce, even on a global scale. In the case of Ghana, existing but limited research in this domain primarily focuses on handicraft marketing and promotion, neglecting the critical assessment of the impact, contributions, and challenges involved in tourism handicrafts trade, a rapidly growing economic activity and

major livelihood option for many youths and women (Owusu-Mintah, 2013; Segbefia, 2009). Moreover, in this era of sustainable development goals (SDGs), current research further underscores the interconnectedness of pro-poor tourism to poverty alleviation and the upkeep of people's sustainable livelihoods in developing parts of the world (Jonker, 2019; Wen et al., 2021).

This study addresses the gaps in the current literature by investigating the extent to which informal traders benefit from handicraft tourism sales to sustain their livelihoods. In addition, it identifies the challenges affecting the sustainability of informal tourism craft trade businesses in Ghana. Drawing on the objectives, the literature, and the empirical discoveries to be made, this study seeks to exclusively contribute to the growing discourse on sustainable livelihoods in the context of poverty-tourism linkages, offering insights that inform policy interventions and development of sustainable strategies towards sustaining and improving the livelihood of those involved in tourism handicraft trade in Ghana.

2. Literature Review

Tourism as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty remains a persistent global challenge that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations across various regions. The extensive body of literature emphasizes the multidimensional nature of poverty, which extends beyond income deprivation to encompass a lack of access to essential resources, education, healthcare, and social capital (Mehrotra, 2019; World Bank, 2021). Scholars have proposed various theoretical frameworks to conceptualize poverty, including the capabilities approach, structuralist perspectives, and intersectionality theory, which underscore the complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors (Scheyvens, 2017). Furthermore, research emphasizes the differential impact of poverty across demographic groups, with women, children, and marginalized communities bearing a disproportionate burden (Mehrotra, 2019; Wen et al., 2021). Globalization, urbanization, environmental degradation, and systemic inequalities exacerbate poverty dynamics and perpetuate cycles of deprivation and marginalization (Wen et al. 2021; World Bank 2021). To tackle this pervasive canker, tourism has been recognized and used as a critical strategy to limit the rise of poverty in many parts of the world.

In today's 21st century, tourism is continuing to be increasingly recognized as a potential tool for poverty alleviation, with scholars and practitioners exploring its socioeconomic impacts in various contexts (Mehrotra, 2019; Rogerson & Collins, 2019; Scheyvens, 2017). Tourism is widely advocated by development economists and governments for its substantial economic contributions and potential to alleviate poverty (Chok et al., 2007). Tourism has become the highest-earning sector in 46 of the 49 poorest nations (Mehrotra, 2019; World Bank, 2021).

Tourism presents an appealing prospect for underdeveloped regions of the world to help in economic gain, livelihood sustenance, and poverty alleviation. Numerous studies have highlighted the potential of tourism to generate income and employment opportunities, particularly in developing countries (Chok et al. 2007; Wen et al., 2021). Tourism-related activities, such as accommodation, transportation, craft sales, and guided tours, create jobs for local communities, including those in rural and marginalized areas, where alternative livelihood options may be limited (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Mmopelwa & Mackenzie, 2019). Additionally, tourism can stimulate entrepreneurship and the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), empowering local residents to participate in the tourism value chain and generate income through the sale of goods and services (Chok et al., 2007; Rogerson, 2013).

However, the extent to which tourism contributes to poverty reduction varies depending on numerous factors, including the scale and nature of tourism development, the level of community involvement, and the distribution of benefits (Qiao & Chen, 2021; Rogerson & Collins, 2019). Scholars caution that tourism can exacerbate inequalities and marginalization if not managed sustainably and equitably (Wang & Tziamalis, 2023). Issues such as leakage of tourism revenue, limited local ownership and control, and negative sociocultural impacts can undermine the potential benefits of tourism in poverty alleviation (Medina-Muñoz et al., 2016). Furthermore, the vulnerability of tourism-dependent communities to external shocks, such as economic downturns, natural disasters, and global health crises, highlights the importance of building resilience and diversifying livelihoods (Saarinen & Gill, 2018). Sustainable tourism development strategies that prioritize community empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation are essential for maximizing the positive impacts of tourism on poverty reduction, while minimizing its negative consequences (Chok et al., 2007; Qiao & Chen, 2021).

Tourism Handicraft Trade

Tourism is often viewed as a catalyst for economic growth in many regions, particularly in developing countries (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022). Tourism handicraft trade involves the production, selling, and buying of locally made crafts and artisanal products within tourism destinations. These products showcase the cultural heritage and artistic talent of local communities (ITC, 2015; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015; Jonker, 2019). They contribute to the local economy and provide income opportunities for artisans and craft producers, serving as a mainstay livelihood option in many tourism destinations (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022). Thus, handicraft production and trade are important components of the tourism industry and contribute to local economies through income generation, employment creation, cultural preservation, and livelihood

support (ITC 2015; Mehrotra 2019). Therefore, handicraft trade presents opportunities for empowerment and community development. As a livelihood option, participation in handicraft trade along the tourism value chain can enhance the socioeconomic status of artisans, particularly women and marginalized groups (Croes, 2013; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). Additionally, initiatives promoting sustainable tourism and responsible consumption offer avenues for addressing the environmental and ethical concerns associated with handicraft production (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). In Ghana, there has been a surge in interest in handicraft businesses, particularly within the tourism industry, as noted for its potential to enrich culture and provide a lucrative market for economic development (Owusu-Mintah, 2013). Handicrafts encompassing products such as hand-weaving, wood carving, and ceramics have proven profitable for small retailers in developing nations (Osei et al., 2011). The combination of handicrafts and tourism aligns with the flourishing 21st-century tourism industry, presenting a powerful avenue that contributes significantly to livelihoods. Recognized among the key sectors, agriculture, crafts and textiles, and tourism, tourism-related handicraft businesses are pivotal for poverty alleviation and empowerment of women (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019; Scheyvens, 2017). Despite the lack of explicit political and economic strategies, handicraft trade is flourishing and dependent on tourism demand and intermediary activities (Benson, 2014; Jonker, 2019). In regions such as Ghana and other developing countries, handicraft businesses serve as self-employment opportunities, particularly when unemployment rates are high (Owusu-Mintah, 2013). Notably, tourism-related handicrafts contribute substantially to income generation, as seen in Ethiopia's annual \$12.7 million revenue (Zibanai, 2017). Tourism is acknowledged as a mechanism for poverty reduction and livelihood improvement, facilitating entry into craft businesses. However, smaller businesses in this sector face challenges, such as bad governance, poor policies, and limited access to financial inputs (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019). Despite these obstacles, handicraft-related businesses are significant in developing economies, such as Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Malawi, South Africa, and Morocco (Benson, 2014; Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). For instance, in 2022, Morocco's handicraft industry generated over US\$1.5 billion, benefiting a third of the country's population and fostering sociocultural preservation (Morocco World News, 2022). Nonetheless, globalization poses a threat to authenticity, as craft traders prioritize customer preferences over cultural meanings. In a broader context, tourism-related handicraft businesses are viewed as instruments for balancing economic growth, poverty reduction, and rural-urban migration control.

Challenges of the Tourism Handicraft Trade

Many challenges impede the growth of tourism-related handicraft businesses, consequently affecting the overall

development of the tourism industry, particularly in developing nations. These challenges affect sustainability and contributions to local economies and individual livelihoods. One significant challenge is the commodification and standardization of handicrafts to meet tourist demands, leading to the loss of cultural authenticity and uniqueness (Wondirad et al., 2022). This is partly due to competition between mass-produced souvenirs and imported goods, which often undermines the market for locally made crafts, regardless of how they are crafted. This threatens the livelihoods of artisan communities (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019). Quality control and consistency issues also plague handicraft trade, affecting consumer trust and satisfaction (Shafi et al. 2021). Moreover, limited access to markets, particularly for artisans in remote or marginalized regions, hinders their ability to sell their products and generate income (Dalal et al., 2024). Infrastructure challenges, such as inadequate transportation and marketing facilities, exacerbate market access issues (Dalal et al., 2024; Ezra, 2022). Additionally, socio-political instability, natural disasters, and global economic downturns can disrupt the tourism market and reduce demand for handicrafts (Dana et al., 2022; Wong & Fernandini, 2011). The challenges faced by tourism handicraft trade are exacerbated by constrained financial resources with inadequate funding available for both short and long-term needs (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019; Spillan & King, 2017). Limited access to financing hampers the development of infrastructure, marketing initiatives, and skill-building programs for artisans (Kusi et al. 2015). Without sufficient financial support, efforts to address quality control, market access, and product diversification will be hindered, further compromising the sustainability and competitiveness of the handicraft sector (Wondirad et al., 2022).

Other studies indicate that inadequate planning and financial mismanagement among producers result in inefficient delivery management and reduced productivity levels, causing delayed and rushed orders, elevated rejection rates, and increased production costs (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019; Acquah, 2013). In Ghana, producers and traders are reluctant to prioritize prudent investment decisions, overlooking critical elements such as equipment, machinery, new designs, and accounting systems that could enhance overall production efficiency (Osei et al., 2011). Another significant challenge lies in poor organization and direction within the industry (Ferreira et al., 2019). The Ford Foundation (2005) identified that in Ghana, donor organizations, NGOs, government agencies, and private sector entities, despite providing support to the craft industry, lack coordination, leading to disjointed efforts and activities that impact the overall trajectory of the tourism craft industry.

Seasonal fluctuations further contribute to declining markets during the off-season, affecting the demand from buyers and tourists (Afrifah & Mensah, 2023; Dalal et al. 2024; Zhao, 2015). Another critical constraint is the

scarcity of raw materials, inconsistent supply, and difficulties in obtaining resources for production, leading to an increase in the cost of conducting business. For instance, in the northern circuit of Tanzania, women face challenges in obtaining clay for crafting, compelling them to undertake long journeys to fetch raw materials (Makyao 2013). This shortage of resources consumes the production time of rural craft producers in Ghana as they grapple with the collection of raw materials (Auwah, 2011; Mithelman, 2019). These multifaceted challenges collectively impede the growth and sustainability of tourism-related handicraft trade, consequently affecting the tourism industry in developing nations.

Theoretical Perspectives

To understand the contribution to livelihoods and barriers to tourism craft trade sustainability, a Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) was utilized in this study. The SLF is a comprehensive approach for understanding and analyzing the various factors that influence people's livelihoods (Serrat, 2017). It considers multiple dimensions, including social, economic, human, natural, and physical capital, and is used as a comprehensive approach to assess how different forms of economic activity, such as tourism, contribute to the well-being of the poor (DFID, 1999; Serrat, 2017). The SLF recognizes that poverty is not solely an issue of income, but is also influenced by social, human, natural, and financial capital. It considers how individuals and households' access and utilize these different forms of capital to improve their well-being and overcome poverty (Scoones 2000). The Sustainable Livelihood Framework introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding the intricate relationship between socioeconomic and ecological factors in sustainable development. Chambers and Conway (1992) further advanced this framework by emphasizing that livelihoods comprise capabilities, assets, and activities that are essential for a means of living. Sustainability involves the ability to withstand stress and shocks, enhance capabilities, and provide opportunities for future generations, while contributing to net benefits at the local and global levels (Morse et al., 2009). In the context of handicraft trading, the SLF provides a lens through which to analyze the factors influencing informal traders' livelihoods of informal traders (Mmopelwa & Mackenzie, 2019). The three categories of assets defined by Chambers and Conway (1992)—investments, stores, resources, and claims—offer a nuanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals engaged in handicraft sales.

Investments:

- **Human Investments:** Health, skills, and education are crucial for informal traders. This involves how human investments are used in craft trade to contribute to the sustainability of livelihoods.

- **Individual Productive Assets:** This includes equipment, spaces/shops, and land. Access to such assets influences the viability of handicraft-trading businesses.
- **Collective Assets:** Soil, water, and raw materials play a role in sustaining the handicraft industry. Understanding collective assets is integral to assessing the overall trade sustainability.

Stores and Resources:

- **Tangible assets:** Involve tangible assets such as craft products, jewelry, and woven textiles to provide value for informal traders.
- **Finance/Money:** Examining financial aspects, including savings and access to capital, will contribute to understanding the economic sustainability of handicraft trading businesses.

Claims:

- **Obligatory Requests:** Analyzing demands and appeals for resources or assistance made by traders during periods of shock or recess will provide insights into the coping mechanisms within handicraft trade.

In the context of the study on the tourism handicraft trade and its relationship with the livelihoods of traders in Ghana, the application of the SLF provides room for examining how these groups access and use various forms of capital, navigate the external context, interact with institutions, and employ different livelihood strategies (Benson, 2014; Serrat, 2017). The goal is to identify the factors that contribute to the sustainability of their livelihoods and those that pose challenges to their wellbeing. This study assesses the role of the handicraft sector within the tourism industry in Ghana in providing sustainable livelihoods for marginalized groups, such as artisans, handicraft producers, and petty business traders. Using the SLF, this study can also explore the interplay of assets, context, institutions, and livelihood strategies in shaping the outcomes for these groups. This framework allows for a nuanced analysis that goes beyond income considerations and provides a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by informal craft traders in the context of livelihood sustenance/poverty alleviation (Mmopelwa & Mackenzie, 2019; Serrat, 2017). In copiously applying the SLF, the findings of this study are expected to contribute valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to enhance the sustainability of livelihoods in Ghana's tourism handicraft trade.

Moreover, this study draws on the Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) concept to provide a strong basis for the analysis of study outcomes. PPT has emerged as a practical avenue for fostering inclusive participation and net benefits for impoverished communities engaged in tourism activities (Scheyvens, 2017; Wen et al., 2021). Small-scale craft

entrepreneurs and craft villages have gained significance within this paradigm, offering a nuanced perspective that is often overshadowed by the predominant focus on the social, economic, and physical impacts of tourism. Unlike the development of tourism enclaves, which can marginalize local entrepreneurs, PPT emphasizes fostering linkages between small tourism businesses, such as handicraft trade, and impoverished individuals (Kiptoo, 2023; Segbefia, 2009). This approach, articulated by the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership (PPTP), seeks to enhance tourism's contribution to poverty reduction by ensuring economic benefits, capacity building, and cashless benefits, fostering networking and participation (Atkinson, 2016). By unlocking opportunities for poor participants in the handicraft business, Pro-Poor Tourism has become a catalyst for poverty reduction, improved livelihood, economic security, and sustainable development. It empowers craftsmen and women, enabling them to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and adapt to the changing dynamics of life, ultimately positioning handicraft trade as a vital component of regional development and an immediate source of alternative employment and income for rural communities (Kiptoo, 2023; Richard, 2007).

Fusing the concept of Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) provides a comprehensive lens for understanding and addressing the challenges impeding the sustainability of informal tourism craft trade businesses in Ghana. PPT emphasizes creating increased net benefits for people whose self-reported incomes are in the lowest-income bracket through tourism activities, aligning with the SLF's focus on enhancing livelihoods. The SLF, with its emphasis on economic, social, and environmental dimensions, is a fitting framework for analyzing the intricate challenges faced by informal traders in the tourism craft sector. In Ghana, these challenges are multi-faceted. Poor planning and financial mismanagement among producers, as identified in the literature (Segbefia, 2009), resonates with the economic capital component of the SLF. The reluctance to prioritize prudent investment decisions aligns with the need to enhance the financial assets within the SLF. Poor organization and coordination among stakeholders, documented in the literature (Ford Foundation, 2005), indicate institutional and social capital challenges within the SLF. The lack of networking among producers, driven by concerns about design plagiarism, hinders collaborative efforts, reflecting a deficit in social capital. Sustainable product and design development challenges, coupled with the absence of protection for new designs, underscore the need to foster human capital and innovative strategies within SLF. Limited access to comprehensive craft training institutions (Awuah, 2011) corresponds to the gaps in human capital development in the SLF. Dwindling marketing opportunities and limited financing (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019; Segbefia, 2009) are intertwined challenges

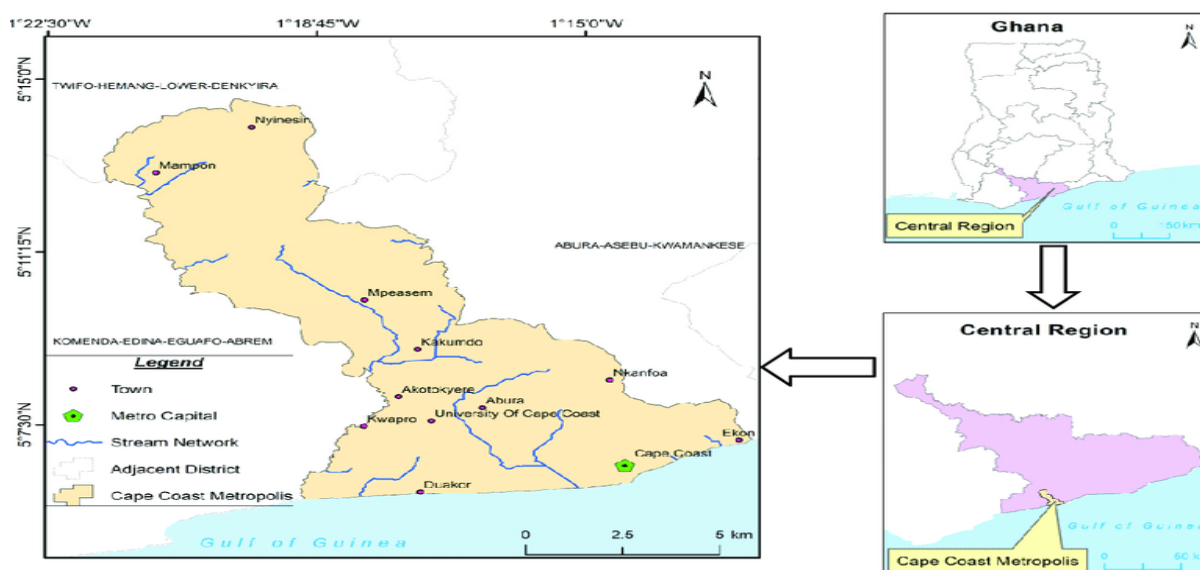


Figure 1: Map of the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area

Source: SY Danso

that affect economic and financial assets within the SLF. The constraints on obtaining raw materials align with the environmental capital challenges, which impact the availability of resources for sustainable livelihoods. In summary, integrating the Pro-Poor Tourism concept with a Sustainable Livelihood Framework illuminates the interconnected challenges faced by informal tourism craft trade businesses in Ghana. The literature underscores the need for a holistic approach that addresses economic, social, and institutional dimensions to promote sustainable livelihoods in this sector.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory approach, employing a holistic single-case study design to examine the specifics of the contributions and constraints affecting the sustainability of tourism craft trade. This design is underpinned by a thorough qualitative approach that emphasizes narrative and phenomenological descriptions. While themes are recognized as potentially important, their role is secondary to gaining a deep understanding of the case under study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Emphasizing holism, this study proposes understanding the phenomenon as an interconnected whole, allowing for interplay and connections among the variables or responses of participants. This study uses unstructured in-depth interviews to explore this phenomenon. Following Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2017) and Scholz and Tietje (2002), an informal synthesis process based on narratives with direct speech was used to mark, present, and support the study outcomes. This approach is appropriate for this study, as it is grounded in the recognition of the significance of holistic understanding and insights derived

from traders’ real-life experiences with tourism handicraft trade as a daily activity (Alvesson et al., 2022; Yin, 2003).

Study Region

The research area is the Cape Coast Metropolis, with a focus on tourism craft traders, offering a unique and compelling context for studying the challenges and opportunities within handicraft trade (Figure 1). Situated within the Central Region of Ghana, Cape Coast is renowned as the historical hub of Ghana's tourism, notably housing the Cape Coast Slave Castle. The local population, primarily composed of fishermen and petty traders, relies heavily on tourism-related activities, with informal craft tourism serving as a vital source of livelihood for many residents. The research participants were individuals who operated as petty and economically marginalized tourism handicraft traders. These individuals rely on selling handmade craft as their primary source of livelihood. Their economic situation is often precarious and they typically inhabit lower socioeconomic ladder rungs. Their livelihoods are intricately tied to the tourism industry as they depend heavily on purchases made by tourists. This is due to the presence of Cape Coast Slave Castle and the adjoining Elmina Castle, which attracts a significant influx of international tourists, particularly during peak seasons, fostering a vibrant market for tourist artifacts. This dynamic interplay between historical significance, cultural heritage, and economic activity further makes Cape Coast an ideal case study for examining the complexities of handicraft tourism trade and its socioeconomic impacts on local communities. More notably, reliance on tourism makes these traders highly vulnerable to fluctuations in

tourist numbers, economic downturns, or other external factors affecting the tourism sector. However, these traders typically work tirelessly to sustain their livelihoods and often operate seven days a week throughout the year. Their commitment to their craft and resilience in the face of economic challenges highlight the importance of understanding and supporting economically vulnerable communities through research, policy intervention, and collaborations.

Instrument and Data Collection

The interview technique was applied using a qualitative research approach, and data were obtained using an in-depth interview form. This interview technique is preferred to obtain in-depth information about the realities to be investigated and reveal the challenges that impact the sustainable contribution of tourism craft to livelihoods. Essentially, an in-depth interview (IDI) was preferred because it provides flexibility to the researcher to ask new questions, change the order of questions, and skip some questions according to the course of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Alvesson et al., 2022). The interview guide was set up in three (3) main parts of 15 open-ended questions. Part A focuses on the benefits and contributions of tourism handicrafts to traders' livelihoods. It consists of four-related questions asked including: Can you describe how your involvement in tourism handicraft trade has impacted your livelihood and economic well-being? How does the income generated from selling handicrafts contribute to meeting your basic needs, such as food, shelter, and education for your family? How has participation in tourism handicraft trade influenced your sense of identity, cultural preservation, and connection to your community's heritage? From your perspective, what are the long-term benefits and opportunities offered by tourism handicrafts for both individual traders and the broader community, particularly in terms of economic development and empowerment? Part B is on constraints affecting the tourism handicraft trade business and is made of five-related questions such as; Can you describe some of the main challenges you face as a tourism craft trader in Cape Coast? How do you perceive the impact of competition from mass-produced souvenirs on your business? What obstacles do you encounter when accessing financing or resources to support craft trade activities? Could you discuss any difficulties you face in maintaining the authenticity and cultural integrity of your craft while meeting tourist demands? How do you navigate issues related to market access, transportation, and infrastructure when selling your crafts to tourists visiting Cape Coast? The final PART C contained six questions that elicited the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, educational level, marital status, years of business, and average monthly sales. The research instrument was created from the literature, particularly Benson (2014), Chok et al. (2007), Croes (2013), Makyaoy (2013), Nyawo and Mubangizi

(2015), Osei et al. (2011), Owusu-Mintah (2013) and Segbefia (2009)

A pre-test of the instrument was then conducted on seven craft traders at Elmina Castle on 18th of March 2017 to test the correctness and reliability of the instrument, after which the opinions of one faculty member of the University of Cape Coast in the field were taken. The interview instrument was then modified in terms of wording and approved for used in this research. Before this, an official letter explaining the main objective of the study was used to seek consent from 25 purposively selected participants, 22 of whom consented to participate in the study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted between April 14, 2017, and May 2, 2017, at the participants' business operation units. Permission was sought from craft traders to use a voice recorder to digitally record the interviews to prevent data loss. This was allowed. Subsequently, 22 interviews were conducted, each lasting 20-30 minutes on average. The interviews were conducted in three languages (Fante, Twi, and English), based on the preferences of the participants. The interviews were conducted by two research assistant who were Master's (MPhil) in Tourism Management students at the University of Cape Coast who helped in acquiring ethically sound and quality data for the study.

To further ensure validity and reliability of the study, particularly with the interviews and the results, the responses provided by the interviewees were repeated by the interviewer to the interviewees to confirm or modify their responses. This helped ensure that the interviewees understood the issues very well, and that their responses were not misrepresented.

Data Analysis

This study employed content analysis to fulfil various objectives. The anonymity of the interviewees was preserved using coded identities (e.g., "TRADER1, TRADER2"), ensuring that ethical considerations were met. This methodology facilitated a systematic exploration of the qualitative data derived from recorded interviews, in which dimension/theme codes were generated within a predetermined framework of questions. By leveraging content analysis techniques (Neuendorf, 2017; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), this approach supports the identification of patterns and meanings within transcribed textual data by comparing similar texts and assigning relevant codes. Participant responses were then organized under textual dimensions/theme codes, followed by content grouping to enhance the interpretive depth of the study. To uphold the credibility and reliability of the data and findings, key direct quotations from craft traders' responses were incorporated into the report (Neuendorf, 2017). Consequently, the data analyzed through content analysis were presented in an organized and interpreted format based on the verbatim responses of the participants. The use of this method facilitates a thorough analysis, elevating the rigor and interpretative quality of the study.

4. Findings

The data presented in Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic and business characteristics of the surveyed population. In terms of gender distribution, the majority (77.3%) of respondents were male, while females constituted a smaller proportion (22.7 %). This gender imbalance may have implications for market targeting and product/service development, because understanding the preferences and needs of both genders is crucial for effective business strategies. Analysis of the age distribution revealed that the highest percentage fell within the 30-39 age range, accounting for 45.5% of the respondents. The 20-29 age group followed up at 27.3%, and the 40-49 age range constituted 22.7%. In particular, there was a small percentage (4.5%) in which age information was undisclosed. This age distribution suggests that the target audience for the surveyed business may primarily consist of individuals in their prime working years, and efforts to cater to the needs and preferences of this demographic may yield positive results.

Examining the level of education among the respondents, the majority (50%) had completed secondary education, whereas 31.8% had a basic level of education. This educational distribution underscores the importance of tailoring communication and intervention approaches to suit various educational backgrounds. Furthermore, 13.6% had tertiary education, necessitating targeted strategies to engage this group effectively in the case of any intervention. The results also showed that more married (59%) were involved in the study compared with singles. Data on monthly sales and business experience provide additional layers for nuanced insights and strategic decision making (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic profiles

Characteristics	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Male	17	77.3
Female	5	22.7
Age		
20-29	6	27.3
30-39	10	45.5
40-49	5	22.7
Undisclosed	1	4.5
Level of Education		
No education	1	4.5
Basic Level	7	31.8
Secondary Level	11	50.0
Tertiary Level	3	13.5
Marital Status		
Married	13	59.0
Single	9	41.0
Monthly Sales		
500 – 1,000	12	54.5
1, 100 – 2, 000	4	18.2
Above 2000	2	9.1
Undisclosed	4	18.2
Year in Business		
1 – 5	6	27.3
6 – 10	9	40.9
11 – 15	7	31.8

Source: Author

Contribution of the Tourism Handicraft Trade to Livelihoods

The interplay between tourism handicraft trade and livelihoods is shown in this exploratory study, unravelling its socio-economic import. Exploring craft traders' lived experiences in this business, this study uncovered the role of handicraft trade in fostering sustainable income, education, business self-sustenance, and beneficial social networks.

• *Source of income and Life support*

The interviews reveal the basic but crucial role played by handicraft trade in upholding traders' livelihoods. This study highlights the widespread recognition of the economic benefits and contributions of this trade. The narratives shared by diverse traders paint a vivid picture of a resilient woman providing for her family to a determined young man attaining some level of financial autonomy. These stories underscore the pivotal significance of handicraft trade as the foremost source of sustenance for marginalized economic groups. Among the array of accounts and anecdotes, one prominent stands out: the response of a trader who intimates:

This business I am doing is the only thing I am living on. It has truly been the only source of money for me and my family. We are five (5). My three children, myself and their father. I use some of the money I make here to feed the family, some for rent and some to support my husband in his quest to farm and help supplement what I bring home from this work. I don't want to lie about this, this business has truly helped and still helping me and my family to survive. That is why in the off seasons we get food to eat because I save during the peak seasons (TRADER 5).

Another respondent also expressed the following:

This business has made me live a good life because I make about Ghc2500 in a month when tourists come. I take care of my sister and send money back to my mum in Kumasi. After secondary school, I could not continue my education so I resorted to this business. My sister gave me some little money and I started. Right now, I have everything that I want, and rent my own apartment when I live. I look after my sister and take care of my mum. Yeah, so this is the only thing I do for a living and it is a good business (TRADER 16).

A further response indicates that:

It's a working business that provides help in a lot of ways especially when it comes to taking care of the home, sometimes my husband does not bring much, not at all. So, the business helps to cushion us up. It saved us so many times. Going to the market, buy food and settle some basic costs here and there. It truly helps, I can't lie about it, although not in the best way I want it (TRADER 2)

• *Investment in Education*

The handicraft business provided traders with the ability to invest in education for themselves and for their children. The passage features the accounts of individuals and families who obtained education or acquired the same education for their children through profits. Parents

expressed the importance of using their earnings to provide quality education for their children, indicating a broader perspective on securing a better future through learning through this trade. One participant profoundly expressed:

I am a product of this business. I am a graduate of UCC (University of Cape Coast) and this has been the business which has taken me throughout my studies at the senior high school and the university. I used to help my mum as we sold these products and from it we obtained life. It has made me to become who I am today. I am a teacher and still helping my mum to continue to do this business. I am a product of this my friends (TRADER, 20).



Figure 2: A craft business set up

Source: Author

For a mother in this business, education is the best thing she can provide to her children in this era. Hence, she used the little money she had made to send her children to school. She stated that:

I used my money to send my children to school. The money I made here; I use it on my kids. Because the best I can give to my children is education in these times. If I am a mother and I don't send my children to school with the money I make then what future am I creating for them? So, I use my profits to educate my kids by paying school fees and as well buy books, and bags and sew proper uniforms for my children to attend school. They will become better people tomorrow (TRADER 9).

Another mother also expressed that:

Tourism handicrafts have been a lifeline for me. The influx of tourists has allowed me to showcase and sell my traditional Kente fabrics. This business has not only provided financial stability but also helped send my kids to school, provide for them adequately as I can and helps to preserve our rich cultural heritage (TRADER 15).

- **Reinvestment and Business development**

Traders consistently mention the practice of reinvesting (restocking) their profits back into handicrafts and other businesses. This theme highlights a level of self-sustainability in handicraft trade, with traders using their earnings to expand and improve their enterprises. Examples include graduate savings to build a home and

establish a musical studio solely based on the proceeds of the handicraft business.

There is no other means by which I expand and restock these shops aside the sales I make. Because of this, I plough some of the money back into the development and growth of the business. I have saved hugely and I can now tell you that, I am using the money I make to build a home for myself. I am also having a musical studio which is under construction. I am doing all this just from the money I make from this handicraft business (TRADER 2)

Another respondent expressed the following:

We face big problems with a lack of external financial support, so me, I rely on my little profits from the business here to reinvest in it. This cycle of reinvestment has enhanced the development and growth of this my enterprise. So yeah, the business keeps sustaining us and itself (TRADER 6).

A trader also articulated that:

We suffer in the off-seasons. I must say, it is the money I generate from the business that helps me to stay in business. I reinvest it in it all the time and this help to sustain the business. So during off-season, you do not sell much so it difficult to feed and reinvest at the same time. (TRADER 4)

These results highlight the pivotal role of handicraft businesses in fostering economic self-sufficiency for individuals facing limited financial resources in the region.



Figure 3: A growing tourism handicraft business

Source: Author

- **Beneficial social networks and Cultural exchanges**

Discussions with participants also showed how handicraft trade facilitates the formation of social networks and cultural exchanges. Traders interact with a diverse range of people, including international travellers and domestic visitors. The positive impact of these interactions is evident as traders establish relationships with customers, leading to repeat businesses. Additionally, there are instances in which forming social networks through handicraft trade opens opportunities for individuals to travel abroad for better prospects. One trader narrated:

It helps me to meet new people from different places of the world. Some take away boredom as they crack jokes for me. I form relationships with people and anytime they come around, they come here to buy from me. The world is made

up of different people who come around here to visit this historic castle. As they come here, they talk to us, they buy from us. They tell us how beautiful our cultural artefacts are and this sounds good to us. It makes me happy (TRADER, 15).

Accounts also indicate how others form social networks, leading them to travel outside the country. A 29years old man narrated as follows:

I have been working here with a lady, now she is outside Ghana. As we are here and the foreigners come, with form a network with them. And this was lucky to see a white man who wanted to take her away for greener pastures. That is where she sells (pointing to the spot). And now she is in Australia all because of this business. So when tourists come, they associate with us and we form a network with them and out that positive things happen (TRADER 5)



Figure 4: A tourist looking through artefacts

Source: Author

A trader further professed that:

There was a young man here who had his entrepreneurial cut up with an adventurous Canadian tourist. She was absorbed with the unique craftsmanship, so she formed a connection with the craftsman, and a friendship bloomed. Through their conversation over time, the Canadian buyer extended an unexpected offer – an invitation to Canada. This unexpected action took the young man from this same market here at the castle of Cape Coast to Canada. I think that their friendship not only enriched the craftsman life but also joined two continents through this craft trade (TRADER 11).

Challenges that impact the Sustainability of Tourism Handicraft Businesses

The sustainability of informal tourism handicraft businesses is interlaced with challenges stemming from economic dynamics and sociocultural occurrences. This study identifies the diverse constraints that directly impact the viability and sustainability of the tourism handicraft trade and its contribution to livelihoods in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

- *Lack of funding support (Financial constraints)*

Overall, the results indicate the pervasive financial difficulties handicraft traders face. A lack of financial resources or funding options is a significant hindrance to

the smooth running, expansion, and sustainability of these businesses. Traders emphasize the struggle to generate enough revenue to fund their inputs or product purchases, and the lack of government assistance in this area further exacerbates their situation. One respondent lamented the following:

Now it is hard for me to get enough money to buy more products and expand my business. No help from anywhere. Government will not help us, even if they do, we cannot pay the interest. This our work is good but to get enough for my family, children and for the business is difficult. So you can only reinvest little which is not enough at all. So, there is no money and is affecting our business. Government should help us (TRADER 11).

Another further expressed this sentiment:

"Funding and finding options are our biggest problems in the business. I wish that we could get some basic loan scheme for us but here we are empty. We keep trying, but if nothing is done about our struggle to obtain mere loans that we can at least work with and pay back, hmm, then we may just fold up. Because, due to the seasonal nature we cannot depend on only what we sell here to invest in the business. As for the business, if we get the basic funding, it can work paa but we are not getting it. We need help (TRADER 5).

Another respondent also reiterated that:

We do not get support in terms of funds, loan schemes or some organised financial help. For me, that is the most difficult thing hurting our businesses, we all need financial help. I could sell different items here and even at home, people will come and buy, but because I do not have enough funding, everything is limited for me. I hope the government or the Assembly come to help us in a way (TRADER, 17)

The interview revealed a desperate plea for financial support, underscoring the harsh reality faced by many handicraft traders.

- *Rising cost of doing Business*

A critical barrier to the sustainability of handicraft businesses is the rising cost of doing business, manifested in the rising cost of raw materials and products as well as hikes in transportation charges, which makes restocking very difficult and greatly affects their transactions and the petty profits they make. A male trader who had been doing this business for the past 15 years said the following:

This business has been good to me, I cannot lie about it. In the year 2006/2007 the cost of products that I sell here are cheaper. Now the products are expensive and it is reducing the profit margins for me. As you know, Ghana has changed, and with politics and the change of government (2009 – 2016), the cost of things is expensive including our products. That is why now their products are very costly (TRADER 11).

Another trader lamented that:

Getting these goods most at times is very expensive. All the travelling involved comes with money. When I want to buy these beads I have to travel to Accra or Kumasi myself. This comes with the huge cost of transportation not only for me but the goods. So by the time I bring the goods, the cost involved

will be high. Sometimes it borders me a little but I cannot stop doing my business (TRADER 1).

Moreover, another respondent expressed that:

Almost all our products are from outside Ghana with only few that we purchase Ghana. We buy products from Burkina Faso, Kenya and Mali. That is why our products are sometimes very expensive due to taxes. Import and taxes are very high and it affects our pricing and even profit margin. Government should have looked at us and do something but these are not happening. Small businesses like ours in this country suffer a lot. They should may arrangement to help us, maybe small low interest loans could have been helpful. Especially coming off from the off-season, we need help to active in business (TRADER 21).

- *Seasonality of the Tourism trade*

The seasonal nature of international tourist flow in Ghana has emerged as a critical factor that influences the success of handicraft businesses. Traders note the peak seasons (May–July and November–January) as periods of increased sales, whereas off-seasons result in significantly reduced income. The testimonies of both male and female traders emphasize the financial instability caused by the fluctuating demand for their products, with adverse effects on business sustainability.

Tourists do not come all the time, when the season is over, I don't normally sell enough because people do not come to buy. In the peak seasons, I get a lot of money, sometimes I make up to about Ghc2000 a month in the peak seasons, but in the off-season sometimes a week I don't even sell up to Ghc50. In the off-season, if you are not careful you will spend all your money and live with nothing and so I save a lot of money in the peak season to cater for myself and the business in the off-seasons. The seasonal nature of tourist inflow is seriously affecting the business. They should bring back the Panafest at least that will help us (TRADER 14).

Another trader narrated that:

This our business is not stable at all. Right now, you can see tourists around and some are coming to buy for us. But see, when they are gone sometimes a whole week, I don't even sell a penny of a thing. I will just come and sit here from morning to evening and go home empty-handed. This business helps in the tourist season a lot, hmmm, but during the off-season, it is not encouraging. So, when you want to do this business, you consider that, so I am used to it but the seasonal nature affects the business on a more serious note (TRADER 13).

A further response goes this way:

Seeing all the places, getting these goods from those places is really expensive and stressful most of times but you cannot stop because you have to survive and keep going. It is even more difficult during the off seasons when tourists do not come much. And you know, we do not even get the support as small businesses but arrh it is well (TRADER 12).

5. Discussion

The findings from the interviews with handicraft traders largely resonate with the literature, providing an understanding of the contributions and challenges faced by individuals engaged in handicraft tourism trade. The craft is not lucrative, as the results suggest; yet, it remains a vital source of income and sustenance for many artisans. Despite modest financial returns, artisans recognize the significance of trade in facilitating educational investments and reinvestment in their businesses, thereby perpetuating a cycle of economic activity within their communities (Rogerson, 2013). Moreover, the interviews underscored the social and cultural dimensions of handicraft tourism trade. The results highlight how engagement in this trade fosters social interactions and cultural exchanges, not only among artisans but also with tourists and other stakeholders (Ferreira et al., 2019; Wong & Fernandini, 2011). These interactions enrich the cultural fabric of communities and contribute to the promotion of the local heritage and traditions. This generally reflects the fact that handicrafts contribute significantly to social and cultural enrichment, income generation, community empowerment, and poverty reduction (Bogale & Tiruneh, 2019).

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), which serves as the theoretical foundation for this study, emphasizes the multidimensional nature of livelihoods, including social, economic, human, natural, and physical capital which can be enhanced by various economic activities including tourism craft trade (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Thus, the consistent expression of the significance of handicraft trade in sustaining livelihoods among interviewees confirms the SLF's emphasis on various forms of capital. Human investments, such as self-support and education, where income is generated, show how vital these areas are for informal traders. This is highlighted by traders' narratives on the role of the handicraft business in supporting their families and

Table 2: Summary of Key themes from the qualitative data

Main Dimension	Key Themes	Number of indicative participants
Contributions to Livelihoods	Source of Income and Life support	22
	Investment in Education	16
	Reinvestment and Business Development	15
	Beneficial social networks and cultural exchanges	9
Challenges Encountered	Lack of Funding support (Financial constraints)	22
	Rising cost of doing business	16
	Seasonality of Tourism trade	22

Source: Author

education (Mmopelwa & Mackenzie, 2019), highlighting the transformative role of handicraft trade in fostering educational opportunities, which aligns with the broader perspective of securing a better future through learning and education (SDG 4). Moreover, tangible assets including craft products and financial resources play a critical role in the sustainability of handicraft trading. The traders' emphasis on reinvesting their profits back into the business echoes the SLF's concept of stores and resources, demonstrating how tangible assets such as financial resources contribute to trade viability (Chambers & Conway, 1992). This also underscores some level of self-sustainability of handicraft trade and demonstrates the potential for economic self-sufficiency among traders in this economic activity if well supported. Furthermore, the claims aspect of the SLF is reflected in traders' necessary requests/pleas for financial support during periods of financial stress, underscoring the coping mechanisms within handicraft trade that need to be attended to by stakeholders (Serrat, 2017).

The findings of the study also demonstrated in the PPT principles, showing how informal handicraft trade among local people can serve as a catalyst for poverty reduction, improved livelihoods, and sustainable development, empowering craftsmen and women to navigate challenges and seize opportunities if well supported (Atkinson, 2016; Croes, 2013). Moreover, handicraft trade serves as a platform for forming social networks, engaging in cultural exchanges, and spilling opportunities. Traders interact with diverse individuals, both locally and internationally, which helps foster relationships and generate opportunities that extend beyond business transactions in some cases, as also revealed in the study, in the area of travel opportunities for some traders. The interview discussions illustrate the potential of tourism handicraft trade to enrich culture, provide economic opportunities, and contribute substantially to income generation. The accounts of traders using their earnings to fund education for themselves and their children resonate with the positive impact of tourism handicraft businesses as a poverty alleviation strategy and empowerment of marginalized individuals (Medina-Muñoz et al., 2016; Chok et al., 2007). The findings emphasize how handicraft trade becomes a means for economic self-sufficiency and a main source of employment for individuals facing limited financial resources in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

The results suggest that the sustainability of this livelihood option and its associated benefits is limited and threatened by a lack of financial/funding support to these traders, raising the cost of doing business, which involves difficulty in restocking products when they are out of goods for sale. This echoes the literature on inadequate finances for informal craft traders in developing countries, such as Ghana (Spillan & King, 2017). These limited financial resources and capacities constrain traders' ability to invest in their businesses, thereby hindering potential growth and innovation (Kusi et al., 2015). Without adequate capital,

artisans may struggle to purchase the raw materials, tools, and equipment necessary for production, leading to stagnation in product quality and diversity. This can also exacerbate the vulnerability of traders' livelihoods. Inadequate income from craft sales may force artisans to return to relying on precarious livelihood strategies such as engaging in multiple jobs or accepting exploitative terms from intermediaries (Wang & Tziamalis, 2023). This perpetuates the cycle of economic insecurity and undermines the potential for sustainable livelihood development.

This financial constraint also parallels the SLF's economic capital dimension, further emphasizing the role of financial resources in maintaining and expanding livelihoods. Traders find it difficult to generate sufficient revenue to fund inputs or product purchases, particularly during the off-season, accentuating the need for external support from the government. The rising cost of doing business, particularly the increased cost of raw materials, products, and transportation, further compounded the financial challenges faced by these handicraft businesses, mirroring the literature on the challenges faced by craft traders in obtaining raw materials and dealing with financial constraints (Makyao, 2013). Insufficient funds hinder their capacity to expand their small businesses and maintain their livelihoods, whereas increased costs create economic challenges that affect their economic capital within the SLF. Traders struggle to cope with these increased costs, underscoring the delicate balance required to sustain economic activity.

Finally, seasonal fluctuations exacerbate economic vulnerabilities, as off-seasons lead to reduced incomes. The seasonality of tourism readily impacts the tourism handicraft trade, since the most significant market is tourists. Seasonality directly impacts traders' economic stability, as their income relies heavily on tourist traffic during peak seasons. During off-seasons, reduced tourist numbers translate to diminished sales and lower incomes for traders, exacerbating economic vulnerabilities (Afrifah & Mensah, 2023; Zhao, 2015). This cyclicity can lead to financial strain and uncertainty, making it challenging for traders to meet their basic needs and sustain their businesses throughout the year (Zhao, 2015). Moreover, the seasonal nature of tourism exacerbates existing disparities and inequalities within communities, depending on handicraft trade. Those who rely solely on tourism-related income may face heightened financial hardship during off-peak periods exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities (Wang & Tziamalis, 2023). Additionally, the unpredictability of tourist flows can hinder long-term planning and investment in business, thereby limiting opportunities for growth and development.

The results demonstrate a desperate plea for financial support from traders, reflecting the ongoing struggle to obtain external financial support, and the limitations imposed by the seasonal nature of the business. This

finding mirrors the emphasis on seasonality's impact on tourism handicraft businesses. Traders' responses highlight the financial instability caused by fluctuating demand and the need for strategies to address off-season challenges (Osei et al., 2011). Addressing these financial constraints and providing consistent support, particularly during off-peak periods, are crucial for enhancing handicraft traders' economic and social resilience and ensuring the sustainability of their livelihoods.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

These findings significantly contribute to the literature by shedding light on the multifaceted role of handicraft tourism in sustaining livelihoods, fostering social interactions, and preserving cultural heritage. This study underscores the socioeconomic significance of tourism handicraft trade, particularly in supporting educational investments and fostering economic self-sufficiency among artisans. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), this study highlights the diverse forms of capital—economic, human, social, and cultural—involved in handicraft trade, emphasizing the need for holistic support mechanisms to sustain livelihoods. Moreover, this study aligns with the principles of poverty alleviation and sustainable development and illustrates how handicraft trade can serve as a catalyst for income generation, community empowerment, and cultural enrichment. Furthermore, this study highlights the pervasive challenges that handicraft traders face, particularly in accessing financial resources, coping with seasonal fluctuations, and navigating market dynamics. These findings have implications for policy and practice and emphasize the need for targeted interventions to address financial constraints, enhance market access, and promote resilience among handicraft traders. By elucidating the complex interplay between the economic, social, and physical factors that shape handicraft trade, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders seeking to support sustainable livelihoods and inclusive growth in tourism-dependent communities. To enhance the economic and social resilience of handicraft trade, it is imperative to establish a dedicated financial support mechanism such as low-interest loan schemes or grants to address the persistent issue of insufficient funds. Collaborative efforts involving the government (national and local), NGOs, and private sector should be explored to provide sustainable financial support for craft businesses. Additionally, initiatives that aim to mitigate the rising costs of doing business, including subsidies for raw materials and bulk purchasing arrangements, can alleviate traders' economic challenges. This could involve partnerships between traders and suppliers, or government interventions to stabilize costs. Moreover, developing strategies to diversify income sources during off-seasons, such as promoting local sales or facilitating online platforms, can buffer the impact of seasonal fluctuations and contribute to sustained economic wellbeing. Drawing from the

literature, these recommendations align with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, emphasizing a holistic approach to bolster economic capital and ensure the long-term viability of handicraft tourism businesses. Governments are urged to support the handicraft sector, foster entrepreneurship, and engage unemployed youth through incentives to develop handicraft trade, sustain livelihoods, and curb rural-urban migration, especially in Ghana.

Study Limitation: The limitations of this qualitative study lie primarily in its narrow focus on the experiences and perspectives of craft tourism traders on Cape Coast, Ghana. Although the findings provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by artisans in this specific context, they may not be generalizable to other regions or settings with different socioeconomic dynamics and tourism landscapes. Additionally, the study relied heavily on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies in interpretation. Besides, there may be possible inherent subjectivity in the interpretation of interviewee responses which can occur by means of subjective lens of the researcher. Moreover, this study primarily addresses the economic constraints faced by traders, overlooking other potential factors influencing the sustainability of handicraft trade, such as sociocultural dynamics, policy frameworks, and market trends. Further research incorporating a broader range of stakeholders and employing mixed-method approaches could offer an improved understanding of the complexities surrounding handicraft tourism trade, which could lead to more balanced interventions to support artisan livelihoods and promote sustainable development.

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INFO PAGE

Towards sustainable livelihoods: A study of the contributions and challenges in tourism handicraft trade in Ghana

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of tourism handicraft trade in Ghana, shedding light on the contributions and challenges faced by individuals engaged in this economic activity. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and Principles of Pro-Poor Tourism, this study investigates how tourism handicraft trade serves as a multidimensional source of livelihood, impacting social, economic, and physical capital. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study collected data from 22 tourism handicraft traders in Cape Coast, Ghana, through in-depth interviews. This study reveals the transformative role of handicraft trade in advancing economic and educational opportunities and underscores tangible assets and financial resources as pivotal for sustainability. By embracing Pro-Poor Tourism principles, handicraft trade has emerged as an essential means of poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, and sustainable development, fostering social networks and cultural exchanges. However, persistent financial challenges necessitate external support, especially during off-seasons, financial stress, and increased costs. The study concludes with an emphasis on consistent stakeholders' support, highlighting the need to navigate financial constraints and seasonal fluctuations to ensure the long-term sustainability of handicraft trade and livelihood support in the Cape Coast Metropolis and Ghana.

Keywords: *Sustaining livelihoods, Tourism, Handicraft trade, Pro-poor tourism, Ghana.*

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Collins Dodzi Dzitse:	<i>Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Project administration</i>	100%

Author statement: *Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article*

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