Craft production, development, and tourism: Evaluating the kente business in Kpetoe, Ghana

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Craft production, development, and tourism:
Evaluating the kente business in Kpetoe, Ghana

by

Taylor Mithelman

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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ABSTRACT

Kente weavers in Kpetoe are in a precarious position, operating as small business owners and artisans residing on the periphery of Ghana, both geographically and in craft production. The weavers have struggled to find economic stability as rural artisans in a globalized economy. Initiatives brought about by local and international organizations have been largely focused on increasing tourism as a form of economic development in the community. In this thesis, I focus on the planning and implementation of the ecotourism center built in Kpetoe in 2010 through a partnership between the Nature Conservation Research Center (NCRC), a Ghanaian NGO led by an American, and the Peace Corps. This ecotourism center was built to serve as a hub for visitors, the primary “tool” given to the community by NCRC to pursue an increased focus on tourism. Today, the ecotourism center sits unused and unable to fulfill NCRC’s goals for the space due to limited financial means and access within the community. My study of the ecotourism center reveals that the top-down nature of development persists even when “alternative” development strategies are employed, resulting in a failure to address key concerns of the population. This thesis seeks to understand the major challenges the community faces in the context of larger themes in development and Ghana. In evaluating the project of the ecotourism center I demonstrate ways that the model used by NCRC and Peace Corps failed to address certain challenges to kente weavers.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Kente weavers in Kpetoe are in a precarious position, operating as small business owners and artisans residing on the periphery of Ghana, both geographically and in craft production. The weavers have struggled to find economic stability as rural artisans in a globalized economy. Initiatives brought about by local and international organizations in an attempt to improve weavers’ prospects for economic success have been largely focused on tourism. These tourism centered plans emerged out of the international development industry’s emphasis on tourism as a vehicle for economic development. Versions of these programs were established with government and NGO partnerships in Ghana, intended to give communities the tools to be successful in their own tourism ventures. In this thesis, I focus on the planning and implementation of the ecotourism center built in Kpetoe in 2010 through a partnership between the Nature Conservation Research Center, a Ghanaian NGO led by an American, and the Peace Corps, which has operated in Ghana since 1961. This ecotourism center was built to serve as a hub for visitors, the primary “tool” given to the community by NCRC to pursue an increased focus on tourism.

My study of the ecotourism center reveals that the top-down nature of development that fails to address key concerns of the population persists even when “alternative” development strategies are employed. The planning and implementation of the ecotourism center in Kpetoe was presented as an equal partnership with the community, an extension of ecotourism planning taking place throughout the country by NCRC. In reality the ecotourism sits empty and unused, unable to fulfill the goals for the space due to limited financial means and access within the community of Kpetoe. Despite the fact that this ecotourism center has failed to deliver on the
promises of NCRC to boost tourism and subsequently sales, there has not been follow up or evaluation on this implemented plan on behalf of either Peace Corps or NCRC. This thesis seeks to understand the major challenges the community faces in the context of larger themes in development and Ghana. In evaluating the project of the ecotourism center I demonstrate ways that the model used by NCRC and Peace Corps failed to address certain challenges to kente weavers. Evaluation and discussion of past projects implemented in Kpetoe is the first step in creating more successful partnerships with the community in future projects, combatting the tendency for NGOs to reinvent the wheel when starting a project in a community. The process of recognizing mistakes, understanding what could have been improved in the past, and applying them to future plans leads to better-informed partnerships with the community.

**Kente Production in Ghana**

Kente cloth is a form of narrow strip weaving created on a horizontal frame treadle loom predominantly produced within the borders of Ghana (Dennis 2004). Kente is elevated in Ghanaian culture to a higher-status, more “artisanal” quality than other textiles produced in Ghana, such as the large batches of hand dyed batik or the factory produced wax-resist cloth, because it is hand-made, complex, and historically significant. Kente is hand-woven, creating intricate patterns through painstaking detail, a skill passed on from a master weaver to the next generation. Kente has played an important role in Ghanaian society in contributing to a royal or presidential image and subsequently remains as a significant symbol on a national and international scale (Ross & Adu-Agyem 2008). As the first president of the newly independent nation of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1957-1966) had to effectively unite splintered factions of loyalties under one government. Implementing systems of representations through exhibitions, documentaries, and display of regional forms of art endorsed as “national” culture assisted in
presenting a “vision of a homogeneous nation-state.” (Hess 2001). The Nkrumah government made an explicit effort to advance “‘traditional’ cultural practices, and advocacy of a national socialist culture that would discourage the advancement of regional ambitions.” (Hess 2001) Kente was one such craft; Nkrumah posed in kente for official photos used for elections or on the nation’s stamps. Nkrumah also wore kente for appearances in parliament sessions as well as U.N. meetings (Axelsson 2012).

Modern adaptations of the traditional form of weaving emerged over time as kente became a symbol for Ghana, West Africa, and even the African diaspora. Kente was formerly the cloth of the rich and powerful, used by chiefs and others in the community with authority (Dennis 2004). Now, kente is not limited to the small group of people it once was. While it is still an expensive textile to purchase and often reserved for special events, its uses have been expanded to fit “modern” stylings, worn as matching skirts and tops or wrapped around the leather thongs of sandals. Kente has also been made into purses, bow-ties, and single strips meant for easy purchasing by tourists.

Today, weavers in Kpetoe on the eastern border of Ghana produce kente as a primary form of income. Despite their significant investment in the business as well as attempts to increase business through tourism, weavers continue to struggle to make a steady living off of their craft. The low-profit margins and minimal tourism in recent years have left many weavers struggling to make ends meet, often taking on other part-time or temporary jobs. Ultimately, if solutions for struggling kente weavers are to be identified, understanding the unique circumstances in which production takes place is vital. Examining factors such as geopolitical position, conducting business in a country significantly shaped by development and the increased popularity of tourism shapes our grasp on the challenges weavers in Kpetoe face.
The handmade quality of kente is often perceived by visitors and Ghanaians alike to be reminiscent of simpler times, particularly kente produced with older, historically significant patterns with a ‘traditional’ aesthetic. Antrosio and Coloredo-Mansfeld (2015) discuss the false narrative of the low-risk, routine aspect of artisan work. Rather, their work with farmers and artisans in South America demonstrates that these groups of people are often enmeshed in risky ventures, participating in the capitalist market (Antrosio and Coloredo-Mansfeld 54). This interaction with the capitalist market includes a level of experimentation in risk in order to pursue potential rewards for their businesses. The kente business is not stagnant. Therefore, efforts to support weavers in their businesses should take into account the amount of experimenting they already do in the larger market. The weavers are already operating under entrepreneurial, risk-taking models with far less business tools available to them than western entrepreneurs do (i.e. online selling tools, fast and convenient shipping) leading to creative strategies. Partnerships with weavers should take into account their existing entrepreneurial business practices, working off of the basis of knowledge about the market the weavers have already developed. The current strategies implemented by NGOs like NCRC fail to acknowledge and utilize the business knowledge of the weavers.

The origin and development of kente is a contested history. The Asante and Ewe are two ethnic groups that currently reside within Ghana and Togo’s borders. The Ewe are spread across the Volta region in Eastern Ghana, spreading into Togo. The Asante live in south-central Ghana, with weaving business focused in the towns surrounding Kumasi. Both ethnic groups lay claim to the original development of kente cloth, each with a unique story about how it came into existence. This history remains entangled with narratives of a power imbalance between the two groups, in both politics and economics. Adler (1992, 41) identified that “Ewe history, which we
can only reconstruct from the records of outsiders, is scant. While the Ashanti ‘captured the limelight’ in the region, the Ewe were quietly settling in their villages, tucked away behind the impasse of the Volta River.” Today, kente production continues to center around these two groups based in the Bonwire village outside of Kumasi and the Agotime Traditional area outside Ho which includes the village of Kpetoe. Bonwire is a part of the successful Kumasi tourism industry which focuses heavily on “craft villages” while Kpetoe remains on the peripheral of kente tourism with its location off the beaten path of many tourism destinations in the country.

Throughout the rise of kente’s popularity as a symbol of the national culture and the diaspora, the bold patterns traditionally woven by Asante weavers were worn the most on the international stage (Hess 2001). Similarly, the Asante fame as great warriors against the British established the Kumasi area and the palace of the Asante King as major tourism destinations. The craft villages that surrounded Kumasi, supported by royalty for generations, was also a well-established destination for anyone interested in craft production in Ghana (Johnson 1979). By contrast, Ewe patterns were typically much more subdued and made up of intricately woven pictographs (Kraamer 2006). While these patterns continued to be produced for special occasions, the majority of production began to shift to brighter, geometric patterns that fit consumer trends in Ghana. The Ewe do not enjoy the same well-established tourism status that the Asante do with their location close to Togo and around an hour’s drive from the nearest major natural landmark. Their location on the peripheral of the country translates to a position on the peripheral of kente tourism in Ghana. The Asante and the Ewe have each engaged with kente production in their own unique ways, dependent on their position geographically and politically. These circumstances set the stage for interactions with development and tourism that can differ significantly despite the identical medium at play - kente production.
Nature Conservation Research Center and the Ecotourism Center

Nature Conservation Research Center (NCRC) is an NGO based in Ghana founded by an American. Alongside the Wildlife Division and Ghana Tourism Board, NCRC is a key stakeholder in the presence of ecotourism in planning for economic growth and conservation in Ghana (Eshun 2011, 141). Their Community Based Ecotourism plan received funding from USAID in 2000 to implement the first phase. This phase included implementing 14 ecotourism sites across Ghana that included natural, cultural, and historic sites. Phase I produced enough revenue to continue into Phase II of the program in 2006 with continued initial support from USAID. During Phase II, the Peace Corps volunteer living in Kpetoe began a partnership with NCRC with intentions of receiving guidance and funding from NCRC for an ecotourism center based in the village for the local kente weavers. After about a year of planning with a few weavers and community leaders, NCRC brought in a team of laborers to build the ecotourism center which opened in 2010.

The intention for the ecotourism space was to be used for display of kente products for sale as well as a museum space for visitors to learn about kente. The ecotourism center is built along the main road just a couple minutes drive from the center of the village. The building itself contains three rooms and an attached washroom. The first room is the largest and could hold seated group of around 20 visitors. A door off of the main room leads to the room used both as a store and as a museum. The room holds a large set of glass protected shelves meant for product, however it is currently empty. A series of framed photographs and printed summaries of the story of kente are hung around the entire room along with a display version of the kente loom. The third room is the smallest and sits behind the desk built in one corner of the main room. This space appears to be meant for storage or possibly an office but it is currently empty.
The ecotourism center opened in 2010 and remained open for an unspecified amount of time. During my visits to Kpetoe in 2014, 2015, and 2018 I never saw the ecotourism center open with the exception of the time I requested entry during my most recent visit. The key point of failure described by the weavers was an inability to carry the financial burden of maintaining product in the store while waiting for visitors to come by the items. An overall slowing of tourism for the village led to the eventual reclaiming of products by weavers to sell elsewhere. With the ecotourism center mostly empty there was no reason to open it on a daily basis and it eventually evolved into only being used for community meetings.

**Development and Tourism**

The ecotourism center was a plan put into action by NCRC with partnership with Peace Corps. These two international organizations are heavily influenced and shaped by larger trends in development and tourism. Their actions demonstrate ideas championed on a large scale through institutions like the World Bank, IMF and USAID. Development emerged as a major force in the post-WWII era, carrying capitalism and Western dominant ideas of modernity across the world through institutions like the IMF and the World Bank (Gardner & Lewis 2015, 12). These major international organizations continued to usher in decades of policy that shaped the global world we live in. Escobar (1995) describes development as a discourse in the way it transcends specific institutions and evolved into a way of thinking instilled in developing countries.

This pursuit of development was a process of “modernization” achieved through progressively industrializing a nation (Gardner & Lewis 2015, 12). The process of industrialization took on specific economic rules in the 80s & 90s as neoliberal theory dominated the policies of the World Bank and IMF, enforcing Structural Adjustment Programs on many
developing countries including Ghana (Sarris & Shams 1991). Structural Adjustment Programs were implemented in many African countries in the 1980s after countries asked for assistance from the World Bank and IMF to help stabilize and improve living conditions. The terms expressed in the Structural Adjustment Programs were set to be completed by debtor countries in order to be able to receive new loans or debt relief. From the perspective of the institutions like the IMF and World Bank, these programs would create efficient and successful market economies in developing countries by removing “over-bloated” public services, state interference and ownership, and corruption (Konadu-Agyemang 2001).

Structural Adjustment brought on massive waves of criticism as economies crumbled and people were left in poverty. This criticism resulted in a gradual shift in the approach of institutions like the World Bank. Eventually, this resulted in the Millenium Development Goals followed by the Sustainable Development Goals (Mutasa 2015). These goals have set a precedent for large scale development organization to consider factors outside economics when planning for development. While these goals reflect the complex, interconnected aspects of development issues, there continues to be criticism about the large scale nature of the goals, continued adherence to neoliberal economics, and the use of quantitative data to measure progress. Escobar (1995) emphasizes the inherent power imbalance in the discourse of development that has grown out of colonial structures and western-centric ideas. Transforming this discourse to account for non-western voices means changing the rules of development and making room for non-western methods of knowing (Escobar 1992).

A symptom of the large-scale, neoliberal development apparatus has been the proliferation of NGOs across countries like Ghana. The presence of many of these organizations emerged after the state was no longer able to carry out social services after structural adjustment.
Piot’s (2010) perspectives on post-Cold War Togo are used as an example of larger themes about West Africa. Among these is the proliferation of Pentecostal Christianity and shifting power structures in reaction to Structural Adjustment programs, the growing presence of NGOs, and new political leadership. In this transition, Piot notes the “transfer of the biopolitical to the NGOs and the human rights organizations” (17) and that the NGOs and international organizations are the “new sovereign” (135). Two major consequences of this transfer of power is the fact that their knowledge and work is rarely local with headquarters and ideology based in the West. The second is that these outsourced forms of control have replaced existing structures without adequate evaluation and feedback opportunities that existed in former structures.

Ferguson (1990) discusses the ways poverty has been reduced to a technical problem to be met with technical solutions through development. In this process of framing issues like poverty as purely technical, the issues are depoliticized, removed from the context that shapes these issues (Ferguson 1990, 256). NGOs have become the common vehicle for carrying out these technical solutions, supported by larger donors to carry out development ideas on the ground. Criticisms of NGOs point out the role they play in undermining the power of the state, complicit in the larger neo-liberal development plan. NGOs focus on welfare gives a “veneer of respectability” (Igoe and Kelsall 2005, 15) that legitimizes the neo-liberal development method without engaging with its flaws. Another danger of civil society driven primarily by NGOs is the tendency for one group to succeed at the expense of another (Igoe 2005, 117). This has been a common consequence of the proliferation of NGOs hand in hand with economic liberalization across Africa.

Other voices in the development discourse walk a line between traditional development economics and alternative forms of development. Economists such as Sen (1999) and Easterly
(2006) look for solutions that account for human factors that are rarely represented in GNP -- a major tool used in the evaluation of a nation’s progress. Sen (1999) presents a form of development that focuses on the concept of freedom, measuring development by whether or not individuals have access and control over their lives, choosing their own future. Part of this form of development can also be seen as eliminating sources of “unfreedom” which includes tyranny, lack of quality public resources, and poor economic opportunities (Sen 1999). Sen’s ideas about development as freedom utilize many of the same tools of development employed by large institutions but his call to put less emphasis on the role of the GNP in determining development is an important shift in development theory, particularly because it is coming from an economist.

Frediani (2010) gives an overview of Sen’s Capability Approach in the context of criticisms surrounding development in recent decades. At the core of Sen’s ideas is evaluating whether or not individuals have the ability to achieve things they value. Achieving these values can certainly be influenced by factors like income, but it is not the sole indicator. Agency is the key idea at the center of Sen’s ideas and this somewhat ambiguous goal allows social factors to be accounted for in evaluation. In comparison with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) popularized in the 80s, the Capability Approach seems rather similar. However, Frediani understands the SLF to be a more utilitarian form of Sen’s Capability Approach because it is based in concept of social capital and fails to address personal well-being. Frediani illuminates the many small differences between a multitude of development theories. The consensus for many contributors to development theory is that evaluating a country through statistics like GDP is simply inadequate but attempts to address this shortcoming have wide variations. For my own research, I find many ideas from economists and anthropologists related to development as complementary tools to be utilized in the process of understanding a localized issue. Striving for
one generalized plan or approach has clearly not been effective in the past, so in the process of understanding the development that took place in Kpetoe I will use a variety of lens that applies at the localized level.

One source of ideas for my research is Easterly’s (2006) focus on the value of localized, small scale methods of development as a productive counter to large scale development ideas of the Millenium Development Goals. The solution posed is to utilize the “searcher” skills often found among entrepreneurs or inventors rather than using the big picture planning that has been utilized across the globe since Bretton Woods. Easterly brings a realist perspective to the table that focuses on slowly chipping away at these issues at the local level rather than relying on top-down, large-scale initiatives. His inclusion of non-traditional development strategies that do not rely solely on donations often requires more involvement from the community. Easterly’s ideas attempt to utilize the strategies of the market for the benefit of development, a major departure from Escobar’s (1995) calls for a new discourse. However, repurposing market knowledge is much more feasible to do immediately under the current system.

Similarly to Easterly’s ideas about utilizing market knowledge, tourism has become a popular form of development aimed at producing economic gains for communities. Tourism as development aligns with neo-liberal ideas that encourage limited state-interventions and maximum economic growth because it primarily takes place through businesses or NGOs (West & Carrier 2004). Theoretically, tourism is a tool to be utilized in order to increase private investment, foreign cash flow, and local jobs to benefit the community (Carr et al. 2016). In reality, indigenous people are often put in a precarious situation when relying on tourism for

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1 Bretton Woods was the conference that took place prior to the end of World War II that established a global financial system backed by a new international organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The agreement also set up the World Bank and set the stage for the World Trade Organization (Bretton Woods Project 2019)
socio-economic development because ownership and control over the values, resources, and trajectory of the program are necessary in order to see benefits (Carr et al. 2016). Even if a community is able to gain power and control over resources, governance, and values of the tourism program, it is difficult to maintain in the long term (Carr et al. 2016) particularly because as assets in the community become more valuable, there is greater incentive for outside entities to acquire them. Even strong community collaboration that successfully kick-starts community investment becomes increasingly vulnerable in the face of well-financed outside organizations or businesses. There must be community wide buy-in to the long term ownership and goals if power, access, and control is to remain rooted in the community.

Communities across Ghana have latched on to this practice of turning a defining characteristic of the village into a tourism destination. The goal is that by highlighting and marking this characteristic, they will bring in tourism that will provide money to a variety of industries in the area (Silverman 2015). Some communities have developed these sites focused on heritage markers, others on art production or natural landmarks but most see very little return on investment when visitors only stay for a couple of hours (Silverman 2015, 122).

Tourism has existed in a variety of forms throughout history but the existence of ecotourism is much more recent. It emerged as an environmentally conscious alternative to mass tourism and subsequently has morphed to encompass several more ideals (Cobbinah 2015). Cobbinah’s (2015) review of the literature on ecotourism from the past several decades attempts to create a set of defining characteristics that can be used to identify ecotourism. However, this definition is significantly based upon the ideas stated by organizations when in reality many ecotourism ventures fall short of these characteristics. Cobbinah (2015, 182) defines these guiding principles of ecotourism to be: environmental conservation, cultural preservation,
community participation, economic benefits, empowerment of vulnerable groups. Cobbinah then compares his findings defining ecotourism with perceptions of ecotourism in a village near the Kakum conservation area in Ghana. His research demonstrated that only the principles of environmental conservation and economic benefits were central to locals’ ideas about ecotourism. The other three principles that are for the benefit of the community were not in practice and thus not seen as a part of ecotourism.

Echoing Cobbinah’s ideas about the gap between planning and practice, West and Carrier (2004) examine the inadequate attention for local issues despite messaging that emphasizes positive change for locals. In reality, the ecotourism programs typically focus more on generating profits and attracting more visitors (West & Carrier 2004). While tourism is often pitched as an excellent way to improve the local economy and maintain culture, Seales & Stein (2011) demonstrate that benefits are not always distributed throughout the community. Seales & Stein (2011) also note that “of each US$100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only around US$5 actually stays in a developing-country destination’s economy (20)” a major contradiction to the espoused benefit of attracting foreign capital.

The trendy aspects of environmentally responsible travel have led to commercial success for those working with conservation efforts or including various recycling initiatives. In Seales & Stein’s (2011) case study of Costa Rica, entrepreneurs using environmental education or initiatives in their business attract more customers and subsequent commercial success. However, aspects of community development in which entrepreneurs “employed local people, purchased supplies locally and patronized local hotels and lodges was not related to commercial success (20)” (Seales & Stein 2011). Benefits for locals then are at the mercy of entrepreneurs
because there is not an economic motivation to hire locals or support local business (Seales & Stein 2011).

Büscher et al. describe the way ecotourism is consistently branded and marketed on both a local and national scale as the “ecotourism script” (2017). This script is embraced as wholly positive for its free-market strategies that grow tourism while also increasing conservation, yet the heavy use of this script obscures contradictions or failures of the program (Büscher et al. 2017). The positive representation of ecotourism also discouraged self-reflection on behalf of NGO or government programs that would demonstrate that many community members had either failed to gain benefits or had encountered new issues that outweighed the benefits (Büscher et al. 2017).

The success of ecotourism in communities is viewed within a western framework that prioritizes economic growth. Even when ecotourism is successful in providing economic growth for local communities, success should also be evaluated according to local values. In the context of the Maasai people, the large influx of tourists has provided additional income for the community however it has also caused difficulties with their farming and cattle herding as conservation efforts prevent them from harming predators (Buzinde et al. 2014). If the evaluation of ecotourism considered local ideas about well-being, it would account for the elders’ concern about “loss of cultural values” among the younger generation (Buzinde et al. 2014). Buzinde et al. (2014) call for the Millenium Development Goals to take into account locally defined well-being in order to boost sources of well-being and eliminate sources that detract from well-being.

Participatory forms of development in the form of bottom-up or community-based development has been a response to criticisms about the top-down nature of development institutions. The form participation often takes, however, is from a place of power where those
residing in developing countries have significantly less say than those in the West. Tosun (2000) calls these forms of participation manipulative, passive, and pseudo-participation to emphasize how little local input usually impacts projects. The idea of pseudo-participation highlights a common shortcoming of the current participatory framework as intentions are usually good but in practice, very little decision making resides within the community.

NCRCs identity as an NGO based in Ghana, run by westerners demonstrates the inner-conflict between community-run conservation and western conservation. “Real community conservation means real community control” (Igoe 2004, 130) which would require relinquished control from western investors and conservationists. The partial involvement that NCRC solicits from the communities they work with demonstrates their failure to give full control to the community.

Escobar (2008) discusses the defining role views on modernity and globalization have played in the larger discussion of development. The version of both these concepts commonly used in development circles is the globalization through a singular version of modernity as originated in western Europe (Escobar 2008, 160). Development defined by these characteristics evolves into the infrastructure focused planning that occurs in countries like Ghana. Current work in anthropology engages with infrastructure as both an object as well as the “relation between things” (Larkin 2013, 329). Similarly, the ecotourism center built in Kpetoe was a physical building meant to serve as the connecting factor between visitors and local weavers. While the ecotourism center does not represent the same level of infrastructural violence described by Appel (2012) carried out by private oil companies in Equatorial Guinea, there is a level of disconnection that takes place. The community already had three weaving centers built and owned by different community members that were already attempting to grow new
customers, even tourism, out of these locations. Rather than contributing to these existing efforts, a new building is built that dispossess the community at large from ownership and increases the exclusivity of the building. This exclusivity is partially carried out through the major influence community elite are able to hold over the space through the literal control of the key.

Methods

I conducted this research through participant observation and interviews. I spent one month in the community of Kpetoe. I lived with a friend in the neighboring town of Ho and took public transportation about 30 mins each way every day to spend time with the weavers in Kpetoe. Over the course of the month, I conducted 11 formal interviews and 10 informal interviews with weavers. In addition to these interviews, I spent time talking to owners of related businesses in the area, officers at a local customs academy, and taxi drivers. Several of my interviews were conducted in phases as I would learn new information elsewhere in the village that would help me formulate more specific questions for weavers or leaders such as the paramount chief. Through these interviews, I was able to gather information about selling practices, related business practices, use of current buildings and proposed buildings, weavers’ access to leadership, and a modest understanding of political and social conflict in the village.

This research in Kpetoe was my second round of fieldwork in the village. I had previously done fieldwork in Kpetoe during December 2015 while I was researching weavers’ perspectives on kente. During my previous fieldwork, I spent about half of each day learning how to weave kente followed by interviews in the afternoon. For this research, my fieldwork typically entailed conducting an interview or simply conversing with a different community member each day combined with a variety of errands I would tag along with weavers for. This often meant traveling around the community and neighboring villages to check on the progress of weavers.
that had been hired for a large order or taking orders to the local seamstress or tailor to be sewn together. Engaging with community members who were not weaving usually meant hanging out at their home or place of work while we discussed their perspective on the kente business.

During my most recent visit, there were no significant community events that occurred while I was there. However, during my 2015 I attended a funeral and a celebration at the local school which led to be a recognized visitor within the community rather than a one-time tourist.

I met my key consultant in the community back in 2014 and since then I have been able to gain access to a variety of community members through him and his family of weavers. He is one of the best English speakers in the village because he has lived and worked in other areas of the country and has served as a translator for me throughout my research. Most community members speak a good deal of English so I am able to converse of some level without the assistance of a translator. However, when I was discussing in-depth issues with individuals, my key consultant would often step in to translate more complicated words or phrases. Additionally, I was unable to follow along with conversations taking place around me when we were out and about in the community without assistance as I do not speak the local language, Ewe. This language barrier hindered my ability to gather observational data rooted in conversations. However, on occasion that I was unable to understand a conversation I was able to observe body language usually followed by a summary of the conversation by my key consultant.

Other limitations to my research were the limited amount of time I was in the community which prevented me from being able to go more in depth in my understanding of local politics and social conflict that was affecting business in some ways. Additionally, because I was not there during the festival season, I was not able to meet many of the leaders that come back to the village during this time. My fieldwork during July took place before much of the planning had
taken place for the festival so I was unable to gain a solid understanding of the role the festival plays in the community. My identity as a white woman from the U.S. in the community also prevented a certain level of access, most notably to individuals who had negative experiences with western visitors before. One shop owner, in particular, refused to speak with me because he had become so frustrated with the lack of results from western visitors who had previously done work in the community. This interaction also reflects previous work done by an anthropologist in the community who did not remain connected with the individuals she spent time with years ago, leaving portions of the community wary to new academic visitors. The frustration expressed by the shop owner I did not meet during my last research in contrast with the positive responses I received from those I had worked with before demonstrate the major significance of long-term investment in the community.

Part of evaluating participatory processes is taking into account power relations in a community. Understanding sources of power demonstrate who has access and control over resources and decision making (Gardner & Lewis 2015, 126). Power can be manifested through political status, class, gender, or social position and we see these manifestations taking place in relation to kente weaving in Kpetoe. Artisans occupy a precarious position in the world, confronting issues of the globalized economy ushering in new competition and forms of production (Scrace 2003, 450). In a local context, this means lesser levels of power in the community as the majority of weavers lack financial security or high social status. In this thesis, I will unpack the way these sources of power or lack thereof impact development on a macro scale, but also shape the small yet important decisions made in Kpetoe.

In order to evaluate the assets of Kpetoe as a weaving community, I also utilize the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Emery & Flora 2006). While there have been many
methods for evaluating different forms of capital in a community, this particular method fits the characteristics of Kpetoe well. The CCF divides capital up into seven categories; natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capitals. An important distinction with these categories is between financial and built capital. The former details the financial assets which are available to invest in the community, the latter describes the infrastructure in place to uphold these activities. Using this framework allows for assets to be divided up in a way that demonstrates areas where investment or planning was lacking as well as solutions that strategically grow certain assets.

**Conclusion**

This thesis focuses on the planning and implementation of the ecotourism center in Kpetoe, Ghana to explore larger themes of top-down, pseudo-participatory systems of development taking place even in alternative forms of development. The strategy of economic growth through tourism in Ghana is a reaction to larger trends in development as well as the weakening of state services that established greater influence for NGOs. In these circumstances the NCRC template for ecotourism was implemented in Kpetoe and ultimately failed with no follow up to change or adapt programming. Evaluating the ecotourism center building carried out by NCRC and Peace Corps reveals aspects of the weaver’s daily realities and issues of social capital that were not taken into account when planning.
CHAPTER 2: KENTE PRODUCTION IN KPETOE

In order to understand how the development and tourism plans affected the community, we must first understand how the weaving community operates. Details like how weavers manage money in their businesses or whether or not they will be able to work together on a project significantly affects if plans for the community will even be able to take root and function effectively. In this chapter I break down the common groups weavers work in, the structures where they work, and how they typically conduct business with customers. I also detail the average pricing structure, how gender in weaving affects the community, and cost of supplies.

Infrastrucutre and Organization

The majority of the weavers in Kpetoe work within a network or group formed through kin connections or business relationships. Some of these groups are more formal and resemble a cooperative while others work under a manager in a very informal arrangement. Two key incentives for working as a part of a larger group are the increased access to customers and efficiency in gaining new orders. Access to customers is increased because many customers are unwilling to work with a single individual for fear they will run away with the initial deposit. Working as a part of a network helps mitigate those concerns as there will be others that could be held accountable for any money lost. A network of weavers also allows large orders to be completed on a short timeline as two to four weavers may work on the same piece at once. Efficiency is increased because often times managers are in charge of gathering orders from customers, allowing weavers to focus on production rather than tracking down new customers. The managers do take a fee for their work which decreases profits for the weavers however the benefits appear to outweigh the cost of the fee.
Several formal weaving centers can be found around the area. The weaving center that closely resembles the organization of a cooperative is the Agbenenyo Weavers Association. The weavers work inside a large building built by the government that has a metal roof and electricity. Members pay one-time dues to join and then assist in paying the monthly electric bill. Weavers can join the association after approval from other members on the basis of character and weaving skill. The association differs from a traditional artisan cooperative because it does not buy supplies in bulk in order to cut costs of supplies. There is a level of cooperation involved in deciding minimum prices for their work as well as passing on work to another weaver in the association if an order is received by a weaver that is too busy. However, the cooperation does not extend to a level of planning and meetings meant to pursue business as a group.

The association format is largely based around weavers wanting a place to weave under a roof and equipped with electricity. The weavers are not drawn into the group through kin connections. One weaver expressed his choice to join was based on the fact that the master weaver that taught him also worked in the association building. Most of the weavers’ choices to weave there were based on a combination of factors such as visibility from the road, electricity, enclosed working area, and intentions to expand the business to new customers. Additionally, the association gained legitimacy as a place for tourists to visit by being established by the government and working with organizations like the Peace Corps. The work with the Peace Corps also led to the ecotourism center built next door by Nature Conservation and Resource Center (NCRC) which furthered the association's identity as a tourist destination. These connections with international organizations, however, are not paying off for members of the association as expected as demonstrated in recent years with the low tourism numbers.
The other major weaving center, Dogbeda Kete Center, was established by a family in the 90s and continues to be run by the father of the family. The building was originally built with a thatch roof which was replaced with a metal roof and electricity was added after taking out a loan. The owner of the Dogbeda Kete weaving center took out the loan at a time when tourism was quite strong in the 90s, the subsequent decline of business has made the payments much more difficult to make. Many of the weavers that work there are related to the owner. His son does most of the managing of orders and other nephews share the work on larger orders. A few others were young boys in the community – described by community members as orphans – that had been taught by the elder as a way of supporting themselves.

The owner of the center does not receive monthly payments from his weavers to offset the cost of electricity and the loan payments. He not only carries the majority of the financial responsibilities of the weaving center but also is clearly in charge of delegating work to the young men that work for him. However, this level of responsibility does allow him to maintain control over the quality and pace of the work. Since many of the weavers are young men working part-time after school hours alongside fellow family members or friends they can get rather unruly and distracted from their work, preferring to joke around or chat with friends. With his position as an elder in the community, often an elder relative, as well as their employer he scolds them into staying on task to complete orders on time. Ultimately, his reputation as a businessman is at risk if an order is not completed well or on time. However, scolding is rarely necessary as weavers get older and the weaving income shifts from a supplementary income for school fees to their full-time livelihood to support a family of their own.

The natural leadership and oversight of production that takes place within a physical structure visible from the main road establish Dogbeda Kete Center as a reliable location to
acquire kente for tourists or regional travelers looking to purchase kente. They display samples in front of the building that catches your eye as you drive by and demonstrate the quality product they produce. Tourists may find this particularly helpful as the sample strips can be purchased for a relatively low cost. With business operations taking place out of a brick-and-mortar they gain a certain level of credibility that puts first-time customers at ease, particularly when needing to put up the initial deposit. Additionally, the owner of the center is a well-established elder in the community, a reputation he intends to continue through honest business. Regional customers can be reassured that the owner will ensure quality work from the weavers he employs.

A third weaving center is far less frequented by tourists as it is set back from the road and currently only houses two looms. While there is a sign near the road to draw attention to the building, it has become faded over time and is so easy to miss I did not notice the building until I had visited the town several times. The weavers working there said the building belonged to a friend who let them weave there free of charge. The building itself was looking a little run down with paint worn off the wood, broken screens, a grown over the path leading to the door and no working electricity, although it appeared to be wired for it. It seemed as if the building had originally been built to meet the needs of several weavers to work full time. One wall was fitted with a set of cabinets with latches that could be locked. Weavers would be able to store materials in their own cabinet and lock away supplies when leaving work. By contrast, only two looms stood in the very empty building and none of the storage areas were in use. Both weavers that used the space only were weaving for custom orders and did not attempt to solicit tourism to the center. The weavers were on the older end of the spectrum of weavers in Kpetoe, especially compared to other weaving centers. The weaving center was primarily a space to weave in the rainy season and less so an organized group pursuing increased business.
The last weaving center I visited was in a neighboring village and run by an entrepreneur who focused heavily on producing for the tourism market. He gradually established himself as more than a kente weaver by working with the various visitors that visited the region and maintaining those connections for years to come. These connections also grew his interactions with western standards of business conduct, expanding his knowledge even further with visits to the U.S. He has been heavily involved in the business side of kente in both a regional and international setting. His network of people outside of the Volta Region led to opportunities to act as a representative of kente weavers, meeting politicians and working with large organizations like West African Trade and Ghana Trade. His knowledge of the international market through these experiences led him to focus on bringing groups of tourists to his weaving center for workshops on weaving. He also engaged with some corporate clients on the possibility of producing products for the western market on a large scale, a plan that ultimately fell through.

The building he works out of has several rooms, one for receiving visitors, his office, and a larger room for weaving. The compound is equipped with electricity and is set up for tourists with extra couches, information about kente on display, and many framed photos of notable visitors. Out of my several visits, I only saw weavers at work in the building once. It appears that prioritizing group tourism has resulted in lower numbers of weavers being employed for every-day orders at this particular weaving center. The owner did not express an interest in collecting orders from local customers to continue to put weavers to work in-between visits from tour groups. Instead, he had established a substantial tomato farming business that brought in supplemental income. He also spent time promoting his weaving center and workshops online. His focus was on larger sales in the form of hosting multi-day workshops and organizing travel for large groups rather than the small day-to-day weaving that many weavers survived on.
Outside of these four physical structures that serve as weaving centers throughout the community, there are many small, self-organized groups to be found both in town and in more remote areas. These groups are often established through kinship ties but a few are also established through a master-weaver employing young weavers. This arrangement allows older weavers to ensure quality work from the younger weavers they employ, particularly those that are still learning more difficult patterns or have yet to establish a good work ethic. Within these groups there is a handful of individuals who are considered managers, although the arrangement resembles contract work in the way individual weavers maintain autonomy and freedom over when, where, and for who they work for. Managers were typically the eldest male in a family with several groups of siblings looking to their eldest brother to do the managing. There were also cases where the father of the family delegated most of the managing to the eldest son in order for the father to spend more time on family matters. The managers typically were in charge of any family members that were weavers, but work also was passed along to friends or acquaintances that would come under the manager’s direction whenever receiving work through them.

These managers spent most of their time delegating orders to weavers and checking in on the progress of various orders. They are primarily the spokesperson for these informal groups, meeting with visitors and potential customers. Each time I went to visit a different group of weavers around town there was always a single individual whom I was expected to interview because they were in charge of the business aspects of producing and selling kente. The manager was also the individual in the group that had the strongest English skills, although not all groups of weavers had an English speaker. Their income was a fee taken off the top of the price of the kente, usually around 50-100 cedis depending on the size of the order. In turn, the managers
essentially absorbed any risk involved with hiring weavers. For example, if a customer orders a cloth, the manager takes the order and then distributes the money needed for supplies among a couple of weavers so they can complete the order. If one of the weavers takes the money and leaves town the manager absorbs the loss and must be responsible for finding and paying a new weaver to fulfill the order. This liability, while uncommon, has happened enough to make customers wary of working directly with a weaver they do not know. The manager is the solution to this problem that ensures a level of security that will continue to bring business to the weavers of Kpetoe. The manager also fulfills a caretaking role to a certain extent, if the initial deposit runs out in the process of producing the order, the manager is often expected to provide food for the weaver until the order is completed and the rest of payment is received. This apparently can become a common issue because the initial deposit usually only covers the cost of supplies. It is also in the best interest of managers to make sure weavers are taken care of because otherwise, weavers will leave their loom temporarily to work other odd-jobs in order to provide for their families, slowing down the overall timeline for completion of the kente order.

Weavers who were not considered managers or elders – usually the youngest weavers or the younger brothers in a family – seemed to have more flexibility in their weaving schedule. Slow business led some weavers to take long breaks throughout the day. Even when there was a lot of work to be done younger weavers often had to be chastised by elders into staying and working at the loom with fewer breaks. During the rainy season the schedule shifts for those working outside because they are dependent on dry weather to be able to weave. Those working in one of the weaving centers are able to weave regardless of the rain because of the roof and the electricity. Weavers did mention that weaving at one of the centers becomes particularly useful if
business is good and orders need fulfilling quickly because they can weave past sunset with access to electricity.

**Gender and Responsibilities**

Kente weaving has historically been a male profession (Ross and Adu-Agyem 2008). Previously there were significant obstacles for women to weave kente as there were restrictions against women weaving during their period (Ross and Adu-Agyem 2008). Now there are Ewe kente weavers who are women as kente weaving shifted from a ceremonial to business task. Like the men they sell to shops, traders, and directly to customers. During my previous fieldwork in the area, I met two different women who were weaving kente. They both expressed a disinterest in weaving, preferring other job opportunities like hair styling if they become available. Weaving is a strenuous activity and the women expressed the difficulties on the body to sit and weave for a prolonged amount of time. Since they worked on looms outside of their homes they were isolated from friends who worked and socialized in town. Additionally, progress was slowed when they had to watch children while weaving, periodically stopping to address the children’s needs. Women are also expected to carry on with many labor-intensive household tasks making a labor-intensive form of income such as weaving less than ideal. Upon return to Kpetoe in 2018 I discovered neither of the women were working as weavers. One had been able to realize her dream of owning a hair braiding shop and the other had married and moved to her husband’s village. To both these women weaving existed only as a form of income and when they were able to fulfill that need elsewhere they left weaving behind. This occurrence of shifting away from kente weaving is not entirely unique to women in the area as many men have stopped weaving when opportunities for more stable income presented themselves.
Women in Kpetoe often make a living through selling food, running shops, sewing, and hair braiding. Although weaving is a primary occupation in the area, development initiatives must take into consideration the wider village economy in order for women to see benefits as well. Because international organizations have yet to implement a successful initiative Kpetoe, it is difficult to predict whether or not women would be included in such opportunities. However, there is considerable risk that they would be excluded so any future planning should specify how to partner with women as well as men in the community. The importance of setting up partnerships with women as well as men is underlined by the studies of how women are more likely to pass on benefits to the rest of the family (United Nations 2009).

Outside of kente weaving, women can be incorporated into the overall business plan through their current role in sewing aspect of production. Ready-made products made out of kente, whether that be bags, bow-ties, or dresses, should utilize the seamstresses working in the community rather than sending kente to Accra for production. This would require additional training and better sewing machines as women in rural villages are usually unable to come by either easily. This leads to outsourcing sewing work to larger cities even though women in the village would benefit from these additional work opportunities.

While weaving is a significant component of income for many men in the community, most men also engage in some other form of work to make ends meet. A combination of low profit margins, lack of steady business, and the rising cost of supplies has left weavers looking for additional forms of income to survive slow business seasons. Several weavers started their morning working in their fields where they farmed tomatoes other staple crops. Others picked up work at the customs academy taking care of the grounds or working on construction projects. Most weavers got to work at the loom in the afternoon allowing for additional work or business
to be taken care of in the morning. During prosperous times for weavers this diversification of income was not as necessary or they could hire out additional help to work on their fields when they were busy. For elders in the community, mornings were used to travel to Ho and back to visit the courts to resolve chieftaincy disputes or buy supplies unavailable in the village. This division of work and family responsibilities was particularly evident among the elder weavers who had significant work to handle outside weaving yet also had to manage the younger weavers.

**Pricing and Sales**

One of the most crucial factors in the minimal profits weavers are currently making is determined by their pricing and cost of supplies. Traditionally kente is sold in two sizes; a women’s cloth and a men’s cloth. The former is sold in three pieces, one for a skirt, the second for a top and the third to either be worn over the shoulder or used as an extra wrapper. The men’s cloth is double the length of the women’s and sewn into one large piece to be worn wrapped around the body. These two lengths are the basis for determining pricing as well as estimating the amount of time it will take to weave. There are slight variations in prices around the community but overall, there seemed to be average benchmarks for equating quality and difficulty with higher-priced kente.

The Agbenenyo weaving center does set pricing standards within the group to ensure individuals within the group cannot gain more business with lower prices. Their pricing system is informal, based on a mutual understanding of the difficulty of patterns and the cost of supplies. Pricing, in general, can shift fairly often with the shifting cost of supplies as well as the influence of the cedi to dollar ratio on the daily economy. The inflation of the cedi can make pricing a contentious issue for local consumers as prices are raised to keep pace with the cost of living and
supplies. The declining value of the cedi makes selling to an international consumer all the more attractive as the value of the dollar makes the intricate work of kente weavers seem quite affordable, an issue I will explore in later chapters.

A significant portion of the price of kente production is made up of the cost of supplies, on average, making up half the sale price of a set of kente cloth\textsuperscript{1}. Additionally, more difficult patterns use more thread increasing the amount spent on supplies, which is factored into an increased sale price. However, price increases for more difficult patterns do not take into account the additional time it takes to weave patterns minimizing the profits gained from certain pieces and subsequently devaluing the highly skilled work of weavers. The price breakdown of kente reveals the relatively small fee the weavers receive for labor considering the amount of time production takes. It is difficult to know precisely how much weavers are making per hour of work since their schedules vary and how they divide up work among weavers can change timelines and profits. However, based on a cost analysis conducted with several weavers, on average weavers were making around 2 USD per day for their work\textsuperscript{2}. These low-profit margins for the amount of work it takes to weave an order account for the additional jobs many weavers have as well as their struggle to wait for the best offer on their work before selling.

High-quality kente purchased directly from the weaver is often more inexpensive than when purchasing it in Accra or Kumasi. This is partially due to the rural to urban price inflation as well as the difference in the number of people being paid when kente is traded and sold in shops far away from the production center. Theoretically, this lowered price point could be a great selling point to customers, however, the limited financial resources weavers possess puts

\textsuperscript{2} While the constant fluctuation of currency exchange rates can make it difficult to record the buying power of the cedi, a good reference point is that a filling meal for one can cost around 1USD. When the weavers make 2USD a day it essentially covers food and water (drinking water must be purchased as well) for the family assuming some food is grown at home.
them in a precarious position that does not often allow them to wait for customers in order to make a sale. This puts weavers in a weak bargaining position when they come to a point where they have to sell to a shop or traders, who are able to buy kente from weavers for a price lower than they would usually sell to a customer. Traders or shop owners can then sell the kente for a profit either in town or in other areas of the country. This only deepens the weavers struggle to make a living from kente weaving, leaving them with even less profit to use for daily expenses or supplies for their next project.

The response to this issue by Peace Corps and various other NGOs working with artisans around the country has been to attempt to bring business directly to the artisans. By cutting out the middlemen they hope to eliminate the amount of product that weavers have to sell below market value and customers can also be convinced that they are getting the best deal if they receive it straight from the source. However, this plan undoubtedly damages the business prospects of shop owners and traders creating conflicts of interest. While this effect has by no means taken over the kente business in Kpetoe, it is clear that shop owners do not care for this idea. The plan to bring customers straight to the weavers has largely been implemented by westerners, so not surprisingly the local shop owner was not happy to see me. I attempted to find him for an interview on several occasions and when I finally found him he refused to speak with me. Admittedly, I had hardly visited his store in comparison with all the time I spent around various groups of weavers. It made sense that he would be frustrated by my presence because every time a western visitor showed up they were attempting to bypass his store. Other smaller shop owners in town had diversified their business not to rely solely on the selling of kente cloth, some sold thread and also managed groups of weavers. These individuals must also be
considered when trying to improve business for the weavers as there would be several families that would suffer if their business model was to be circumvented by other strategies entirely.

The cost of supplies is a major influence on the profit margins of kente production. Currently there is no organization among weaving groups to pursue buying in bulk in order to lower the cost of supplies. Rather, weavers either buy thread in small amounts from shops in the village or “bulk” from traders in Accra. Their “bulk” purchases are larger one time purchases than they would make from shops in the village, however, they are still limited to the amount of thread needed to complete an entire order. The savings are small enough that it has not become a significant tactic to try to increase profits, partially because it requires making the journey to Accra. None of the weavers I met with had a large quantity of supplies on hand, opting instead to purchase small amounts as they progressed on work.

One of the issues that arise from purchasing thread an order at a time is color matching. Threads come from many different sources when purchased over time so weavers can find it difficult to reproduce a product with an identical color profile. For one time orders, this may not become an issue but any possibility to produce on a commercial scale would require management of supplies in order to standardize colors. Additionally, some weavers that have either failed to purchase the correct amount of supplies for an entire order or were financially unable to purchase the total supplies at once may have difficulty color matching within the same piece. Quality of the piece can decline significantly if weavers do not take care to match the colors precisely as one portion of the cloth could have different shades of colors than the others.

The two common ways kente is sold is either directly to the customer through custom orders or weavers sell to shop owners or traders. The former provides weavers the highest profit because they receive payment directly. Prospective customers seek out a weaver in the
community, sometimes traveling from nearby villages or as far as Accra, to complete the order. They typically sit down with a manager or a weaver to determine the patterns and colors they want and the amount of cloth needed. Once a price is determined they pay the first half of the cost up front and pay the second half upon completion of the order. Often times customers work with the same weaver over time unless that weaver is too busy and unable to take the new order. If the weaver is unable to take the order they will pass it along to another weaver in their group or possibly hire another weaver to complete a portion of the product so it can be completed on time. When weavers do not have any custom orders they will weave men’s or women’s cloth that follows colors and patterns that are trendy to sell to shop owners or traders. Patterns for these pieces are usually not too time-consuming or difficult in order to account for the loss in profits when selling to shops or traders. When the product is completed they typically try to sell to shop owners first because they will pay a better price than traders. Selling to traders is the last resort for many weavers because they pay the lowest price to account for the price increase when transporting product and selling to shops in Accra and Kumasi. If weavers are selling to a trader they ideally would like to sell simplistic and quickly produced kente that will allow a quick turnaround in investment.

The popularity of kente among tourists and as graduation stools has led to the production of single strips often with words woven into it. The graduation stools are often produced in large quantities ordered ahead of time. The single strips woven for tourists are often produced in smaller quantities because many weavers cannot afford to keep large quantities of product on hand to wait for tourists to visit and purchase. One tactic weavers’ have used to keep some product ready for tourists is to weave an extra strip of kente for custom orders than they set aside. This provides a variety of work as single strips to be purchased or to be used as examples
customers can base their custom orders off of. These are several ways weavers have been able to work around the delicate balance of needing product on hand for unexpected tourists and also the necessity of selling product in order to provide for their basic needs.

These options for selling highlights the precarious position weavers are often in that leads to decreased leverage when pricing their products. Ideally, weavers would like to sell directly to customers in order to maximize profits. Loss of profit when selling to traders and shop owners has led various organizations and community members to prioritize space for weavers to sell their products. This idea partially led to the Ecotourism Center in Kpetoe and is also a driving force behind the “craft village” being built in town. The obstacle to a successful implementation of this idea is that establishing a shop run by weavers requires a certain level of financial stability to allow the products to sit on shelves while waiting for it to be purchased. Lack of this level of financial stability in the past led to weavers taking products from shelves to be sold to other shops or traders. The financial necessity to immediate sell product in order to have enough income to provide for one’s family and buy enough supplies to continue weaving leaves the weavers at the mercy of shop owners and traders and the prices they set.

Kente weaving continues to be a central form of livelihood for weavers with or without involvement from outside organizations. Aspects of the business like supply-chains and the international textile market shape the circumstances under which kente is produced. In the following chapters, I will unpack the ways development shaped the free-market system kente businesses must compete in and the subsequent involvement from international organizations that ushered in the popularity of tourism. This overview of kente within the context of regional and international circumstances reinforces the fact that craft-production is intricately tied to larger issues in ways that are often not accounted for when planning for these communities.
CHAPTER 3: SETTING THE STAGE FOR NCRC: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM TRENDS

While the actions of NGOs are often perceived as separate from large development institutions, the groundwork set by entities such as the IMF or the World Bank create the circumstances under which NGOs like NCRC operate. In this chapter, I focus on the context in which NCRCs relative power and influence in Ghana emerged. Understanding key shifts in policy and trends demonstrate the basis for NCRC’s tourism-focused programming. In turn, this helps us approach the evaluation of the ecotourism center in the following chapter through a lens that reflects the context of development and tourism in Ghana.

Structural Adjustment Programs and Neoliberal Policy

Ghana was one of many countries entangled in the swath of programs that shaped governments and economies across the world in the last few decades of the 20th century. One of the most notable and destructive periods of development was the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs or Economic Reform Program (ERP) in 1983 (Konadu-Agyemang 2001, 4). In this era, a neoliberal agenda – characterized by opening up economies to the free-market and minimizing state intervention including many social programs – was pushed across the globe through programs implemented by the IMF and World Bank. The programs were put in place in response to requested debt relief for many developing nations in the wake of the global recession in 1982-1983. These changes directly shifted the economic circumstances businesses operated in, peeling back protections and subsidies that previously allowed Ghanaian businesses to thrive. The IMF believed these changes were direct solutions to the “bottlenecks” in the economy which were preventing the invisible hand of the market from working (Konadu-
Agyemang 2001, 7). Initially, the program seemed to be working but growth rates quickly leveled off and it became clear that wealthy had the most opportunity for gain while average citizens began to grapple with the effects on the economy (Akawuwa 2001).

The negative effects of ERP can primarily be seen within poor, rural communities who suffered extensively under rising food prices brought on by a devaluation of the cedi as well increased commodity prices (Akawuwa 2001, 278). Artisans in Ghana typically fall within this rural and poor category, although there is also a large number of poor artisans who work in urban centers. Any benefits of adjustment had been contained to the largest export sectors, excluding these small businesses from any benefits while simultaneously making it increasingly difficult to purchase supplies with rising costs of commodities. In many ways, this model has seemed to persist for weavers as they are unable to work on large quantities of kente without first obtaining a down payment in order to purchase supplies.

The Ghanaian government eventually recognized the harm caused by adjustment programs when the 1987 Living Standards Measurement Survey demonstrated increased levels of income inequality. The Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) was implemented to offer additional assistance to those struggling due to ERP. PAMSCAD was aimed at creating jobs for the poorest individuals like small scale miners and artisans, funding labor-intensive community improvement projects that could employ these disadvantaged populations (Akawuwa 2001, 276). In reality, a large portion -- nearly 80 percent -- of PAMSCAD funds went to those above the poverty line (Eshun 2011, 107). Although the SAP created clear damages to the Ghanaian people and economy, it also was key to the shift to a diversified economy that included tourism as a key contributor to the GDP (Eshun 2011).
Textile Industry and SAPs

While a variety of industries were affected by policy changes during the SAP era and the neoliberal policies that followed, the industrialized textile industry was one area that suffered extensively with new neoliberal policies opening up markets. Industrial textile production, which lagged behind in technology and stable electricity, struggled to compete with imported textiles as they poured into the country at much cheaper prices. In comparison to these factory produced textiles, the handmade qualities of kente gave a particular advantage during this era with continued production taking place without new technology. Another challenge for the industrial textile industry that emerged out of an increased global exchange, was the importing of secondhand clothing. This source of extremely inexpensive western clothing was a serious competitor for the producers of textiles worn for everyday work. The influx of secondhand clothes did not affect kente as much because kente is a high-cost fabric worn for special occasions, unable to be replaced by any second-hand clothing items without losing the symbolism and power portrayed by wearing kente.

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3 The end of the World Trade Organization's Multi-Fibre Agreement in 2005 completely eliminated any advantage Ghana had in the local textile market (de Valk 1996). Ghanaian production quickly fell behind when forced to compete with newer, more efficient textile production in other areas of the world, particularly China (Shinn 2007, 56). The local textile industry, especially the larger operations, continued to descend further into an industry slump as machinery became outdated and in a state of disrepair without available spare parts and capital to procure new technology (de Valk 1996, 155). Power outages and infrastructure instability further exacerbated attempts to succeed for any business that was able to survive.

4 As the west produced an ever-increasing amount of excess textile waste, secondhand shops like Salvation Army depended on exporting large bales of clothing to foreign markets (Hansen 2000, 100). Imports of secondhand clothing in African countries tended to increase with economic insecurity brought on by SAPs and decrease with violence and war or policy enacted to ban secondhand clothing (Hansen 2000, 117). The effects of secondhand clothing trade, outside of its influence on the way people dress, has increased competition for the textile and clothing industries as they are unable to compete with the cheap prices of secondhand items (Hansen 2000, 236).
One source of competition for even handmade products, however, has been the many counterfeit versions produced by machines in China and imported into Ghana. These Chinese textile producers made patterns that resembled kente, African wax-resist dyed textiles, and batik but using modern textile printing to produce the items at a much faster pace and a lower price point (Axelsson 2012). Some measures have been taken by the Ghanaian government to support the struggling local textile industries such as implementing a National Friday Wear program to encourage Ghanaians to dress in locally made fabrics on Fridays (Axelsson 2012, 174).

However, the prominence of Chinese textiles in Ghanaian markets continues with products made with these imported versions of local textiles used by locals and sold to tourists. The latter provides the greatest threat to kente producers as many tourists who buy these imported versions sincerely believe they are buying the locally produced version. This is exacerbated by the lack of knowledge among westerners as to what the differences are between a printed and woven textiles. This misunderstanding also allows for some shop owners, particularly in Accra, to sell a printed version of kente to tourists as “authentic” kente for a much higher price than it is worth. Ironically, one of these Chinese produced imitations of kente was given to weavers in Kpetoe as a gift from a visitor. They now hang as curtains in the ecotourism center, juxtaposed against the loom on display, a wall of photographed weavers, and empty shelves that once held product to be sold to tourists.

NGO Power and Influence

As poverty increased while state social services decreased, NGOs became the solution for assistance in many communities. Their projects in rural communities often extend past social services and have begun to implement programming focused on improving livelihoods through specific trades, including craft production. The involvement of NGOs like Nature Conservation
and Research Center and Peace Corps in Ghana led to direct impacts on the future of the kente business in Kpetoe. The proliferation of NGOs in Ghana and throughout Africa occurred as a reaction to declining state power. As the state became increasingly minimal, NGOs stepped in to provide resources to communities, work with grassroots organizations, and serve as sources of funding (Tettey et. al 2003). Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as described by their name, are supposed to operate independently of the state. In reality, however, their increased importance in the age of the minimal state led to powerful partnerships between NGOs and international organizations like the World Bank or USAID. The relative power of these NGOs was particularly pronounced in countries like Ghana when they were based out of western nations, as they often were. These NGOs welded a significant amount of power and resources in comparison to locally established NGOs, allowing the West to set the development agenda on multiple levels (Tettey et. al 2003).

From western perspectives, NGOs are presented as a beacon of hope, made up of do-gooders who are willing to piece together the resources necessary to get the job done. However, in reality, their presence is a complicated combination of power relations within independent nations. Criticisms of the increased presence of NGOs point out the ways they delegitimize or undermine the authority of the state primarily by circumventing state programs (Leve & Karim 2001, 54). It is also in this way that NGOs act as an extension of the neoliberal initiatives in the developing world, taking over responsibilities formerly expected from the state (Fisher 1997). NGOs become entangled with private industry either with a direct partnership with businesses or indirect influence through donors (Leve & Karim 2001, 54; Fisher 1997, 454). As NGOs compete for funding and appropriate programming to stay viable, they encounter what is essentially a form of the free-market but for non-profits. While unique and creative approaches
have emerged out of this competitive development environment, it is important to recognize the flaws in relying solely on NGOs for major needs. While there are advantages to having groups that operate outside the private sector or the government, they can fall short in their ability to be a stable presence over time in a community, particularly due to their fickle funding situations. Additionally, the idealized version of equal representation and input from throughout a community tends to fall apart in practice as NGOs rely on existing hierarchies to gain information and make progress in the community (Fisher 1997, 456).

The major role NGOs have played in Ghana can easily be observed throughout the country from the number of trucks with various logos plastered on the side to the signs above clinics identifying the NGO partnerships that led to the building. The University of Ghana Legon even offers a Management of NGOs course in the College of Business which detailed the day-to-day operations of an NGO. Rural communities like Kpetoe see NGOs influence on their life with irregularity. The minimal interaction many of the weavers have with these various NGOs is evidenced in their vague knowledge of the groups that have moved through the community over time and the projects they worked on. Despite the fact that many of these NGOs, such as Nature Conservation and Research Center, claim to work from a grassroots representation, lack of ownership in projects such as the Ecotourism center demonstrates that decision making power still resides among elites in the community. For example, the ecotourism center was planned as a part of a larger model for developing tourism in villages across Ghana before they even began to work with Kpetoe. By using this pre-existing plan, NCRC’s “participatory process” boiled down to asking for permission from the chief and a group of weavers rather than creating the goals for the project with the weavers.
**The Emergence of (Eco)Tourism as Development**

The pursuit of development and foreign capital investment has caused tourism to grow into a dominant force in the economies of developing nations (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015). The importance of the industry grew so massively, "by the 1990s, tourism vied with oil as the world's largest legitimate business (Honey 2008, 10)." Unlike the oil business, tourism was seen as an opportunity for economic growth in a variety of related sectors, providing more jobs and infrastructure with direct community benefits. Traditional mass tourism models eventually came under scrutiny for its wasteful structure of high consumption and limited benefits for locals (West & Carrier 2004, 484). As criticism grew, the formerly niche area of ecotourism rose up to become a major player in the international tourism sector.

In development circles, ecotourism is a promised improvement on the mass tourism model because it engages with conservation issues while still maintaining an emphasis on economic growth through participating in the market (Honey 2008, 91). Ecotourism is a fitting response to the popularity of sustainable development and other holistic development approaches. This natural partnership between development and ecotourism has led to popularity among small and large NGOs to use development projects with a tourism element. A 2005 analysis totaled the investment from some of the largest international development donors (i.e. UNDP, USAID, World Bank) in tourism-related projects at $10 Billion (Honey 2008, 8). The extensive competition for funding has also contributed to the thriving enterprise-based approach used as a partial source for funds. Private industry or NGOs often collect fees and sell products to sustain their day-to-day operations while larger conservation or infrastructure work is partially supported by large development organizations (Honey 2008, 91).
The growing popularity of ecotourism across the world led to sets of guidelines and definitions born out of different international conferences or organizations (Honey 2008, 8). The use of the ecotourism label, however, is not officially designated by a governing body. This leaves relative flexibility of how the term is applied to different businesses or organizations. In this text, I refer to the programs and buildings put in place by organizations like Peace Corps and Nature Conservation and Research Center (NCRC) as ‘ecotourism' because they were put in place with intentional efforts to consider conservation in their work even if it was limited to small scale changes in the community. These intentions also resulted in the involved organizations to refer to these programs as ecotourism. I refer to a more general pursuit of foreign capital exchange in the form of selling kente products to international visitors as ‘tourism' because the process is not contingent on the presence of a conservation-oriented ecotourism venture. This distinction also brings to our attention the difference between these forms of engagement with the tourism sector. Ecotourism is typically born out of top-down leadership based in or connected to the west as it is predominantly a western idea. Tourism in Kpetoe has been pursued by a variety of groups in the village. Those working from within the community label their efforts as tourism and typically work through a small business model. Tourism efforts driven from outside the community have been labeled as ecotourism.

Approaches to implementing ecotourism around the world often blend private enterprise, state-led investment, and community participation. The limited financial contribution on behalf of the Ghanaian government, the economic promise for private industry, and the involvement of a variety of national and international NGOs led to collaboration between many entities in the growth of the tourism sector in Ghana. Eshun (2011) categorizes the type of tourism by who the key initiator or leader of the program is, defined as state-led, community-based, and privately
owned tourism. The work of Wildlife Division is an example of state-led tourism while the resorts established near popular nature sites are an example of privately owned tourism. Land ownership plays a major role in the level of private vs. state involvement, with national parks typically maintaining the highest level of state oversight. In Ghana the Wildlife Division oversees the nature reserves, acting as what Eshun (2011) calls a “quasi-governmental” authority. The Wildlife Division exists as the most direct connection to the Ghanaian government in terms of conservation and tourism although they also have received support from agencies like USAID and UNDP.

In comparison, the majority of other sectors in the tourism industries of Ghana, particularly those less tied to land conservation, are run through NGO partnership with the government. These are often funded through a mixture of large international organizations and private enterprise (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, 397). The combined form of state-led and community-based ecotourism development emerged under the guidance of Nature Conservation and Research Center (NCRC) and has since grown to be a dominant form of tourism in the country. This combination of state-led and community-based tourism under the guidance of an NGO is the primary form of tourism I focus on within this paper. This format for developing ecotourism destinations with intentions of economic development has gained considerable ground in developing nations like Ghana and has major impacts on rural communities like Kpetoe. Examining the organizations that have led the way in state-led and community-based tourism development in Ghana help us understand the narrative and goals that have become the standard for proposed economic growth through tourism.
Conclusion

The major influence organizations like Nature Conservation and Resource Center have had on the direction of development and tourism in Ghana emerged out of shifting economic and social factors. These economic and social conditions were shaped by larger trends in the development world, spurred on by the neoliberal ideology of the West. Kente, as a cultural symbol linked to tourism and linked to an increasingly popular movement of using craft production to create sustainable livelihoods, is intertwined in globalized markets and the effects of development. Producing kente is a form of cultural production as it is a visual representation of the nation of Ghana presented to the rest of the world (Hess 2001). Operating a small business in the Global South inevitably means engaging with the effects of decades of development that have shaped the modern economy. Some of these effects are on a large-scale, policy decisions that have resulted in increased poverty in places like rural Ghana (Sarris & Shams 1991). In Ghana, the large scale shift towards neoliberal policies affected the day-to-day life of its citizens through the collapse of industry and the devaluing of currency. Other effects of development trickled down to the way industries like tourism have shifted their messaging towards conscientious consumerism for visitors to developing countries (Scrase 2003, 454).

Neoliberal policies implemented in Ghana led to increased instability in rural areas and ushered in the constant presence of international organizations who are shaping the future of Ghana without significant oversight. The small village of Kpetoe is affected by larger shifts in the global market through the cost of supplies and competition with large industrialized forces like China or well-marketed competitors in the craft sector. The obstacles weavers face and the increased focus on tourism found in Kpetoe are a symptom of larger shifts in development and globalization that have trickled down to the business of kente production.
CHAPTER 4: THE ESTABLISHMENT & FAILURE OF KPETOE’S ECOTOURISM CENTER: UNPACKING NCRC’S PROCESSES

NCRC facilitated the building of the Ecotourism center in Kpetoe with assistance from Peace Corps in 2010. The program implemented in Kpetoe was adapted from a template program NCRC used across Ghana in an attempt to foster economic growth by using environmentally responsible tourism. In this chapter, I unpack the process of developing the ecotourism center, reasons the building is not utilized today, and how social connections played into decisions made in the planning process.

Tourism in Kpetoe Pre-NCRC

It is important to note that the projects like building the ecotourism center are not unique to the work of outside organizations. In fact, there are three weaving centers built by community members in the area that serve similar functions of providing a clear destination for visitors to stop at. However, the weaving centers built by locals also serve a larger purpose as a space used for weaving, sheltered from rain and with electricity for weaving at night. There has been some history of tourism success in Kpetoe with a steady stream of visitors in the late 90s and early 2000s. Part of this was operated by a tour company out of Accra that brought large busses of tourists to visit the village for a "cultural" experience. This allowed the weavers to sell their products and other community members to participate through drumming and dancing and the collected fees were distributed among participants. The arrangement between the community and the tourism company ended a few years later when communication between the operator and the community faltered. Since then, the weavers have been unable to establish a contact in Accra that provides a similar arrangement.
Ecotourism and Ghana

Ecotourism has become a very popular method for attempting economic growth and environmental conservation simultaneously in Ghana. The variety of nature, the history of the slave trade, and the current political stability of the country have established Ghana as a tourism destination in West Africa, particularly among the diaspora (Bruner 1996). The government has supported the tourism sector and its contributions to the GDP by encouraging monument building, biodiversity, and continued political stability. (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015). This encouragement sometimes results in direct financial and resource support of organizations like the Wildlife Division, but often times is more of a process of opening doors for NGOs and creating public partnerships with international organizations that can implement programs and provide funding (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015).

NCRC exists as a major presence shaping national policy and local ecotourism practices even though it operates officially as an NGO. Partnerships with Wildlife Division as well Ghana Tourism Authority have serve as an official endorsement of NCRC’s methods, which allowed considerable influence on the tourism sector on behalf of NCRC. NCRC promote a community-based approach to implementing ecotourism projects, reaching out to local leaders to establish a tourism committee and developing their programs around community partnership (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015; Büscher et. al 2017). Their push for benefits for local communities through ecotourism initiatives led NCRC to apply for funding from USAID (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, 397). The program that received funding set the groundwork for ecotourism in Ghana is known as the Community Based Ecotourism Program (CBEP). The program began to receive funding from USAID in 1999 and "Phase I" of implementation began in 2002 (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, 397). Sponsorship by USAID continued into "Phase II" when it began in 2006.
(Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, 397). On paper, the program entails establishing better facilities, marketing, and organization at tourism sites to help them thrive as sources of sustainable income for the community (Table 1). For the most part these infrastructure changes were successfully implemented. These improvements were used as a template for ecotourism sites across the country with support from the government, including a variety of destinations, from craft producing villages to rainforests. NCRC’s role in Ghana came to fill a gap in the conservation efforts of the government as they partnered with communities regardless of whether or not their tourism industry was linked to a government owned conservation area. This allowed their programming to expand to craft producing communities in particular.
Table 1: Implemented measures at ecotourism sites in Ghana

Source: Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, “Inputs of CBEP Phase I to the ecotourism sites in Ghana.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improve ecotourism facilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Installation of directional signs:</strong> makes easy recognition and location of the attraction sites in addition to marketing the sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve/construct interpretative centres:</strong> new interpretative centres were provided at nine destinations and upgrades were made to existing structures at four destinations. This was to facilitate the organisation of tourist services and exchanges of information, which adds to the overall experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve nature trails:</strong> involved making improvement to the trail leading to Mt Afadjato’s summit and developing new hiking trails at most of the sites</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sanitation facilities:</strong> has contributed to a cleaner natural environment</td>
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<tr>
<th>Improve ecotourism marketing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advertisement:</strong> ecotourism brochures and two visitor surveys were conducted to monitor visitor satisfaction and review pricing structures for all services at sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uniform receipt system:</strong> to improve transparency and accountability of tourism revenues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web presence:</strong> email connection to six GTA regional offices and also creating an official website for ecotourism in Ghana</td>
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<tr>
<th>Improve organisational developmental/human resource capability</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism awareness:</strong> this activity was championed by GTA, aimed to increase community understanding and awareness about ecotourism. GTA conducted three awareness sessions in each project community and focused on tourism and environmental conservation education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial management:</strong> focused on streamlining accounting procedures at the project destinations through management and bookkeeping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publications:</strong> included financial management, customer service and guide training manuals, an ecotourism marketing plan and a biological survey report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretive training and customer service training:</strong> the project offered specialised training in tour guiding and customer service skills</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Phase I was limited to a small amount of sites in which a program was developed to construct the necessary infrastructure as well as a standard program tour visitors would be able to receive upon their visit. The initial sites were more focused on conservation areas like Kakum National Park (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015). Phase II is considerably less clear and programmed in comparison to phase I of CBEP. The primary objectives seem to remain the same with additional communities added to the program. Phase II began with continued financial support from USAID which was gradually decreased under the assumption that ecotourism sites had
become self-supporting (Eshun 2011, 148). The ecotourism site in Kpetoe falls under Phase II of CBEP as it was initiated and completed between 2008 and 2010. A comparison between the program implemented in Kpetoe and those detailed in phase one demonstrate the transition from a community-led, state-led partnership to a heavily community-led process. The expansion of Phase II to include more locations followed by a decrease in USAID funding seemed to also decrease the oversight from NCRC. The Peace Corps volunteer that initiated the partnership with NCRC essentially received a set of guidelines that were expected to be completed in order to receive funding for the ecotourism center. Steps to receive funding included writing up a constitution for the weaving center, installing rubbish bins around the area, establishing a tour protocol with pricing, billboards, and determining a location for the building. Then NCRC brought in a crew of construction workers from Accra to complete the building itself.

It appears funding for CBEP is primarily used to establish the ecotourism program in a community, which at times includes infrastructure building. However, NCRC also references the income through tourist fees and sale of products at ecotourism sites as sources of funding used at individual locations to make infrastructure improvements (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko 2015, 397; NCRC 2019). It is unclear whether funds allotted by NCRC are spent in the same way at each location but based on the ecotourism center in Kpetoe it appears funds are primarily used for establishing the center. After construction, the ecotourism center is expected to operate at the direction of locals and any funds generated by the locals through the program can be used however they decide (NCRC 2019).

The current ecotourism model allows one-time investment on behalf of the government or larger agencies when they build the visitor center or establish the necessary infrastructure for tourism. After this initial investment, the onus falls on the community to sustain constant visitor
flows in order to reap the economic benefits of ecotourism. While developing the tourism site requires involvement and support by the state or NGOs, a neo-liberal approach takes its place once infrastructure building is completed. If the ecotourism site succeeds, this transfer of control to the communities upon completion of infrastructure building can be interpreted as successful community-led development. If the ecotourism site does not bring in visitors, however, the community is unable to reap any benefits despite a substantial amount of money being poured into the infrastructure building.

While NCRC is involved with much of the initial planning and establishment of ecotourism sites, they have relatively little influence over the programs once they are established. In communities where Peace Corps is already present, NCRC was an easy collaborator for individual projects with their plans already oriented towards improving livelihoods through economic growth. The 2000s brought three different Peace Corps volunteers to Kpetoe who were tasked with working with the weavers in hopes of boosting their business. They utilized connections in Accra, product design ideas, and marketing knowledge to boost tourism flows in Kpetoe. In addition to tracking numbers of visitors and promoting the location, the volunteers facilitated a partnership with NCRC. The purpose of this partnership was to establish environmentally conscious community habits, build an ecotourism center for visitors, and train weavers to run the center in ways that would appeal to western visitors. The expectation was that implementing these changes would address any issues with slowed visitor flows. The Peace Corps volunteer stationed in Kpetoe from 2008-2010 was the key facilitator between NCRC and the community, following the guidelines set by the NGO to prep the community for the ecotourism center. The goals set by Peace Corps to increase visitor flows influenced the partnership with NCRC for the Ecotourism center, motivated in part by the need for a clear,
physical landmark where tourists could stop to learn about and buy kente. When NCRC's involvement concluded with the construction of the ecotourism center, Peace Corps continued to promote tourism to Kpetoe for at least two more years before they shifted their attention to other villages.

Peace Corps no longer has a volunteer stationed in Kpetoe and NCRC is no longer involved with the operation of the ecotourism center. In 2010 the ecotourism center was opened and over 8 years later the ecotourism center sits locked up and only used for community meetings a few times a year. Any tourists who do visit Kpetoe will most likely never see the inside of the building -- which was meant to a be museum space -- or be able to use the washroom facility. I only gained knowledge about the center upon hearing about it from a former Peace Corps volunteer after I had already spent a month in the community. This decline in the use of the ecotourism center in Kpetoe offers a lens through which we can analyze the shortcomings of the plans implemented by NCRC and Peace Corps

**Pseudo-Participation in the Ecotourism Process**

Categorizing much of the work of NCRC and Peace Corps as sustainable development and ecotourism is in many ways contingent on their claims of community participation. Participatory processes are a major element of the ecotourism "script" used across the developing world (Büscher et. al 2017). The idea of creating a form of tourism that benefits the local community is dependent on their involvement in order to ensure ownership over the program (Butcher 2007, 63). Participatory processes in community-based development gained popularity after criticisms about the top-down nature of development institutions and these ideas carried over into ecotourism. NGOs focused on tourism growth have been particularly invested in soliciting participation (Tosun 2000). Participation and ownership are vital if communities are to
reap the benefits of tourism. Ownership includes control over the values, resources, and trajectory of the programs and participation provides the framework to influence and shape these elements (Carr et. al 2016).

Tosun (2000) critiques the current participatory framework as manipulative, passive, and a form of pseudo-participation. When NGOs are led by individuals from the West or individuals from outside the community, participation is being determined on the terms of those in power rather than those within the community (Tosun 2000). In these cases, which are quite common, participation usually takes place through various forms of consultation. This "pseudo-participation" limits the terms on which the community is able to contribute and also predetermines the overall direction of the program (Tosun 2000). On paper, participatory frameworks seem like a positive and inclusive method for implementing tourism in communities, but the reality is varying levels of influence when the community does participate.

The profitability of ecotourism in matters of environmental conservation has been shown to be disproportionately favored over community development measures. This is connected to the greater opportunities for profit that emerge out of conservation in comparison to community development. Ecotourism as a private industry, is primarily taking place with the intention of producing some level of profit. In Costa Rica, for example, aspects of community development in which entrepreneurs "employed local people, purchased supplies locally, and patronized local hotels and lodges was not related to commercial success" in comparison to tourism ventures that highlighted environmental practices (Seales and Stein 2011, 20). This study demonstrates that making decisions to highlight or incorporate community development is much more reliant on personal motivation because monetary gains are not as apparent as they are with conservation focused businesses(Seales and Stein 2011). Theoretically, ecotourism's role is to counter the
singular focused conservation and tourism industries by providing a framework that takes into account local culture and livelihoods alongside conservation. However, in practice, the business model of ecotourism falls into a similar model of leaving goals for local livelihoods in the face of other opportunities for greater profit.

The discrepancy in the profitability of conversation compared to community development within ecotourism demonstrates the importance of ownership and participatory processes in order for a community to actually see the benefits. If a community is to have true ownership over the program, that includes control over the trajectory of the plan, which requires involvement from the start. The current participatory process in Kpetoe involves weavers in the process of implementation rather than the planning process. The plan of establishing an ecotourism center was decided by NCRC and Peace Corps and then weavers were involved in the process of implementing this plan. This pseudo-participatory process strips the community of true ownership over the ecotourism program as the plan does not address their core issues and distribute control among community members. This lack of participation in the planning stages has neglected the needs of weavers. This lack of ownership was expressed through weavers expressing a lack of knowledge or control over any development efforts by NCRC or Peace Corps.

This issue of pseudo-participation can also occur even within local leadership. When key contributors and spokespersons are made up of the big men of the community, they often fail to articulate the concerns of weavers in order to solve long-standing issues. NCRC and Peace Corps' attempts to solicit the participation of the local community largely took place through a few individuals, mostly leaders in the community. This led to a lack of understanding about the issues weavers faced in their business and also a power imbalance when it came to control over
the building itself. Interviews with community leaders and weavers demonstrated a major disconnect in what leaders actually knew about the day to day struggles of weavers. The paramount chief felt weavers were being greedy for requiring a fee be paid for tourists to try their hand at weaving for a few minutes despite the fact weavers were struggling to make enough profit to put food on the table. Leaders felt the reason for inadequate sales was the lack of a central market area rather than the weavers' financial instability that left them unable to buy supplies to weave new products unless they sold previous work first. Despite this lack of knowledge about the day to day struggles of weavers, these were the leaders tasked with informing NCRC about the community's needs. This disconnect between weavers and decision-makers will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

**Challenges Under the Community Based Ecotourism Plan**

The ecotourism "script" emphasizes the importance of "authenticity" and conservation to implement a profitable ecotourism experience (Büscher et. al 2017). The concept of authenticity essentially alludes to a simplistic, content, and traditional community that, when put on display, is appealing to visitors (Büscher et. al 2017). This, of course, fails to address the complexity of any community in reality. While these leaders are certainly a valuable resource, Büscher et. al (2017) emphasizes the reality of competing interests when organizing a project related to community resources or heritage. When NCRC perceives these communities as homogenous, they take the advice of a few individuals on the committee and proceed without engaging with alternative perspectives in the community (Büscher et. al 2017). This pseudo-participatory framework is quite common in the NGO community and ultimately prevents full community participation and ownership. Full ownership would take place from the first stages of planning, rather than using solicited participation to make slight adaptations of an existing plan. This
means taking the weaver’s ideas and concerns into account when determining the goals of the project.

As NCRC and Peace Corps embarked on their partnership for increased tourism in Kpetoe, they first failed to take into account competition within this sector of the craft market. Kente produced by the Asante takes place in the Kumasi area, which is one of the more successful areas in Ghana for tourism. The clusters of craft villages in the area and the fact that Kumasi is also a large city with lots of accommodations and a university lends itself well to large group tours. Kpetoe is off the beaten path of typical tourist routes because it is so far east and the nearest town, Ho, is not nearly as large as Kumasi. Most of the travelers that pass through Kpetoe are coming or going from Togo, which is naturally a smaller number than the number of visitors that pass through the Accra to Kumasi route as it requires crossing an international border. Asante woven kente also holds a higher status in the kente market partially due to a successful marketing push focusing on its "royal" qualities as well as the patterns popularized by leaders like Kwame Nkrumah (Hess 2001). The low demand for kente from Ewe weavers, like those in Kpetoe, has led many weavers in the village to sell their cloth for a low price out of necessity to traders who will transport and sell the kente to shops in Kumasi where prices can be set higher. Additionally, Chinese printed replicas of kente patterns have flooded the market with cheap bolts of "kente" fabric (Axelsson 2012). While the product is clearly discernible by those familiar with the woven quality of kente, many unsuspected visitors buy products made of the fake kente without knowing the difference.

All of the above factors present a fierce market that Ewe kente weavers are competing against. The competition also bases much of their income on the tourism market. The Asante weavers, for example, have made their name known among the tour operators and the guide
books. Each semester a busload of international students visit the weaving village outside of Kumasi and many others buy fake kente products at the art market in Accra. In this context it is hard to argue the market has been untapped, rather it seems like the challenge NCRC and Peace Corps was taking on was diverting some of that tourism flow to the Ewe weavers. Bringing more tourism to Kpetoe seems even more unlikely when considering how far out of the way it is in comparison to the major non-craft tourist attractions in Ghana (i.e Mole, Canopy Walks, Cape Coast slave castles). If the community's needs and challenges were taken into account when planning for economic development in the area, it may have accounted for the competitive kente tourism market. Relying on tourism alone puts weavers at risk for market fluctuations and also presents a significant challenge to shift existing tourism patterns.

The other aspect of the ecotourism center that wound up being unsuccessful is the building. A significant amount of funds from USAID passed through NCRC in order to build the ecotourism center. Building a center was seen as the solution to the tourism problem by outside organizations, what the community was perceived to lack was a clear destination with a structured experience for visitors. Establishing this destination in the form of the ecotourism center with museum displays would mimic a tourism experience foreign visitors would find familiar and comfortable. One of the most important aspects of the museum set-up was various examples of traditional Ewe weaving on display. In addition to this display there needed to be a fair amount of product on hand for visitors to buy from once they had completed the tour. What this approach did not take into account was the lack of financial capital that left most weavers unable to be able to produce kente that might sit on a shelf for months. The limited amount of financial capital available to the weavers means most individuals have to sell product fairly quickly in order to be able to afford supplies to start on the next product. Unless the weavers
received an investment that allowed them to weave a back stock of products, they would be unable to contribute product to the store and continue feeding their families. Initially, weavers donated cloth for display and put out whatever product they could, but when tourism did not improve drastically they collected their products from the center. The space became useless without the ability to display and sell kente.

By not understanding the competition in the kente market, constructing a building without addressing the needs of weavers, and engaging with the community through just a few individuals, NCRC constructed an ecotourism center that wasted resources and failed to create benefits for the community. This case study demonstrates that even programs focused on community-based approaches can fail to meet community needs unless they start working with them from the beginning of the planning process. A participatory process should seek to understand the complexity of a community and work with them to construct an appropriate response to the issues they face.

There is a clear disconnect between the planning and goals of organizations like NCRC and the needs and goals of the people they are trying to help. This disconnect is evidenced in the lack of awareness of competitors, communication with leaders that do not represent the average weaver, and adherence to a one-size fits all framework. Many of these issues echo the variety of pitfalls of tourism and development discussed throughout this paper. Ultimately, it points to a lack of true bottom-up, community-based development despite the variety of organizations that claim to be doing so.

**Development Decisions Shaped by Social Capital**

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Emery & Flora 2006) details seven forms of capital represented in communities. Using this framework I am able to pinpoint the assets that
NCRC was choosing to focus on and those that were neglecting. Dissecting these differences demonstrates the ways that plans can appear to address the issues at hand, but in reality fail to take into account specific strengths or weaknesses. Financial capital and built capital are two different assets which have often been grouped under a general form of economic capital. Financial capital is the financial resources able to build up a community by developing businesses or capacity building. Built capital is the infrastructure that supports a community such as buildings, water, sewage, and electricity. While the two are certainly connected in the way built capital requires a certain level of financial capital, infrastructure cannot stand in for the role of financial capital. Growing various forms of built capital is a common path for many NGOs to take which has resulted in various clinics, schools, wells and visitor centers such as the ecotourism center. Building some form of infrastructure is a visual demonstration of progress being made in the community, however, it is clear that buildings alone will not fix the issues communities face. The ecotourism center in Kpetoe is rarely used today and the weaver’s financial obstacles persist regardless of its presence.

The CCF helps us see the many dimensions that make up a community and thus are engaged within the course of trying to implement change. The complexity of communities also underlines the importance of social capital both in understanding the flaws of past projects, and the opportunities to work on the community’s issues through social capital building. Development projects are deeply entrenched in the community in the sense that they are for the community’s use but also in the ways politics, family ties, and class divisions carry over into the process. Understanding reasons for their success or failure, then, also requires some knowledge of the political, familial, and class structures that it emerged out of. Evaluating social capital can be just as valuable as evaluating aspects of built and financial capital.
NCRC & Peace Corps failed to recognize the importance of financial capital when implementing their plan for ecotourism. The lack of knowledge about the precarious financial situation of many weavers led them to the assumption that they would be financially able to contribute product to the shelves of the ecotourism center, an investment that could take months to pay off. In the end, this lack of planning for the financial constraints of the weavers undermined the possibilities of a successful ecotourism center. Weavers remarked that I was the only person to ask them about the breakdown of their prices and the limited financial resources despite other groups’ multiple attempts to improve their weaving businesses. The lack of attention given to these very major issues for weavers demonstrates the information that has been overlooked when pursuing a singular method of development. The failure of the ecotourism center to take into account the financial constraints of weavers demonstrates the importance of using tools like the Community Capitals framework prior to planning and carrying out a project. Differentiating assets from one another in order to fully understand areas of weakness or need may have changed the trajectory of NCRC’s work in Kpetoe. Evaluating development plans in retrospect reveals that a singular aspect is often fixating on, in this case having a physical building for tourists to visit. The consequence of this fixation is that it can obscure the details that eventually could lead to the plan’s demise.

Hierarchies of Power in the Community

Development as implemented by large western institutions is a systematic imbalance of power as the organizations carrying out programs in communities are primarily implemented from a Western-centric perspective of progress. This hierarchy carries over to the development model as western organizations seek out guidance and partnerships from the elite in communities in Ghana. International organizations recognize the important role chiefs play in development
projects due to the power chiefs possess over land, knowledge, and artifacts. Some projects, such as heritage preservation, are highly reliant on the involvement of the chief in order to access the necessary history and artifacts (Asiedu et. al 2009). However, the ecotourism center differs from a heritage project in the way it interacts with local businesses. While the involvement of local chiefs may be important for ownership and control within the community, the narratives of community members must also form the program otherwise they will struggle to have the same level of access and control as those in power. This is especially poignant given the goal of the ecotourism center, which is to boost tourism to the area in order to bolster local business. With these goals in mind, control and access of the plans implemented by NGOs are directly linked with business outcomes. Access and control over planning, then, becomes imperative to individual livelihoods as tourism influences business.

Planning for the ecotourism center relied on a “participatory” process that pulled heavily on a few individuals. The reliance on powerful community members as decision-makers on projects related to the weavers' livelihood has continued over into new projects like the proposed craft village building. The process of establishing the ecotourism center was primarily implemented through instructions from NCRC relayed to the Peace Corps volunteer at the time. The Peace Corps volunteer did much of the organization and planning in order to carry out the plan NCRC had for the ecotourism center. He was expected to check a certain amount of preliminary aspects off the list before NCRC would build the center like placing trash cans around the community or gathering weavers to discuss goals for the community. These were largely accomplished with some help from his friendships with Big men in the area and some smaller details were carried out with the help of a couple of other weavers. The pseudo-participatory process is evidenced in the way plans were handed down from NCRC with little
adaptation to local needs. The resulting buy into the project had to be carried out from the top-down by chiefs and district assemblymen to maintain momentum. The preliminary steps like the placement of trash bins around the community were well received by community members and the ecotourism was an exciting addition to the community when it opened. However, the long term failure of the plan demonstrates the lack of control among those who needed improved business the most.

Further imbalance of power in the community is illustrated in NCRCs acceptance of a land donation from the paramount chief to build the ecotourism center on. The acceptance of the donation was most likely made with the best of intentions. However, the donation was made without NCRC pursuing a level of understanding about local politics and the effects it would have on the community use of the building. A portion of the community has been feuding with the paramount chief for some time over land rights and chieftaincy rights. This portion of the community includes a significant number of weavers who were unaware or uninvolved with the ecotourism center. This disconnect is partially geographical as they are on the furthest end of town, but it is also rooted in social connections. The social connections that brought a partnership between the paramount chief and Peace Corps was also the way the portion of the community feuding with the paramount chief was left out from planning and implementation. It is unclear whether NCRC was aware of the portion of the community that was essentially excluded from involvement with the ecotourism center. Based on the experiences of the Peace Corps volunteer at that time it seems as if partnerships were struck up with anyone who was willing to help or give guidance which happened to be the paramount chief among other leaders in town. While it appears there were not intentional decisions to exclude groups of weavers, the
lack of understanding of social relationships in the community did, in fact, leave weavers excluded.

These divisions continued after the Peace Corps volunteers left as the paramount chief gained control over the key to the building, control he had a certain amount of right to as he owned the land the building was on. I experienced the control he has first-hand when I asked a weaver to see the inside of the building. The weaver told us who to ask for the key, which was actually a government worker in a nearby building. When we asked for the key the government worker would not let us in until we asked the paramount chief for permission. After driving over to the palace, discovering the chief was napping, and returning to the office she made a few phone calls and eventually let us in. The whole pursuit of approval took over an hour and the weavers had no control over access to the building. At this point, I realized the futility of utilizing the space for tourism if the ecotourism center was under lock and key of a single individual. Realistically, tourists would not wait around for an hour in order to get access to the building. This also explains why the center is only used occasionally for community meetings as the planning it takes to ensure the building is open for use fits the structure for planned meetings as opposed to impromptu visits.

**Adaptations of the Tourism Model**

In Kpetoe, community leaders are continually fixated on the idea of uplifting the community through tourism, an idea that has been modeled by the actions of NGOs. Despite the failure of the ecotourism center built in 2010, community leaders insist that their shortcomings as a tourism destination are due to the lack of a central visitors center and store in town. The paramount chief criticized the current location of the ecotourism center as too far from the center of town, wanting the location to be moved closer to his palace. This would make it more likely
for visitors to pass through or spend time with the paramount chief. While the paramount chief expressed only the most positive of intentions -- wanting to share his passion for kente with visitors -- there were murmurings among weavers of more controlling motivations for keeping the visitor’s center close. Chief’s can benefit from the gifts foreign visitors often bring out of respect, but a few weavers were more concerned that having a visitors center close by would allow him to direct visitors to his preferred businesses or weavers. This concern seemed to be minor among weavers though, as any promise of increased tourism eclipsed any worries about the uneven distribution of benefits due to the extremely slow tourism flows in recent years.

The intentions of community leaders, primarily big men and elders working with the paramount chief, to continue pursuing tourism has set in motion plans to build a “craft village” which will be a building in the center of town made up of several shops. At the time of my fieldwork, the foundation for the building had been laid but all other progress had been halted due to lack of funds. Most of the details around the actual use and organization of the craft village when it is completed are unclear. My conversations with the paramount chief as well as other community members revealed conflicting perspectives on how space would be divided among the community and how much financial commitment it would require from weavers. Instead, the primary focus was on completing the building and then devising a plan for use of the space after it had been built. Ultimately the craft village is at risk to fall into the same disuse as the ecotourism center because there is simply not a system in place to provide monetary assistance while they wait for tourists to show up. When asked about this, the paramount chief expressed interest in gaining support from an NGO to provide money to the weavers while business increased.
The current understanding among weavers in the community about the craft village is that they will be able to sell their products there. Some weavers appeared to believe they would have their own individual stalls to sell their product in although it was unclear if they would have to pay rent or not. Others thought the items will be sold in a similar fashion as the ecotourism center, essentially on a consignment system with all items in a single store and weavers will receive payment once one of their items are sold. Either of these options, assuming some sort of rent is paid in the first, fails to take into account the financial pressure weavers are under. The craft village would presumably rely on similar tactics as the ecotourism center, to have rapid increases in tourism that could meet the financial needs of weavers.

Funding for the craft village building is being gathered annually at the kente festival. The festival is an opportunity for increased visitors as well as the return of many big men of the community. These big men are financially or politically well-off individuals who have been successful enough to live at least part time in other cities or countries. When they return to the community for events like the kente festival they are able to display their privilege through leadership positions or significant financial donations to the community. Collections for are taken at the grand durbar each year and have been used for the planned craft village for an unspecified amount of time. Overall the gathering and use of funds from the festival is not very transparent. Only a couple of weavers are on the board and they are unaware of how and when the money is being spent. This is partially due to the limited involvement weavers have with the kente festival. The board that runs the kente festival is made up of big men from Kpetoe who are able to financially contribute to the running of the festival. Some of these men reside in big cities for the majority of the year, only returning to Kpetoe for major events, disconnected from day-to-day life in the village. There are two weavers that are privy to an amount of the board’s
planning. One acts as a sort of liaison or organizer of the weavers throughout town, communicating details the weavers need to know about the festival. The other was in charge of the annual Miss Kente Beauty Pageant that takes place as a part of the week’s festivities. Neither of these positions holds much sway with the board’s decisions, nor did they seem to be aware of the specifics of finances.

Fundraising for the craft village set aside, the kente festival is not a very significant time for weavers’ business during the year owing to the fact that most attendees already have their kente and are not looking to buy. The kente festival does, however, demonstrate the hierarchy in the community that permeates the kente business in Kpetoe. The kente festival is built around showcasing the skills of weavers yet they have very little involvement in planning. The financial benefits that accrue from the festival are not under the control of the weavers. The kente festival has actually been canceled in the past due to chieftaincy disputes. This left weavers frustrated that they had no say in the cancellation because they lost out on opportunities to connect with foreign diplomats that were rumored to be present for the festival. As the big men of the community continue to hold most of the decision-making power, the weavers’ biggest concerns about their weaving businesses continue to go unheard.

**Conclusion**

NCRC’s ecotourism template was implemented in Kpetoe with little to no modification. Regardless of the adaptations made, the plan failed to take into account the most significant obstacles weavers faced which could not be fixed with infrastructure. This plan was presented as the solution for the community and thus continues to be replicated on the basis of this claim despite showing no success. Future attempts to improve economic circumstances of weavers should plan alongside weavers from the start to adequately reflect their greatest challenges in day
to day business. The level of planning would also require ongoing evaluation to ensure the existing plan continues to work with the current market conditions along with other social factors.
CHAPTER 5: CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PARTNERSHIPS WITH KPETOYE
WEAVERS & EXISTING CHALLENGES IN KENTE PRODUCTION

With the continued involvement of NGOs in craft producing businesses in the Global
South it is very likely the weavers will encounter another group seeking to support their work. In
fact, different groups of weavers have encountered several individuals from Europe or the U.S.
since 2010 that have proposed a business partnership that has subsequently never come to
fruition. In the event that an NGO takes interest in the kente weavers of Kpetoe, considerable
boundaries should be set to ensure that the community maintains power and control in the
partnership so that the project reflects their needs. In this chapter I outline some of the key
obstacles weavers face in their current business model as discussed in my interviews. Solutions
for improving the weaver’s economic situation will only come about if the economic and social
circumstances are taken into account when planning.

Challenges of Craft-Producing Businesses

Kente is an artisanal, high quality and unique products that has the best chance at
surviving in both domestic markets and the potential to increase export volumes (de Valk 1996,
155). The hand made quality of kente elevates the product to an artisanal level which could
theoretically allow for higher pricing than a machine made product. As a well-known form of
artistry in Ghana, kente producers have sought to expand operations seek out untapped consumer
base. The result has been the prevalence of kente souvenirs sold to tourists as well as individual
weavers attempting to expand into the global market by selling online or through stores in other
countries. While machine-made textiles suffered the most under SAP era policy shifts, the
artisanal production of kente still faces challenges competing in this global market. Producers of
artisanal items in the Global South may find new challenges in this global market related to marketing strategies, online shopping, and western business practices. Although these obstacles are more nuanced than the technical difficulties faced by industrial textile manufacturers in the sense that it requires more than updated machinery, it is, in a sense, an extension of the same problematic aspects of neoliberalism that shut down factories.

Weavers are attempting to compete in the global marketplace with artisanal products, a process that has often failed artisans around the world in the face of competitors who have more knowledge of western markets (Scrase 2003, 453). Some NGOs have used craft production as a form of generating funds for their programs as well as offering jobs to locals. These NGOs typically use a multi-national team to keep the organization running and market their products to western consumers. Small business owners and artisans who seek to enter this global market are then often competing against these well-organized and marketed organizations for western customers with less business and marketing knowledge. Regardless of the NGOs intentions, they can compete against one another in the same market but with differing levels of understanding of the western consumer.

Unique handmade products are no longer tied to the act of traveling, rather various businesses and nonprofits in the U.S. import craft products from artisans in the developing world. Some of these products can be found in large chains around the nation such as the “Bolga Baskets” -- woven baskets made in Bolgatanga, Ghana -- which can be purchased at Whole Foods, West Elm, and World Market. Outside of these major retailers, these baskets can be found through various online shopping platforms such as Etsy. Small nonprofits have organized their plans for assisting a community or a group of people through craft production. Organizations like Global Mamas or Ubuntu Life use craft production as a way to create stability
for local mothers through employment. The products are sold primarily to a western consumer base and help fund the jobs provided through the organization as well as additional community projects for improved livelihoods.

The few retailers and organizations mentioned above represent a small number of the many other businesses and organizations emphasizing handmade products accompanied by heartfelt stories about the producers themselves. This larger trend towards conscientious consumerism, where purchasing power is leveraged for good, means the popularity of craft production has gained new steam. Regardless of whether or not weavers are engaged with these international NGOs and retailers, they are selling a handmade product in a world that is increasingly driven by the marketing and businesses practices widely implemented by these western businesses. While the global market opens up opportunities for producers to expand their consumer base, especially to those with increased purchasing power, they are competing in the context of western business practices. Selling products from Ghana can no longer be wholly reliant on the novelty of the item as handmade products can be found in a variety of outlets.

**Reasonable Expectations of Community Cooperation**

Big men, chiefs, and foreign visitors have made many of the decisions regarding an improvement to the local kente business. While the weavers may lack access to power in the community, they also seem to lack unification that could lead to greater power. As discussed in earlier chapters, the weavers operate in various groups of small businesses, some tied together by family some not. The weavers are competitors for local business so it is reasonable that they have not leaned into a coordinated effort. Between the scarcity of business and the various feuds scattered throughout the community, it seems unreasonable to expect everyone to work together.
However, this is an area where CCF recommendations for strategically increasing forms of capital can be utilized to understand the assets that exist outside of financial means.

Kente production seems to exist in a strange place between free-market business and cultural activity. Its roots as a small-scale, locally produced, culturally significant textile often lead international organizations or tourists to view kente as a wholly community activity. This especially rang true when the kente was primarily being woven with cotton threads processed and dyed locally allowing multiple aspects of production to be contained within the community. Kente production as a form of livelihood means weavers have to compete against one another for business. The former leads to an idealized community perfect for tourism where all weavers can sell equally to visitors. The latter demonstrates the lack of coordination among the fractured groups of weavers for fear that the limited business will be spread too thin. Business partnerships and kinship networks have a responsibility to distribute orders among weavers they employ. While this often builds an effective safety net for individuals or families, it also means low levels of business effective the whole weaving group.

The delicate balance between competition and cooperation among weavers is very subtle. For the most part, weavers did not let on about the competition from group to group. Generally speaking, weavers will even let their competitors bring kente over to their weaving space if a tourist stops by to buy something. However, there is an underlying sense of distrust when it comes to large-scale success that has prevented significant cooperation among weavers. This distrust became evident when one weaver negotiated a deal with a western company to produce some samples that could eventually lead to larger orders. The weaver hired out several other to complete the order on time as is commonplace with larger orders. When the hired weavers became concerned they might be missing out on higher wages they attempted to work directly
with the company which the company refused to do. This resulted in the breakdown of this opportunity.

The above circumstances demonstrate that distrust tends to take root when a group or individual has the potential to rise significantly above the others. This reaction does not occur when weavers encounter competition for small sales within the community. However, when a larger, particularly, international opportunity presents itself, suspicions arise. These suspicions are partially spurred on by the language barrier. One individual told a story of another weaver giving a prospective international business partner a tour of the area. When they stopped by the individual’s weaving area the other weaver spoke to the business partner in English, explaining and pointing to different weavers. The individual and his fellow weavers were unable to understand what the weaver was saying to the business partner and they became suspicious that perhaps he was telling the businessman that all these weavers worked for him. Since there were no other English speakers there at the time nobody knows what passed between the weaver and the business partner. Perhaps he was merely showing the visitor different weavings in progress around the area or he could have been misrepresenting the group has his employees. Either way, there was a wedge driven between these two groups on the basis of this lack of transparency.

These situations demonstrate the divisions among weavers that can occur when anxieties surrounding discrepancies in social, political, or cultural capital occur. The majority of weavers possess lower levels of social and cultural capital that are often necessary to conduct business beyond the ordinary day-to-day orders. For the weavers that possess greater levels of social capital through connections with individuals in other countries or cities or greater cultural capital through an understanding of western business practices (i.e. invoices, deadlines, email communication), potential gains are much greater than their competitors. These advantages are
acquired gradually and can snowball into bigger opportunities. Usually the first aspect that sets an individual a part is being able to speak and write fluently in english, opening up communication with American visitors. Then opportunities to interact with such visitors brings increased understanding of foreign markets and culture leading to greater potential for international business. Although these differences in social and cultural capital may cause some wariness among weavers, the true distrust seems to emerge out of a lack of communication. Without transparency as to how the whole community can benefit through the business deal acquired by a single individual, there have been attempts to undercut the success of that weaver.

Uniting the artisan community for mutual benefit has often been carried out through establishing a cooperative. Similarly to Kpetoe, there was an artisan community in Oaxaca, Mexico on the periphery of the market due to the large success of other textile producing towns. A cooperative for the weavers was founded with the goal of accessing global markets (Cohen 1998). Their status as a cooperative allowed them to access grants and loans as well as buy supplies in bulk, hopefully leading to community-wide gains (Cohen 1998, 77). The cooperative ultimately failed to fulfill these goals and their shortcoming was described in the lack of economic diversification, marginalization of poorer members, and unequal access to market knowledge (Cohen 1998, 78). These problems that plagued the artisan community in Oaxaca are quite similar to those in Kpetoe even without the cooperative structure. While cooperatives address more than just infrastructure, they are similar to development’s focus on infrastructure building the sense that it relies on a singular change in hopes that it will shift many smaller issues.

Attempting to create a cooperative in Kpetoe in order to create widespread benefits would most likely change very little about the current circumstances and could bring up new
issues. The current division of weavers into a variety of weaving groups headed up by a leader would be difficult to combine into a single cooperative. It would require some level of competition among weavers to gain control over the cooperative. Additionally, the numbers of weavers spread across the community are so high it would be difficult to combine them under a single organization. If the weavers were able to overcome conflict to unite under a single group there would undoubtedly be weavers left out as there are countless weavers working in remote areas of the village. The current manager model allows individuals closer to the center of the village to distribute work to more remote areas but this would be difficult to continue under a cooperative model. Presumably, the cooperative would operate out of a single building where supplies would be held, meetings could take place, and visitors could stop by. This set up would centralize operations making it difficult for participation among those who currently benefit from the decentralized model. The current hierarchies of power would be maintained in this model with the weavers on the peripheral of the weaving community being logistically and financially unable to contribute to the cooperative in a way that would allow them to hold sway in decisions. Another key component of many cooperatives is purchasing supplies in bulk. While this would save a little money for each weaver, it would undoubtedly create new tensions in the community as the local shop owners that sell thread would no longer have a viable business. Additionally, buying supplies in bulk would not provide a significant enough difference in the profits for weavers to make a major change in their livelihood. Rather, pursuing a diversified market has the potential to increase profits the most, however, the cooperative structure does not inherently address this issue.

Rather than focusing on uniting different weaving groups through a cooperative framework, emphasis could be put on increasing cooperation and transparency among weavers.
This could take place through a series of community meeting to discuss ways business is disseminated through the community and demonstrate the benefits of new business. During my own time traveling around to different groups of weavers I witnessed weavers connect and learn about each other's business struggles for the first time as my translator belonged to a different weaving group than the majority of the interviewees. Although this exchange of information was informal in nature, it started to break down former misunderstandings between groups. Even though some of these groups lived close to each other, there was not a platform that allowed them to share their experiences with the kente business which allowed resentment and jealousy to grow. When given the space to connect over the difficulties of their business, weavers began to see their mutual struggle. Ideally, this platform could be utilized to demonstrate the advantages for market diversification, allowing more business to pour into the village and be spread around town.

While this idea is much less concise and straightforward than a cooperative format, it allows issues like market diversification to be addressed. Discussing the multiple markets weavers could tap in to (i.e. local, regional, tourist, international) in large groups could dissipate some of the worries about all weavers competing for a single income source. Additionally, when a few weavers tap into new markets they open up more business for other weavers as they are no longer able to fulfill the number of local orders they once did. By focusing on business issues in community settings, social capital is built up between weavers making it less likely they will try to undercut successful individuals among them. The level of cooperation among weavers when it comes to small tourist sales demonstrates the social connections are already being used to balance out the competitive business environment, this social capital needs strengthening so it can be put to use in higher stakes situations (i.e. international business) when underlying
anxieties in the community emerge. Approaching this goal in an informal way rather than a cooperative format avoids exclusion of groups of people based on location or financial means. It also prevents increased tensions in the community by working for solutions that will not harm the businesses of those selling supplies in town.

Solutions for creating more substantial business for weavers in Kpetoe have been singular in their approach, attempting to create a location that fosters business growth through tourism. These singular solutions fail to address the complexity of the issues weavers face. Other options, such as the cooperative approach, would continue down this path of structural changes that privilege certain groups or individuals in hopes of fixing the problem. The spread out and splintered nature of the many groups of weavers does not fit these solutions, nor do these solutions acknowledge the fact that these are competing businesses. Issues like market diversification and marginalization of those with less capital require an evaluation that acknowledges aspects of social, cultural, and financial capital. Using the CCF we can see how underlying social and cultural capital tensions led to larger financial and built capital issues, thus those underlying tensions should also be addressed. While breaking down a problem with the CCF demonstrates more complexity, an unattractive idea for many development institutions looking for results, it also demonstrates the potential for implementing strategic planning for long-term success.

Understanding Community Power Structures

The disconnect between the leaders of the community and the majority of the weavers is an aspect of the community hierarchy that was not taken into account in past plans. NCRC and Peace Corps reliance on community leaders to gain access to the community also obscured the financial realities of the weavers. Additionally, lack of understanding about the community led to
the artificial sense of a central and cooperative place of business for all the weavers in the community. In reality, only a portion of the community’s weavers had access to what became the ecotourism center and even a smaller portion of those weavers were involved in the planning process.

Community hierarchies that need to be taken into account when planning primarily revolve around a handful of conflicts among leaders of the community. These political and social conflicts are largely rooted in disputes over land and chieftaincies in the area. While many of the weavers on either side of the conflict can engage in a level of business with each other, the leaders themselves continue to be locked in conflict. This conflict significantly affects the ownership and use of land in the area as well as which family benefits from leased land. The clear repercussion of this dispute has been a lack of access to the ecotourism center for the community center.

These hierarchies also significantly impact other events that require large scale planning such as the kente festival. The desire of chiefs and big men to be involved in prestige building events in the community has led to diminished access and control among weavers. Although the kente festival offers the potential to reach new customers that visit only during this time of the year, it really is quite limited when paired with the aspects of festivals that allow a handful of individuals to display wealth and power. This reflects a larger trend of hierarchies in the community becoming more pronounced when a project or event becomes large or prestigious. Utilizing this knowledge, future projects should take into consideration optimizing opportunities for day-to-day impacts that have less prestige than infrastructure building or large events (i.e. product design, pricing, business planning), allowing greater partnership with weavers rather than disconnected community leaders.
Another pervasive but less obvious issue is the lack of clear communication across the community as information often fails to travel between groups. This failure of communication among community members has led to increased misunderstandings and resentments. While a full understanding of the long standing conflict from an outsiders vantage point is unlikely, it is clear that this knowledge of division in the community should play a role in how plans are designed and enacted. A failure to acknowledge that tensions exist can and has easily led to exclusion of different groups of weavers. This exclusion happened easily and unknowingly, a symptom of being physically based out of a single area of the village and hanging out within the same circle of people. Spending time with people across the village, learning about family and political ties in the process will allow more intentional planning that includes individuals and families across the community.

Conclusion

While individuals and families in Kpetoe each encounter a unique combination of challenges to their livelihoods that I have not quantified in my research, there were some larger themes that have been left unaddressed in past projects in the community. Understanding the challenges of craft-producing businesses, the potential and limits of community cooperation, and the existing hierarchies in a community will lead to better planning in the future. Aspects of these challenges contributed to the failure of the ecotourism center and most likely will continue to cause issues in the construction and use of the craft village. Planning with these challenges in mind can pose new questions that have not been previously considered and can lead to new ideas for the kente business in Kpetoe.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The continued effects of neo-liberal development on governments led to increased power for NGOs like NCRC. Their partnership with the government gave them direct access to projects in communities such as Kpetoe, partnering with other international organizations like Peace Corps. The strategies of NCRC and the Community-Based Ecotourism Program (CBEP) mimics larger trends in development, optimizing opportunities for communities to participate in tourism with intentions of economic growth. The emphasis on economic growth through tourism as the only goal, led NCRC to implement a series of similar versions of the CBEP in villages across Ghana.

NCRC and Peace Corps implemented these plans with what they perceived to be a partnership with the community. In reality the ecotourism center built in Kpetoe emerged out of a pre-existing plan with assumptions made about what the community needed to succeed (i.e. infrastructure and a focus on international tourists). This failure to ask questions and partner with the community to outline the goals and strategies for growth led to implementation of a plan that did not account for the financial or social constraints of the village and the subsequent abandonment of the ecotourism center. The failure of the ecotourism center can be traced back not to the use of the space after the building opened in 2010, but rather to the planning stages where goals were set that did not account for the challenges weavers in Kpetoe face.

This research demonstrates the importance of understanding the many complexities of any community before beginning to plan for its ‘improvement’. The building of the ecotourism center demonstrates the resources that are wasted when the planning process is not fully participatory to account for the complexities of the community. The simplification of the issues weavers faced led planners to ignore crucial aspects of their business model, like their reliance
on quickly selling their kente in order to buy supplies. The kente business is not a stand-alone entity, but a piece of the larger community, markets, and culture. Recognizing its place in this web of other influences leads to more sustainable, realistic plans to create better business for the weavers of Kpetoe. These ideas counter development’s tendency to act and quickly implement trendy templates to improve the issue at hand. Taking time to gather knowledge, partner with the community, and utilize creative solutions will lead to more sustainable outcomes.

The failure to plan alongside the community from the start was made worse by the lack of follow-up and evaluation after implementation. Evaluation of the current functions of the ecotourism center would have revealed the flaws in the selling process or lack of tourism industry contacts. Adjustments in the selling process for products in ecotourism center or setting up systems to connect weavers with tour companies did not occur because there was no evaluation stage to reveal these shortcomings. Evaluation is important if programming is to be improved in the future. Challenges of past programming can be used to pinpoint what questions to ask and how to better partner with the community.

This thesis seeks to understand the major challenges the community faces in the context of larger themes in development and Ghana. By tracing the path NCRC and Peace Corps took to implement the ecotourism center I demonstrate ways they failed to address certain challenges to kente weavers. Even through “alternative” development strategies, key concerns of community members go unaddressed due to the top-down nature of development. Full partnership with the community should begin at the start of the planning process, defining goals and challenges they face. Partnership with the community would not only increase access and control, but also utilize existing local and entrepreneurial knowledge that was not previously acknowledged. Future
projects that emerge out of such partnerships will create a more sustainable, equitable work within the kente business of Kpetoe.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX. IRB EXEMPTION

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

2: Research involving use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior, unless (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, and (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**

- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

In addition, **changes to key personnel** must receive prior approval.

**Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on our website.** For modifications that require prior approval, an amendment to the most recent IRB application must be submitted in IRBManager. A determination of exemption or approval from the IRB must be granted before implementing the proposed changes.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

**IRB 03/2018**