

PAPER

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN EMERGING DESTINATIONS: EVALUATING COMMUNITY-LEVEL OUTCOMES

Abduvakhidova Munisa^{1,*} and Dr.Summera Khalid ¹

¹Master's student, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies "Tourism and Hospitality" faculty

² Professor, Department of Foreign Economic Activity and Tourism, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

* abduvakhidova@gmail.com

Abstract

Sustainable tourism helps countries grow economically, protect the environment, and improve the lives of local communities. This article studies three emerging tourism destinations—Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kenya and examines the impact of tourism on local communities. The study examines how government support, the use of local resources, and active community involvement contribute to tourism development, based on an Input-Output framework. The findings suggest that when these factors work together, tourism can become more sustainable and generate positive social and economic outcomes for both communities and the broader national economy. The analysis finds that Costa Rica has strong economic and community benefits, Bhutan focuses on protecting the environment and empowering local people, and Kenya performs moderately with room for improvement. Projected trends for 2025 show that leisure travel, volunteer programs, and wellness tourism are the main contributors to community and environmental benefits. The study shows that when managed well, sustainable tourism can support economic growth while also helping communities and protecting the environment, offering useful lessons for other emerging destinations.

Key words: Sustainable Tourism, Community-Based Tourism, Emerging Destinations, Community Empowerment, Economic Growth, Environmental Protection, Cultural Preservation, Input- Output Framework

Introduction

Sustainable tourism developed from the term of sustainable development. In the late twentieth

century, sustainable development itself came because of environmental damage, overuse of resources, and imbalanced economic growth (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). In the World Commission

Compiled on: March 2, 2026.

Copyright: ©2026 by the authors. Submitted to *Advances in Science and Sustainability* for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\) 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

on Environment and Development sustainable development defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43). This concept promotes a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being. Building on these principles, sustainable tourism developed as a way to apply sustainability by minimizing negative environmental and social impacts while maximizing economic and community benefits (Weaver, 2006). In this context, local communities are central to the development of sustainable tourism.

A key element of sustainable tourism is the involvement of local communities to the well-being of society and this plays a crucial role in the emerging destinations. Community participation, reasonable benefit distribution, and the protection of local cultural and social values are widely recognized as essential components of sustainable tourism practices (Murphy, 1985). As it mentioned above, it is particularly pivotal in new emerging destinations with limited institutional capacity, tourism development is often advocated as a means of economic growth and poverty reduction. In these circumstances, there is a critical need to examine the positive impacts of sustainable tourism on local communities, which is the basis of the current research.

The possible of growth economic development through tourism has been supported in various contexts, especially in newly emerging tourism destinations with the aim of attracting investment and creating jobs. As a result, the achievement of tourism development is often evaluated through using economic indicators, such as tourist arrivals, revenue generation, and contribution to gross domestic product. Although these economic limitations show the economic profitability of tourism development in the destination, they often fail to demonstrate the social and community impacts, or in some cases, even completely neglect social sides. Most tourism development strategies, as elaborated by Sharpley (2020) still ignore the social components and focus on the economic growth.

Moreover, tourism income is not always distributed within local communities. Previous

studies have shown that tourism development can worsen social inequalities, with economic gains often concentrated among external investors, large initiatives, or specific social groups, while marginalized populations receive limited benefits. Tourism does not automatically lead to community development (Scheyvens, 1999). In some cases, it affects local residents' living standards, cultural commodification and natural resources, despite the overall growth of the tourism sector.

While the significance of sustainable tourism has been increasing in academic and relevant policies, the empirical research examining the outcome of sustainable tourism in communities, especially new tourism destinations, remains limited. Most of the existing studies argue that practice of sustainability tourism has a positive impact on the community, and yet these outcomes are rarely solved and evaluated. As such, the impact of sustainable tourism development on communities has been ineffectively studied, creating a demand for more studies that evaluate the impact of sustainable tourism development on communities.

The main objective of this study is to evaluate community-level sustainable tourism outcomes in developing tourism destinations. In particular, the study focuses on how sustainable tourism practices impact the socio-economic conditions and social well-being of local communities. Examining these results provides empirical evidence on whether sustainable tourism contributes to community development beyond traditional economic indicators.

The subject of the study is limited to local communities in developing tourism destinations where tourism is being actively promoted as a strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction. The study examines key aspects of impact on communities, including employment opportunities, income generation, social inclusion and preservation of cultural and social values. Focusing on these aspects allows the wider social and economic impacts of tourism to be reflected while maintaining a clear focus on the experiences of local communities.

This study contributes to the study of sustainable tourism by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Despite general promotion of sustainable tourism as a means of balancing economic growth,

environmental protection and social justice, empirical evidence on its impact at the community level remains limited, especially in developing destinations. Focusing on local communities provides guidance for policymakers, planners, and tourism practitioners to develop development strategies that are cost-effective, socially equitable, and environmental

Review of literature

2.1 Community-Based Tourism and Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) in Emerging Destinations

Tourism is widely recognized as a tool for economic growth and poverty reduction, especially in emerging destinations, where infrastructure and institutional capacity are often limited (UNWTO, 2018; Weaver, 2006). However, rapid tourism development can also negatively impact local culture, social structures, and the environment if community needs are overlooked (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Khalid et al., 2021). Community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as an approach to balance these dynamics by ensuring local communities benefit economically, socially, and culturally, while preserving their traditions and natural resources (Murphy, 1985; Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

In emerging destinations, where tourism is often promoted as a development strategy, local community engagement becomes even more crucial. The success of sustainable tourism in these areas depends on active participation, benefit distribution, and protection of local values, which collectively contribute to long-term socio-economic and cultural sustainability (Weaver, 2006; Khalid et al., 2021). Social exchange theory suggests that residents' support for tourism is shaped by their perceptions of its positive and negative impacts, highlighting the importance of community empowerment in decision-making processes (Khalid et al., 2021).

2.2 Community Empowerment

Community empowerment discusses providing local residents with the knowledge, skills, and authority to actively participate in tourism planning and management, ensuring their voices influence outcomes (Khalid et al., 2021; Sutawa, 2012).

Empowered communities are better positioned to influence tourism in economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. In contrast, top-down tourism planning often affect residents negatively, leading to conflicts between planners and communities and undermining sustainable tourism development (Sood, et al.,2018).

Empowerment is particularly important in emerging destinations, where institutional structures may be weak, and residents' capacity to influence decisions can determine whether tourism contributes positively to community well-being. Research demonstrates that communities with higher levels of empowerment experience improved socio-economic outcomes and greater support for sustainable tourism initiatives (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Khalid et al., 2021).

2.3 Community Support for Tourism

Resident support is a key factor in the success of sustainable tourism, as community cooperation influences the social, cultural, and economic outcomes of tourism initiatives (Khalid et al., 2021). Local participation in planning and decision-making fosters positive attitudes toward tourism, reduces conflict, and enhances equitable distribution of benefits (Sebele, 2010; Dangi & Jamal, 2016). On the contrary, limited engagement can result in negative consequences such as "tourism phobia," over-tourism, and inequitable economic gains (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Abbasian et al., 2020).

Indicators and measurement systems, both quantitative and qualitative, can support community engagement by following the distribution of economic benefits, environmental impacts, and social outcomes. While existing frameworks such as ETIS or UNWTO guidelines provide structured indicators, they often fail to capture qualitative nuances, such as cultural preservation or residents' perceptions, highlighting the need for context-sensitive tools in emerging destinations (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Font et al., 2021). Despite extensive research on sustainable tourism and community-based tourism, several gaps remain, particularly in emerging destinations. First, while many studies emphasize economic benefits, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating the actual socio-cultural and

environmental outcomes for local communities (Khalid et al., 2021; Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

Secondly, although community empowerment and support are recognized as critical, existing research often relies on generalized indicators that fail to capture local context, perceptions, and qualitative dimensions (Font et al., 2021; Bramwell & Lane, 1993). Thirdly, previous research has primarily focused on well-established tourism destinations, while developing destinations remain less studied despite facing serious and unique social and environmental challenges. (Weaver, 2006). To fill these research gaps, a community-centred approach is needed, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate sustainable tourism outcomes. This approach helps to understand the impact of tourism on community well-being, culture, and the environment, and the findings are useful for governments and tourism planners in developing tourism areas.

community empowerment, cultural preservation, and participatory decision-making.

The analysis identifies a clear research gap: existing studies often examine sustainability outcomes or community empowerment separately, with limited integration of both approaches. This gap is particularly relevant in emerging destinations, where rapid tourism growth requires frameworks that balance economic viability, environmental protection, and local community involvement. Therefore, the table justifies the need for an integrated Sustainable Community-Based Tourism (SCBT) approach, which combines ST and CBT principles to achieve more inclusive and balanced tourism development.

Conceptual framework

Table 1. Conceptual Matrix Comparing Sustainable Tourism (ST) and Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Dimension	Sustainable Tourism (ST)	Community-Based Tourism (CBT)	Integration / Gap for SCBT
Focus	Environmental protection, economic growth, long-term sustainability	Community empowerment, social equity, cultural preservation	Integrates sustainability with active community engagement for holistic outcomes
Primary Benefits	Minimizes environmental impact, maintains resources, supports economic growth	Enhances residents' well-being, preserves culture, empowers local people	Maximizes economic, social, and cultural benefits simultaneously
Stakeholders	Governments, tourism planners, industry	Local communities, NGOs, community groups	All stakeholders collaborate, ensuring balanced decision-making
Challenges	Often top-down; communities may have limited voice	Small scale; sometimes lacks financial sustainability	Need mechanisms to empower communities while ensuring economic viability
Key Indicators	Environmental metrics, tourist arrivals, economic performance	Community satisfaction, participation level, cultural preservation	Multi-dimensional indicators: economic, social, cultural, environmental
Decision-making Approach	Often expert-driven or policy-driven	Participatory; decisions at local level	Participatory, evidence-based, and inclusive planning integrating both levels
Research Gap	Focus on macro-level outcomes; limited insight on social/cultural impact	Participatory; decisions at local level	Lack of integrated frameworks combining ST and CBT principles for emerging destinations

Source: Author's compilation based on Bramwell & Lane (1993), Murphy (1985), Weaver (2006), UNWTO (2018), and Goodwin (2011).

Conceptual Comparative Analysis

Table 1 provides a conceptual comparison between Sustainable Tourism (ST) and Community-Based Tourism (CBT), highlighting their key focuses, stakeholders, benefits, and limitations. The table shows that while ST mainly emphasizes environmental protection, economic performance, and macro-level planning, CBT prioritizes



Figure 2 Input-Output Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Emerging Destinations

The Input-Output framework shows how sustainable tourism in emerging destinations can produce benefits for local communities. Inputs are the resources and support needed to make tourism sustainable, including government support, community participation, local resources, and training. These inputs feed into processes such as planning, applying sustainable practices, and empowering residents to take part in decisions. The outputs are the results of these actions: economic growth, improved social well-being, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. The continuous improvement helps that communities monitor outcomes and suggest adjustments, helping policies and practices stay effective over

time.

This diagram shows how actions in tourism lead to specific outcomes, when appropriate resources like money, training, support and local community involvement can produce tangible benefits. Also, ongoing monitoring and evaluation allow changes, ensuring tourism remains sustainable and beneficial for both people and the environment.

Table 2 Comparative analysis of sustainability outcomes in selected emerging destinations

Country	Economic Contribution (USD Billion / Year)	Environmental Conservation (Protected Areas %)	Community Engagement (Participation Rate %)	Cultural Preservation (Programs / Year)
Costa Rica	5.1	25%	72%	15
Bhutan	0.75	51%	85%	12
Kenya	2.3	19%	60%	10

This table 2 highlights that Bhutan leads in environmental conservation and community engagement, reflecting its “high-value, low-volume” tourism model. Costa Rica shows strong economic contribution and balanced performance across dimensions, benefiting from long-term ecotourism strategies. Kenya demonstrates moderate performance, with opportunities to enhance community participation and expand cultural preservation programs. These quantitative insights provide a practical extension of the conceptual framework, showing how inputs (resources, policies, and community engagement) translate into measurable outputs (economic, social, and environmental benefits) in real-world contexts.

Country Analysis: Applying the Framework

In order to show the practical application of this framework, this study examines three emerging destinations—Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kenya—which have adopted different sustainability-oriented tourism strategies and provide measurable outcomes across economic, environmental, and community dimensions.

Costa Rica demonstrates a strong economic contribution to sustainable tourism, generating approximately USD 5.1 billion per year (Sherpass Stories, 2024). About 25% of its land is under environmental protection (Sherpass Stories, 2024), reflecting a moderate but effective effort in conservation. Community engagement is pivotal,

with 72% participation in tourism initiatives (Sherpass Stories, 2024), while 15 cultural preservation programs are implemented annually (Sherpass Stories, 2024).

Analysis: Costa Rica’s input–output framework is evident in government support and infrastructure investment (inputs) facilitating eco-tourism initiatives and community programs (processes), which lead to measurable economic gains, social benefits, and environmental protection (outputs). The data shows that while economic benefits are high, there is room to increase the percentage of protected areas for long-term sustainability.

Bhutan prioritizes environmental and social sustainability, with 51% of its land under protected areas (Borgen Project, 2023), the highest among the three countries. Community engagement is 85% (Borgen Project, 2023), reflecting strong empowerment and participation, while cultural preservation is sustained through 12 programs per year (Borgen Project, 2023). Economic contribution is smaller at USD 0.75 billion per year (Borgen Project, 2023), aligning with Bhutan’s “high-value, low-impact” tourism strategy. Analysis: In Bhutan, inputs such as strict policy controls, resident empowerment, and regulated visitor numbers feed into processes that emphasize conservation and local involvement. Outputs show strong environmental protection and community well-being, demonstrating that sustainable tourism can prioritize long-term social and ecological outcomes over short-term economic gain.

Kenya generates USD 2.3 billion per year from tourism, with 19% of its land protected, 60% community participation, and 10 cultural preservation programs (Magical Kenya, 2024). Kenya shows moderate performance across all dimensions but faces challenges balancing economic growth with community engagement and conservation.

Analysis: Kenya’s sustainable tourism initiatives rely on inputs like national policies and training programs. These feed into processes such as eco-safaris and community-based conservation projects, producing outputs with notable economic benefits but relatively lower environmental and social outcomes compared to Costa Rica and Bhutan.

Interpretation: By linking the data to the Input–Output framework, it is clear that

government support, community engagement, and available resources (inputs) directly influence planning and sustainable practices (processes), resulting in measurable benefits in economic, environmental, and community outcomes (outputs). The comparison also illustrates the need for integrated approaches where economic, social, and environmental objectives are balanced, supporting the conceptual framework of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism (SCBT).

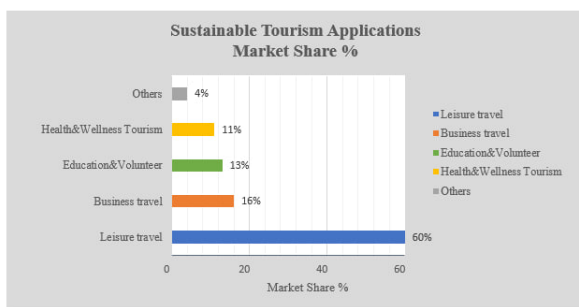


Figure 2: Sustainable Tourism Market Share by Application in 2025

Source: on Future Data Stats (2025 projection) Based-<https://www.futuredatastats.com/sustainable-tourism-market>

This bar chart shows the projected 2025 market share of sustainable tourism applications. Leisure Travel dominates at 60% (Costa Rica and Kenya), followed by Business Travel at 16%, Education & Volunteer Tourism at 13% (Bhutan and Kenya), Health & Wellness Tourism at 11% (Costa Rica and Bhutan), and Others at 4%. These results reflect how inputs like government support and community engagement translate into outputs across economic, environmental, and social dimensions, aligning with the Input–Output conceptual framework.

Objectives and significance

The main objective of this study is to

- Assess sustainable tourism strategies implemented in emerging destinations
- Focus on case studies: Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kenya
- Evaluate sustainability across economic, environmental, and community dimensions
- Analyze community-level outcomes, including: local participation, community empowerment, cultural preservation
- Examine the relationship between tourism inputs, processes, and outputs using the Input-Output framework

- Identify best practices and gaps to inform sustainable tourism policy and development This study is significant because it

- bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation of sustainable tourism
- demonstrates how key inputs (e.g., government support, community engagement) lead to measurable outputs

- provides a practical understanding of sustainable tourism outcomes across: economic, environmental, social dimensions

- offers comparative insights from Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kenya

- supports policymakers, planners, and tourism practitioners with evidence-based guidance

- addresses a research gap by presenting empirical evidence on community-level outcomes in emerging destinations

Results and Discussion

The country-level analysis shows that Costa Rica contributes significantly to sustainable tourism, generating approximately USD 5.1 billion per year. Around 25% of its land is protected, and community engagement reaches 72%, with 15 cultural preservation programs implemented annually. These outcomes reflect a balanced approach that integrates economic growth with social and environmental objectives. Bhutan, on the other hand, places strong emphasis on environmental and social sustainability, with 51% of its land under protection and community participation at 85%, alongside 12 cultural programs per year. While its economic contribution is smaller at USD 0.75 billion, Bhutan's high-value, low-impact tourism strategy demonstrates that prioritizing long-term social and ecological outcomes can achieve strong community benefits even with lower immediate economic gains. Kenya shows moderate performance across all dimensions, generating USD 2.3 billion per year, protecting 19% of its land, maintaining 60% community participation, and implementing 10 cultural programs. While Kenya achieves notable economic benefits, its environmental and social outcomes indicate room for improvement.

The 2025 sustainable tourism market applications further illustrate how different strategies translate into measurable outcomes. Leisure travel dominates at 60%, particularly

in Costa Rica and Kenya, while business travel represents 16% across all three countries. Education and volunteer tourism, accounting for 13%, supports community-based initiatives in Bhutan and Kenya, whereas health and wellness tourism at 11% emphasizes well-being in Costa Rica and Bhutan. The projected market distribution demonstrates how tourism inputs, such as government support and community engagement, feed into processes like eco-tourism initiatives, volunteer programs, and wellness tourism, resulting in outputs that include economic growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Linking these findings to the Input–Output framework, it is evident that the availability of resources, policy support, and local community involvement (inputs) facilitate planning and sustainable practices (processes), ultimately producing measurable benefits in economic, environmental, and social dimensions (outputs). The comparison also highlights the need for integrated approaches, showing that balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives is essential for achieving the goals of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that sustainable tourism in emerging destinations can produce measurable community-level outcomes when economic, environmental, and social objectives are integrated. Costa Rica demonstrates effective synergy between economic gains and community participation through ecotourism and wellness initiatives, while Bhutan highlights that prioritizing environmental conservation and community empowerment can lead to strong social outcomes even with lower economic contributions. Kenya shows moderate performance and identifies opportunities to strengthen community engagement and environmental protection. Overall, the combination of quantitative country-level data, the Input–Output framework, and projected market applications for 2025 provides practical insights for designing balanced, community-centered, and environmentally sustainable tourism strategies in emerging destinations.

References

1. Abbasian, S., Ghaderi, Z., & Nazari, S. (2020). Resident perceptions of tourism impacts and support for sustainable tourism development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(5), 657–674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1637924>
2. Borgen Project. (2023). Sustainable tourism in Bhutan. Retrieved from <https://borgenproject.org/sustainable-tourism-in-bhutan/>
3. Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (1993). Sustainable tourism: An evolving global approach. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966958930951067>
4. Dangi, T. B., & Jamal, T. (2016). An integrated approach to sustainable community-based tourism. *Sustainability*, 8(5), 475. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8050475>
5. Font, X., Harris, C., & Jones, S. (2021). Monitoring the social impacts of sustainable tourism. *Tourism Management*, 82, 104–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104130>
6. Goodwin, H. (2011). *Taking responsibility for tourism*. Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers.
7. Khalid, S., Sutawa, B., & Sutawa, M. (2021). Community participation and sustainable tourism development in emerging destinations. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 32(2), 120–135.
8. Khalid, S., Stecenko, I., Kadirova, Z., Nurieva, A., & Gazieva, S. (2023). Sustainable development goals through the triad of green economy, growth, and deal. In *Proceedings of the 2nd Pamir Transboundary Conference for Sustainable Societies* (Vol. 21, pp. 1376–1385).
9. Khalid, S. (2025). THE ROLE OF AI-DRIVEN SMART TOURISM ASSISTANTS IN ENHANCING PERSONALIZED TRAVEL EXPERIENCES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EMERGING AND DEVELOPED MARKETS. *University Research Base*, 5–10.
10. Khalid, S., et al. (2023). Artificial Intelligence and innovation management: A transformative era for supply chain resilience. *Journal*

of Strategic Management and Digital Transformation

11. Murphy, P. E. (1985). *Tourism: A community approach*. London: Routledge.
12. Postma, A., & Schmuecker, D. (2017). Resident perceptions and tourism development: The role of empowerment. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 14(3), 273–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2016.1277363>
13. Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, 20(2), 245–249. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00069-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00069-7)
14. Sood, A., Sharma, S., & Kaur, P. (2018). Top-down versus bottom-up approaches in tourism development. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(6), 719–730. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2180>
15. Sutawa, B. (2012). Community empowerment in tourism planning: Case studies from Asia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 402–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2012.658019>
16. Sharpley, R. (2020). Tourism, development and sustainable communities. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1641870>
17. Sherpass Stories. (2024). Costa Rica and sustainable tourism: Balancing success and responsibility. Retrieved from <https://www.sherpassstories.com/en/costa-rica-and-sustainable-tourism-balancing-success-and-responsibility/>
18. Magical Kenya. (2024). Travel sustainably. Retrieved from <https://magicalkenya.com/travel-sustainably/>
19. Future Data Stats. (2025). Sustainable tourism market projections. Retrieved from https://www.futuredatastats.com/sustainable-tourism-market?srsltid=AfmBOooA1vnoaWTkrD8bVm-n_SycmWLqGfjHhPMDrHq15ZjmrjiDtVM9
20. Weaver, D. B. (2006). *Sustainable tourism: Theory and practice*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
21. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford University Press.
- UNWTO. (2018). *Sustainable tourism for development guidebook*. Madrid: United Nations World Tourism Organization.