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Influence of Host-Tourist Relations on Sustainable Community Development in Lake Region Economic Bloc, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the effect of effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in Lake Region economic bloc. The study was anchored on the Social Exchange and Sustainable Development theories, and employed a mixed method research design. The target population was 109 homestay operators, 14 County Directors of Tourism, 23,000 guests and 36,577 gazetted village elders. The stratified simple random sampling was used to select homestays operators, tourists (guests) and village elders. Krejcie and Morgan (1973) Table was used to select a sample of 384 guests and 384 village elders randomly. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was tested for face and content validity using expert judgement, and for construct validity using Principal Component Analysis, with Cronbach's Alpha testing for reliability. Quantitative data analysed using descriptive (means and standard deviation) and inferentially using linear regression analysis. The results indicated that host-tourist relations had a positive significant effect on sustainable community development ($\beta = 0.825$; $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that host-tourist relations significantly affect sustainable community development in the Lake Region Economic Bloc. The study thus recommends that the ministry of tourism should foster positive and mutually beneficial relationships between hosts and tourists. Government agencies, tourism industry players, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities should work together to develop policies and strategies that promote sustainable community development and responsible tourism practices.

Key Words: *Host-Tourist Relations, Sustainable, Community Development.*

1.0 Introduction

As tourism destinations strive to balance economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity, understanding the role of management of homestay tourism and its effect on sustainable community development becomes increasingly imperative (Kayat, *et al.*, 2015). In recent years, the tourism industry has witnessed a notable shift towards more sustainable and community-centric forms of travel. Among these approaches, homestay tourism has emerged as a promising model that not only offers travelers authentic cultural experiences but also fosters economic opportunities and social empowerment within local communities (Sawastuk *et al.*, 2018).

Janjua *et al.* (2021) highlighted that homestay tourism significantly contributes to community development, serving as a model for sustainable tourism that enhances the economic, social, and environmental welfare of local communities (Agyeiwaah, 2019). Rizal *et al.* (2021) described homestays as accommodations where tourists, travelers, or students stay with local host families, offering an immersive experience that fosters cultural exchange, provides a sense of home, and offers affordable lodging options (Kuhzady *et al.*, 2020). Operating within the broader tourism and hospitality industry, the homestay sector is characterized by its intangibility, variability, and inseparability (Walter *et al.*, 2018). Carneiro and Eusébio (2015) further emphasized that homestay tourism not only facilitates tourism activities but also empowers local residents by involving them in decision-making processes that shape tourism development in their region. This engagement fosters a sense of ownership over tourism resources, ensuring their sustainable use (Janjua *et al.*, 2021). Ultimately, homestay tourism promotes a symbiotic relationship between tourism development and local empowerment, advocating for a sustainable and inclusive approach to tourism management.

Tourism stands as one of Kenya's most significant socio-economic sectors (Kimaiga & Kihima, 2018). Consequently, the sector was earmarked as a key player in realizing the objectives of Kenya's Vision 2030 project, which aims to propel the nation towards a highly industrialized economy and ensure a high standard of living for its populace (Kihima, Oluoch & Kathurima, 2022). Kimaiga *et al.*, (2015) observe that the project's Medium-Term Plan identified homestay tourism as a means to foster community involvement in tourism and a platform for local residents to directly benefit from the tourism industry.

Understanding the dynamics of host-tourism relations is pivotal in the investigation of homestay tourism's role in sustainable community development (Carneiro and Eusébio, 2015). The host-tourist interactions and its results have received little attention in the literature of tourism (Tabaeeian, *et al.* (2023). Tekalign, *et al.* (2018) stated that the host-tourist interactions constitute the fundamental framework within which homestay experiences unfold, profoundly influencing interactions, perceptions, and outcomes for hosts, tourists, and local communities. It can be inferred that hosts, acting as cultural intermediaries, provide visitors with authentic insights into local customs, traditions, and ways of life, while tourists bring diverse perspectives, interests, and expectations that directly shape their interactions with hosts and the overall tourism encounter.

As demonstrated by Andereck & Nyaupane (2017), an examination of host-tourism relations unveils the underlying determinants of successful homestay experiences. Meaningful interactions between hosts and tourists, grounded in trust, reciprocity, and shared values, not only enrich the tourism experience but also yield tangible benefits for local communities (Kemunto *et al.*, 2015). These benefits may encompass augmented income opportunities for hosts, preservation of cultural heritage, and the promotion of environmental conservation initiatives.

A number of studies have evaluated the host-tourist relations in the homestay realm worldwide. These include studies by Carneiro and Eusébio (2015), Eusébio and Lima (2018), Tabaeian, *et al.* (2023) and Tekalign, *et al.* (2018). While these studies are conducted in different contexts and samples, they all seem to concur that host-tourist relations importantly serve as the linchpin of homestay tourism, bridging cultural divides, fostering mutual understanding, and laying the foundation for sustainable community development.

Tabaeian *et al.* (2023) found that hedonic and functional interactions positively influenced relationship quality and perceived service quality among Iranian tourists, enhancing memorable experiences and revisit intentions. Carneiro and Eusébio (2015) and Eusébio and Lima (2018) also highlighted the positive impact of host-tourist interactions on residents' perceptions of tourism. However, research on host-tourism relations remains limited, particularly in emerging circuits like Kenya's Lake Region Economic Bloc. This region, rich in cultural and environmental assets (Ogucha *et al.*, 2015), has seen rising tourist arrivals, with homestay tourism gaining prominence (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage, 2022). Data from the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB, 2022) confirms this growth, emphasizing the need for effective homestay tourism management to sustain its momentum.

Within the Lake Region economic bloc, various challenges underscore the imperative for sustainable community development initiatives. Statistics reveal a significant portion of the basin's population grapples with poverty, with 40 percent living below the poverty line (KNBS, 2022). Geographically, the study focuses on the Lake Region economic bloc comprising of Kericho, Bomet, Transzoia, Nandi, Bungoma, Busia, Homa-Bay, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Migori, Nyamira, Siaya and Vihiga counties. Considering diverse communities and tourism activities within this region. It aims to capture the unique socio-cultural and environmental characteristics that influence the adoption of homestay tourism and its subsequent impact on sustainable community development. In essence, host-tourism relations serve as the linchpin of homestay tourism, serving to bridge cultural divides, foster mutual understanding, and establish the groundwork for sustainable community development.

While the adoption of homestay tourism is increasing in the Lake Region, there is a significant research gap regarding its extent and impact on sustainable community development in the area. It is evident that the area has been explored, the evidence is largely drawn from other countries (Carneiro and Eusébio, 2015; Eusébio and Lima, 2018; Tabaeian, *et al.*, 2023; Tekalign, *et al.*, 2018). Specific studies on the host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in Lake Region economic bloc are limited which hinders the understanding of the subject in the context. This study therefore aimed to address these research gaps by determining the effect of

effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in lake region economic bloc

1.1 Objectives of the Study

To establish the effect of effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in Lake Region economic bloc.

1.2 Hypothesis

H₀₁: Host-tourist relations has no statistically significant effect on sustainable community development in Lake Region economic bloc.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on the Social Exchange and Sustainable Development theories.

2.1.1 Social Exchange Theory

This study was informed by social exchange theory developed by Peter Blau in 1964. Blau (1964) developed a general framework for analysing macro structures and processes based on an extension of his micro-level theory of social exchange processes. In the tourism industry, SET is applicable when hosts and visitors exchange resources that are valued to both parties (Hritz and Ross, 2010). Since SET involves the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interactive situation, the findings from previous studies revealed that the residents who perceived they would benefit from tourism activities were likely to agree with positive tourism impacts.

Support towards development of tourism industry can be determined by investigating the tourism impacts perceived by the residents, specifically by identifying the benefits and costs resulting from the tourism industry (Zhou *et al.*, 2013). The community supports and participate in the exchange activities with visitors if they are benefiting. However, if the activities cost more than benefits, they are to oppose this activities or program development (Lee, 2012). Social exchange theory was used to assess the influence of community participation to the sustainable homestay program.

2.1.2 Sustainable Development Theory

Herman Daly introduced the Sustainable Development Theory in 1990, emphasizing that renewable resources should be harvested at a rate that allows for their sustainable replenishment, ensuring that extraction does not exceed regeneration (Ukaga, Maser & Reichenbach, 2011; Lander, 2017). The theory has gained widespread recognition in academic, governance, and development spheres, with both governmental and non-governmental entities adopting it as a guiding framework. Social sustainability is linked to strong health systems, peace, human rights, decent work, gender equality, education, and the rule of law, while economic sustainability

depends on efficient production, distribution, and consumption. Environmental sustainability, in turn, is shaped by sound land use, physical planning, and biodiversity conservation.

The current study applies this theory to examine the mediating effect of stakeholder engagement. As Lander (2017) observed, public participation is crucial in translating sustainability principles into practice, as individual and collective commitment is vital for success. The integration of economic, social, and environmental sustainability helps mitigate negative synergies, foster positive interactions, and achieve meaningful sustainable development.

2.2 Empirical Review

Carneiro and Eusébio (2015) investigated the correlation between interactions between hosts and tourists and how residents perceive the impacts of tourism on their Quality of Life (QOL). The study conducted a survey among residents in two coastal communities in Portugal. Principal Component Analyses (PCAs) were utilized to identify dimensions of host-tourist interactions and QOL aspects. Additionally, an analysis of importance versus perceived impact, along with Paired t-tests, was carried out to uncover disparities in residents' perceived importance of various QOL domains and their perceptions of how tourism affects these domains. Correlation tests were also employed to identify significant associations between dimensions of host-tourist interaction and residents' QOL domains. The findings suggest that interactions between residents and tourists in these destinations are limited and superficial, revealing gaps between the importance residents place on various QOL domains and their perceptions of how tourism impacts these domains. Moreover, the study indicates a positive relationship between host-tourist interactions and residents' perceptions of tourism impacts on multiple aspects of their QOL.

Further, Eusébio and Lima (2018) conducted a study which aimed to create and validate a structural model that explores the direct and indirect causal relationships among place attachment, host-tourist interaction, and perceived positive and negative impacts of tourism on residents' attitudes toward tourism development on Boa Vista Island in Cape Verde. Face-to-face questionnaires were distributed to residents over 18 years on Boa Vista Island, using a combination of cluster and convenience sampling techniques to select the sample. The findings indicated that residents' attitudes were positively influenced by their attachment to the place, interactions between hosts and tourists, and perceived positive impacts of tourism, while they are negatively influenced by perceived negative impacts. Notably, host-tourist interaction emerged as the most influential factor, directly and indirectly, affecting residents' attitudes toward tourism development. Additionally, although both positive and negative perceptions of tourism impacts played a significant role in shaping residents' attitudes, the impact of positive perceptions outweighs that of negative ones. The study did not however focus on host-tourist relation with respect to sustainable community development.

On another front, Tabaeian, *et al.* (2023) conducted a research that sought to explore how local interactions between hosts and tourists, along with perceived service quality, relationship quality, and memorable tourism experiences, influence revisit intentions in ecotourism, all within the framework of social exchange theory. An online survey questionnaire was distributed to Iranian tourists who had selected local accommodations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey between 2019 and 2020, covering both domestic and international destinations. A total of 406 valid responses were collected, and the study's proposed model was analyzed using partial least squares structural

equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that both hedonic and functional interactions positively impact relationship quality and perceived service quality. Furthermore, impact relationship quality and perceived service quality significantly contribute to creating memorable experiences and fostering revisit intentions. The study did not focus on host-tourist relations and sustainable community development.

Tekalign et al. (2018) examined tourists' preferences for tourism activities designed by local stakeholders in Menagesha Suba Forest, Ethiopia, highlighting the underdevelopment of the area despite its rich resources. Using a discrete choice experiment analyzed through mixed logit and latent class models, the study revealed varying preferences for park infrastructure improvements among foreigners, foreign residents, and locals. A key finding was the disconnect between tourists' preferences and the activities planned by the host community, indicating a lack of mutual understanding. The study emphasized the need to increase awareness among host residents about tourism dynamics to align development efforts with tourist expectations. However, like Eusébio and Lima (2018), the study did not address homestay tourism, host-community relations, or sustainable community development, leaving a critical gap. To bridge this, the current study examines the effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in the Lake Region Economic Bloc.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is developed after review of theoretical and empirical literature. This study develops conceptual framework to show the link between independent variable (effect of host-tourist relations) and the dependent variable Sustainable community development indicated by, empowerment, social mobility, cultural identity and optimum use of resources. The conceptual framework that guided the study is shown in Figure 1.

Independent variable



H₀₁

Dependent variable

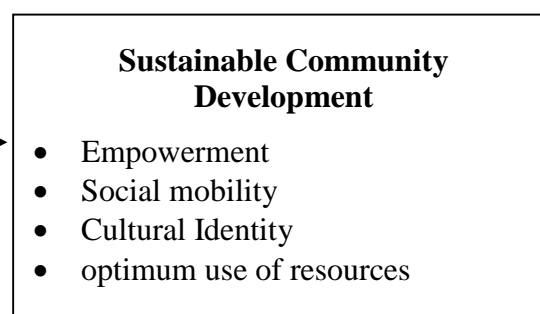


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted a positivist research paradigm to explore causal relationships between host-tourist relations and community development. A mixed methods research design integrated quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2017). Conducted in Kenya's Lake Region Economic Bloc (LREB). The region has significant potential that has yet to be tapped into. Key areas of potential include nature and wildlife tourism; agro- tourism; water sports tourism, and cultural

heritage and community-based tourism. This region was selected because of the tourist attractions, have not been tapped and exploited by the country's tourist industry.

The study targeted 109 homestay operators, 23,000 guests, 36,577 gazetted villages, and 14 County Directors of Tourism (Airbnb Directory, 2022). Stratified proportionate sampling selected 384 guests and 384 village elders, while all 14 County Directors were included through a census (Krejcie & Morgan, 1973). Data collection involved a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and interviews for triangulation. A pilot study with 88 respondents ensured validity and reliability (Kothari, 2012). Content validity was confirmed (CVI = 0.877) (Mason, 2010), and construct validity was tested using Factor Analysis and PCA, with factor loadings above 0.5 considered significant. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, ensuring internal consistency.

Quantitative data was subjected to descriptive analysis, employing measures such as the mean and standard deviation. For quantitative data, inferential statistics were employed, encompassing linear regression analysis to formulate a mathematical model establishing the relationship between host-tourist relations and Sustainable Community Development. To answer the research hypotheses, the study employed linear regression analysis. The model is as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon, \dots \dots \dots \text{Equation 1}$$

Where:

Y= Sustainable Community Development

X₁= Host-tourist relations

β₀= The Y-intercept

β₁= regression coefficient of four independent variables

ε =error term

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The study sought to determine the effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development in Lake Region economic bloc. To test the hypothesis, a simple linear regression was used. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Effect of Host-Tourist Relations on Sustainable Community Development

SCDVP	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
HTSRLN	.825	.017	47.27	0	.79	.859	***
Constant	.431	.063	6.87	0	.307	.554	***
Mean dependent var		3.205	SD dependent var			1.153	
R-squared		0.812	Number of obs			520	
F-test		2234.079	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		757.933	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			766.441	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

As shown in Table 1, there was a strong and significant positive effect of host-tourist relations (HTSRLN) on sustainable community development (SCDVP). The coefficient for HTSRLN is 0.825, with a standard error of 0.017, indicating that for every one-unit improvement in host-tourist relations, sustainable community development is expected to increase by 0.825 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. This substantial effect is supported by a very high t-value of 47.27 and a p-value of 0.00, confirming that the effect is statistically significant at the 1% level. The 95% confidence interval for the coefficient ranges from 0.790 to 0.859, showing a high level of precision in the estimate.

The constant term is 0.431, with a standard error of 0.063, and is also statistically significant, representing the expected value of sustainable community development when host-tourist relations are at zero. Additionally, the model explains 81.2% of the variance in sustainable community development, suggesting that host-tourist relations are a major determinant of sustainable community development. The F-test value of 2234.079, with a p-value of 0.000, further indicates that the overall model is highly significant and provides a good fit for the data. Overall, these results underscore the critical role that positive host-tourist relations play in driving sustainable community development. The regression model obtained from the output is;

$$\text{Sustainable Community Development} = 0.431 + 0.825 * \text{Host-tourist Relations}$$

The results emphasize the crucial role that strong host-tourist relations play in advancing sustainable community development. Practically, this means that communities involved in tourism should focus on fostering positive interactions between hosts and tourists by improving how hosts engage with and treat their guests. This insight is particularly important for policymakers, tourism operators, and community leaders, who should prioritize programs and initiatives that enhance the quality of host-tourist relations (Tabaeeian, *et al.*, 2023). The substantial effect observed in the results suggests that even small improvements in these relations can lead to significant gains in sustainable community development.

Theoretically, these findings support the idea that social interactions within tourism can have profound effects on community outcomes. The strong positive effect of host-tourist relations on sustainable community development aligns with the Stakeholders Theory that emphasizes the importance of social capital and community engagement in driving sustainable development (Carneiro and Eusébio, 2015). This result reinforces the notion that the quality of relationships between hosts and tourists is not just a peripheral aspect of tourism but a central factor in achieving broader development goals.

These findings are in tandem with results reported by Carneiro and Eusébio (2015), Eusébio and Lima (2018), Tabaeian, *et al.* (2023) and Tekalign, *et al.* (2018) all who show that host-tourist relations are important drivers in tourism activities. With Carneiro and Eusébio (2015) investigating the correlation between interactions between hosts and tourists and how residents perceive the impacts of tourism on their Quality of Life (QOL), Eusébio and Lima (2018) investigating causal relationships among place attachment, host-tourist interaction, and perceived positive and negative impacts of tourism on residents' attitudes toward tourism development.

Tekalign, *et al.* (2018) seeking to investigate tourists' preferences regarding tourism activities designed by local stakeholders, all the results show the need for good host-tourism relations. Host-tourist relations encompass various aspects, including communication, hospitality, cultural exchanges, and personalized experiences. Positive interactions and strong relationships between hosts and tourists can lead to enhanced satisfaction, repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and ultimately contribute to the success and sustainability of tourism activities, including community-based initiatives like homestay programs (Tekalign, *et al.*, 2018). The alignment of these findings underscores the broader consensus within the tourism research community regarding the central importance of interpersonal dynamics and quality interactions between hosts and tourists in influencing overall tourism experiences and outcomes. As such, these insights are instrumental for guiding strategies and best practices in managing and improving tourism offerings, particularly those rooted in community engagement and local cultural tourism.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that host-tourist relations significantly impact sustainable community development in the Lake Region Economic Bloc. This underscores the need for fostering positive and mutually beneficial interactions, as they enhance tourism experiences, promote cultural exchange, support local economic growth, and contribute to environmental conservation. The findings highlight the role of interpersonal interactions and cultural understanding in shaping sustainable tourism practices. Investing in training, capacity building, and cultural sensitivity for both hosts and tourists can strengthen these relations, leading to long-term benefits. The positive correlation between host-tourist relations and sustainable community development emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts, stakeholder engagement, and responsible tourism practices in promoting inclusive and resilient development in the region.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that collaborative efforts among various stakeholders are essential for the successful implementation of homestay tourism programs. The stakeholders comprising of

government agencies, tourism industry players, NGOs, and local communities should develop policies that promote sustainable community development and responsible tourism practices. All stakeholders should develop joint initiatives leveraging on their strengths and resources to address common challenges and achieve shared prosperity. Additionally, they should establish multi-stakeholder task forces to facilitate collaboration and coordination among key actors involved in homestay tourism development. The study recommends for future research be carried out across different tourism circuits in order to make comparisons.

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