



Evaluation of Residents' Perception of Sustainable Tourism Development in Obudu Plateau

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Abstract

This study evaluates the perceptions of residents towards sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau, Nigeria. A survey research design was used, with a sample size of 348 respondents selected through proportionate stratified sampling across seven villages. Primary and secondary data were used. The primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools involving frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics including Pearson and Spearman's Rho correlation tests. Findings revealed that residents perceive tourism as a key driver of economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability. Economic benefits, such as job creation and infrastructure development, were highly rated, while environmental conservation received strong support. Cultural preservation was acknowledged but received less emphasis. Residents actively participated in conservation and cultural promotion but had low engagement in entrepreneurial ventures and decision-making. Hypothesis testing using Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a weak negative relationship ($r = -0.032$) between the level of residents' participation in sustainable tourism development and their perception of sustainable tourism development, which was not statistically significant. Similarly, Spearman's Rho showed a weak but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.113$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting a slight inverse relationship. These results indicate that residents' level of participation does not significantly influence their perception of sustainable tourism, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. The study recommends targeted awareness and capacity-building programs to be implemented to deepen residents' understanding of the broader concept of sustainable tourism and how their participation can influence its success.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Residents' Perception, Obudu Plateau, Community participation, Environmental Management.

Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to national income generation, employment creation, and rural development. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, tourism is increasingly being recognized as a viable strategy for economic diversification, poverty alleviation, and environmental conservation (Sharpley, 2009; WTO & UNEP, 2005). Nevertheless, alongside these benefits come a range of social, cultural, and environmental challenges, particularly when tourism is not strategically and sustainably managed (Akama, 1996). These concerns have led to a global shift toward sustainable tourism; an approach that prioritizes long-term environmental stewardship, social inclusiveness, and economic viability (Boyd & Butler, 1996; WTO & UNEP, 2005).

Sustainable tourism development aims to meet the needs of present tourists and host communities while enhancing the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. It promotes minimal environmental impact, respect for local cultures, and equitable distribution of benefits among all stakeholders (Sharpley, 2009). At the heart of sustainable tourism is the active involvement and support of local communities, whose daily lives are most affected by tourism activities (Tosun, 2006). Understanding how local residents perceive tourism development is therefore critical for formulating policies and strategies that are not only inclusive but also sustainable (Ap, 1992; Andereck & Vogt, 2000).

Local community participation in sustainable tourism development involves actively engaging local residents in decision-making processes and integrating their perspectives and needs into tourism strategies (Lestari et al., 2025). This approach empowers communities to participate in tourism, fostering ownership and accountability for preserving cultural heritage and natural resources. It aims to promote ethical tourism practices that balance environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community benefits, while providing high-quality experiences for visitors.

Historically, tourism development has often been dominated by external entities, such as government agencies and private corporations, neglecting the aspirations of local communities. This top-down approach has led to negative social, cultural, and environmental impacts, including cultural degradation, displacement, and exploitation of natural resources (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). In response, tourism strategies have increasingly focused on community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasizes local engagement in planning and maintaining tourism activities (Murphy, 1985). Local community involvement plays a central role in enhancing sustainable tourism development. It involves active engagement, collaboration, and shared benefits among community members, tourism operators, and other stakeholders. Local communities possess valuable knowledge, cultural heritage, and natural resources that can enhance tourism experiences. Additionally, their participation fosters stewardship and promotes the preservation of traditions, the environment, and resources for future generations (Hiwasaki, 2006; Iorio & Corsale, 2014).

Sustainable development in protected areas like Obudu Plateau requires a balance between conservation objectives and socio-economic needs of local communities (Gidebo, 2022). Protected areas are essential for biodiversity conservation, but their establishment can significantly affect nearby communities. Therefore, fostering partnerships between residents, NGOs, and government agencies is crucial for promoting sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and cultural preservation (Gatiso, 2022).

The Obudu Plateau in Cross River State, Nigeria, stands out as a notable eco-tourism destination, renowned for its temperate climate, rolling hills, scenic landscapes, and the popular Obudu Mountain Resort. Over the years, the region has experienced increasing tourist influx and infrastructure development aimed at boosting its appeal.

Despite these developments, there remains a significant gap in understanding the perceptions, expectations, and concerns of local residents regarding tourism growth in the area. Anecdotal evidence suggests varied opinions. While some residents acknowledge the economic and social benefits tourism brings, others express concerns about environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and potential displacement (Ap, 1992; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

The absence of empirical data on residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau poses a barrier to effective planning and the formulation of sustainable tourism policies. Without genuine community participation and support, tourism projects may face resistance, misalignment with local priorities, or lead to the unsustainable exploitation of resources (Tosun, 2006). Therefore, evaluating residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development in the Obudu Plateau is both timely and essential. Such an evaluation will provide valuable insights into grassroots-level experiences and concerns, identify priority areas for intervention, and guide the design of participatory strategies that harmonize tourism development with community aspirations and sustainability goals (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Boyd & Butler, 1996).

Statement of the problem

Over the past ten years, tourism development in Obudu Plateau has seen significant progress, largely driven by its scenic landscapes, cultural heritage, and the presence of the Obudu Mountain Resort. While several efforts have been made to tap into the area's tourism potential, growing concerns have emerged regarding the sustainability of these developments and the level of involvement and benefit that local communities actually experience. Although sustainable tourism promotes environmental protection, cultural preservation, and inclusive economic advancement, these ideals may not always align with actual practice on the ground.

Local residents are essential stakeholders in the tourism sector, yet their views, engagement, and participation are frequently neglected or insufficiently examined. In the case of Obudu Plateau, there is a lack of research evaluating how residents perceive tourism's influence on their environment, traditions, economic well-being and overall quality of life. This lack of understanding can undermine the sustainability of tourism initiatives as unfavorable perceptions or minimal community support can result in resistance, disputes or the deterioration of crucial local resources.

Also, tourism planning in the area has often followed a top-down approach, where community voices are rarely part of the decision-making process. Such exclusion can lead to mistrust, dissatisfaction and an unfair sharing of tourism-related benefits. Without a thorough understanding of residents' perception or viewpoints, it becomes challenging for planners, policymakers, and tourism operators to implement strategies that align with sustainable development goals and the needs of the local population.

It is in view of this that this current study seeks to fill the knowledge gap by evaluating resident's perceptions toward sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau. The study will assess their level of participation, perceived benefits and challenges militating against effective resident's participation in sustainable tourism development. Understanding these perceptions is essential for promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable tourism development model for the region.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to evaluate the perception of residents toward sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau, Nigeria. The objectives include:

1. To examine residents' perceptions of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism development in the area.
2. Assess the level of resident's participation in sustainable tourism development activities in the area.

Research Questions

1. What is residents' perception of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism development in the area?
2. What is the level of resident's participation in sustainable tourism development activities in the area?

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between level of resident's participation and resident's perception of sustainable tourism development of Obudu Plateau.

Literature review

Concept of Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism development, as defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2004), involves meeting the needs of current tourists and host communities while preserving opportunities for future generations. It involves resource management that balances economic, social, and aesthetic demands with the protection of cultural values and environmental support systems. According to Hall (2000), this development model minimizes the environmental damage and negative imbalances associated with tourism activities.

Sustainable tourism is a holistic strategy aimed at reducing the negative impact of tourism on nature, society, and the economy, while maximizing its benefits especially for local populations. The sector can significantly contribute to sustainable development through job creation, especially for women and marginalized individuals (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002).

The overarching objective is to ensure environmental protection, uphold cultural identity, foster social equity and promote economic growth. As noted by Liu *et al.*, (2013), this approach addresses both present and future needs, emphasizing fairness across and within generations. Active participation of local residents is critical, as it helps improve living standards, strengthen the local economy, and preserve both the built and natural environments (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; McIntyre, 1993; Park & Yoon, 2009).

Hall and Lew (2009) emphasize that sustainable tourism considers both visitor satisfaction and the long-term sustainability of resources. This study supports a community-based model where active resident participation drives economic development, employment, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. However, perspectives differ, while some like Weaver (2006), argue that tourism can be sustainable and enhance lives, others believe that the negative environmental and social impacts make true sustainability unattainable (Wall, 1994; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005).

For sustainable tourism to succeed, it must address the needs of all stakeholders while enhancing the quality of life for host communities and protecting destination assets (UNWTO, 2013). Nevertheless, achieving this balance is complicated by various social, environmental, and institutional challenges. Economic, social and environmental sustainability are deeply interconnected, and progress relies on cooperation among government, private sectors and local communities (UNWTO, 2005).

Residents' Perception in Tourism Development

Residents' perception is a critical factor in determining the sustainability and long-term success of tourism development in any destination. As emphasized by Ap (1992), local residents are not only the hosts but also the individuals most directly affected positively or negatively by tourism activities. Their perceptions and attitudes toward tourism significantly influence their level of support or resistance, which in turn can determine whether a tourism initiative thrives or fails. When residents perceive tourism as beneficial through avenues such as job creation, improved infrastructure, cultural exchange and enhanced public services. They are more likely to support its continued development.

On the other hand, negative perceptions can arise when tourism is seen to contribute to environmental degradation, cultural commodification, rising living costs, or when the distribution of tourism benefits is perceived as unequal. In such cases, resistance and opposition may emerge, potentially hindering tourism growth and undermining sustainability efforts.

Several empirical studies further reinforce the complexity of residents' perceptions. For instance, Gursoy, Jurowski, and Uysal (2002) found that residents' attitudes are shaped by a range of factors, including their level of involvement in the tourism sector, perceived personal benefits, and the degree to which they trust tourism planners and

authorities. Their structural model highlights how both economic and socio-cultural concerns influence overall resident attitudes.

Similarly, Andereck and Vogt (2000) demonstrated that demographic factors such as age, education level and income as well as geographic proximity to tourism hotspots significantly affect how residents perceive tourism impacts. Their study also emphasizes that residents who are more engaged with tourism activities or who reside closer to tourism centers tend to have a more nuanced understanding of tourism's benefits and drawbacks.

Understanding the diverse and dynamic nature of resident perceptions is essential for tourism planners and policymakers. By incorporating residents' voices and concerns into decision-making processes, more inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies can be developed. This not only fosters community support but also ensures that tourism contributes positively to local development without compromising environmental, cultural or social well-being.

Importance of Resident Involvement in Sustainable Tourism Development

Active involvement of local residents is essential for sustainable and successful tourism initiatives (Tosun, 2006; UNWTO, 2019; Sebele, 2010). This ensures that tourism benefits align with community needs and reflect the cultural and environmental context of the area.

Tosun (2006) emphasizes that engaging communities promotes skill development and empowerment, allowing locals to take part in tourism-related ventures. Training and capacity-building efforts further strengthen their ability to participate meaningfully. Through tourism, communities can access income-generating opportunities, employment, and entrepreneurship. Revenue from tourism often supports infrastructure, education, and healthcare projects.

Tourism fosters local job creation, helping reduce unemployment and improve economic conditions. According to the UNWTO (2019), the sector generated 319 million jobs globally, many of which are community-based. Encouraging local entrepreneurship also helps diversify local economies. Sebele (2010) supports this, noting that tourism allows residents to create businesses offering authentic experiences to visitors.

Richards and Wilson (2006) argue that community involvement enhances cultural exchange by offering genuine local experiences. It ensures tourists engage with traditions in a respectful and meaningful way. Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) add that local participation in managing and promoting cultural sites is key to heritage preservation.

Stronza and Gordillo (2008) observe that when locals are involved in ecotourism, conservation outcomes improve, as communities have a vested interest in protecting their environment. Scheyvens (1999) supports this by noting that resident participation leads to sustainable practices like effective waste management and conservation. Furthermore,

tourism development that includes local communities promotes equity by spreading benefits across all social groups, including the marginalized (Ashley & Roe, 2002).

Tourism and local Community Participation

Local community participation is widely regarded as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism development. Tosun (2006) differentiates between genuine participation, induced participation, and coercive participation, providing a framework to understand varying levels of community involvement. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, tourism development is often characterized by top-down planning, which limits community influence and results in poor local ownership. Participatory tourism encourages shared decision-making, fosters transparency, and ensures that tourism projects align with community needs.

Studies in other African contexts have emphasized the need for locally driven tourism development to build trust and sustainability. For instance, (Scheyvens, 1999) highlighted the importance of empowering communities economically, socially, and politically to enable active participation in tourism development. Studies by (Bello et al., 2018), reinforce this perspective, emphasizing that effective community participation can lead to fairer distribution of tourism benefits and enhanced conservation efforts.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two key theories:

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory as introduced by Muler González *et al.*, (2023) in the context of tourism, provides a valuable framework for understanding how local residents assess and respond to tourism development in their communities. The theory is based on the idea that individuals engage in a rational evaluation of the costs and benefits associated with tourism. When residents perceive that the benefits such as employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, cultural pride, and increased income outweigh the negative impacts like congestion, cultural erosion, environmental degradation, or rising cost of living, they are more likely to support tourism initiatives.

Conversely, if the perceived costs are greater than the rewards, resistance or opposition to tourism may emerge. This theory helps explain why attitudes toward tourism vary within communities, as not all residents experience its impacts equally. Those who benefit directly from tourism, such as business owners or workers in the tourism sector, may have more favorable attitudes compared to those who feel excluded or burdened by its effects. Social Exchange Theory is particularly useful for tourism planners and policymakers because it emphasizes the importance of equitable benefit distribution and active community engagement (Muler González *et al.*, 2023).

Stakeholder theory

The stakeholder theory was first introduced by Edward Freeman in 1983 in his book "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach". However, the theory of stakeholders can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s when scholars began discussing the idea of organizations having responsibilities to groups beyond just shareholders (McGregor McCance, 2024). Stakeholder Theory proposes that a company's success is dependent on its ability to create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders (McGregor McCance, 2024). Stakeholders include: employees, suppliers, the community, partners and, of course, shareholders.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative) to obtain comprehensive data on residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau. This design is suitable for exploring attitudes, opinions, and behavioral patterns among a large population.

Study Area

The study was conducted in selected communities located around the Obudu Plateau in Cross River State, Nigeria. These communities are within or near the Obudu Mountain Resort and are directly or indirectly impacted by tourism activities. The area is known for its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and tourism potential, making it a suitable location for examining sustainable tourism development issues.

Population of the Study

The population comprised local residents (18 years and above) living in seven selected communities around the Obudu Plateau: Anape, Okpazenge, Kegol, Keji-Uka, Okwamu, Apah-ajili and Old-Ikwette. These communities were selected due to their proximity to tourism sites and degree of interaction with tourists.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To determine the sample size of the study population, the Taro Yamane sample size formula was used. A total of 348 respondents were selected using proportionate stratified sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of different age groups, genders, and economic backgrounds. Each community formed a stratum, and respondents were randomly selected within each stratum. Additionally, 10 key informants (community leaders, tourism operators, and government officials) were purposively selected for interviews based on their knowledge and involvement in tourism development.

Data Collection Instruments

Two main instruments were used for data collection:

- **Structured Questionnaire:** Designed to gather quantitative data on perceived impacts (economic, social, environmental), level of participation in tourism development and the challenges militating against effective participation. The questionnaire included closed and Likert-scale questions.
- **Interview Guide:** Used to collect qualitative data from key informants. The interview was also organized and their responses were recorded and used as a veritable tool to provide answers to the questions on challenges militating against effective participation.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collated through questionnaire were analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, frequencies, tables and simple percentages which form the basis for decision making.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents showed that, 232 respondents representing 69.5% of the total respondents were male, while 102 respondents representing 30.5% were female. This indicates a higher representation of males among the respondents.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of the respondents are within the age range of 36–45 years with 111 respondents representing 33.2% followed by the 26–35 age group with 104 respondents representing 31.1%. Those aged 46 years and above accounted for 66 respondents representing 19.8% while the 18–25 age group constituted 53 respondents representing 15.9%.

Marital status of the respondents shows that 216 of them representing 64.7% of the total respondents are married, while 118 respondents representing 35.3% are single.

The educational qualifications of respondents indicate that 156 of them representing 46.7% attained secondary education while 149 respondents representing 44.6% attained tertiary education. A smaller proportion, 28 respondents (8.4%) attained primary education, and only 1 respondent (0.3%) reported having no formal education.

In terms of occupation, tourism-related jobs were the most common, with 95 respondents representing 28.4%. Civil servants accounted for 77 respondents (23.1%), followed by farmers with 63 respondents (18.9%), security personnel with 47 respondents (14.1%), traders with 39 respondents (11.7%), and the unemployed with 13 respondents representing 3.9%.

Length of residency shows that a majority of respondents have lived in the area for over 20 years with 196 respondents representing 58.7%. This is followed by those who have resided for 16–20 years with 95 respondents representing 28.4%. Those who have lived for 11–15

years accounted for 38 respondents representing 11.4%, while only 5 respondents representing 1.5% have lived in the area for less than 10 years.

Residents' Perceptions of Sustainable Tourism Development in Obudu Plateau

Table 4.1 provides a summary of residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau, highlighting their views on various aspects of tourism's impact on the community. The results reveal that while residents generally acknowledge the positive contributions of tourism to economic growth, infrastructure development, cultural preservation, and social engagement, there are concerns about environmental management and public safety.

The statement 2 on the questionnaire which states that "Tourism has contributed positively to the local economy" was accepted with the highest mean score of 4.40 and standard deviation of 0.536, followed by statement 4 which states "The infrastructure developed for tourism also benefits residents (e.g., roads)" with a mean value of 4.37 and standard deviation of 0.589. Statement 6 which states "Tourism development in the area has led to better job opportunities for residents" also received a high mean score of 4.25 and standard deviation of 0.607.

Conversely, the lowest was statement 7 which states "Tourism activities in Obudu Plateau are effectively managed to prevent environmental harm" with a mean score of 3.39 and standard deviation of 0.578, followed by statement 8 which states "Tourism has improved the safety and cleanliness of public spaces in the area." with a mean score of 3.49 and standard deviation of 0.623. These findings suggest that while residents appreciate the economic benefits and infrastructural improvements brought about by tourism, there is a need for better management practices to enhance environmental protection and public safety.

Table 4.1 Residents' Perceptions of Sustainable Tourism Development in Obudu Plateau

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1. Tourism activities in the area prioritize environmental conservation.	4.05	.291	Accepted
2. Tourism has contributed positively to the local economy.	4.40	.536	Accepted
3. Tourism in the area helps preserve the local culture and tradition.	3.94	.417	Accepted
4. The infrastructure developed for tourism also benefits residents (e.g roads).	4.37	.589	Accepted
5. I am satisfied with the impact of tourism on the community's quality of life.	3.91	.443	Accepted
6. Tourism development in the area has led to better job opportunities for residents.	4.25	.607	Accepted
7. Tourism activities in Obudu plateau are effectively managed to prevent environmental harm.	3.39	.578	Undecided

8. Tourism has improved the safety and cleanliness of public spaces in the area.	3.49	.623	Undecided
9. Tourism has provided meaningful engagement opportunities for the youth.	4.10	.458	Accepted
10. Tourism projects in the area consider long- term impact on local environment.	4.07	.356	Accepted

Likert scale: 0.5-1.49 = Strongly Disagreed; 1.5-2.49 = Disagreed; 2.5-3.49 = neutral; 3.5-4.49=Agreed; 4.5-5 = Strongly Agreed.

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Level of residents' Participation in Sustainable Tourism Development activities in Obudu Plateau

Table 4.2 provides a summary of the level of residents' participation in sustainable tourism development activities in Obudu Plateau, highlighting their involvement in various sustainability efforts. The results indicate that while residents actively support some aspects of sustainable tourism, their participation in other areas remains neutral or undecided.

The statement 19, which says "I support flora and fauna conservation," was accepted with a mean score of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.621, followed by statement 20, which says "I discourage poaching activities," with a mean score of 4.04 and a standard deviation of 0.707. These results show strong agreement from residents in supporting wildlife conservation and discouraging poaching, indicating their significant contribution to sustainability.

The least was statement 14, which states "I participate in community meetings regarding tourism planning," with a mean score of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 0.881, indicating a rejection of active involvement in tourism planning. This suggests that residents are less engaged in the decision-making processes related to tourism development in the region.

Other statements, such as statement 11 which says "I am actively involved in tourism activities within the Obudu Plateau" and statement 12 which says "I provide guidance tours to tourists to support conservation efforts", received undecided ratings with mean scores around 3.0, indicating moderate or mixed levels of participation in these activities. Similarly, statement 15 which says "I support tourism development initiatives that benefit the community" and statement 17 which says "I engage in protecting water sources around the plateau" also had undecided responses with mean scores of 2.90 and 3.06, respectively. This reflects some uncertainty or lack of widespread involvement in these activities.

Table 4.2 Level of residents' Participation in Sustainable Tourism Development activities in Obudu Plateau

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
11. I actively involved in tourism activities within the Obudu plateau	3.07	.360	Undecided
12. I provide guidance tour to tourists to support conservation efforts.	3.12	.500	Undecided
13. Resident's manages nature reserves that protect local wildlife.	3.04	.740	Undecided
14. I participate in community meetings regarding tourism planning.	2.29	.881	Rejected
15. I support tourism development initiatives that benefit the community.	2.90	.846	Undecided
16. I participate in tree planting and reforestation initiatives to restore deforested areas and enhance the plateau natural beauty.	2.58	.774	Undecided
17. I engage in protecting water sources around the plateau.	3.06	.885	Undecided
18. I participate in community based- fire prevention and control measures to protect forest and farmland from uncontrolled wildfire.	2.99	.465	Undecided
19. I support flora and fauna conservation.	3.70	.621	Accepted
20. I discourage poaching activities.	4.04	.707	Accepted

Likert scale: 0.5-1.49 = Strongly Disagreed; 1.5-2.49 = Disagreed; 2.5-3.49 = neutral; 3.5-4.49=Agreed; 4.5-5 = Strongly Agreed.

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4.3: Pearson Correlations

VARIABLES	RPSTD	RPLRSTD	LRPSTDA	BALRPSTD	PMAELRPSTD
RPSTD	1				
RPLRSTD	-.032	1			
LRPSTDA	.015	.387**	1		
BALRPSTD	.177**	.204**	.196**	1	
PMAELRPSTD	.234**	.019	-.119*	.063	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Nonparametric Correlations

Table 4.4: Spearman's Rho

VARIABLES	RPSTD	RPLRSTD	LRPSTDA	BALRPSTD	PMAELRPSTD
RPSTD	1.000				
RPLRSTD	-.113*	1.000			
LRPSTDA	-.175**	.430**	1.000		
BALRPSTD	.020	.228**	.087	1.000	
PMAELRPSTD	.354**	-.015	-.160**	-.016	1.000

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is no significant relationship between the level of resident participation and residents' perception of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau.

The data presented in the Pearson correlation (table 4.3) provides insights into the linear relationships among variables influencing sustainable tourism development in the Obudu Plateau while the Spearman's Rho analysis (table 4.4) further explores the rank-order relationships among the variables.

From the result presented, the analysis of Pearson correlation showed a weak negative relationship ($r = -0.032$) between level of residents' participation in sustainable tourism development (LRPSTD) and their perception of sustainable tourism development (RPLRSTD). This correlation was not statistically significant, indicating that variations in residents' participation do not have a meaningful impact on their perception of sustainable tourism.

Similarly, the Spearman's rho correlation produced a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.113$), which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. While this suggests a slight inverse relationship, the overall results do not provide strong enough evidence to establish a meaningful connection between the variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was not rejected, implying that the level of resident participation in sustainable tourism development does not significantly influence their perception of tourism sustainability in Obudu Plateau.

Discussion of findings

The findings on residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau provide critical insights into the community's experiences and opinions. The results reveal strong agreement on the positive economic contributions of tourism; with high mean scores for economic benefits with an average mean score of 4.40, and job creation opportunities with a mean score of 4.25. These findings align with the work of Vodeb *et al.*, (2021), where residents in Slovenia and Croatia recognized economic benefits as a significant positive impact of tourism. Both studies underscore the importance of economic incentives in fostering resident support for sustainable tourism development.

Environmental conservation was also a key area of agreement in the present study, as residents strongly emphasized the prioritization of conservation with a mean score of 4.05 and standard deviation of 0.291 and the consideration of long-term environmental impacts in tourism projects with a mean score of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.356. This aligns with the work of Huayhuaca *et al.*, (2010), where environmental sustainability was found to be a significant predictor of resident satisfaction, and Cottrell *et al.*, (2013), which emphasized community education and participation in improving perceptions of environmental practices. Together, these findings highlight the importance of sustainable environmental practices in tourism development.

Residents also agreed that tourism helps preserve local culture, with a mean score of 3.94, reflecting support for cultural sustainability. This finding is consistent with Cottrell *et al.*, (2013), which underscored the role of community involvement in promoting cultural and environmental conservation. Also, the present study identified strong support for the development of tourism-related infrastructure, particularly roads with a mean score of 4.37, and meaningful engagement opportunities for youth with a mean score of 4.10. These findings are in line with the study by Cottrell *et al.*, (2013), who opined that local community involvement enhances perceptions of tourism's socio-economic benefits.

Despite these positive findings, the study also identified mixed perceptions of tourism impacts. Residents were generally satisfied with tourism's impact on their quality of life with a mean score of 3.91, but they expressed moderate agreement on the effectiveness of management practices to prevent environmental harm with a mean score of 3.39 and the impact of tourism on public safety and cleanliness with a mean score of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 0.623. These findings align with the study by Vodeb *et al.*, (2021), where residents acknowledged both positive and negative impacts of tourism, reflecting the complexity of balancing tourism development with community concerns. The variability in perceptions of safety and cleanliness suggests a need for improved management strategies to address these concerns.

In assessing the level of resident's participation in sustainable tourism development activities, the results revealed that residents are actively engaged in several tourism-related activities, particularly those supporting environmental conservation and cultural promotion. For instance, residents were most actively involved in providing guided tours to support conservation efforts with a mean score of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.415, organizing cultural festivals and events with a mean score of 4.31 and a standard deviation of 0.598, and advocating for the management of nature reserves with a mean score of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.514. These findings correspond with the concept of high community participation, as discussed by Murphy and Reisinger (2013), where residents are actively involved in tourism planning and development, especially in areas related to environmental conservation and cultural promotion. The strong commitment to preserving biodiversity, as reflected in the mean scores of 4.33 for discouraging poaching and 4.30 for supporting flora and fauna conservation, further supports the idea of high levels of trust and communication among stakeholders, as highlighted by Jamal & Getz (2015) and Sharpley (2014).

However, the study also revealed variability in resident's involvement across different roles. Activities such as the sale of sustainable souvenirs with a mean score of 2.89 and standard deviation of 0.653, and sustainable timber harvesting with a mean score of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 0.846 were less widely practiced or inconsistently supported by residents. These lower mean scores and higher standard deviations suggest that participation in these activities is not as widespread or uniform, reflecting a moderate level of resident's involvement, as described by Jamal & Getz (2015) and Sharpley (2014).

Although residents were moderately engaged in activities such as tree planting and reforestation with a mean score of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 0.645, these roles were not universally adopted, indicating that participation levels in these practices were not as high as in other areas like cultural promotion or biodiversity conservation.

Despite these variations, the study found strong collective support for certain roles, particularly those related to environmental conservation. The high mean scores for roles such as discouraging poaching and supporting flora and fauna conservation with mean scores of 4.33 and 4.30 respectively suggest a strong community consensus on the importance of these efforts. This collective commitment aligns with the findings of Ghaderi *et al.*, (2021), who noted that higher levels of community participation lead to more positive attitudes toward tourism development. However, the variability observed in practices like reforestation and the sale of sustainable souvenirs contrasts with the generally high level of community involvement described in other tourism contexts, where participation is often more consistent across various activities.

The study indicates that while the residents of Obudu Plateau demonstrate strong engagement in certain aspects of sustainable tourism, there are areas where participation is more moderate or inconsistent. This variability highlights the need for targeted efforts to enhance participation in specific sustainable practices, ensuring broader and more consistent community involvement in the tourism development process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study evaluates of residents' perception of sustainable tourism development in Obudu Plateau. While residents showed strong support for the economic, environmental and cultural benefits of tourism, statistical analysis revealed no significant relationship between their level of participation and their perceptions of tourism sustainability. This suggests that even though residents actively engage in various tourism-related activities especially those promoting conservation and cultural heritage, their participation does not necessarily shape how they perceive tourism's sustainability.

Also, while residents are highly involved in certain activities such as organizing cultural events and supporting biodiversity conservation, their participation in others, like sustainable souvenir sales and reforestation is less consistent. These disparities point to varying levels of interest or accessibility across different aspects of sustainable tourism.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that targeted awareness and capacity-building programs to be implemented to deepen residents' understanding of the broader concept of sustainable tourism and how their participation can influence its success. While residents already engage in various activities that promote conservation and cultural heritage, efforts should be made to enhance their involvement in less-participated areas such as sustainable souvenir production and reforestation initiatives. This could be achieved through community training, incentives and partnerships with local tourism

stakeholders. Similarly, fostering a more inclusive decision-making process and ensuring that residents see clear links between their actions and the long-term sustainability of tourism could help align their perceptions with their level of involvement, thereby strengthening the overall impact of community participation in sustainable tourism development in the Obudu Plateau.

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