

Community-Based Tourism: Global Perspectives, Benefits, Challenges, and Research Frameworks for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This review synthesizes global and regional perspectives on community-based tourism (CBT), highlighting its evolution from a niche concept to a mainstream development strategy linked to poverty reduction, cultural preservation, and socio-ecological resilience. Drawing on recent literature, the paper examines the opportunities and benefits of CBT alongside persistent challenges. A comparative analysis of CBT implementation in developing and developed nations underscores contextual differences in policy frameworks, land tenure, and community cohesion. The review further explores key research frameworks applied in CBT assessment, including the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Community Capitals Framework (CCF), as well as global guidelines like the AIUa Framework and practical models such as community-based ecotourism (CBET). Special attention is given to SLF and its adaptation for tourism (SLFT), outlining its strengths, applications, and limitations. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for integrated, participatory, and resilience-oriented frameworks to ensure CBT delivers inclusive and sustainable outcomes, particularly in developing regions such as African countries.

Keywords: Community-based Tourism (CBT); Benefits and Challenges; Research Frameworks; Sustainable Livelihoods Framework for Tourism (SLFT); Africa

Concepts and Perspectives

Community-based tourism (CBT), which involves local communities in planning, developing, and managing tourism activities, has become a widely adopted approach for sustainable tourism development (Lee & Jan, 2019). Both CBT and sustainable tourism development (STD) aim to balance economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity by integrating local knowledge, promoting conservation, and enhancing community well-being (Kiss, 2004; Lee & Jan, 2019). CBT seeks to ensure that economic benefits remain within the community while prioritizing cultural and environmental sustainability (Tosun, 2006). Resident involvement fosters ownership, responsibility, and improved economic and social outcomes (Ngo et al., 2024; Jackson, 2025).

According to Summit (2002), CBT promotes belonging among residents and supports tourism development alongside natural resource conservation, protecting heritage and customs. Successful CBT practices enhance livelihoods and community survival, while neglect can lead to environmental degradation, resource loss, displacement, and reduced revenues. Over the past three decades, CBT has evolved from a niche alternative to a mainstream sustainable development strategy emphasizing local ownership, participatory governance, and equitable benefit-sharing. Foundational definitions focused on local participation (Murphy, 1985; Scheyvens, 1999), while recent studies incorporate social justice, inclusive governance, and resilience-building (Lemunge et al., 2025; Priatmoko et al., 2021). CBT is now linked to inclusive growth, climate resilience, and community empowerment (Abreu et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2024).

Effectiveness depends on mobilizing social capital, negotiating power dynamics, and integrating into competitive tourism value chains (Kumar, 2023; Lemunge et al., 2025). When

supported by capacity building and institutional partnerships, CBT contributes to Sustainable Development Goals such as poverty reduction, food security, gender equality, and responsible consumption (Abreu et al., 2024; Lemunge et al., 2025). Conversely, poor governance, elite capture, and limited managerial capacity undermine equity and authenticity (Clark et al., 2024; Kumar, 2023). Contemporary literature frames CBT as both an alternative to mass tourism and a community-centered development model requiring sustained investment in skills, transparent governance, and equitable benefit-sharing to achieve long-term sustainability. This shift underscores CBT's growing role as a strategic tool for resilience and inclusive tourism development in Africa and other developing regions.

Global Perspectives on Community-based Tourism

Globally, community-based tourism (CBT) has been shown to support conservation and cultural revitalization, especially when communities continue to hold meaningful decision-making authority and secure equitable access to benefits. Studies from Latin America and the Pacific confirm the role CBT's play in strengthening Indigenous identity and socio-ecological resilience through locally governed tourism enterprises (Ruiz-Ballesteros & del Campo Tejedor, 2020; Gascón & Mamani, 2021). Similarly, other studies point to positive conservation outcomes where CBT aligns with community land rights and participatory governance (Kumar et al., 2023; Esmail et al., 2023). However, elite capture, corruption, limited digital skills, and donor dependency have been identified as challenges that still continue to undermine local control and divert benefits away from vulnerable households (U4, 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Additionally, empirical studies from Indonesia and Nepal show that institutional gaps and weak market linkages frequently leave CBT ventures commercially fragile and overly dependent on external funding or tourism seasonality (Wijayanto et al., 2022; Savage et al., 2021). Consequently, recent research studies recommend that, if CBT is to deliver long-term conservation and cultural outcomes, there is need to have stronger governance structures, to clarify community property rights, and to build capacity that link communities to value chains (Suyatna, 2024; Jackson, 2025).

Community-based Tourism in Africa

Community-based tourism in Africa has been widely linked to community-based environmental conservation, revenue-sharing, cultural preservation, and improved livelihoods, particularly in wildlife-rich and culturally significant landscapes. Empirical studies show that, when communities have protected land rights, effective institutions, and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms, CBT can improve household income, reduce human-wildlife conflict, enhance environmental resilience and strengthen local governance (Oduor, 2020; Snyman & Bricker, 2019; Lemunge et al., 2025).

In Kenya, conservancies such as those in Maasai Mara and the northern rangelands demonstrate both the potential and challenges of CBT, in that, while they contribute to economic empowerment and biodiversity protection, they continue to face the challenges of uneven benefit distribution, power struggles, limited access to markets and institutional weaknesses (Sagana et al., 2023; Weldemichel & Lein, 2019). Capacity building is particularly critical for inclusive outcomes thus according to Imbaya et al. (2019), training, skills development, and community engagement significantly improve the commercial viability and equity of CBT initiatives.

Besides wildlife-focused CBT, cultural heritage and coastal initiatives demonstrate the integration of environmental and cultural conservation into local tourism. For instance, coastal

sacred forest programs and Swahili cultural tourism enterprises at the Kenyan coast support ecosystem protection and cultural revitalization as they generate local income (Kibicho, 2004; Runya et al, 2023). In addition, trans-boundary initiatives around Mt. Elgon and Lake Victoria highlight the potential for regional collaboration, enhanced environmental governance, and tourism competitiveness, though they also underscore the challenges of multi-jurisdictional coordination (Omondi & Nabanoga, 2020; Nyamweya, 2023). Collectively, recent African and Kenyan research indicates that CBT can be a powerful tool for sustainable development, but its success depends on strong governance, institutional support, capacity building, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Benefits and Challenges

Insights from Recent Review Articles

These insights are based on a synthesis of seven recent conceptual and review articles that explore the opportunities, benefits, and challenges associated with community-based tourism development: Strydom et al. (2018), Kihima and Musila (2019), Stone & Stone (2020), Prakoso et al. (2020), Afeno-Agbe & Mensah (2022), Velan (2022), and Suyatna et al. (2024). Based on these review articles, the following is a synthesized summary of the opportunities, benefits, and challenges associated with CBT.

Opportunities and Benefits of CBT:

- **Socio-Economic Development:** CBT generates income, employment, and supports small-scale enterprises; It brings foreign exchange and stimulates local economies.
- **Community Empowerment:** CBT enhances local capacity, fosters ownership, Community control and management and encourages participation in decision-making; It strengthens community pride and identity.
- **Cultural Preservation and Conservation:** CBT promotes safeguarding of traditions, heritage, and local values.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Encourages responsible tourism and conservation of natural resources.
- **Policy and Planning Support:** CBT provides a framework for inclusive tourism policy-making and long-term planning.

Challenges of CBT:

- **Limited Capacity and Skills Development:** Communities often lack the necessary skills, education, and resources to manage CBT effectively.
- **Governance and Institutional Weaknesses:** Poor coordination, lack of transparency, and weak institutional support hinder CBT success.
- **Economic Leakage and Inequity:** Benefits may not be evenly distributed; local elites may dominate projects, and revenue may not stay within the community.
- **Market Access and Promotion:** Difficulty in reaching broader markets and attracting tourists limits growth.
- **Cultural and Structural Barriers:** Resistance to change, lack of trust in external stakeholders, and bureaucratic hurdles impede progress.
- **Conflicts and Power Dynamics:** Internal disputes and unequal power relations can erode trust and disrupt CBT initiatives.

- Sustainability Concerns: CBT must be economically viable and socially inclusive to avoid becoming exploitative or unsustainable.
- Inadequate infrastructure: Basic facilities such as reliable transportation, accommodation, communication network and utilities, which are essential for supporting tourism activities.
- Limited research: Without sufficient research to understand the complexities and unique challenges faced by communities attempting to implement and sustain CBT initiatives, it becomes difficult to identify best practices, measure impacts accurately and develop effective strategies for overcoming obstacles such as limited capacity governance issues and economic inequities.

Comparative Perspectives on CBT Development: Developing vs. Developed Nations

Drawing on a review of 103 location-specific case studies and relevant literature, Zielinski et al. (2020) conducted a comparative analysis across multiple thematic categories to investigate how community-based tourism (CBT) and rural tourism are conceptualized and implemented differently in developing and developed nations, despite sharing similar goals and challenges. The key differences are:

- Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors: Developing nations often use CBT as a tool for poverty alleviation, while developed nations focus more on lifestyle and heritage preservation.
- Policy and Governance: Developed countries tend to have more robust institutional frameworks, whereas developing nations rely heavily on external support and NGOs.
- Land Ownership: Land tenure systems differ significantly, affecting community control and tourism development.
- Community Cohesiveness: Social cohesion and collective action are more prevalent in some developing contexts, influencing CBT success.
- External Stakeholder Assimilation: The role of NGOs, donors, and government varies, with developing nations more dependent on external actors.
- Type of Visitors: Developed nations attract domestic and regional tourists, while developing nations often rely on international visitors.

The study argues that the national context - rather than objective criteria - largely shapes how CBT is perceived and implemented.

Illustrative Case Studies

Table 1 presents selected case studies on community-based tourism, organized according to the key opportunities/benefits and challenges each case reveals.

Table 1. Selected Case Studies on CBT Benefits and Challenges

Destination	Opportunities/benefits	Challenges	Authors
Ghana	Modest economic gains through infrastructure and income. Conservation incentives promoting sustainable resource use. Community empowerment via involvement in tourism planning.	Apathy toward participation. Employment and revenue sharing issues. Capacity limitations. Human-wildlife conflict affecting livelihoods.	Mensah (2017)
Nepal	Improved individual well-being and psychological health.	Lack of proper mechanisms and planning.	Baniya et al. (2018)



	Community development through entrepreneurship and cultural preservation. Enhanced quality of life (financial and emotional).	Limited scope and community engagement.	
Kenya	Participation in decision-making and Benefit Sharing Annual compensation and employment of Local communities Infrastructure development	Participation is confined to given consent on land utilisation and benefit sharing Community lacks power to ensure that agreements are implemented Benefits not evenly distributed	Kihima & Musila (2019)
Thailand	Abundant Tourism Resources Improved Security and Local Economy	Resource Ownership Conflicts. Benefit Leakage. Financial Constraints. Low Community Participation.	Lo & Janta (2020)
Romania	Rich natural and cultural resources. Entrepreneurial leadership driving CBT success. Social and cultural capital. Revitalization of rural areas.	Post-socialist transitions affecting stability. Municipal barriers and bureaucracy. Weak institutional frameworks threatening sustainability.	Nagy & Segui (2020)
Vietnam	Cultural and craft heritage attracting tourists. Growth in tourism, especially international visitors. Support from government and NGOs. Community hospitality and interactive experiences.	Limited human resources and training. Space and material constraints. Competition from industrial products. Infrastructure and marketing gaps.	Pham et al. (2021)
Indonesia	Ecological and cultural assets. Strong community engagement potential. Positive indicators for sustainability and growth. Competitive tourism potential.	Governance and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Limited stakeholder collaboration. Weak promotion and visibility. Internal and external community conflicts.	Ahsani et al. (2022)
Ethiopia	Positive community attitudes toward tourism. Eco-tourism potential with rich resources. Existing infrastructure supporting CBT.	Weak tourism marketing. Inadequate accommodation facilities. Low community awareness of CBT principles.	Gebreyesus et al. (2022)
Malaysia	Ecotourism entrepreneurship social, cultural capital and networks Institutional support Environmental awareness Cultural preservation Improve gender relations	Lack of trained human resources Competition and dominance by outsiders/non-native investors owning Community-based ecotourism enterprises	Kunjuraman (2022)

Frameworks for Assessing CBT in Research

There are multiple frameworks used in community-based tourism, each focusing on different aspects of development and sustainability. The frameworks used in community-based tourism are primarily conceptual theories, policy guidance, and practical models, centered on community ownership, empowerment, equitable benefit-sharing, and sustainability - often informed by participatory development traditions and social-ecological perspectives. In evaluation practice, CBT

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studies increasingly link local outcomes to livelihoods (via the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework), resident attitudes (via Social Exchange Theory), and multi-capital community assets (via the Community Capitals Framework).

Core Conceptual Frameworks

Participatory Development: This foundational model emphasizes the active and meaningful involvement of local communities at all stages of tourism planning and management, from decision-making to implementation and benefit distribution.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF): SLF places people at the center and analyzes assets (human, natural, physical, financial, social), vulnerability context, structures/processes, strategies, and outcomes - making it useful for assessing how CBT contributes to livelihood resilience and poverty reduction.

Social Exchange Theory (SET): This theory is often used to understand the local community's perception of tourism impacts. It suggests that residents are more likely to support tourism development if they perceive the benefits (e.g., income, jobs) as outweighing the costs (e.g., cultural dilution, environmental stress).

Socio-Ecological Resilience: Resilience thinking highlights non-linear change, thresholds, adaptive capacity, and multi-level governance - increasingly applied to tourism destinations and community systems coping with shocks (e.g., pandemics, climate extremes) and guiding CBT strategies for adaptability.

Community Capitals Framework (CCF): CCF assesses seven interconnected capitals: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built - encouraging balanced investment and offering a diagnostic lens for CBT projects and outcomes.

Global Policy and Measurement Guidance

The International Union of Local Authority (AIUla Framework): A global guideline developed by UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO) and the G20, which provides a framework for inclusive community development through tourism aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Yanes et al 2019, Prakoso et al 2020; Arias *et al.*, 2014). Prakoso et al., 2020 reported that this framework focuses on using tourism for inclusive community development. Its primary goal is to help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially regarding poverty reduction and decent work. Key aspects include promoting economic growth and job creation within the community, empowering marginalized communities, and ensuring cultural and environmental sustainability.

Practical Implementation Models

The "6A" framework: This framework entails the major 6 A's in a destination i.e. Attraction, Accommodation, Accessibility, Activities, and Amenities, or sometimes Available packages/Ancillary services (Tong et al., 2025): While a general tourism destination model, it is adapted in CBT to ensure these components are developed or managed by the local community to maximize local retention of benefits.

Integrated Ecotourism Model (CBET): This model specifically focuses on combining environmental conservation goals with community development objectives, often within protected areas, and involves the community as stewards of their natural resources (Raspati *et al.*, 2017)

Multi-stakeholder Approach: Many initiatives, such as the CAMPFIRE initiative in Zimbabwe or the TourDure program in South Korea, utilize a collaborative approach involving

communities, NGOs, governments, and private sectors to provide essential support, funding, and market access (Stone & Stone, 2025; Jung, 2022).

Community-Based Enterprise (CBE) Model: This model treats the CBT initiative as a business owned and operated by the community (formally or informally), with profits shared among members or reinvested into community projects (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2014). The fundamental goal of these frameworks is to ensure that communities have significant control and ownership over the tourism activities in their areas, moving beyond low-level employment provision to true economic and social empowerment.

A typology of CBT Assessment Frameworks

CBT frameworks used in research can be grouped into three overlapping categories:

1. Sustainability-focused frameworks

(a) *Holistic sustainability:* This approach ensures a balance between the environment, economy, and social aspects of tourism, mainly focusing on the SDG's

(b) *Livelihoods frameworks:* This framework connects CBT with local livelihood improvement by focusing on enhancing job opportunities, creating markets for local products, and leading to improvements in quality of life through investments in health, education, and infrastructure.

(c) *Community Capitals Framework (CCF):* This analytical tool examines seven interconnected capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built/physical) to assess and advance sustainable tourism development strategies

2. Empowerment and participation frameworks

(a) *Ladder of participation:* This model illustrates degrees of community involvement, from non-participation to full citizen control, to ensure the community has power and influence in decision-making.

(b) *Community empowerment:* This framework prioritizes the community's ability to own tourism products, make their own decisions, and enjoy the benefits of tourism.

3. Business and operational frameworks

(a) *Business Plan Approach framework* - this framework emphasizes treating CBT as a business with a solid plan, market strategy, and commercial mindset to ensure profitability and sustainability.

(b) *Operational frameworks such as Monitoring and evaluation* - this component includes establishing baseline assessments, setting performance indicators, and using feedback mechanisms like surveys and community meetings to track progress and make necessary adjustments.

(c) *Value proposition* - this framework involves understanding what travelers want and creating a compelling value proposition that goes beyond just supporting the community, ensuring the product is attractive to tour operators and travelers.

Integrated and Hybrid Frameworks

(a) *Community-based ecotourism:* This framework combines CBT principles with ecotourism to foster ecological and cultural awareness, based on social equity and leading to the long-term well-being of local people.

(b) *Integrated models:* These frameworks bring together multiple elements, such as public and private sector collaboration, regional coordination, and a focus on sustainability, to create a more comprehensive approach to tourism development.

Community-based tourism (CBT) extends far beyond tourism - it intersects with livelihoods, culture, governance, and sustainability. Frameworks such as the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) provide structured approaches to capture these diverse dimensions systematically, rather than focusing solely on economic indicators. By applying these frameworks, researchers and practitioners can gain deeper insights into community perceptions and power dynamics, evaluate livelihood and multi-capital outcomes, understand resident support for tourism, and measure sustainability consistently and comprehensively.

Compared to SET and CCF, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) has been applied less frequently in evaluating tourism's impacts on communities. The following section provides an expanded review of SLF and its application in assessing community-based tourism.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) in CBT

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework - Origin and application

The origin of Sustainable Livelihoods as a concept is widely attributed to a 1992 discussion paper by Chambers and Conway. Chambers and Conway defined a livelihood, to comprise of the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long-term (Chambers & Conway, 1992: 7).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) has its origin in the development circles in the 1980s and 1990s. The focus on livelihoods as argued by Solesbury (2003) was necessitated by wider shifts in approaches to development from economic growth to human wellbeing and sustainability. The initial application in policy was in 1999 as the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach by the UK's Department for International Development - DFID (DFID 1999).

In 1998, The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) through a White Paper, developed The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Framework, a framework for analyzing rural development interventions. The framework highlighted five interacting elements: contexts (policy settings, politics, history, agro-ecology, socio-economic conditions); resources (capital assets); institutions (formal and informal institutions and organizations); strategies (agricultural intensification/ extensification, livelihood diversification and migration); and outcomes (Scoones, 1998; Ellis & Allison, 2004; DFID, 1999; Solesbury, 2003; Natarajan et al., 2022; Gkartzios et al. 2022; Kumar et al. 2023; Yang 2024).

Serrat (2017) argues the following about the sustainable livelihoods approach. First it improves understanding of the livelihoods of the poor. Second it organizes the factors that constrain or enhance livelihood opportunities and shows how they relate. Finally, it can help plan development activities and assess the contribution that existing activities have made to sustaining livelihoods.

Strengths and Critiques of SLF

The main support of the livelihoods approach was its strength as opposed to earlier analysis of development measures which 'do not fit or capture the complex and diverse realities of most rural life' (Chambers & Conway, 1992: 4). The concept of sustainable livelihoods also linked the three extant concepts of capability, equity and sustainability (Solesbury 2003). Natarajan et al., (2022) noted that the popularity of the SLF among development practitioners emerged both from its

practical focus, and its de-politicization of wider shifts in the development landscape. The SLF also values local knowledge, engages with local people and, in Robert Chambers (1983) term, seeks to ‘put the last first’.

Solesbury (2003) argued that livelihoods approaches are overly mechanical and fail to account for time and chance. Scoones (2013) identified four major gaps: lack of engagement with economic globalization; insufficient attention to power, politics, and governance; inadequate treatment of long-term environmental changes such as climate change; and neglect of broader agrarian transitions. Natarajan et al. (2022) highlighted weaknesses in theory, method, scale, historical conceptualization, politics, and decolonizing knowledge debates, proposing a reformulated SLF for the 21st century—structural, spatially disaggregated, dynamic, and ecologically coherent. Yang (2024) supports this updated framework, emphasizing: (i) “livelihoods in flux” to reflect dynamic and unpredictable strategies; (ii) reduced emphasis on assets, focusing instead on nested relationships among assets, power, and environmental contexts; (iii) inclusion of livelihood characteristics, vulnerability, and opportunity to balance negative connotations; and (iv) greater attention to macro factors (policy, markets, societal shifts) and microelements (cultural traditions, collective governance).

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework for Tourism (SLFT)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework for Tourism (SLFT) is an adaptation of the broader Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, specifically tailored to the tourism context. It provides a holistic approach to analyzing how tourism affects the livelihoods of local communities.

SLFT is increasingly used to guide and evaluate community-based tourism initiatives, especially in rural and developing areas. The framework helps assess tourism’s impact on local livelihoods, design sustainable tourism projects that deliver community benefits, and inform governments and NGOs on strategies to reduce poverty and enhance resilience. It does so by examining five key forms of capital:

1. Human Capital - Skills, knowledge, health, and the ability to work in tourism-related jobs. Example: Training locals as guides or hospitality staff.
2. Social Capital - Social networks, relationships, and institutions that foster cooperation and trust. Example: Community-based tourism initiatives or cooperatives.
3. Natural Capital - Natural resources such as land, water, and biodiversity that tourism depends on. Example: Ecotourism in protected areas or scenic landscapes.
4. Physical Capital - Infrastructure and tools needed for tourism, including roads, buildings, and technology. Example: Lodges, transportation systems, and communication networks.
5. Financial Capital - Income, savings, credit, and other economic assets. Example: Revenue from tourism reinvested into the community.

Application of SLFT in Assessing Community-Based Tourism

Evaluating Livelihood Outcomes: SLFT offers a systematic approach to assessing how CBT projects influence the economic, social, and environmental well-being of local communities. For example, a study in Sabah, Malaysia, applied SLFT to examine tourism’s impact on local employment, skill development, and access to resources (Kunjuraman, 2023).

Identifying Gaps and Vulnerabilities: The framework helps identify weaknesses in tourism planning, such as over-reliance on external funding, seasonal income fluctuations, and limited local autonomy. A case study of the Aangan project in Goa, India, revealed that CBT initiatives often

struggle when institutional support is withdrawn, underscoring the need for community empowerment and capacity building (Mahatme et al., 2025).

Integrating Socio-Cultural Capital: Recent adaptations of SLFT incorporate socio-cultural capital into the original framework, acknowledging the role of cultural identity, traditions, and community cohesion in tourism success. This addition enhances SLFT's relevance to CBT, where cultural experiences are central to the tourism product (Kunjuraman, 2023).

Promoting Resilience and Sustainability: SLFT encourages the design of CBT projects that build resilience by diversifying income sources, strengthening local governance, and fostering long-term capacity. It supports strategies such as equitable profit-sharing, inclusive decision-making, and sustainable resource use (Mahatme et al., 2025).

Guiding Policy and Practice: Policymakers and NGOs use SLFT to design, monitor, and evaluate tourism interventions. The framework ensures that tourism development aligns with broader goals, including poverty reduction, gender equity, and environmental conservation (Paiano et al., 2024).

Limitations of SLFT in Evaluating Community-Based Tourism

When applying SLFT to assess CBT, the literature highlights several key limitations: an overemphasis on economic capital, limited integration of power dynamics and governance, a static representation of livelihoods, insufficient attention to cultural and emotional capital, and a lack of tools for measuring subjective well-being.

Overemphasis on Economic Capital: SLFT often prioritizes financial and economic outcomes, which can overshadow non-economic values such as cultural preservation, emotional well-being, and community identity. This narrow focus may lead to tourism models that prioritize profit over sustainability or equity (Kunjuraman, 2023). For example, in the Aangan CBT project in Goa, India, economic dependency on external funding created vulnerability when institutional support was withdrawn (Mahatme et al., 2025).

Limited Integration of Power Dynamics and Governance: The framework tends to underrepresent power relations, political structures, and governance issues that influence tourism outcomes. It may not fully capture how elite capture, external control, or lack of community autonomy affect CBT success (Kunjuraman, 2023). Local empowerment and self-sufficiency are critical, yet SLFT does not adequately address these dimensions.

Static Representation of Livelihoods: SLFT can be overly static, failing to reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of tourism livelihoods. Seasonal tourism, shifting visitor preferences, and changing community roles are often not well captured (Kunjuraman, 2023). For instance, seasonal fluctuations in tourism income posed major challenges in the Goa case study, affecting long-term sustainability (Mahatme et al., 2025).

Insufficient Attention to Cultural and Emotional Capital: Traditional SLFT focuses on five types of capital—human, social, natural, physical, and financial—but often overlooks socio-cultural capital, including traditions, identity, and emotional ties. This omission weakens its ability to assess CBT projects that rely heavily on cultural experiences (Mahatme et al., 2025). Expanding SLFT to include socio-cultural capital has been proposed to better reflect CBT realities.

Lack of Measurement Tools for Subjective Well-being: SLFT does not provide robust tools for measuring subjective well-being, such as community satisfaction, pride, or perceived quality of life. These indicators are crucial in CBT, where success is not only economic but also social and emotional (Paiano et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Community-based tourism represents a powerful tool for achieving sustainable development goals, fostering local empowerment, and promoting cultural and environmental stewardship. Drawing on recent literature, this paper examines the concept of community-based tourism, highlighting its opportunities and benefits as well as the persistent challenges it faces. The review analyzes key research frameworks used in CBT assessment, including Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). Particular attention is given to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and its adaptation for tourism (SLFT). The review paper indicates that research frameworks like SLF, SET, and CCF provide valuable lenses for assessing CBT impacts, yet each has inherent limitations that call for more dynamic, context-sensitive, and multi-dimensional approaches. Integrating socio-cultural and emotional dimensions, power dynamics, and resilience thinking into existing frameworks can enhance their relevance and effectiveness. Future research should consider all these major research frameworks, paying attention to each model's strengths, applications, and limitations. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for integrated, participatory, and resilience-oriented frameworks to ensure CBT delivers inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

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