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To Determine Perceptions of Community Members Towards Participating in Cultural Tourism Activities: A Case of Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise in Moshi District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the perceptions of community members towards participating in cultural tourism activities at Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE) in Moshi District, Tanzania. The study is guided by Pretty's typology of community participation framework, a qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and document review. The data were analyzed thematically to capture the voices and experiences of participants. Findings revealed that community members generally hold positive perceptions of participation, driven by socio-economic benefits such as employment opportunities and livelihood diversification, as well as intrinsic values including cultural pride, identity preservation and heritage safeguarding. However, concerns were raised regarding limited decision-making power, unequal benefit-sharing and inadequate infrastructure, which were seen as barriers to more meaningful involvement. The study concludes that for cultural tourism to succeed sustainably, there is a need to enhance local ownership, improve training and ensure fair distribution of benefits. These insights contribute to broader debates on community-based tourism by highlighting the centrality of local perceptions in shaping the success and inclusiveness of cultural tourism enterprises.

Keyword: Cultural Tourism, Community Participation

1.0 Introduction

Cultural tourism has grown into a major component of global tourism, offering visitors experiences of heritage, traditions and local lifestyles. It is widely recognized as a tool for cultural preservation and economic growth in many communities (Richards, 2023). Community perceptions strongly influence the outcomes of cultural tourism. When community members view tourism positively, they are more likely to support its expansion and participate actively. Conversely, negative perceptions often result in resistance and limited participation (Salazar, 2018). Participation is often motivated by expectations of benefits. Economic opportunities, social recognition, and cultural revitalization are among the factors that encourage involvement, but when benefits are perceived as unequally distributed, participation tends to decline (Scheyvens, 2022). Thus, perceptions of fairness are closely linked to levels of engagement.

Beyond economic considerations, many residents are motivated by intrinsic values such as cultural pride and identity preservation. Studies show that residents may participate in cultural tourism as a way to protect and showcase traditions to outsiders (Salazar, 2022). These motivations, however, exist alongside barriers that constrain participation. Limited skills, weak infrastructure, and lack of training opportunities often reduce local involvement (Mbaiwa, 2023). Governance frameworks also play a role: top-down decision-making can create feelings of exclusion, while participatory models encourage empowerment and positive attitudes (Manyara and Jones, 2023). Authenticity further shapes perceptions, as some communities fear cultural commodification, while others see tourism as a respectful means of strengthening traditions (Cohen and Cohen, 2019). These contrasting experiences show that community perceptions are not uniform but shaped by multiple social, cultural, and economic factors.

In Tanzania, Cultural Tourism Enterprises (CTEs) have been promoted since the 1990s to diversify tourism beyond wildlife attractions and strengthen community-based initiatives (Lwoga, 2017). Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE), located in Uru Msuni village in Kilimanjaro Region, is one such initiative where residents participate in activities such as traditional cooking, farm tours, homestays and storytelling. While the enterprise provides opportunities for cultural preservation and livelihood improvement, little is known about how local residents perceive their involvement and the challenges they encounter in sustaining participation.

Therefore, this paper aims to determine community members' perceptions toward participating in cultural tourism activities at KCTE. By focusing on local voices, the study provides insights into the motivations, constraints, and expectations of residents, offering lessons for strengthening community-based tourism and promoting more inclusive and sustainable cultural tourism development.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Pretty's (1995) Typology of Community Participation explains different levels of community involvement, ranging from passive participation, where people are only informed, to self-mobilization, where communities control decisions and resources.

At the lower levels, participation is manipulative or passive, with communities merely told what has been decided. Consultation offers space to share opinions, but with little real influence. In some cases, people participate mainly for material incentives, contributing labor or skills but lacking authority in planning or decision-making. At more advanced stages, communities engage in joint analysis with external stakeholders, gaining some decision-making power and acting as partners. The highest forms of participation involve self-mobilization, where local people independently take initiatives, manage resources and sustain control.

In this study, Pretty's typology is used as an analytical tool to classify and evaluate the actual patterns of community involvement in cultural tourism at KCTE, highlighting whether participation is passive, incentive-driven or genuinely empowering.

2.2 Empirical Review

Tichaawa and Mhlanga (2015) examined local community perceptions of the CAMPFIRE program, a well-established community-based wildlife tourism initiative near Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. They employed a descriptive survey method using Likert-scale questionnaires to gauge residents' opinions on the program's effectiveness. Bivariate statistical techniques analyzed the perception data. Results showed a generally positive attitude. These findings suggest that community members generally view the program positively, especially when they see direct benefits and participate in resource management. The study concluded that tangible benefits, such as tourism income and infrastructure improvements, are crucial for fostering positive perceptions of such initiatives.

Mgonja et al., (2015) studied various Cultural Tourism Programs (CTPs) in Tanzania to explore how local communities participate and perceive these programs. Using a qualitative approach, they conducted in-depth interviews with two selected CTP groups and five government tourism officials. They analyzed the data thematically with NVivo software to systematically code and interpret the responses. Their results indicated that these programs differ significantly in size, organization and resource availability. A common issue was the lack of transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms and clear criteria for community involvement. Local perceptions were often negative, citing unclear decision-making, inadequate empowerment and the exclusion of ordinary community members from planning and benefit sharing. The study concluded that without structured participation, fair governance and visible benefits for communities, local involvement in cultural tourism remains weak and unsustainable.

Muganda *et al.*, (2019) investigated the local community's desire to be involved in tourism decision-making processes. The research employed a qualitative survey design, collecting data through interviews with villagers who had been engaged in various tourism-related activities such as road maintenance, staffing at tourist centers, conflict resolution, and compensation negotiations. The results revealed a strong willingness among community members to participate more actively in tourism development. However, despite their interest, many felt hindered by a lack of adequate skills and technical knowledge required to engage meaningfully in planning and management. Moreover, there was widespread mistrust toward elected leaders, whom residents felt lacked tourism-specific knowledge and did not fairly represent local interests. The researchers concluded that while the foundation for participation exists in the form of community interest, meaningful inclusion would require deliberate efforts in capacity-building, democratic decision-making structures and establishing transparent

Nasrolahi et al., (2022) examined community engagement strategies at the Bisotun World Heritage Site in Iran. Their study aimed to propose and test a participatory decision-making model to improve community involvement in heritage site planning and management. Using stakeholder interviews and a qualitative evaluation of a newly developed engagement tool, the researchers found that most local community members felt excluded from tourism planning processes and were unaware of their rights regarding heritage site management. However, after implementing the proposed tool, which provided a structured framework for participatory planning, community engagement notably improved, particularly at early stages of project development. The study concluded that introducing formal participatory models not only increases community inclusion but also positively shifts perceptions toward tourism, empowering local people to see themselves as active stakeholders rather than passive beneficiaries.

Tourism Programs (CTPs) involving the Maasai and other indigenous groups highlight the significance of community engagement in tourism. However, Ochieng (2016) illustrates in Kenya's Maasai Mara, challenges such as elite capture and uneven benefit distribution persist when governance structures are not fully inclusive, underscoring the importance of transparent and participatory mechanisms.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study was conducted at the Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE) in Uru Msuni village, Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania, an area recognized for its rich cultural heritage and strong community involvement in tourism. Guided by a constructivist paradigm, the research adopted a qualitative approach and employed a case study design to gain in-depth insights into community members' perceptions and participation in cultural tourism activities. This philosophical stance acknowledged that multiple realities exist and that meaning is co-created through interaction and lived experiences, making it suitable for exploring the cultural and social dynamics within KCTE.

The target population comprised community members and stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the enterprise, including farmers, homestay hosts, campsite operators, local leaders, tour guides and cooperative society representatives. Sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation to ensure sufficient depth of understanding. Purposive sampling was used to identify key participants with significant roles in cultural tourism, while snowball sampling helped reach hidden participants such as women food vendors, craft makers and youth guides. This dual strategy enabled the inclusion of both visible and less formal contributors to cultural tourism development.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and document review, allowing for triangulation and validation of findings. Thematic analysis, combining deductive and inductive coding, was used to identify patterns and emerging themes from the data. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking and cross-verification of data sources, while strict research ethics were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. Together, these methodological choices provided a rigorous framework for capturing diverse community perspectives on participation in cultural tourism at KCTE.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The findings are presented, described and classified based on the information gathered from the field. Due to the nature of the data, the information was presented in a purely qualitative format without any tabular representation. Data are organized according to specific objective and illustrated with direct quotations from participants, reflecting their experiences and perspectives regarding community participation in cultural tourism activities at Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE) and in corroboration with literature reviews.

4.1 Community perceptions towards participating in cultural tourism activities

The study aims to determine community perceptions of participation in cultural tourism under the Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE). To gather the information the researchers conducted interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document review. The findings from the field revealed a mix of positive and negative views, reflecting both the opportunities and challenges of community involvement in cultural tourism activities.

Based on the findings, many participants appreciated KCTE for creating income opportunities, generating employment and strengthening pride in cultural traditions. Activities such as coffee tours, cooking lessons, banana-beer making and homestays were seen as valuable platforms to share knowledge while earning income. As one farmer noted: "Guiding visitors through coffee production helped tourists respect local farming traditions, while women emphasized how cooking and brewing lessons not only generated income but also reinforced cultural identity" (interview with a local farmer, July 2025).

Another farmer emphasized the symbolic role of bananas: "In our village, bananas are everything. When tourists come, we show them all these uses and they are shocked. For us, this is not only our tradition but also a way to earn some income by sharing our knowledge with visitors." (Interview with project member, July 2025)

Homestays owner added: "Running a homestay means a lot to me and my family. By welcoming guests into our home, we get to share our everyday life, our food and our traditions. This program brings us new friends and extra money. We feel proud sharing who we are." (Interview with homestay owner, July 2025)

During field observation, the researcher actively joined the coffee tour organized by KCTE. This direct participation offered first-hand experience of every stage of the activity, starting from coffee picking, processing, roasting and tasting together with tourists and local guides. It was observed that local community members warmly engaged with visitors, explained traditional coffee farming techniques and demonstrated genuine hospitality throughout the process. Their enthusiasm and cooperation reflected both pride in their cultural heritage and commitment to providing an authentic visitor experience. This finding suggests that the coffee tour not only serves as an income-generating activity but also as a platform for cultural sharing and strengthening community-visitor relationships.

These findings indicate that visible improvements in community livelihoods significantly shape positive attitudes toward cultural tourism. Participants consistently reported that activities such as coffee tours, cooking lessons, banana-beer making and homestays provided meaningful sources of income and employment while also reinforcing cultural identity. This pattern aligns with the work of Muganda *et al.*, (2015) and Tichaawa and Mhlanga (2015), who argue that communities are more likely to view tourism positively when its benefits are visible and directly improve livelihoods. Economic gains not only alleviate poverty pressures but also enhance social status and community confidence, making residents more receptive to tourism development. Therefore, the findings confirm that visible livelihood improvements are key drivers of positive community perceptions toward tourism. This underscores the importance of designing tourism initiatives that deliver tangible economic benefits while actively promoting cultural pride, ensuring that local communities remain engaged, supportive and empowered over the long term.

In addition, the data highlighted that women actively participate in cooking lessons and banana beer preparation, earning independent income while at the same time safeguarding cultural traditions. This shows that cultural tourism not only creates an economic pathway for women but also becomes a platform to transmit indigenous knowledge across generations and to international visitors.

One woman explained:

I teach visitors how to cook traditional Chagga food. They enjoy eating what they have prepared and always ask for the recipes to take home. Some even say it is the best meal they have had in Tanzania (interview with project member, July 2025).

Another woman added: "When I show visitors how we make banana beer, they are very excited. They say it is unique because of the natural process we use" (Interview with project member, July 2025).

Focus group discussions with women participants revealed deeper perspectives on empowerment, recognition and self-worth that emerged through their engagement in the KCTE. The findings indicate that cultural tourism has not only provided women with income-generating opportunities but has also reshaped their social positions within the community. One participant stated:

Before KCTE, we were mostly at home doing house chores, but now we meet people from different countries and share our skills. We earn money and also respect from our husbands and the community. It has changed how we see ourselves; we are no longer just helpers but contributors to family income (FGD with women participant, July 2025).

Another woman in the focus group noted:

Even when tourists leave, they sometimes send messages or gifts to thank us. It makes us feel important. Our daughters also see that women can do more than just farm but they can run activities and manage their own income (FGD with participant, July 2025).

Observational findings supported these claims. The researcher observed that during coffee and cooking demonstrations, locals engaged enthusiastically with visitors, explaining every step with confidence and humor. It was noted that many residents were traditional attire and used local tools to showcase authenticity

These voices demonstrate how cultural activities serve a dual purpose, generating income for women and reinforcing pride in traditional practices. In line with Muganda *et al.*, (2019), practical opportunities for local communities not only increase direct economic benefits but also strengthen cultural exchange by transforming everyday practices into valuable experiences. Additionally, such involvement supports gender empowerment, since women gain financial independence while simultaneously shaping the cultural image shared with outsiders. The results suggest that cultural tourism can be used as a strategic tool for creating inclusive spaces where women gain recognition, confidence and control over economic resources. Financial independence allows them to make meaningful decisions within their families and communities, while their interactions with visitors promote self-assurance and respect. This aligns with the gender empowerment perspective that recognizes participation not just as access to economic activities but as involvement in processes of decision-making, knowledge-sharing and leadership.

Despite the positive perceptions community members have toward participating in cultural tourism, still several challenges that limit meaningful participation. Many community members reported limited awareness and uneven access to information, leaving them feeling excluded and perceiving tourism as externally driven. As one coffee farmer explained, "We hear visitors come to our village, but no one tells us how to be part of it or what tourists want to see. Without this knowledge, it feels like tourism is happening to us, not with us" (Interview, July 2025).

During the focus group discussions, participants strongly echoed these concerns, presenting a collective argument that the absence of transparent communication channels and participatory planning processes significantly limits equal access to tourism opportunities and benefits. Many participants described how information about tourist arrivals, scheduled activities and training programs often circulates among a small group of individuals, mainly local leaders, guides or those already connected to KCTE, while the majority of residents remain uninformed. One participant explained:

Sometimes, only the village leaders or those who work closely with KCTE know when tourists are coming. By the time others find out, the activities are already finished. We need more open communication so that everyone can take part (FGD with participant, July 2025)

Another participant added:

We see tourists walking around with guides, but most of us are not informed about what they are doing or how we can contribute. It feels like tourism belongs to a few people, not the whole community. We want to be included, even if it means doing small things like showing our farms or selling our local food (FGD with participant, July 2025)

Similarly, a women's group representative explained:

If information reached everyone, especially women and young people, we could plan and prepare local products or cultural performances for the visitors. But since we are not told in time, we lose those chances to earn and to show our traditions (FGD with participant, July 2025)

These findings align with Reindrawati (2023) and Lwoga (2017), who argue that the lack of accessible information hinders meaningful participation. When information is unevenly distributed, communities perceive tourism as externally driven rather than community-owned, which undermines motivation to engage. The findings suggest that while cultural tourism has introduced positive opportunities, the lack of information and awareness among community members continues to constrain full participation. The evidence implies that effective communication and sensitization are critical for fostering trust and ownership in community-based tourism projects. Limited awareness not only restricts engagement but also reinforces perceptions that tourism benefits outsiders rather than local residents. This highlights the need for inclusive information-sharing mechanisms and participatory planning processes to ensure that community members understand the benefits, roles, and potential of cultural tourism.

On the other hand, findings indicate that Skills gaps further constrained participation, especially in guiding, language and hospitality, confining many residents to low-paying support roles. A local youth guide noted, "When tourists ask questions in English, I sometimes struggle to explain our traditions properly. I feel embarrassed and wish I had more language training so I can guide confidently" (Interview with local guide, July 2025).

These findings align with the work of Muganda et al., (2019), who emphasize that insufficient capacity-building hinders community empowerment and often limits community members to marginal roles within tourism projects. Without access to training in languages, hospitality skills and interpretive guiding techniques, local communities are unable to participate fully in tourism activities. Addressing these skill gaps is essential for both social and economic empowerment. Investment in targeted capacity-building programs such as language courses, customer service training and interpretive skills workshops which would enable community members to take on more prominent and higher-paying roles. Improved skills not only increase individual income but also enhance the quality of tourist experiences, strengthening the reputation and sustainability of KCTE. Furthermore, skill development fosters confidence, encourages greater participation in decision-making, and deepens residents' sense of ownership over tourism activities.

Furthermore, Unequal distribution of tourism benefits was another source of negative perception. Participants observed that opportunities were often concentrated among individuals connected to village leaders. An elderly farmer stated, "The system is not equal... Most of us only see the small benefits, like being asked to cook, clean or perform for visitors... Only a few enjoy the real advantages, while the majority remain on the margins" (interview with old farmer, July 2025).

Similar concerns are reported by Ochieng (2016), who emphasizes that unfair benefit-sharing in community-based tourism undermines trust, participation and collective commitment. When benefits are concentrated in the hands of a few, the wider community may perceive tourism initiatives as exploitative rather than empowering. This perception not only threatens social cohesion but can also reduce the willingness of residents to engage in tourism activities, share cultural knowledge, or support the sustainability of the enterprise. From the researchers' perspectives, findings suggest that equitable benefit-sharing is as important as the generation of benefits itself. Transparent mechanisms for distributing income such as community funds, rotational leadership of tourism activities or structured profit-sharing arrangements, can mitigate elite capture. emphasizing that unfair benefit-sharing undermines trust and motivation among wider community members.

Lastly, the finding shows that infrastructure limitations, particularly roads to coffee farms and waterfalls during the rainy season, further reduced tourism participation and income reliability due to its poor condition. One farmer-guide noted, "Sometimes tourists turn back before reaching the farms because the path is too slippery. This means we lose income and visitors do not see the full experience we want to share" (Interview with local farmer, July 2025).

These findings support the arguments of Muganda *et al.*, (2013), who emphasize that weak rural infrastructure negatively affects visitor satisfaction and threatens the long-term sustainability of community-based tourism. Without accessible and safe transport routes, communities struggle to maximize the benefits of their cultural assets and tourists are less likely to engage fully with the experiences offered. Therefore, addressing infrastructure constraints is critical for unlocking the full potential of cultural tourism at KCTE. Investment in road improvement and safe pathways would enhance both accessibility and visitor experience, increasing tourist arrivals and income reliability. Moreover, infrastructure development signals to the community that tourism initiatives are valued and supported, fostering greater participation and commitment.

Overall, the evidence suggests that cultural tourism at KCTE contributes significantly to economic livelihoods, cultural preservation and social empowerment, particularly for women who gain both income and recognition. However, sustainable and inclusive growth requires addressing critical gaps such as skills development, equitable benefit-sharing, improved infrastructure and more participatory governance. Without these, local residents risk remaining service providers rather than empowered decision-makers. Strengthening these areas would not only enhance community ownership but also ensure that cultural tourism continues to serve as both an engine of development and a custodian of heritage.

5.0 Conclusion

This study finds that community perceptions of cultural tourism at Kiliman Cultural Tourism Enterprise (KCTE) are shaped by both positive and negative views. On the positive side, cultural tourism has provided meaningful income opportunities, created employment and strengthened pride in local traditions, particularly through activities such as coffee tours, cooking lessons, banana-beer brewing and homestays. These opportunities have also facilitated cultural exchange, allowing residents to showcase and preserve their heritage while earning recognition and social esteem. However, challenges persist that constrain meaningful participation. Limited access to information, inadequate skills in guiding, language and hospitality, inequitable benefit-sharing, and poor infrastructure, especially roads to key sites during the rainy season, have restricted the ability of many residents to fully engage in tourism.

From the evidence, it is clear that the long-term success and sustainability of cultural tourism at KCTE depend on integrating economic, social and cultural dimensions. Inclusive governance structures, transparent decision-making and equitable sharing of tourism benefits are essential to maintain trust, motivation and community ownership. In essence, sustaining positive community perceptions requires a holistic approach that not only maximizes economic gains but also fosters cultural preservation, social cohesion and a genuine sense of ownership. By addressing these critical gaps, KCTE can continue to serve as a model for community-based cultural tourism that is both profitable and socially empowering, ensuring that local traditions remain a source of pride and a vehicle for sustainable development.

5.1 Recommendations

The study recommends enhancing inclusivity by involving all community groups, including women, youth, and informal contributors, in decision-making and benefit-sharing to ensure broad-based participation. Capacity-building initiatives should be implemented to provide training and awareness programs that improve knowledge and skills related to cultural tourism and hospitality. Transparent governance is essential, with clear benefit-sharing mechanisms and regular communication to strengthen trust in leadership. Efforts should also be made to safeguard cultural authenticity by preserving traditional practices and avoiding over-commercialization, thereby maintaining community pride and heritage. Finally, sustainability and collaboration should be

prioritized through strengthened partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and tourism stakeholders to provide technical support, monitoring, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

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