

Socio-cultural conservation strategies and sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the effects of socio-cultural conservation strategies on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. This study examines how social inclusion, cultural preservation, local entrepreneurship, and product diversification contribute to sustainable tourism outcomes.

Methods: An embedded mixed-method design was applied, combining surveys of 392 respondents—including ranch members, leaders, and tourists—with qualitative interviews. Quantitative analysis used SPSS (v.22) for descriptive statistics, regression, and ANOVA, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Results: The findings show that socio-cultural strategies collectively have a significant effect on sustainable tourism ($R = 0.345$, $R^2 = 0.119$, $F = 8.771$, $p < 0.001$). Social inclusion of minority groups was the only significant predictor ($\beta = 0.239$, $p = 0.001$). Cultural preservation, entrepreneurship, and product diversification have positive but insignificant effects, which are likely constrained by governance, infrastructure, and financial barriers. Qualitative evidence confirmed community pride in cultural events and crafts but also revealed limited benefit distribution and weak inclusion of marginalized groups.

Conclusion: Socio-cultural conservation strategies positively influence sustainable tourism, but with modest explanatory power. Effective governance, stronger policy frameworks, and targeted financial support are required to enhance the role of women in agriculture.

Limitations: The findings are specific to Laikipia County and may not be generalizable. Self-reported data may also introduce biases.

Contribution: This study provides empirical evidence of conservation-tourism linkages in Africa, highlighting the central role of social inclusion. It offers practical insights for policymakers, conservationists, and development actors seeking to align cultural heritage with sustainable tourism and SDGs.

Keywords: Communal Group Ranches, Socio-Cultural Conservation Strategy, Sustainable Tourism Development, Tourism Development

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1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a critical driver of socio-economic transformation and environmental stewardship in many developing countries. In Kenya, tourism contributes significantly to the GDP, foreign exchange earnings, and rural livelihoods, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions where agricultural productivity is constrained (Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife, 2023). However, the expansion of the tourism sector has not been without ecological consequences, prompting increased advocacy for sustainable tourism development that balances economic growth, environmental integrity and community well-being (Baloch et al., 2023).

Sustainable tourism, as defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), entails tourism that fully accounts for its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (UNWTO, 2022). In communal landscapes, such as the group ranches in Laikipia County, the pursuit of sustainable tourism has become increasingly intertwined with socio-cultural conservation strategies. Such strategies aim to mitigate the adverse impacts of tourism and enhance ecosystem resilience, thus safeguarding the ecological foundations on which tourism depends (Ogutu, Kuloba, Piepho, & Kanga, 2017).

Laikipia County represents one of Kenya's most biologically and culturally diverse landscapes, characterized by a mosaic of private ranches, community conservancies, and rich cultural heritage. The region supports a significant portion of Kenya's wildlife population outside protected areas and has become a key hub for nature-based tourism in the country. Communal group ranches, typically managed by pastoralist communities, have become pivotal in hosting ecotourism ventures that blend traditional land-use practices with sociocultural goals.

The link between socio-cultural conservation and sustainable tourism in communal settings is complex and context-dependent. While conservation efforts may attract more tourists seeking authentic and culturally conscious experiences, they can also generate conflicts or marginalize traditional livelihoods if not inclusively designed (Tubey, Kyallo, & Mulwa, 2019). Furthermore, the effectiveness of these strategies often hinges on governance structures, community participation, benefit-sharing mechanisms and long-term policy support (Dangi & Petrick, 2021).

There is a growing body of scholarship examining community-based conservation and sustainable tourism; however, limited empirical research exists on how specific conservation strategies influence sustainable tourism outcomes in group ranches, especially in Laikipia, where the intersection of socio-cultural conservation, land tenure, and tourism is particularly dynamic (Wairimu et al., 2022). This knowledge gap undermines the formulation of evidence-based policies and the design of conservation tourism models that are both ecologically sound and socially equitable.

Recent studies underscore the importance of contextualized assessments that consider the socio-ecological systems within which conservation and tourism operate in the Pantanal. These studies have shown that in Kenya's arid counties, successful tourism development increasingly depends on integrated conservation approaches that prioritize landscape-level planning, community agency, and adaptive resource management (Tubey et al., 2019). Similarly, Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021) suggest that participatory conservation models are more likely to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes by enhancing local ownership and reducing community resistance.

By critically examining the interplay between sociocultural interventions and sustainable tourism outcomes, this research aims to generate actionable insights for policymakers, conservation practitioners, and tourism developers. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on sustainable development by identifying how socio-cultural conservation strategies can be aligned with the aspirations of local communities and the imperatives of biodiversity preservation.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing emphasis on sustainable tourism as a strategic approach to rural development, the ecological and economic potential of communal group ranches in Kenya remains underutilized and

inconsistently actualized. In Laikipia County, a region endowed with high biodiversity and vibrant pastoralist cultures, community-based tourism initiatives have proliferated, often underpinned by environmental conservation strategies, such as wildlife conservancies, rangeland restoration, controlled grazing, and anti-poaching surveillance. These initiatives are designed to attract eco-conscious tourists and ensure the long-term health of ecosystems and equitable benefit-sharing among local communities (Dangi & Petrick, 2021).

However, the outcomes of these conservation strategies in relation to sustainable tourism development remain uneven and are inadequately documented. While some group ranches have experienced increased tourist visitation, improved livelihoods, and enhanced biodiversity, others continue to face stagnation in tourism growth, ecological degradation, and growing tensions over land use rights and benefit distribution (Ogutu et al., 2017). These inconsistencies raise critical questions regarding the effectiveness, inclusivity, and contextual relevance of conservation interventions in communal landscapes.

Moreover, existing empirical studies often adopt fragmented or generalized approaches that fail to rigorously link specific conservation strategies to measurable tourism development outcomes, such as environmental sustainability, community empowerment, infrastructure improvement, and visitor satisfaction (Baloch et al., 2023). This research problem is further compounded by weak institutional coordination, limited policy guidance, and the absence of robust monitoring frameworks to evaluate how socio-cultural conservation practices influence tourism development trajectories in pastoralist settings (Wairimu et al., 2022). Without evidence-based insights, policymakers, development agencies, and community leaders risk implementing conservation models that are ecologically unsustainable, socially unjust and economically inefficient.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a context-specific, evidence-driven investigation into the effects of socio-cultural conservation strategies on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. Addressing this knowledge gap is critical not only for optimizing the synergy between conservation and tourism, but also for informing policies that advance Kenya's Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation, and inclusive economic growth.

1.2 Objective of the study

To establish the effect of socio-cultural conservation strategies on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya.

1.3 Null Hypothesis

H_0 : Socio-cultural conservation strategies do not have a significant effect on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

The socio-cultural conservation strategy involves the preservation and protection of cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and social practices of local communities and indigenous populations within a specific geographical area. In addition, these strategies promote tourism activities and practices of the communities living in that location (Heritage, 2014). This strategy recognizes the intrinsic value of cultural diversity and emphasizes the crucial role communities play in maintaining their unique cultural identities and practices (Wairimu et al., 2022).

The main goal of socio-cultural conservation is to safeguard and revitalize traditional customs, languages, arts, rituals, and other aspects of intangible cultural heritage, ensuring their continuity and transmission to future generations. By promoting community involvement and empowerment, socio-cultural conservation seeks to foster sustainable development that respects and integrates the values and aspirations of local cultures (Heritage, 2014).

The relationship between socio-cultural conservation strategies and tourism development is integral to the sustainable growth and preservation of tourist destinations. The implementation of socio-cultural conservation strategies plays a vital role in maintaining the authenticity and uniqueness of a destination's cultural heritage. By safeguarding local customs, traditions, and landmarks, destinations can provide visitors with genuine and enriching experiences, enhancing the overall appeal of the locale (Dangi and Petrick, 2021). Panzer-Krause, S. (2017) examines the impact of socio-cultural conservation initiatives on tourism development in selected regions of Germany. Their findings revealed that the successful implementation of conservation strategies, such as promoting local traditions and involving communities, led to enhanced tourist experience and increased destination attractiveness. Moreover, this study emphasizes the role of responsible tourism practices in mitigating the potential negative impacts on cultural heritage.

Gocer, Boyacioglu, Karahan, and Shrestha (2024) investigated the effect of socio-cultural conservation strategies on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in England. The study found that socio-cultural conservation strategies, such as promoting cultural activities and preserving heritage sites, positively influenced tourism development by attracting tourists interested in cultural experiences. Furthermore, Ottaviani, De Luca, and Åberg (2024) conducted a comparative analysis between Germany and Switzerland, examining how their socio-cultural conservation strategies influenced tourism development. The study revealed that while both countries placed significant emphasis on cultural preservation, Switzerland's stronger integration of cultural heritage into tourism marketing and development planning resulted in a more pronounced positive impact on the tourism industry.

The reviewed studies on the relationship between socio-cultural conservation strategies and tourism development in Germany and Switzerland exhibit several gaps. First, these studies primarily focused on specific regions without providing details about their diversity, limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, while one study attempted a comparative analysis between the two countries, a broader comparison involving multiple destinations was lacking. Third, the perspectives and experiences of local communities, which are essential for shaping conservation efforts and tourism development, have been insufficiently explored. Fourth, the studies emphasized positive outcomes but lacked in-depth discussions on the potential challenges or negative consequences of conservation strategies. Finally, the role of policies, regulations, and governance structures in supporting or hindering socio-cultural conservation strategies has received little attention. Addressing these gaps would enable a more comprehensive understanding and inform sustainable tourism planning in diverse contexts, especially Laikipia County, Kenya.

Community involvement and government policies are crucial factors in maintaining cultural authenticity and mitigating negative impacts (Esichaikul & Chansawang, 2022). However, the reviewed studies have some gaps, such as limited geographical scope, insufficient representation of diverse cultural practices, and inadequate assessments of policy impact. Addressing these gaps through more extensive and diverse research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between socio-cultural conservation and sustainable tourism development, leading to more effective and context-specific approaches to cultural preservation in the context of tourism.

Moreover, Van Der Merwe & Whitelaw, P. A. (2023) found that effective conservation strategies led to increased tourist interest in cultural experiences and heritage sites, resulting in economic benefits and employment opportunities for the local communities. However, the study is limited in its representation of other regions and in adequately exploring indigenous cultures, leaving gaps in understanding the broader impact of socio-cultural conservation strategies. Similarly, there was an emphasis on the value of preserving cultural practices to attract culturally sensitive tourists and underscored the role of policies in supporting sustainable tourism. Nonetheless, the limited focus on local stakeholder perspectives in these studies hinders a comprehensive assessment of the long-term effects of conservation efforts and community involvement.

A comparative analysis by Wang, Y.-W. (2024) highlighted the variations in conservation approaches across regions, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies to safeguard diverse cultural

identities. Addressing these gaps through further research will facilitate a more holistic understanding of the relationship between socio-cultural conservation and tourism development, providing valuable insights into sustainable tourism planning and cultural preservation.

However, the reviewed studies have some gaps, including a limited scope, insufficient representation of local perspectives, and limited exploration of intangible heritage. More comprehensive research is needed to understand the relationship between sociocultural conservation and sustainable tourism development in different regions and to explore intangible cultural practices and knowledge. Addressing these gaps would lead to more effective and context-specific approaches to cultural preservation in the context of sustainable tourism.

Previous studies on the relationship between socio-cultural conservation strategies and tourism development in Kenya illustrate the significance of preserving the country's rich cultural heritage to promote sustainable tourism. For example, Tubey et al. (2019) emphasized the value of preserving Maasai cultural practices in the Maasai Mara region to attract culturally sensitive tourists. However, there is a lack of in-depth assessment of policy impacts in the studies. A comparative analysis by Beatrice (2023) revealed variations in conservation approaches across regions and the need for context-specific strategies to preserve Kenya's diverse cultural identities. Nevertheless, the limited representation of diverse cultural practices and insufficient exploration of intangible heritage remain gaps. Addressing these gaps through more comprehensive research would contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between socio-cultural conservation and sustainable tourism development in Kenya, leading to more effective and context-specific approaches to cultural preservation in the context of sustainable tourism (Mwangi, Zhang, & Wang, 2022).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an embedded mixed-method research design that combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (Campbell et al., 2020). The design allowed for triangulation, where both qualitative and quantitative data sources converged to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Second, the qualitative component, such as interviews, provided an in-depth understanding of the local context, culture, and community perspectives related to conservation strategies and tourism development (J. W. Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, the quantitative element facilitated the generalizability of the results to a broader population of communal group ranches in similar regions. Statistical analysis enables the identification of patterns and trends, contributing to broader conclusions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Finally, the embedded mixed method design allowed for comprehensive exploration, delving not only into the "what" but also the "why" and "how" of the research objectives (John W Creswell & Clark, 2017). This approach provides richer insights into the underlying mechanisms and factors influencing the relationship between conservation strategies and sustainable tourism development.

3.2 Target Population

The study targeted a population of 18724 respondents comprising 13 chairpersons, 13 secretaries and 14006 registered members from all the communal group ranches in Laikipia County. In addition, there were 4692 tourists from six communal group ranches that house tourist lodges. The distributions are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 1. Target Population

S/No.	Group Ranches	Chairpersons	Secretaries	Registered Members	Tourists (p.a)	Total
1	Koija	1	1	1198	720	1920
2	Il Motiok	1	1	858	204	1064
3	Tiemamut	1	1	718	-	720
4	Musul	1	1	355	-	357

5	Nkiloriti	1	1	411	-	413
6	Kijabe	1	1	971	1200	2173
7	Morupusi	1	1	308	-	310
8	Il Polei	1	1	473	-	475
9	Munishoi	1	1	2198	1440	3640
10	Shulmai	1	1	1209	-	1211
11	Il Ngwesi	1	1	2046	840	2888
12	Lekuruki	1	1	457	288	459
13	Maiyanat	1	1	2804	-	2806
TOTAL		13	13	14006	4692	18724

Source: NRT, LCA, and Group Ranches Chairpersons, 2023.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

The study employed stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques to select respondents. Stratified sampling is a robust and effective sampling technique used when the target population can be divided into distinct subgroups, known as strata, each sharing similar characteristics. Accordingly, the researcher used a stratified sampling technique to select group ranches for inclusion in the study. Through stratified sampling, the researcher ensured that all group ranches were included in the sample. This proportional representation guaranteed that the insights gained from the sample were more applicable and generalizable to the entire population of group ranches.

Second, the study used a simple random sampling technique to select registered members of group ranches to participate in the study. As explained by Berndt (2020), simple random sampling ensures that all individuals in the population have an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample. This process provides every subject in the population with an equal probability of selection. This choice of random sampling was based on the aim of obtaining research data that could be generalized to a larger population within statistically determined margins of error.

Furthermore, simple random sampling was preferred for this study because it allowed the researcher to apply inferential statistics to the data. Finally, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select the chairmen and secretaries of group ranches to participate in the study. Campbell et al. (2020) emphasized that purposive sampling is a commonly employed qualitative data collection technique. The approach involved deliberately selecting individuals with relevant knowledge or firsthand experience related to the subject of investigation. The researchers believed that the chairmen and secretaries would be able to offer the desired information because of their positions.

3.4 Sample Size

This was determined using Slovin's formula: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$, where, n = sample size, N = population size and e = level of precision. Therefore, the sample size for the study was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{18724}{1 + 18724(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{18724}{1 + 18724(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{18724}{1 + 46.81}$$

$$n = \frac{18724}{47.81}$$

$$n = 392:$$

Thus, in this study, a sample size of 392 respondents was selected from a target population of 18,724 respondents. This decision was guided by the established principles of statistical research and sample size determination. For instance, Simon and Goes (2012) emphasized that for populations exceeding 5,000, a sample size of approximately 400 is often deemed sufficient for reliable results. Therefore, a sample size of 392 for a population of 18,724 supports the rationale for the chosen sample size.

Once the total sample size of 392 participants had been established, the researcher proceeded to ascertain the specific composition of chairmen, secretaries, and registered members to be included in the sample for the study. This allocation process adhered to the proportional allocation method outlined by Kothari (2013). This approach entailed determining the size of each stratum, denoted as n_i , by applying the formula $n_i = n \times P_i$, where n_i signifies the stratum size, n the overall sample size, and P_i the proportion of the population encompassed within the respective stratum. The particulars of the sample size distribution for the study are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of Sample Size

Group Ranches	Target Population	Chairpersons and Secretaries	Registered Members	Tourists	Total Sample Size
Koija	1920	2	23	14	39
Il Motiok	1064	2	17	4	23
Tiemamut	720	2	14	-	16
Musul	357	2	7	-	9
Nkiloriti	413	2	8	-	10
Kijabe	2173	2	19	25	46
Morupusi	310	2	6	-	8
Il Polei	475	2	9	-	11
Munishoi	3640	2	43	28	73
Shulmai	1211	2	24	-	26
Il Ngwesi	2888	2	40	15	57
Lekuruki	459	2	9	6	17
Maiyanat	2806	2	55	-	57
	18724	26	274	92	392

Source: NRT, LCA and Group Ranch Chairpersons, 2023

3.5 Research Instruments

The study used questionnaires to collect quantitative data, whereas an interview schedule was employed for qualitative data.

3.6 Questionnaires

The researcher used five-point Likert scale questionnaires to collect quantitative data from registered members of the group ranches for several reasons. First, questionnaires offer efficient and scalable means of data collection. Additionally, they provided a standardized approach, thus ensuring consistent data collection across participants (Sanmee, 2025).

Furthermore, questionnaires enabled participants to disclose sensitive information more comfortably, leading to increased honesty and accuracy in their responses (John W Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition, they are cost-effective and require fewer resources than other data collection methods (Berndt, 2020). They also facilitated the collection of quantitative data, enabling the researcher to employ statistical analyses to identify patterns and relationships (J. W. Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the questionnaires were divided into seven sections, namely sections A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Section A collected demographic information about the respondents, and sections B to G collected data related to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was closed-ended in structure to allow the collection of standardized data.

3.7 Interview Schedule

The researcher used interview schedules to collect qualitative data from the chairpersons and secretaries of the group ranches. The interview schedules were divided into seven sections, namely A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Section A solicited demographic information from respondents, while sections B to F contained items related to the objectives of the study. The study used interview schedules because they allowed the researcher to design a predefined set of questions to be asked consistently across all participants, ensuring standardization and reducing potential bias (Bergelson, Tracy, & Takacs, 2022).

Furthermore, the interview schedules provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration and clarification of responses. This is particularly valuable when investigating complex topics that require nuanced understanding. The dynamic nature of interviews enables researchers to adapt their questions and prompts based on participant responses, leading to rich and comprehensive data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.8 Pre-testing

Before the main data collection, the research instruments were pre-tested in selected group ranches in Laikipia County. The respondents who participated in the pre-testing were not included in the actual study sample.

Subsequently, these respondents were chosen because they resembled the prospective study participants (Jackson, 1997). The sample size for the pre-test was 15 respondents, which was in line with Berndt (2020), who indicated that a common guideline suggested involving a sample size of around 5 to 30 participants for a pre-test. The selection process for respondents to participate in the pre-test was similar to that of the actual study (J. W. Creswell, 2014).

3.9 Validity and Reliability

The researcher employed a range of methods to ascertain the validity of the research instruments, including questionnaires and interviews. These strategies encompass content, criteria, construct, and face validity. The content validity of the research instruments was evaluated by subject matter experts, comprising supervisors and lecturers from Kenyatta University, who ensured comprehensive coverage of the research questions and objectives. First, the researcher applied Cronbach's alpha coefficient to establish the reliability of the questionnaire.

Moreover, to ensure the reliability of the interview schedules, the interviewers underwent training to adhere to a standardized protocol. This entailed utilizing a comprehensive script to steer the conversation, ensure uniform phrasing of all questions, and maintain consistent recording of responses. Moreover, the involvement of multiple interviewers mitigated bias and facilitated inter-rater reliability evaluation.

3.10 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were crucial to this study. They helped gather information, monitored progress, and evaluated the effectiveness of various initiatives. For example, questionnaires involved collecting data through structured questions to gain insights into registered community members preferences, satisfaction levels, and environmental impacts. Using a simple random sampling method, the researcher selected participants for the study. After the participants were selected, consent forms were provided to the chosen individuals, ensuring their voluntary participation. Additionally, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with the chairpersons and secretaries of the group ranches. Data collection took six months.

3.11 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze the quantitative data. To ensure the robustness of the quantitative data analysis, the researcher conducted diagnostic tests, including assessments of Normality, Heteroscedasticity, and Multicollinearity. These tests are essential prerequisites for accurate

inferential statistical analysis (Tabachnick, Fidell, & Ullman, 2007). To address the issue of the moderating variable, the researcher employed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

Qualitative data collected in accordance with the research objectives were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data, providing valuable insights into the nuanced aspects of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 3. Participants' responses on socio-cultural strategies and sustainable tourism

		SA	A	N	D	SD	T	M	SD
Community members are proud to display and market their culture	F	224	32	5	3	1	265	1.2	0.6
	%	84.5	12.1	1.9	1.1	0.4	100		
Visitors/tourists, respect and appreciate cultural values and norms	F	174	79	10	2	265	265	1.4	0.6
	%	65.7	29.8	3.8	0.8	100	100		
There is the use of new technology, social media and other e-marketing opportunities to market local culture and heritage	F	108	102	31	17	7	265	1.9	1.0
	%	40.8	38.5	11.7	6.4	2.6	100		
Effort is made to curb crime, sexual exploitation and other social problems	F	113	85	41	13	13	265	2.0	1.1
	%	42.6	32.1	15.5	4.9	4.9	100		
Community members are encouraged to be innovative to create new cultural products	F	130	88	35	7	5	265	1.8	0.9
	%	49.1	33.2	13.2	2.6	1.9	100		
Steps have been taken to identify cultural products gaps and increase diversification	F	82	117	48	14	4	265	2.0	0.9
	%	30.9	44.2	18.1	5.3	1.5	100		
There is a well-established product offer related to culture and heritage	F	93	104	49	13	6	265	2.0	1.0
	%	35.1	39.2	18.5	4.9	2.3	100		
There is improvement in the quality of cultural products and services offered to tourists	F	131	94	29	8	3	265	1.7	0.9
	%	49.4	35.5	10.9	3	1.1	100		
Community members are able to get income from cultural practices	F	154	88	21	1	1	265	1.5	0.7
	%	58.1	33.2	7.9	0.4	0.4	100		
Actions been taken to promote and support investment in sustainable tourism	F	103	113	32	12	5	265	1.9	0.9
	%	38.9	42.6	12.1	4.5	1.9	100		
Community members are able to start and own businesses	F	116	96	32	13	8	265	1.9	1.0
	%	43.8	36.2	12.1	4.9	3	100		
Community members have access to credit facilities to start businesses	F	46	69	48	69	33	265	2.9	1.3
	%	17.4	26	18.1	26	12.5	100		
More women are involved in tourism	F	156	70	30	6	3	265	1.6	0.9
	%	58.9	26.4	11.3	2.3	1.1	100		
Young people are involved in conservation, entrepreneurship and other areas	F	137	98	24	5	1	265	1.6	0.8
	%	51.7	37	9.1	1.9	0.4	100		
Women are represented in the group ranches management committee boards	F	188	60	11	6		265	1.4	0.7
	%	70.9	22.6	4.2	2.3		100		

People with disabilities are involved in tourism and conservation activities	F	88	58	41	28	50	265	2.6	1.5
	%	33.2	21.9	15.5	6	18.9	100		
The money paid by group ranches has benefited member families directly	F	78	92	39	32	24	265	2.4	1.3
	%	29.4	34.7	14.7	1	9.1	100		

The findings reveal that community members take immense pride in displaying and marketing their culture, as evidenced by 84.5% of respondents who strongly agreed and an additional 12.1% who agreed with this statement. They further suggest that investing in platforms such as cultural festivals, exhibitions, and training programs would enable community members to share their heritage with a wider audience and derive economic benefits. This aligns with Jackson (1997), who emphasized that socio-cultural conservation strategies aim to preserve cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, ensuring their transmission to future generations.

Tourists also respect and appreciate the cultural values and norms of the community, with 65.7% strongly agreeing and 29.8% agreeing with this assertion. This positive perception by visitors indicates that the cultural authenticity and practices of the community resonate well with them, thereby enhancing their overall experience. Respecting cultural norms is essential for sustaining tourism and fostering mutual understanding between visitors and host communities.

The adoption of new technology, social media, and other e-marketing tools to promote local culture and heritage was acknowledged by a moderate proportion of respondents, with 40.8% strongly agreeing and 38.5% agreeing to it. However, a notable 11.7% were neutral, and a small percentage disagreed, highlighting a gap in the effective use of digital tools for promoting culture. This finding underscores the need for increased digital literacy and access to technology, as noted by Sanmee (2025), who advocated for community empowerment in sociocultural conservation strategies. They further suggested that leveraging digital tools can enhance cultural visibility and engagement with a broader audience.

Efforts to curb crime, sexual exploitation, and other social problems within the context of tourism have received mixed responses. While 42.6% strongly agreed and 32.1% agreed that such efforts were being made, 15.5% remained neutral, and a small percentage expressed disagreement. This finding suggests that while progress has been made, there is room for improvement in comprehensively addressing these issues. Strengthening local policies, improving security measures, and engaging the community in crime prevention initiatives can help build a safer and more sustainable tourism environment. This aligns with the findings of Trono, Castronuovo, and Kosmas (2024), who highlight the role of responsible tourism practices in mitigating negative impacts on cultural heritage. Although progress has been made, the findings suggest the need for more robust security measures and community engagement in crime prevention initiatives. Similar concerns were raised by Mthethwa and Ndhlovu (2018), who found that while conservation strategies in South Africa boosted tourism, they also posed challenges related to crime and exploitation in the area.

The findings also indicate that the community is encouraged to innovate and create new cultural products, with 49.1% and 33.2% of respondents strongly agreeing and agreeing, respectively. However, there are gaps in identifying cultural product opportunities, as evidenced by lower agreement levels (30.9% strongly agree and 44.2% agree).

The quality of cultural products and services offered to tourists was also reported to have improved, with 49.4% and 35.5% of respondents strongly and somewhat agreeing, respectively. These improvements are significant for enhancing visitor satisfaction and ensuring repeated tourism. Similarly, 58.1% of respondents strongly agreed that cultural practices generate income for community members, reinforcing cultural tourism's economic value. However, access to credit for starting businesses remains a challenge, with only 17.4% strongly agreeing and 26% agreeing that such access

is available. This limitation hinders community members' ability to capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities linked to cultural tourism.

According to Quiroga (2025), the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage are central to attracting culturally motivated tourists. These findings are further supported by research in Germany, which found that conservation efforts that incorporate community-driven cultural preservation initiatives significantly enhance destination attractiveness and visitor satisfaction. The findings also highlight gender and youth inclusion in tourism and conservation activities in the area. More women are involved in tourism, with 58.9% and 26.4% strongly and somewhat agreeing, respectively, while young people actively participate in conservation and entrepreneurship, as indicated by 51.7% and 37% who strongly and somewhat agree, respectively. These findings emphasize the importance of continued efforts to promote inclusivity in tourism-related activities.

However, the involvement of people with disabilities in tourism and conservation remains limited, with 33.2% strongly agreeing and 21.9% agreeing, while a significant proportion expressed neutrality or disagreement. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the participation of marginalized groups in tourism. Finally, the findings suggest that the benefits from group ranch payments are unevenly distributed, with only 29.4% and 34.7% of the respondents strongly and somewhat agree, respectively, that families directly benefit. This highlights the opportunity to improve transparency and fairness in the allocation of benefits derived from tourism revenue.

4.1 Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.345a	0.119	0.105	0.35404
a	Predictors:	(Constant), Preservation_and_Promotion_of_Culture_and_Heritage, Entrepreneurship_opportunities_for_locals, Quality_and_Diversification_of_Product_Offer	Social_inclusion_of_minority_groups,	

The hypothesis under investigation was that socio-cultural conservation strategies do not have a significant effect on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. The model summary findings reveal a moderate positive relationship between socio-cultural conservation strategies, including social inclusion of minority groups, preservation and promotion of culture and heritage, entrepreneurship opportunities for locals, quality and diversification of product offerings, and sustainable tourism development.

Furthermore, the R-value of 0.345 indicates a weak-to-moderate correlation between these strategies and the dependent variable. The R^2 value of 0.119 suggests that 11.9% of the variance in sustainable tourism development can be attributed to the socio-cultural conservation strategies included in this model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.105, which accounts for the number of predictors, indicates a slight reduction in the explanatory power of the model but confirms its validity. The standard error of the estimate, 0.35404, highlights the variability in the data but suggests that the model has some predictive relevance.

Recent studies have confirmed that socio-cultural conservation strategies contribute to sustainable tourism by enhancing cultural authenticity, promoting inclusivity, and providing economic opportunities for local communities. For example, Mithen, Rabbani, and Rabbani (2025) argue that cultural heritage preservation fosters a sense of identity and attracts tourists interested in authentic experiences, leading to sustainable tourism growth. Similarly, Cimadomo, G., Marotta, A., & Russo, R. (2017) highlight that community-driven conservation initiatives improve cultural product quality and ensure equitable tourism benefits. These studies align with the current research findings, suggesting that the preservation and promotion of culture and heritage, the inclusion of minority groups, and entrepreneurship opportunities moderately influence sustainable tourism.

However, some studies have reported a stronger relationship between socio-cultural conservation and sustainable tourism than that observed in Laikipia County. For instance, Hernández-Rojas and Huete Alcocer (2021) found that in Latin America, socio-cultural conservation accounted for over 30% of the variance in sustainable tourism development, which is significantly higher than the 11.9% found in this study. This discrepancy may be attributed to differences in policy implementation, community participation, and integrating cultural assets into the tourism sector. In regions with robust heritage policies and well-structured tourism programs, the impact of socio-cultural conservation on sustainability is more pronounced (Brown, Mokgalo, & Chipfuva, 2020).

Table 5. Analysis of Variance

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum Squares	of Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.397	4	1.099	8.771	.000b
	Residual	32.589	260	0.125		
	Total	36.986	264			

a Dependent Variable: Sustainable tourism development

b	Predictors:	(Constant),	Social_inclusion_of_minority_groups,
		Preservation_and_Promotion_of_Culture_and_Heritage,	
		Entrepreneurship_opportunities_for_locals, Quality_and_Diversificatio_of_Product_Offer	

The results of the ANOVA test confirm that the socio-cultural conservation strategies included in the regression model have a statistically significant impact on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. The F-statistic of 8.771 and the p-value of 0.000 indicate that the model is significant at a conventional confidence level ($p < 0.05$), meaning that socio-cultural conservation strategies are influential predictors of sustainable tourism development. These findings were examined in relation to the existing literature to highlight points of agreement, divergence, and potential explanations for variations.

Recent studies reinforce the argument that socio-cultural conservation strategies significantly impact sustainable tourism development in the following ways. For example, Kim et al. (2021) found that cultural heritage preservation and community involvement explained 18.5% of the variance in sustainable tourism development in South Korea, with an F statistic of 12.563 ($p < 0.001$). The F-value of 8.771, while significant, is somewhat lower, suggesting that other factors, such as policy frameworks, funding, and stakeholder collaboration, could play a more substantial role in sustainable tourism outcomes in Laikipia.

In another study, Hernández-Rojas and Huete Alcocer (2021) investigated the role of socio-cultural factors in tourism sustainability in Latin America and found an F-statistic of 10.921 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a slightly stronger model significance. The authors attributed this to well-established community tourism programs and policy support for Indigenous participation in tourism development. This contrasts with the findings in Laikipia, where community engagement may not be as structured or supported by policy frameworks, which may explain the slightly lower predictive power of the model.

Furthermore, Tubey et al. (2019) examined socio-cultural conservation strategies in East Africa, which closely align with the current study. They noted that while these strategies were significant, infrastructural challenges, weak enforcement of conservation policies, and inconsistent funding for cultural preservation limited their overall impact on the sustainable tourism. This suggests that similar contextual factors could be at play in Laikipia, where barriers such as inadequate tourism marketing, insufficient financial support, and limited stakeholder collaboration may weaken the model's overall explanatory power.

The regression sum of squares (4.397) represents the proportion of variance in sustainable tourism development explained by socio-cultural conservation strategies, while the residual sum of squares (32.589) reflects the unexplained variance. The total sum of squares (36.986) indicates the overall variance in the sustainable tourism. This means that while socio-cultural conservation strategies contribute to sustainable tourism, a substantial proportion of variability remains unexplained by this model.

Comparing these findings with those of other studies, Sharma, Singh, and Pratt (2025) found that socio-cultural conservation strategies explained 22.3% of the variance in sustainable tourism in India, suggesting a higher model fit. The authors attributed this to the strong government support for cultural heritage tourism and community-based tourism enterprises. Similarly, Zhang and Zhao (2021) reported a model with an R^2 value of 0.211, meaning that socio-cultural conservation strategies explained 21.1% of the variance in sustainability of tourism in China. These findings indicate that while socio-cultural conservation is crucial, additional factors, such as tourism infrastructure, government policy, and market dynamics, play a significant role in tourism sustainability.

The lower explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.119$) in Laikipia compared to these studies suggests potential limitations in policy implementation, funding and community engagement. Brown et al. (2020) emphasized that for socio-cultural conservation strategies to have a stronger impact, governments and private stakeholders must work together to enhance cultural tourism infrastructure, provide financial incentives for local entrepreneurs, and develop policies that integrate conservation with tourism planning. The model's statistical significance ($p = 0.000$) suggests that socio-cultural conservation strategies are not random predictors but genuinely contribute to sustainable tourism. This aligns with the broader literature that supports the integration of cultural preservation, social inclusion, and entrepreneurship as drivers of sustainable tourism (Rienda, Ruiz-Fernández, & Andreu, 2024).

However, the relatively low proportion of variance explained by these factors (11.9%) indicates that tourism sustainability in Laikipia is influenced by additional determinants beyond socio-cultural conservation. For instance, the Longdom Journals. (2023) argued that economic, environmental, and technological factors significantly impact tourism sustainability. In their study on East African tourism, they found that integrating socio-cultural conservation with infrastructure development, digital marketing, and environmental conservation led to higher model significance and a stronger predictive power. This suggests that a more holistic approach is needed in Laikipia to enhance the role of socio-cultural conservation in sustainable tourism development.

Differences in governance structures, funding availability, and cultural heritage policies may explain the variations in model significance across different studies. They attributed this difference to strong policy enforcement, well-funded cultural tourism projects, and the establishment of heritage tourism markets. In contrast, regions with emerging tourism industries, such as parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, tend to report lower F-statistics and R^2 values due to weaker institutional support and infrastructure gaps (Maneejuk, Yamaka, & Srichaikul, 2022). This suggests that while socio-cultural conservation is important, its effectiveness depends on broader systemic factors, such as governance, financial investment, and infrastructure development.

Table 6. Effects of Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable

Mo del		Coefficientsa		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig			
		B	Std. Error						
1	(Constant)	2.236	0.087		25.8	0			
	Preservation_and_Promotion_of_Cul ture_and_Heritage	0.012	0.047	0.018	0.24	0.8			
					8	0.04			

Quality_and_Diversification_of_Prod uct_Offer	0.031	0.044	0.055	0.70	0.4
Entrepreneurship_opportunities_for_ locals	0.057	0.045	0.097	1.26	0.2
Social_inclusion_of_minority_group s	0.151	0.046	0.239	3.27	0.0

a Dependent Variable: Sustainable tourism development

The coefficient table provides insights into how each variable affects the dependent variable. Social inclusion of minority groups was the only variable that had a statistically significant contribution. A unit increase in social inclusion of minority groups corresponds to an increase of 0.151 units in sustainable tourism development, as shown by its unstandardized coefficient ($B=0.151$). This variable had the highest standardized beta value (0.239) among the predictors, emphasizing its relative importance. Its significance ($p=0.001$) highlights the critical role of inclusivity in advancing sustainable tourism. This finding suggests that empowering minority groups through social inclusion can lead to meaningful improvements in tourism outcomes.

Recent studies have corroborated the significance of social inclusion in tourism. For instance, Odede (2020) highlights that community involvement, especially among marginalized groups, leads to social empowerment and cohesive community development, which are pivotal for sustainable tourism. Similarly, Napatah and Azlan (2022) emphasized that minority community participation in tourism development enhances cultural preservation and economic benefits, contributing to the overall sustainability of tourism initiatives. Moreover, empowering minority groups through active participation in tourism decision-making processes can lead to innovative tourism products and services that reflect the community's unique cultural heritage, thereby attracting niche markets interested in authentic cultural experiences.

Notwithstanding, preservation and promotion of culture and heritage has an unstandardized coefficient of ($B=0.012$), indicating that a unit increase in this variable would lead to a marginal increase of 0.012 units in sustainable tourism development. However, its p-value ($p=0.804$) shows that this contribution is statistically insignificant. This suggests that while preserving and promoting cultural heritage may be a valuable conservation strategy, it does not strongly influence sustainable tourism development in this context. This finding contrasts with the existing literature, which often emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage preservation in tourism. For example, Brooks, Waterton, Saul, and Renzaho (2023) found that preserving cultural heritage significantly enhances tourist attraction and community pride, leading to sustainable tourism.

This discrepancy may be due to contextual differences. In Laikipia County, the mechanisms for effectively integrating cultural heritage into tourism offerings may be underdeveloped or misaligned with tourist expectations. Additionally, challenges related to the commodification of culture may arise, where the commercialization of cultural practices may lead to a loss of authenticity, thereby diminishing their appeal to tourists seeking genuine cultural experiences. This underscores the need for strategies that not only preserve cultural heritage but also present it in a manner that resonates with contemporary tourist interests while maintaining authenticity.

Quality and diversification of product offerings has an unstandardized coefficient of ($B=0.031$), indicating that a unit increase in this variable would result in a slight increase of 0.031 units in sustainable tourism development. However, with a p-value of 0.484, this variable did not have a statistically significant effect. This finding implies that diversifying tourism products, while important for broadening appeal, may not be sufficient to impact sustainable tourism outcomes in Laikipia County. The literature indicates that diversified and high-quality tourism products are essential for attracting a broad spectrum of tourists and enhancing their overall experience. For instance, Kim and Park (2021) demonstrated that diversified tourism offerings, including cultural festivals and eco-tourism activities, significantly contribute to increased tourist satisfaction and repeat visits.

However, the insignificant effect observed in Laikipia County could be attributed to a number of factors. There may be limitations in the current tourism product portfolio, such as a lack of innovation or failure to meet international quality standards. Additionally, inadequate marketing strategies might result in low visibility of the available offerings to potential tourists. Furthermore, infrastructural challenges, such as poor accessibility to tourist sites and a lack of essential amenities, could deter tourists, thereby diminishing the impact of product diversification efforts.

Entrepreneurship opportunities for locals has an unstandardized coefficient of ($B=0.057$), meaning a unit increase in this variable leads to a 0.057-unit increase in sustainable tourism development. Despite this positive relationship, the p-value (0.208) indicates that the effect is not statistically significant. This suggests that while promoting local entrepreneurship is beneficial, it may need to be complemented by other strategies to significantly enhance sustainable tourism development in the area. Entrepreneurship is often highlighted as a catalyst for sustainable tourism because it stimulates local economies and fosters innovation. Manyara and Jones (2007) found that local entrepreneurship led to job creation and income diversification, contributing to community well-being and sustainable tourism.

The lack of a significant impact in Laikipia County may result from barriers hindering local entrepreneurship. These include limited access to capital, inadequate training and skills development, and restrictive regulatory frameworks. Additionally, there may be challenges related to market access, where local entrepreneurs struggle to reach potential customers due to poor marketing and distribution channels. Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions, such as microfinance programs, capacity-building workshops, and policy reforms, can enhance the role of local entrepreneurship in promoting sustainable tourism.

The findings demonstrate that the social inclusion of minority groups is the most impactful socio-cultural conservation strategy in this study, with a statistically significant and meaningful contribution to sustainable tourism development. The other predictors, namely, preservation and promotion of culture and heritage, quality and diversification of product offerings, and entrepreneurship opportunities for locals, show positive but statistically insignificant effects. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected, as socio-cultural conservation strategies collectively influence sustainable tourism development. These results underscore the importance of prioritizing inclusive socio-cultural practices and suggest that more emphasis should be placed on integrating and empowering minority groups to optimize tourism development.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study sought to establish the effect of socio-cultural conservation strategies on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. The findings indicate that socio-cultural conservation strategies have a weak-to-moderate positive impact on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. The model summary shows an R-value of 0.345, signifying a moderate correlation between socio-cultural strategies—including social inclusion of minority groups, preservation and promotion of culture and heritage, entrepreneurship opportunities for locals, and quality and diversification of product offerings—and sustainable tourism development.

The R^2 value of 0.119 suggests that these factors explain 11.9% of the variance in sustainable tourism, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.105, indicating a slight reduction in explanatory power when accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The ANOVA results confirm the statistical significance of the model ($F = 8.771$, $p = 0.000$), demonstrating that socio-cultural conservation strategies are significant predictors of sustainable tourism development. However, the relatively low explanatory power suggests that other factors, such as policy implementation, funding, and infrastructure, may play a more substantial role. These findings align with the existing literature, which highlights that socio-cultural conservation enhances cultural authenticity, promotes inclusivity, and creates economic opportunities for local communities. The coefficient analysis further revealed that while each individual predictor

contributed to sustainable tourism, their effects varied, with some showing weaker statistical significance.

The study concluded that socio-cultural conservation strategies have a positive but relatively modest impact on sustainable tourism development in communal group ranches in Laikipia County, Kenya. While elements such as the social inclusion of minority groups, cultural preservation, entrepreneurship opportunities, and diversified tourism offerings contribute to sustainability, their overall influence remains limited. The statistical analysis confirms that these factors play a significant role, but their impact is not as pronounced as other potential determinants, such as policy implementation, funding, and infrastructure development. However, given the varying significance of individual predictors, it is evident that socio-cultural strategies alone are insufficient to drive sustainable tourism.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The respondents might have had biases that could have affected the findings of the study. To overcome this limitation, the researcher used multiple data collection tools, including questionnaires and interviews, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. In addition, the researcher anticipated that the investigation of socio-cultural conservation strategies for sustainable tourism development would be hindered by factors such as community participation, leadership, and resources. The researcher mitigated this challenge by engaging stakeholders in the research process and building trust and rapport with the local communities, as well as employing research assistants and guides from the study sites.

5.3 Recommendation

The Ministry of Culture and Heritage, alongside the County Government of Laikipia, should establish legislative frameworks that promote cultural heritage preservation by funding local art, music, and historical sites to boost cultural tourism. Community-based organizations (CBOs) and local tourism boards should be empowered to manage and promote cultural tourism, ensuring that tourism revenue is reinvested in the community. Additionally, the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) should enforce equity and inclusivity policies that ensure that minority groups and marginalized populations are actively involved in tourism-related decision-making and employment opportunities.

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