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Abstract

Tourism development has become a focal point for many towns across the world, providing both cultural and economic interchange. However, the attitudes and involvement of locals play a major role in the success and longevity of such efforts. There has been little research on how community involvement affects locals' perceptions of tourist destination areas, particularly in the early phases of development, despite the crucial role that community participation plays in the development of sustainable tourism. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between locals' opinions regarding the growth of tourism in Kenya's Rimoi National Reserve and community participation. A convergent design and a mixed-methods approach were used in the investigation. Data was gathered from 10 resident teenagers who were purposefully chosen and 231 family heads who were chosen using a systematic sampling technique. While focus groups were used to produce qualitative data, questionnaires were employed to gather quantitative data. The results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between locals' sentiments toward tourism development and community participation ($R=.666$). Furthermore, the model indicated that approximately 44.4% of the variation in community participation could be directly accounted for by variations in the in residents' attitudes toward support for tourism development within the Rimoi National Reserve ($R^2=0.444$). The study concludes that locals' perceptions of tourist development are

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significantly improved by community participation. Thus, active engagement of the community residents not only fosters positive attitudes but also holds the promise of yielding more sustainable and inclusive outcomes in tourism development initiatives within the community. The study recommends actively involving Rimoi National Reserve gateway community residents in tourism development discussions and decisions, raising awareness about the benefits of community participation, implementing capacity-building initiatives, and maintaining transparent communication channels.

Keywords: *Tourism development, Community participation, Residents' attitudes, Sustainable tourism, and Rimoi National Reserve*

1.0 Introduction

Community attitudes are pivotal in determining the success of tourism development, with residents generally more supportive when they are actively engaged and perceive positive impacts (Egresi & Kara, 2018). Residents are more supportive when they are actively involved and perceive positive impacts (Jaafar et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). However, negative consequences such as conflicts, resistance, and feelings of dependency can arise when communities feel excluded or perceive adverse tourism effects (Canavan, 2017). Recognizing tourism as a continuous process, ongoing monitoring of impacts and stakeholder engagement is essential for effective and equitable development (Sharpley, 2014).

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires tourism since it not only boosts local economies but also protects natural and cultural resources (WTTC, 2018). All parties involved in the development of sustainable tourism must participate with knowledge (Tosun, 2006; Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Participatory tourism development can yield sustainable outcomes and avoid conflicts (Tosun, 2006; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

Grassroots participation is preferred over induced participation. To guarantee the sustainability of tourism growth in every place, community involvement is therefore essential (Tosun, 2006). It is almost impossible to maintain tourism in a place without the backing of the local population. Therefore, it is crucial to have meaningful involvement with the destination community, particularly in the early stages of tourist development, to make sure that their needs, views, and concerns are taken into account at every step of tourism planning and execution. However, in Rimoi National Reserve, as in many other destinations in developing countries, local communities have been overlooked in pre-implementation assessments of their attitudes towards tourism development and its subsequent phases (MacKenzie & Gannon, 2019; Gannon et al., 2021).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As a major worldwide industry, tourism is promoting inclusive development, economic growth, and environmental sustainability (Sharpley, 2002; UNWTO, 2010; WTTC, 2018). It is essential to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include gender equality and the eradication of poverty (UNWTO, 2010; WTTC, 2018).

The positive aspects of tourism involve revitalizing the economy, enhancing life quality, and safeguarding culture (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Doh, 2010). Conversely, the involvement of the community is vital in the advancement of sustainable tourism, and positive attitudes toward the advantages of tourism are linked to increased community participation (Jaafar et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017; MacKenzie & Gannon, 2019). While understanding the importance of

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resident perspectives and community engagement in the creation of sustainable tourism is key, there remains limited knowledge about these interactions, particularly in destinations such as Kenya's Rimoi National Reserve (Choi & Jang, 2023; MacKenzie & Gannon, 2019).

Local communities frequently do not have significant participation in decision-making procedures, which can result in conflicts and development practices that are not sustainable (Moyo, & Tichaawa, 2017). Furthermore, there is a lack of thorough investigation into the opinions of residents regarding tourism growth, which creates difficulties for successful tourism organization and control (Gursoy et al., 2019). The absence of empirical data on resident attitudes and community involvement in Rimoi National Reserve poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of tourism, hindering evidence-based planning and policymaking efforts (Tosun, 2006). Investigating the relationship between residents' attitudes towards tourism development and community involvement is essential for guiding sustainable tourism projects in Rimoi National Reserve. Thus, this research aimed to investigate how community involvement relates to the opinions of residents on the development of tourism in Rimoi National Reserve, Kenya.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested while controlling for age, gender, and education covariates.

H₀₁: Community Participation has no statistically significant relationship with residents' attitudes towards tourism development in Rimoi National Reserve, Kenya.

1.3 Research Question

How do residents' perceptions of community participation influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development?

1.4 Theoretical Framework and Model Underpinning

The Normative Model of Community Participation in Tourism Development (NMCPTD), put forth by Tosun and Timothy (2003), served as the foundation for this study. Furthermore, the significance of citizen empowerment and grassroots engagement in development programs was underscored by the consideration of Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" and Pretty's typology of participation. Tosun's concept highlights the transfer of decision-making authority to local inhabitants, promoting their significant impact on local initiatives and policies.

Contrary to coercive participation, which often prioritizes the interests of decision-makers and tourism operators, Tosun (2006) proposes a bottom-up, grassroots participatory approach to sustainable tourism development. This model emphasizes shared benefits and autonomy in decision-making, fostering community empowerment and preserving local values. The study utilizes these frameworks to explore community participation in Rimoi National Reserve, aiming to understand its correlation with tourism impacts and attitudes toward development.

Policy documents like the Tourism Act 2011 and the Wildlife Management and Conservation Act 2013 in Kenya uphold community participation and demonstrate the country's dedication to decentralized government and local participation in decision-making. Using Tosun's approach, the research clarifies the many community participation strategies—such as forced, induced, and spontaneous—and emphasizes the significance of sincere grassroots involvement in attaining sustainable tourism goals (Tosun, 2006). This strategy not only improves local perceptions of tourism but also promotes workable rules and a fair split of expenses and gains among locals. The normative typologies of community participation are displayed in figure 1.

7. Self-mobilization	←	8. Citizen control	Degrees of Citizen Power	→	Spontaneous Participation Bottom-up; active par.; direct participation; par. in decision making, authentic participation; self planning;	
6. Interactive participation		7. Delegated power				6. Partnership
5. Functional participation	←	5. Placation	Degrees of Citizen Tokenism	→	Induced Participation Top-down; passive; formal; mostly indirect; degree of tokenism, manipulation; pseudo-participation; participation in implementation and sharing benefits; choice between proposed alternatives and feedback.	
4. Participation for material incentives		4. Consultation				3. Informing
3. Participation by consultation		2. Therapy				Non-participation
2. Passive participation	1. Manipulation	Coercive Participation Top-down, passive; mostly indirect, formal; participation in implementation, but not necessarily sharing benefits; choice between proposed limited alternatives or no choice; paternalism, non-participation, high degree of tokenism and manipulation.				
1. Manipulative participation						
Pretty's (1995) typology of community participation	Arstein's (1971) typology of community participation			Tosun's (1999a) typology of community participation		

Keys: Corresponding categories in each typology → ←

Figure 1: Normative Typologies of Community Participation

Source: (Tosun, 2006)

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The relationship between Community Participation and Residents' Attitudes Towards Tourism Development in Rimoi National Reserve, Kenya as shown in figure 2.

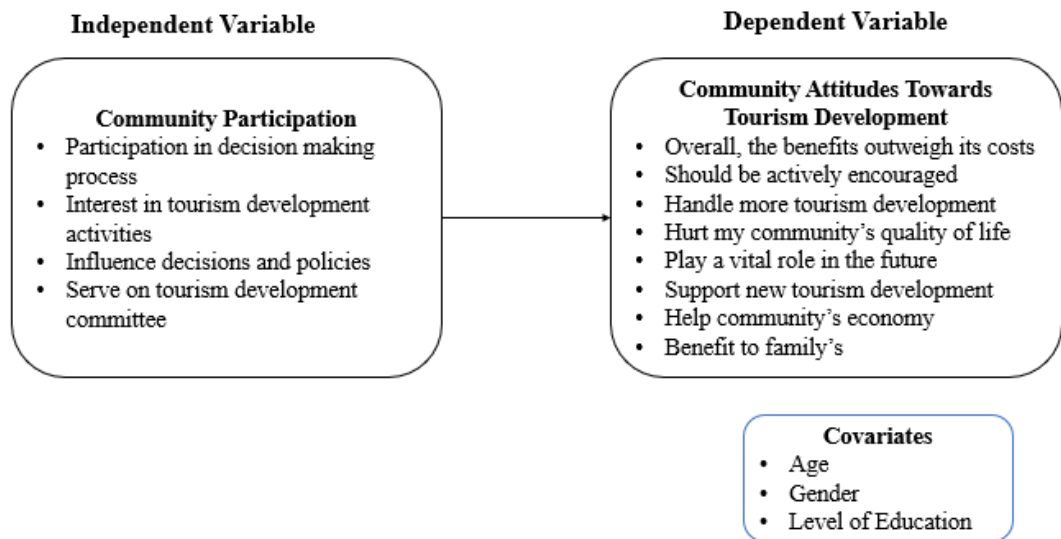


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researchers' Construct (2024)

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Residents' Attitudes towards Tourism Development

In the area of tourism research, the concept of opinions on tourism growth has been extensively examined. When discussing attitudes, we are referring to individuals' opinions, which may be either supportive or opposed to a particular idea (Choi & Jang, 2023). The perspectives of Dillette et al. (2017) and Algassim et al. (2021) mirror personal beliefs. According to research by Alqasa and colleagues in 2014, an individual's perception of an activity indicates if they view it favorably or unfavorably. People who approach a task with a positive attitude are likely to have a positive reaction, while those with a negative attitude are more likely to have a negative reaction.

Consequently, in the context of tourism, locals' attitudes toward tourist development and community involvement can foster favorable or unfavorable perceptions, which may affect locals' support for tourism growth in their communities. It is implied that attitudes are acquired by exposure to or knowledge of the object; they are generalized predispositions that exist in the mind of the individual and influence conduct before it ever occurs. This is how attitude is conceptualized. As a result, the community gains insight into local affairs and develops more positive views toward tourist development when it has the power to influence initiatives and participate in the decision-making process (Alim *et al.*, 2021).

People have opinions about practically everything, including politicians, religion, institutions, people, food, music, clothing, and other items. In general, attitudes can be distinguished by their unique qualities. For instance, the study can focus on the different natural attractions and their effects on the destination community if the researcher in charge of the tourism study is curious about locals' opinions regarding the growth of tourism in rural areas (object). The attitude object is what is meant by this. A person's attitude may be strongly or weakly held depending on appraisal and ongoing assessment. Therefore, attitudes are learned through social interaction, operant and classical conditioning, and the same processes that teach culture (Ajzen, 2018).

Similar to marketing, attitudes towards tourism can be developed (or learned) through first-hand experience with the product, word-of-mouth, advertisements in the media, retail shop flyers, and the internet. According to Alqasa et al. (2014), attitudes are malleable and subject to change. People no longer have the same attitudes that they have in their youth. People's attitudes are always changing as a result of their experiences, and they also pick up new attitudes when they come across new attitude objects. Events or situations can occasionally have an impact on attitudes, and this can have an impact on how an attitude and conduct are related.

Certain attitudes are more difficult to shift and might persist in a person's life, but others can fluctuate from week to week. Thus, impact studies and community attitudes in tourist destination areas must be examined to determine how the growth of tourism affects local attitudes to evaluate the long-term benefits to the host community as well as the overall success of tourism development (Kihima, 2015; Almeida-García et al., 2016).

To manage both the desired and undesired effects of the numerous and diverse generated impacts on the growth and sustainability of tourism, the community's attitude toward tourist development is essential. Tourism impact analysis of tourism development outcomes and attitudes of the community before new or further development of any rural tourism destinations is critical as attitudes are dynamic and can change. No community residents can hold the same attitudes now as they did when they were younger (Karytsas *et al.*, 2019; Látková & Vogt, 2012).

Research has shown the significance of the community's positive perception of tourism in securing the industry's sustainability in the long run, taking into account commercial, socio-cultural, psychological, political, and economic factors (Dillette et al., 2017; Sharpley, 2014). To encourage development in destination areas, it is essential to collaborate with government bodies and other stakeholders to involve the local community in planning tourism projects (Hadinejad et al., 2019; Egresi & Kara, 2018). Most tourism research claims that to garner backing from residents in destination communities for tourism development, it is vital to foster favorable attitudes and perceptions of the benefits brought about by the development (Nchor, Ebu, & Odey, 2021; Runya, et al., 2022). As per Algassim et al. (2021), opinions in a host community are shaped by the evaluations of possible trade-offs between factors that will impact the community's future. Hence, understanding the perceptions, perspectives, thoughts, and sentiments of the community towards tourism, along with the advantages and disadvantages linked to it, is crucial for fostering tourism growth in their regions and advancing a sustainable tourism industry.

Several factors have been recognized to influence residents' outlook on tourism, its expansion, and the level of support it receives from the community. Community attachment, local economy status, community interests, participation levels, ecological attitudes, and environmental concerns about locals using tourism resources are some of the factors identified (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Ko & Stewart, 2002; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015). Local community characteristics, such as which specific groups benefit from tourism development, play a role in shaping attitudes towards the industry. If locals do not perceive any personal advantages, they are likely to resist the development of tourism in their area (Latkova & Vogt, 2012; Saufi et al., 2014). As a result, they could support social tourism businesses that offer benefits, whether real or perceived, to residents (Choi & Jang, 2023; Khanom et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, certain host communities perceive tourism as having a detrimental effect on their local culture and the way tourists distribute resources (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Latkova & Vogt (2012) found no clear connection between the level of engagement in the tourism industry and the impacts of travel. Differences in attitudes may be due to varying expectations of benefits or enhancements in local public services among the population (Andereck et al., 2005; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

Residents' attitudes toward development are influenced by their perceived power compared to industrial power. The community is more inclined to be interested in and have a positive attitude toward tourism and its development projects when it believes it can influence the direction and pace of industry expansion (Sakitri, 2018; Khanom et al., 2019). According to Gannon et al. (2021), a connection can be observed between how the local population feels about tourism and their ability to impact upcoming decisions on tourist development outcomes of tourism development in communities must be examined before any true tourism development strategy in this area can be developed further. According to Gursoy and Rutherford (2004), the host community's negative impressions of tourism development lead to people's opposition to additional development in their locations.

For the tourism business to be successful in a specific place, the cooperation and goodwill of the local population are necessary, especially when sustainability is taken into account (Dillette et al., 2017; Graci, 2020; Karytsas et al., 2019). For any tourism endeavor to be considered successful, it is essential to determine the local community's perspectives toward trade related to tourists. One important element of sustainable tourism growth has been identified as the degree of public passion for travel (Tosun, 2006).

2.1.1 Community Participation

Conceptually, community participation has two main goals: first, it aims to empower and improve the lives of the world's poor people; second, it views disadvantaged participation as a means, not an end in itself; third, meaningful participation is about optimizing participation to achieve project goals rather than maximizing participation (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar 2016).

The goals of rural tourism development aim to promote community awareness and positive views towards tourism, manage impact issues, strengthen community backing, decrease resistance, and reliance, economically empower locals, encourage comprehensive growth, and establish capabilities for long-term sustainability. In the tourism industry, community involvement involves individuals voluntarily having control or influence on decisions that affect them. In other words, participation involves giving the community the ability to voice their opinions and have control over decisions. Decreasing transaction expenses in both horizontal and vertical interactions is essential for the sustainability of involvement (Jaafar, et al., 2017).

Bramwell and Sharman (1999) describe involvement in development as a spectrum, ranging from passive involvement where people are only told about projects, to self-mobilization where they take independent actions without outside influence. The authors support functional participation, in which local communities form groups to achieve specific goals for development projects. This form of participation fosters equality, ensures a better quality of life for everyone, and reduces inequalities in trade. Managers and planners must acknowledge and manage the impacts of tourism on development to formulate more practical and effective strategies for sustainable tourism development, particularly in rural areas (Graci, 2020; Thetsane, 2019; Tosun, 2006; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016).

Participation occurs at various levels including global, national, subnational, community, and household levels (Mak et al., 2012). In the realm of tourism, the focus is on engaging the residents who have the opportunity to benefit from the transformations brought about by local tourism projects. The qualities of the residents are important because they impact the type of participation that occurs. Participation is connected to both financial, social, and psychological costs and benefits. Individuals or beneficiaries must participate when the advantages are greater than the disadvantages (Moyo & Tichaawa, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019; Saufi et al., 2014).

Participation is also linked to four primary goals, which are equity, efficacy, efficiency, and empowerment. The link between an output's cost and inputs is what efficiency is all about. As a result of participation, roles, authority, and ownership are likely to become more clear than they otherwise would be. Participation also fosters conversation, consultation, and information exchange (Mbevi, 2016). Effective resource mobilization, site selection, improved project design, implementation, and facility maintenance beyond the development project's lifespan are all made possible by participation (Garrod, 2003). It suggests that there won't be as many disputes and setbacks in the context of this study, which will lead to more seamless execution and reduced development expenses overall. Quick identification of property ownership rights, prompt obtaining of a land permit, and speedy construction and completion are the spillover benefits (Thongma, *et al.*, 2011). This will stem conflicts like those that have been witnessed in the Amboseli and Maasai Mara game reserves where the local community resisted the development of Tourism projects (Tubey, 2020). Others have been fatal like the case at Loliondo, Ngorongoro District, Tanzania where police and game wardens attempted to demarcate 1,500 hectares of

village land as a game reserve for trophy hunting and the community resisted eviction resulting in violence, loss of life and property (Bartels, 2016; Goldman, 2011).

Community engagement greatly influences the direction of tourism initiatives, with participation varying in form and intensity depending on the circumstances. Numerous studies have delved into the involvement of communities in tourism growth, emphasizing its importance in the sustainable advancement and revitalization of local populations (Mak et al., 2012, Moyo & Tichaawa, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019; Saufi et al., 2014). When residents are allowed to participate in tourist development, their expectations are satisfied and their influence on community projects and policies is strengthened (Garrod, 2003; Lekaota, 2015). Communities often have different views on their roles compared to what is portrayed in literature, highlighting the importance of educating locals about their vital role as key stakeholders in the tourism sector (Jaafar et al., 2017).

Community involvement in tourism development has a significant impact on better tourism results, enhanced quality of life, and economic growth (Thongma et al., 2011). Engaging local community members in decision-making processes enhances their backing for the development of the tourism sector and their dedication to preserving their traditional way of life and values. Despite its importance, there have been limited research studies, particularly in Kenya, that have explored the role of community participation in sustainable tourism development (Gannon, Rasoolimanesh, & Taheri, 2021). Involving a mediator in the study enhances understanding of how tourism impacts community perspectives by engaging the community, leading to more effective and sustainable tourism growth.

Collaborative planning aims to improve solutions by giving decision-making power to citizens and other stakeholders, resulting in easier execution, efficient resource allocation, conflict reduction, and overall benefits for the public (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Community participation in the tourism planning process through committees, focus groups, and consultations can help address concerns and prevent disputes, ultimately ensuring the industry's longevity (Garrod, 2003; Jaafar et al., 2017). Communities can influence decisions regarding their resources, promote sustainable tourism growth, and minimize conflicts by involving them in crucial decision-making processes and establishing tourism-focused associations or committees to advocate for their interests (Thetsane, 2019).

Although previous studies have extensively investigated community participation perspectives and their impact on locals' attitudes towards tourism development, most of these researches were conducted in popular tourist destinations. Consequently, there is a lack of written works in recently established destination towns. Thus, this research aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature by investigating how community engagement affects residents' views on the expansion of tourism in Rimoi National Reserve, a nascent tourist destination in Kenya.

3.0 Methodology and Materials

Philosophical Underpinning and Research Design

The study employed a Mixed Methods approach situated within the pragmatic paradigm. The pragmatist paradigm acknowledges the complexity of the world and the diverse perspectives through which reality can be understood. Unlike the traditional positivist paradigm that seeks objective truth, pragmatism emphasizes knowledge construction through experiences and interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to this paradigm, the study collects data using both qualitative and quantitative techniques to fully comprehend the research subject. Convergent

mixed methods one-phase research design was used by the researcher, enabling the simultaneous gathering and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This strategy combines the findings from both data sources to provide comprehensive interpretations that provide a full understanding of the research problem.

Study Area

The study was conducted at Rimoi National Reserve, located in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya, within the former Rift Valley Province. Positioned in the western Kerio Valley, Rimoi National Reserve was established in 2015, offering camping opportunities and wildlife observation along the Kerio River. Its mission is to preserve nature while providing supplementary income sources for local communities.

Target Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The study targeted 548 household heads residing in the Rimoi gateway community. This population was selected due to their proximity to Rimoi National Reserve, making them directly exposed to tourist activities and potential future developments within the reserve. 10 resident teenagers were chosen using a purposive sample technique, while 231 family heads were chosen using a systematic random sample technique. Six men and four women, ages 18 to 34, with a variety of experiences made up this group.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, and focus groups were used to collect qualitative data. Expert panels evaluated the questionnaire scales for face and content validity after making modifications based on existing literature. Additionally, the reliability of the residents' attitudes towards tourism development was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, indicating a value of 0.773, while the coefficient for community engagement items was 0.833. Hair et al. (2019) found that the questionnaire items displayed internal reliability as they surpassed the 0.7 cutoff point for values.

To ensure the data's trustworthiness, reliability, and credibility, the participants validated the focus group discussion responses through member-checking. During the study, ethical guidelines such as privacy, consent, and secrecy were upheld (Yin, 2016). Quantitative data was assessed using multiple linear regression and descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations), while qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis.

Model Specification

Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, the researchers assessed the relationship between community participation in tourism development (independent variable) and residents' attitudes toward tourism development (dependent variable) and. A simple regression model was used to analyze the data and assess the importance of the study's hypothesis.

The regression model was defined as:

$$\text{RATD} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CMPAR} + \varepsilon$$

Where; RATD=Residents' attitudes towards Tourism Development, CMPAR=Community Participation, β_0 =Constant, β_1 =Effect size and ε =Error term.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Residents' Attitude towards Tourism Development

The dependent variable in the study was the attitudes of the locals about the development of tourism. On a five-point Likert scale, the eight items measure residents' sentiments toward tourism development. Table 1 shows the outcomes.

Table 1: Residents' Attitude towards Tourism Development

Item Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
RATD1	Overall, the benefits of tourism development in my community outweigh its costs.	3.922	1.089
RATD2	In general, new tourism development should be actively encouraged in my community.	4.113	0.911
RATD3	My community can handle more tourism development.	3.948	1.175
RATD4	Increased tourism would not hurt my community's quality of life.	3.714	1.232
RATD5	Tourism development contributes to the conservation and preservation of our local heritage.	3.983	0.818
RATD6	I support new tourism development in my community	4.178	0.913
RATD7	I believe tourism development enhances the overall quality of life for residents of our community.	4.113	0.897
RATD8	I feel that tourism development supports the growth and diversification of local businesses.	4.333	0.926
Valid N=231			
Grand Mean		4.038	0.995

According to the results presented in Table 1, the majority of individuals in the community view the increase in tourism positively. The mean score for the average response (RATD1) is 3.922, with a standard deviation of 1.089, suggesting that they believe the benefits of tourism development are greater than the drawbacks. Moreover, a mean score of 4.113 and a standard deviation of 0.911 suggest strong consensus in supporting the active promotion of new tourism development (RATD2). Just like that, the average score of 3.948 and standard deviation of 1.175 showed the respondents' belief in their community's ability to handle a rise in tourism.

There is a lack of confidence in the potential impact on quality of life due to the view that increased tourism would not harm their community, as indicated by a mean score of 3.714 and standard deviation of 1.232 (RATD4), although overall sentiment remains positive. These results were in line with the conclusions drawn from focus groups, which also emphasized the potential benefits of tourist development while also raising concerns about its potential to undermine local values and way of life.

"Tourism has brought opportunities for our youth, and there is a sense of pride in showcasing our beautiful culture and wildlife. This has made our Rimoi national reserve known to the world as a tourist destination" [PP5]

"Tourism development has impacted this area positively; we have improved infrastructure and job opportunities. On the negative side, our original natural environment is slowly disappearing" [PP1]

"On the positive side, tourism has boosted our businesses around. On the negative side, it feels like we are losing control of our community. Our traditional culture and mannerisms are fading away" [PP9]

Moreover, with an average score of 3.983 and a standard deviation of 0.818, participants generally perceive tourism development as beneficial in the conservation and preservation of local heritage (RATD5). From enhancing the overall quality of life to backing local businesses and promoting growth and diversification, most survey participants expressed approval for new tourism projects in their area, with average ratings ranging from 4.113 to 4.333. The overall average score of 4.038, along with a standard deviation of 0.995 across all categories, shows a positive view toward the expansion of tourism in the Rimoi National Reserve Gateway community. This indicates an ongoing pattern of favorable outlooks among participants.

Community Participation in Tourism Development Activities

The study's independent variable was community participation, which was assessed using a five-point Likert scale (5 being strongly disagree, 4 being agree, 3 being neutral, 2 being disagree, and 1 being strongly disagree). Table 2 displays the findings of the descriptive statistics.

Table 2: Community Participation in Tourism Development Activities

Item Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
PAR1	As resident, I am willing to actively participate in tourism-related events or festivals organized in my community	4.039	0.984
PAR2	I am willing to actively support initiatives for new tourism development in my community.	4.087	1.026
PAR3	As a resident, I am willing to be involved in local tourism-decision making process	4.052	1.066
PAR4	I am interested in local tourism development activities.	4.121	0.91
PAR5	I would like to serve on a committee involved in local tourism development activities.	4	1.115
PAR6	In the past 12 months, I have been actively participating in public meetings or forums about possible local tourism development.	3.732	1.298
Valid N=231			
Grand Mean		4.005	1.067

The results in Table 2 revealed encouraging insights into residents' attitudes and willingness to engage in various dimensions of tourism development within their community. PAR1 indicated a robust enthusiasm among residents to actively participate in tourism-related events or festivals, suggesting a strong sense of community involvement and cultural enrichment (Mean: 4.039, SD: 0.984). Similarly, PAR2 unveiled substantial support from residents for initiatives aimed at fostering new tourism development, underscoring a belief in the potential benefits for economic growth and prosperity within the community (Mean: 4.087, SD: 1.026). According to PAR3, there was a notable trend among respondents to actively participate in local tourist decision-making processes, indicating a desire for community empowerment and involvement in the creation of policies about tourism (Mean: 4.052, SD: 1.066). What the focus group participants said during the discussions was as follows:

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"I rarely attend meetings to discuss local tourism. I believe that even if we participate in such forums and meetings, our opinions and our community's voice are never heard." [PP7]

"Forums are a great way to express opinions about local tourism development. We are willing to actively engage in these discussions and attend meetings only when we feel we are included in the conversation about tourism in our area." [PP5]

In addition, PAR4 demonstrated residents' strong enthusiasm for taking part in regional tourist development initiatives, highlighting their understanding of tourism as an essential component of community identity and their readiness to support its expansion and prosperity (Mean: 4.121, SD: 0.910). To encourage their participation, they did, however, note that they needed to be aware of the tourism development initiatives taking place in Rimoi and the importance of community involvement.

"Participating in tourism events in this area is something I am open to, but sometimes, I need more information. It is not that I am not interested, but having clear details about what is happening would encourage me to participate more"[PP5]

"I believe in the power of community engagement. It is not just about interest but about actively participating and supporting initiatives contributing to our community's well-being." [PP1]

Furthermore, PAR5 showed that locals were quite willing to serve on committees that were involved in local tourism development activities, demonstrating a significant willingness for direct participation in the decision-making processes associated with the planning and execution of tourism (Mean: 4.000, SD: 1.115). Most community members said that they would be open to taking part in tourism development initiatives, but they also voiced concerns about their opinions not being taken into account throughout the decision-making process.

"I believe we should all have a say in how tourism develops in our area. Count me in for decision-making processes. It is our community and our input matters. I want to actively participate in shaping the direction of our local tourism." [PP2]

"Being involved in local tourism decision-making is important to me. I have seen other communities benefit from the active engagement of residents, and I want the same for us. I am open to being part of the discussions that will shape our tourism future." [PP1]

Despite slightly lower scores, PAR6 indicated ongoing community interest and involvement in public meetings or forums about local tourism development over the past year, highlighting an enduring commitment to discussions concerning the community's tourism future (Mean: 3.732, SD: 1.298). Overall, these findings suggest a positive attitude and a strong willingness among residents to actively participate in various facets of tourism development, providing valuable insights into community perceptions and preferences regarding local tourism initiatives.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The associations between the studied variables were determined by correlation analysis. Table 3 illustrates the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test, which indicated a high positive link ($R=.666$) between residents' opinions toward tourism development and community participation.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix (N=231)

	Community Participation	Community Attitudes towards Tourism Development
Community Participation	1	.666**
Community Attitudes towards Tourism Development	.666**	1

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

Relationship between Community Participation and Residents' Attitudes Towards Tourism Development

The study's hypothesis (**H₀₁**) was that there is no statistically significant correlation between community participation and locals' opinions regarding the growth of tourism in Kenya's Rimoi National Reserve. The data on community engagement was regressed using aggregate mean scores on the citizens' views toward tourism development to test the hypothesis. The approach of simple linear regression was employed to test the hypothesis. According to the model summary results (Table 4), community participation accounted for 44.4% of the variation in residents' attitudes toward support for tourism development within the Rimoi National Reserve (R²=0.444).

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
1	.666 ^a	0.444	0.442	0.5092	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), Community Participation
b Dependent Variable: Community Attitudes towards Tourism Development

Based on the ANOVA results (F (1, 229) = 182.909, p = 0.00) in Table 5, it was clear that the regression model was robust enough to predict locals' opinions toward tourism development. This indicated that community involvement had a major impact on locals' attitudes about how tourism developed in the Rimoi National Reserve Gateway Community.

Table 5: Model Fitness

Model	ANOVA					
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47.425	1	47.425	182.909	.000 ^b
	Residual	59.376	229	0.259		
	Total	106.801	230			

a Dependent Variable: Residents' Attitudes towards Tourism Development
b Predictors: (Constant), Community Participation

The optimal model was;

$$RTD = 1.759 + 0.570CMPAR$$

Where, CMPAR = Community Participation, 1.759 = y-intercept-constant, and 0.570 = Effect size.

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The effect size of 0.570 suggests that people's views toward tourist development are likely to increase by 0.570 units for every unit increase in community participation. The proposed null hypothesis was securely rejected and the alternative was confirmed since the level of community participation significantly predicted the views of the residents toward tourism development.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.759	0.172		10.223	.000
	Community Participation	0.57	0.042	0.666	13.524	.000
<i>b Dependent Variable: Residents' Attitudes towards Tourism Development</i>						

As per the study's suggested hypothesis (H0), community involvement did not have a statistically significant effect on residents' attitudes toward tourism expansion. However, the findings showed that community participation has a positive effect on the views of residents on tourism development. These results align with previous studies that highlight the importance of genuine involvement from the local community in tourism growth. According to Mwawaza and Shirandula (2019), current forms of community participation in East African tourism often force individuals and limit their participation in important policy and decision-making processes related to the growth of the tourism sector.

Using inclusive and participatory methods that involve the local community in developing sustainable tourism plans is crucial (Vodeb et al., 2023). Hence, without the participation of Rimoi's residents in tourism planning, the region may struggle to promote sustainable tourism initiatives (Jaldesa, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to encourage authentic and natural community involvement in tourism development initiatives among the members of the Rimoi National Reserve Gateway community.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

The research sought to establish the connection between residents' views on tourism growth and their engagement in the community. The community living near Rimoi National Reserve views community involvement in tourism development activities favorably, as indicated by both quantitative and qualitative data. However, there is a need for greater community participation to promote active involvement in discussions and decision-making processes related to local tourism development. Despite the hypothesis that community participation would not affect residents' attitudes toward tourism development, the results show a positive and significant impact of community participation on residents' attitudes toward tourism development. Hence, encouraging higher levels of community participation may result in improved attitudes and outcomes for local tourism growth projects.

6.0 Recommendations

The study suggests that to enhance community engagement and perceptions of tourism development in the Rimoi National Reserve gateway village, it is important for local communities

to actively participate in discussions and decision-making related to regional tourism projects. This should be handled by the Elgeyo Marakwet County administration and tourist partners. Community forums, seminars, and other participatory processes that try to gather opinions and feedback from locals could help achieve this. The advantages of community involvement in tourism-related activities should also be promoted, with a focus on how it influences sustainable development and protects regional culture and history.

Moreover, initiatives aimed at increasing capacity can also be used to provide residents with the know-how and abilities they need to actively participate in tourism-related activities. Transparent communication channels must be used in conjunction with these initiatives to guarantee that locals are informed and have a voice in decision-making. Local governments can capitalize on the good sentiments around tourist development and use them to produce more prosperous and long-lasting results for the community at large by encouraging greater community involvement.

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