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Stakeholder Networks and the Sustainability of Tourism Projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County, Kenya

Authors: Mantaine Minis, Calistus Luhombo and Edwin Juma

^{1,2&3}The Catholic University of Eastern Africa - Kenya. **Website:** www.cuea.edu

Correspondence: Mantaine Minis **Email:** maintaineminis@gmail.com

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Chief Editor

Web:
www.ijfdc.org
Email:
info@ijfdc.org

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of stakeholder networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County. The study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory, employing convergent parallel research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative survey methods to support its findings. The study targeted 889 participants (879 community members who own land for quantitative study, 8 tourism camp managers and 2 conservancy managers). The study employed Yamane's 1969 sampling method to get sample size of the quantitative aspect. Simple random sampling techniques in selecting respondents. Sample size was 275 landowners and 10 keys informants selected through strategic research methods. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides and analyzed using SPSS version 26 software program. Descriptive statistics that were percentages and frequencies was summarized and presented in tables, graphs and charts. The qualitative data was analysed thematically where voices of the interviewees were captured in the analysis. Majority of respondents, 109 (40.2%) agreed and 87 (32.1%) strongly agreed that tourism stakeholders always keep the local community informed about project plans and changes. The study established that stakeholder networks, knowledge, and perspectives significantly influence the sustainability of tourism projects in the study area. On enhancing inclusive stakeholder engagement, Narok County Government, in partnership with tourism stakeholders, should develop locally driven policies that institutionalize community involvement in tourism decision-making.

Key words: Stakeholder Networks, Sustainability, Tourism Projects, Community Conservancies

1.1 Background to the Study

Sustainability in tourism projects is a practical necessity that ensures long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits (Khater et al., 2024). Though widely referenced, the concept lacks a universally accepted definition or clear timeframe. In tourism, it generally refers to the intentional planning and management of initiatives that balance environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic viability (Shekhar, 2024). A tourism project is considered sustainable when it fulfils the needs of current tourists and host communities without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. The principle, rooted in the Brundtland Commission's Our Common Future (BCOCF) in

1987), guides global tourism development (Mihalic, 2024). Without sustainable practices, tourism risks causing pollution, habitat loss, and resource depletion. Effective approaches include waste reduction, use of renewable energy, and biodiversity protection. Moreover, sustainability involves safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting social cohesion (Khater et al., 2024). Sustainability of tourism projects support local entrepreneurship and equitable benefit-sharing, contributing to long-term community resilience (Khater & Faik, 2025).

However, sustainable tourism projects are underpinned by several operational mechanisms, among which stakeholder network is particularly fundamental. The realization of sustainability in tourism relies heavily on the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, entrepreneurs, government agencies, NGOs, and tourists. Their engagement ensures that tourism initiatives remain locally relevant, socially inclusive, and environmentally responsible. Empirical evidence supports this participatory approach. In the Austrian Alpine tourism sector, a coordinated network of 127 organizations including local entities and tourism operators boosted sustainability metrics by 56% through integrated collaboration (Haid, Albrecht, & Finkler, 2023).

Local communities and tourism operators in Morocco deliver excellent results by sharing knowledge with public organizations. Their work earns tourism 11% of GDP and creates 2.5 million jobs (Nicolaidis, 2020). Different groups working within tourism including national authorities developed strong systems for sustainable growth especially at South African community programs where stakeholder inputs produced successful results in 65% of cases (Stoffelen et al., 2020). Networks of tourism stakeholders around Northern and Western Africa achieve exceptional outcomes when working together to sustain tourism projects.

Tanzania earns 17% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from tourism services while government organizations and local populations together direct how the industry grows (Moschin, 2020). The varying stakeholder knowledge levels significantly impact project outcomes, with community participation rates in Uganda's protected areas showing that learnt stakeholders are 40% more likely to engage in sustainable tourism enterprises (Mpangwire et al., 2024). Stakeholder perspectives across different stakeholder levels have proven crucial in Rwanda's tourism development, where community-based approaches have yielded 35% higher success rates in project implementation (Nsabimana, 2021).

The interconnected nature of stakeholder networks has appeared as a critical issue in tourism sustainability across Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. In Tanzania's wildlife management areas, stakeholder participation at multiple levels has resulted in 55% improved project outcomes when local knowledge is effectively integrated (Mkonda, 2022). Uganda's tourism sector demonstrates that stakeholder knowledge transfer between different levels - from policy makers to local communities - leads to 30% better sustainability metrics (Banura, 2023). Similarly, Rwanda's gorilla tourism initiatives show that when diverse stakeholder perspectives are incorporated into planning processes, project sustainability increases by 45%, with enhanced community benefit-sharing mechanism (Ndayizeye & Munene, 2022).

In Kenya, tourism stands as a vital economic sector, contributing 10.4% to the GDP in 2019 and employing over 1.6 million people (Ndeche et al., 2021). The sustainability of tourism projects across the country's destinations has faced significant challenges related to stakeholder engagement and

coordination. The intricate stakeholder networks, encompassing local societies, government agencies, private division units, and conservation groups, often operate in disconnected systems, leading to fragmented decision-making processes (Kipkoech, 2022). This complex web of stakeholder knowledge varies significantly, mainly in regions like the Maasai Mara, where traditional societies possess deep cultural insights while tourism operators maintain market-driven expertise, creating a diverse knowledge ecosystem that impacts project outcomes (Irer et al., 2023).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Tourism is very crucial in community development since it stresses on human interactions and service delivery. Building trust among the communities fingered in their operations is most of what it depends on. In the Narok County Maasai Mara community conservancy, this trust has helped to knit the community together as they come up as one and provide services to visitors. Nevertheless, the strongest community conservation efforts are not enough to ensure their effectiveness if several things are not addressed. Under these are biodiversity protection, proper land use planning, resolution of conflicts between wildlife and local communities, resident empowerment and incorporation of traditional knowledge in conservation practice. For sustainable tourism practices, the Maasai Mara community conservancies in Narok County have implemented zoning plans that designate areas for tourism, grazing, and conservation (Narok County Government, 2023). This strategic land-use planning ensures the preservation of wildlife habitats while accommodating community needs. Additionally, wildlife corridors have been established to facilitate the free movement of animals between the Maasai Mara National Reserve and neighboring conservancies, maintaining essential ecosystem connectivity (Narok County Government, 2023). To address human-wildlife conflicts, these conservancies have instituted compensation programs for livestock and human losses caused by predators, constructed predator-proof livestock enclosures, and employed community rangers to monitor wildlife movements and prevent conflicts. Integrating traditional Maasai conservation practices, such as rotational grazing, into modern conservation strategies has further enhanced environmental stewardship (Maasai Mara Conservancies (MMC, 2022). Moreover, reforestation projects, water conservation programs, and sustainable land management practices have been implemented to mitigate environmental degradation (Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR, 2022). Despite significant efforts to promote sustainable tourism, several challenges threaten tourism projects long-term viability in Maasai Mara conservancies. According to World Wide Fund for Nature Kenya (WWF, 2023) report, human-wildlife conflicts persist in Maasai Mara conservancies due to delays and inadequacies in compensation programs, leading to retaliatory killings of wildlife. Climate change has further exacerbated environmental degradation, with erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts affecting grazing land and water sources, placing stress on both wildlife and livestock (Narok County Government, 2023). Consequently, biodiversity loss was one of the most immediate threats, as habitat destruction, overgrazing, and human-wildlife conflicts leads to a decline in wildlife populations. This disrupt the delicate ecosystem balance and endanger key species, ultimately diminishing the Mara's reputation as a premier wildlife destination. A decline in tourism revenue would follow, as the degradation of natural landscapes and wildlife populations would make the area less attractive to visitors. Tourism is a major source of revenue for local people, and reduced visitor numbers would lead to economic losses, affecting livelihoods and increasing poverty levels. Additionally, human-wildlife conflicts would intensify, as land encroachment and resource competition escalate. Land degradation will also become a significant problem, with deforestation, soil erosion, and declining vegetation threatening both wildlife and agricultural productivity. Moreover, climate change vulnerability would increase due to poor land management and deforestation. Prolonged droughts,

unpredictable rainfall, and water scarcity would further strain the ecosystem and communities that depend on it. Without sustainable conservation strategies, the long-term viability of the Maasai Mara conservancies would be at risk, jeopardizing not only the environmental honesty of the area but also the economic and social well-being of the people who depend on it. Nevertheless, there are few studies that comprehensively examine the long-term sustainability of Maasai Mara conservancies, particularly in relation to balancing conservation efforts with community livelihoods. While existing research highlights the importance of zoning (Muriithi, 2022), wildlife corridors (Jane & Kioko, 2024), and compensation programs (Chakrabarti, 2021), there remains a gap in getting the reason behind poor sustainability of tourism projects in the Maasai Mara conservancies. Therefore, the study seeks to know the effect of stakeholder networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

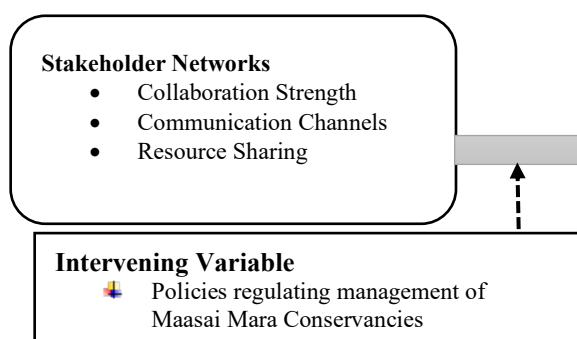
To investigate the influence of Stakeholder Networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study results may profit the local communities by gaining insights into how their networks in tourism projects can enhance sustainability. Improved stakeholder networks can lead to better revenue-sharing models, employment opportunities, and enhanced conservation practices that secure their livelihoods. Tourism investors and operators may benefit by understanding the consequence of engaging resident people in decision-making and conservation efforts. This may lead to stronger partnerships, reduced conflicts, and a more stable business environment, ultimately improving tourism revenues and sustainability. The county administration of Narok, through the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, and the Kenya Wildlife Service, may gain valuable data to inform policy decisions. The study may guide them in developing more effective frameworks that promote supportable tourism while balancing financial development and ecological conservation.

1.5 The conceptual Framework

Independent variable



Dependent Variable

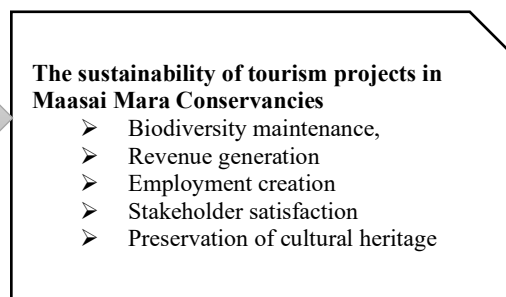


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Source: Own Conceptualization, 2024

1.6 The Literature Review

This section presents theoretical and empirical reviews on the influence of Stakeholder Networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies.

1.6.1 Theoretical review

Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory was introduced by R. Edward Freeman (1984) proposing that organizations should be accountable to all individuals and groups (stakeholders) that can affect or are affected by the government's aims. This theory argues that the success and sustainability of any project, including tourism initiatives, are dependent on how well it integrates the interests and participation of diverse stakeholders (Mahajan, Lim, Sareen, Kumar & Panwar, 2023). In the context of tourism projects, stakeholders typically include local communities, government agencies, private industries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and conservation groups. All of these groups have an imperative role to show among contributing to the long term sustainability of the project (García Rosell & Tallberg, 2021).

For tourism projects, the Stakeholder Theory is very appropriate in that it advocates for collaborative approach to project sustainability. Cultural knowledge and labor are provided by local communities and policy support and funding by governments (Dimitrovski et al., 2021). Infrastructure is owned by private businesses, and NGOs and conservation groups concentrate on environmental sustainability. Once together, the stakeholders work well to create a balanced approach to development that takes into account environmental, as well as economic and social considerations. Any tourism projects according to this framework need to follow the process of stakeholder engagement to generate financial returns in addition to respecting and protecting the nature and culture of the destination (Dogru, Line, Mody, Hanks, Abbott, Acikgoz & Zhang, 2025).

Stakeholder conflicts could pose a threat to project success; as a result, the theory promotes communication, decision making, and fair distribution of benefits to stakeholders for sustainability (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). This approach also puts all stakeholder groups in the position in which they feel they own pieces of the projects and this helps them to contribute positively to their long-term goals. Additionally, the theory emphasizes the vital role of accountability in the tourism development as stakeholders shall be actively involved in the monitoring and updating the project. In this way, Stakeholder Theory is a good framework to understand how the implementation of the different interests of the investors is compulsory to do the sustainability of tourism projects (Kivits et al., 2021).

1.6.2 Empirical Review

Stakeholder Networks and Sustainability of Tourism Projects

Connected stakeholders help tourism projects survive better because they create productive teamwork. By joining forces stakeholders improve their projects because they bring together both knowledge and finances in safer ways (Chase, Phillips, & Amsden, 2023). Reliable information passes between stakeholders on time which creates open trust relationships and transparency. Proper sharing of assets including funds and professional knowledge helps projects operate more effectively and sustainably for the long run. Building strong stakeholder networks provides a base for sustainable tourism development where all partners see positive results (Choi, Oh & Chon, 2021).

Eco-tourism areas of Thailand require reliable communication systems to build sustainable tourism development successfully. Digital spaces plus social media plus government programs help tourists talk better with local residents and tourism businesses. The Community-Based Tourism Institute (CBT-I) trains its local guides online and shows tourists how to protect the environment via digital platforms (Hong Lüthje, Björn & Miettinen 2023). Through its multilingual initiatives TAT ensures that international visitors learn how to protect the environment during their visits to Thailand. Recent progress chokes up from language problems between cultures and unclear government decisions. Positive change to sustainable tourism practices depends on better digital inclusion programs and multilingual education for local participants (Haid, Albrecht & Finkler, 2023).

Brazil succeeds in making tourism sustainable because its tourism business and local societies share resources effectively specially in the Amazon area. Eco-lodges team up with local communities and nature protection groups to handle local natural resources and showcase true culture of the area (Li *et al.*, 2021). The Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve demonstrates methods for both protecting nature and developing economic opportunities alike. When tourism earnings are put back into local community developments these projects become self-supporting over time. Despite these problems organizations still face difficulties in obtaining funds and maintaining proper facilities (Lee, 2021). More funding from both local and foreign organizations will help Brazil develop better sustainable tourism programs.

Tourism projects in Ghana maintain their sustainability because various interested parties work together. The government led a team that included local people and private enterprise to protect and manage the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum along with partners at Atsakpo, Mensah, Boakye, Afenyo-Agbe and Danquah 2024. The site continues as a top tourist destination because these stakeholders provide money, develop the existing setup and back useful decisions. The local community members who make and sell goods in the area receive positive business effects because of their partnerships with the tourism industry. The partners help train local guides and protect natural resources through their joint programs (Geoffrey Deladem, Xiao, Siueia, Doku & Tettey, 2021). These partnerships build shared responsibility that helps managers boost practices while generating more income and protecting our tourist destinations.

Nyandungu Urban Wetland Ecotourism Park in Rwanda demonstrates how sharing resources creates benefits for tourism sustainability. Under the guidance of the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) the organization restored the 120-hectare degraded wetland into a sustainable ecotourism attraction. The initiative brought together government agencies together with local communities and private investors who delivered funding support and expert skills and work labor (Njenji, 2020). The diverse collection of group resources allowed stakeholders to create environmentally friendly park structures and educational spaces as well as protective programs throughout the park's territory. The development initiative maintains biodiversity levels while offering recreational areas while creating financial benefits by providing local community jobs together with business prospects. The successful model proves that resource-sharing creates sustainable tourism because it enables Rwanda to preserve its environment while advancing social and economic development (Buzinde & Caterina-Knorr, 2023).

Laikipia County applies joint resource utilization methods which build sustainable foundations for its tourism developments. The management of land together with financial investments and conservation initiatives at Laikipia County falls under the collaboration among community conservancies and private investors and local governments (Mukundi, 2023). Through this collaborative model stakeholders successfully launched eco-lodges and wildlife corridors and conservation-based tourism initiatives which align financial gain for preservation of biodiversity and local income improvement. Stakeholders succeed in establishing an equitable tourism approach through collaborative financial support along with specialized technical help and land-management decisions. Through their established partnerships locals obtain vital capabilities together with training skills allowing them to lead tourism activities (Ileri, 2022). Tourism in Laikipia established itself as a primary sustainable destination for visitors in Kenya.

1.7 Research methodology

Research Design : The design adopted in this study was a mixed method approach with convergent parallel design.

Target Population : The target population comprises 889 individuals. This includes 879 members of the local community, among them landowners who are directly affiliated with the conservancies, eight tourism camp managers, and two conservancy managers, one each from Mara Naboisho Conservancy and Olare Motorogi Conservancy. The local landowners actively participation in tourism-related land lease agreements and conservation initiatives. Furthermore, tourism camp managers are included due to their involvement in the daily operations of tourism enterprises and their interaction with both visitors and the community. The conservancy managers represent the institutional governance of the conservancies and are instrumental in shaping policies, coordinating stakeholder input, and overseeing conservation strategies. Mara Naboisho and Olare Motorogi conservancies were purposively selected because they operate under a 15-year land lease arrangement between local landowners and tourism investors. These arrangements reflect a collaborative conservation model rooted in community initiative and supported by external partners, including the Basecamp Foundation and the Olare Orok Trust.

Table 1: Target Population

Conservancy	Land Owners	Tourism Camp Managers	Conservancy managers	Target population
Mara Conservancy	Naboisho600	5	1	606
Olare Motorogi Conservancy	279	3	1	283
Total	879	8	2	889

Source: Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (2024)

Sample Size : The sample size is calculated using the formula by Yamane (1969) since it provides a practical and statistically determination where stratification of the population is intended. It is given as follows;

$$n = N / 1 + N(e^2)$$

$$N=879$$

$$\text{The precision } (e) = 0.05$$

$$879/1+879(0.05)$$

$$879/3.1975=275$$

The study sampled 275 land owners from 879 land owners in the two conservancies and 10 key informants.

Sampling Procedure : Hence, this research has deliberately chosen Naboisho Conservancy and Olare Motorogi Conservancy as the areas of study. On the basis of these conservancies, the conservancies shall be used to create two distinct strata for the target population on which stratified random sampling shall be employed. To determine how many individuals should be selected from each stratum, a probabilistic allocation formula is commonly applied. The formula ensured proportional representation of each subgroup in the sample relative to its size in the target population.

Sample Size/target population x the stratum population

Then, respondents were chosen via simple random sampling to keep the procedure of choosing respondents as fair as possible and getting rid of any semblance of bias.

Table 2: Sample Size per Stratum

Conservancy	Target population	Sample size per conservancy
Mara Naboisho Conservancy	600	188
Olaré Motorogi Conservancy	279	87
Total	879	275

Source: Researcher (2024).

Data Collection Instruments : The quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were applied in the study. To keep the quantitative study within the realm of the quantifiable, the structured questionnaires were used to gather the information with the community members. For the qualitative component, the study employed interview guides to collect data from the key informants (eight tourism camp managers and two conservancy managers). These guides contained open-ended questions tailored to explore in-depth insights on the question into investigation. They were semi-structured to allow for probing and flexibility in exploring deeper insights while maintaining focus on key themes related to the study. The descriptive and inferential statistical methods for quantitative data that are suitable for parametric tests were used in the analysis of quantitative data. The qualitative analysis was carried out using content analysis. The researcher utilized NVIVO software to generate codes that represent key themes within the data. These codes helped identify emerging patterns and relationships, such as frequently repeated words and phrases, the use of metaphors, and specialized terminology.

Ethical Considerations : To ensure research integrity and credibility, the researcher adhered to the ethical considerations. Researchers obtained informed consent from participants, after explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, any potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and Anonymity of the data was kept through protecting the identities of participants. Given the diverse cultural contexts of participants, the study was sensitive to cultural norms and practices, ensuring that the research was respectful and relevant to the communities involved. The study further sought approvals from university ethical review committee, and the research agencies mandated to regulate research in Kenya; National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

1.8 Study Findings

Rate of Response

Out of 275 questionnaires distributed to 275 respondents who were the Land owners in the two Conservancies, that is, 271 questionnaires were correctly completed, sent back, and deemed appropriate for analysis which translated to a 98.5% response rate on questionnaire. All key respondents, that is, eight tourism camp managers, and two conservancy managers, one each from Mara Naboisho Conservancy and Olare Motorogi Conservancy participated in this study through interview translated to 100% response rate in each case. Therefore, the overall response was 281 out of 285 participants translating to response rate of 98.6% across all categories of respondents. Kelley, Clark, Brown, and Sitzia (2019) cite that response rates of more than 60 percent are regarded as good, and when the rate is more than 80 percent in social research, it is classified as excellent.

Response on Primary Land use by Respondents

This section presents the respondents' primary use of land within the Maasai Mara Community Conservancies. The way land is utilized determines its ecological footprint, the stakeholders' willingness to invest in long-term conservation initiatives, and the potential conflicts or synergies with tourism-related activities. Respondents were asked to identify the main use of their land, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Figure 3: Respondents' Primary Land Use

Land Use	Frequency	Percent
Tourism-related Activities	121	44.6
Livestock Grazing	44	16.2
Agriculture	39	14.4
Mixed-use (tourism, grazing, farming)	67	24.7
Total	271	100.0

Source: *Field Data, 2025*

The results in Table 3 indicate that the largest proportion of landowners, 121 (44.6%), reported that their land is primarily used for tourism-related activities. This reflects a significant alignment between land use and the core focus of the study tourism sustainability. A further 67 respondents (24.7%) indicated that they apply mixed-use approaches (combining tourism, grazing, and farming), while 44 (16.2%) used their land mainly for livestock grazing, and 39 (14.4%) for agriculture. These findings suggested that nearly 70% of respondents were engaged in either full or partial tourism-related land use. This underscores the growing integration of conservation tourism as a sustainable economic alternative among community landowners in Narok County. According to Honey and Krantz (2020), community conservancies that adopt tourism-based land use models often realize both ecological and economic benefits, provided there is stakeholder participation and equitable benefit-sharing. This adaptability was vital for enhancing the long-term sustainability of tourism projects, as it reduces over-dependence on a single land use and spreads economic risk.

Stakeholder Networks and Sustainability of Tourism Projects

This section presents findings related to the first objective which sought to establish the influence of Stakeholder Networks on the sustainability of tourism projects. Land owner participants were asked to respond by indicating the extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement in rating the influence of

Stakeholder Networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County on a Likert scale of 1-5 where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= M, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree. Findings were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Response on Stakeholder Networks N=271

Stakeholder Networks	1 (SD)		2 (D)		3 (M)		4 (A)		5 (SA)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Tourism stakeholders always keep the local community informed about project plans and changes.	12	4.4	21	7.7	42	15.5	109	40.2	87	32.1
Local communities rarely have a say in how tourism projects are managed.	45	16.6	63	23.2	58	21.4	67	24.7	38	14.0
Information about tourism activities often reaches the local community in a timely and clear manner.	18	6.6	29	10.7	54	19.9	106	39.1	64	23.6
There is never proper communication between tourism investors and the local community.	61	22.5	69	25.5	48	17.7	52	19.2	41	15.1
Tourism investors often involve local communities in decision-making.	19	7.0	27	10.0	49	18.1	103	38.0	73	26.9
The local community rarely benefits from tourism-generated resources.	58	21.4	66	24.4	41	15.1	59	21.8	47	17.3
Local community members and tourism stakeholders always work together to sustain tourism projects.	13	4.8	22	8.1	50	18.5	117	43.2	69	25.5
There is never genuine cooperation between tourism stakeholders and the local community.	64	23.6	72	26.6	45	16.6	49	18.1	41	15.1
Tourism stakeholders always share benefits (e.g., employment, revenue, infrastructure) with the local community.	20	7.4	26	9.6	47	17.3	106	39.1	72	26.6
The local community rarely has access to reliable communication channels with tourism stakeholders.	59	21.8	67	24.7	49	18.1	53	19.6	43	15.9

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings in Table 4 present responses on how stakeholder networks influence the sustainability of tourism projects in Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County, as perceived by landowner participants. Majority of respondents, 109 (40.2%) agreed and 87 (32.1%) strongly agreed that tourism stakeholders always keep the local community informed about project plans and changes. In contrast, 21 (7.7%) disagreed, 12 (4.4%) strongly disagreed, and 42 (15.5%) remained neutral. These findings suggest a strong consensus that stakeholder networks are playing a vital role in promoting transparency and communication. In response to whether information about tourism activities often reaches the local community in a timely and clear manner, 106 (39.1%) of respondents agreed and 64 (23.6%) strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 29 (10.7%) disagreed, 18 (6.6%) strongly disagreed, and 54 (19.9%) were neutral. These results reinforce the view that communication effectiveness is perceived positively, reflecting Kimaro's (2022) findings that real-time stakeholder updates reduce misunderstanding and enhance project ownership.

Regarding whether tourism investors often involve local communities in decision-making, 103 (38.0%) agreed and 73 (26.9%) strongly agreed. A small portion, 27 (10.0%) disagreed, 19 (7.0%) strongly

disagreed, and 49 (18.1%) were neutral. This indicates that a large proportion of landowners recognize inclusive decision-making practices. On whether local communities rarely have a say in how tourism projects are managed, a notable proportion, 63 (23.2%) disagreed and 45 (16.6%) strongly disagreed. However, 67 (24.7%) agreed, 38 (14.0%) strongly agreed, and 58 (21.4%) remained neutral. These mixed responses suggested that while some community members feel heard, others still experience marginalization in project governance. When asked whether the local community and tourism stakeholders always work together to sustain tourism projects, 117 (43.2%) agreed and 69 (25.5%) strongly agreed. A small portion, 22 (8.1%) disagreed, 13 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, and 50 (18.5%) were neutral. These results affirm that there is perceived cooperation and joint responsibility in sustaining tourism efforts.

In contrast, for the statement that there was never genuine cooperation between tourism stakeholders and the local community, 72 (26.6%) disagreed and 64 (23.6%) strongly disagreed. However, 49 (18.1%) agreed, 41 (15.1%) strongly agreed, and 45 (16.6%) remained neutral. While the overall disagreement suggests trust in cooperation, the sizable agreement points to a need for improvement in the quality of collaboration. In response to whether tourism stakeholders always share benefits such as employment, revenue, and infrastructure with the local community, 106 (39.1%) agreed and 72 (26.6%) strongly agreed. Only 26 (9.6%) disagreed, 20 (7.4%) strongly disagreed, and 47 (17.3%) were neutral. These findings support Kimaro's (2022) conclusion that equitable benefit distribution is key to sustaining local support and preventing community disengagement from tourism projects.

Regarding whether the local community rarely benefits from tourism-generated resources, 66 (24.4%) disagreed and 58 (21.4%) strongly disagreed. However, 59 (21.8%) agreed and 47 (17.3%) strongly agreed, while 41 (15.1%) were neutral. This reveals a divided perception on whether benefits truly reach the community. While the majority indicate benefit realization, the significant minority expressing dissatisfaction signals gaps in benefit-sharing mechanisms that need policy attention, as echoed by Choi, Oh & Chon (2021). On the question of whether the local community rarely has access to reliable communication channels with tourism stakeholders, 67 (24.7%) disagreed and 59 (21.8%) strongly disagreed. Yet, 53 (19.6%) agreed, 43 (15.9%) strongly agreed, and 49 (18.1%) remained neutral. This suggests that although communication infrastructure is present, it may not be equally accessible to all members. During the interview, the study sought the opinion of the key respondents on the influence of Stakeholder Networks on the sustainability of tourism projects at Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County. During the interview participants were asked how they would describe the strength and effectiveness of collaboration among key tourism stakeholders in the conservancies and what communication channels are being used to coordinate tourism activities among stakeholders, and how effective are they. Each participant gave their view as follows:

Respondent 1 explained that

"The strength of collaboration among stakeholders depends largely on how frequently we meet and share information. Regular monthly meetings between landowners, conservancy officials, and tourism operators have helped us align our goals and reduce conflicts. This has greatly contributed to project stability and reduced misunderstandings." (Respondent 1 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Echoing this, Respondent 2 noted that

"WhatsApp groups are very effective for real-time communication, especially when there are changes in tourist numbers or incidents like poaching threats. These platforms keep everyone in

the loop quickly, which supports immediate joint action and strengthens trust among stakeholders.” (Respondent 2 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 3 emphasized that

“Communication is fairly effective within individual conservancies, but we lack strong inter-conservancy collaboration. Sometimes we duplicate efforts because one group doesn’t know what the other is doing. This weakens our overall impact on sustainability since we’re not operating as a unified network.” (Respondent 3 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 4 stated that

“Tourism NGOs have played a key role in strengthening our networks by training local leaders and supporting inclusive decision-making forums. But there is still a gap—women and youth are often left out of the core discussions, which limits the sustainability of our projects because not all voices are represented.” (Respondent 4 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 5 reported that

“We use both formal meetings and informal channels like phone calls or barazas to coordinate activities. However, timely communication is sometimes hindered by lack of internet access in remote areas, which affects our ability to respond fast and plan sustainably.” (Respondent 5 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 6 added that

“Emails are mostly used by the conservancy managers and partners, but community members prefer WhatsApp or verbal updates during public gatherings because not everyone is literate or tech-savvy. This mixed approach to communication helps ensure broader participation and enhances network effectiveness.” (Respondent 6 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 7 observed that

“Effective communication has helped reduce misunderstandings, especially regarding revenue sharing. Everyone now knows what percentage they are entitled to, thanks to transparent discussions and shared documentation. This transparency has increased confidence in the projects and strengthened stakeholder commitment.” (Respondent 7 Interview, July 19, 2025).

Respondent 8 concluded that

“The sustainability of tourism here really depends on how strong and transparent our stakeholder networks are. When people feel involved, they take ownership, which is good for conservation and for tourism income. Weak networks, on the other hand, create suspicion and disengagement.” (Respondent 8 Interview, July 19, 2025).

1.8 Conclusion of the Study

The study established that stakeholder networks, knowledge, and perspectives significantly influence the sustainability of tourism projects in Maasai Mara Community Conservancies in Narok County. Strong communication channels, inclusive participation, and cooperation within stakeholder networks were found to build trust, improve coordination, and enhance project ownership. However, gaps such as exclusion of marginalized groups, inconsistent collaboration, and unequal benefit-sharing were noted, indicating the need for more equitable engagement frameworks.

1.9 Study Recommendations

On enhancing inclusive stakeholder engagement, Narok County Government, in partnership with tourism stakeholders, should develop locally driven policies that institutionalize community

involvement in tourism decision-making. Special attention should be given to the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women and youth, to promote equity and strengthen project ownership.

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