

Community Needs and Participation to Nature-Based Tourism Development in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Philippines

Jordan M. Cabaguing

Eastern Samar State University Guiuan Campus, Philippines

jcabaguing20@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6745-669X>

Abstract

This research explored the relationship between community needs, participation, and challenges in nature-based tourism development. The study focused on understanding how infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, services, and environmental conservation impact community participation in tourism planning, decision-making, and implementation. Using a researcher-made survey instrument, a total of 115 respondents from community members, leaders, and tourism operators participated in the study. The results showed that addressing community needs significantly enhances nature-based tourism development. Significant challenges such as limited financial resources, insufficient training, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of stakeholders' collaboration were also highlighted in the results. A positive relationship between community needs and participation was computed. This indicates that addressing the needs of the community can enhance their participation in nature-based tourism development. Likewise, a positive correlation was observed between community needs and challenges in participating in nature-based tourism development suggesting that addressing these needs can lessen communities' challenges in participating in nature-based tourism. Theoretically, the study emphasizes community empowerment as a tool for sustainable tourism practices. This ensures that tourism development aligns with local priorities, leading to a more sustainable and equitable outcome. By adopting these strategies policymakers, and tour operators, site developers can foster sustainable and inclusive nature-based tourism development that will not only benefit the tourism sector but the community in general.

Keywords: Nature-based tourism, community participation, Community needs, sustainable tourism development, Guiuan Eastern Samar Philippines

1. Introduction

Globally, there is a significant increase in the recognition of the positive benefits of nature-based tourism as it is widely recognized as important for improving health and well-being, enhancing societal connections, connecting with nature and cultural heritage, fostering cultural identity, and developing a conservation consciousness (Wolsko et al., 2019). There are many positive emotions associated with direct exposure and experiences to nature, including awe, happiness, joy, and contentment (Ballew & Omoto, 2018). It is also associated with significant stress reductions. Nature-based tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors, and most public lands and protected areas in different tourism destinations have become significant tourist sites (Mandic, 2019; Cervený & Miller, 2019). Accordingly, 8 billion tourists visit protected areas in the world each year, resulting to \$1.91 trillion visitor expenditure (WTTC, 2024). Additionally, nature-based tourism provides opportunities for improving ecological conditions as visitors are engaged in stewardship experiences (Snyman & Bricker, 2021; Schild, 2019) which represents important aspects of recreation sustainability and delivery of tourism services.

The municipality of Guiuan is strategically located in the southernmost part of Eastern Samar, Philippines. It is known for its rich flora and fauna and one of the largest seascapes and marine landscape of the country. Guiuan's tourism industry is booming as it is dubbed the surfing capital of Eastern Visayas. Domestic and international tourists travel to witness the big waves, vibrant natural attractions and rich cultural heritage of the place. In spite of this, the municipality is experiencing severe impact from climate change, including typhoons, which have caused significant damage to properties, to the economy of the local community, and to the environment due to the effects of climate change. Also, the municipality experienced biodiversity loss, sea water intrusions, and rising temperatures. These challenges and disruptions underscore the significance of sustainable tourism development prioritizing community participation and environment conservation (Hilvano et al., 2023; Herrera et al., 2021).

Community participation is essential for tourism development (Musadad, 2018) especially in nature tourism destinations. Their participation can also empower the community to take part in the conservation of the environment since they usually benefit from tourism activities in the area (Lee TsungHung & Jan FenHauh, 2018). Community participation is also a tool to induce sustainable tourism development (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019). According to Khalid et al., (2019) high community empowerment and support establish successful sustainable tourism development. They have a crucial function in bridging the link from community empowerment to sustainable tourism in a local area as they play a central role in planning effective and socially responsible tourism (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Kline et al., 2019).

However, there were challenges communities are facing relative to nature-based tourism participation including multi-sectoral participation, diversity and heterogeneity, lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of income distribution plans, and passive community participation (Stone & Stone, 2020). As well as incompetence in the tourism industry, poverty, policies on sustainable management, and language barriers (Musadad, 2018). Therefore, there should be programs that can overcome local challenges. According to Naidoo et al (2021) few studies have examined the degree of involvement of local communities in nature-based tourism, and the benefits that can be generated from participating that can impact tourists' decision making in visiting destinations.

Thus, this study was conducted to evaluate the needs of the community, their engagement and participation in the development of nature-based tourism in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Philippines with the aim of identifying opportunities and possible challenges in developing robust nature-based tourism for sustainable tourism growth benefiting the community and the environment. Specifically, aimed to answer the following objectives:

1. To determine the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of their age, sex, resident type, and educational attainment.
2. Assess the needs and priorities of the community regarding nature-based tourism development relative to infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, services, and environmental conservation.
3. Evaluate the level of community participation in relation to tourism planning, decision-making, and implementation.
4. Identify the challenges and issues faced by the community in actively participating in nature-based tourism initiatives and sustainable tourism development programs.
5. Assess if there is a positive influence between community, needs, participation, and challenges in nature-based tourism development.

2. Literature Review

Nature-based Tourism

Nature-based tourism is defined as visitation to a natural destination for recreational activity where interaction with plants and animals is incidental, and the object of the visit is to gain an understanding of the natural history of the destination (Bartoletti et al., 2019). It provides essential benefits to travelers, communities, and society in general as it contributes to the sustainability of the destination (Ballow & Omoto, 2018). People who visit natural areas can learn about the natural systems and the development attached to the place that positively contributes to individual's health (Cartwright & Mitten, 2017; Otto & Pensini, 2017). Literatures highlighted the various contributions of nature-based tourism to mental and physical health of travelers (Frumkin et al., 2017; Wolsko et al., 2019; Soga & Gaston, 2016). Promoting physical exercise by visiting forests including trekking, and hiking are believed to help in reducing stress and boost immunity (Ewert & Chang, 2018). Accordingly, Derrien et al., (2019) opined that human health is viewed as a critical component of sustainability.

Community Needs and Participation to Nature-based tourism.

Community needs is viewed as an understanding what are the needs of the community in participating to nature-based tourism and are ways of empowering them to be self-reliant in tourism (Dolezal & Vovelli, 2022). Communities should be helped in ways that can increase their income and improve their living standards. Thus, the need for a change in technicalities in the current approach of community tourism development is needed (Adewumi et al., 2019). According to World Travel & Tourism Council (2022) communities requires improved access roads, transportation facilities, and utilities to support tourism activities and for the success of the nature-based tourism. It was highlighted that infrastructure development should respect local cultures and promotes environmental protection while enhancing the quality of life of the community. In the concept of community-nature based tourism the community members are included in the administration of the different activities. Thus, it is a need for them to be trained and develop the skills in handling visitors and guests which can strengthen the bond between the community and the travelers. Moreover, it can also be developed through the creation of a diversified potential tourism products that will provide several choices to tourists to enjoy and experience (Rini, 2019). Involving local communities in tourism planning ensures that their needs, aspirations, and cultural values are integrated into tourism development strategies. This can lead to a greater sense of ownership and responsibility among residents, fostering support for tourism initiatives (Reindrawati, 2023).

Nature-based tourism is commonly a visitation to natural destinations for recreation (Bartoletti et al., 2019) or by gaining an understanding about the natural history of the destination (Fennell, 2020) where there is an interaction of plants, animals and the travelers. Thus, conservation of the environmental resources is a need for sustainability of the activities (Baloch et al., 2023). Moreover, tourism should contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage. Effective conservation strategies include community-led initiatives that engage the locals in protecting the environment, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility (UNWTO, n.d.). Local communities are considering livelihood as a one of the opportunities in nature-based tourism. As stated by the study of Nguyen et al. (2022) nature-based tourism provides significant economic benefit to local communities as it enhances local livelihood by generating income through tourism activities. However, it is important to ensure that economic benefit of tourism is equally distributed among community members to avoid social tensions. Nature-based tourism can incentivize the communities to engage in conservation efforts as the economic benefit from tourism can lead to a direct interest in the preservation of local biodiversity.

On the study of Nugroho and Numata (2022) the perceived economic benefits of nature-based tourism are the greatest influence of local support for tourism development. Perceived economic benefits were significant mediators of the relationship between community involvement and support on tourism development. Community participation is deemed essential to provide sustainable benefits for community's survival (Reindrawati, 2023). However, community participation is still a challenge for developing countries including infrastructure to facilitate physical access, information access to the locals, and budgetary support for sustainable tourism awareness. Understanding the importance of community participation in tourism planning is encouraged to developing countries to pay attention in this aspect to improve public participation (Mao et al., 2021). Significantly, Wijaya et al., (2022) opined that community involvement and participation of government in tourism development planning ensures environmental sustainability where they take part of maintaining the physical beauty and image of the environment.

Additionally, providing support both materials and financial as well as policies such as providing character education and counseling is an effort to maintain local character and culture in the area. Community participation in decision-making is an important aspect for sustainable nature-based tourism development. Literatures emphasizes the significance of local community engagement in decision-making for protected area-based tourism. It is considered as a voluntary process which does not only foster sense of ownership but also aligns tourism activities to that of the local needs and environmental conservation goals (Belo et al., 2016; Gumede & Nzama, 2021). Moreover, engaging communities primarily lead to a better-informed decision reflecting to the actual needs and preferences of the population. Studies of Rijal (2023); Nurbati and Bambang (2018) concluded that the active participation of the community sustainable projects are more likely to be successful. Furthermore, enhances social cohesion and trust between the residents and the government entities nurturing a collaborative environment for future initiatives. Eyisi et al., (2021) stressed in their study that community empowerment should include of meeting the real and felt needs of the community to better access the resources, manage local organizations, and socially control he environmental aspect though community capability building.

Meanwhile, Akbar et al., (2020) and Sood et al., (2017) concluded that top-down tourism planning approach hinders the interest between tourism planner and the local communities that hinders community participation and to the overall tourism development. The theory of social exchange theory discusses about the importance of community participation, the community leads to a better decision making and opportunities to build a better tourism destinations (Motlhanke et al., 2021; Mendoza-Ramos et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021). Therefore, the researcher postulate that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Community Needs positively influences Community Participation in nature-based tourism development.*

Community Needs and Nature-based tourism challenges.

Exploring the needs of the community towards nature-based tourism does not only provide an avenue for understanding its context but rather it helps to improve the overall management of the tourism industry in developing destinations (Margayan, 2018). It provides insights to how cost-effect nature-based solutions can contribute to societal and ecological management that are common across to the tourism and hospitality sector (Olya & Taheri, 2022). Moreover, nature-based tourism is having these challenges of social engagement, technology (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020), and wildlife poaching and deforestation (Chilembwe, 2019). Communities are engaged to such malpractices due to poverty, because food security is the main priority for

their survival. Furthermore, there is a lack of proper enforcement of tourism laws and regulators (Chilembwe, 2019; Mandić & McCool, 2023). Therefore, the researcher postulated that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Community Needs positively influences challenges in nature-based tourism participation.*

On the study conducted by Haukeland et al., (2023) suggested that addressing the challenges in nature-based tourism participation are key elements of an economically successful tourism destination, and environmental and socially sustainable nature-based tourism industry. Moreover, recognizing the needs of the community is of crucial importance to tourism destination operators, policymakers, and planning authorities in designing programs that can be of help to community development (Fuchs et al., 2021). The collected data of Phuong et al., (2020) expressed that lacking adequate financial resources, poor coordination and overlapping competencies between the authorities responsible for the development of nature-based tourism, and lacking of tourists awareness of the importance of nature-based tourism development are some of the challenges NTB are facing. Therefore, the researcher hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Challenges in nature-based tourism participation positively influences in nature based-tourism participation.*

The hypothesized model of the study is shown in figure 1.

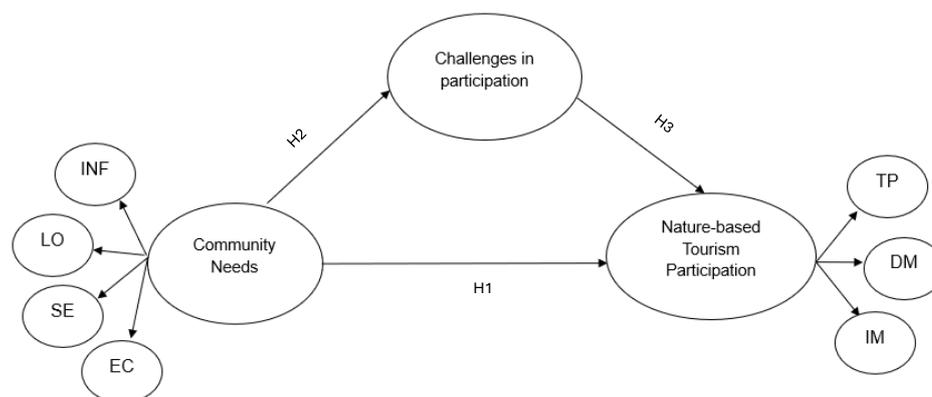


Figure 1: Research Framework.

Note: INF-Infrastructure, LO-Livelihood opportunities, SE-Services, EC-Environmental Conservation, TP-Tourism Planning, DM-Decision-making, IM-Implementation

3. Methodology

This study used a descriptive-correlational design to measure the relationship between the variables. Descriptive studies describe individuals, events or conditions by studying them as they are in nature. The researcher does not manipulate any variables, but rather describes them. It investigates the population, identifying problems within the organization, community, or group (Siedlecki, 2020). The design is appropriate as the study tests several hypotheses. The study was conducted in the Barangays of Calico-an island and Homonhon and Sulua-an island of Guiuan, Eastern Samar as most natural attractions can be found in those barangays. Calico-an island has five barangays namely Pagnamitan, Baras, Ngolos, Converse, and Sulangan. On Homonhon, there are eight, specifically Bitaugan, Cagusu-an, Canawayon, Casuguran, Culasi, Habag, Inapulangan, and Pagbabangnan. Tourists visit these islands for many compelling reasons.

Calico-an island's ABCD Beach is known for its white-sand beaches, crystal-clear waters, and excellent surfing. As well as lush forests, hidden lagoons, and limestone rock formations, the islands offer travelers unparalleled natural scenery. The rich marine life around these islands makes them an excellent destination for snorkeling and diving activities. Also, the undisturbed sites offer travelers a more authentic and peaceful experience, allowing them to explore multiple destinations within the municipality with ease. The respondents of the study are the local community living along the Calico-an, Homonhon, and Sulu-an islands of Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Philippines. Using Raosoft software, 186 respondents were calculated. However, there are only 180 survey instruments that were retrieved. Only 115 were considered valid and utilized for data analysis and 65 were excluded as most contained missing values and responses.

In gathering the needed data, the researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire. In constructing the researcher-made survey questionnaire, the researcher went through a thorough and careful reading of related studies, periodicals, and books to come up with a questionnaire that is well-reviewed and validated through experts. The tourism officer of the Municipality of Guiuan and the Dean of the College of Hospitality are prime validators. On the other hand, there are three (3) other experts and validators in business management and research. Five (5) barangay officials (non-respondents) were also considered validators. Consequently, the instrument was randomly validated to thirty (30) non-respondents of Mercedes, a neighboring town of Guiuan, Eastern Samar. Suggestions coming from the non-respondents were gathered and extracted leading to the creation of a more valid and reliable research questionnaire. Moreover, to test the appropriateness of the indicator/criterion used per factor in the researcher-made questionnaire, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis/Test was conducted ascertaining that all items used as an indicator certainly measure what it is supposed to measure and accurately serve its purpose as a criterion. With an acceptable threshold of at least 0.50 standard estimate as compared to the p values.

Likewise, a reliability test was also conducted to ensure that the instrument is reliable. The table below presents the validity and reliability test of the survey instrument.

Table 1: Reliability Result

Construct	Cronbach	CR	AVE
Community Participation			
Tourism Planning	0.839	0.875	0.842
Decision Making	0.868	0.951	0.921
Implementation	0.976	0.832	0.889
Community Needs			
Infrastructure	0.852	0.765	0.535
Livelihood Opportunities	0.844	0.782	0.589
Service	0.853	0.883	0.503
Environmental Conservation	0.872	0.741	0.621
Challenges in nature-based tourism participation	0.875	0.866	0.540

Note: CR-Confirmatory Reliability, AVE-Average Variance Extracted

As shown in table 1, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) shows strong validity and reliability across the different constructs: Community Participation, Community Needs, and Challenges. The three indicators measuring community participation obtained a Cronbach alpha exceeding beyond the acceptable value of 0.70 which indicates an excellent internal consistency.

Likewise, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) also got a value greater than 0.50, demonstrating excellent convergent validity, indicating that the different indicators capture a substantial amount of variance. Considering the different constructs to measure the community needs, it obtained a Cronbach alpha value beyond 0.70 which shows strong internal consistency. The CR and AVE values are very satisfactory as the values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. Challenges in Nature-based Tourism Participation was found to be a reliable construct having a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.875, which means high internal consistency. The CR and AVE suggest that the construct has acceptable convergent validity, capturing a reasonable amount of variance from its indicators.

Table 2: Model Fit

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>P-value</i>	χ^2 / df	<i>TLI</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>
Community Participation	54.12	29	<0.001	1.866	0.881	0.832	0.051
Community Needs	33.45	29	<0.001	1.153	0.824	0.813	0.062
Challenges in nature-based tourism participation	35.25	29	<0.001	1.215	0.890	0.811	0.067

*Note: χ^2 -chi-square test, *df*-degrees of freedom, *TLI*-Tucker-Lewi index, *GFI*- Goodness of Fit Index, *RMSEA*- Root-mean-square error of approximation*

All the variables being measured of the study have a favorable chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) ratios and RMSEA values, indicative of strong model fit. Explicitly, Community Participation has $\chi^2/df = 1.866$ and RMSEA = 0.051, while Challenges in Nature-based Tourism Participation has $\chi^2/df = 1.153$ and RMSEA = 0.067. The Community Needs construct shows a marginal fit, with a χ^2/df ratio of 1.215 and RMSEA of 0.062, alongside lower TLI (0.824) and GFI (0.813) values, indicating a reasonable model fit. In conclusion, the variables exhibit a high reliability and validity as observed on the Cronbach alpha values, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted values. The high internal consistency and reliability along with the different variables measured suggests that the models are robust and adequately represent the underlying variables the study intends to measure.

The researcher asked permission from the officials of the barangays on Calico-an, Homonhon, and Sulua-an islands. Then, the survey questionnaire was handed to the respondents. They were asked to answer the survey instrument at their most convenient time. An explanation was made to them on how to answer the instrument. The researcher did not make any force in extracting the data; respondents are free to withdraw or not to participate in the study. Thus, any data gathered and was not gathered remains private and confidential. The data retrieved and obtained from the respondents is kept in a secure file. They were tallied for data analysis and interpretation. The research was generally conducted in accordance with ethical considerations. The tallied data was analyzed using an appropriate statistical tool. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean, and standard deviation were utilized in the study. Moreover, for testing the hypothesis, structural modeling equation was used.

4. Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents. Table 3 presents the result of the respondents in terms of their age, sex, monthly income, occupation, and educational attainment.

Table 3: Profile of the respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	20-35	55	47.83
	36-45	49	42.61
	46-65	11	9.56
Sex	Male	31	26.96
	Female	56	48.69
	LGBTQ+	28	24.35
Resident Type	Community members	55	47.83
	Community Leader	45	39.13
	Tourism operators	15	13.04
Educational Attainment	Masters-Doctoral	10	8.70
	Bachelor's Degree	60	52.17
	Senior High School	30	26.09
	Secondary	15	13.04

N= 115

The profile of the respondents in Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the respondents' demographic and socio-economic characteristics. For age, it has been divided into three groups: 20-35 years (47.83%), 36-45 years (42.61%), and 46-65 years (9.56%), as shown in the results most of the respondents are young with the highest representation from 20-35 years old. The sexual orientation of the respondents is well-represented with 26.96% from male, 48.69% female, and 24.35 from members of the LGBTQ+. The highest percentage for the resident type came from community members with 47.83%. followed by community leaders with 39.13% and 13.04% from tourism operators. Lastly, for educational attainment, holders of master's or doctoral degrees has a percentage of 8.70%, with bachelor's degree has 52.17%, while 26.09% from senior high school education, and 13.04% with secondary education, signifying a well-educated sample.

The diverse representation of the respondents from age to educational attainment ensures a comprehensive understanding of the community's profile. The participation of young adult with notable representation from the members of the LGBTQ+ points to inclusive community engagement. Furthermore, community members, leaders, and tourism operators' involvement ensure that various aspects of community life and economic status are considered. The aspects of education attained by the key informants are considered with this study which may influence their responses in terms of awareness and critical thinking towards participating nature-based tourism development. Accordingly, demographic profile including employment status and income of the community influences their preference for involvement in tourism development (Zhang et al., 2013; Thetsane, 2019). Moreover, as concluded by Cha et al., (2021) socio-demographic of the local community showed that lack of capital and knowledge in tourism activities are the key barriers for local participation. Thus, understanding what they need should not be ignored.

Community Needs. Table 4 is the presentation of the findings of the community needs relative to nature-based tourism development.

Table 4: Community Needs to Nature-based Tourism Development

Indicators	\bar{x}	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Infrastructure	4.51	0.504	Extremely Important	1
Livelihood Opportunities	4.44	0.526	Extremely Important	4
Service	4.47	0.513	Extremely Important	3
Environmental Conservation	4.49	0.533	Extremely Important	2
Overall Mean	4.48	0.519	Extremely Important	

Legend: 4.21-5.00- Extremely Important, 3.41-4.20- Very Important, 2.61-3.40- Moderately Important, 1.81-2.60- Slightly Important, 1.00-1.80 – Not Important

An analysis of community needs relative to nature-based tourism development is presented in table 2. The different indicators have been ranked having infrastructure as the most critical need ($\bar{x}=4.51$, $SD=0.504$). According to the study conducted by Irazábal (2018) when tourists are brought closer to nature without proper urban and more balanced approach to planning governmental infrastructure development may cause social and environmental damage. Infrastructure development can protect natural habitats and sensitive ecosystems while the destination is accommodating its visitors. Thus, interpretive signages, parking facilities, trails, restrooms and drinking water stations along with different natural sites, educational exhibits, and guided tours to enrich tourists understanding and appreciation to the importance of the environment are essential.

Environmental conservation followed closely with ($\bar{x}=4.49$, $SD=0.533$). As stated by Trelohan et al., (2022) nature-based tourism relies closely on the environment. It is crucial for the community to think about environmental sustainability. This includes involving the community in conservation efforts together with the visitors, education programs, adopting sustainable practices, and prioritizing habitat preservation. Likewise, ensuring that biodiversity is protected by promoting responsible tourism and supporting long-term environmental protection. Service quality is another crucial factor ($\bar{x}=4.47$, $SD=0.513$). The success of nature-based tourism development heavily relies on the key services we offer to the tourists that enhance their experiences ensuring convenience and safety. Accessibility to natural attractions is facilitated by essential services such as the local transportation available in the destination area for easy exploration and mobility of tourists. Likewise, visitor information services such as visitor centers, brochures, and maps significantly play a crucial role in promoting responsible tourism practices and helping tourists to navigate along with the diverse natural landscape of the area. Access to emergency services including medical facilities and emergency contact is important in ensuring the well-being of the tourists participating in different nature-based activities.

Significantly, food services near to sites such as cafes, food stalls, and restaurants are essential in meeting the needs of the tourists and supporting local entrepreneurs does not only enhance the overall experience of the visitors but also contribute to economic vitality of the community. Despite of being on the last rank Livelihood opportunities is also considered as deemed important ($\bar{x}=4.44$, $SD=0.526$). The result indicates that nature-based tourism development activities should align with local skills, interests, and cultural heritage, prioritizing community relevance. Community members that actively participate in decision-making expect that livelihood opportunities are reflected into their specific needs and aspirations (Stemmer et al., 2022). Thus, it is important that training programs and skill-building opportunities for the community interested in nature-based tourism must carefully be planned. The plan should focus on enhancing the quality of life of the community through livelihood programs and opportunities. Generally, having the overall mean ($\bar{x}=4.48$,

$SD=0.519$) across all the indicators suggests that participants strongly agree on the importance of all the indicators in developing nature-based tourism. Having a consistent high mean score and low standard deviation conspired consensus of prioritizing infrastructure, environmental conservation, service quality, and livelihood opportunities. The results highlight the need for a comprehensive development strategy balancing physical infrastructure, economic benefits, excellent service, and sustainable environmental practices, aligned to that of the priorities of the community.

Community Participation. It is shown in table 5 the results on community participation towards nature-based tourism development having the indicators tourism planning, decision-making, and implementation.

Table 5. *Community Participation to Nature-based Tourism Development*

Indicators	\bar{x}	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Tourism Planning	3.84	0.617	Likely	2
Decision-making	3.72	0.658	Likely	3
Implementation	3.93	0.638	Likely	1
Overall Mean	3.83	0.638	Likely	

Legend: 4.21-5.00- *Highly Likely*, 3.41-4.20- *Likely*, 2.61-3.40- *Moderately Likely*, 1.81-2.60- *Unlikely*, 1.00-1.80 – *Highly Unlikely*

Community participation in nature-based tourism development as shown in Table 3 focused on three key indicators: tourism planning, decision-making, and implementation. The implementation got the highest mean score ($\bar{x}=3.93$, $SD=0.638$) suggesting that community members has a high likelihood of participating in the practical assessment of tourism initiatives, such as on infrastructure development and conservation activities, collaboration with local business, organizing of an event, collaboration to government and tourism organizations. Singgalen et al., (2019) concluded that community participation in tourism development includes planning, implementation, and evaluating programs. As added by Kiss et al., (2022) their engagement in the implementation of policies and programs towards tourism development can strengthen and diversity both expected and unexpected outcomes including sense of belonging, environmental protection, and inclusiveness in general.

Tourism planning showed an important level of engagement ($\bar{x}=3.84$, $SD=0.617$) indicating that the community are having a higher likelihood to be involved in planning process, including brainstorming and strategic collaboration to concerned authorities or organizations. Accordingly, Bello (2021) opined the significant role of community in the planning phase of tourism development. As expressed by Dragouni and Fouseki (2018) their participation can lead to a higher legitimacy of tourism policies and plans. Also, facilitates the development of socially acceptable and more benefits to the local community. With this, local government and tourism authorities must consider the input and feedback from community members relative to decision making about development projects. It can be noted that community members feel empowered to contribute their knowledge, skills, and perspective. Subsequently, the outcomes align with the priorities and interests of the community.

Decision-making having ($\bar{x}=3.72$, $SD=0.658$) also falls within “Likely” interpretation which reflects a high likelihood of the community’s willingness to contribute to governance and policy-making decisions relative to tourism programs and projects. In related tourism decisions made by government and other concerned agencies local community are considered. They actively seek the input of the community through a dialogue (Hong et al., 2023; Wijaya

et al., 2022). It is conveyed in the result that during tourism planning and management, the community must have representation to address their concerns and interests. The process of decision-making should be transparent and open, with tourism-related information readily available to the community.

Community Challenges in participating nature-based tourism development. Table 6 presents the challenges in participating in nature-based tourism development.

Table 6: Community Challenges in participating nature-based tourism development

Item	\bar{x}	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Limited financial resources and funding opportunities.	3.92	0.880	Very Challenging	2
Insufficient access to training programs, capacity-building initiatives, and technical assistance.	3.93	0.886	Very Challenging	1
Limited awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism practices.	3.90	0.878	Very Challenging	3
Lack of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.	3.74	0.991	Very Challenging	5
Inadequate infrastructure and facilities.	3.85	0.871	Very Challenging	4
Overall Mean	3.87	0.901	Very Challenging	

Legend: 4.21-5.00- Extremely Challenging 3.41-4.20- Very Challenging, 2.61-3.40- Moderately Challenging, 1.81-2.60- Slightly Challenging, 1.00-1.80 – Not Challenging

Lack of access to training programs, capacity building initiative, and technical assistance emerged as the most pressing challenge ($\bar{x}=3.93$, $SD=0.886$). This underscores the gap in educational resources focused on tourism development practices, emphasizing the needs for targeted programs to equip the community and other stakeholders with essential skills and knowledge. Followed by limited financial resources and funding opportunities ($\bar{x}=3.92$, $SD=0.880$). This points out that the community is struggling to secure sufficient financial support for tourism initiatives, highlighting the need for innovative funding strategies and enhanced mobilization of resources. Moreover, a notable concern was also observed regarding limited awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism practices ($\bar{x}=3.90$, $SD=0.878$). This result stressed the need for an information campaign for community and other stakeholder awareness in sustainable tourism principles.

Likewise, inadequate infrastructure and facilities posed as a significant challenge ($\bar{x}=3.85$, $SD=0.871$) including lack of transportation, accommodation, tourists' facilities that are significant in supporting tourism activities effectively, indicating the need for improvement of infrastructures to enhance the experiences of tourists and operational efficiency of the industry. Lastly, fostering collaboration and coordination among stakeholders is evidently challenging to communities ($\bar{x}=3.74$, $SD=0.991$). This result stresses the necessity of improving communication channels and partnership framework to align interest and efforts among stakeholders involved in tourism development. Overall, overcoming barriers related to education, funding, education, infrastructure, sustainable practices, and collaboration, can pave the way for sustainable and inclusive tourism development that benefits both the community and tourists.

Hypotheses Testing. Presented in table 7 the result of the hypotheses testing support with the structural framework of the study.

Table 7: Hypotheses Testing

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Std. Estimate</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>95% Boot CI</i>	
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
H1: CN → CP	0.862	0.033	0.395	8.900**	Supported	0.675	0.934
H2: CN → CCh	0.697	0.059	0.519	6.788**	Supported	0.331	0.587
H3: CCh → CP	0.817	0.032	0.607	9.518**	Supported	0.588	0.704

Note: CN-Community Needs, CP-Community Participation, CCh-Community Challenges, β -Standard Coefficient Beta,; $R = ^2.669$, LL-Lower limit, UL-Upper limit, ** $p < 0.01$

The different constructs: CN, CP, CCh in the structural equation model demonstrate a significant and positive relationship. It can be observed in the first hypothesis that a moderate positive relationship between CN and CP in nature-based tourism development with (Std. estimate=0.862, β =0.395, t =8.900) supports the hypothesis. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval (LL=0.675, UL=0.934) further confirms the reliability of the result. The result strongly supports that community needs positively influence community participation to nature-based tourism development. The moderately strong positive relationship between CN and CCh with (Std. estimate=0.697, β =0.519, t =8.900) stressed that as CN increases, CCh also increases significantly. The 95% confidence interval (LL=0.331, UL=0.687) indicates reliability on the result. Thus, a solid support on the hypothesis that CN positively influences CCh. The computed (Std. estimate=0.817, β =0.607, t =9.518) suggests a strong positive relationship between CCh and CP. This means that an increase in CCh is strongly associated with an increase in CP.

Considering the results of the three computed hypotheses construed that improving CN can directly and indirectly through CCh enhance CP. It further highlights the importance of CN influencing CP with significant implications for understanding and enhancing the different constructs. Abraham et al., (2019) supported the findings when they concluded that community needs play a crucial role in shaping community participation. It is also a significant predictor of community participation, and that improving community needs can encourage community participation. Moreover, Hidayat & Wulandari (2022) established a findings using Structural Equation Modeling that community needs positively influences community participation through community capacity.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

A significant insight is concluded towards community participation in nature-based tourism development focused on the importance of addressing community needs, enhancing education and, and stakeholders who are interested in improving community involvement and ensuring long-training, financial support, promoting stakeholders' collaboration, and involving the community in policy and planning. The respondents came from a diverse community well-represented from various segments, and educational backgrounds. Community needs for infrastructure, environmental conservation, services, and livelihood opportunities are crucial with infrastructure ranked as the highest. Challenges to participating in nature-based tourism such as limited financial resources, insufficient training, and inadequate infrastructure are significant barriers. There is a positive correlation between addressing community needs, challenges, and participation in nature-based tourism development.

Therefore, addressing community needs to enhance participation in nature-based tourism development and to reduce challenges is recommended since more participation is associated with recognizing challenges. There is a need to prioritize infrastructure development, environment conservation, and service quality along with training programs tailored to the community needs. It is also important to consider funding strategies, as well as strong cooperation among stakeholders. Policymakers and tourism practitioners could use these findings to design plans and policies to ensure that nature-based tourism is sustainable and community-driven. It is suggested that in promoting sustainable nature-based tourism the local people, the community, local authorities, and other government organizations should be part. The local people may be encouraged to actively engage in conservation efforts of the natural and cultural assets through environmentally friendly activities. Moreover, they can also be encouraged to preserve traditional knowledge and practices related to nature and culture by incorporating them into tourism activities.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) projects can be developed for the locals to be involved in tourism activities for them to benefit economically and socially. Educational campaigns focused on the benefits of sustainable tourism are also to be conducted by teaching the residents on eco-friendly practices to boost their understanding of the importance of sustainability. The local government may consider developing eco-friendly transportation and activities such as bicycle rentals that can help reduce carbon footprints. Likewise, implementing zoning regulations to protect sensitive nature areas from overdevelopment, ensuring that the tourism activities are concentrated in less vulnerable areas. Local Government may also consider formulating policies and regulations relative to eco-friendly businesses with strict regulations on activities that can harm the environment. Also, promoting ecotourism programs focused on the natural and cultural heritage such as guided nature tours, bird watching, and marine conservation trips. Implementing strategies in managing visitors can help to control the number of visitors in some sensitive sites and destinations and minimize the environmental impact.

Theoretical Implications

This paper provides evidence for the community participation and empowerment theory of Community Based Tourism. It indicates that responding to community problems can result in development participation. It also ensures increased social inclusion as needs like infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, and services being met boost their participation at various levels - planning, decision-making, and implementation processes, thereby positioning community needs with implications for stepping further to the right in increasing the curve of participation. It generates social capital, contributing towards tourism sustainability through enhanced communication and more cohesive relationships among stakeholders. Establishing trust and collaboration between the community, businesses, and authorities is key to a successful tourism development. Moreover, it also provides insights into the barriers to community participation in the forms of limited financial capacity, inadequate programs, and insufficient training programs. This is to address some of the challenges faced in tourism development. Finally, the results demonstrate that inclusion of marginalized communities is crucial to the development of socially just and equitable tourism outcomes. This further contributes to debates about sustainable tourism, community development, and inclusive development. This makes a significant contribution to the knowledge base upon which future research and practice might be built.

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