
**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM ON
THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE: THE CASE OF TENGERU CULTURAL TOURISM
PROGRAMME**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the impact of the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge among local communities in Tengeru, Tanzania. Guided by sustainable tourism theory, a qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation involving community members, tourism practitioners and local authorities. The data were analysed thematically to capture participants' perspectives and experiences. Findings revealed that TCTP has significantly contributed to safeguarding traditional practices such as local dances, handicrafts, culinary traditions and storytelling, while promoting cultural awareness among both residents and visitors. Additionally, the programme has enhanced community participation, generated income opportunities and fostered creative innovation in tourism products. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate marketing and the potential for cultural commodification were identified as barriers to optimal impact. The study concludes that TCTP provides an effective model for integrating cultural preservation with community-driven tourism initiatives, offering valuable insights for policymakers, tourism developers and scholars interested in sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices.

KEYWORDS: Community-Based Tourism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) globally is a form of tourism in which local communities are actively involved in planning, managing and benefiting from tourism activities. CBT is recognized as a sustainable approach that links cultural preservation with economic development. Unlike conventional tourism, which often focuses on profit and visitor experience at the expense of local culture, CBT emphasizes community ownership, participation and empowerment. By managing tourism resources themselves, communities can protect their cultural heritage, strengthen social cohesion and generate income to support local development (Long, Lopez-Guzman, & Kim, 2021; Lo & Janta, 2020). Examples show that when communities are actively involved in tourism, they can use cultural activities such as traditional crafts, music, dance and storytelling to preserve cultural knowledge and strengthen social identity while generating income for community priorities (Zhu, Rahmanita, & Styles, 2022; Dolezal & Novelli, 2020).

CBT has been implemented in different settings to promote cultural heritage and local development. Community conservancies and cultural villages offer experiences such as traditional dance performances, storytelling, guided nature walks, craft demonstrations and eco-lodges. These initiatives provide direct economic benefits to the community, encourage cultural pride and create incentives for preserving local traditions and knowledge. By involving residents in decision-making and allowing them to share in tourism revenue, CBT fosters a sense of ownership over cultural and natural resources. It also enables communities to innovate by combining traditional knowledge with tourism activities, such as developing crafts, homestays and eco-friendly tours that appeal to visitors while maintaining cultural authenticity (Long et al., 2021).

Research by Mbaiwa (2005) on tourism in the Okavango Delta demonstrates that community participation in tourism not only provides financial benefits but also supports cultural continuity and social cohesion. Communities engaged in CBT are more likely to maintain traditional practices, including storytelling, crafts, rituals and local governance systems, because these activities become valuable both culturally and economically. Similarly, initiatives like the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme exemplify how CBT can promote cultural heritage while improving livelihoods. Residents actively manage tourism activities, such as traditional dance, music, craft production and coffee tours, ensuring that cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations (Mgonja, Sirima, Backman, & Backman, 2015). These programs also encourage skill development, innovation and community cohesion,

showing that CBT is not just a tourism model but a tool for sustainable development and cultural preservation (Bakari, Mwambe, & Bright, 2025).

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Tourism Theory

Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. The goal is to balance economic growth, environmental protection and social equity, ensuring that tourism benefits both current and future generations.

Sustainable Tourism Theory focuses on creating tourism that benefits the environment, local communities and economies without causing harm. The goal is to ensure that tourism is responsible and respectful, preserving resources, culture and nature for the future (UNWTO, 2017).

Sustainable Tourism Theory emphasizes not only environmental and economic considerations but also the social and cultural dimensions of tourism. By promoting tourism practices that respect local traditions, values and heritage, this theory supports the safeguarding of cultural identity. In practice, tourism activities guided by sustainability principles encourage communities to maintain and showcase their traditional practices, arts, crafts, rituals and languages. For example, cultural performances, handicraft production and local culinary experiences become integral components of tourism while simultaneously reinforcing the community's cultural continuity. Therefore, sustainable tourism provides a framework through which cultural heritage can be actively preserved and transmitted to future generations, ensuring that tourism contributes to both economic development and cultural vitality (UNWTO, 2017).

2.2 Empirical review

2.2.1 Cultural Preservation and Promotion Through Community-Based Tourism

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged globally as a powerful mechanism for safeguarding cultural heritage while simultaneously providing economic opportunities to local communities. Unlike conventional tourism, which often commodifies culture passively, CBT emphasizes active community participation in both the management and presentation of cultural practices. This participatory approach ensures that cultural expressions ranging from traditional crafts, performing arts, rituals, culinary practices and storytelling remain vibrant

and socially relevant (Scheyvens, 2015; Stone, Stone, & Nyaupane, 2025). By engaging residents in these activities, CBT not only safeguards intangible heritage but also promotes intergenerational transmission of knowledge, thereby fostering cultural continuity and community identity.

CBT initiatives demonstrate the potential for tourism to restore, preserve and innovate cultural practices. In Vietnam, the Kim Bồng woodworking village illustrates how community-led tourism can revitalize traditional crafts. Artisans not only earn a livelihood through tourism but also maintain complex skills that might otherwise have been lost due to industrialization or urban migration (Nguyen & Le, 2019). Similarly, Thailand's Amphawa floating market community has transformed local canal markets into interactive tourism sites, where residents actively participate in heritage conservation, craft production and cultural performance while generating sustainable income (Siriporn, 2020). These cases highlight the dual outcomes of CBT: cultural continuity and economic empowerment. Moreover, they demonstrate how tourism can serve as a vehicle for innovation, as communities adapt traditional practices to meet contemporary visitor expectations while maintaining authenticity. CBT is also linked to its capacity to educate both residents and tourists. By creating immersive experiences, CBT allows visitors to gain experiential knowledge of local cultures beyond superficial observation. Participation in culinary practices, crafts, or traditional performances fosters appreciation of local social norms, values and worldviews. At the same time, communities reaffirm and transmit their own cultural knowledge, reinforcing social cohesion and identity (Novelli, 2016). This educational dimension aligns with sustainable tourism frameworks that emphasize cultural, social and economic sustainability as mutually reinforcing outcomes (UNWTO, 2013).

CBT has been particularly significant for empowering marginalized groups and preserving Indigenous knowledge systems. The Basarwa (San) communities in Botswana's Okavango Delta engage visitors through guided nature walks, storytelling and craft demonstrations. This interaction not only generates income but also facilitates cultural pride and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge (Mbaiwa, 2005). Similarly, Kenya's Maasai Mara Conservancies allow communities to manage tourism activities while performing traditional ceremonies and rituals, ensuring that cultural practices are maintained and benefits are equitably shared (Tubey, Kyalo, & Mulwa, 2019). Such initiatives illustrate that CBT in Africa operates at the intersection of cultural preservation, social empowerment and economic development.

CBT programs also highlight the role of women and other historically marginalized groups in cultural preservation. Women's involvement in craft production, culinary activities and cultural performances often provides independent income and increases their decision-making influence within communities. This aligns with global CBT observations that community engagement in tourism strengthens inclusivity and equitable participation, ensuring that cultural preservation is not only a heritage concern but also a pathway for social empowerment (Stone, Stone, & Nyaupane, 2025; Scheyvens, 2015).

Moreover, CBT also demonstrates how cultural preservation can stimulate creativity and innovation. Communities develop marketable products that blend traditional knowledge with contemporary entrepreneurial strategies, such as handicrafts, performance arts and culturally inspired souvenirs. This entrepreneurial dimension ensures cultural practices remain dynamic and economically viable while retaining authenticity (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012; Zielinski et al., 2025). It also emphasizes the importance of capacity-building, training and knowledge-sharing for sustaining both cultural and economic benefits over time.

Examples of CBT integrating cultural preservation with community development. Programs such as the Mto wa Mbu Cultural Tourism Programme demonstrate how local communities can leverage tourism to showcase traditional handicrafts, music, dance and storytelling. Beyond economic benefits, these programs encourage community cohesion, promote social networks and support initiatives in local education, infrastructure and environmental stewardship (Lwoga, 2017). Tanzanian CBT initiatives exemplify how culture, livelihood and sustainable tourism objectives can be harmonized, aligning with principles articulated by the UNWTO for community-centered sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2013).

CBT also emphasizes innovation and skill development. Communities often integrate traditional practices with entrepreneurial activities, creating tourism products that are both culturally authentic and economically viable. This approach allows residents to preserve and adapt their heritage to contemporary tourism demands without compromising authenticity, reinforcing the notion that cultural heritage can be a living, evolving practice rather than a static relic (Scheyvens, 2015; Novelli, 2016; Zielinski et al., 2025).

CBT also aligns closely with sustainable tourism theory. According to UNWTO (2013), sustainable tourism requires balancing economic, social and environmental objectives while ensuring community participation in decision-making. CBT operationalises this by positioning communities at the centre of tourism management. Cultural preservation, social empowerment and economic development are not separate outcomes but mutually reinforcing

components of sustainable practice. Through participatory management, skill development and creative adaptation, CBT allows communities to maintain cultural authenticity while generating sustainable livelihoods and promoting intercultural understanding.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study was conducted at the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) in Tengeru village, Meru District, Arusha Region, Tanzania, an area known for its rich Meru cultural heritage and active community participation in tourism. Guided by a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative approach and a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of community members' experiences, perceptions and participation in community-based cultural tourism activities.

The target population included community members and stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in TCTP, such as programme managers, elders, households, women and youth groups, tour guides, artisans and lodge owners. The sample size was determined through data saturation, while purposive sampling was used to select key informants with relevant knowledge and leadership roles. Snowball sampling was employed to reach less visible participants, including women food vendors, craft makers, homestay hosts and youth guides, ensuring broad representation of community perspectives.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation and document review, enabling triangulation of findings. Thematic analysis, using both inductive and deductive coding, was applied to identify recurring patterns and key themes. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking, while ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and cultural sensitivity were strictly observed. These methodological approaches provided a reliable framework for understanding community participation and the impacts of community-based tourism at TCTP.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented, described and classified based on information gathered from the field. Due to the qualitative nature of the data, the findings are presented in narrative form without the use of tables or statistical figures. The data are organized according to the specific objective of the study and are illustrated using direct quotations from participants to capture their lived experiences and perspectives on community participation in cultural tourism activities at the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (CTP). The presentation of the

findings is further supported through comparison and corroboration with relevant literature reviewed in earlier chapters, allowing for a deeper interpretation and discussion of the results.

4.1 Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Traditions

In this, data was collected through interviews, observations and focus group discussions with community members and stakeholders involved in the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme. The findings from these interactions revealed the following results.

4.1.1 Preservation of Traditional Practices

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Tengeru has played a key role in maintaining and safeguarding the community's traditional ways of life. Through well-designed cultural tourism activities, residents can keep alive practices such as traditional dancing, singing, preparation of local foods, handicraft production and the construction and display of traditional housing. These activities not only attract visitors but also act as deliberate mechanisms for cultural continuity. By institutionalizing these practices within the tourism programme, CBT ensures that younger generations are exposed to, learn and actively participate in traditional practices, preventing the erosion of indigenous knowledge over time.



Figure 2: Showing a house built and decorated in traditional style, reflecting the culture of the source community. (Source: Researcher 2025)

Community members themselves acknowledge the value of the programme. One household interviewee stated:

The Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme has contributed to protecting culture, such as dancing, food, singing, housing and other traditional practices. The programme helps

preserve indigenous knowledge, culture and tradition. (Interviewee A, Tengeru, 27 July 2025)

Similarly, a participant in a focus group discussion highlighted the broader impact of the programme, saying: “*The programme preserves natural and cultural resources, particularly those around Meru and broader Tanzanian traditions.*” (FGD Group A, 2025)

These observations align with Scheyvens (2015), who notes that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives are widely recognized for safeguarding cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development. CBT empowers communities to protect cultural assets while simultaneously deriving economic benefits (Stone, Stone, & Nyaupane, 2025). The programme has played a vital role in preserving and promoting Tengeru’s rich cultural and heritage traditions. Through activities such as cultural performances, traditional handicraft production and the management of homestays, the community has been able to safeguard and showcase its intangible cultural heritage. These initiatives help maintain traditional knowledge, skills and artistic expressions, ensuring their transmission to future generations while strengthening community identity and cultural pride

Through the tourism programme, I can sell my handicrafts and host visitors in my home. This has given me a chance to support my family and be part of community activities I never had access to before. (Interviewee B, Tengeru, 28 July 2025)

The success of the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme is strongly tied to community involvement and local management structures. Lwoga (2017) emphasizes that sustainable cultural preservation through tourism requires active participation of community members in planning and implementation. In Tengeru, residents are not passive participants; they organize and lead cultural performances, manage homestays and engage in environmental conservation activities such as tree planting and water protection. This dual focus on cultural and ecological preservation demonstrates a comprehensive approach, where local knowledge is respected and practically applied.

The outcomes observed in the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme also reflect the principles of sustainable tourism theory as articulated by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) during the *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017*. UNWTO (2017) emphasizes that sustainable tourism should not only meet economic needs but also respect socio-cultural authenticity, conserve cultural heritage and ensure that host communities benefit socially and economically from tourism activities. This theoretical framework aligns with Tengeru’s experience, where cultural preservation and community

participation are central to tourism planning and implementation. By actively involving residents in cultural performances, handicraft production and homestays, the programme supports the UNWTO's vision of tourism that safeguards traditional knowledge, fosters community empowerment and promotes cultural continuity while generating tangible economic opportunities for local households (UNWTO, 2017)

Therefore, the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme demonstrates that CBT can be an effective mechanism for cultural preservation while also promoting social inclusion. By combining community participation, economic opportunities for marginalized groups such as women, educational components and income-generating activities, the programme functions both as a cultural safeguarding tool and a platform for sustainable development. Tengeru's experience provides practical lessons for other communities seeking to protect indigenous knowledge while engaging with the tourism economy.

4.1.2 Cultural Education

Through Community-Based Tourism, Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) provides cultural education to both tourists and the local community. During interviews, participants noted that the programme serves as an educational platform where outsiders learn about African traditions, while at the same time reinforcing cultural knowledge and values within the community itself.

One participant explained that

“Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme has contributions in preserving indigenous knowledge, culture and traditions... This is one of the mechanisms of preserving our culture and tradition from generation to generation” (Focus Group Discussion A, July 27, 2025). Similarly, another group stressed that “Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme... preserves indigenous knowledge, culture and traditions through creating a conducive environment where various traditional practices and beliefs are being conducted” (Focus Group Discussion B, July 29, 2025).

These findings indicate that the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) plays a crucial role in preserving indigenous knowledge, culture and traditions, while simultaneously promoting Tanzania's heritage to visitors. This finding aligns with Lwoga (2017), highlighting that the conservation of cultural heritage in tourism is most effective when institutional support is combined with active community participation. It further aligns sustainable tourism principles, emphasizing that integrating cultural education empowers

communities to value and preserve their heritage while engaging in sustainable practices. Studies by Abdul Aziz et al. (2023) and Cole (2006) highlight the importance of community-based education and participation in heritage conservation and UNESCO emphasizes that preserving cultural heritage contributes to sustainable development. Overall, combining institutional support, community engagement and cultural education ensures the long-term sustainability of heritage sites.

Sustainable Tourism Theory, as defined by UNWTO (2017), emphasizes tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host communities while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. The theory highlights the importance of balancing economic, social and cultural objectives, ensuring that tourism contributes positively to local communities without depleting cultural or natural resources (UNWTO, 2017). In the case of the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP), this theory is reflected in how the programme integrates cultural education with community participation. By enabling residents to actively demonstrate and teach traditional practices such as dances, local cuisine preparation and coffee-making, the programme preserves indigenous knowledge while providing tourists with meaningful learning experiences. This approach aligns with sustainable tourism principles because it fosters cultural continuity, empowers local communities and promotes heritage appreciation in a way that supports long-term socio-cultural and economic sustainability (UNWTO, 2017).

In Tengeru, residents actively participate in the TCTP by demonstrating and teaching cultural practices such as performing traditional dances, preparing local cuisine and showing coffee-making techniques to visitors, which clearly reflects a community-driven approach to cultural preservation. Observations during the study further confirmed that visitors did not merely observe these activities but actively participated, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of local traditions. From my perspective, TCTP's success lies in this active engagement, showing that when communities are empowered to share their culture, both preservation and tourism development are strengthened.

4.1.3 Promoting Local Culture Internationally

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Tengeru has emerged as a powerful vehicle for promoting Tanzanian culture at both local and international levels. The Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) offers a structured platform where traditional foods, dances, songs, handicrafts and other cultural practices are presented to visitors. Unlike passive

tourism, TCTP emphasizes participatory experiences, allowing tourists to engage directly in cultural activities such as coffee pounding, traditional cooking and group dances. These interactions provide tourists with a deeper understanding of Tanzanian cultural values, social norms and heritage, going beyond mere observation to active cultural immersion. Through such participation, tourists gain experiential knowledge of the Meru culture, which strengthens their appreciation of Tanzania's diverse cultural identity while simultaneously raising the country's profile internationally.

Focus group discussions highlighted the programme's impact on cultural promotion and community involvement. One participant explained:

I see some improvement in the tourism sector in Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme. The programme has contributed to the advertisement of African culture, whereby most of the tourists who are visiting us are interested in our culture such as food, dancing, songs and all ways of life. Moreover, Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme has improved the protection of natural resources and the employment of many young men and women in Arusha Region, especially people from Tengeru Village. (FGD with Group A, July 27, 2025).

The findings align with Novelli (2016), who argues that CBT encourages the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity through tourist participation in local traditions and arts. Mbaiwa (2017) further supports this, noting that participatory tourism not only sustains cultural practices but also provides a platform for communities to gain global recognition, enhancing both cultural pride and visibility. In Tengeru, the involvement of women has been particularly significant in promoting Tanzanian culture. Women actively participate in preparing traditional foods, performing songs and crafting handicrafts, serving as cultural ambassadors who showcase the richness of local traditions to visitors. Through their performances and demonstrations, tourists gain a deeper understanding of Meru customs, culinary practices and artistic expressions. This active engagement by women ensures that key aspects of Tanzanian heritage are communicated effectively to both domestic and international audiences, making them pivotal agents in the global promotion of Tanzania's cultural identity.

Observations during fieldwork demonstrated that the active engagement of community members, including programme owners and women, in performances and interactive sessions creates a dynamic cultural exchange. Tourists are not only entertained but also educated about Tanzanian history, social structures and indigenous practices. This interactive

dimension enhances tourists' appreciation for the authenticity of local culture and promotes Tanzania as a destination rich in heritage. Moreover, the programme's cultural activities indirectly contribute to environmental awareness, as tourists are guided to respect natural resources while participating in traditional practices, linking cultural preservation with sustainable tourism.

Therefore, TCTP is more than just a tourism programme; it is a way for the community to share and promote Tanzanian culture. From my observations, the programme effectively shows tourists the richness of local traditions, including dances, songs, food and crafts, while also helping the community preserve these practices. By involving people of all ages, especially women, TCTP ensures that cultural knowledge is passed on and celebrated. The programme not only brings visitors closer to Tanzanian heritage but also helps the world see and appreciate the uniqueness of our culture.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study has shown that the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) plays an important role in preserving and promoting the indigenous cultural heritage of the Meru community. Through active involvement of residents, the programme has successfully maintained traditional practices such as dancing, singing, handicraft making, traditional housing and food preparation. These activities not only protect cultural knowledge but also ensure that younger generations learn and continue these traditions, strengthening community identity. The programme shows how community-based tourism can help both preserve culture and support social cohesion.

In addition, TCTP serves as an educational platform for both community members and visitors. By participating in cultural activities like coffee-making, traditional cooking and performances, tourists gain a deeper understanding of Meru culture, while locals reinforce their own traditions. This hands-on approach empowers community members, particularly women and youth, to take active roles in managing tourism and sharing their culture. The programme balances social, cultural and economic goals, reflecting principles of sustainable tourism and supporting long-term community benefits.

Finally, TCTP has helped raise awareness of Tanzanian culture at national and international levels. Through tourism activities, the community is able to share its heritage, attract visitors and generate income. This shows that community-based tourism can support cultural

preservation, provide economic opportunities and strengthen community pride. Overall, TCTP demonstrates the practical benefits of involving communities directly in tourism.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the Tengeru Cultural Tourism Programme (TCTP) continues to provide ongoing training for community members in areas such as cultural performances, hospitality and tourism management to enhance skills and maintain high-quality experiences for visitors. Efforts should also be made to increase the participation of women, youth and other groups in planning, decision-making and benefit-sharing processes, ensuring that the economic and social advantages of tourism are equitably distributed. Additionally, the programme should strengthen partnerships with national and international tourism organizations and improve marketing strategies to attract more visitors while promoting Tengeru cultural heritage. Cultural tourism activities should continue to be linked with environmental conservation initiatives, including waste management, tree planting and protection of natural resources, to ensure that sustainability is maintained holistically. Finally, the programme should establish a systematic framework for monitoring and evaluating its cultural, social and economic impacts, which will help guide improvements, support decision-making and safeguard the long-term preservation of indigenous knowledge and traditions.

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