

Crafting the Green Mosaic: Sustainable Community Tourism Insights Drawn from Grounded Revelations from the Sri Lankan Landscape

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This study explores how sustainable community tourism drives socioeconomic development through active community involvement, focusing on alternative livelihoods and participatory resource management to foster inclusive, grassroots-led growth.

Design/methodology: A qualitative multiple case study design was employed, using in-depth interviews conducted in two phases for longitudinal insights into community tourism dynamics in Sri Lanka.

Findings: Three key propositions emerged, revealing how community participation and sustainable practices interlink to shape tourism outcomes, highlighting successes, challenges, and local engagement impacts.

Research limitations/implications: Findings apply to community tourism in Sri Lanka and similar developing contexts, offering theoretical and managerial insights for Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs) and sustainable development strategies.

Novelty/Originality of the study: The study introduces a green mosaic framework, advancing knowledge by integrating environmental sustainability with community empowerment to redefine tourism-led socioeconomic development.

INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of socio-economic development, a nation's success hinges not only on its resource endowment but also on the deftness with which it manages and maximizes these resources. Sri Lanka tourism is celebrated as a potent catalyst for economic progress, especially in the wake of the ethnic civil war, which has provided a renewed opportunity to revive and expand the industry. This post-conflict period has opened doors for the country to reinvigorate its tourism sector, which is seen as a crucial engine for national development despite ongoing socio-cultural critiques (Arachchi et al, 2015). Tourism's role extends beyond merely enhancing the balance of payments through foreign exchange earnings; it also encompasses job creation and boosting government revenues, thus becoming a cornerstone of national economic strategy (Brandt et al, 2019). Additionally, local and regional developments are increasingly prioritized, with tourism serving as a strategic tool for economic diversification (Battaglia et al, 2012).

Sri Lanka tourism is celebrated as a vital driver of economic growth, especially in the aftermath of the ethnic civil war, which has provided renewed opportunities to revitalize and expand this crucial sector. This post-conflict period has ushered in a transformative era for Sri Lankan tourism, positioning it as a cornerstone of national development (Bashar, 2018). Beyond its role in enhancing the balance of payments through foreign exchange earnings, tourism plays an integral role in job creation, infrastructure development, and government revenue generation, all of which are essential for economic resilience (Chin et al, 2000). Furthermore, as Sri Lanka emphasizes local and regional economic growth, tourism emerges as a strategic means of economic diversification, with the potential to uplift rural areas and build stronger community economies (Clifton & Benson, 2006).

However, the capacity of tourism to drive sustainable socio-economic development fundamentally depends on active community engagement. Meaningful progress in this area requires that local residents are both motivated and equipped to participate in and benefit from tourism ventures (Belsoy et al, 2012). For tourism to serve as a true catalyst for community advancement, emerging forms of alternative tourism increasingly recognize the value of integrating local heritage, environmental resources, and cultural assets into the visitor experience (De Zoysa, 2021). Effective community tourism hinges on fostering dynamic collaborations between communities and stakeholders, promoting sustainable practices that can transform community involvement from a marginal role into a core element of tourism strategy (Speer & Hughey, 1995). Achieving successful community-driven tourism requires careful planning and coordination, including conflict management, resource optimization, and comprehensive stakeholder engagement (Arachchi, 2014). When communities are granted genuine ownership or control over initiatives, they experience enhanced empowerment and autonomy, equipping them to build profitable partnerships and negotiate their interests effectively (Morrow, 2021). Despite these empowering opportunities, significant obstacles often prevent communities from fully achieving sustainable tourism success. This study explores these challenges through three key propositions, backed by empirical evidence, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections (Kariyawasam et al, 2020).

This study examines community tourism initiatives in Sri Lanka that have evolved from participatory natural resource management efforts, underscoring the importance of collective rather than individual participation in sustainable tourism. Observations reveal that community involvement often intensifies during the implementation phase, whereas planning and design phases typically see less direct community input in Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs). To maximize the impact of community-based tourism, it is essential to engage all stakeholders state entities, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations from the early planning stages to lay a foundation for seamless implementation (Stem et al, 2003)

METHODOLOGY

At the core of the data collection journey lays a series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, unfolding across two significant timelines: the first between 2008 and 2009, and the second from 2015 to 2016, as part of a follow-up inquiry. Most of these conversations were held in Sinhala, capturing the pulse of local voices, while exchanges with CEGA, the Arugam Bay Tourism Association (ABTA), and foreign experts flowed in English, bridging diverse perspectives.

The collection process was further enriched by the meticulous gathering of field notes, carefully recorded whenever keen observations surfaced. Conversations echoed through a digital voice recorder, with the exception of interviews involving government officials, where the process took a different turn. These digitally preserved dialogues were then transferred to a computer, where they were meticulously organized into separate folders and saved in a format compatible with playback through Windows Media Player. The recorded voices then underwent the transformative process of transcription, converting spoken words into the texture of written language.

All semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim, first in Sinhala, preserving the authenticity of the original exchange, and then translated into English, ensuring the delicate nuances of language and culture were faithfully retained. For the more free-flowing unstructured interviews, a tape analysis unfolded, where the audio tracks were revisited with care. Key moments and insightful quotations were drawn out like hidden gems, their significance magnified through close listening and detailed note-taking. These captured reflections formed the rich foundation upon which the deeper analysis of the study's findings would rest, illuminating the path ahead.

RESULTS

Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs)

The intricate web of stakeholders involved in CETIs reflects a wide array of interests tied to the ownership and management of key resources. However, the ultimate success of CETIs hinges upon the efficiency and effectiveness of primary stakeholders. A critical element for this success lies in whether the local communities possess the necessary skills to plan and design their initiatives. In this study, it became evident that these communities lacked a comprehensive understanding of the entire process required to establish and sustain community tourism ventures. For instance, both the Walathwewa Community Environmental and Tourism Initiative (WECTI) and the Rekawa Community Environmental and Tourism Initiative (RCETI) encountered significant hurdles during the planning and implementation stages. In these cases, organizations such as the Forest Department (DF) and the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) prioritized natural resource management over tourism development, further complicating progress.

Partnerships, networks, and collaborations among CETI stakeholders remain in their infancy. Disagreements about appropriate organizational structures, development protocols, and operating procedures, coupled with inadequate technical skills and experience, further exacerbate this issue. These shortcomings reflect the lack of

comprehensive measures taken by conveners during the community capacity-building phase, leading to poor integration with the broader tourism industry. As a result, CETIs often operate in isolation, missing opportunities for collaboration and collective strength. According to the Programme Director of Sewalanka (personal communication, August 18, 2008), establishing a proper structure for community tourism networks is fundamental to their success. However, efforts to create such networks continue to face disagreements over inputs, benefit sharing, and stakeholder responsibilities.

One illustrative example is a program facilitated by Sewalanka, a local non-governmental organization (LNGO), aimed at establishing a network for community-based organizations (CBOs). Despite these efforts, it became clear that the various organizations involved lacked a shared vision. Proposed models, such as a cooperative society or a people's company, made little headway. This highlights the importance of understanding the motivations and contributions of each stakeholder in any collaborative effort.

Another critical challenge relates to a lack of awareness and misunderstandings regarding the tourism industry's operational dynamics. Some community members fail to grasp the importance of establishing business relationships with other stakeholders. For example, they question the necessity of offering commissions to individuals or institutions willing to promote CETI services. This misunderstanding creates friction, as evidenced by a fishery's cooperative society in Southern Sri Lanka, which offers boat tours to a blowhole but fails to compensate guides and local hoteliers who promote the experience. Rigid rules within the cooperative prevent the necessary flexibility to accommodate such arrangements. However, certain initiatives, such as the Walawe River Ecotourism Organisation (WREO) and the Turtle Conservation Project and Tourism Initiative (TCPTI), have adopted a more pragmatic approach by working with hoteliers and tour operators on a commission basis.

In order for CETIs to thrive, community members must develop business acumen that enables them to recognize available opportunities and the competitive nature of the tourism industry. These skills are crucial for ensuring long-term growth and sustainability. Collaboration among stakeholders has long been a focal point in community tourism literature. New ideas are emerging that emphasize the importance of partnerships between local operators and external stakeholders. A travel journalist from Lonely Planet (personal communication, April 22, 2008) noted that such collaborations can provide market access to marginalized communities, especially in regions not yet developed on a global scale. An example of such an effort is World Hotel Link (WHL), which unites small-scale operators under a central organization with greater technical skills, financial resources, and online merchandising opportunities. This central structure serves as a bridge, supporting local organizations and fostering a global network. Unfortunately, such collaborative networks are still lacking in the CETIs examined in this study, as they have yet to fully exploit the potential business opportunities available through partnerships.

The study reveals that weak collaboration stands as one of the primary obstacles to the operational success of Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs), significantly diminishing their entrepreneurial potential. None of the cases examined in the research exhibited strong records of collaboration, a crucial ingredient for effective marketing and community tourism. Strong partnerships help create tourism clusters that can amplify capacities and lead to more robust alliances. However, due to a lack of understanding, CETIs have often rejected partnership offers from private entrepreneurs and NGOs. For instance, the Treasurer of WCETI shared that although such proposals had been made, "we were not interested," as the "outsiders' terms and conditions were not in our favour" (personal communication, July 22, 2008).

On the flip side, the former President of WCETI acknowledged that "failure to establish a partnership with a suitable party was a mistake" (personal communication, July 23, 2008). This remark highlights the detrimental effects of isolation, as internal unity was still elusive, leading to conflicts over the use of local resources. For example, a rift emerged between RCETI and the local fishermen's organization in the same village. These conflicts not only hinder progress but also underscore the importance of fostering cooperation between different community groups. Without such partnerships, the long-term planning and development of CETIs remain fraught with challenges.

As of the follow-up study, only the Turtle Conservation Project and Tourism Initiative (TCPTI) was still operational. The project's enduring success was attributed to its strong technical foundation and support from the Turtle Conservation Project. Other initiatives, unfortunately, had ceased operations entirely, with the Walawe River Ecotourism Organisation (WREO) being a notable example, destabilized by internal conflicts among its members (Ex-President/WREO, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Attitudes, resources, and commitment of the community affecting to the community involvement in CETIs

The study uncovered a critical shortcoming in the participation readiness of the community, encompassing attitudes, resources, and commitment, which directly hinders their involvement in CETIs (Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives). In community development, positive attitudes, resource availability, and strong commitment are essential ingredients, yet many communities in this study lacked these fundamental elements. Attitudes toward tourism varied greatly depending on individual understanding, exposure, and experience with the industry. While awareness campaigns helped shift attitudes toward conservation and the sustainable use of resources, attitudes toward tourism were more resistant. Many community members

expressed initial reluctance to support tourism, fearing its negative socio-cultural impacts. As one community member shared, "Initially, some of us were reluctant to accept the idea of promoting tourism in the village" (Secretary/WREO, personal communication, September 5, 2008).

From an economic standpoint, resource availability is crucial to developing CETIs. Yet, marginalized communities often struggle to assemble the right combination of resources to sustain livelihoods. Volunteer labor, often a cornerstone of community projects, proved ineffective beyond a certain point due to its opportunity costs, particularly in subsistence agricultural communities. Furthermore, land tenure issues exacerbated the problem, with many coastal communities losing valuable property to local and foreign investors, leaving them with diminished bargaining power over development decisions. Complicating matters further, regulatory frameworks in areas adjacent to natural resources, such as forests and marine ecosystems, were rigid, though recent efforts suggested a shift toward more community participation. Nevertheless, the strict technical and regulatory limitations hindered full community involvement, as noted by the Deputy Conservator of Forests (personal communication, December 15, 2009).

Commitment, another essential component of community-driven tourism, varied widely. While some CETIs, like WREO, RECTI, and WCETI, displayed strong commitment during their initial stages, sustaining this momentum proved challenging. Misguided initiatives, such as WCETI and RCETI, struggled to maintain community dedication and required reorganization before they could hope for success.

Empowerment also emerged as a key factor, tied closely to power dynamics within the community. True empowerment requires changes in power relationships, allowing communities to take collective decisions that affect their future. However, traditional power structures, often dominated by local elites or religious leadership, resisted collective decision-making in many rural Sri Lankan communities. Empowering communities through power-sharing and fostering participation readiness was essential, yet empowerment efforts remained inconsistent and underwhelming in their execution. This lack of comprehensive facilitation further hindered progress, leading to the collapse of initiatives like RCETI by 2015, due to both a lack of commitment and insufficient financial sustainability (Ex-Treasurer/RCETI, personal communication, December 12, 2015).

Shortcomings in inhibit the stability and expansion of CETIs

The study illuminates several stumbling blocks that stifle the growth and stability of Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs), with two main culprits rising to the surface: a lack of collaboration among stakeholders and inconsistent guidance from conveners. The widening chasm in community capacity has gone largely unaddressed. Take, for instance, the WCETI case, which provides a clear snapshot of the pitfalls encountered during the planning phase led by the Sri Lanka Australia Natural Resource Management Programme (SLANRMP). Without the integration of tourism industry experts, this initiative was left to flounder, lacking the critical synergy between tourism and community efforts. In many instances, the guidance offered by conveners was like a ship without a compass lacking direction and expertise in key areas such as tourism. SLANRMP, though focused on improving the environment through resource management, failed to recognize the broader scope needed to make community tourism thrive. Their tunnel vision could have been widened with the involvement of tourism stakeholders, a missed opportunity that contributed to the initiative's faltering.

The study critically examines the planning landscape in Sri Lanka, revealing a top-heavy approach that often ignores grassroots realities. Despite the involvement of regional professionals, politicians, and administrators, the plans remain top-down, failing to capture the true needs of the communities they aim to serve. Political agendas, motivated by infrastructure projects with political leverage, often guide development, while bureaucratic delays and rushed planning compromise the integrity of initiatives. This finding aligns with challenges seen globally in community tourism, where top-down planning frequently undermines local input, resulting in misaligned objectives and ineffective outcomes.

For instance, in similar contexts across Asia and Africa, community tourism projects have faced setbacks due to the lack of genuine local engagement. In many cases, political interference in planning has steered development towards infrastructure projects that do not prioritize community needs, a pattern that mirrors Sri Lanka's experience. In contrast, examples from countries like Costa Rica and New Zealand, where community tourism projects thrive, highlight the success of decentralized planning models. These countries have effectively integrated community voices into the planning process, empowering local stakeholders, such as farmers and artisans, to contribute meaningfully to tourism development.

The fragmentation observed in Sri Lanka's tourism planning, with a disjointed stakeholder approach and the absence of tourism experts in the WCETI project, resonates with similar gaps in resource mobilization seen in other regions. In some cases, lack of expertise in both local and international contexts has led to missed opportunities and underdeveloped projects. The absence of specialized support from organizations like the Department of Forests (DF) and SLANRMP exacerbates this issue, as evidenced in the Sri Lankan case where the NGO, Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, struggled to advance the initiative without robust institutional backing. This highlights the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration in tourism planning, where the absence of experienced professionals can result in project failure.

Global examples, such as those from the successful ecotourism ventures in Kenya and Bhutan, demonstrate how integrating local knowledge with expert guidance can help bridge the gap between top-down planning and community involvement. These countries have cultivated ecosystems where state agencies, NGOs, and community groups work in harmony to design tourism initiatives that are both sustainable and community-driven. In these instances, community involvement is not just encouraged but is integral to the planning and implementation process, ensuring that the initiatives are not only feasible but culturally sensitive and environmentally responsible. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the global dialogue on sustainable community tourism by underscoring the importance of bottom-up planning, expert involvement, and cross-sector collaboration. Without these, initiatives are likely to fall short of their potential, as evidenced both in Sri Lanka and in similar projects around the world.

DISCUSSION

The discussion unveils the intricate tapestry of community involvement in tourism, painting a vivid picture of its dual role. Communities not only attract tourists with their unique lifestyles but also play a crucial part in ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism ventures. The bond between the community, visitors, and the tourism industry flourishes through direct and indirect interactions, making the local community an indispensable thread in the fabric of tourism development, especially in marginalized and remote areas. Community-based tourism taps into social capital, preserving local wisdom, cultural values, and traditional lifestyles while creating avenues for adding value to the broader tourism landscape.

In Sri Lanka, community participation in tourism follows three distinct models: private enterprises that outsource services to individuals and community groups; initiatives by resource management agencies, such as the Department of Forests (DF) with external funding; and NGO- or CBO-led projects that heavily involve the community. It is the third model, central to the development of Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs), that the study explores, though the structure and stage of development of these initiatives vary greatly. Community tourism rooted in natural resources aligns seamlessly with the principles of sustainable resource management, contributing to conservation efforts while fostering alternative livelihoods. Sri Lanka, as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, is perfectly positioned to promote alternative forms of tourism. To succeed, however, a significant shift is needed from a top-down, command-and-control approach to a participatory model that places the community at the heart of natural resource management. The tourism industry, too, is increasingly seeking product diversification, making the environment ripe for the growth of community tourism.

According to Kiss (2004), community support for conservation is driven by perceived benefits from tourism. However, in Sri Lanka, this dynamic unfolds differently. Even when tourism initiatives offer limited financial gain, communities maintain strong conservationist attitudes, valuing environmental stewardship over the secondary rewards tourism might bring. In this context, community tourism becomes a secondary response to conservation efforts, rather than a primary driver.

While conservation objectives within CETIs have largely been achieved, the study highlights a significant flaw: insufficient collaboration with the tourism industry. As a result, tourism has not generated the necessary revenue to sustain long-term conservation efforts, leaving these initiatives dependent on external funding. Despite this, community tourism, leveraging natural and cultural heritage, holds immense potential for product diversification in Sri Lanka's tourism industry. These resources are not only vital but multifaceted, and safeguarding them for future generations must be a priority.

Tourism, as the study suggests, is not a traditional economic activity for many local communities. Ideas for developing community tourism often come from external actors, and technical assistance is crucial to build capacity within these communities. Yet, marketing mechanisms for these initiatives remain underdeveloped, and without proper stakeholder support and expertise from the tourism industry, their full potential remains untapped. Institutional backing at the policy level is also essential, as many local stakeholders lack the empowerment needed to engage successfully in the tourism market.

The study brings the notion of alternative tourism to the forefront, particularly in areas where tourism resources are available. Sri Lanka's tourism industry faces a pressing need to reposition its product offerings to ensure long-term sustainability. Community involvement is key to this repositioning, as access to natural resources, managed collectively by communities and state agencies, can drive development.

However, the performance of CETIs is a mixed bag. While some initiatives progress slowly, others have ceased operations altogether. Low operational capacity and limited opportunities have prevented broader community involvement, though indirect benefits are offered to non-participating members, primarily through social welfare. Women, in particular, are less actively engaged, although their participation is more visible in indirect roles, where tourism serves as a supplementary income source.

Questions have arisen about whether these initiatives can generate enough revenue to fund long-term environmental conservation. Yet, the study suggests shifting the perspective. These initiatives may not consistently produce significant financial returns, but they have succeeded in transforming community attitudes toward conservation with a long-term benefit that outweighs immediate monetary concerns.

Understanding the true potential of community tourism is essential. It has the ability to diversify local economies, create linkages, and stimulate sustainable resource use. The demand for alternative tourism, including community-based options, is growing, as tourists increasingly seek eco-friendly and culturally enriching experiences. This presents a clear market opportunity, yet CETIs struggle with weak organization, lack of marketing networks, and limited national and international visibility.

Throughout the study, aspects such as the organization and internal workings of CETIs, the role of conveners, inter-organizational relationships, and community readiness for participation were examined. The findings point to key ingredients for successful community tourism: effective resource mobilization, visionary leadership, strong stakeholder collaboration, and responsible intervention by conveners. These elements form the cornerstone of best practices in community-based tourism, offering a pathway to sustainable development and shared prosperity.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of the study intricate web of social relationships that underpin the planning, development, and operations of Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs). The findings offer understanding how stakeholder relationships are forged, sustained, and sometimes fractured. These dynamics align with the theory of social exchange, highlighting how power relations within communities directly influence the organization and execution of development efforts at the grassroots level. One key insight from the study is the vital role that rational decision-making plays in facilitating beneficial social exchanges. However, the community's limited knowledge and awareness stemming from gaps in capacity development hinder these exchanges. Without such interactions, the development of tourism within these communities remains a distant possibility.

For community tourism to thrive, strong and established relationships between primary stakeholders (the community and conveners) and secondary stakeholders (individuals and institutions) are crucial. The initiation and facilitation of projects stem from these relationships. As McIver suggests, all social relationships grow from shared interests, and many of the goals people pursue can only be achieved through collaboration. Yet, as the study reveals, maintaining this collaboration is no simple feat. In cases like the RCETI, the loss of common interest during certain stages of development led to the breakdown of these relationships. In community tourism, the continuous nurturing of these bonds is essential for both community empowerment and stakeholder compliance.

The study also sheds light on the profound consequences of inconsistent stakeholder collaboration. The success of a development process is often determined by how social power is distributed among its stakeholders. In some cases, community collaboration weakens when individuals wield disproportionate power, even though collective bargaining remains possible such as in securing legitimate access to state-owned natural resources. Blau, (2017) captures this dynamic, noting that when an individual asserts dominance without reciprocating dependence, resentment brews, and social approval falters. This was evident in the WCETI case, where an imbalance of power due to a local resort operation strained the community's cohesion, offering a clear example of how unequal power dynamics can disrupt local development efforts.

In summary, the theoretical underpinnings of the study highlight the delicate balance of power, collaboration, and shared interests essential to successful community tourism. Without maintaining these relationships, both within the community and with external stakeholders, sustainable development remains out of reach.

Managerial Implications

The managerial implications offer lessons for those guiding Community Environmental and Tourism Initiatives (CETIs) for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) as primarily established to harness resources in marginalized areas. However, these communities and their CBOs often lack the technical expertise required to venture into complex industries like tourism.

Community participation in CETIs tends to be more visible during the implementation phase, as most of the ideas originate from external sources. Generally, local involvement in these initiatives is part-time, positioning community tourism as a supplementary economic activity rather than a primary livelihood. While considerable time, effort, and resources have been devoted to community capacity development programs, these initiatives often fall short. Technical limitations and the sporadic nature of these efforts are widely recognized, leading to unproductive results and hindering the progress of many CETIs.

Many CETIs have struggled to make headway in forging partnerships with potential stakeholders, resulting in a lack of significant progress in this area. The less successful CETIs typically struggle with product development, facility creation, and marketing. Their operational scope is limited, and although initiatives near established

tourism hubs and urban centers attract more visitors, these are often short-term, day visitors. Little to no effort has been made to tap into niche tourism markets, leaving significant growth opportunities unexplored.

The operational strength of CETIs has been undermined by inadequate domestic capital formation and the inability to replace labor with venture capital. This shortfall has hampered their ability to function effectively. Coordination among state agencies has been far from ideal, with inter-sectoral collaboration falling short of its potential. CETIs often rely heavily on conveners for their success. However, the involvement of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) has proven more effective compared to Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs). INGOs bring a systematic approach and technical expertise that have been beneficial for project implementation.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while Sri Lanka's resource potential, social dynamics, and cultural richness provide a strong foundation for community tourism, significant challenges in the economic, political, and technological spheres must be addressed for its full realization. The over-reliance on traditional mass tourism highlights critical shortcomings in marketing efforts and underscores the need for a more diversified approach to attracting tourists. Additionally, the lack of unified action among various initiatives often leads to fragmented outcomes, further impeding the growth of community tourism.

For community tourism to realize its potential and provide consistent benefits to both local communities and the broader tourism sector, a structured, inclusive, and sustainable development approach is necessary. To that end, several actionable policy recommendations emerge: Community tourism should not be isolated but integrated into broader sustainable livelihood strategies. Policymakers should ensure that community tourism is linked to other economic sectors such as agriculture, craft, and conservation, creating a holistic model that supports local economies while preserving cultural and environmental assets. Collaborative policies that foster synergies between tourism and other sectors can generate more stable and resilient income streams for communities.

Policy efforts must prioritize the development of local expertise and leadership in community tourism. Initiatives should focus on providing community members with the necessary skills to manage tourism projects, from hospitality training to environmental conservation techniques. Additionally, fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable tourism practices through community workshops and training programs can empower locals to take ownership of tourism projects, ensuring they are both sustainable and beneficial to all stakeholders.

The lack of effective marketing for community tourism is a key obstacle to growth. National and regional tourism boards should collaborate with local communities to create targeted marketing campaigns that highlight the unique cultural and environmental offerings of community tourism experiences. Digital platforms and social media should be leveraged to reach a wider audience, and partnerships with international tourism agencies can help raise the profile of Sri Lanka's community-based tourism offerings on the global stage.

A more unified approach is required, involving coordination between government agencies, NGOs, private sector stakeholders, and local communities. Policymakers should establish frameworks that facilitate collaboration and ensure that tourism projects are developed in consultation with all relevant parties. Local tourism boards can be empowered to serve as central hubs for coordinating efforts, ensuring that projects are aligned with both community needs and national tourism goals. Investments in technology and infrastructure are critical to overcoming barriers to community tourism. The government should facilitate access to technology that supports digital marketing, booking systems, and visitor management tools. Additionally, infrastructure improvements in transportation, waste management, and energy efficiency should be prioritized to ensure that tourism development is environmentally sustainable and logistically feasible.

Policymakers should develop and enforce clear frameworks that outline sustainable tourism practices, focusing on the protection of local ecosystems, heritage sites, and community well-being. These frameworks should encourage responsible tourism behaviors and ensure that both local communities and visitors are aware of their roles in preserving the environment and cultural heritage. Regular monitoring and evaluation are crucial to track the progress of community tourism initiatives and ensure that they are delivering on their promises. Policymakers should implement systems to assess the economic, social, and environmental impacts of community tourism projects, allowing for timely adjustments and improvements. This data-driven approach will help ensure that community tourism is a viable, long-term solution for sustainable development in Sri Lanka.

By addressing these policy recommendations, Sri Lanka can unlock the full potential of community tourism, creating a sustainable model that not only benefits the tourism industry but also uplifts local communities and preserves the country's rich cultural and natural heritage. Failure to act on these recommendations could result in missed opportunities, as competition in the global tourism market intensifies and alternative models of community-based tourism evolve.

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