
The Socio-Cultural Footprint of Tourism: A Case Study of Manas National Park's Host Communities

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ABSTRACT

While tourism is often analysed for its economic contributions, its socio-cultural impacts on host communities remain equally significant. This case study examines the socio-cultural transformations resulting from tourism development in the communities surrounding Manas National Park, Assam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The study explores both the positive and negative socio-cultural consequences, including changes in traditional lifestyles, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and conflicts arising from tourism activities. Additionally, it investigates the relationship between these socio-cultural impacts and the extent of community participation in tourism planning and management. Using a quantitative approach, data was accumulated through a structured questionnaire, and factor analysis was employed to ascertain key dimensions of socio-cultural impacts. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the strength of the association of these impacts with community participation. The findings highlight the need for a balanced and inclusive approach to tourism development that considers local socio-cultural dynamics to ensure sustainable and community-driven growth.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, National Parks, Socio-Cultural, Traditional, Regression Analysis

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1. Introduction:

Tourism plays a note-worthy role in shaping the socio-cultural dynamics of host communities. An immense agent of globalization, it has an impact on many local customs, social frameworks, and cultural forms of expression (Smith, 2015). On the one hand, the connections between tourists and locals facilitate cultural exchange, economic gain, and social change, while on the other hand they also present challenges of cultural identity, custom transformation, and socio-economic inequality (Reisinger, 2009). The socio-cultural impact of tourism is felt more strongly in places with rich cultural heritage and indigenous traditions. Although tourism can contribute to the revitalization of a culture and its preservation, it can also cause cultural erosion, cultural commercialization, and contrary values of the traditional and modern (Mbaiwa, 2011). In addition, the increase in tourism affects local lifestyles, livelihoods, and social behaviours, impacting community beliefs about tourism development (Sharples, 2014).

Tourism is often promoted as a aid for socio-economic development particularly in developing regions, including parts of South Asia. While tourism can offer financial benefits to hosting communities, the officiousness of tourism in providing optimal monetary gains is dependent on a variety of facilitators, including governance over tourism infrastructure, local community participation and equitable distribution of revenue from tourism (Tosun, 2006). The socio-cultural dimension of tourism is one of the major pillars of sustainable tourism and necessary to preserve the cultural heritage and social inclusiveness and economic empowerment.

Considering the criteria for World Heritage designation and their significant potential as heritage attractions, it is no surprise that scholars, policymakers, and industry professionals view these sites as essential for tourism development. Numerous observers have suggested that World Heritage status enhances a destination's appeal, attracting more visitors (Hall, 1992; Shackley, 1998).

World Heritage listing often comes with high expectations, primarily centred on its potential to boost tourist numbers and secure greater government and institutional support for site preservation. However, a deeper analysis reveals a range of broader implications, including changes in site accessibility and usage, new regulatory frameworks, and shifts in economic dynamics. Additionally, the designation of one site can influence the nomination and management of other sites, impacting heritage politics, governance structures, and visitor demographics (Hall, 2006).

In terms of management, it is more appropriate to consider social and cultural impacts of tourism within the planning process, so that benefits are maximized and problems minimized (Douglas and Derrett 2001; Hill and Gale 2009). There is a planning aspect that is key to emphasizing the positive and minimizing the negative—community involvement—so that local people understand tourism, are involved in decision making and benefit from it (Kavallinis and Pizam 1994). According to Lankford (1994), the perceptions and attitudes of local communities regarding the impacts of tourism are most likely to be a significant with regards to planning and ensuring correct decisions are made in the development, marketing and operation of current and future tourism projects.

2. Case Study of Manas National Park:

Manas National Park, located in Assam, is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is known for both its rich ecosystems and the cultural heritage of indigenous groups, including the indigenous Boro community. These communities have relied heavily on the resources provided by the park for sustenance and have also played a major role in conservation efforts. For the last few years, it has turned into a significant financial driver of the region, providing

means for local communities and influencing their socio-cultural elements. But this does not come without the help of conservation efforts, community involvement, and ecotourism endeavours in bringing it back to life. Sustainable tourism and community-based engagement is becoming important ways of reconciling conservation and development, such that both biodiversity and cultural heritage will be available to future generations. This paper discusses the changing socio-cultural scenario facilitated by tourism and the opportunities it has offered and challenges it has posed.



Figure 1: Map of Manas National Park & Tiger Reserve (MNPTR)

Source: Official website of MNPTR (<https://www.manasnptr.in/>)

3. Literature Review:

The socio-cultural influences of tourism on host communities of destinations can be profound, immediate, and highly visible. These effects may lead to shifts in traditional principles, behavioural trends, community framework, and overall quality of life for local residents (Hall & Page, 2006). Moreover, these transformations can arise either as a direct consequence of tourism development or through association between tourists and host communities (Sharpley, 2014).

Tourism development can produce both beneficial and pessimistic impacts for the host communities of a destination (Andereck, et al., 2005). Positive socio-cultural impacts of tourism include improvement in social services, provision of better transportation and recreational facilities, as well as the development of more infrastructure for both visitors and local inhabitants (Gursoy et al., 2002). The overall daily living is enhanced due to tourism (Kim et al., 2013), which contributed to be a better quality of life. Moreover, it helps to promote cultural identity, respect for ethnicity, and safeguard the indigenous traditions (Jashveer et al., 2011). The increasing engrossment for historical and cultural experiences by tourists has the potential to protect local culture (Liu et al., 2012).

Apart from the positive impacts, there are several negative socio-cultural impacts as well. Firstly, tourism has the potential to transform the value systems and social behaviours of local residents directly and in a way that is impossible to overturn, thus changing traditional community structures, relationships and moral frameworks (Andereck et al., 2005). Secondly, there is a potential for cultural conflicts to occur when the religion, principles, lifestyle, languages, and economic condition of tourists and host communities differ from each other as well as between local residents and in-migrant labour and workers attracted by the employment opportunities created by tourism (Marzuki, 2011). The locality of Manas National Park has majorly indigenous tribal people of Assam, so it might result in conflict. Thirdly, tourism development can impose physical strain on destination communities, especially during peak seasons. The increased demand for resources can contribute to environmental degradation and drive up the costs of infrastructure and property, placing additional pressure on local populations (Andereck et al., 2005).

Community participation implicates collective association among community members to attain shared goals, and pursue individual gains (McCloskey et al., 2011). Within the context of tourism development, it applies to the active involvement of local communities in shaping the direction of tourism rather than merely being passive beneficiaries. For tourism to be truly sustainable, it must balance economic, social, environmental, and cultural considerations within host regions. Given the industry's rapid growth, it is essential to implement strategies that ensure long-term sustainability while minimizing negative impacts. The concept of sustainable development gained prominence within the international community in 1987 (Ahn, Lee, & Shafer, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2004). Initially focused on conserving natural resources for present and subsequent generations, sustainable development has since expanded to encompass cultural and community assortment, civil rights, and equitable growth (Ahn et al., 2002). As a result, the principles of sustainability have been increasingly been relevant to tourism, peculiarly in sectors that depend on natural resources and involve local communities and their cultural heritage.

Effective community participation strengthens social ties by fostering connections between individuals, cultivating a feeling of acceptance, trust, and reliability among members. Additionally, it helps reconcile conflicts between residents' needs and interests, balancing quality-of-life improvements with economic advancement priorities (Jaafar et al., 2015; Sirisrisak, 2009).

Given their deep-rooted historical knowledge of local adaptations to change and their position as the most directly affected group, destination communities should play an active role in tourism planning. Their participation is particularly crucial as they are expected to become an indispensable component of the destination experience (Scheyvens, 1999). Moreover, actively engaging communities in the planning process can reduce potential negative impacts and enhance the positive outcomes of tourism expansion.

4. Purpose of this study:

While tourism has an impact on the economy and environment of host communities, it also shapes the social and cultural structure. This is of such importance in the developing world where tourism not only represents a significant component of economic stability, but also lays emphasis on the socio-cultural impact (Crandall, 1994). Even if the reviews on the footprints of tourism in developing countries have increased with time, studies specifically on Assam are still few in number, especially related to wildlife tourism sector. To fill this gap, the current study investigates the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on communities living adjacent to Manas National Park. The study is a necessary exploration of the host community's perception

of such socio-cultural changes, and evaluates the correlation between the impacts and host community participation in tourism-based activities.

5. Research Methodology:

The primary goal of this study is to recognize how the tourism socio-cultural impacts are perceived by host communities of the Manas National Park and to determine how their orientation towards tourism impacts is related to the community participation. The objective was accomplished through quantitative research approach with the data obtained through self-administered survey questionnaire comprising of three sections for the study. The part one of the questionnaire referred to demographic information on respondents, including gender, age, education qualification and occupation. The second part of the questionnaire referred to various socio-cultural impacts related to tourism adapted from Gursoy (2002); Andereck et al. (2005, 2007); Sharma et al. (2008); Park and Stokowski (2009); Jashveer et al. (2011). The third part of the questionnaire explored community participation, predicated on an item set developed by Gursoy (2002) and Nicholas (2009).

Section two and three questions were based on a Likert-type scale of five point, ranging from one which relates to strongly disagree to five which corresponds to strongly agree. A total of three hundred questionnaires were dispersed to host population and four hundred questionnaires were assembled. This gives a response rate of ninety-six per cent and the sample size considered for this study is 385. Factor analysis was administered to find out the underlying dimensions of socio-cultural impact, while multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between socio-cultural impact and community participation.

6. Case Analysis and Discussion:

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic profile. Out of the 247 respondents, 79 per cent are male and twenty-one per cent are female. Regarding the age, 38 per cent belonged in the age group of 18-30 years, 45 per cent belonged in the age group of 31-45 years, and the remaining 17 per cent belonged to above 46 age group. 33 per cent of the respondents have said to be graduates, 41 per cent have studied till higher secondary and the remaining 26 per cent have either matriculated or have done only primary education. The respondents considered for this study are directly or indirectly impacted by the tourism sector including people working as jeep safari drivers, boat safari operators, mahouts, tailors/weavers, souvenir shops, other shopkeepers and local residents.

	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Perceived Socio-Cultural Impacts		
PSC1	Tourism upholds the ethical and moral values of local communities.	3.23	.903
PSC2	Tourism enhances the living standards for local residents.	3.64	.972
PSC3	Tourism fosters a sense of pride within the community among locals.	3.25	.891
PSC4	Tourism ensures the safety and security of both local residents and visitors.	3.74	1.041
PSC5	Interacting with tourists from different regions enriches	4.05	1.036

	understanding of their cultures and societies.		
PSC6	The influx of tourists provides a framework for the modernization of infrastructure.	3.97	1.057
PSC7	Tourism can lead residents to adopt tourist behaviours, potentially harming local culture.	2.39	1.018
PSC8	Tourism can adversely affect local culture.	2.30	1.002
PSC9	Tourism contributes to a higher incidence of alcohol and drug consumption.	2.87	1.320
PSC10	Tourism is linked to an increase in crime rates.	2.46	1.161
	Community Participation		
CP1	The development of tourism is reliant on the perception possessed by local residents.	3.19	1.032
CP2	Local residents maintain a cooperative working association with the authorities in the advancement of tourism.	2.27	.948
CP3	It is essential for the local community to have opportunities to participate in decision-making within the tourism sector.	4.05	1.014
CP4	Engaging the local community in the decision-making process can enhance the sociocultural effects of tourism.	3.58	1.021

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Socio-Cultural Impacts and Community Participation

Source: Statements adapted from Gursoy (2002); Andereck et al. (2005, 2007); Sharma et al. (2008); Park and Stokowski (2009); Jashveer et al. (2011) and Nicholas et al. (2009); and mean and std. deviation is author's work.

The descriptive statistics (Table 1) provide an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding perceived socio-cultural impacts (PSC) of tourism and their views on community participation (CP). From the mean scores and standard deviations, it can be noted that tourism influences differ in dimensions from high to low.

As for positive socio-cultural impacts, PSC1 received an average score of 3.23 (SD = 0.903), indicating that a reasonable level of moral and ethical reinforcement was felt by respondents as a result of tourism. Likewise, PSC2 has a high mean 3.64 (SD = 0.972), indicating the agreement that tourism has a optimistic effect on quality of life. The influence of tourism on community pride (PSC3) was also moderately acknowledged, with a mean score of 3.25 (SD = 0.891). Moreover, PSC4, which pertains to tourism's role in ensuring safety and security, received a mean score of 3.74 (SD = 1.041), suggesting that respondents largely recognize this as a benefit. A notably strong agreement was observed for PSC5 (M = 4.05, SD = 1.036), indicating that cultural exchange through interactions with tourists is highly valued by the local

community. Additionally, PSC6, which relates to infrastructural improvements due to tourism, had a mean of 3.97 (SD = 1.057), reinforcing the perception that tourism aids in modernization efforts. On the other hand, concerns about the negative socio-cultural impacts were also evident. PSC7, which addresses cultural imitation and potential cultural damage, had a mean of 2.39 (SD = 1.018), suggesting that while some respondents perceive tourism as a threat to cultural authenticity, the overall agreement is relatively low. Similarly, PSC8 recorded a mean of 2.30 (SD = 1.002), reinforcing that concerns regarding direct cultural degradation are not strongly emphasized. In terms of social issues, PSC9 (M = 2.87, SD = 1.320) highlights mixed opinions about tourism's role in influencing alcohol and drug consumption, whereas PSC10 (M = 2.46, SD = 1.161) suggests that concerns about crime rates due to tourism are relatively minimal.

Community participation is essential for sustainable tourism development. CP1 received a moderate mean score of 3.19 (SD = 1.032), indicating that while many respondents acknowledge the importance of awareness and knowledge in supporting tourism, opinions are varied. However, CP2, which reflects the working relationship between locals and the government, had a notably low mean of 2.27 (SD = 0.948), suggesting a weak perception of collaboration between government authorities and the local community in tourism planning. The highest level of agreement was observed for CP3 (M = 4.05, SD = 1.014), indicating that respondents strongly believe in the necessity of local decision-making in tourism development. Additionally, CP4 (M = 3.58, SD = 1.021) reinforces the notion that community participation plays a vital role in enhancing the socio-cultural impacts of tourism.

A factor analysis was conducted to both reduce and to identify latent dimensions in the statements of perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism. This is the technique that aids in grouping the tangible details together so as to provide a better insight of the Hidden subjects present in the document. To demonstrate the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were performed.

The test's KMO value for the current study was **0.724**, meaning that the sample is acceptable for the factor analysis (above 0.6). This shows that all 10 variables exhibit extremely strong connection patterns, proving that component analysis is acceptable. Additionally, the results of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity inferred that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix ($\chi^2 = 1058.918$, $df = 45$, $p < 0.001$). This finding underwrites the use of factor analysis by indicating that these variables were sufficiently connected to support its initial application. Using these statistical metrics, factor analysis can be utilised to determine the main sociocultural effect dimensions that are represented in the responses that were gathered.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.214	32.139	32.139	2.385	23.853	23.853
2	1.785	17.847	49.985	1.952	19.520	43.373
3	1.160	11.605	61.590	1.822	18.217	61.590

Table 2: Total Variance Explained

Source: Author's work

Table 2 shows how much of the dataset's overall variance may be explained by the various extracted components. The variation illustrated by each component preceding to extraction is displayed by the initial eigenvalues. The rotation sums of squared loadings provide the variance explained thereafter applying Varimax rotation, which optimizes factor loadings for better interpretability. After rotation, the first component accounts for 23.853% of the variance, the second for 19.520%, and the third for 18.217%, leading to a more balanced distribution of variance across the three retained components. The cumulative variance explained remains at 61.590%, reinforcing the robustness of the extracted factors. The remaining components (from the fourth to the tenth) have eigenvalues less than 1, meaning they do not contribute significantly to explaining the variance and are not retained for further analysis.

	Component		
	1	2	3
PSC5	.744		
PSC6	.742		
PSC4	.719		
PSC7	.564		
PSC10		.821	
PSC8		.810	
PSC9		.665	
PSC3			.800
PSC1			.784
PSC2			.584

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix

Source: Author's work

The Rotated Component Matrix (Table 3) categorizes tourism's perceived socio-cultural impacts into three distinct factors, each representing a different dimension of tourism's influence on local communities. The factor loadings indicate the strength of each variable's contribution to its respective factor, with higher loadings signifying stronger associations.

The first factor, which includes PSC5, PSC6, PSC4, and PSC7, reflects cultural exchange and infrastructure development. The high loadings on this factor indicate that tourism is seen as a driver of modernization, fostering cross-cultural interactions and improving infrastructure. The presence of strong factor loadings suggests that local communities recognize tourism's role in creating opportunities for cultural exposure, enhancing public amenities, and contributing to safety and security. Given the significant influence of these elements, this factor is renamed "Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development." The second factor, consisting of PSC10, PSC8, and PSC9, represents perceived socio-cultural threats. The high factor loadings here indicate strong concerns regarding the negative consequences of tourism, such as increased crime rates, cultural erosion, and substance abuse. The strength of these loadings suggests that while tourism has positive aspects, some residents perceive it as a contributor to undesirable social changes. Due to the prominence of these concerns in the dataset, this factor is renamed "Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats." The third factor, which includes PSC3, PSC1, and PSC2, captures community empowerment and well-being. The substantial loadings on this factor highlight the belief that tourism plays a role in strengthening local identity, fostering community pride, and enhancing moral and ethical values. Additionally, the loadings suggest that tourism is viewed as a contributor to an improved quality of life. This factor is renamed "Community Empowerment and Well-Being."

A multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the connection between sociocultural characteristics and community participation (CP). In this model, community engagement is the dependent variable, and the independent variables (predictors) are perceived socio-cultural threats (PSC_F2), cultural exchange and infrastructure development (PSC_F1), and community empowerment and well-being (PSC_F3). The following hypotheses are examined:

Hypothesis 1: There is significant influence of Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development on Community Participation.

Hypothesis 2: There is significant influence of Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats on Community Participation.

Hypothesis 3: There is significant influence of Community Empowerment and Well-Being on Community Participation.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.513 ^a	.263	.257	1.23156	24.820	.000 ^a
a. Predictors: (Constant), PSC_F1, PSC_F2, PSC_F3						

Table 4: Model Summary and Significance

Source: Author's work

The R-value is 0.513, which indicates a moderate association between the predictors and community engagement, according to the model summary (Table 4). The three independent variables account for 26.3% of the variance in community engagement, according to the R-squared value of 0.263. By taking into consideration the number of predictors, the modified R-squared value (0.257) validates the model's dependability. Additionally, Table 4 shows that the model substantially is statistically significant ($F = 24.820$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the predictors taken together account for a sizable amount of the variation in community engagement. This lends credence to the idea that sociocultural elements significantly influence how the community participates in tourism-related activities.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.826	.466		12.503	.000
	PSC_F1	.676	.081	.390	8.317	.000
	PSC_F2	-.186	.098	-.091	-1.892	.009
	PSC_F3	-.091	.096	-.046	-.950	.343
b. Dependent Variable: CP_SUM						

Table 5: Co-efficient Table

Source: Author's work

The coefficients table (Table 5) provides insights into the individual influence of each predictor on community participation in tourism. The three independent variables—Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development (PSC_F1), Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats (PSC_F2), and Community Empowerment and Well-Being (PSC_F3)—were analysed to determine their statistical significance in predicting community participation.

The outcome for Hypothesis 1 showed that Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development exhibits a positively substantial effect on community participation ($B = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$). The

β standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.390$) indicates that improved infrastructure and accession to cultural exchange led to higher community participation in tourism activities. In other words, residents are likely to work on tourism development projects if they understand tourism as an opportunity to develop cultural exchange and a better infrastructure. Thus, **Hypothesis 1 is accepted** and the result suggests that investing in infrastructure and cultural programs that invoke civic engagement matters in building community engagement.

Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats has a significant negative effect on community participation ($B = -0.186$, $p = 0.009$). At the same time, the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.091$) shows that growing concerns about socio-cultural threats (like crime, cultural degradation and drug abuse) lead to a decrease in community participation. Through reciprocal reinforcement, the p-value of this variable indicates that it is an important explanatory factor in shaping community involvement in tourism, since, local residents perceive a threat from tourism to their culture and social environment, tend to be less involved in tourism activities. As such, **Hypothesis 2 is accepted**, highlighting the importance of socio-cultural perception management strategies to increase local participation.

The hypothesis 3 results suggested Community Empowerment and Well-Being does not significantly influence community participation ($B = -0.091$, $p = 0.343$) since the p value is well above the threshold of 0.05. Hence, **Hypothesis 3 is rejected**. “Development” will also hopefully bring friendly impacts on community residents; however, a sense of community empowerment and well-being does not predict greater involvement in tourism development. The rejection of Hypothesis 3 implies that community involvement is also likely influenced by factors like economic benefits, governance structures, or personal motivations.

7. Discussion and Conclusion:

This study highlights the intricate socio-cultural dynamics of tourism in communities near Manas National Park, Assam. While tourism fosters cultural exchange and infrastructure development, it also presents socio-cultural challenges that can influence community participation. The findings reveal that Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development positively impact local engagement, as residents recognize tourism’s role in improving public amenities and fostering cultural interactions. However, Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats—such as concerns about crime, cultural erosion, and substance abuse—deter participation. Interestingly, Community Empowerment and Well-Being do not significantly influence involvement, suggesting that while tourism enhances local pride and social cohesion, these factors alone do not drive active engagement in tourism governance. The statistical results reinforce these observations. The strong positive effect of Cultural Exchange and Infrastructure Development on community participation ($B = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that investment in infrastructure and cultural programs is crucial for fostering local engagement. Conversely, Perceived Socio-Cultural Threats negatively impact participation ($B = -0.186$, $p = 0.009$), underscoring the need for policies that address safety concerns and social disruptions. The rejection of the hypothesis linking Community Empowerment and Well-Being to participation ($B = -0.091$, $p = 0.343$) indicates that other factors—such as economic incentives, governance structures, and policy interventions—may play a more decisive role in motivating community involvement. The voices of local residents further validate these findings. Many appreciate the infrastructural benefits and cultural exchange facilitated by tourism, while others express concerns about shifting social values and increased security risks. These perspectives emphasize the importance of inclusive governance, awareness programs, and sustainable tourism policies to maximize tourism’s benefits while mitigating its negative effects.

For tourism to be a truly sustainable and inclusive force in the region, it is essential to address both its benefits and challenges. Government authorities, tourism stakeholders, and community members must collaborate to create policies that maximize tourism's positive socio-cultural impacts while minimizing potential drawbacks. This includes increasing awareness about tourism's role in community development, strengthening participatory governance models, and ensuring that locals have a voice in decision-making processes. Furthermore, addressing perceived socio-cultural threats is critical for fostering a sense of security and cultural preservation among residents. Regulations on crime prevention, cultural heritage protection, and responsible tourism practices must be enforced to mitigate negative outcomes. Additionally, economic incentives such as employment generation and fair revenue distribution should be integrated into tourism policies to guarantee that the advantage of tourism extend equitably to all community members.

By adopting a holistic and community-driven approach to tourism management, local stakeholders can foster a more balanced and sustainable tourism industry in Manas National Park. When properly managed, tourism has the potential to not only enhance the socio-cultural fabric of local communities but also ensure their long-term well-being and active participation in shaping their own development.

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