

Tourism Initiatives and Their Impact on Sustainable Livelihoods in Chitlang Village

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Abstract

This study employs a Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) to analyze how rural tourism initiatives in Chitlang, Nepal, generate employment and transform community livelihoods. Using a mixed-methods approach including geospatial analysis, semi-structured interviews (n=46), focus group discussions, and thematic analysis, we examine tourism's impact across five livelihood capitals: financial, social, physical, and natural. Findings reveal that homestays, agro-tourism, cultural interpretation, and handicraft production diversify income streams, empower women and youth, and strengthen cultural preservation. However, challenges persist in seasonal employment, unequal benefit distribution, environmental strain, and cultural commodification. The study contributes novel insights by integrating community narratives with SLF to demonstrate how locally embedded tourism models foster economic resilience while highlighting governance gaps. We recommend inclusive policy frameworks, enhanced skill development, and ecological safeguards to optimize tourism's role in sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Rural tourism, livelihoods, sustainability, employment, cultural preservation.

Introduction

Rural tourism has emerged as a critical strategy for economic diversification, cultural revitalization, and employment generation in developing countries. As a people-centered development approach, rural tourism seeks to leverage local heritage, culture, and landscapes to create sustainable livelihoods while preserving environmental and cultural integrity (Sharpley & Roberts, 2004; Lane, 1994). In Nepal, where rural

communities are traditionally dependent on agriculture and remittances, tourism offers an alternative economic pathway that complements local strengths and reduces urban migration pressures (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). Amid Nepal's growing emphasis on decentralization and sustainable development, villages like Chitlang in Makwanpur District have become pivotal examples of rural tourism initiatives in action. Located near Kathmandu Valley, Chitlang is historically and culturally significant, known for Lichhavi-era inscriptions, Newar settlements, and festivals like Rato Machhindra Nath Jatra, all of which contribute to its rich heritage tourism potential (Lamichhane et al., 2020; Timalisina, 2021).

In recent years, Chitlang has witnessed a steady transformation in its socio-economic landscape, driven by community-based tourism initiatives such as homestays, agro-tourism, and cultural performances. These initiatives not only align with Nepal's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also represent grassroots efforts to foster inclusive development. Rural tourism in Chitlang now supports a range of employment opportunities, including hospitality services, handicrafts, food and beverage operations, tour guiding, and storytelling, contributing directly to financial, social, and human capital (Richards, 2007; Mitchell & Reid, 2001). Women and youth, once marginalized in the formal economy, have particularly benefited through skills training, entrepreneurship, and employment in hospitality and cultural services (Ashley & Roe, 2002). The increased demand for local products and experiences has also revitalized traditional skills, such as pottery, textile-making, and gastronomy, reinforcing the intrinsic relationship between tourism and cultural preservation (Bessiere, 1998; Everett, 2009). Yet, these developments must be assessed in a nuanced manner that accounts for disparities in benefit distribution, seasonality of employment, and environmental sustainability.

Given these dynamics, this study investigates how tourism initiatives in Chitlang contribute to rural employment and livelihood transformation. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (DFID, 2000), the research critically examines tourism's role in enhancing key livelihood capitals, financial, human, social, natural, and physical, within a constructivist paradigm. Through qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative analysis, the study engages with community voices to assess tourism's impact on employment generation, cultural integrity, and social equity. In doing so, it not only captures the complex and layered realities of rural tourism in Nepal but also provides a contextualized lens for understanding how localized tourism models can inform broader rural development policies. By focusing on Chitlang as a representative case, the study contributes to ongoing debates in tourism geography and sustainable development, offering valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in community-based tourism in South Asia.

Methods and Materials

Selection of study area

Chitlang village in Makwanpur district, near Kathmandu Valley, is a historically significant Newar settlement with rich cultural and archaeological heritage. Inscriptions from the Lichhavi era, such as those at Ganeshtan, indicate connections to King Udaydev and land grants by Amshubarma to shepherds, possibly Gopal dynasty ancestors (Lamichhane et al., 2020). The village hosts diverse ethnic groups, Tamang, Newar, Khas, and Brahmin, each preserving distinct traditions across its former wards. Cultural ties with Kathmandu and Patan are maintained through festivals like Rato Machhendranath Jatra and 'yemba thanegu' (Timalsina, 2021). Recently, tourism and ecotourism have emerged as complementary livelihood strategies alongside subsistence farming, fishing, and homestays. These initiatives aim to boost income while fostering conservation, sustainable resource management, and local participation. Chitlang's historical setting, scenic landscapes, and indigenous culture are key tourism assets. Despite its potential, the area remains underexplored, making it a nationally and internationally relevant site for rural and homestay tourism development.

Location Map of Study Area

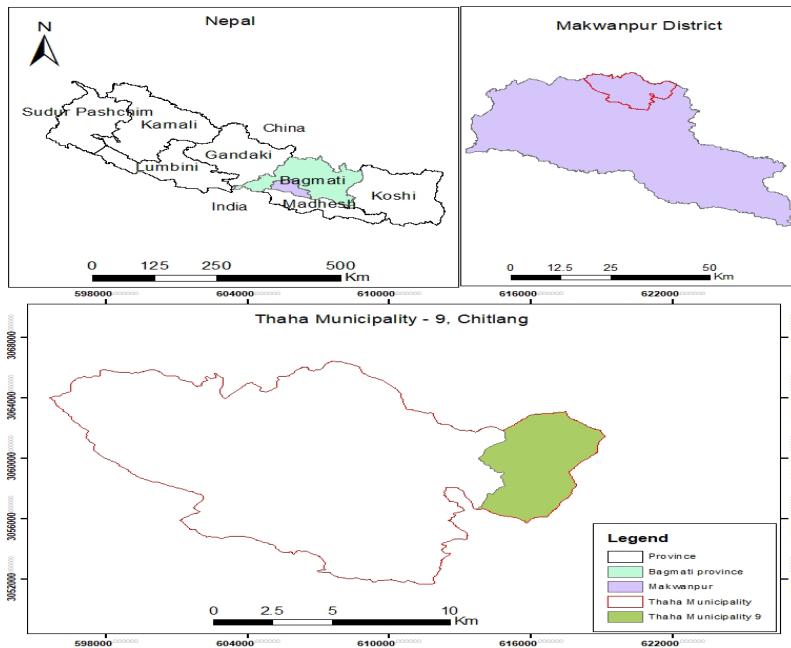


Figure 1. Location map of Chitlang Village

Research design

This study has adopted a constructivist philosophical stance, asserting that reality and knowledge are socially constructed through personal experiences and interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Adom et al., 2016). Within the context of rural tourism in Chitlang village, this paradigm has underscored the subjective and culturally embedded nature of tourism's impact on community livelihoods, shaped by diverse local perceptions (Sapkota & Paudyal, 2021). Emphasizing multiple realities, qualitative methods were employed to co-construct meaning with participants and capture the dynamic implications of tourism (Leavy, 2022). Ontologically, the study views reality as context-dependent and socially interpreted, while epistemologically, it affirms that knowledge arises through social engagement, respecting local values (Draucker et al., 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study utilized purposeful and theoretical sampling to select 46 participants, including tourism-involved households, hoteliers, guides, porters, and non-participant community members (Suri, 2011; Coyne, 1997). Data collection methods have included semi-structured interviews, two focus group discussions (FGDs), three key informant interviews (KIIs), and field observations. Thematic analysis using iterative coding and inductive reasoning was applied. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) and narrative synthesis have guided analysis of capital asset changes. Ethical rigor was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kocaman, 2025), ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and researcher reflexivity.

Results and Discussion

Sense of place and sense of attachment

Tuan (1979) introduced the concepts of “sense of place” and “sense of attachment” in human geography, emphasizing the emotional and experiential connections people form with specific locations. In the context of Chitlang, these concepts are vividly illustrated through the work of local guides. Naresh and his peers serve as cultural interpreters who bridge the gap between visitors and the community. Their storytelling and interpretation transform landscapes and landmarks into sites of significance, fostering a “sense of place” that resonates with tourists on both emotional and intellectual levels. Similarly, Tuan’s notion of “sense of attachment” is also evident in their journey. Their deep-rooted connection to Chitlang reflects their identity and pride in the region’s cultural and natural heritage. By actively participating in cultural and environmental preservation, they exemplify how attachment to a place can be strengthened through meaningful engagement. Their role as stewards of ecological and cultural integrity inspires tourists to appreciate and respect these unique attributes.

Together, the concepts of “sense of place” and “sense of attachment” demonstrate how the intrinsic connections locals have with their environment can be influenced to create transformative tourism experiences. These ideas highlight the dual benefits of rural tourism, such as enriching the lives of local communities and providing visitors with meaningful and memorable encounters with culture and nature.

Major tourism products of Chitlang

The study reveals that Chitlang's diverse tourism products significantly support local livelihoods, infrastructure, and cultural preservation. These offerings (Table 1) integrate nature, tradition, and community engagement, strengthening financial, social, human, and natural capital in alignment with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF).

Table 1. *Tourism products of Chitlang*

Tourism Product	Description
Homestay and hospitality services	Chitlang offers eco-friendly homestays and small hotels, allowing tourists to experience local hospitality. These services provide direct employment to locals, especially women, and enhance community participation in tourism.
Agro-tourism	Tourists engage in agricultural activities like harvesting and livestock care, leveraging the village's strong farming base. This product promotes rural-urban linkages, encourages sustainable farming, and diversifies household income sources.
Cultural tourism	Includes traditional Newari and multi-ethnic festivals, rituals, dances, and local heritage tours. Reviving local culture fosters pride among residents but requires careful management to avoid cultural commodification.
Souvenirs and handicrafts	Locals produce and sell traditional crafts and souvenirs to visitors. Encourages preservation of traditional skills and offers entrepreneurial opportunities to artisans and youth.

Natural attractions and eco-tourism	Tourists visit scenic landscapes, forests, and Indrasarowar Lake for recreation and eco-tourism experiences. Promotes environmental awareness and conservation but requires sustainable waste and resource management.
Tour guiding and cultural interpretation	Local guides provide storytelling and cultural interpretation for tourists. Enhances the quality of tourist experiences while providing income and preserving intangible cultural heritage.

Source: Field survey, 2023

Rural tourism initiatives

The study identified key tourism livelihood activities in Chitlang village. Among 21 respondents, 33.3% were engaged in informal employment, 28.6% in formal tourism-related work, 19% in cultural entertainment and community tourism, 14.3% in souvenir sales, and 4.8% in cultural tours, reflecting diverse tourism-based engagements. Cultural tours are underutilized in Chitlang, with only 4.8% participation, indicating a need to promote such initiatives to diversify tourism and enhance local engagement.

Employment opportunities in rural tourism in Chitlang

Rural tourism has become a vital force for economic growth in Chitlang, creating diverse employment opportunities. Thematic analysis of local narratives (Table 3) highlights growing awareness of agro-tourism potential, supported by agriculture, government training, and hospitality industry efforts. This has led to jobs in hotels, homestays, and agro-tourism, though roles in tour guiding and cultural interpretation remain comparatively limited.

Table 2. *Employment opportunities*

	Opportunities (n=46)	Content repetition in narratives
1	Hospitality and accommodation	26
2	Tour guides and cultural interpreters	24
3	Local artisans and craftsmen	11
4	Food and beverage services	22
5	Agricultural tourism (Agri-tourism)	31

Source: Field survey, 2023

Hospitality and accommodation

The hospitality sector is a key beneficiary of rural tourism, generating employment in roles such as receptionists, housekeepers, chefs, and managers. Studies by Sharpley and Roberts (2004), Lane (1994), and Komppula (2007) emphasize its importance in sustaining rural economies and creating jobs. In Chitlang, local hotels and homestays emerged as major employers, particularly for women. Field data from 2023 revealed over 50 new jobs in hospitality for young graduates. Table 3 shows that hospitality training programs significantly improved participants' professional skills and livelihoods, offering training in customer service, communication, and basic hotel management.

The hospitality and accommodation training programs in Chitlang have significantly enhanced local livelihoods, as shown in Table 3. All participants reported the training as a career turning point, gaining skills in customer service, communication, and hotel management. Neelima's transition from unemployment to hotel receptionist underscores tourism's transformative impact, offering personal and financial growth through government-supported training. Similarly, Sunita's journey from subsistence farming to a supervisory hospitality role illustrates rural tourism's potential, particularly for women. Starting with no experience, she progressed rapidly, improving her family's financial condition and supporting her siblings' education. The homestay's focus on local sourcing has further strengthened Chitlang's economy, demonstrating how tourism fosters inclusive development and long-term sustainability within the village community.

Table 3. *Skill development through training*

Learning through training on hospitality and accommodation (n=46)		
1	Essential skills in hospitality management	32
2	Financial impact	26
3	Joy of interaction	36
4	Continuous learning and professional development	27
5	Language (basic English)	13
6	Enhance computer skills	11

Source: Field survey, 2023

Tour guides and cultural interpreters

Rural tourism relies on knowledgeable tour guides and cultural interpreters to enhance visitor experiences through local heritage and natural beauty (Lane, 1994). Weiler and Black (2015) highlight guides' roles in connecting tourists with local cultures, while

Cohen (1988) stresses interpretation's importance. Study participants emphasized storytelling and local knowledge as essential for authentic, immersive tourism, supported by Chitlang's training program data.

Table 4. *Learning through training*

Learning through training related to tour guides and cultural interpreters (n=46)		
1	Local knowledge enhancement (IK)	11
2	Improve storytelling skills	12
3	Knowledge of local flora and fauna	23
4	Skill development as cultural interpreters	21
5	Improve skills in customer service	26

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 4 and narratives reveal the transformative impact of rural tourism on individuals like Naresh and Laxman. Laxman, a local graduate, shifted from farming to tour guiding, utilizing his flora and fauna knowledge despite challenges in learning new skills. Naresh, formerly a farmer, overcame financial hardship through structured training, developing storytelling, language, and customer service skills. Both embody environmental stewardship and cultural pride, enriching visitor experiences and enhancing local heritage appreciation.

Local artisans and craftsmen

The rise of rural tourism has significantly boosted demand for local crafts and souvenirs, revitalizing traditional skills and generating sustainable employment for artisans. Scholars like Long and Lane (2000) and Richards (2007) underscore cultural products as central to rural tourism, enhancing economic benefits and tourist experiences. Interviews in Chitlang confirm tourism's role in income generation and craftsmanship preservation. Additionally, increased demand for local goods fosters cultural identity and sustainable resource use, reinforcing tourism's transformative socio-cultural and economic impact.

Table 5. *Village tourism initiation*

Village tourism initiatives (n=46)		
1	Revitalized traditional crafts (renewed interest in traditional pottery techniques among the young)	11
2	Demand for authentic, locally made souvenirs	20
3	Income generation/sustainable economic benefits	22
4	Preserving traditional techniques	27
5	Life change	31
6	Employ others	30

Source: Field survey, 2023

Tourism has reinvigorated traditional crafts such as pottery in Chitlang, especially among the younger generation, ensuring their continuity. The growing influx of tourists has created a robust market for locally crafted souvenirs, increasing demand for handmade products that reflect the village's cultural heritage. This shift has provided sustainable economic opportunities, uplifting the community's financial status. Tourism has also encouraged the preservation of traditional crafting techniques, which might have otherwise declined due to modernization or disinterest. Many locals report transformative experiences, citing improved livelihoods, skill enhancement, and new career paths. In Chitlang, tourism not only generates direct employment for artisans and service providers but also stimulates additional jobs in souvenir production, tourism management, and hospitality, benefiting the wider community. These outcomes demonstrate how rural tourism catalyzes cultural preservation, economic resilience, and social transformation. Artisans like Jogman, a potter, experienced renewed demand for traditional crafts, reviving his struggling business and enabling income stability through tourism. He found joy in innovating while preserving traditional techniques and sharing stories with tourists, enhancing their cultural engagement. Similarly, Sanomaya, whose pottery once offered minimal income, now sells in Chitlang and Kathmandu Valley, earning over NPR 250,000 annually. Her success allowed her to expand operations and employ fellow villagers, fostering intergenerational interest in the craft. In-depth interviews revealed that increased earnings from tourism enabled artisans to invest in better tools, education, and improved livelihoods. Anjali's narrative further reinforced tourism's role in preserving cultural crafts and sustaining local economies. These cases affirm assertions by Weaver and Lawton (2001), Aas et al. (2005), Hall (2000), and Richards (2007) that cultural products are pivotal to rural tourism, emphasizing the need to support traditional artisanship as a core tourism development strategy.

Food and beverage services

The growth of food and beverage services like restaurants and cafes in tourist spots such as Chitlang has played a vital role in rural socio-economic development by creating jobs. Rural tourism promotes local cuisine, attracting tourists who seek authentic cultural experiences and cultural storytelling (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). These businesses employ many locals as cooks, servers, and managers, boosting income and employment. Scholars like Bessiere (1998) and Everett (2009) highlight that integrating traditional food into tourism strengthens cultural identity and supports sustainable rural growth. Using local ingredients and recipes stimulates agriculture, spreading economic benefits more widely. Thus, food-based tourism supports both the economy and cultural heritage.

The entrepreneurial stories of Dhiraj and Bijaya show rural tourism's impact on Chitlang's culinary revival. Dhiraj's restaurant, famous for local dishes and farmer partnerships, drew tourists and created jobs. Bijaya fulfilled her dream by opening a restaurant featuring traditional cuisine with locally sourced ingredients, which quickly succeeded. She hired and trained community members, especially women, enhancing local skills and employment. The rising demand helped farmers nearby, spreading tourism benefits across the village. Her restaurant became a cultural and economic hub, preserving culinary traditions while reaching a global audience. This example shows how rural tourism can drive economic growth, generate jobs, and preserve culture through food, illustrating inclusive development by blending tradition with sustainable livelihoods.

Agriculture and tourism (Agro-tourism)

Agro-tourism is a niche within rural tourism that offers visitors farm experiences, tours, and direct sales of agricultural products. They also argue that agro-tourism provides farmers with additional revenue streams. Participants in this study who engaged in agro-tourism activities reported increased income and greater interaction with tourists interested in rural lifestyles and organic farming.

Table 6. *Promotion of agriculture and tourism*

Promotion of agriculture and tourism (n=46)		
1	Diversification of farming activities	25
2	Economic empowerment and income generation	36
3	Promotion of local gastronomy and culture	22
4	Employment creation and community development	34
5	Preservation of sustainable practices and cultural heritage	37

Source: Field survey, 2023

Agro-tourism, a subset of rural tourism, offers visitors immersive farm experiences, tours, and direct access to agricultural products, while providing farmers with alternative income sources. In Chitlang, participants engaged in agro-tourism reported increased income, improved tourist interactions, and enhanced cultural exchange. Table 6 illustrates agro-tourism's transformative potential in fostering economic, social, and cultural development. By integrating tourism into farming, individuals like Rajman and Devi diversified their livelihoods. Rajman offers farm tours and produce sales, and Devi leads cooking classes using farm-fresh ingredients. These efforts not only shielded them from market fluctuations but also promoted local gastronomy and cultural preservation. Agro-tourism also generates employment, as Rajman's hiring of locals like Gopal shows. The model fosters sustainable practices, strengthens rural economies, and promotes inclusive development. Chitlang's success stories affirm agro-tourism's role in driving sustainable rural prosperity and preserving cultural landscapes.

Community engagement in tourism-related jobs

The extent of community engagement in tourism-related jobs is influenced by several factors, including skills and training, economic benefits, cultural and social factors, and community support networks (Table 7).

Table 7. *Community engagement in tourism-related activities*

Community engagement in tourism-related jobs (n=46)		
1	Skills and training	26
2	Economic benefits	36
3	Cultural and social factors	23
4	Community support and networks	25

Source: Field survey, 2023

Skills and training for local people

Capacity building is crucial for fair participation and sustainable rural tourism. In Chitlang, training programs have notably enhanced local skills in hospitality, language, and business management. These efforts empower residents to deliver better services, run businesses, and maintain cultural heritage, boosting both income and quality of life. For example, Neelima, once unemployed and working in Kathmandu, gained confidence and hospitality skills through local training, enabling her to become a hotel receptionist in her village and support her family. Likewise, Suman used business management training to open a successful homestay, mastering finance, marketing, and guest services. His achievement motivates others to explore similar ventures, creating

widespread economic and social gains. These stories highlight how targeted training fosters self-reliance and entrepreneurship. Overall, skill development proves essential for improving employment prospects and sustainable tourism in rural areas. Such programs combat unemployment and align local talents with market needs, promoting community-led tourism growth and resilience. Neelima's and Suman's experiences exemplify the powerful impact of strategic training investments in rural tourism development.

Economic benefits

Tourism employment significantly boosts community participation in rural areas by providing steady income, job security, and entrepreneurial opportunities, especially where economic options are limited (Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Ashley & Roe, 2002; Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). Participants in this study reported improved financial stability from tourism jobs, which helped buffer against agricultural risks and enabled investment in education, healthcare, and living conditions. For instance, Ramesh shifted from subsistence farming to running a homestay, generating a reliable income and enhancing agriculture. Meena, a single mother, gained financial independence by selling handmade textiles, improving her children's education. These examples show tourism's role in driving local development.

At the community level, tourism benefits have expanded in Chitlang. Local farmers supply produce to tourism establishments, increasing their income and encouraging sustainability. The tourism multiplier effect is evident as more residents start businesses. Rajesh, previously unemployed, became a seasonal tour guide and farmer, securing a stable income and pursuing further education in tourism, demonstrating opportunities for growth and household stability. Together, these stories highlight how reliable income and entrepreneurship through tourism motivate engagement and foster sustainable rural prosperity.

Cultural and social factors

Cultural attitudes and social structures, especially gender roles, heavily shape community participation in tourism in Chitlang village. Traditional norms divide tasks, with women focusing on housekeeping and crafts while men engage in guiding and agricultural tourism. For example, Sunita shifted from housework to homestay housekeeping, boosting her family's income and supporting her children's education. Rekha transformed her craft skills into a business selling handmade textiles and later formed a women's cooperative, fostering both economic empowerment and community unity. Men like Pratap moved from farming to guiding tourists, using local ecological

knowledge to generate a steady income and help preserve cultural heritage. Kiran combined farming with offering farm tours, improving earnings, investing in tools, and promoting sustainable agriculture. These cases show how gendered roles shape tourism activities women in nurturing and creative areas, men in physically demanding and knowledge-sharing roles reinforcing tradition while encouraging socio-economic progress. This cultural division encourages a complementary tourism approach, with both genders jointly enhancing economic resilience and safeguarding heritage. Their collaboration also enables passing down local knowledge to future generations, ensuring tourism's sustainability. The Chitlang experience highlights that acknowledging and incorporating cultural and social dynamics is essential for inclusive, sustainable community-based tourism. Aligning tourism with traditional roles and local strengths can drive empowerment and development in rural areas.

Impact of rural tourism on socio-cultural dynamics and traditions of Chitlang

Rural tourism in Chitlang has significantly influenced the socio-cultural dynamics and the local traditions. This section explores how rural tourism initiatives have affected the socio-cultural landscape of Chitlang village, incorporating narratives and other empirical information contextualized with the relevant academic references.

Table 8 illustrates that cultural preservation and revitalization are the most frequently reported impacts, suggesting that tourism plays a significant role in revitalizing traditional cultural practices. Cultural commodification and social cohesion follow closely behind, highlighting the dual nature of tourism's impact, both preserving and altering traditions.

Table 8. *Rural tourism and its impact on socio-culture and traditions*

Impact of rural tourism on socio-culture and traditions (n=46)		
1	Cultural preservation and revitalization	37
2	Cultural commodification	33
3	Social cohesion and community identity	31
4	Gender roles and empowerment	30
5	Intergenerational dynamics	27

Source: Field survey, 2023

Gender roles and empowerment have also been positively influenced, with a relatively high frequency of responses, indicating that tourism is contributing to shifts in gender dynamics. Intergenerational dynamics, while still important, received the fewest

responses, reflecting a more moderate influence compared to the other factors. This analysis suggests that rural tourism in Chitlang is primarily contributing to cultural revitalization, with notable improvements in social cohesion and gender empowerment.

Cultural preservation and revitalization

Rural tourism serves a dual purpose by helping preserve and revitalize culture through heritage conservation and adapting traditions to attract tourists. In Chitlang village, tourism has sparked renewed interest in traditional music, dance, and festivals like Rato Machhindra Nath Jatra, Kartik Naach, Indra Jatra, and Gai Jatra, which now see higher participation and enthusiasm. Interviews with elders confirm increased festival engagement and funding, while artisans report a 40% rise in traditional craft sales, which encourages youth involvement.

Cultural commodification

Tourism in Chitlang has both revitalized and challenged cultural traditions. While it provides income and promotes heritage, it has also led to concerns over commodification and authenticity. Scholars like Cohen (1988), Spilan (2013), and Smith (2012) highlight how cultural expressions may be altered to suit tourist preferences, diluting their original essence. In Chitlang, residents expressed mixed feelings about this during focus group discussions. Traditional Newari performers, for instance, adapted attire and routines to be more tourist-friendly, sparking debate over cultural integrity. Elderly musician Tirthaman noted a revival of traditional music due to tourism, stating that increased tourist interest encouraged him to teach local youths like Kumal. Kumal, a dancer, expressed internal conflict between preserving authentic dances and adapting them for tourist appeal. However, he acknowledged that tourism inspired him to deepen his cultural knowledge and pursue formal dance training. Similarly, Astaman, a local key informant, emphasized the importance of masked Newari dances and noted that tourism has rejuvenated efforts to preserve such traditions, with Kumal's team playing a key role in cultural conservation.

Social cohesion and community identity

Tourism in Chitlang village has strengthened social cohesion by enhancing communal pride, identity, and unity through activities like heritage site renovation and promotion of local crafts. Interviews, particularly with community leader Sita, revealed that tourism fosters a collective sense of purpose and pride. However, tensions have emerged due to perceived inequalities in the distribution of tourism benefits, such as revenues and job opportunities. Sita emphasized the importance of inclusive policies and equitable

resource sharing to ensure sustained social harmony and mitigate marginalization within the community.

Gender roles and empowerment

Tourism in Chitlang has significantly influenced gender roles by providing women with economic opportunities, promoting gender equality, and challenging traditional norms. Women increasingly engage in tourism-related activities such as managing homestays, selling local products, and handicrafts. For instance, Anita, with her husband Ramesh, launched a homestay business, gaining financial independence and community respect, while also empowering other women. Similarly, Kamala's homestay income enabled her to educate her children and invest in new ventures. These narratives underscore tourism's transformative impact on women's socio-economic empowerment (Table 8).

Intergenerational dynamics

Tourism in Chitlang significantly influences intergenerational relationships by both bridging and challenging generational dynamics. It fosters cultural continuity as elders actively pass down traditional knowledge, such as crafts, music, and storytelling, to the youth, as seen in examples like Sanomaya, Anjali, and Tirthaman. These intergenerational exchanges enhance cultural rootedness, reflecting Yi-Fu Tuan's (1979) notion of attachment to place. However, generational tensions may arise when younger individuals prioritize commercialization over preservation. Rural tourism initiatives have thus shaped the village's socio-cultural landscape in complex ways, supporting cultural preservation, economic upliftment, and social cohesion, while also posing risks of commodification and internal conflicts. Through a constructivist lens, this research captures the layered experiences of community members navigating these socio-cultural transformations.

Rural tourism and livelihoods

To assess rural tourism's impact on Chitlang's local livelihoods, it is vital to examine five key assets: social, financial, human, physical, and natural capital (DFID, 2000; Chambers & Conway, 1992). Stakeholder insights enrich the analysis, revealing how tourism influences these assets in complex ways. Residents reported improved social cohesion, financial gains, and human capital development, yet also expressed concerns over natural resource sustainability and infrastructure strain. Table 9 summarizes these impacts, emphasizing the need for balanced, inclusive, and sustainable tourism strategies.

Table 9. *Livelihood assets and their impact*

Livelihood asset	Impact descriptions	Value
Social capital	Tourism has enhanced community cohesion, collective action, and local collaboration through tourism committees.	8
Financial capital	Rural tourism has increased income, diversified livelihoods, and reduced reliance on traditional agriculture.	7
Human capital	Skill development in hospitality, language, and tourism management, leading to greater confidence and employability.	6
Physical capital	Improved infrastructure (roads, utilities, communication) has facilitated better market access and tourism growth.	7
Natural capital	Tourism has both promoted environmental conservation and posed challenges like resource strain and littering.	5

Source: Field survey, 2023

Rural tourism and its impact on social capital

Social capital encompasses the networks, relationships, trust, and norms that enable collective community action. In Chitlang, rural tourism has markedly strengthened social capital by fostering cohesion and cooperation through community-based tourism committees and cooperatives. These initiatives have unified residents in shared goals such as infrastructure improvement and cultural promotion. As one elder noted, tourism has fostered interaction and cultural pride among villagers. Social capital scored highest (8) among livelihood assets, reflecting enhanced community ties and mutual collaboration. Positive impacts include revitalizing cultural identity (41), strengthening cohesion (37), building networks (33), promoting collective action (32), and encouraging leadership and empowerment (29). However, trust and norms development scored lowest (21), suggesting that while tourism promotes trust, it is not yet deeply rooted.

Despite these benefits, rural tourism has also introduced challenges. The most notable negative impact is conflict over resources (35), followed by unequal benefit distribution (32), highlighting disparities in access to tourism gains. Social stratification (27) indicates rising hierarchies in tourism participation, while cultural commodification

(23) reflects concerns over the authenticity of traditions. Erosion of traditional norms (20) appears less severe but still notable. The data reveals overlapping themes: tourism fosters unity and pride but also brings tension and inequality. While rural tourism in Chitlang significantly enhances social capital by encouraging collaboration and cultural renewal, it also exposes structural vulnerabilities. Addressing issues such as unequal benefits, resource disputes, and cultural commodification is crucial to ensure tourism's long-term sustainability and inclusiveness, allowing it to contribute positively without undermining traditional values or community cohesion.

Rural tourism and its impact on financial capital

Financial capital refers to the economic resources available to households, including income, savings, and credit. In Chitlang, rural tourism has notably enhanced financial capital by creating new income streams through homestays, handicrafts, and local food sales. A local homestay owner noted that tourism provides a steady income, enabling investments in education and future savings. This shift has reduced reliance on traditional agriculture, offering substantial economic benefits with a value rating of 7. Tourism-related businesses, such as guiding services and local crafts, have diversified household incomes. According to Job creation and preservation of rural culture and heritage are the most frequently cited benefits (40 mentions each), followed by income diversification (37), improved living standards (36), and new market opportunities (31). Although the reduction of poverty (26) is less mentioned, it remains a key long-term benefit of rural tourism.

Conversely, rural tourism in Chitlang presents notable challenges. The most cited issues include employment seasonality (33 mentions) and poor job quality (31), reflecting the unstable nature of tourism-based work. Overreliance on tourism (27) underscores the vulnerability of rural economies, while the invasion of outsiders (14) signals potential threats to cultural integrity. A comparison of positive and negative impacts reveals a duality in job creation, contrasted with job instability, and cultural preservation conflicts with cultural disruption. While tourism fosters income diversification and market emergence, it also risks economic fragility. Ultimately, rural tourism's dual-edged nature calls for sustainable practices and broader economic diversification to enhance benefits and mitigate adverse effects.

Rural tourism and its impact on human capital

Human capital encompasses the skills, knowledge, education, and health that enhance individuals' livelihood potential and overall well-being. In Chitlang, rural tourism has moderately impacted human capital (value: 6), primarily through skill development.

A young guide shared his transition from farming to tourism after receiving training, highlighting improved communication, confidence, and global exposure. Such narratives, repeated 37 times in the study, reflect tourism's contribution to enhancing hospitality, language, and tourism management skills. Local government training programs have empowered residents, particularly youth, making them more competitive in the tourism market. Despite these advancements, the moderate score indicates a continued need for more inclusive capacity-building efforts.

Training programs in hospitality, language, and tourism management have enabled Chitlang residents to shift from traditional livelihoods to more profitable careers, enhancing personal competencies and contributing to community-wide economic advancement. Economic mobility, referenced 34 times in narratives, emerged as a notable benefit, with tourism-related jobs improving incomes and living standards. Increased confidence and communication skills, cited 29 times, stem from interactions with diverse tourists and participation in training, particularly empowering youth. Educational and capacity-building initiatives, noted 27 times, offer valuable opportunities, although their limited accessibility underscores the need for more inclusive outreach. Despite these gains, tourism's rise has also brought challenges to human capital development. Traditional knowledge erosion, mentioned by 28 respondents, reflects a cultural loss due to modern skill prioritization. Limited access to training, reported by 27 individuals, especially affects marginalized groups, reinforcing inequalities. Uneven benefit distribution, cited 24 times, reveals social disparity, with some excluded from opportunities. Additionally, 22 respondents expressed concern over reliance on tourism-specific skills, which heightens vulnerability to economic downturns. These findings underscore tourism's dual impact, echoing Leiper's (1979) model of socio-economic transformation and Butler's (1980) caution on developmental consequences.

Rural tourism and its impact on physical capital

The development of tourism infrastructure in Chitlang, such as improved roads, electricity, and communication networks, has significantly strengthened physical capital, benefiting both tourism and local livelihoods. A local business owner highlighted that better roads have increased tourist visits and eased daily life. Rated 7, these infrastructural improvements have enhanced market access, healthcare, and education, making the village more accessible, livable, and economically vibrant.

Rural tourism has substantially shaped the physical capital of Chitlang, yielding both positive and negative consequences. Notable benefits include infrastructure improvement (41), such as better roads, electricity, and communication networks, which have enhanced

access to healthcare, education, and overall livability for both residents and tourists. Market access (39) has also improved, allowing local businesses to expand and benefit economically from the influx of visitors. Livelihood diversification (34) shows a shift from agriculture to tourism-based employment like hospitality and guiding, fostering economic resilience. The facilitation of tourism activities (28) further illustrates how improved infrastructure enhances visitor experiences, reinforcing Chitlang's appeal as a rural tourism destination. Additionally, improved infrastructure and income opportunities have elevated the quality of life (35) for residents. Despite these advancements, rural tourism presents several critical challenges. Environmental degradation (21), caused by infrastructure expansion and increased tourist activity, threatens sustainability through deforestation and waste issues. Dependence on tourism infrastructure (25) exposes the community to economic instability amid tourist fluctuations. Uneven development (20) reflects infrastructure disparities that deepen community inequalities, while the loss of traditional aesthetics (20) highlights cultural erosion linked to modernization. Lastly, strain on local resources (19) from competing demands between tourists and residents has led to shortages in water and electricity, impacting community well-being. Thus, while rural tourism has strengthened Chitlang's physical capital and economy, it also necessitates balanced, sustainable management to mitigate its adverse impacts and preserve long-term viability.

Rural tourism and its impact on natural capital

Natural capital encompasses essential environmental resources like land, water, forests, and biodiversity. In Chitlang, tourism has heightened environmental awareness, prompting community clean-up efforts and tree planting. However, increased tourist activity has strained water sources and introduced litter, raising concerns about environmental degradation. Despite conservation initiatives, tourism's impact remains dual, fostering ecological stewardship while simultaneously threatening sustainability. With a low value of 5, natural capital reflects the ongoing tension between preservation and resource pressure, highlighting the urgent need for more sustainable tourism practices to safeguard Chitlang's environmental assets.

Comprehensive overview of the dual impacts of eco-tourism and environmental conservation on local communities and ecosystems, emphasizing both positive and negative consequences in the rural tourism context. The most notable positive effect is the promotion of eco-tourism and sustainable practices (27), highlighting its central role in encouraging environmentally responsible tourism. This is followed by increased environmental awareness and conservation efforts (22), suggesting that tourism can educate the public on the importance of protecting natural resources. Tourism also

adds value to natural beauty (21), offering economic incentives to maintain scenic landscapes, while community collaboration for conservation (19) underscores the role of partnerships among stakeholders. Additionally, economic incentives for natural resource preservation (11) reflect how financial gains from tourism can drive conservation. However, the negative impacts are also significant, with waste management challenges (30) representing the most critical issue due to high tourist volumes. Over-reliance on natural resources (27) and environmental degradation (17) reveal the strain tourism places on local ecosystems. Habitat disruption and biodiversity loss (19), along with conflicts between conservation and development (13), further illustrate the complexities of rural tourism. These findings call for balanced, sustainable tourism policies to ensure environmental integrity and community well-being.

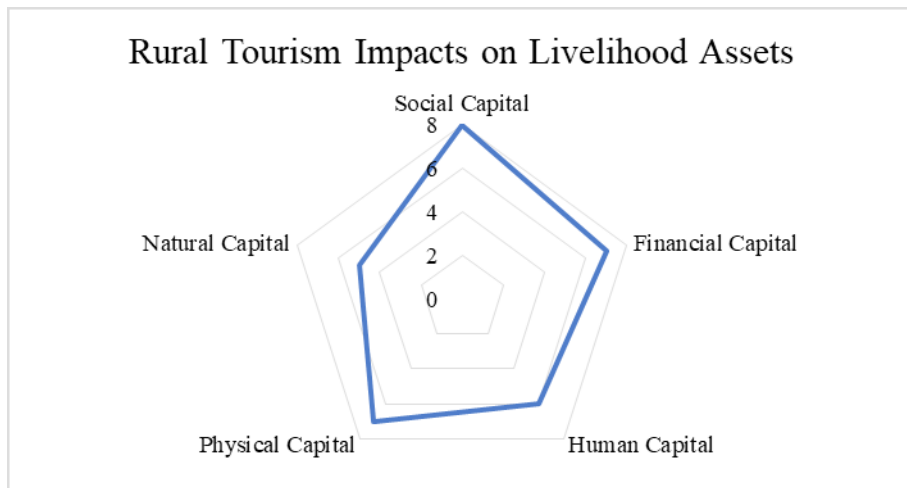


Figure 1. *Rural tourism impacts livelihood assets*

The diagram reflects a generally positive impact of rural tourism on livelihood assets, with social and financial capital being the most positively affected in Chitlang. However, the relatively lower score for natural capital highlights the need for ongoing efforts to balance tourism growth with environmental sustainability. This balanced approach will ensure that tourism continues to enhance livelihoods without compromising the village's natural resources and long-term viability.

Conclusion

This study illuminated the multifaceted role of rural tourism in transforming the socio-economic and cultural fabric of Chitlang village, Makwanpur. Tourism initiatives have

significantly enhanced livelihood opportunities by strengthening social, financial, human, and physical capital. Employment generation in hospitality, agro-tourism, cultural interpretation, and artisanal production demonstrates how tourism supports economic diversification and uplifts marginalized groups. The narratives of locals illustrate tourism's transformative potential in promoting gender empowerment, cultural preservation, and community cohesion. Moreover, tourism has spurred infrastructure development, improved skillsets, and encouraged entrepreneurial ventures, contributing to the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, tourism's benefits are not uniformly distributed. The persistence of informal, seasonal jobs, unequal access to training, and structural inequities, especially regarding gender, caste, and education, highlight areas requiring targeted intervention. Furthermore, the degradation of natural capital, waste management challenges, and the commodification of culture signal a need for more sustainable and inclusive practices. While tourism has positively influenced social and financial assets, its impact on natural capital remains problematic, demanding policy frameworks that balance development with conservation.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the resilience of tourism-linked livelihoods in the face of external shocks, such as pandemics or climate change. Comparative research between rural destinations in Nepal and other South Asian contexts can provide cross-cultural insights into community-based tourism models. There is also a need to explore digital and geospatial technologies in enhancing rural tourism planning and marketing. Lastly, participatory action research that engages community members in co-developing inclusive tourism policies will ensure equitable benefit distribution. Such research can inform adaptive strategies that align with local values and ecological sustainability, securing long-term prosperity for rural communities like Chitlang within Nepal's evolving tourism landscape.

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