

Review Article

# Homestay Tourism As A Pathway To Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): A Comprehensive Review Of Effective Implementation In Developing Countries.

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## Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected goals adopted by the United Nations to address the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The primary objective of the SDGs is global prosperity, with "No Poverty" being the first goal. While several studies have identified issues such as climate change as contributors to poverty, increasing employment opportunities is widely regarded as a key solution to achieving the "No Poverty" goal. In this context, the UN has proposed tourism as a potential livelihood opportunity for all. However, large-scale infrastructure development for tourism poses a threat to regional biodiversity and erodes traditional cultural values, raising concerns that "tourism kills tourism." In response, various countries have introduced alternative forms of tourism. In India, the government has encouraged *homestays* through various schemes. This alternative form of tourism provides an ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable solution, aligned with the SDGs. Therefore, this study reviews existing literature and explores how homestay tourism contributes to achieving the SDGs. The findings suggest that the SDGs cannot be achieved merely by launching numerous schemes; success can only be realized through effective implementation at the grassroots level. The study primarily explores that making the local involvement in *homestay* tourism on rural would pave path to achieve all other SDGs. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of leveraging communication capital to promote sustainable livelihoods.

**Keywords** : community partnership, campaign and cognitive development, development communication, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable tourism, homestay.

## INTRODUCTION

Environmental disruptions' are not a matter to be discussed in any specific locality or even a country; they are a trans-boundary issue that triggered the need for an international treaty. In this context, the United Nations emphasized the importance of individual countries' commitments to environmental protection and developed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These consist of 17 goals and 169 targets, designed to address the needs of future generations. It set targets for countries to achieve within their own boundaries. The SDGs emphasize the need for each country to take action to eliminate poverty, mitigate climate change, and safeguard natural resources for future generations. SDGs provide a framework for promoting

policies that balance economic, social, and environmental conservation.

Several researchers have pointed out that radical developments aimed at economic benefits adversely affect various ecosystems and the climate (Caprotti, 2014; Albugami et al., 2024). These growing issues are significantly impacting agriculture and the livelihoods dependent on it. This has increased the gap between the rich and the poor and has raised concerns about food security. In this regard, the United Nations advocates for sustainable livelihoods as a means of ensuring social security.

Ecologists have asserted that environmental deterioration occurring in a local area should not be confined to that locality alone, as its consequences are felt globally. As climate change affects rural livelihoods and socio-culture, Matovu

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et al. (2024) suggests for employment opportunities that directly connected with local socio-culture and ensuring environmental conservation.

### Tourism

In this line, tourism is considered as economic powerhouse by several nations. But, the mass tourism induces extensive physical infrastructure growth unbalances the environment and socio-economic situation of the destination and spoils the aesthetic appeal of the land itself (Tao and Wall, 2009). Tourism development should balance natural, physical, social and economic factors; otherwise, the destination area is degraded and consequently, no longer attractive to tourists. Hence, it can be said that tourism sows its seeds for destruction, and tourism can kill tourism (Glasson et al., 1995). As a remedy, the locals have to be empowered to be involved in the tourism industry.

Shoo and Songorwa (2013) argued that no one from the other region would have knowledge and passionate towards conserving their own land. Therefore, the natural conservation would not succeed unless the local community benefits economically. Akash & Aram (2022) cited that environmental communication can be applied effectively through environmental conservation practices. Sustainable communication balances a vital role in encouraging the locals to involve in tourism businesses, and foster tourists on the importance of conserving natural resources for the sake of present and future generations (Fuchs, 2008; Tiago et al., 2021). Environmentalists have outlined the need to promote sustainable tourism, which focuses on raising awareness regarding the conservation of the natural environment and maintaining cultural identity and the well-being of local people (Atun et al., 2018).

Albugami et al. (2024) asserted that livelihoods should improve the living conditions of both current and future generations by maintaining and enhancing assets and capabilities, without compromising the natural resource base for the future. In this context, the Government of India is also launching several policies to encourage locals to engage in tourism-related livelihoods. In this scenario, this study suggests encouraging local participation in *homestay tourism* would act as tool for sustainable livelihood that would support the achievement of all the SDGs.

Basically, the tourism industry depends on a destination's weather conditions and biodiversity. Tourism has become a significant aspect of human experience, driven by diverse motivations such as leisure, family bonding, nature exploration, and socio-cultural experiences. However, tourists are increasingly seeking authentic, real-time experiences and cultural knowledge. Travel often fosters cognitive development through exposure to biodiversity, culture, and heritage. In today's competitive world, tourism

has also become a branded business, with travel agencies launching various themes to attract tourists as customers.

### Homestay tourism

The concept of homestay tourism has been present since the early 1970s, as a way to promote cultural exchange and economic development. However, it gained popularity in research and practice in the late 1990s as part of efforts to encourage sustainable tourism aimed at empowering agriculture and preserving unique traditional cultures in rural areas. In response to growing concerns about environmental and social issues in tourist destinations, several organizations, including the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), have advocated for sustainable tourism practices like rural tourism, homestays, highlighting their potential to support sustainable development, preserve local culture, and empower communities.

Today, the concept of homestay tourism is connected in various forms, including cultural homestays, agri-tourism, farm stays, and cottage tourism. This provides travellers with the opportunity to engage directly with local communities, experience authentic local cultures and environments, and enjoy a sense of novelty. In line with sustainability, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is viewed as an integration of the rural environment, as well as natural, cultural, economic, and human experiences (Dangi & Jamal 2016).

In general, a homestay refers to accommodation provided to visitors by a residence owned by a local family, rather than in hotels or resorts. Visitors are also offered homemade food and the opportunity to engage with local culture and customs, experiencing the local way of life (Kulshreshtha & Kulshreshtha, 2019; Kuhzady et al., 2020; PIB, 2016). By facilitating visitors' stays with local residents, homestays offer authentic socio-cultural experiences, appealing to those seeking novelty, personalized service, and social interactions. This alternative form of tourism provides an ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable solution, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the digital era, such rural tourism offers children real-time experiences that strengthen family bonds among digital-native children (Priya & Maheswari, 2023).

Wang and Tziamalis (2023) suggest that homestays directly benefit local families economically, with the financial gains circulating within the region, improving living standards and the accumulation of human capital. However, earlier, 'homestays' were not directly linked to sustainability. Early homestays, often referred to as independent motels in Japan, primarily provided accommodation with breakfast for travellers. Some studies suggest that the concept of homestay tourism evolved from second-home tourism (Jaakson, 1986), where wealthy nobles, owned second residences in rural or

hilly areas. These owners would spend time and money in these regions, enjoying the natural environment and inviting friends and relatives to experience the local food and culture. This type of tourism, driven by seasonal mobility, had a significant multiplier effect on the local economy, contributing to the region's economic growth (Khan et al., 2020). It also enhanced the economic, social, and physical infrastructure of local communities.

Over time, the financial benefits and the emphasis on authentic cultural experiences in rural areas prompted policymakers to promote rural tourism as a model for sustainable practices. This led to the commercialization of private residences for profit, giving rise to the concept of homestays. The idea was incorporated by tourism and sustainability researchers, and the UNWTO encouraged its adoption in several countries. With the unique indigenous cultures, nature-based attractions, and favorable weather conditions, local communities in countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Costa Rica were encouraged to promote tourism for both economic betterment and employment opportunities (Sharma & Thapar, 2016).

However, several studies have criticized the improper implementation of sustainable tourism practices and their adverse effects. These studies highlight the challenges in implementing sustainable tourism and point out that rural empowerment schemes often remain only on paper, rather than being implemented in needy communities (Hiltunen, 2007). Such activities consequences the degradation of fragile ecosystems, the centralization of the economy, economic instability, cultural imperialism, and have negatively affected indigenous communities.

Habitat loss and species extinction in aquatic systems have been identified as major issues caused by tourism in Trindade and Praia Grande, Brazil (Lopes et al., 2015). Similar challenges have been reported in Kerala's aquatic tourism (Akash & Aram, 2018). Rapid tourism development has forced indigenous people to leave their ancestral farmlands in search of alternative livelihoods. Rural communities that depend on nature and environmental services for food security, livestock feeding, and fertile agricultural soil are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts (Daw et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2014; Akash & Aram, 2022).

Tourists usually visit destinations for their unique biodiversity, but if the biodiversity of the destinations were spoiled, tourists remove them from their travel wish lists, negatively impacting residents who rely on tourism for their livelihoods. Furthermore, tourism experts have opined that —protected areas need tourism, and —tourism needs protected areas. Thus, tourism is considered a critical component in the establishment and management of protected areas.

Global agencies, such as UNESCO, have identified lands with unique biophysical and ecological features as biological hotspots to safeguard and have notified governments. The

Western Ghats in India was identified as one such hotspot, prompting the Government of India to appoint committees to frame policy guidelines for its protection.

The Gadgil Committee report (2011) and the Kasturirangan Committee report (2013) both highlighted that the frequent occurrence of natural disasters like land sliding and flooding in Kerala is largely due to unplanned tourism development, including the construction of multi-storey resorts, excessive hill cutting, and other damaging activities. Gadgil's key recommendation to promote community-based, eco-sensitive tourism at the grassroots level was not implemented, owing to the interests of corporate tourist resort owners. Both reports proposed several measures for the conservation of the fragile Western Ghats ecosystem. Following the recent devastating landslide in Wayanad, Gadgil criticised the state government for failing to adhere to guidelines intended to prevent such disasters, especially in the context of climate change. He further pointed to the rejection of the committee's recommendations as a major factor contributing to the disaster (The Hindu, July 31, 2024).

It is evident that numerous environmentalists have advocated for the promotion of homestay tourism as an alternative to large tourism resorts in India. This article reviews the literature to identify which SDGs are directly influencing homestay tourism. The study also aims to explore the underlying factors contributing to the limited success of sustainable tourism policies in India.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the need for the Community Based Tourism (CBT) promotion in India.
2. To assess how homestay tourism helps achieve SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) by improving access to resources, services, and opportunities for disadvantaged communities.
3. To identify the existing literature on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that directly influence homestay tourism.
4. To evaluate the broader effects of homestay tourism on achieving other interconnected SDGs, while focusing on the achievement of SDG 10.
5. To understand challenges and opportunities in homestay tourism
6. Develop awareness model to minimise the negative impact of coastal tourism on the environment

## METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative research methodology to gather secondary data from various sources, including journal articles, books, newspaper reports on SDGs, government

policy documents, and environmental commission reports. The study adopts the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) to assess the impact of homestay tourism on the natural, economic, physical, and socio-cultural aspects, highlighting the interconnections between tourism and sustainable development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Homestay tourism has emerged as a significant component of sustainable tourism, offering a unique opportunity to advance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a subset of rural tourism, it is promoted in India to support sustainable livelihoods and foster cultural exchange. By integrating local communities into the tourism value chain, homestays help preserve traditional lifestyles and generate income, particularly in rural and underdeveloped regions. This approach contributes to poverty alleviation, gender empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding, aligning closely with the SDGs' goals of inclusivity and sustainability. Numerous studies highlight tourism's direct contribution in achieving SDGs 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 13, focusing on poverty reduction, gender equality, decent work, and infrastructure development. This paper reviews the literature on the relationship between homestay tourism and the SDGs, emphasizing its economic, social, and environmental contributions. While homestay tourism offers several benefits, the article also examines the challenges in its implementation.

### SDG 1: No Poverty

A growing body of literature suggests that rural tourism projects empower local communities by promoting entrepreneurship, creating employment opportunities, and preserving cultural heritage (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Rogerson, 2015). However, critics argue that tourism benefits often bypass local populations, exacerbating poverty. This issue can be mitigated through the direct involvement of locals in tourism (Jayashree & Aram 2019; Akash & Aram, 2022). Mir et al., (2017) conducted a study in the Kashmir Valley and found that rural tourism can help reduce poverty, in line with SDG 1. The study concluded that homestay visitors gained a better understanding of the region's culture, traditions, and natural landscapes compared to those staying in luxury hotels. The study also found that villagers hosting homestays experienced economic improvement, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.

The UNWTO established the Technical Cooperation and Services Programme (TECO) in 2013 to support sustainable development by promoting tourism across countries as a driver of socio-economic growth and poverty alleviation through livelihood opportunities. TECO launched several projects under the Sustainable Tourism- Eliminating Poverty

(ST-EP) initiative, highlighting the role of tourism in poverty reduction, that in the line of SDG 1.

### SDG 5: Gender Equality

As homestay tourism involves hosting in local houses, women gain increased active participation. This provides them with an independent income source, enhancing financial autonomy and improving their social status through tourism-driven livelihoods (Rao, 2018; Yaja et al., 2023; Bansal et al., 2024). To promote homestays, the government of India has introduced schemes and capacity-building programs that provide women with training in business, language skills, and hospitality to help them manage homestays effectively (Kulshreshtha & Kulshreshtha, 2019). These initiatives enable women to interact with tourists from diverse regions (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013), boosting their confidence and equipping them with the skills to handle internet and banking tasks independently. This self-reliance fosters a sense of equality within their families (Priya & Maheswari, 2023), expands their opportunities in other areas, and empowers them to advocate for gender equality. Flabbi et al. (2018) and Russen et al. (2021) mentioned that female entrepreneurs are more commonly found in tourism than other industries. Tiwari (2023) noted that homestay tourism empowered women to take legal action against domestic violence and provided support to those suffering in silence due to social stigma.

### SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The International Labour Organization (ILO 2005) summarised the accessibility of job opportunities to all as the only solution to wipeout poverty. UNO (2007) pinned that for the poor, 'labour opportunities and capacity to work' are the assets that the poor can use to improve their wellbeing.

Homestay tourism, as a form of community-based tourism, offers local communities the opportunity to engage with the global tourism industry. By providing lodging and experiences focused on local food, home accommodation, culture, and heritage, homestays facilitate cultural exchanges between tourists and locals (Mason 2016; Manzoor et al. 2019). They also enable tour guiding services and the direct marketing of local crafts and agricultural products. This stimulates the local economy, with financial benefits circulating within the region and creates multiplier effect that fosters rural development (Hangoma & Surgey, 2019; Khan et al., 2020). Thus, the homestay tourism concept aligns with SDG 8, as it directly provides decent work and economic growth for rural communities.

Kumar et al. (2022) asserts that direct community participation in homestay tourism raises environmental consciousness and provides economic benefits for local governments. This enables local governments to invest more in rural infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, and roads.

Yaja et al. (2023) highlighted that homestay tourism can empower women and marginalized rural populations by offering greater access to employment opportunities and fostering financial independence. Financial independence enables women to make decisions within the family and ensures equal opportunities and fair working conditions for all. Flabbi et al. (2018) and Russen et al. (2021) highlighted that females secure better job opportunities with higher wages in the tourism industry compared to other sectors.

Sustainable tourism certifications and fair labour practices have improved working conditions and promoted entrepreneurship (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Gössling 2017). Akash & Aram (2022) reported that communication is a key factor for sustainable livelihoods, which can be strengthened through direct involvement in tourism-related activities. The study also emphasized the importance of access to communication capital for attaining all other assets required for sustainable livelihoods.

From the literature, it can be inferred that the implementation of homestays provides several livelihood opportunities and plays a significant role in reducing the migration of the local population to cities in search of employment. This, in turn, helps rural areas develop innovative and sustainable industries, as well as infrastructure comparable to that of cities. This dual impact aligns with SDG 8 and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Bansal et al., 2024).

Becken, Frampton, and Simmons (2001) indicated that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a hotel were as high as 155 MJ per visitor per night. Lower-level accommodation such as a youth hostel had considerably lower values: 39 MJ per visitor per night. This indicates that the potential CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are greater for higher-level hotels. Warnken et al. (2005) and Gössling (2017) asserted that energy use per person per night is higher in hotels with higher service quality and greater consumption.

### **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**

As compared to other forms of tourism, homestay tourism is more connected to the SDGs (UNWTO). While most forms of tourism focus on economic advancement, the homestay tourism offers opportunities for sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure development align with SDG9. Homestay tourism supports sustainable infrastructure development through community-led innovations, eco-friendly infrastructure, sustainable transport and rural development (Kumar et al., 2022; Gössling 2017).

Pasanchay & Schott (2021) used the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) to assess Natural, Human, Physical, Social, and Financial capitals as the outcomes of homestays. The study identified Natural capital as the most crucial capital for tourist attraction. It also highlighted that homestays are innovative, sustainable infrastructure that aligns with SDG 9. To reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in tourism destinations, it is recommended to install renewable energy sources such as

solar panels, thermal cookers, biogas plants, and LED bulbs. Additionally, energy consumption from ACs and fans can be reduced by insulating homes with materials that trap heat or enhance cooling, lowering the need for heating or cooling. The use of these renewables in tourism destinations supports the achievement of SDG 9.

Constructing large dormitories instead of individual rooms helps accommodate more guests per room and enhances energy efficiency, effectively reducing hotel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions without decreasing the total number of guests (Tsai et al., 2014).

### **SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities within and among countries**

Inequality within populations limits access to essential resources such as health, clean water, sanitation, quality education, and decent job opportunities. Economic inequality results in poorer health outcomes, limited employment, and fewer educational accesses (Knowles, 2005; Lillard et al., 2015). It also fosters discrimination, which may push marginalized individuals into criminal activities, further burdening society.

Hossen and Khondker (2020) highlighted that in India, inequalities are primarily observed in access to opportunities, income, gender, and region, with these disparities being disproportionately high. Therefore, a country like India, with its diverse culture, languages, and traditions, requires a comprehensive analysis of inequality at various levels. Such analysis is necessary for the government to design and strengthen pro-poor policies that could help reduce crime rates (Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002; Anser et al., 2020; Roy & Roy, 2019; Itskovich & Factor, 2023).

Economists suggest that social security can be extended to all by reducing economic inequality through employment guarantee schemes, aligning with SDG 10 (Roy & Roy, 2019; Kumar et al., 2022).

Several studies have highlighted that lack of access to key SDGs — including SDG 1 (poverty reduction), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (health), SDG 4 (education), and SDG 8 (decent work for all) — worsens inequalities. This, in turn, hampers progress towards achieving SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (Anser et al., 2020; Bansal et al., 2024).

In this context, tourism is seen as a driving force for global peace-building and cultural exchange, with homestays promoted at the local level. Homestay tourism, hosted in local homes, provides women with an independent source of income, enhancing their financial autonomy and social status (Rao, 2018; Yaja et al., 2023). Moreover, involving women and marginalized rural communities in homestay tourism empowers them, fostering active participation in social activities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Flabbi et al., 2018; Russen et al., 2021). This increased social status also improves access to the internet and entrepreneurship programs, further enhancing social security (Priya & Maheswari, 2023),

thus contributing to the reduction of gender inequality in alignment with SDG 5.

Key outcomes include local community participation, the economic multiplier effect, and rural infrastructure development, all of which are enhanced by local involvement in homestay tourism, benefiting everyone and reducing inequalities (Anser et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2022; Yaja et al., 2023).

### **SDG 13: Climate Action**

In the context of sustainable development, the environment, economy, and society have been viewed as the three pillars. However, it is increasingly recognized that environmental conservation forms the very foundation upon which these pillars. Several studies emphasize that, without environmental conservation, both economic growth and social well-being cannot be sustained (Brundtland, 2014; Sachs, 2015; Elder & Olsen, 2019). Therefore, the protection of natural ecosystems and resources is central to achieving sustainability in all its dimensions.

The construction of new accommodations for tourists in destinations leads to higher carbon footprints and requires deforestation and tree cutting. Whereas, accommodating tourists in existing homes helps mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Since homestay tourism is organized in existing homes and utilizes resources rather than constructing hotels and resorts, it reduces the need for new constructions (Roy & Roy 2019; Raihan, 2023; Bansal et al., 2024). This approach of homestay concept helps reduce GHG emissions, particularly CO<sub>2</sub>, which is a major contributor to global climate change.

Homestays serve indigenous food, reducing carbon emissions associated with the long- distance transportation of food products. They also offer the same meals prepared for the family, as outlined in the Indian Government's Homestay Promotion Scheme (Bed & Breakfast Scheme), which helps reduce food wastage compared to buffet systems in large hotels (PIB, 2016). Dolnicar et al., (2020) noted that food waste contributes to 20% of global greenhouse gases. By minimizing waste and promoting responsible management, homestays play a significant role in climate change mitigation and sustainable tourism.

Compared to hotels, homestays foster a stronger connection between visitors and local people. Hosts actively participate in local festivals, customs, traditions, folklore, art, and music, contributing to the preservation of indigenous foods, as outlined in 'Social Practice Theory' (Jayashree & Aram, 2019). This allows visitors to directly experience the effects of climate change in the local region. Travellers can see firsthand how radical developments are impacting the environment and learn how to reduce their carbon footprint locally—information often not communicated even through regional newspapers (Nirmala & Aram, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

Upon reviewing various literature related to SDGs, the tourism industry, sustainable livelihoods, and government policy, it can be concluded that all SDGs are interconnected.

The authors identified that implementing any one SDG can pave the way for the achievement of others. They also found that economic, gender, and urban-rural disparities are key barriers to the achievement of SDGs.

This article primarily examines the role of homestay tourism in achieving SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality). By providing an inclusive platform for marginalized communities to engage in tourism, homestay models help reduce economic, gender, and urban-rural disparities while fostering social inclusion.

By creating income-generating opportunities for local rural families, particularly women, homestays directly contribute to poverty reduction (SDG 1) and promote gender equality (SDG 5). Additionally, the development of rural infrastructure and local industries (SDG 9) strengthens the economic resilience of these areas. As employment opportunities increase, there is a direct link to SDG 8, which promotes decent work and economic growth, thereby reducing inequalities.

Furthermore, homestay tourism aligns with SDG 13, focusing on climate action, by encouraging sustainable practices. Overall, promoting homestay tourism not only strengthens the local economy but also serves as a tool for greater equality, helping to narrow rural-urban inequalities, gender disparities, and employed-unemployed disparities, and supporting the maximization of positive impacts on SDG 10 at various levels. Even though homestays are directly connected with SDGs 1, 5, 9, 10, and 13, they further support the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Education for All), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

This paper highlights the interconnectedness of the SDGs in the context of homestay tourism, suggesting that promoting such inclusive models can be a strategic approach to reducing grassroots-level inequalities, in line with SDG 10. The potential of homestay tourism to contribute to multiple SDGs requires further research. To effectively address SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality), more research is needed to identify various increasing inequalities. Whereas experimental collaborative research with local communities, government bodies, and educational institutions can work together to create a solid framework that addresses inequality and helps achieve all other related SDGs.

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