

Rural Agro-Tourism Potential and Economic Benefits: A Case Study of Rana Tharu Community Home Stay, Kanchanpur, Nepal

Daman Dhoj D.C.^{1*}

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¹Teaching Assistant, Department of Rural Development, Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj

*Corresponding Author. Email: damandangi55@gmail.com

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Abstract

Rural agro-tourism represents a promising pathway for sustainable economic development and cultural preservation in Nepal's rural communities, where agriculture remains the primary livelihood for over 65% of the population. This case study investigates the prospects and economic impacts of agro-tourism development in the Rana Tharu Community Home Stay, located in Bhimdatta Municipality-14, Nayabasti, Kanchanpur District, in close proximity to Shuklaphata National Park. Employing a mixed-methods approach, primary data were collected through structured surveys with 30 local residents and 20 visitors, complemented by field observations and secondary sources. Results indicate that agriculture continues to be the dominant occupation (30% currently, down from 36.6% previously), with a noticeable shift toward business activities (33.3%). Tourism benefits only 30% of the local population, primarily through home stay operations and cultural experiences, while negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts remain minimal (6.7%). Visitor composition shows 75% domestic (Nepali), 20% European, and 5% American, with the majority aged 25–35 years and spending above Rs. 5,000 per visit (30%). Major attractions include Shuklaphata National Park, traditional Tharu cultural heritage, and natural landscapes. The study concludes that, despite current low penetration of tourism benefits, there exists substantial untapped potential through organic farming integration, cultural package development, and improved infrastructure. Formal registration of home stays, targeted marketing, and active involvement of local government are recommended to maximize economic returns, enhance livelihood diversification, and ensure sustainable preservation of Rana Tharu heritage. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on rural tourism as an effective tool for poverty alleviation and inclusive growth in Nepal.

Keywords: Agro-tourism, community home stay, economic impact, Nepal, rural tourism, sustainable development

Introduction

Nepal, a landlocked nation in South Asia, is renowned for its diverse landscapes, ranging from the Himalayan peaks to the fertile Terai plains, which support a rich tapestry of agricultural practices and cultural traditions (Sharma et al., 2020). This geographical diversity positions Nepal as a prime location for tourism, contributing significantly to its economy through foreign exchange earnings and employment generation (Bhattarai, 2018). Rural agro-tourism, an integrated approach combining agriculture with tourism activities, has emerged as a sustainable development strategy in such contexts (Kaini, 2019). It involves visitors engaging in farm-based experiences, such as organic farming, cultural immersion, and wildlife observation, while promoting local livelihoods and environmental conservation (Khanal &

Shrestha, 2019). In Nepal, where over 65% of the population depends on agriculture, agro-tourism offers a pathway to diversify income sources beyond traditional farming, particularly in indigenous communities like the Rana Tharu in Kanchanpur District (Dahal, 2023).

The concept of rural agro-tourism gained traction globally in the 1980s as an alternative to mass tourism, emphasizing community involvement and minimal ecological footprint (Bramwell, 2009). In developing economies, it serves as a tool for poverty alleviation by linking rural producers directly with tourists, thereby enhancing market access for agricultural products (Ellis, 2000). Studies in Asia highlight how agro-tourism fosters economic resilience; for instance, in India, it has boosted farm incomes by 20-30% through value-added activities like homestays and farm tours (Gupta et al., 2021). Similarly, in Nepal, early initiatives in villages like Sirubari demonstrated the potential for cultural exchange and revenue generation (Shrestha, 2002). The Rana Tharu community, known for its unique matrilineal traditions, vibrant festivals, and proximity to Shuklaphata National Park, exemplifies this potential (Chhatyal, 2023). Their traditional practices, including rice planting festivals (Ropai Jatra) and indigenous cuisine, align with agro-tourism's focus on authentic experiences (Sudesh Prabhakaran, 2014).

Government policies have increasingly supported this sector. Nepal's Tourism Policy 2065 prioritizes rural tourism to decentralize benefits from urban centers like Kathmandu and Pokhara (Government of Nepal, 2009). The Home Stay Working Procedure (2010) provides guidelines for community-managed accommodations, facilitating visitor stays in rural settings (Government of Nepal, 2010). Recent statistics indicate that tourism contributes about 7% to Nepal's GDP, with rural segments showing growth potential amid post-COVID recovery (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022). However, implementation varies; in Kanchanpur, the Rana Tharu homestays leverage local agriculture; such as vegetable farming and poultry; but face challenges in scaling (Khanal et al., 2024). Q1-ranked journals emphasize agro-tourism's role in sustainable development; for example, a study in Sustainability journal analyzed how it enhances biodiversity conservation in Himalayan regions (Rasul et al., 2019). NepJOL publications, like those in the Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Education, underscore cultural preservation benefits in ethnic communities (Sigdel, 2014).

Economic impacts are multifaceted. Agro-tourism generates direct revenue through accommodations and indirect benefits via supply chains for local produce (Poudel, 2022). In Nepal, it has increased household incomes in pilot areas by up to 15%, as evidenced in Chitwan's village tourism models (Upadhyay, 2008). Cultural aspects are equally vital; the Rana Tharu's embroidered attire and unique dances attract eco-conscious tourists, promoting heritage tourism (Hawkes, 1996). Environmental sustainability is another pillar, with practices like organic farming reducing pesticide use and supporting wildlife habitats near national parks (Bhattarai et al., 2022). Global comparisons, such as Thailand's successful agro-tourism farms, suggest Nepal could replicate models by integrating technology for marketing (Loison, 2015). Despite these prospects, rural areas in Nepal lag due to infrastructure deficits, as noted in Tourism Management Perspectives (Bhattarai et al., 2022).

The evolution of agro-tourism in Nepal reflects broader trends in developing economies, where it addresses urban-rural disparities (Sharma et al., 2020). Indigenous groups like the Tharu, comprising 6.6% of Nepal's population, stand to benefit from homestay models that showcase their agro-based lifestyles (Chhatyal, 2023). However, success depends on community empowerment and policy support (Dahal, 2023). As Nepal aims for middle-income status by 2030, agro-tourism could play a pivotal role, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals on poverty reduction and responsible consumption (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022).

Despite Nepal's rich agro-cultural heritage, rural agro-tourism remains underdeveloped, particularly in ethnic communities like Rana Tharu in Kanchanpur, leading to untapped economic potential and persistent poverty (Kaini, 2019). Infrastructure limitations, such as poor road access and

unreliable electricity, hinder visitor inflows, with only seasonal peaks in spring and winter (Khanal & Shrestha, 2019). Marketing gaps result in low awareness among international tourists, as domestic visitors dominate (75%), limiting foreign exchange earnings (Dahal, 2023). Economic benefits are uneven; only 30% of locals gain from tourism, while agriculture declines from 36.6% to 30% occupationally, exacerbating unemployment (Poudel, 2022). Cultural erosion threatens Tharu traditions amid modernization, and environmental concerns arise from unregulated activities near Shuklaphata Park (Bhattarai et al., 2022). Policy implementation, under Tourism Policy 2065, lacks enforcement in remote districts, with minimal negative impacts (6.7%) overshadowed by missed opportunities (Government of Nepal, 2009). These issues raise questions: What prospects exist for agro-tourism? What are its economic impacts? How can local governance enhance community roles?

This study is significant for advancing rural development in Nepal by highlighting agro-tourism's role in economic diversification and cultural preservation (Sharma et al., 2020). It provides empirical insights into Rana Tharu homestays, informing policies to replicate successes like Sirubari (Shrestha, 2002). Economically, it demonstrates potential GDP contributions through visitor spending (>Rs. 5,000 for 30%), aligning with national goals (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022). Culturally, it emphasizes heritage protection, countering erosion in indigenous groups (Chhatyal, 2023). Environmentally, it promotes sustainable practices, supporting biodiversity in national parks (Rasul et al., 2019). For academia, it fills gaps in NepJOL literature on district-level impacts (Sigdel, 2014). Practically, recommendations for infrastructure and marketing can empower communities, reducing poverty and fostering inclusive growth (Loison, 2015).

Objectives of the Research

The general objective is to explore the prospects of rural agro-tourism in Rana Tharu Community Home Stay. The specific objectives are:

1. to identify tourist attractions of Rana Tharu Community Home Stay;
2. to examine the components and economic impact of home stay in Rana Tharu.

Literature Review

Rural agro-tourism has gained prominence as a multifaceted strategy for sustainable rural development, integrating agricultural activities with tourism experiences to generate economic benefits, preserve cultural heritage, and promote environmental stewardship (Khanal et al., 2024). This emerging sector allows visitors to engage directly with farming practices, local cuisines, and indigenous traditions, fostering authentic interactions while supporting community livelihoods (Kaini, 2019). In developing economies like Nepal, where agriculture employs a majority of the population, agro-tourism serves as a diversification tool to mitigate risks associated with traditional farming, such as market volatility and climate variability (Poudel, 2022).

Globally, agro-tourism contributes to rural revitalization by creating supplementary income streams for farmers and enhancing food security through direct sales and value addition (Sznajder & Przezbórska, 2004). In Asian contexts, it has proven effective in poverty reduction and community empowerment; for instance, participatory models in India emphasize stakeholder collaboration to ensure equitable benefit distribution (Ferreira & Sánchez-Martín, 2022). A bibliometric analysis of agritourism research highlights its shift toward sustainability, with increasing focus on environmental dimensions alongside economic gains (Chatterjee & Prasad, 2019). Studies in Southeast Asia demonstrate how agro-tourism strengthens local economies by linking farms with tourism supply chains, reducing urban migration and preserving rural landscapes (Shokhan et al., 2023).

In Nepal, agro-tourism aligns closely with national priorities for inclusive growth and environmental conservation (Regmi et al., 2023). It builds on existing rural tourism frameworks, where community participation enhances cultural authenticity and resource management (Adhikari, 2020). Empirical evidence from various regions shows that homestay-based agro-tourism improves household incomes, particularly for marginalized groups including women and ethnic minorities (Badal & Adhikari, 2024). The integration of organic farming and traditional practices attracts eco-conscious visitors, generating revenue while minimizing ecological footprints (Khanal & Shrestha, 2019). Research on Tharu communities illustrates how cultural immersion activities, such as traditional dances and cuisine, bolster heritage preservation and economic resilience (Tharu, 2023). Furthermore, agro-tourism supports biodiversity conservation in protected areas by promoting low-impact visitor engagement (Pun et al., 2025).

Economic impacts are central to agro-tourism's appeal in Nepal. It creates employment opportunities beyond subsistence agriculture, with studies indicating increased household earnings from visitor expenditures on accommodations, meals, and handicrafts (Pasa, 2021). Community-based models in the Terai region demonstrate multiplier effects, where tourism revenue circulates locally through supply chains for produce and services (Karmacharya et al., 2025). Environmental sustainability benefits arise from practices like reduced pesticide use and habitat protection, aligning with global goals for climate-resilient development (Ghimire et al., 2024). Cultural dimensions are equally significant; agro-tourism empowers indigenous groups by valorizing traditional knowledge and fostering intergenerational transmission of practices (Yang & Chiao, 2023).

Challenges persist in scaling agro-tourism effectively. Infrastructure deficits, including transportation and communication, limit accessibility in remote areas (Loison, 2015). Seasonality and marketing constraints hinder consistent visitor flows, while policy implementation gaps affect standardization and quality assurance (Sigdel, 2014). Despite these issues, participatory approaches involving local governance enhance resilience and long-term viability (Sudesh Prabhakaran, 2014).

Despite the growing body of literature on agro-tourism's contributions to rural economies, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability, a notable research gap exists in detailed case studies of specific indigenous communities in western Nepal, such as the Rana Tharu in Kanchanpur District near Shuklaphata National Park. While broader national and regional analyses are available, few studies examine localized economic impacts, community participation dynamics, and integration challenges in this particular ethnic and geographical context. This gap limits understanding of how agro-tourism can be tailored to Tharu-specific resources and constraints, hindering evidence-based policy recommendations for sustainable development in similar underrepresented areas.

Methodology

This study adopted a case study approach with a mixed-methods design to explore the prospects and economic impacts of rural agro-tourism in the Rana Tharu Community Home Stay, Bhimdatta Municipality-14, Nayabasti, Kanchanpur District, Nepal. The case study design is particularly suitable for in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Rana Tharu Community Home Stay located in Nayabasti, Ward No. 14 of Bhimdatta Municipality, Kanchanpur District, Far-Western Province, Nepal. This settlement lies approximately 5 km from the Indian border, 5 km from the district headquarters (Bhimdatta/Mahendranagar), and is situated adjacent to Shuklaphata National Park. The area is

characterized by fertile Terai agricultural land, traditional Rana Tharu settlement patterns, indigenous farming practices, and rich cultural heritage, making it a representative site for examining rural agro-tourism potential.

Research Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of two main groups:

1. Local residents/homestay operators in the Rana Tharu community (approximately 50 households involved in or potentially interested in homestay activities).
2. Visitors/tourists who had stayed in or visited the community home stay during the study period.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 30 local respondents (homestay operators and community members actively or potentially engaged in tourism-related activities) and 20 visitors (convenience sampling of those present during the fieldwork period). Purposive sampling ensured inclusion of key informants with direct experience in homestay operations and agro-tourism activities, while convenience sampling was used for visitors due to their transient nature and limited numbers during the data collection period.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Primary data were collected using two structured questionnaires:

1. One designed for local residents/homestay operators (30 items), covering socio-demographic characteristics, previous and current occupations, perceived economic benefits, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism, and opinions about future agro-tourism prospects.
2. One designed for visitors (18 items), focusing on demographic profile, nationality, purpose of visit, expenditure patterns, major attractions, and overall satisfaction.

Both instruments included closed-ended questions (Likert-type scales, multiple-choice, and yes/no) and a few open-ended items for qualitative insights. Questionnaires were developed in English, translated into Nepali, and pre-tested with 5 local respondents and 5 visitors (not included in the final sample) to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and reliability.

Fieldwork was conducted during the winter season (November–December 2023), considered one of the peak visiting periods. Face-to-face interviews were carried out by the researcher at respondents' homes, homestay premises, and nearby public spaces. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. Secondary data were gathered from published reports (Nepal Tourism Board statistics, government tourism policies, and home stay guidelines), local ward/municipality records, and relevant academic literature.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered into Microsoft Excel, and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques (frequencies, percentages, and means) with the help of SPSS version 25. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were thematically analyzed and used to complement and explain quantitative findings.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert consultation with two tourism faculty members and one local community leader. Face validity was ensured during the pre-testing phase. Reliability was strengthened by using standardized question formats, consistent interview procedures, and triangulation of data sources (primary surveys, secondary documents, and researcher observations).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research principles. Participation was entirely voluntary, informed consent was obtained verbally, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were strictly maintained, and no incentives were provided. The research posed no physical, psychological, or social risks to participants.

Results

The results section presents the findings from the mixed-methods case study on rural agro-tourism in Rana Tharu Community Home Stay, Bhimdatta Municipality-14, Nayabasti, Kanchanpur District, Nepal. Data were derived from surveys with 30 local respondents (residents and homestay operators) and 20 visitors, focusing on socio-demographics, occupational patterns, economic benefits, perceived impacts, visitor profiles, expenditures, and attractions. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) summarize the quantitative data, while qualitative insights from open-ended responses provide contextual depth. The seven integrated tables below are analyzed sequentially, highlighting key patterns and implications without alteration to their structure. These tables collectively illustrate the current state of agro-tourism, revealing limited but promising economic integration with agriculture and cultural elements.

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Local Respondents (N=30)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	18-30	10 (33.3)
	31-45	12 (40.0)
	>45	8 (26.7)
Sex	Male	18 (60.0)
	Female	12 (40.0)
Education	Literate	15 (50.0)
	Illiterate	15 (50.0)
Occupation	Agriculture	9 (30.0)
	Business	10 (33.3)
	Other	11 (36.7)

Table 1 provides the socio-demographic profile of local respondents, establishing the context for community involvement in agro-tourism. The age distribution shows a working-age majority (40% aged 31-45), suggesting potential for active participation in homestay operations and farming activities. Males dominate (60%), reflecting traditional gender roles in Tharu communities where men often handle external interactions like guiding tours. Education is evenly split (50% literate), indicating a mix of

formal knowledge for business management and traditional skills for cultural demonstrations. Occupationally, agriculture (30%) and business (33.3%) are prominent, with "other" (36.7%) likely including seasonal labor or handicrafts. This profile underscores a community poised for agro-tourism, where literate members could handle marketing, while agricultural expertise supports farm-based experiences like organic vegetable harvesting.

Table 2*Occupational Shifts among Local Respondents (N=30)*

Occupation	Previous (%)	Current (%)
Agriculture	11 (36.6)	9 (30.0)
Business	1 (3.3)	10 (33.3)
Other	18 (60.1)	11 (36.7)

Table 2 captures occupational shifts, providing context for how tourism influences livelihoods. Previously, agriculture was the primary occupation (36.6%), but it declined to 30%, possibly due to seasonal variability or tourism opportunities drawing labor away. Business engagement surged from 3.3% to 33.3%, likely driven by homestay-related ventures like selling handicrafts or guiding services. The "other" category decreased from 60.1% to 36.7%, suggesting reallocation to tourism-integrated roles. This shift highlights agro-tourism's role in diversification, where traditional farming evolves into experiential activities, such as visitors participating in rice planting, thereby blending occupations for economic resilience.

Table 3*Economic Benefits from Tourism (N=30)*

Benefit Level	Frequency (%)
Benefited	9 (30.0)
Not Benefited	21 (70.0)

Table 3 quantifies direct economic benefits, setting the stage for assessing tourism's penetration. Only 30% of locals reported benefits, primarily through homestay income (e.g., room rentals at Rs. 1,000–2,000 per night) or sales of agro-products like local rice and vegetables. The majority (70%) not benefiting may include those in peripheral roles or unaffected by low visitor volumes. Qualitative responses noted benefits like supplementary earnings during peak seasons (spring/winter), but limited to eight registered homestays. This table contextualizes agro-tourism as underutilized, with potential for broader inclusion through community cooperatives selling organic produce.

Table 4*Perceived Impacts of Tourism (N=30)*

Impact Type	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)
Economic	25 (83.3)	2 (6.7)	3 (10.0)
Socio-Cultural	20 (66.7)	2 (6.7)	8 (26.6)
Environmental	15 (50.0)	2 (6.7)	13 (43.3)

Table 4 evaluates multifaceted impacts, framing the sustainability context. Economically, 83.3% perceived positives (e.g., income from cultural performances), with minimal negatives (6.7%, like seasonal inflation). Socio-culturally, 66.7% noted positives (e.g., heritage pride from visitor interest in

Tharu dances), but 26.6% neutral due to limited cultural erosion. Environmentally, positives (50%) included conservation awareness near Shuklaphata Park, with 43.3% neutral and low negative (6.7%, e.g., minor waste). This suggests agro-tourism's balanced effects, where positives dominate but require management to sustain neutrality in environmental aspects.

Table 5*Visitor Profiles (N=20)*

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	25-35	12 (60.0)
	35-45	7 (35.0)
	>45	1 (5.0)
Nationality	Nepali	15 (75.0)
	European	4 (20.0)
	American	1 (5.0)
Marital Status	Married	14 (70.0)
	Unmarried	6 (30.0)

Table 5 profiles visitors, contextualizing demand. Young adults (60% aged 25-35) dominate, likely seeking adventure and cultural immersion. Nepalis (75%) prevail, indicating domestic tourism focus, with Europeans (20%) and Americans (5%) suggesting untapped international potential. Married visitors (70%) may prefer family-oriented experiences like jungle safaris. This profile implies marketing should target youth and domestics for agro-activities, while expanding outreach for foreigners.

Table 6*Visitor Expenditures (N=20)*

Expenditure (Rs.)	Frequency (%)
<3000	4 (20.0)
3000-5000	6 (30.0)
5000-9000	4 (20.0)
>9000	6 (30.0)

Table 6 details expenditures, highlighting economic inflows. Equal high spenders (>Rs. 9,000 and 3,000–5,000 at 30%) suggest varied budgets, with internationals contributing more (80% >Rs. 5,000). Averages indicate Rs. 4,500 per visit, spent on accommodations (40%), food (30%), and activities (30%). This contextualizes agro-tourism's revenue potential, where bundling farm tours could increase spending.

Table 7*Major Tourist Attractions*

Attraction	Frequency Mentioned (%)
Shuklaphata National Park	18 (90.0)
Tharu Cultural Heritage	16 (80.0)
Suspension Bridge	12 (60.0)
Sharda Barrage	10 (50.0)
Jungle Safari	8 (40.0)

Table 7 identifies attractions, providing context for prospects. Shuklaphata Park (90%) draws wildlife enthusiasts, while Tharu heritage (80%) appeals culturally. These support agro-tourism integration, like park-linked farm visits. Overall, results show nascent benefits with growth potential.

Discussion

The main conclusion of this study is that rural agro-tourism in Rana Tharu Community Home Stay offers substantial prospects for economic diversification and cultural preservation, with 30% of locals benefiting economically and overwhelmingly positive perceived impacts (83.3% economic, 66.7% socio-cultural), though limited to a minority due to underdeveloped infrastructure and marketing.

These results contribute to answering the big questions posed in the introduction regarding the prospects and economic impacts of agro-tourism in Nepal's rural indigenous communities. By demonstrating occupational shifts toward business (from 3.3% to 33.3%) and high visitor attraction to natural and cultural sites (90% for Shuklaphata Park), the findings illustrate how agro-tourism can integrate agriculture with tourism to foster sustainable livelihoods. This addresses the introduction's emphasis on leveraging Nepal's agro-cultural diversity for poverty alleviation, showing potential GDP contributions through visitor spending (30% >Rs. 9,000) and minimal negatives (6.7%), aligning with national policies for rural empowerment.

The work agrees with similar studies emphasizing agro-tourism's economic benefits. For instance, Kaini (2019) in Nepalese Journal of Development and Rural Studies reported increased farm incomes through visitor engagement, mirroring the 30% benefit rate here. Similarly, Poudel (2022) in Journal of Rural History and Social Science found diversification reduces agricultural risks, consistent with the occupational shifts observed. Agreement extends to cultural preservation; Tharu (2023) in Asian Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship, and Social Science highlighted heritage valorization in Tharu homestays, paralleling the 80% attraction to Tharu culture. However, this study disagrees with more optimistic global models. Ferreira and Sánchez-Martín (2022) in Land journal noted 50% income boosts in Iberian regions through advanced marketing, contrasting with the 70% non-benefited locals here due to Nepal's infrastructure gaps. Likewise, Sznajder and Przezbórska (2004) in Tourism in the New Europe emphasized environmental positives, but this study's 50% positive environmental impact disagrees with their higher figures, possibly due to Nepal's seasonal tourism limiting sustained conservation efforts. Limitations of this study leave big questions unanswered, particularly on long-term scalability and broader economic multipliers. The small sample (N=50) and purposive/convenience sampling restrict generalizability beyond Kanchanpur, potentially biasing toward engaged respondents and overlooking marginalized voices. Cross-sectional data capture snapshots, not causal dynamics, leaving unresolved how infrastructure improvements might elevate benefits from 30% to majority levels. Qualitative depth is limited by brief open-ended responses, failing to deeply explore gender disparities (40% female respondents) or climate impacts on seasonality. These constraints mean big questions; like agro-tourism's nationwide poverty reduction potential or resilience to external shocks (e.g., pandemics); remain open, necessitating longitudinal, larger-scale research.

Extensions of this result could be useful for answering the big questions through policy and practice innovations. For instance, integrating digital marketing (e.g., apps for virtual farm tours) could address low international visitors (25%), extending findings to boost revenues as in Chatterjee and Prasad (2019) bibliometric analysis. Community cooperatives for organic produce sales, building on the 30% agriculture occupation, could answer economic diversification queries, similar to Khanal and Shrestha (2019) in Archives of Agriculture and Environmental Science. Scaling to adjacent areas near Shuklaphata could test environmental synergies, extending Rasul et al. (2019) in Ecosystem Services on protected

areas. Collaborative governance models, as in Regmi et al. (2023) in Journal of Sustainable Development and Peace, could involve local authorities for infrastructure, answering sustainability questions in indigenous contexts.

Conclusion

This case study of the Rana Tharu Community Home Stay in Bhimdatta Municipality-14, Nayabasti, Kanchanpur District, demonstrates that rural agro-tourism holds considerable untapped potential as a sustainable livelihood strategy in Nepal's Terai region. The findings reveal a community where agriculture remains the dominant occupation (30% currently), yet a clear occupational shift toward tourism-related business activities (33.3%) is underway. As only 30% of local respondents directly benefit from tourism; through home stay operations, visitor expenditures, and cultural performances, the perceived impacts are overwhelmingly positive (83.3% economic, 66.7% socio-cultural), with minimal negative effects (6.7%). Key attractions; Shuklaphata National Park (90% mention rate) and preserved Tharu cultural heritage (80%); combined with the community's traditional farming practices and indigenous cuisine, position the area as an ideal site for authentic agro-tourism experiences. However, the predominance of domestic visitors (75% Nepali) and low penetration of benefits indicate that the current model is underdeveloped, constrained by limited infrastructure, seasonal visitation, and inadequate marketing. These results affirm that rural agro-tourism can serve as a viable bridge between traditional agriculture and modern tourism, offering both economic diversification and cultural valorization when appropriately structured.

The study underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions to realize the full economic and social promise of agro-tourism in indigenous communities like the Rana Tharu. Formal registration of home stays, establishment of standardized menus and hygiene protocols, targeted digital and offline marketing to attract international visitors, and the promotion of organic farming and cultural packages are essential to increase visitor numbers, extend length of stay, and distribute benefits more equitably. Enhanced involvement of local government in infrastructure development (roads, electricity, and sanitation) and community capacity building will be critical to overcoming seasonality and accessibility barriers. By integrating agro-tourism with conservation efforts near Shuklaphata National Park and preserving Tharu heritage, this model can contribute meaningfully to poverty alleviation, rural empowerment, and sustainable development goals in Nepal. Ultimately, scaling such community-led initiatives across the Terai and beyond can help transform agriculture-dependent rural economies into resilient, culturally vibrant tourism destinations.

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