

From Subsistence to Service: A Descriptive Qualitative Study of Tourism Livelihood Transitions in Talaingod, Davao Del Norte

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Abstract

Solely profit-driven tourism erodes communities. I explored the vulnerability context, livelihood assets, and livelihood outcomes of Talaingod. Using descriptive qualitative design, I purposely selected and interviewed 5 local participants. I discovered that tourism transformed livelihoods in Talaingod but also brought both opportunities and risks. Future researches may examine the role of livelihood assets in the relationship between vulnerability context and livelihood outcomes through mediation analysis. Local government officials, the Municipal Tourism Office, and barangay leaders may implement a community-based tourism livelihood framework to protect local livelihoods, land rights, and equitable tourism benefits in Talaingod.

Keywords: Subsistence to service; descriptive qualitative study; tourism livelihood transitions; Talaingod; Davao del Norte

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discussed the problem and its scope, the significance of the study, the research objectives, the theoretical lens, and the paradigm.

1.1. Problem and its Scope

Profit-driven tourism erodes the communities it claims to uplift. Behind the promise of rural development, lands and resources are increasingly turned into economic assets, often without fair compensation or meaningful community participation (Widaningrum et al., 2025). This disrupts traditional livelihoods, weakens local control, and deepens the economic vulnerability of rural residents (Mohan, 2025; Ahmed et al., 2025; Kania, 2025).

This problem extends beyond one rural community and reflects a global pattern of displacement. In China, land expropriation displaced rural residents and converted agricultural lands for development (Kan, 2024; Liu & Li, 2023). In El Salvador, rural communities lost access to land and resources, increasing local marginalization (Patel, 2024). In Mexico, development activities intensified land conflicts and restricted fishing communities' access to local resources (González Márquez & García de Fuentes, 2024).

The Philippines faces similar realities. In Siargao, land conversion displaced residents and limited fisherfolk access to traditional fishing grounds (Ocampo & Sarmiento, 2023). In Palawan, expanding private

zones reduced community access to land and coastal resources (Mendoza & Reyes, 2024). In Baguio City, rising land values and changing land use patterns pushed long-time residents toward surrounding areas (Cabigas & Dela Cruz, 2023).

When profit-driven tourism expands without regulation, communities pay the price. Land and culture become commodities, residents are displaced, traditions lose meaning, and environmental resources decline (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2024; Butler, 2023; Gössling & Higham, 2024). Yet existing studies still focus heavily on economic gains while giving limited attention to displacement, land insecurity, and community experiences (Pham & Tosev, 2023; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2024). Tourism may enrich destinations, but it can also impoverish the people who built them.

1.2. Significance of the Study

My study contributed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, which promotes decent work and economic growth by exploring how local tourism can create sustainable livelihoods for local communities in Talaingod. Aligned with the mission and vision of Holy Cross of Davao College, my research underscored the importance of community-oriented development, fostering socio-cultural awareness and economic empowerment. By documenting the changes brought by local tourism, my study provided valuable insights for fostering inclusive growth and culturally sensitive practices, supporting both regional development agendas and the global call for sustainable and equitable economic opportunities.

1.3. Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate the changes brought about by the local tourism to the lives of the locals of Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

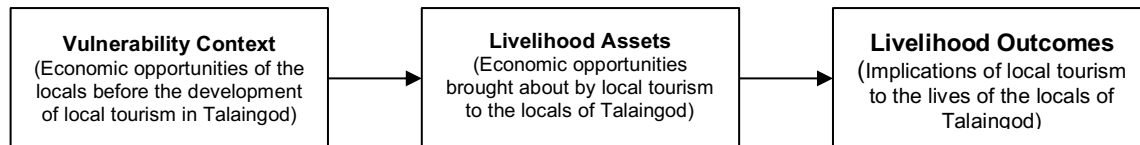
1. What are the economic opportunities of the locals before the development of local tourism in Talaingod?
2. What are the economic opportunities brought about by local tourism to the locals of Talaingod?
3. What are the implications of local tourism to the lives of the locals of Talaingod?

1.4. Theoretical Lens

My research is guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Framework for Tourism (SLFT) as developed by Shen (2009). The SLFT provides a comprehensive lens for examining how tourism development interacts with local livelihood systems. The framework examines the Vulnerability Context—the economic trends, seasonal fluctuations, and livelihood shocks that shape household conditions prior to tourism intervention. It analyzes Livelihood Assets (human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital) and the Diversification Strategies households employ as tourism introduces new income-generating activities. It also assesses Livelihood Outcomes—the economic, social, and institutional results of tourism development on local populations. Other components of the SLFT, including the specific characterization of Tourism Context, Institutional Arrangements, and Attraction Capital, are beyond the scope of this inquiry. Applying this lens, the study investigates the economic conditions preceding tourism in Talaingod, the opportunities created by tourism development, and the overall implications for the lives of local residents.

1.5. Paradigm

Figure 1. Theoretical Paradigm of my study based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework for Tourism (SLFT) of Shen (2009)



This study is anchored on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework for Tourism (SLFT) as developed by Shen (2009), which serves as the theoretical paradigm guiding the investigation. The framework is operationalized through three interconnected components: the Vulnerability Context, which examines economic opportunities before tourism; Livelihood Assets, which analyzes economic opportunities brought by tourism; and Livelihood Outcomes, which assesses the implications of tourism on the lives of locals. Together, these three components provide a cohesive lens for examining tourism-led transformation in Talaingod, Davao del Norte.

1.6. Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that the experiences of local residents in Talaingod aligned with Shen's (2009) Sustainable Livelihood Framework for Tourism (SLFT). I further assumed that vulnerability context, livelihood assets, and livelihood outcomes collectively shape the economic transformation of locals amid tourism development. I also assumed that my participants' narratives extend beyond Shen's framework, as they demonstrated culturally grounded coping mechanisms such as relying on subsistence farming and illegal logging before tourism, transitioning to café employment and guiding after tourism arrival, and drawing strength from community solidarity and cultural pride. Consequently, I assumed that my participants experienced uneven livelihood outcomes—gaining jobs, infrastructure, and cultural confidence while facing land deception and social disruption—revealing that tourism-driven development in this context produces both progress and precariousness.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I presented the research design, the study locale, the sample and sampling technique, the data gathering technique, the data analysis technique, and the ethical considerations.

2.1. Research Design

My study used a descriptive qualitative research design to describe and interpret phenomena naturally without manipulating variables (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This design is appropriate for exploring participants' experiences in areas with limited existing research and for presenting findings using participants' own perspectives (Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009). It is flexible and effective in capturing rich and authentic experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). In this study, it was used to examine the economic changes brought by tourism to locals in Talaingod.

2.2. Locale of the Study

Talaingod is an emerging eco-cultural tourism destination known for its cultural heritage and natural landscapes. Government initiatives and improved accessibility through the Kapalong-Talaingod-Bukidnon Road and the 2025 RTMI bus route supported tourism and economic opportunities after years of conflict (Legarda,

2016; Del Rosario, 2014; Caduaya, 2025; SunStar Philippines, 2025). Its tourism potential and local government support make it suitable for exploring the community's economic experiences brought by tourism.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique used to select participants with relevant experiences related to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is commonly used in qualitative research to gather deep insights from information-rich participants (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015). A total of five (5) participants were selected, consistent with the recommended 4–7 participants for qualitative descriptive studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Participants were locals aged 18 and above who lived in Talaingod before tourism development and could communicate in Filipino, Bisaya, or English.

2.4. Data Gathering Technique

My study employed in-depth interviews, a qualitative method using one-on-one, open-ended conversations to explore participants' experiences and perspectives (Kelly & Sennott, 2024). This method is useful for collecting detailed and context-rich narratives about participants' lived experiences (Goffman, 2023; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). It allowed me to gather detailed responses, clarify answers, and build trust while discussing sensitive topics such as livelihood and economic changes (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2024). This method helped me explore the experiences of locals in Talaingod before and after tourism development.

2.5. Data Analysis Technique

For this study, I employed thematic analysis, a qualitative method used to identify and analyze themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method is flexible and effective in identifying shared meanings and experiences from qualitative responses (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase process, I transcribed, coded, and grouped recurring responses into themes. Three major themes emerged: (1) Economic Opportunities Before Tourism Development, (2) Economic Opportunities Brought by Tourism Development, and (3) Implications of Tourism Development. This method helped me understand both the direct experiences and deeper meanings shared by locals in Talaingod.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework of trustworthiness by ensuring credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through in-depth interviews with five participants, member checking, and prolonged engagement with the community of Talaingod. Dependability was maintained through audit trails such as transcripts, coding logs, field notes, and adviser feedback, while confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling and grounding interpretations on participants' narratives.

My study also complied with the ethical standards of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board by securing informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting confidentiality through pseudonyms. Data privacy was maintained in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) through password-protected storage accessible only to me, with all digital data scheduled for deletion five months after the completion and publication of the study.

3. RESULTS

In this chapter, I discussed the findings and presented the modified paradigm of my research.

3.1. Economic Opportunities of the Locals before the Development of Local Tourism in Talaingod

As I listened, I noticed how limited opportunities pushed families toward unsafe practices just to survive. One of the participants attested, saying:

"Naga drive si papa sa una sir kanang sa logging. Naga drive sya ug sakyanan kanang Sadam magdeliver ug kahoy. Illegal logging man daw na sa una." (My father used to work as a driver in logging operations, transporting lumber. This was considered illegal logging in the past.) (Rooted Educator)

This reality was further illustrated by another participant who said:

"Ang tribo sa amoa, walay laing panginabuhi-an kundi abaca lang ug kanang maisan. Mao gyud na ang pinakaunang kuan [panginabuhi-an] sir." (In our tribe, we depended solely on farming abaca and corn as our main livelihood strategy.) (Lone Scholar)

The dangers of these livelihoods became evident when a participant shared his father's terrifying experience, stating:

"Tapos gilabay siya [akong papa]—gibangkaw siya. Maygani wala siya na-igo. Dagan siya unya pagdagan niya, gipabuthan siya ug pusil. Pagpabuto sa pusil, wala gihapon siya na-igo sir. Ika-tulo gyud to siya nahitabo sir... murag delikado na." (My father faced significant dangers in his work, including being attacked with spears and shot at multiple times. It became too risky, forcing him to leave this job, even though it meant financial hardship.) (Rooted Educator)

The financial struggle of farming was painfully described by another participant who admitted:

"Gamay ra sir uy, kay usahay, kanang wala man miy ikapalit ug medisina. Ginalimpisahan lang namo ang uban mais. Mao ra gyud na among kita nga dili gani maka bawi sa among gasto ug hago." (Our income was so little that we couldn't even afford to buy fertilizers. Even with all our efforts, the money from farming wasn't enough to cover our basic expenses.) (Enduring Mother)

The most heartbreaking reality came from a participant who confessed the extent of their food insecurity, saying:

"Usahay gani makahilak ko kay usahay mangatulog rami nga wala mi [kaon]. Kamote ra ug balanghoy among gina-kaon." (Sometimes I cried because we had to sleep hungry, surviving only on sweet potatoes and cassava.) (Enduring Mother)

This hardship was further echoed by another participant who described how they survived during failed harvests:

"Ang kanoon lang gyud namo ana kanang uhay. Ang uhay mao lang among sud-an unya sabawan ra, tapos mao nalang among kan-on hangtod sa makuha na ang among tanom." (During difficult times, all we had to eat were vine shoots cooked into soup, stretching it until our harvests could support us again. It was a harsh way of surviving.) (Lone Scholar)

As I listened to the participants, I heard stories of hunger, dangerous illegal logging, failed farming, and families struggling to survive with little income. Through their narratives, I saw a community living in poverty and uncertainty, relying on risky and unsustainable livelihoods just to meet basic needs. I felt deep empathy and heaviness knowing these were real lived experiences of hardship and survival. I interpreted these findings as evidence of severe economic vulnerability caused by the lack of stable livelihood opportunities before tourism development. These conditions help explain why many locals later embraced tourism-related work, as it offered income, security, and hope that were previously unavailable to them. Having a deeper understanding of their stories of poverty and survival, I became curious about how tourism later created new economic opportunities and changed the lives of locals in Talaingod.

3.2. Economic Opportunities Brought About by Local Tourism to the Locals of Talaingod

As I listened, I noticed how tourism created new pathways for stable income. One participant attested:

"Ni-apply si papa ug driver sa mixer [sa semento] para ma kalsada. Mao to nadawat man siya, didto na sya nag-trabaho, regular na iyang kita ato nga time." (My father applied as a driver for cement mixers in a road project. He got the job, and that provided him with a regular income for a while, improving our family's stability.) (Rooted Educator)

Another participant shared how service jobs transformed their life, as Enduring Mother said:

"Napaskwela nako akong mga anak ug nag-arang-arang ang among kinabuhi kay naa nako trabaho sa Cliff's Café. Akong binulan nga swledo kay dako gyud ug tabang." (With my job at Cliff's Café, I was able to send my children to school, and life became more comfortable. I received regular monthly salaries that greatly helped us.) (Enduring Mother)

Guiding opportunities also emerged, as Lone Scholar stated:

"Kung Manobo, pwede sila nga mu-tourist guide sa mga tao nga musulod didto kay silay nasayod sa lugar." (Manobos could work as tourist guides since they know the area well.) (Lone Scholar)

Agriculture expanded due to tourist demand, as Enduring Mother mentioned:

"Nagpatanom nako ug lubi... mao na ang among income karon naay maka harvest ug kopras tungod kay nag enhance ang turismo." (I've expanded my coconut farming, and now our income has improved through increased harvests and copra sales, supported by tourism-driven demand.) (Enduring Mother)

The local government supported this shift, as Unyielding Returner attested:

"Pareha karon, ang mga tao didto karon, kining naga-tanom sila ug gulay, kay sentro naman siya sa kuan (economic activity) ba. Ang ilang produkto, dali na mahalina kay daghan naman nang tao mangadto... Gisuporta pud na sa gobyerno. Nag conduct sila ug seminar sa mga tao sa paagi paagi ug kung unsa nga gulay ang nindot itanom dira ug unsaon pag-atiman." (Now, the people there are planting vegetables because it has become a center of economic activity. Their products are easily sold because many people go there... It is also supported by the government. They conducted a seminar for the people on which vegetables are good to plant there and how to take care of them.) (Unyielding Returner)

Cultural products found a new market, as Hopeful Matriarch said:

"Mag tahi sila ug mga cultural attire sa Lumad... murag ma-sikat ug mapasigarbo ang kultura sa mga lokal. Naa pud mga baligya nga produkto sa mga Lumad pareha anang beeds. Tungod sa turismo, nakahalin pud sila kay daghan." (The Lumad's cultural attire became highly sought after, giving pride to their tradition and providing additional income. They also sell products like beads. Because of tourism, they were able to make sales since there are many people.) (Hopeful Matriarch)

Even food vendors benefited, as Rooted Educator mentioned:

"Si mama namaligya ra gihapon ug biko. Karon kay daghan man turista daghan nag palit." (My mother continues to sell rice cakes. Now, with more tourists, her sales have increased significantly.) (Rooted Educator)

As I listened to the participants, I heard stories of relief and improved stability through tourism-related work such as driving cement mixers, working in cafés, guiding tourists, farming, and selling local products. I saw a community slowly transitioning from hardship to hope, where these opportunities provided income, food security, and support for their children's education. I felt admiration for the resilience of the locals in maximizing these opportunities, but I also felt concern about whether these benefits would last and who truly controlled these tourism enterprises. I interpreted these findings as evidence that tourism created multiple economic opportunities that helped improve the community's living conditions. However, I also noticed that most locals remained workers rather than owners of tourism businesses. This realization led me to further explore the implications of tourism, particularly the emerging concerns related to land, social changes, and the long-term sustainability of these economic benefits in Talaingod.

3.3. Implications of Local Tourism to the Lives of the Locals of Talaingod

As I listened, I noticed how tourism created meaningful platforms for cultural expression and heritage preservation. One of the participants attested, saying:

"Ang mga Lumad, nahatagan gyud sila ug opportunity nga ipa-perform ilang mga traditional nga ritual ug sayaw." (The Lumad were given opportunities to showcase their traditional dances and rituals to visitors, helping preserve their culture.) (Rooted Educator)

This reality was further vividly visualized by another participant who described a positive shift in how locals now engage with outsiders, as Enduring Mother said:

"Sa una mahadlok gyud mi makigstorya sa mga Bisaya, karon kay sa ilaha mi naga interact kay trabaho man sa tourism." (Previously, we were hesitant to interact with outsiders like the Bisayas. Now, we engage with them regularly due to tourism-related work, building confidence.) (Enduring Mother)

The tangible improvements in basic amenities became evident through the words of another local, as Enduring Mother attested:

"Naa na mi tubig ug kuryente sa among lugar tungod kay nag ka access ug dalan padulong sa Bukidnon." (We now have access to water and electricity, and roads have been built connecting us to Bukidnon, all facilitated through tourism development.) (Enduring Mother)

The critical role of road connectivity was further emphasized by another key informant who said:

"Sa una tung wala pa nakasulod ang kalsada [sa among Sitio], maglisod gyud ang gobyerno ng musulod kay wala may kalsada sir. Karon nga naa nay kuan [kalsada], daghan na gyud ang musulod sa amoa [nga gikan sa Gobyerno]." (Before, when the road had not yet reached our sitio, it was difficult for the government to enter because there was no road. Now that there is a road, many from the government can easily come to our place.) (Lone Scholar)

However, not all implications were positive, as one participant revealed a troubling reality, saying:

"Ang mga tag-iya sa mga yuta, na ilad kay barato ang palit sa ilang ancestral lands para himoon ug resort." (Some landowners were deceived into selling their ancestral lands for very low prices, turning those areas into resorts without fair compensation.) (Rooted Educator)

Despite these challenges, I noticed a fundamental shift in how locals approach their future, as Unyielding Returner mentioned:

"Sa una ang amo lang gyud nga target kay ang maka kaon ug ugma, pero tungod sa turismo naanad mi ug long-term nga pagplano." (Previously, we only worried about what we'd eat for the day. With tourism, we learned the value of long-term planning for better livelihoods.) (Unyielding Returner)

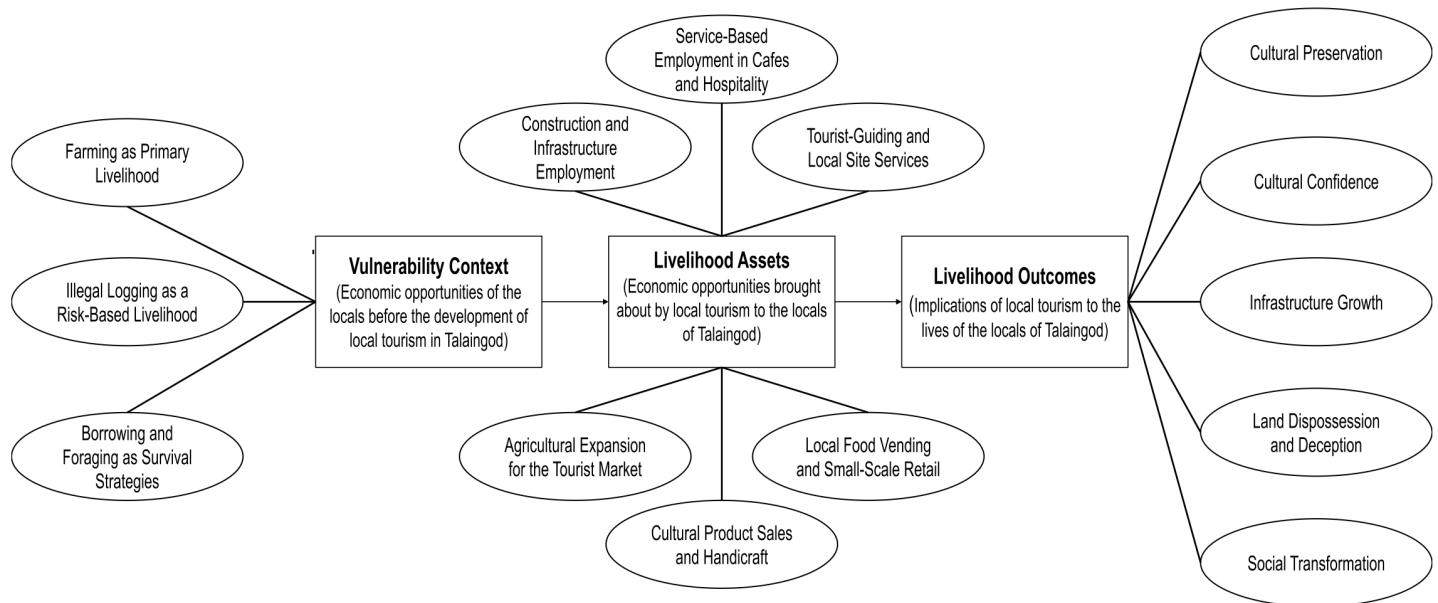
As I listened to the participants, I heard both gratitude and grief. They were grateful for the roads, electricity, livelihood opportunities, cultural pride, and confidence brought by tourism, yet saddened by stories of land loss and deception involving ancestral properties. I saw a community benefiting from development while also becoming vulnerable to exploitation by outsiders with greater resources and knowledge about land ownership. I felt both pride in the locals' resilience and concern about the possible loss of land, culture, and community trust. I interpreted these findings as evidence that tourism is a double-edged sword. While it created economic opportunities and improved infrastructure, it also introduced risks related to land security and social change. These findings complete my study by showing that although tourism helped address poverty and unemployment in Talaingod, its long-term benefits will depend on protecting the community's rights, culture, and ancestral land.

3.4. Summary of Findings

1. The economic opportunities of the locals before the development of local tourism in Talaingod were farming as primary livelihood, illegal logging as a risk-based livelihood, and borrowing and foraging as survival strategies.
2. The economic opportunities brought about by local tourism to the locals of Talaingod were construction and infrastructure employment, service-based employment in cafes and hospitality, tourist guiding and local site services, agricultural expansion for the tourist market, cultural product sales and handicraft vending, and local food vending and small-scale retail.
3. The implications of local tourism to the lives of the locals of Talaingod were cultural preservation, cultural confidence, infrastructure growth, land dispossession and deception, and social transformation.

3.5. Modified Paradigm

Figure 2. Modified Paradigm of the Study Based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework for Tourism (SLFT) of Shen (2009)



4. DISCUSSION

In this chapter I discussed the findings of my study and presented the implications for practice and future directions.

4.1. Pre-Tourism Livelihoods and Survival Strategies

My findings revealed that before tourism development, economic opportunities in Talaingod were limited to farming as the main livelihood, illegal logging as a risk-based income source, and borrowing and foraging as survival strategies during food shortages. This supports Alam (2025), who argued that pre-development vulnerability is shaped by limited assets, livelihood shocks, and food insecurity. My findings also align with Buerkert et al. (2025), who found that communities in Ladakh, Himalayan India relied on subsistence farming with limited market access before tourism expansion, similar to Talaingod. Likewise, Li et al. (2024) found that tourism-related land acquisition often disrupts local land use and community stability, reflecting Talaingod's dependence on land-based survival strategies. However, my findings contradict Kan (2024), who reported that some Chinese tourism villages retained land ownership during tourism transitions. In Talaingod, farming alone was insufficient to meet basic needs, forcing residents to rely on illegal logging and foraging, indicating chronic vulnerability rather than livelihood resilience.

4.2. Tourism-Driven Economic Opportunities

My findings revealed that tourism created diverse economic opportunities in Talaingod, including construction work, café and hospitality jobs, tourist guiding, agricultural expansion, cultural product sales, and food vending. This supports CRISIL Intelligence (2025), which identified tourism as a major non-farm livelihood source that generates employment and supports rural enterprises. My findings also align with Adeleke and

Ogunleye (2025), who found that tourism, agricultural diversification, and off-farm activities improve rural income and reduce poverty. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2024) reported that tourism and local product development in Vietnam created new markets and non-agricultural income sources, similar to Talaingod's guiding and cultural product sales. However, my findings partially contradict Buerkert et al. (2025), who found that tourism in Ladakh reduced agricultural self-sufficiency and traditional farming. In Talaingod, agriculture was not abandoned; instead, coconut and vegetable production expanded to meet tourist demand, suggesting that farming and tourism functioned as complementary livelihoods rather than competing ones.

4.3. Socio-Cultural and Economic Implications of Tourism

My findings revealed that local tourism in Talaingod brought both benefits and risks, including cultural preservation, improved confidence, infrastructure growth, social change, and land dispossession through deception. This supports Shrestha et al. (2025), who found that Indigenous tourism strengthens cultural identity, and aligns with Budiutami et al. (2024), who reported that tourism improves residents' openness toward outsiders. It also corroborates the Asian Development Bank (2026), which linked tourism projects with improved infrastructure and services. However, my findings are challenged by the United Nations Human Rights Office (2025), which documented forced displacement in Indonesia's Mandalika tourism project. Although Talaingod experienced land deception rather than violent eviction, both cases highlight the risk of weakened land rights, suggesting that community-based tourism does not automatically protect local communities from displacement.

4.5. Implications for Practice

Upon reflecting on the findings of this study, local government officials of Talaingod, the Municipal Tourism Office, and barangay leaders may implement a community-based tourism livelihood protection framework to address economic vulnerability and emerging issues of land dispossession. These initiatives may include: (1) establishing a municipal tourism livelihood desk to monitor tourism-related jobs and prioritize local employment; (2) requiring free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) and legal review for tourism-related land transactions to prevent deceptive land acquisition; (3) creating a tourism livelihood fund to support food vending, cultural products, and agricultural enterprises; and (4) conducting tourism livelihood trainings with agencies such as DTI and TESDA on financial literacy, customer service, food safety, and business management. These measures may help ensure that tourism benefits local residents while protecting land rights and reducing vulnerability to exploitation, allowing tourism to serve as a pathway to sustainable livelihoods rather than land dispossession.

4.6. Future Directions

Future research may use mediation analysis to examine the relationship between pre-tourism vulnerability and livelihood outcomes, with tourism-driven livelihood diversification as the mediating variable. Future researchers may also conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to develop and validate instruments based on the study's vulnerability, diversification, and outcome indicators. The instrument may then be tested across tourism-dependent rural communities in the Philippines to validate the proposed Tourism Livelihood Transitions Framework (TLTF) and determine whether Talaingod's pattern of economic gains and land-related risks exists in other contexts.

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