

Effects of Land Disputes on Sustainable Tourism in Lamu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The study sought to establish the effects of land disputes on sustainable tourism in Lamu County. Grounded in crisis management and sustainable development theories, the descriptive design was used, drawing data from a target population of 497 stakeholders, including security agencies, hotel operators, and tourism entities sample of 105 respondents was eventually used. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods, such as extrapolation using a multiple linear regression model, correlation, and thematic qualitative analysis, were used to examine data from semi-structured surveys and secondary sources to assess the extent of security risks. The study found that land disputes significantly influence tourism sustainability in Lamu County. Issues such as land grabbing, beach privatization, and delayed issuance of title deeds were found to discourage both local and foreign investment. These disputes not only disrupt community cohesion but also erode investor confidence, slowing down development projects in the tourism sector. In contrast, areas where land ownership conflicts have been resolved were observed to attract more stable investment and stronger collaboration between local communities and developers. Respondents emphasized that equitable land distribution and transparent management of land resources build trust, promote social harmony, and encourage sustainable economic activities. The findings, therefore, underscore that secure and fair land tenure systems are not only a matter of justice but also an essential foundation for sustainable tourism. Without resolving underlying land issues, tourism development risks becoming exclusionary, benefiting only a few while fueling local resentment and instability. Resolve land conflicts transparently by ensuring fair adjudication, equitable access to beaches, and protection of community land rights.

Keywords: *Land disputes, sustainable tourism, Lamu County*

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1. Introduction

The tourism sector is among the fastest-growing in the world, the largest economic activity, and a significant generator of GDP for most nations (Ashish, 2022). Meanwhile, the industry is extremely vulnerable to security threats. Threats to international safety, including pandemics, natural disasters, political unrest, and terrorism, can severely harm tourism. For instance, terrorist attacks on major cities or tourist destinations trigger rapid and large declines in tourist arrivals as visitors prioritize security over taking a holiday. The global tourism industry has

faced several security threats, which not only result in economic loss but also alter travel patterns (ROK, 2016).

France is the world leader in the number of tourist visits, providing a case study of how security threats affect tourism. France also receives millions of tourists annually because of its cultural heritage, icons, and lively city life, such as that of Paris. France, however, has experienced serious security issues, such as terrorism. The 2015 Paris attacks and the 2016 Nice truck attack had direct and immediate effects on the tourism sector. As a result, the overall volume of tourists visiting France, particularly from neighboring nations, fell precipitously. The French government, in collaboration with tourism industry players, had to implement stringent security measures and undertake marketing campaigns that would rebuild tourist confidence (Lowy, Bond, Nathanson, Dolgen, & Resnik, 2016; Solla, Carboni, Breaud, Babe, Brezac, Chivoret, Dupont, & Fernandez, 2018).

The African continent is one of the most favorable contexts for the growth of the tourism industry. This is due to its favorable climate and the presence of vast, picturesque scenery, diverse flora and fauna, and multiple cultures. The continent's tourism potential is minimally exploited, as statistics indicate its share of global tourism receipts is 3 percent, amounting to barely five percent of the globe's tourist arrivals. The minimal exploitation and low number of international tourist arrivals are attributed to rampant and sporadic conflicts. The continent in the last five decades has reported over 80 armed conflicts, including terrorism from violent extremists in some parts of the continent (Diriye, 2015).

Kenya, with its exquisite scenery, diverse wildlife, and strong cultural heritage, is one of Africa's top tourist destinations. The national parks, like the Maasai Mara, Amboseli, and Tsavo, are a haven for nature lovers. Kenya's coastal towns, like Mombasa and Diani Beach, are well known for their serene beaches and cultural heritage. Nonetheless, Kenya has faced security issues, particularly from the extremist organization Al-Shabaab from adjacent Somalia. High-profile incidents include Nairobi's Westgate Mall terrorist attack in 2013, which claimed 67 lives, and the 2015 attack on Garissa University College, which led to the killing of 148 people. These attacks have raised alarm among tourists for safety and security, triggering travel warnings and reducing tourist numbers (Musoma, 2023; Diphorn, Kagwe, 2015).

Since Kenya pursued Alshabaab terrorists in 2011 by sending its auxiliaries to Somalia under AMISOM, it has been left to bear the brunt of sporadic terrorist attacks from the group. Such attacks include the Westgate attack (2013), the Dusit attack (2019), and the Lamu-Mpeketoni attack (2014). These attacks led to travel advisories against Kenya as a tourist destination, zoning effects, and loss of potential investors (Kiptoo, 2016). Lamu County, located at the northeast tip of the Kenyan coast, is characterized by its outstanding cultural heritage, historic sites, and pristine beaches. Lamu has been a key tourist destination in Kenya. Despite its prospects, Lamu has also faced several security issues that have negatively affected its tourism sector. The region has been vulnerable to terrorist attacks, mainly due to its geographical location near Somalia and the presence of the terror group Al-Shabaab. Incidents of violence, intimidation, and recruitment efforts have generated fear among tourists and deterred potential visitors, thus reducing tourism.

1.1 Problem Statement

Land disputes have emerged as a critical challenge to the sustainability of tourism in many coastal destinations, particularly in developing regions where land tenure systems are often weak or contested. In areas such as Lamu County, conflicts over land ownership, beach access, and delayed issuance of title deeds undermine investor confidence, disrupt community

cohesion, and limit equitable participation in tourism development (KNBS, 2024; GoK, 2021). These disputes contribute to unplanned development, exclusion of local communities, and environmental degradation, all of which threaten the long-term sustainability of tourism. Despite growing recognition of land governance issues, there remains limited empirical evidence on how land disputes specifically influence sustainable tourism outcomes.

Lamu County, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, presents a unique context where tourism potential coexists with persistent land-related conflicts. Previous studies have largely focused on broader tourism challenges such as security threats and infrastructure gaps, with less attention given to the direct effects of land disputes on tourism sustainability (Langat & Handa, 2023; Ouma, 2020). This creates a contextual and empirical gap in understanding how land governance dynamics shape tourism development in the region. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effects of land disputes on sustainable tourism in Lamu County, with a view to informing policies that promote equitable land access, social harmony, and sustainable investment in the tourism sector.

1.2 Research Objective

Establish the effects of land disputes on sustainable tourism in Lamu County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Empirical review

Safran (2015) researched land-related difficulties in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, and analyzed their influence on tourist growth using a political economy perspective. The study looked at how customary land tenure systems, political and cultural factors, and institutional frameworks shaped regional tourist growth. The Researcher employed a political economy analysis, utilizing qualitative data from community consultations, policy reviews, and institutional assessments to understand the complexities of land tenure and its effects on tourism. The research findings revealed that Pohnpei's complex land ownership systems, characterized by deep-rooted traditional practices and communal ownership, pose significant challenges to tourism development. The lack of clear land titles and the complexities of negotiating with multiple stakeholders deter potential investors. Additionally, weak institutional frameworks and inconsistent land policies exacerbate these challenges, leading to underutilized lands and missed economic opportunities in tourism. The study highlights the crucial role of context-sensitive strategies and community involvement in tourism growth. It also calls for long-term land and institutional changes to boost land productivity and promote sustainable tourist growth.

Morrison (2022) conducted an in-depth review of how land-related challenges affect tourism expansion in the United Kingdom. The study, outlined within the context of sustainable tourism development, analyzed 20 articles featured in a special edition of the journal *Land*. The outcome showed that tourism expansion is directly influenced by the availability, condition, and distinctive characteristics of the land. Key issues identified include land acquisition, utilization, and management, particularly in developing countries undergoing rapid urbanization and economic transformation. The conversion of agricultural land for tourism purposes raises critical concerns regarding land use and environmental conservation.

Dolan (2022) conducted a comprehensive examination of land disputes and injustices in Lamu County, Kenya, in the study titled "Excluded and Displaced in Your Own Homeland." This research analyses both historical and contemporary land issues and their implications for the marginalization and forced relocation of indigenous groups. The researcher employed a

qualitative approach, utilizing recent research conducted by Haki Yetu, a non-governmental organization advocating for the rights of coastal communities. The research was done with social justice theory in mind, emphasizing the principles of equity, rights, and participation in addressing systemic land dispossession and its socio-economic consequences. The findings of the research revealed that both historical and ongoing land injustices have severely affected the indigenous populations of Lamu County. The influx of mega infrastructure projects, such as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, has intensified land conflicts, leading to further displacement of local communities. The study also highlighted the lack of political will to implement recommendations from reports like the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), which aimed to address these historical grievances. The research also emphasized the critical need for comprehensive land reforms and genuine political commitment to resolve land-related conflicts and facilitate region-specific sustainable advancement. However, the research did not explore the relationship between these land disputes and sustainable tourism in Lamu County, providing an opportunity for research in that field.

2.2 Theoretical review

Sustainable Development Theory originated from the 1987 Brundtland Report, titled "Our Common Future," published by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. The report emphasizes the need for development that meets present needs while ensuring future generations can fulfill their own. This concept of sustainable growth requires a balance among social welfare, environmental conservation, and economic advancement. It also involves long-term planning, foresight regarding potential outcomes, community engagement, and the implementation of coordinated policies. In the context of sustainable tourism in Lamu County, Sustainable Development Theory was used to assess the extent to which current tourism practices align with sustainability principles. The study explored how tourism can contribute to the local economy while minimizing environmental impact and addressing socio-economic challenges. To strengthen tourism's resilience to security risks, this framework examined the roles of eco-friendly practices, community involvement, and policy integration. By examining these aspects, the study aimed to propose strategies that promote sustainable tourism development in Lamu.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the independent variable, land disputes, and the dependent variable, sustainable tourism.

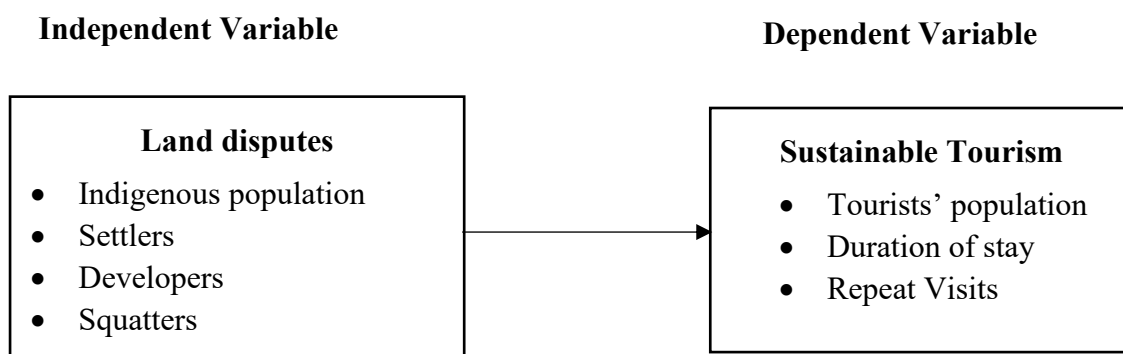


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The descriptive research design was adopted to conduct a thorough investigation into the impact of security threats on sustainable tourism in Lamu. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the issue from both human and institutional perspectives (Jilcha, 2019).

3.2 Target Population

The study focused on a target population comprising tourism stakeholders and government institutions involved in security and tourism-related functions. The security agencies involved the Tourist police Unit in Lamu county, composed of 18 office (Office of the County Commissioner, 2025), The County Police Commander (1), 1 Deputy County Commissioner-Lamu Central, County Director Trade, Tourism and Investment and the President (1) Lamu Tourism Association, 176 Hotel operators (The county Government of Lamu, 2025) and about 300 local tourism excursion companies (Kenya Association of Tour Operators, 2025). The total targeted population was 498.

Table 1: Target Population

Population category	Number of officers
Tourist Police Unit in Lamu County	18
The County Police Commander	1
Deputy County Commissioner-Lamu Central	1
County Director Trade, Tourism and Investment	1
Lamu Tourism Association-President	1
Hotel Operators	176
Local Tourism Excursion Companies	300
TOTAL	498

3.3 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure that various population segments were adequately represented. Selecting between 10% and 30% of the target population is considered sufficient, provided the sample is carefully selected and consists of more than 30 elements (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). In this study, 30% of hotel operators and 10% of local tourism excursion firms were randomly selected. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to identify key informants, including officers from the Tourist Police Unit in Lamu County, the County Police Commander, the Deputy County Commissioner of Lamu Central, the County Director for Trade, Tourism and Investment, and the President of the Lamu Tourism Association. The total sample size was set at 105, which was deemed adequate to represent the larger study population.

Table 2: Sample Size

Population Category	Number of officers Sample
Tourist Police Unit in Lamu County	18
The County Police Commander	1
Deputy County Commissioner-Lamu Central	1
County Director Trade, Tourism and Investment	1
Lamu Tourism Association-President	1
Hotel Operators	53
Local Tourism Excursion Companies	30
TOTAL	105

3.4 Research Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. It is meticulously designed to address the key variables of the study (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The use of clear and direct wording facilitated respondents' comprehension and enabled them to articulate their responses accurately. The questionnaire was administered to all members of the target population.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis entailed the systematic examination of information through logical methodologies to identify patterns or relationships. Following the data collection phase, all questionnaires were thoroughly assessed for completeness. The researcher employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings were presented in tables to facilitate clarity and comparison. Additionally, linear regression was employed to evaluate the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Sustainable Tourism

The researcher asked the respondents to provide insights and indicate their level of agreement with statements on sustainable tourism in Lamu using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Table 3 presents the outcome.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Sustainable Tourism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fixing security problems can help maintain the tourism industry in Lamu.	84	4.63	.485
There is a rise in tourist influx in Lamu	84	4.63	.485
Government security measures have contributed to longer stays of tourists in Lamu	84	4.23	.421
Protecting the environment promotes tourism in Lamu.	84	4.17	.375
There is a constant rise of tourism-related investments in Lamu County.	84	4.29	.454
Valid N (listwise)	84		

The results in Table 3 indicated that respondents were asked whether fixing security problems can help maintain the tourism industry in Lamu, yielding a mean of 4.63 and a standard deviation of 0.485. This showed strong agreement that addressing security risks sustains tourism. A study by Buigut, *Insecurity and Kenyan Tourism, 2014*, on Insecurity and its effects on the tourism sector in Kenya that focused on the impact of terrorism (mainly Al-Shabaab attacks) and political instability (electoral violence) on Kenya’s coastal and safari tourism found that insecurity led to significant reductions in tourist arrivals, especially in coastal Kenya, including Mombasa and Lamu. The study concluded that government counter-terrorism interventions and efforts to restore stability were critical for rebuilding tourist confidence and sustaining the tourism industry. Additionally, a study by Liu (2024) that examined the relationship among security measures, global peace, and tourism competitiveness found that security measures such as armed forces presence and law enforcement improvements have a statistically significant effect on boosting tourism competitiveness and tourist arrivals. The study concluded that sustained improvements in security conditions directly support tourism growth, supporting local findings of this research.

The findings indicate a rise in tourist influx in Lamu, with a mean of 4.63 and a standard deviation of 0.485, indicating strong agreement that Security measures boost tourists’ confidence, hence an increase in the number of tourists visiting Lamu. A report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Institute of Kenya Tourism Research (2025) on international visitor arrivals to Kenya and the recovery of tourism post-COVID-19 showed that visitor arrivals rose from about 2,089,259 in 2023 to 2,394,376 in 2024, representing a 14.6% increase. The report informed of consistent recovery and growth in tourism following pandemic disruptions. Another report by The Standard 2025 assessed Yearly growth in international tourist arrivals and associated tourism metrics, including visitor days and stay duration in Kenya. It was found that in 2024, Kenya recorded 2.39 million international visitor arrivals, up by 14.7% from 2023.

The findings on Government security measures have contributed to longer tourist stays in Lamu, with a mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.421, indicating that responders agreed

that security operations have a positive impact and have boosted tourists' confidence to stay longer in Lamu. A study by Serić, Jakšić, Stojanović, and Bagarić (2022) on how tourists' perceptions of safety/security at a destination influence its attractiveness, including decisions about staying longer, found that positive perceptions of security significantly increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourist destination. Tourists who perceive higher security tend to choose destinations where they feel safer, stay longer, and have better satisfaction. This supports the idea that when the government implements security measures or destinations enhance safety perception, tourists tend to lengthen their stay. Another study by Preko and Gyepi-Garbrah, (2023) examined how safety, security, and trust in information influences tourists' behaviour, including length of stay, revisit intention among others and found out that tourists who perceive destinations as safe, and trust the safety information for example; from governments or tourism boards, are more likely to extend their stay, revisit, or participate more fully in activities.

The findings on Protecting the environment promotes tourism in Lamu had a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.375, indicating high agreement among the respondents, who emphasized the role of environmental conservation in sustaining visitors' interest. A study by Tubey, Kyalo, and Mulwa (2020) examined how environmental conservation strategies affect the sustainability of community-based tourism projects. Established that a strong positive relationship exists between environmental conservation strategies and the sustainability of community-based tourism. This means that better environmental practices significantly contribute to sustainable tourism. Additionally, a study by Widayati, Semarang, et al. (2023) established that environmental awareness and environmental components influence visitor satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and the overall sustainability of marine ecotourism. The study found that environmental awareness, along with destination attractiveness and service quality, positively influences visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention. These advantages, in turn, enhance sustainable marine ecotourism. This study also supports the idea that protecting the environment contributes to better tourist experiences and hence promotes tourism.

Lastly, the findings revealed a steady increase in tourism-related investments in Lamu County, with a mean of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.454, indicating high agreement and suggesting that respondents perceive growth in these investments. A report by the Government of Kenya (Office of the President) (2025) reports that Kenya's tourism revenue reached about KSh 450 billion in 2024, a significant increase from previous years. The reports also stated that the government is investing in infrastructure, marketing, and experiences, targeting to reach 5 million tourists by 2027. This report supports that tourism-related investments are rising consistently. Another report by the Kenya Association of Travel Agents (2024) indicated that Kenya's Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Tourism signed an MoU to strengthen tourist security, allocate resources to the Tourism Police Unit, and improve safety to attract investment. The report also said that foreign arrivals increased by about 21.3% in the first half of 2024 compared to 2023, reflecting growth in tourism-related investments.

Qualitative findings also revealed that sustainable tourism in Lamu is closely linked to the preservation of cultural heritage, Swahili architecture, and traditional festivals such as the Maulid and Lamu Cultural Festival. Respondents emphasized that these cultural assets are key attractions that differentiate Lamu from other destinations. However, they cautioned that over-commercialization of these cultural events risks eroding their authenticity. The thematic analysis further highlighted that while tourism has generated employment and business opportunities, the benefits are unequally distributed, with outside investors often gaining more

than residents. This aligns with the quantitative findings that emphasize the importance of stability and community inclusion for tourism sustainability.

4.1.2 Land Disputes and Sustainable Tourism

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the following parameters of land disputes affect sustainable tourism in Lamu.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Land Disputes and Sustainable Tourism

	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
	There is bad faith between the indigenous population and the settlers, causing conflicts over land issues that deter tourism activities.	84	4.36 .482
	Unresolved land disputes among the indigenous population negatively affect tourism.	84	4.21 .413
	Tourism enterprises in disputed areas experience reduced revenue.	84	4.27 .449
	Land ownership conflicts lead to delays or cancellations of tourism projects	84	4.26 .442
	Privatization of prime beach areas has caused conflict between tourism investors and the local population in Lamu County	84	4.37 .485
	Valid N (listwise)	84	

The finding from Table 4 above, on the statement "There is bad faith between the indigenous population and the settlers, causing conflicts over land issues that deter tourism activities," had a mean of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.482. Showed very high agreement. Respondents strongly believe that mistrust and tensions between local communities and settlers fuel land conflicts and that directly undermine tourism in Lamu. A study by Ondicho (2005) that examined indigenous land tenure systems, colonial/settler land alienation, and the effects on local participation in tourism in Maasailand, Kenya, found that land alienation, including settler/colonial claims over indigenous land, causes mistrust and conflict, which then undermines indigenous involvement and reduces benefits from tourism. Disputes over land rights discourage investment, reduce local ownership, and harm tourism growth. Additionally, an article by Nation, 2020 on conflict between Maasai communities and ranchers/settlers over ownership of large land parcels used by lodges and tourist camps reported that long-running land conflict between indigenous Maasai and settler ranches is causing tension, preventing access to key tourism sites, reducing investor confidence, threatening to cripple tourism lodges in contested areas due to uncertainty, loss of access, and community protests.

The findings on unresolved land disputes among the indigenous population have negative effects on tourism, with a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of .413 showing strong agreement. Respondents recognize that failure to resolve intra-community disputes weakens stability and discourages tourism growth. A study by Ondicho (2005 that examined indigenous

land tenure systems, colonial/settler land alienation, and the effects on local participation in tourism in Maasailand, Kenya, found that unresolved land claims and land alienation by settler or colonial claims over indigenous lands reduce local participation in tourism, create mistrust, and can deter investment. Indigenous land claims are volatile and complicate tourism planning and infrastructure development. Another study by Karimi, Khezri, and Razzaghi (2021) on how regional conflicts, including land disputes and political tensions, affect tourism flows showed that countries with high levels of regional conflict have significantly lower tourist arrival rates. Though not all conflicts are land disputes, many involve unresolved territorial or land claim tensions that harm tourism through instability and perceived insecurity.

The findings on tourism enterprises in disputed areas indicate reduced revenue, with a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.449, indicating strong agreement. Perceptions indicate that businesses in land conflict zones perform poorly due to insecurity and instability. A study by EastAfrican, 2020, on the impact of land invasions by herders, settlers, and conflict on wildlife conservancies, lodges, and tourism camps in Kenya directly showed that enterprises in areas with land conflict/dispute experience reduced revenue, like cancellations, a drop in bookings, and damage to infrastructure, aligning with my statement. Additionally, another article by Standard (2017) reported that in Laikipia County, Kenya, lodges and conservancy enterprises there reported insecurity, property damage, and loss of revenue due to encroachment/invasion of camps or ranches by herders/settlers. Some lodges have closed or been partially damaged because of those issues, causing financial losses, cancellations, and a decline in revenue possibilities due to land disputes and invasions affecting lodging enterprises.

The findings on Land ownership conflicts lead to delays or cancellations of tourism projects, with a mean of 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.442, indicating high agreement. Land disputes disrupt project implementation, discouraging investors and slowing tourism development. An article by Morrison (2022) on Land acquisition/use conflict and its effect on tourism development argued that tourism developments often face delays or cancellations when land rights are unclear, or when there is legal contestation, or when communities oppose projects due to perceived injustice in land allocation. The editorial also emphasized that land issues are a major bottleneck for tourism infrastructure and expansion in multiple destinations.

The findings on the privatization of prime beach areas have caused conflict between tourism investors and the local population in Lamu County, with a mean of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.485, indicating very strong agreement. This was the highest mean in this set, indicating a broad consensus that the commercialization and privatization of beaches often alienate locals and create tension with investors, harming the sustainability of tourism. The statement *'Privatization of prime beach areas has caused conflict between tourism investors and local population in Lamu County'* has been reflected in reports from Kenya's coast. A 2024 study by Standard Group Kenya on Private beachfront ownership hurting tourism documented that hotel businesses in Malindi and Watamu face challenges when beachfronts are privatized, as this restricts public access to the beach and hence causes friction with local communities. Similarly, a study by Kaingu & Pepela showed that as beach operators lose access or control to exclusive beachfronts, socio-cultural tensions rise, reducing local benefits and sometimes damaging tourism businesses due to negative perceptions.

The qualitative findings reinforced these results, showing that unresolved land ownership conflicts and the privatization of prime beach areas have created tensions between local communities and investors. Respondents expressed frustration over limited access to public beaches and slow resolution of title deed disputes, which they said discourage both investors and tourists. Community members emphasized the need for government transparency and fair

allocation of tourism land. The findings suggest that equitable land governance is central to restoring investor confidence and sustaining community support for tourism initiatives.

4.2 Correlation between Land Disputes and Sustainable Tourism

The study conducted a correlation analysis to assess the association between Land disputes and Sustainable Tourism. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation between Land Disputes and Sustainable Tourism

		Sustainable Tourism	Land Disputes
Sustainable Tourism	Pearson Correlation	1	.251*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.021
	N	84	84
Land Disputes	Pearson Correlation	.251*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	
	N	84	84

From Table 5 above, the Pearson correlation coefficient between land disputes and sustainable tourism was $r = .251$, $p = .021$ ($N = 84$). This indicates a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables. Since the p-value (.021) is less than 0.05, the correlation is significant at the 95% confidence level. This suggests that resolving land disputes among the indigenous population and settlers contributes positively to the sustainability of tourism in Lamu County.

Although the relationship of land disputes is weaker compared to terrorism incidents, land conflicts such as ownership disputes, privatization of prime beach areas, and disagreements between locals and investors still influence tourism growth. Addressing land issues can therefore improve investment confidence and create a more stable environment for sustainable tourism.

4.3 Regression

The regression analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the study. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Coefficients

		Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.684	2.814		2.731	.008
	Land Disputes	.236	.095	.239	2.488	.015

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Tourism

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Land disputes ($B = .236$, $\beta = .239$, $p = .015$) also show a positive, significant relationship with sustainable tourism. This suggests that resolving land ownership conflicts, promoting fair access to tourism land, and maintaining peaceful coexistence between local communities and investors contribute meaningfully to tourism growth and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

The study found that land disputes significantly influence tourism sustainability in Lamu County. Issues such as land grabbing, beach privatization, and delayed issuance of title deeds were found to discourage both local and foreign investment. These disputes not only disrupt community cohesion but also erode investor confidence, slowing down development projects in the tourism sector.

In contrast, areas where land ownership conflicts have been resolved were observed to attract more stable investment and stronger collaboration between local communities and developers. Respondents emphasized that equitable land distribution and transparent management of land resources build trust, promote social harmony, and encourage sustainable economic activities.

The findings, therefore, underscore that secure and fair land tenure systems are not only a matter of justice but also an essential foundation for sustainable tourism. Without resolving underlying land issues, tourism development risks becoming exclusionary, benefiting only a few while fueling local resentment and instability.

6. Recommendations

To promote sustainable tourism in Lamu County, it is recommended that land disputes be addressed through transparent, timely, and inclusive mechanisms that ensure fair adjudication, secure land tenure, and protection of community land rights. The government should fast-track the issuance of title deeds, prevent illegal land grabbing and beach privatization, and enforce clear land-use policies that guarantee equitable access to tourism resources. Additionally, involving local communities in decision-making and strengthening collaboration between stakeholders will foster trust, reduce conflicts, and create a stable environment for sustainable tourism development.

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