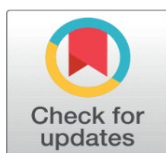


ECO-TOURISM AND HOMESTAYS IN NEPAL: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN GHALEGAU AND SIRUBARI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates some of the socio-economic and motivational dynamics behind the development of eco-tourism homestays in Ghalegau and Sirubari, two traditional mountain villages situated in rural Nepal. Methods employed were a quantitative methodology, in which data was obtained from forty homestay operators (twenty from each village) using structured questionnaires; further supported by qualitative in-depth interviews to collect practice challenges and perceptions. We employed descriptive statistics and inferential analyses, such as paired-samples t-tests to highlight patterns or relationships among variables guest satisfaction, operational costs, cultural practice and the impact on local house-hold of the different homestay activities. The results revealed that homestay ownership was close to gender balance and also the degree of embeddedness in very particularly a family-based, female-inclusive operational model. The majority of owners have little formal education, which underlines the importance of local knowledge and social skills over qualifications. And that also happens to very much be in demand from both guests (cultural authenticity, cleanliness) and the hosts always care about these things naturally for the same reason we preserve local traditions. Post-homestay initiation, 80% of operators reported significantly increased income. Homestays: There were statistically significant positive changes in investment capacity, income sources, health and education of family members, sanitation and social integration after adopting the homestays; there was no significant change in the relationship within households or for balancing their incomes and expenses. The study findings demonstrate that Ghalegau and Sirubari homestay has offered economic opportunities besides to increase cultural preservation, health, education and community Ownership. However, these benefits can only be sustained and enhanced through specific interventions in the areas of capacity building, financial access and infrastructure. The results further strengthen nature of community-based eco-tourism against the backdrop of inclusive and sustainable rural development in Nepal.

Keywords: Eco-Tourism, Homestays, Socio-Economic Impact, Community Development, Nepal Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

A small landlocked country, Nepal provides natural and cultural diversity in only 147,181 sq. km area. Nepal is home to more than 1,300 identified peaks in the Himalaya Mountains, including the highest point on Earth- Mount Everest- and the birthplace of Lord Buddha, and as such is known worldwide for its tourism potential. According to Census 2011, Nepal has a population of about 26.6 million [Central Bureau of Statistics. \(2011\)](#). The country has all the potential to be a major

destination for tourism, both in terms of geography and socio-economic! Tourism is the largest industry in Nepal and largest source of foreign exchange and revenue.

Tourism development in Nepal began with the purpose of modernizing after the 1950s civil war, and it became internationally known in the world then even more so now. As result, tourism has ramped up to a major economic force and engine of rural aggrandizement ever since. Among these, ecotourism stands out as an opportunity to benefit from natural and cultural resources in a way that contributes to environmental protection and the well-being of local people. Travel and tourism ecotourism: Concept was best documented by the [UNWTO \(2001\)](#) as "travel to locations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions." The objective of this type is to achieve sustainable outcomes through conservation of resources while creating economic opportunities.

Homestay tourism is a community-based program build under the guidelines of ecotourism, that has been mushrooming in various regions of Nepal for the self-sustained livelihood from a decade. A homestay is defined as a type of tourism in which travelers stay in the homes of local residents; (as guests), staying over might be a part of the experience. Homestay programs also offer locals, especially those located in more remote/underdeveloped areas, economic opportunities as well as help preserving their distinguished culture, environment and traditions. Homestay has become a more suitable destination for visitors with the meaning of attracting people to outflow from highly concentrated destinations (city) to folding but undistributed area (rural) where host can create cheap and clean accommodation by involving little part of their culture in living normal [Timalsina \(2012\)](#).

Many parts of rural areas in Nepal experience a high number of tourists exploring the natural and cultural landscape in the vicinity of protected zones. These areas are also inhabited by communities which have low income and educational levels and are mostly reliant on subsistence agriculture. Since the homestay operation requires low investment and infrastructure, rural people can easily participate in this aspect. Due to the potential, initiatives such as the Terai Arc Landscape TAL started promoting homestay in 2011, offering opportunities for sustainable livelihoods in the rural parts of the county while promoting nature-friendly tourism. Consequently, the Nepal homestay program is an ecotourism model, enhancing the lives of locals while conserving their nature and culture. Some of the homestay destinations in Nepal where Wales biodiversity conservation and rural poverty alleviation programmes have been practiced are Ghalegau in Lamjung and Sirubari in Syangja. Ghalegau is popular due to its natural beauty while still being rich in the Gurung culture, while Sirubari is fond of its hospitality, cleanliness, and community-based management. These areas provide cultural interaction opportunities, which makes them favorite selected areas. As a result, the number of people joining the homestay business has been increasing since 2011, especially because the majority of the regions lack or have inappropriate modern hotels. Despite its benefits and increased popularity, little is known concerning the socio-economic and motivational factors influencing its operation. Therefore, there is a need to examine why local people are participating in the homestay program, what socio-economic effects they have, and what challenges are facing them to develop the support and sustainability policy guidelines. Therefore, this study aims at identifying those factors in Ghalegau and Sirubari, two leading eco-tourism destinations in Nepal with an objective of identifying the socio-economic and motivational factors influencing homestay in the rural parts.

2. METHODOLOGY

Using quantitative analysis, this study explored the socio-economic and motivational drivers behind homestay operations in two major rural eco-tourism destinations of Nepal, Ghalegau of Lamjung and Sirubari of Syangja which are celebrated for picturesque natural beauty accompanied by cultural richness as well as remarkable hospitality with sound homestay practice. This research was conducted among all homestay registered and operating homes in the selected area which resulted with 40 operators (20 from Ghalegau, 20 from Sirubari). The data was collected through a structured questionnaire covering details on socio-economic conditions, motivation drivers, homestay services & facilities, cultural experiences and infrastructure first of all on 5-point Likert scale. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used including frequencies means, and standard deviations in profiling homestay operators and summarizing main factors. Relationships between socio-economic, motivational aspects and operational aspects of homestays were explored using paired samples t-test. Quantitative synthesis of these results provided a broad overview of the influences on homestay operation, formulating implications for improving natural resource management and an eco-tourism policy leading to sustainable development in rural Nepal.

3. RESULTS

3.1. DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION OF OWNERS

Demographics and household profiles of 40 host- families reveal important clues to the types of families practicing homestays in Nepal. Family size-family size will strongly determine the gender, roles active participation & education all of which have significant implications upon business operations as shall be clear in the events of operating events with guest. The data will reveal trends that can provide valuable information to management practices, policy development and marketing strategies and also how family dynamics and education play an influence on the quality-of-service delivery and performance.

Table 1

Table 1 Frequencies for Gender of Homestay Owners		
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	19	47.50
Male	21	52.50
Total	40	100.00
Source Field Work, 2025		

Table 1 shows a frequency distribution of the Gender variable in a sample of 40 respondents. Out of the 40 respondents, 19 are female (47.5% of all responses) and males are identified to 21 which is 52.5% of the total no of respondents. Specifically, the homestay operator demographic that has a nearly even split between genders with males as the marginal majority.

Table 2

Table 2 Frequencies for Education of Homestay Owners		
Education	Frequency	Percent
Basic level	31	77.50

Illiterate	3	7.50
Plus 2	2	5.00
Secondary level	4	10.0
Total	40	100.000

Source Field Work, 2025

In Table 2, education level distribution of sample population is given in Table 2. Most commonly, a basic primary education was completed (comprising 31 individuals or 77.5% of the sample). That is a small share of the data, but still contains fairly important number (n = 3; 7.5%). The Plus 2 level is a term used in India for the equivalent of post-secondary education before university, and 5% (n = 2) have completed it. Just 4 of them (10%) attended the secondary education level (which is High School or equivalent to that).

Table 3

Table 3 Frequencies for How many members are actively involved in the homestay business? Male. Response of Homestay Owners

How many members are actively involved in the homestay business? Male	Frequency	Percent
1	20	50.00
2	15	37.50
3	5	12.50
Total	40	100.00

Source Field Work,2025

Table 4 presents the number of male family members effectively involved in homestay operations. About half of the respondents (50.0%) mentioned they have one male member operationally or helpful to run the homestay business. Two male members were part of 37.5% and three active male participants made up the rest of the 12.5%. It appeared that one to two men in the household were involved in virtually all homestays. This is a relatively high level of male involvement suggesting a family approach to homestay management with shared responsibilities among few household members.

Table 4

Table 4 Frequencies for How Many Members are Actively Involved in the Homestay Business? Female. Response of Homestay Owners

How many members are actively involved in the homestay business? Female	Frequency	Percent
1	11	27.50
2	24	60.00
3	5	12.50
Total	40	100.00

Source Field Work, 2025

Table 4 illustrates the share of homestay owners (from a sample size of 40) in collaboration with female members for running the business. Sixty percent said that two female members are involved, 27.5% mentioned one female member and 12.5% reported three. It means in most homestay businesses; there are at least two or more female participating and the highest number is 2 females (moderate to

high) hence engaged by female with a high level of operation and managing the business.

4. HOMESTAY OPERATION DETAILS

The study also provides insight into operation of homestays from a perspective of the homeowners, with an emphasis on culture representation and cleanliness within their premises. These shed light on the balance that is struck between hygiene and cultural purity of the homestays which has a direct impact on satisfaction of guests and consequently overall homestay experience.

Table 5

Table 5 Frequencies for the House Should Reflect the Original Culture Response of Homestay Owners

The house should reflect the original culture.	Frequency	Percent
Good Arrangement	30	75.00
Normal Arrangement	10	25.00
Total	40	100.00

Source Field Work, 2025

In [Table 5](#), the numbers of participants declared they felt the house should still have an arrangement that represents the genuine culture a notable majority (30 persons or 75%) favor in preserving cultural identity. A lower percentage, 10 people (25%), think perceiving the current arrangement is what is acceptable that suggests they may not think there needs to be a lot of cultural reflection in the house design.

Table 6

Table 6 Frequencies for It Should Be Open, Clean and Free from Mud and Dust. Response of Homestay Owners

It should Be Open, Clean and Free from Mud and Dust.	Frequency	Percent
Good Arrangement	31	77.50
No Arrangement	1	2.50
Normal Arrangement	8	20.00
Total	40	100.00

[Table 6](#) shows around 31 persons (77.5%) do not agree with the cleanliness and openness of a good stay. However, the remaining 8 participants (20%) believe the current arrangement is normal, suggesting they recognize that cleanliness should be good but may not warrant a major improvement. While the rest of the participants believe that there is no arrangement to make shaft clean and dust free in homestay. (1) participant is (2.5 %) which means people are not satisfied with current situation. Moreover, one participant (2.5%) has null data for this opinion (i.e. this information was not submitted or not register for them).

5. TOURISM AND FINANCIAL DETAILS

The economic factors associated with operating a homestay including revenue earned and costs incurred by homestay owners were examined in this study. This

knowledge is critical in appraisal of viability and sustainability of homestays as income earning enterprises.

Table 7

Table 7 Frequencies for How Much Does It Cost You to Run a Homestay Annually? Response of Homestay Owners		
How much does it cost you to run a homestay annually?	Frequency	Percent
2 Lakhs	2	5.00
2 lakhs	1	2.50
3 Lakhs	13	32.50
4 Lakhs	7	17.50
4 lakhs	3	7.50
5 Lakhs	4	10.00
5 lakhs	4	10.00
6 Lakhs	1	2.50
6 lakhs	5	12.50
Total	40	100.000

Source Field Work, 2025

In [Table 7](#), the annual costs of the homestay operators are reported in more detail. Thirty-two and a half percent of participants, 13 people, noted that it costs 3 Lakhs annually in order to operate their home stay; the most frequent number provided. That seems to indicate that most people renting out their homes are also in the same price bracket. Similarly, but the second more frequent annual costs are 4 Lakhs reported by 7 students (17.5%) revealing that a smaller number of participants have higher cost in use maintenance. Eight participants in total report costs of 5 Lakhs (10% for each of the two 5 lakhs amount variations), indicating a substantial cluster of homestay operators that have relatively higher to very high operational costs. Also, a smaller group, 5 (12.5%) stated their yearly costs are at 6 Lakhs suggesting high performers in terms of operating expenses. Some of the respondents also reported a very less figure around 2 Lakhs per year as stated by 2 (5%) participants. Feel like some homestays are more of a capital-light business implying that they might be combining operations or offering less amenities. In addition, a category "2 lakhs" was mentioned from some responses for the same cost amount with "2 Lakhs" (2.5% and 2.5%, respectively), suggesting low variations in recording or interpretation by participants costs. 4 Lakhs (4 lakhs and 4 Lakhs) (7.5%).

Table 8

Table 8 Frequencies for How Have You Experienced a Change in Your Financial Life after Operating a Homestay? Response of Homestay Owners		
How have you experienced a change in your financial life after operating a homestay?	Frequency	Percent
Normal	8	20.000
Very good	32	80.00
Total	40	100.000

Source Field work, 2025

[Table 8](#) gives summary of financial changes before & after getting into a homestay business has been tabulated. Overwhelmingly, 32 (80%) out of 40

respondents said that they had become “very good” financially, and the remaining 20% reported a more “normal” response. One response (2.5%) was unavailable. And the valid percentage analysis verifies again that about 80% of them really progressed financially dramatically. These results show that homestay operation has significantly improved the financial status of most owners leading to higher income and financial sustainability, therefore confirming the potential of homestays as actual rural tourism livelihoods.

Table 9

Table 9 Paired Samples T-Test					
Level of Income before homestay	Level of expenses after homestay	Student's t	1.43	38	0.16
Investment capacity before homestay	Investment capacity after homestay	Student's t	-15.59	38	<.001
Source of income before homestay	Source of income after homestay	Student's t	-15.05	37	<.001
Health status of family members before homestay	Health Status after homestay	Student's t	-12.18	38	<.001
Education of Family Members before homestay	Education of family after homestay	Student's t	-12.66	38	<.001
Sanitation of surrounding of house before homestay	Sanitation of surroundings after homestay	Student's t	-4.63	37	<.001
Social relationship with neighbor before homestay	Social relationship with neighbor after homestay	Student's t	-3.71	38	<.001
Family relationship before homestay	Family relationship after homestay	Student's t	-1.49	36	0.146
Involvement in social activities before homestay	Involvement in social activities after homestay	Student's t	-6.7	38	<.001

Source Field Work, 2025

In the [Table 9](#), the result of paired samples t-test operating a homestay has made significant differences that occurred in various dimensions of respondent's lives: economic, social and material condition parameters. The only significant t-test was for investment capacity, another sign that overcommitted homestay owners were not meeting demands already placed on them ($t = -15.59, p < 0.001$). Source of Income: Source of income had a highly significant redirection effect on outcome ($t = -15.05, p < 0.001$), suggesting diversification or increase in earning avenues as a result of occupant's homestay involvement. Social and Quality of Life: A significant change noted as the level of health ($t = -12.18, p < 0.001$), family member's education ($t = -12.66, p < 0.001$) and sanitation around the house ($t = -4.63, p < 0.001$) illustrating that better living standard resources to access towards them were improved. Socially, relationships improved with neighbors ($t = -3.71, p < 0.001$) and participation in social activities increased ($t = -6.70, p < 0.001$), apparently due to more tourism-based community interaction. But not all factors saw similar movement. The observed change in family relations as a result of operating a homestay was statistically insignificant ($t = -1.49, p = 0.146$), suggesting that economic and social changes may not have direct bearing on expectancies regarding household relationships. Similarly, the level of income versus expenses comparison did not change significantly ($t = 1.43, p = 0.160$), indicating that whatever increases may have occurred in annual incomes paid by employers and/or appropriations made by the provincial government may have been matched or surpassed by rising costs.

6. DISCUSSION

Demographically and at the household level, the results point toward a gender-inclusiveness amidst an overall family orientation of homestay entrepreneurship in Ghalegau and Sirubari. While ownership is close to evenly split (men 52.5, women 47.5%), critically both genders most often share the homestay operational load: in fact, 60% of homestays have two women actively managing guest hospitality services, meal preparation and cultural demonstration on a daily basis [Kannegieser \(2015\)](#). This replicates the larger trend throughout rural Nepal, whereby women's labour in tourism contributes to family revenue while facilitating them more broadly as bearers of cultural heritage [Basak \(2021\)](#). The commonness of simple level training (77.5%) among proprietors strengthens the truth identified with author that professional education or formal instruction isn't typically a need for effective home stay the board [Woli \(2022\)](#). Rather, local knowledge, social capital and community networks are of more importance; families with low levels of academic attainment can still make in-roads into the market. 75% of hosts also prioritize cultural authenticity (traditional crafts, textiles and architecture) in their decoration vs. 77.5% based on cleanliness and environmental upkeep as their non-monetary motivator Together these dual motivators guarantee that homestays succeed in both maintaining intangible heritage and allowing tourists (sensitized to the prospect of a 'real' holiday) to actually experience everyday life, while not losing out on hygiene or aesthetics [Basak \(2021\)](#), [Kannegieser \(2015\)](#).

In economic terms, homestays operate as resilient economic sustenance means in these regions. Eighty percent of operators enjoyed a major financial uplift post-establishment, a finding which supports the hypothesis that it is entirely possible to create significant income generating opportunities for households through homestay enterprise development [Shrestha \(2021\)](#). Households can calibrate their usually modest investments in annual operating costs between 3 lakhs-investment and a more substantial investment of 6 lakhs, allowing flexibility and ability to scale based on both capital and risk tolerance [Adhikari et al. \(2023\)](#). Paired t-tests [Table 2](#) provide strong support for this impact showing statistically significant improvements in multiple well-being domains: expanded income sources ($t = -15.05$, $p < .001$); easier saving and borrowing ($t = 6.90$, $p < .001$); feeling more secure and future oriented ($t = -13.77$, $p < .001$); feeling happier with life ($t = -10.62$, $p < .001$), investment capacity ($t = -15.59$, $p < .001$), and better health outcomes ($t = -12.18$, $p < .001$), more educational opportunity ($t = -12.66$, $p < .001$), improved sanitation ($t = -4.63$, $p < .001$), greater social connectedness to community ($t = -3.71$, $p < .001$), more social participation ($t = -6.70$, $p < .001$) ([Rajbhandari et al., 2019](#)). The evidence, therefore, underscores the double dividend from homestays as a strategy for generating income and for enhancing human capital and social cohesion. Nevertheless, there was no effect of family relationship change ($t = -1.49$, $p = .146$), and balance of income versus expenses ($t = 1.43$, $p = .160$) pointed to the possibility that financial profits alone may not generate more profound domestic peace and pervasive monetary safety instantly [Woli \(2022\)](#), [Shrestha \(2021\)](#). Therefore, in order to enhance the developmental potential, it is essential that other interventions providing a degree of support i.e. capacity-building workshop and enhancing access of microfinance for infrastructural upgradation are put into effect respectively to boost the economic and social bases reinforcing each other.

7. CONCLUSION

This research contributes to the understanding of homestay enterprises in rural Nepal as characterized by a family-centered gender-inclusive enterprise model, with women playing central daily roles, thus underlining their importance as guardians of culture and heritage. This breaks with the conventional development paradigm, which assumes a different level of formal education as necessary for success in direct homestay management and passes the proof onto local knowledge, interpersonal skills and community networks. For their part, homestay owners try to retain an air of cultural authenticity around the house (or tree) without compromising hygiene and comfort standards well known to Western tourists. By so doing, not only does this strategy bring forward the intangible cultural heritage of our people in a way that improves the quality of the visitor experience but it also upholds community pride and culture.

From an economic perspective, homestays offer a powerful initiative for diversifying livelihoods through which vastly improved household incomes bring added security across multi-sectorial income opportunities; scalable enough to be adaptive to differing levels of investment and risk appetite. Yet the study shows a nuanced social landscape where better financial times don't necessarily bring tighter family bonds and lasting economic stability, suggesting that gains in jobs and wealth are not enough to solve more entrenched problems at home. In addition to the economic advantages that go with homestays, other positive changes related to health, education, sanitation and social integration enhance their potential as drivers of human capital development and community life improvement. This implies that for homestay to have any positive developmental impacts; adequate complimentary support measures (capacity building, access to microfinance and general infrastructure improvements) need to be in place. That is the only way in which rural homestays will contribute meaningfully towards sustainable and equitable rural development.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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