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Evaluating the Impact of Capacity Building on Sustainability Adherence Among Tourism Enterprises in Kenya

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Abstract:

Research Aims:
This study investigates how capacity building enables tourism enterprises in Kenya to translate external sustainability pressures into firm-level sustainability practices. The research specifically examines the relationship between capacity-building interventions and sustainability adherence within the tourism sector in a developing-country context.
Methodology:
The study employed a descriptive survey research design targeting 17,654 registered tourism enterprises in Kenya. A sample of 396 enterprises was selected using probability-proportional-to-size sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The research instrument demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.908$).
Theoretical Contribution/Originality:
Grounded in Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the study extends theoretical understanding by demonstrating that external institutional pressures alone are insufficient to ensure sustainability adherence without internal organizational capacity. The study also operationalizes Dynamic Capabilities Theory within the context of sustainable tourism in emerging economies.
Practitioners/Policy Implications:
The findings identify capacity building as a critical driver of sustainability compliance. The study recommends shifting from enforcement-oriented approaches toward incentivized training, knowledge development, and organizational capability enhancement to improve sustainability performance in tourism enterprises.
Research Limitations/Implications:
The study focuses solely on tourism enterprises in Kenya, limiting broader generalization. However, the findings provide important empirical evidence for future sustainability research and policy development in emerging economies.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Sustainability Adherence, Institutional Theory, Dynamic Capabilities

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a significant driver of the global economy, exhibiting resilience and sustained growth in the post-pandemic era. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, the sector accounted for approximately 10% of global GDP in 2024, equivalent to USD 10.9 trillion, representing an 8.5% increase from 2023 (WTTC, 2023). This positive trend continued into 2025,

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with global tourism contributing a record USD 11.6 trillion, or about 9.8% of the global economy, surpassing the overall global economic growth rate (WTTC, 2025). Although this expansion underscores tourism's importance in economic development, employment creation, and foreign exchange earnings, it also increases pressure on natural ecosystems and host communities, raising significant concerns regarding environmental integrity and socio-cultural sustainability. In response, there has been a marked global shift toward adopting sustainability frameworks and standards to ensure the sector's long-term viability. However, many tourism enterprises, particularly in developing economies, face persistent challenges in consistently implementing sustainability principles within their operations (UN Tourism, 2022). This gap reveals a disconnect between macro-level growth and micro-level practice, with firms' ability to internalize, operationalize, and maintain responsible practices remaining a critical challenge. Capacity building, including skills development, technical support, institutional strengthening, and improved access to resources, is therefore recognized as a crucial mechanism for enhancing sustainability compliance among tourism enterprises (Ashley et al., 2007; OECD, 2020). Understanding the impact of capacity-building initiatives on tourism firms' ability to meet sustainability standards is essential for bridging the divide between global tourism growth and responsible destination management.

In Africa, the tourism sector exhibits significant growth potential, yet persistent structural and institutional constraints continue to impede its sustainability trajectory. The region has experienced a steady recovery in international tourist arrivals, largely driven by increased intra-African travel and renewed global demand (UN Tourism, 2024). Tourism, therefore, remains a vital source of employment, income generation, and foreign exchange for many African economies. Despite this growth, the sector faces considerable vulnerabilities, including increased exposure to climate change, inadequate infrastructure, fragmented governance, and weak institutional coordination. These challenges are especially acute at the enterprise level, where many tourism firms lack the technical expertise, financial resources, and managerial capacity required to implement sustainability-oriented practices effectively (African Development Bank, 2023; UNECA, 2022). Although the literature and policy reports consistently highlight the importance of capacity building in overcoming these barriers, empirical evidence remains limited regarding the extent to which such interventions lead to measurable improvements in sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Africa. Most existing research is conceptual or focused on macro-level policy frameworks, with insufficient attention to firm-level dynamics and outcomes (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019). As a result, it is not yet empirically established whether, and to what extent, capacity-building initiatives such as training, technical support, and institutional strengthening directly enhance tourism enterprises' ability to comply with sustainability standards and practices.

The tourism sector in Kenya constitutes a cornerstone of the national economy, contributing approximately 10.4% to GDP, 4.2% to gross fixed capital formation, and 5.5% to formal employment (TRI, 2020). Within the country's long-term development blueprint, tourism is recognized as a primary sector for economic growth, employment generation, and income creation (GoK, 2007). The World Bank highlights tourism as a significant development instrument, particularly when managed to achieve balanced environmental, social, and economic outcomes (World Bank, 2019, 2023). This is particularly relevant in Kenya, where nearly 80% of tourism is nature-based and relies on wildlife protected areas, coastal ecosystems, and cultural landscapes that support key tourism

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products such as safaris, beach tourism, and heritage experiences (TRI, 2024). The sustainability of these resources is fundamental to the sector's long-term viability and its contribution to national development. In response, Kenya has progressively enhanced its policy and regulatory frameworks to promote sustainable tourism, emphasizing environmental conservation, community participation, and inclusive growth (GoK, 2022, 2023).

Despite these policy advances, sustainability adherence at the enterprise level remains inconsistent and frequently insufficient. Many tourism enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized firms, face persistent challenges, including limited technical expertise, inadequate managerial capacity, and restricted financial resources, that impede the effective implementation of sustainability practices (Imbaya et al., 2019). This disconnect highlights a significant misalignment between national policy objectives and operational realities at the firm level. While existing studies recognize capacity constraints, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the impact of capacity-building interventions on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. Therefore, this study investigated the extent to which capacity building influences sustainability adherence at the enterprise level and examines whether strengthening such capacities can bridge the gap between policy intentions and practical implementation in Kenya's tourism sector.

This study applied Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) to analyze how external pressures and internal capabilities collectively shape sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises. Institutional Theory posits that organizations respond to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures to attain legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). In the Kenyan context, coercive pressures stem from regulatory frameworks such as the Climate Change Act (2016, amended 2023), the Tourism Regulatory Authority's sustainability guidelines, and the National Environment Management Authority's environmental regulations. Normative pressures are driven by industry standards, such as Ecotourism Kenya certification, while mimetic pressures arise when firms imitate leading competitors (Imbaya et al., 2019; Muriithi & Ngare, 2023). Despite the breadth of this regulatory and normative environment, empirical evidence suggests that these pressures frequently result in symbolic rather than substantive compliance. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "decoupling," occurs when firms adopt formal policies without integrating them into operational practices (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). Research in Africa and other developing regions indicates that sustainability implementation is often hindered by limited technical expertise, weak institutional capacity, and resource constraints, resulting in "paper compliance" rather than meaningful performance improvements (UN Tourism, 2023; Mdoda et al., 2024).

These observations underscore a key limitation of Institutional Theory, substantiating that external pressure alone is insufficient to ensure effective sustainability adherence at the firm level. To address this limitation, capacity building was conceptualized in this study as a key explanatory variable mediating the relationship between institutional pressures and sustainability adherence. Through training, technical support, knowledge systems, and resource mobilization, capacity building enables firms to internalize and operationalize externally imposed standards (Surmeier, 2020). Without sufficient internal capacity, enterprises are unable to translate regulatory requirements into actionable practices, perpetuating the gap between policy intent and implementation outcomes. Empirical evidence from Kenya and similar contexts demonstrates that enterprises with stronger internal capabilities achieve higher levels of sustainability compliance,

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while those with limited capacity are confined to superficial adoption (Imbaya et al., 2019). Although this relationship is recognized, empirical research directly examining the influence of capacity building on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya, particularly at the firm level, remains limited.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) complements this perspective by elucidating how internal competencies are developed and deployed in response to external demands. According to this theory, organizational performance depends on the capacity to identify opportunities and threats, act strategically, and reconfigure resources as necessary (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2007). In the tourism sector, sustainability has emerged as both a market and regulatory imperative, requiring firms to continuously adapt their operations to align with evolving environmental standards and consumer expectations (Surmeier, 2020). Capacity building plays a critical role in this context by enhancing absorptive capacity, defined as the ability to acquire, assimilate, and apply new knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Training and technical support, for instance, facilitate the adoption of energy-efficient technologies, the implementation of waste management systems, and compliance with eco-certification standards. These initiatives transform sustainability from a compliance requirement into a source of competitive advantage (Ecotourism Kenya, 2025; Teece, 2018). In developing economies such as Kenya, the relevance of Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) is particularly pronounced due to the capability constraints experienced by small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs). While larger firms often possess the resources necessary to comply with sustainability requirements, SMTEs depend heavily on targeted capacity-building interventions to acquire essential managerial and technical competencies (Mdoda et al., 2024). Empirical evidence demonstrates that these interventions not only improve compliance but also foster eco-innovation, enabling firms to redesign products and processes to minimize environmental impact and enhance value creation (Muriithi & Ngare, 2023). Within this context, capacity building functions as a critical link between policy formulation and practical implementation (Muriithi & Ngare, 2023). By enhancing technical competencies, strengthening institutional frameworks, and facilitating knowledge transfer, these interventions can enable tourism enterprises to progress from theoretical understanding to the implementation of robust sustainability standards (Surmeier, 2020).

Nevertheless, the relationship among institutional pressures, capacity building, and sustainability adherence remains underexplored within the Kenyan tourism sector. While existing literature recognizes the importance of capacity development in promoting inclusive growth (Nthiga et al., 2015), a substantial empirical gap persists regarding its direct causal impact on organizational compliance, especially within the distinct socio-economic environments of developing countries (Mdoda et al., 2024). By integrating Institutional Theory and DCT, this study sought to address this gap by systematically evaluating the effects of capacity-building initiatives on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. By redirecting attention from macro-level policy to enterprise-level implementation, this research offers a detailed analysis of how national sustainability objectives can be translated into measurable, verifiable, and enduring industry practices.

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METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was used to examine the relationship between capacity building and sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. This design enabled the systematic collection of standardized data to describe characteristics of the target population and to analyze relationships between variables without manipulation (Saunders et al., 2019). Grounded in Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the methodology facilitated the measurement of organizational practices and perceptions through structured survey instruments, supporting the quantification of key constructs such as capacity building and sustainability adherence. Additionally, a cross-sectional approach was employed, with data collected at a single point in time to provide a snapshot of prevailing sector conditions. This approach is commonly used in social science research to efficiently assess relationships among variables, especially in large and dispersed populations (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A population of 17,654 registered and regulated tourism enterprises listed in the Tourism Regulatory Authority database (TRA, 2025) was targeted. A representative sample of 396 enterprises was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, ensuring adequate statistical precision and generalizability of the findings. To enhance representativeness across the heterogeneous tourism sector, probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling was employed to settle on a representative sample across enterprise categories as defined in the 9th Schedule of the Tourism Act Cap 381 (GoK, 2022), as shown in Table 1. This approach ensured that each category of tourism enterprise was included in proportion to its population size. Within each category, simple random sampling was used to select individual enterprises, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the study's validity.

Table 1. Sample Size Computation for Regulated Tourism Enterprises

No	Region	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E	Class F	Class G	Sample size
1	Eldoret	5	2	1	0	1	1	0	10
2	Kisumu	24	5	2	0	6	0	1	38
3	Malindi	33	4	4	1	12	1	1	56
4	Mombasa	21	6	9	1	39	1	1	78
5	Nairobi	13	21	54	1	65	1	1	156
6	Nakuru	8	1	2	1	10	0	0	22
7	Nyeri	11	4	3	1	15	1	1	36
	Total Entities	115	43	75	5	148	5	5	396

Source: Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2025

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, chosen for its effectiveness in obtaining standardized information from a large population and enabling quantitative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire focused on the study variables of capacity building and sustainability adherence, with items derived from constructs based on Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions organized into sections addressing enterprise characteristics, capacity-building practices, and sustainability adherence indicators. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), a format widely adopted in social science research to assess perceptions and organizational practices (Boone & Boone, 2012). To ensure instrument quality, both validity and reliability procedures were implemented. Content validity was confirmed through

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expert review for item relevance and clarity, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which surpassed the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency (Field, 2018). The structured questionnaire was therefore deemed suitable for capturing reliable and consistent data required to examine the relationship between capacity building and sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya.

Primary data for this study were collected using an online survey administered through Google Forms, which is recognized for its efficiency, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness in survey research (Evans & Mathur, 2018). The structured questionnaire was digitized and distributed to managers/operators of the 396 sampled tourism enterprises via email and other electronic communication channels. This method facilitated access to a geographically dispersed population of tourism enterprises across Kenya and ensured standardized data collection procedures. Online surveys are particularly appropriate for organizational studies because they allow respondents to complete questionnaires at their convenience, thereby improving response rates and data quality (Bryman, 2016). Data collection occurred over a two-month period, from 27 October to 27 December 2025, providing adequate time for follow-ups and reminders to increase participation. Periodic reminders were issued to encourage survey completion and minimize non-response bias. The use of Google Forms enabled real-time data capture, automatic response recording, and efficient data management, thereby reducing the likelihood of data entry errors and enhancing overall accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the data collection process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and guaranteed anonymity. These measures were consistent with established research ethics guidelines and contributed to the credibility and integrity of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2019). Secondary data were collected from books, journal articles, the Government of Kenya Reports, and Policy documents.

Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to address the study objectives. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, summarized respondents' perceptions of capacity building and sustainability adherence, offering an overview of central tendencies and variability within the dataset (Field, 2018). These measures are particularly suitable for Likert-scale data, as they facilitate interpretation of patterns and levels of agreement across survey items (Boone & Boone, 2012). To assess the suitability of the measurement scales, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate construct validity. EFA is commonly used to identify underlying factor structures and to determine whether observed variables align with theoretically expected constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis included testing sampling adequacy and factorability, followed by factor extraction and rotation to achieve a clear and interpretable structure. This approach ensured that the items measuring capacity building and sustainability adherence were valid and representative of their respective constructs.

Given that the primary data were collected using Likert scales, which are ordinal, a non-parametric test, Spearman's rank-order correlation, was first conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the study variables and to assess whether the data met the assumptions for further parametric analysis. Spearman's rho is suitable for ordinal data because it does not assume normal distribution and evaluates monotonic relationships between variables (Pallant, 2020). The results indicated a significant association, supporting the use of parametric techniques. Linear regression analysis was then used to examine the effect of capacity building

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(independent variable) on sustainability adherence (dependent variable). Although Likert-scale data are ordinal, composite scores from multiple items can approximate interval-level measurement, which justifies the use of regression analysis (Carifio & Perla, 2008). With a sufficiently large sample size as the one used in this study (n=337), parametric tests are robust to violations of normality due to the Central Limit Theorem (Field, 2018). The regression model estimated the strength and direction of the relationship between variables and tested statistical significance, providing empirical evidence for the predictive role of capacity building in enhancing sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya.

RESULTS

Survey Response Rate

At the conclusion of the two-month primary data collection period, 337 completed responses were retrieved from a targeted sample of 396 tourism enterprises. This yielded an 85.10% response rate, a figure that significantly exceeds the thresholds for empirical rigor in social science research. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), while a 50% response rate is considered adequate for analysis, a rate of 70% or higher is classified as excellent. Essentially, while the study targeted enterprises as the primary units of analysis, the data were solicited directly from the enterprise operators and senior managers as representatives of the respective enterprises.

The underpinning logic was that these individuals possessed the requisite technical knowledge and strategic oversight to accurately report on organizational capacity-building interventions and sustainability adherence. The 85.10% participation of these high-level decision-makers, therefore, provides a robust and representative foundation for data analysis, effectively minimizing non-response bias and ensuring that the findings reflect the authentic operational realities of regulated tourism enterprises within the Kenyan context.

Validity of the Survey Instrument

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to establish the construct validity of the measurement scales for capacity building and sustainability adherence. EFA was appropriate in this context because it identified latent constructs underlying observed variables and evaluated whether measurement items loaded onto theoretically meaningful factors (Hair et al., 2019). The suitability of the data for factor analysis was first assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, as shown in Table 1. The KMO value of 0.741 exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.6, indicating that the sample size and data structure were adequate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant (χ^2 = 13394.486, df = 105, $p < .001$), confirming that the variables were sufficiently correlated to justify the use of EFA (Field, 2018). Collectively, these results demonstrate that the dataset met the fundamental assumptions required for factor extraction.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.741
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	13394.486
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was employed to extract factors, as this method is well-suited for identifying underlying constructs rather than solely reducing data (Hair et al., 2019). As

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shown in Table 3 (Total Variance Explained), two factors exhibited eigenvalues greater than 1, in accordance with Kaiser's criterion. Together, these two factors explained 92.12% of the cumulative variance, with Factor 1 accounting for 48.70% and Factor 2 for 43.42%. The substantial proportion of explained variance indicates that the extracted factors strongly reflected the underlying constructs, thereby supporting the measurement model's dimensionality.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	7.305	48.702	48.702	7.219	48.124	48.124	6.989
2	6.512	43.415	92.117	6.449	42.992	91.116	6.717
3	.432	2.880	94.997				
4	.210	1.403	96.400				
5	.165	1.101	97.501				
6	.130	.866	98.367				
7	.069	.458	98.825				
8	.054	.358	99.182				
9	.043	.284	99.467				
10	.035	.235	99.702				
11	.021	.140	99.842				
12	.011	.074	99.916				
13	.006	.042	99.959				
14	.006	.038	99.996				
15	.001	.004	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. When factors are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.
Source: Data Processed, 2025

Additional evidence supporting construct validity is provided by the communalities reported in Table 4, which ranged from 0.551 to 0.992 following extraction. These high communalities indicate that a substantial proportion of each variable's variance is explained by the extracted factors, suggesting that the items are effectively integrated into the factor structure (Hair et al., 2019). This finding further supports the adequacy of the measurement items in representing the constructs of capacity building and sustainability adherence.

Table 4. Communalities

No.		Initial	Extraction
1	Our staff regularly receive training on sustainable tourism practices	.950	.935
2	The enterprise has access to technical support on sustainability issues	.997	.992
3	The enterprise participates in workshops/seminars on sustainability	.997	.973
4	Capacity-building initiatives have improved operational efficiency	.969	.878
5	We collaborate with government/industry associations on sustainability training	.992	.939
6	There are sufficient financial resources allocated for staff training	.998	.988
7	Capacity-building programs are relevant to our operational needs	.998	.992

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8	The enterprise complies with the sustainability standards	.974	.937
9	Energy-efficient practices are implemented in our operations	.989	.969
10	Water conservation measures are in place	.989	.971
11	Waste management practices (reduce, reuse, recycle) are actively implemented	.976	.960
12	The enterprise promotes local community engagement	.800	.790
13	Sustainable sourcing (local/eco-friendly products) is practiced	.986	.991
14	The enterprise monitors and evaluates its environmental impact	.812	.803
15	Sustainability is integrated into all our operations	.591	.551

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Source: Data Processed, 2025

The rotated factor structure, as shown in Table 5 below (Pattern Matrix), offered enhanced clarity regarding the relationships among variables and factors. Promax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, an oblique rotation method that permits factor correlations, was used. This approach was considered appropriate because capacity building and sustainability adherence are conceptually related constructs within tourism governance (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The rotation converged after three iterations, demonstrating a stable and interpretable solution.

Table 5. Pattern Matrix[a]

No		Factor	
		1	2
1	Sustainable sourcing (local/eco-friendly products) is practiced	.996	
2	Water conservation measures are in place	.985	
3	Energy-efficient practices are implemented in our operations	.984	
4	Waste management practices (reduce, reuse, recycle) are actively implemented	.980	
5	The enterprise complies with the sustainability standards	.968	
6	The enterprise monitors and evaluates its environmental impact	.895	
7	The enterprise promotes local community engagement	.889	
8	Sustainability is integrated into all our operations	.744	
9	The enterprise has access to technical support on sustainability issues		.996
10	Capacity-building programs are relevant to our operational needs		.996
11	There are sufficient financial resources allocated for staff training		.994
12	The enterprise participates in workshops/seminars on sustainability		.986
13	We collaborate with government/industry associations on sustainability training		.969
14	Our staff regularly receive training on sustainable tourism practices		.966
15	Capacity-building initiatives have improved operational efficiency		.936

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Furthermore, the pattern matrix (Table 5) demonstrates a distinct factor structure with no cross-loadings. Items pertaining to sustainability adherence, including energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, sustainable sourcing, environmental monitoring, and community engagement, loaded strongly on Factor 1, with loadings from 0.744 to 0.996. In contrast, items assessing capacity building, such as staff training, access to technical support, participation in workshops, financial resource allocation, and the relevance of training programs, loaded highly on Factor 2, with loadings ranging from 0.936 to 0.996. This clear distinction between constructs

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provided evidence of strong convergent validity, as items measuring the same construct clustered together, and discriminant validity, as items did not load significantly on unintended factors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Clearly, these findings substantiate the robustness of the factor structure by showing consistently high loadings across all retained items, thereby reinforcing the constructs' reliability and internal consistency. As such, the lack of problematic cross-loadings and the strength of factor-item relationships suggest that the measurement scales were both theoretically justified and empirically robust. In a nutshell, the use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in this study was both justified and methodologically sound. As such, the satisfactory Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value, significant Bartlett's test, high communalities, strong factor loadings, and substantial explained variance collectively provided robust evidence of construct validity. These findings indicate that the measurement items accurately represented the distinct yet related constructs of capacity building and sustainability adherence, thereby reinforcing the validity of the analytical framework employed.

Table 6. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.908	.894	21

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Capacity Building Interventions among Tourism Enterprises in Keny

The study sought to evaluate the capacity-building interventions among tourism enterprises in Kenya. To achieve this, a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), was utilized to capture the perceptions of enterprise operators and managers regarding various tenets of capacity development. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on the mean scores and standard deviations to determine the central tendencies and the degree of consensus among respondents. The choice of descriptive analysis in this study was guided by the methodological framework of Boone and Boone (2012), who argue that Likert-type and Likert scale data require distinct analytical approaches to maintain statistical validity. They assert that individual Likert-type items, being ordinal, necessitate specific data analysis methods, primarily descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency, to accurately reflect participant responses. Following these guidelines, the study summarized data in a manner consistent with its measurement scale and established a robust basis for interpreting observed trends. The results of this descriptive analysis are synthesized in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Capacity Building Interventions among Tourism Enterprises in Kenya

No		N	Mean		Std. Deviation
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
1	Our staff regularly receive training on sustainable tourism practices	337	4.17	.03	.58
2	The enterprise has access to technical support on sustainability issues	337	4.50	.02	.50

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3	The enterprise participates in workshops/seminars on sustainability	337	4.69	.03	.64
4	Capacity-building initiatives have improved operational efficiency	337	4.79	.02	.40
5	We collaborate with government/industry associations on sustainability training	337	4.65	.02	.47
6	There are sufficient financial resources allocated for staff training	337	4.65	.02	.47
7	Capacity-building programs are relevant to our operational needs	337	4.26	.02	.43
	Valid N (listwise)	337			

Source: Data Processed, 2025

The descriptive analysis in Table 7 shows that the indicator with the highest mean score was "capacity-building initiatives have improved operational efficiency" *(M=4.79, SD= 0.40)*, closely followed by "the enterprise participates in workshops/seminars on sustainability" *(M=4.69, SD=0.64)*. The indicator with the lowest mean score, though still high, was "our staff regularly receive training on sustainable tourism practices" *(M=4.17, SD=0.58)*. Generally, the aggregate mean scores for all seven indicators under study were high, ranging from 4.17 to 4.79.

Sustainability Adherence among Tourism Enterprises in Kenya

The study further sought to evaluate the level of sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. To operationalize this construct, respondents evaluated their respective enterprises' alignment with established sustainability tenets using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The resulting dataset was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, focusing on measures of central tendency and dispersion to identify prevailing trends and patterns of adherence. The findings of this analysis are summarized in Table 4, detailing the mean scores and standard deviations for each sustainability indicator.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Sustainability Adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya

No.	Statement	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
1	The enterprise complies with the sustainability standards	337	4.65	.02	.47
2	Energy-efficient practices are implemented in our operations	337	4.50	.02	.50
3	Water conservation measures are in place	337	4.27	.03	.69
4	Waste management practices (reduce, reuse, recycle) are actively implemented	337	4.29	.03	.67
5	The enterprise promotes local community engagement	337	4.42	.03	.71
6	Sustainable sourcing (local/eco-friendly products) is practiced	337	4.44	.03	.67
7	The enterprise monitors and evaluates its environmental impact	337	4.38	.04	.79
8	Sustainability is integrated into all our operations	337	4.27	.05	.96
	Valid N (listwise)	337			

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The descriptive results for sustainability adherence among Kenyan tourism enterprises, shown in Table 8, demonstrate a high level of implementation across all measured dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 4.27 to 4.65. The highest level of agreement was recorded for compliance with sustainability standards (*M=4.65, SD=0.47*), while energy-efficient practices also showed strong implementation (*M=4.50, SD=0.50).* Two variables also recorded moderate-to-high scores, namely waste management (*M=4.29, SD=0.67)* and water conservation (*M=4.27, SD=0.69).* The lowest mean score was recorded by the integration of sustainability into all operations (*M=4.27, SD=0.96).*

Hypothesis Testing

The study hypothesized that capacity building has no statistically significant effect on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. To determine whether the ordinal data obtained from Likert-scale responses satisfied the assumptions necessary for parametric analysis, Spearman's rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho), a non-parametric test, was employed. This method is suitable for ordinal data because it does not require normality and assesses the strength and direction of monotonic relationships between variables (Field, 2018). The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Correlations

			CapacityB	Sustainability
Spearman's rho	CapacityB	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.837**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	337	337
	Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	.837**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	337	337

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Data Processed, 2025

The results presented in Table 9 demonstrate a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between capacity building and sustainability adherence ($\rho = 0.837$, $p < .001$, $n = 337$). The coefficient magnitude, exceeding 0.8, indicates a very strong association, suggesting that increased capacity building is consistently associated with greater sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises. The statistical significance at the 0.01 level further supports the reliability of this relationship. The strength and consistency of this monotonic association provided preliminary empirical justification for subsequent inferential analysis. Explicitly, employing a non-parametric test at this stage was appropriate given the data's ordinal nature, as it was generated using a Likert scale. Although Likert-scale data can be ranked, the intervals between scale points are not necessarily equal. As observed by Jamieson (2004), ordinal data frequently violate the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity required for parametric tests. Additionally, Likert-scale responses may exhibit skewness due to central tendency bias, acquiescence bias, or clustering around agreement categories, leading to distributions that deviate from normality (Norman, 2010). Therefore, non-parametric methods such as Spearman's rho are preferred for initial analysis, as they are robust to non-normal distributions and do not require interval-level measurement (Pallant, 2020).

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Consequently, linear regression analysis was conducted using composite scores derived from aggregated Likert-scale items. This method is widely endorsed in empirical research, as combining multiple Likert items creates a scale that approximates interval-level measurement and meets the assumptions required for parametric techniques (Carifio & Perla, 2008). Additionally, Field (2018) notes that the Central Limit Theorem indicates that with a sufficiently large sample size, as was the case in this study ($n = 337$), the sampling distribution of the mean approaches normality, even when the underlying data are ordinal. Empirical evidence further demonstrates that parametric tests, including regression, remain robust to moderate violations of normality, especially when data originate from well-constructed Likert scales (Norman, 2010). As such, the strong and statistically significant Spearman correlation in this study provided evidence of a consistent relationship between the variables, thereby justifying further analysis using regression techniques. The conversion of ordinal responses into composite indices, together with the large sample size, supports the use of linear regression as an appropriate and reliable method for examining the predictive effect of capacity building on sustainability adherence.

The data having been confirmed to meet the preconditions for parametric testing, the null hypothesis was tested using linear regression analysis based on the following model:

$$Y= a+ \beta X+e$$

Where;
Y=Sustainability Adherence
a= Constant/ Intercept
β=Slope (beta coefficient for Capacity Building)
X= Capacity Building
e=error term

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Tables 10, 11, and 12, which detail the model summary, ANOVA findings, and coefficient estimates, respectively.

Table 10. Model Summary for Capacity Building and Sustainability Adherence

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.774[a]	.599	.598	2.23548	.599	499.788	1	335	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), capacity
Source: Data Processed, 2025

The model summary results in Table 10 revealed a simple correlation value of 0.774, indicating a strong positive correlation between capacity building and sustainability adherence. The Coefficient of Determination (R Square) is 0.599, which implies that capacity building explains 59.9% of the variance in sustainability adherence among the sampled tourism enterprises. This suggests that while other factors (such as financial capital or market demand) may play a role, capacity building is a dominant driver of sustainable practice implementation in the Kenyan tourism sector.

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Table 11. ANOVA[a] for Capacity Building and Sustainability Adherence

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2497.630	1	2497.630	499.788	.000[b]
	Residual	1674.121	335	4.997		
	Total	4171.751	336			

a. Dependent Variable: sustainability

b. Predictors: (Constant), capacity

Source: Data Processed, 2025

The ANOVA results in Table 11 confirm the overall significance of the regression model. The F-statistic is 499.788 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, the study concluded that the regression model was a statistically significant predictor of sustainability adherence. This finding demonstrated that the observed relationship was not due to chance but rather to the systematic impact of capacity interventions.

Table 12. Coefficients[a] for Capacity Building and Sustainability Adherence

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-18.912	2.424		-7.801	.000	-23.681	-14.143
	capacity	1.495	.067	.774	22.356	.000	1.363	1.627

a. Dependent Variable: sustainability

Source: Data Processed, 2025

The coefficients in Table 12 provide the mathematical basis for the relationship. The unstandardized coefficient for capacity is 1.495. This means that for every one-unit increase in capacity building, sustainability adherence is expected to increase by 1.495 units, holding all other factors constant. The t-value of 22.356 (*P=0.000*) further validates the significant contribution of capacity building to the model. In addition, the Standardized Beta *(β= 0.774)* highlights the strength of capacity as a predictor, confirming its central role in driving organizational change toward sustainability. Based on these findings, the study concluded that capacity building had a statistically significant effect on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya, hence the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted.

DISCUSION

The study aimed to establish managers' and operators' perceptions regarding the effect of capacity-building interventions on sustainability adherence among registered tourism enterprises in Kenya. The descriptive results for capacity building revealed a consistently high level of agreement among respondents that capacity-building initiatives positively influence sustainability adherence. This indicates that tourism enterprises in Kenya generally perceive such interventions as effective and value-adding. The highest-rated item, improved operational efficiency, demonstrates that capacity building is regarded not only as a compliance requirement but also as a strategic tool for enhancing internal processes and performance. This finding supports emerging

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evidence that sustainability-oriented training can generate efficiency gains through improved resource utilization and process optimization (Surmeier, 2020). Furthermore, strong scores for participation in workshops and collaboration with industry associations highlight the significance of external knowledge networks in facilitating sustainability learning. These results reflect the influence of normative and coercive institutional pressures on firm behavior (Muriithi & Ngare, 2023). However, the comparatively lower, though still high, mean score for staff-level training on sustainable tourism practices suggests a potential disconnect between managerial awareness and the dissemination of sustainability knowledge across organizational levels. Previous studies have reported similar gaps, noting that sustainability commitments are often concentrated at the strategic level but are not fully integrated into daily operations due to insufficient employee-level capacity building (Imbaya et al., 2019). This finding is significant as it identifies a critical implementation bottleneck in that, while enterprises may comply at the policy or managerial level, the lack of comprehensive staff training may constrain the depth of sustainability integration.

The findings provide empirical support for the complementary application of Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. High levels of collaboration with government and industry bodies indicate that enterprises are responding to institutional pressures from regulatory frameworks and industry standards. In line with Institutional Theory, such pressures can drive organizations toward conformity, which often results in symbolic compliance or "decoupling" when internal capabilities are insufficient (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). The current results extend this argument by demonstrating that capacity building mitigates this risk by serving as the mechanism through which external pressures are internalized into operational practices. From the perspective of Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the strong consensus that capacity building improves operational efficiency aligns with the concept of organizational transformation, where firms reconfigure resources to address evolving environmental and market demands (Teece, 2007). The results indicate that capacity-building initiatives enhance firms' absorptive capacity, enabling the translation of sustainability knowledge into improved performance outcomes. This finding supports prior research suggesting that firms with stronger learning capabilities are better positioned to adopt eco-innovations and sustain competitive advantage (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Surmeier, 2020).

An unexpected and noteworthy finding was the high level of agreement regarding the sufficiency of the financial resources allocated to training. This outcome contrasts with a substantial body of literature that identifies financial constraints as a primary barrier to sustainability adoption in developing economies (Nthiga et al., 2015; Mdoda et al., 2024). This divergence indicates that, within the Kenyan tourism sector, at least among the surveyed enterprises, capacity building is increasingly viewed as an investment rather than a cost. Such a trend may reflect evolving managerial attitudes or the impact of targeted policy and industry support mechanisms. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as it may not fully capture disparities across enterprise categories, particularly among smaller firms, which often face greater resource constraints. The descriptive results for capacity-building interventions highlight both convergence and divergence with existing literature. While these results affirm the importance of capacity building in promoting sustainability adherence, they also reveal critical gaps in staff-level implementation and challenge prevailing assumptions about resource constraints. These insights

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emphasize the need for more nuanced, firm-level investigations into the design, distribution, and operationalization of capacity-building interventions within the tourism sector.

Descriptive analysis for sustainability adherence indicated that tourism enterprises in Kenya generally exhibit high levels across measured dimensions, demonstrating greater alignment with environmental and socio-economic sustainability standards. This observation aligns with Institutional Theory, which asserts that organizations respond to coercive and normative pressures, such as sustainability standards enforced by the Tourism Regulatory Authority and industry certification schemes, to achieve legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Strong performance in areas such as waste management and water conservation also reflects the transformative dimension of Dynamic Capabilities Theory, as firms reconfigure operational processes to meet sustainability imperatives and adopt emerging circular-economy practices (Teece, 2007; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). These findings indicate that Kenyan tourism enterprises are not only complying with regulatory requirements but are also integrating sustainability into specific operational functions. Nevertheless, the relatively lower mean score for the integration of sustainability across all operations reveals a significant limitation in that, although technical compliance in specific areas is high, comprehensive institutionalization of sustainability remains incomplete. This observation is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the tendency of firms, particularly in developing contexts, to implement fragmented or project-based sustainability initiatives rather than fully embedding them into organizational culture and strategy (Imbaya et al., 2019; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). Conversely, this finding differs from other empirical research that reports generally low levels of sustainability adoption in African tourism due to financial and capacity constraints (Mdoda et al., 2024), suggesting that the Kenyan sector may be advancing more rapidly than previously assumed in certain operational areas.

A notable finding of this study is the relatively high overall adherence levels, despite persistent structural challenges frequently cited in the literature, such as resource limitations and weak institutional enforcement. This divergence indicates that regulatory pressure and industry-driven initiatives in Kenya may be producing more substantive compliance rather than merely symbolic adoption, particularly in certain areas of practice (Muriithi & Ngare, 2023; UN Tourism, 2023). However, the lower score for full integration reveals a significant gap between functional compliance and strategic embedding, supporting the argument that sustainability has not yet been fully institutionalized within enterprise-wide systems. This gap underscores the importance of capacity building in progressing from partial compliance to comprehensive sustainability integration. In the absence of sufficient skills development, organizational learning, and managerial capabilities, firms are likely to struggle to advance beyond isolated sustainability actions toward a unified, organization-wide sustainability orientation (Surmeier, 2020). Therefore, while the findings indicate promising progress, they also emphasize that capacity building remains crucial for deepening sustainability adherence and achieving long-term transformation in Kenya's tourism sector.

The linear regression analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant positive association between capacity building and sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya, indicating that higher levels of training, technical support, and knowledge acquisition are associated with more effective implementation of sustainability practices. This outcome supports the institutional internalization perspective within Institutional Theory, which asserts that external

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pressures, such as regulatory requirements and industry standards, result in substantive organizational change only when accompanied by sufficient internal capabilities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Capacity building thus serves as a crucial mechanism for translating coercive pressures, such as government regulations, and normative pressures, such as certification standards, into measurable sustainability outcomes. This observation is consistent with previous research indicating that, without adequate capacity, firms often engage in symbolic compliance, or "decoupling," in which policies are adopted in form but not in practice (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017; Muriithi & Ngare, 2023). From the perspective of Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), the strong beta coefficient observed in the model indicates that capacity building enhances firms' ability to reconfigure their resource base through learning and adaptation. It specifically strengthens sensing capabilities, such as identifying sustainability trends and regulatory shifts, and seizing capabilities, such as implementing resource-efficient technologies and practices, thereby improving overall organizational responsiveness (Teece, 2007; Teece, 2018). These results align with Surmeier (2020), who contends that in developing tourism markets, dynamic capabilities developed through training and knowledge acquisition are essential for meeting global sustainability standards.

The strength of the relationship observed in this study contrasts with previous research that has reported weaker or inconsistent associations between capacity building and sustainability outcomes, particularly in developing contexts where financial constraints, weak enforcement, and institutional fragmentation hinder effective implementation (Mdoda et al., 2024; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). This divergence suggests that the Kenyan tourism sector may be shifting toward more effective integration of capacity-building initiatives, potentially driven by increased policy emphasis, industry collaboration, and targeted training programs. Notably, the magnitude of the observed relationship indicates that capacity building may play a more significant role in promoting sustainability adherence than previously recognized in the literature. These findings suggest that, beyond external pressures, internal capability development is likely the primary determinant of substantive compliance in this context.

These findings have important implications, especially for policymakers in Kenya. The strong predictive power of capacity building suggests that the government should shift focus from purely regulatory enforcement to incentivized training frameworks. As such, investing in national tourism training programs will yield higher policy-to-practice returns than legislation alone. For operators/managers of regulated tourism enterprises, the observed positive relationship indicates that training is a high-yield investment. Managers should therefore prioritize technical skill acquisition and staff workshops not just for compliance, but as a strategic tool to improve operational efficiency, which showed the highest mean in descriptive results. For industry associations such as Ecotourism Kenya, there is a clear need for standardized certification training. Since collaboration with industry associations scored highly in descriptive statistics, sector associations such as Ecotourism Kenya should lead the knowledge transfer to ensure that small-scale operators have the same adaptive capabilities as larger tourism enterprises in Kenya.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between capacity-building interventions and sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises in Kenya. Grounded in Institutional Theory

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and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the study tested the null hypothesis that capacity building has no statistically significant effect on sustainability adherence in Kenya. Capacity building was conceptualized in terms of training, skills development, technical support, and knowledge transfer, whereas sustainability adherence was measured across environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, with regression analysis employed to test the hypothesized relationship.

The findings revealed that capacity-building interventions had a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainability adherence among tourism enterprises, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. Empirical evidence indicated that investment in human capital and institutional learning enables tourism enterprises to bridge the persistent gap between high-level sustainability policies and operational practices. By integrating Institutional Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, this research contributed to academic discourse and demonstrated that, although institutional pressures (coercive, normative, and mimetic) drive change, the development of internal dynamic capabilities through capacity building prevents "decoupling", which is the symbolic adoption of policy without substantive implementation.

Moreover, the strong predictive power of capacity building identified in this study suggests that government policy should prioritize incentivized training frameworks rather than relying exclusively on regulatory enforcement. Explicitly, this study recommends that policymakers and industry stakeholders should strengthen capacity development programs, promote knowledge-sharing platforms, and institutionalize sustainability training to enhance long-term sector resilience and competitiveness. This study, therefore, contributes to the discourse on sustainable tourism development and provides practical insights for policy formulation and enterprise-level interventions in Kenya.

LIMITATION

This study acknowledges the following four limitations when interpreting and applying these findings. First, the main limitation is the reliance on self-reported data collected through structured questionnaires administered to operators/managers of registered tourism enterprises. Given that self-reported data are vulnerable to social desirability and response biases, especially regarding sustainability adherence, respondents may have overstated their conformity with established standards and practices. Consequently, the observed relationship between capacity building and sustainability adherence may be overestimated.

Second, given that the data was collected at one point in time (cross-sectional), it limits the ability to draw causal inferences. As such, although the study identified a statistically significant relationship between capacity-building initiatives and sustainability adherence, it does not provide conclusive evidence of causality or account for the dynamic, long-term effects of capacity development interventions. Longitudinal research would be better suited to evaluate how sustained investments in capacity building affect behavioural and organizational changes over time.

Third, this study examined a specific sample of tourism enterprises in Kenya, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or regions with different institutional, regulatory, and socio-economic environments. Differences in policy frameworks, market conditions, and industry maturity could affect the applicability of these results outside the study context. Lastly, the study did not explicitly control for all potential confounding variables,

including firm size, financial capacity, market segment, and level of regulatory enforcement, each of which may influence sustainability adherence. Future research should incorporate these variables and employ mixed-method approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which capacity building affects sustainability adherence in the tourism sector.

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