Nature and Information Engineering Publishing

Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Development

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From Ecotourism to Regenerative Hospitality: Advancing Sustainable Tourism Development in Ghana and West Africa

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has helped preserve biodiversity and provide jobs in Ghana and West Africa, but poor local management, ecological regeneration, and regulation are hindering its growth. This study examines how regeneration-focused hospitality might overcome structural hurdles in underdeveloped countries. A qualitative and literature synthesis research approach was used with peer-reviewed academic publications, local policies, and Ghanaian and West African ecotourism, sustainability, and regenerative tourism development studies to support the research. The analysis is combined with three main theories—regenerative development, sustainability science, and community-based tourism—and analysed thematically. According to this study's evidence, ecotourism global practices in the region have prioritised minimising negative impacts and complying with regulations over ecological regeneration, in-community co-creation, and value retention. To fill this gap, a complete framework for regenerative hospitality in ecologically diverse settings with institutional challenges in developing countries is offered. This framework includes ecological regeneration, landscape rehabilitation, community engagement, equitable land ownership distribution, culture regeneration, regenerative economy/business models, circular resource

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 2 February 2026 | Revised: 13 March 2026 | Accepted: 20 March 2026 | Published Online: 27 March 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63385/etsd.v2i1.479

CITATION

Deri, M.N., Zaazie, P., Dery, J., et al., 2026. From Ecotourism to Regenerative Hospitality: Advancing Sustainable Tourism Development in Ghana and West Africa. Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Development. 2(1): 147–167. DOI: https://doi.org/10.63385/etsd.v2i1.479

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use, and local value development, and proactive multi-jurisdictional, multi-level governance. Regenerative hospitality in eco-lodges, resorts, and community-based tourism will improve climate resilience, youth employment, rural community support, and long-term destination viability. The research clarifies and guide ecotourism-regenerative hospitality links in West Africa.

Keywords: Regenerative Hospitality; Ecotourism Transition; Community-Based Tourism; Sustainable Destinations; Ghana; West Africa

1. Introduction

Ecotourism has become a sustainable tourism development strategy that preserves nature, creates jobs, and enhances destination competitiveness. Sustainable tourism literature emphasises balancing environmental integrity, sociocultural well-being, and economic viability to promote long-term destination resource management Based on this idea, eco-tourism and nature-based hospitality (e.g., eco-lodges)[1, 2], community tourism enterprises, accommodations near parks) can reduce ecological degradation, create local jobs, fund conservation efforts, and preserve cultural heritage[2, 3].

Ghana and the Western African subregion promote ecotourism to conserve biological diversity and boost rural development in protected areas, forest reserves, wetlands, and culturally significant landscapes. Ghana's nature-based tourism product, including Kakum National Park and other conserved community adjacency landscapes, is expected to provide ecological conservation and economic benefits through visitor expenditures, rural enterprise, and value chain (e.g., guiding services, crafts, lodging, transportation)[4, 5]. West African eco-tourism planning supports community goals and builds social-ecological resilience, especially in locations where livelihoods depend on developing and conserving land[6].

Since most ecotourism projects focus on mitigation rather than restoration, deforestation, biodiversity loss, watershed stress, and habitat fragmentation remain unaddressed[7]. In addition, these projects' governance structures often focus on local communities as workers rather than fully integrated partners in decision-making and co-designing ecotourism, limiting community participation and ability to capture ecotourism benefits[5, 8]. Finally, fragmented institutional responsibilities, inadequate funding of monitoring and enforcement of policies, and gaps in policy implementation can hinder tourism planning and management of protected areas, making it harder to manage tourism impacts and provide credible and transparent tourism benefits[6, 8].

Tourism destinations across West Africa confront obstacles such as informal economies, a lack of infrastructure, and competing land use demands; as climate change and biodiversity loss occur and worsen, the consequences of these challenges will grow. The sustainability literature suggests that traditional sustainable tourism, which relies on initiatives to improve efficiency or reduce negative impacts on tourism destinations, may not solve destinations' socio-ecological issues[8]. Using net beneficial impacts on ecosystems and local people, regenerative tourism has arisen as a way of "evolving" sustainable tourism[3, 7, 9]. Regenerative tourism research shows a shift from simply adhering to sustainability constraints (i.e., waste reduction) to developing places in a way that restores or enhances the natural environment, helps local communities adapt, and grows natural, cultural, and social resources.

Hospitality firms will be crucial to this transformation because they are at the crossroads of resource use (energy, water, food, and materials), waste generation, local supply purchasing, labour markets, and visitor behaviour[10]. Recent studies have advised hotels and restaurants to consider total resource sustainability throughout the life cycle of the resources, recycle materials, and care for their location to become active participants in positive environmental change rather than just "green" businesses. Regenerative tourism principles are especially important in Ghana and West Africa because eco-lodges and nature-based resorts are prevalent in ecologically fragile and community-adjacent locations. Hospitality businesses' procurement, employment, and partnership decisions will directly affect local conservation initiatives and the benefits local communities receive.

Regenerative hospitality is underdeveloped empirically and conceptually in West African tourism study despite its

emerging global popularity. Regenerative tourism literature is mostly focused on Global North contexts or general theoretical discussions [2, 10, 11], with little guidance on how to apply regenerative principles in emerging economies with limited institutional capacity, uneven environmental standard enforcement, limited access to affordable green finance, and complex local governance involving district authorities, traditional leadership systems, and a West African eco-tourism environments generally use hybrid governance (state conservation laws and customary land relations and community structures), requiring context-sensitive co-creation, benefit sharing, and accountability models [2, 10, 11].

This manuscript addresses this gap by promoting regenerative hospitality as a context-appropriate method to boost sustainable tourism in Ghana and West Africa. It claims that regenerative hospitality can evolve eco-tourism by explicitly integrating ecological regeneration, community co-creation and inclusion, regenerative business models, and adaptive, multi-level governance. These pillars support regenerative tourism, which emphasises net-positive destination outcomes and defined domains of action to shift paradigms [2, 9, 10].

The research intends to:

1. Analyse the limitations of eco-tourism and nature-based hospitality models in Ghana and West Africa, focussing on socio-ecological and governance constraints.
2. Develop a Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework to guide policy makers, destination planners, hospitality operators, and development partners in transitioning from eco-tourism compliance to regenerative outcomes.

Eco-tourism and sustainable development literature benefits from the study in three ways. First, placing regenerative hospitality within the history of sustainable tourism concepts and separating mitigation-centered from regeneration-centered approaches clarifies concepts [6]. Secondly, it connects ecological restoration imperatives with Ghanaian and West African inclusive development and governance realities [8, 10]. Lastly, it shows how hospitality operations (resource use, supply chains, employment, collaborations, tourist involvement) can improve conservation landscapes and community-adjacent destinations [7, 10]. The rest of the paper discusses eco-tourism trajectories and constraints in Ghana and West Africa, the regenerative hospitality paradigm and its theoretical anchoring, the integrative review approach, and the transition framework and its policy and managerial implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Development in Ghana and West Africa

Ghana developed eco-tourism in response to biodiversity conservation concerns, rural development, and international sustainability discussions. The Ghanaian government began managing and planning tourism assets in national parks, forest reserves, wetlands, and community-managed conservation areas in the early 1990s to promote nature-based tourism. Economic resources from these areas would pay for Ghana's conservation efforts and provide income to local communities. Eco-tourism is now considered essential to the country's biodiversity conservation and rural livelihoods. Canopy walkways, visitor centres, eco-lodging facilities, and guided hiking paths are included in conservation management plans [6, 12].

Ghana's eco-tourism has grown thanks to government and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) collaboration, traditional authorities' land ownership decisions, and private sector investment. The central government agencies responsible for tourism, forestry, wildlife, and local government regulate and plan eco-tourism development. International and local NGOs have sponsored Ghanaian experimental projects, created community eco-tourism skills, and promoted participatory conservation [13]. Traditional authority also offers land access, legitimises conservation efforts, and includes local communities in eco-tourism as stewards of customary land and cultural heritage. Finally, private sector eco-lodge developers and tour operators have invested resources, provided marketing knowledge, and provided services to eco-tourism development, typically in partnership with local communities or conservation organisations.

Many Ghanaian studies show that eco-tourism raises conservation awareness, creates jobs, and diversifies rural inhabitants' incomes, especially those living near national parks and resource-based communities [4, 5, 7, 12, 13]. Many of these studies find advances in environmental education, alternative income options (tour guiding, crafts, catering), and

supplemental household income, as well as local residents' awareness of conservation ideals [4, 5]. Ecotourism benefits in Ghana are unequally distributed and depend on visitor numbers, donor funding, and institutional frameworks for promoting this facet of tourism growth. Many Ghanaian ecotourism programs must ask themselves if they will continue to be sustainable and transformative.

2.2. Eco-Tourism in West Africa

The development of eco-tourism in West Africa has similar sub-regional characteristics, creating both opportunities and limitations. Regions within West Africa share an abundance of biodiversity: tropical forests, savannah, coastal wetlands and river semi-aquatic landscape. The region is also rich with cultural landscapes based upon tradition, indigenous knowledge and heritage practices. Many eco-tourism efforts are initiated in countries such as Guinea, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso and are typically based within traditional or customary systems of land and resource use [7].

As demonstrated through the development of transboundary protected area-based conservation and tourism network initiatives, the region has created a region-based eco-tourism model that aims to support biodiversity conservation, facilitate regional cooperation and facilitate marketing and destination development for the respective locations. However, a number of issues, which include differences in capacity, poor coordination, discrepancies between countries in relation to how they invest and create tourism infrastructure, limit the overall impact of this type of regional-based efforts [14].

West Africa's ecotourism development is subject to the general limitations associated with these structural challenges that have arisen within this region. The current challenges associated with eco-tourism development include the lack of adequate infrastructure, including limited transportation connectivity; unreliable energy supply and sources; unreliable water supply and sources; and limited technology access and development opportunities. A large proportion of many local economies is informal, and as a result, it is often difficult to impose and enforce regulations and levy taxes and enable the equitable sharing of benefits. The limited availability of financing to communities and small businesses was also a major factor that impeded investments in eco-tourism infrastructure, environmental management or new products [12]. Therefore, these factors contribute to the creation of an eco-tourism development ecosystem that remains generally small, heavily reliant on external support and susceptible to internal and external market forces and policy shocks.

2.3. Identifying Sustainability Gaps in Existing Eco-Tourism Implementation Models

Although the existing Ghanaian and West African ecotourism business models uphold sustainability narratives, they exhibit clear sustainability gaps. A common criticism made by several authors regarding existing models of ecotourism is that the models are primarily used to express "low-impact", or mitigation-focused practices by auctioning out or lowering the footprint of those practices on the environment and by minimising waste, visitor cap, and minimum environmental standards rather than addressing how to achieve regenerative outcomes that will actively restore ecosystems and improve socio-ecological resilience [8]. In general, conservation continues to be framed as being about preservation and not regeneration, and therefore, many of the greatest challenges affecting degraded landscapes, loss of biodiversity, and issues associated with climate change currently receive no/low consideration.

The second significant gap lies in the limited reinvestment of tourism-generated revenues into further restoration of ecosystems and further development of the surrounding communities. Ecotourism may result in revenue generation through entrance fees, accommodation and guiding services. However, a very limited portion of the revenue generated is allocated for projects related to re-growing or restoring forests, restoring habitats, managing watersheds, or financing long-term conservation [7]. Revenue leakages or centralised management of revenues, as well as donor dependence, further limits the ability of ecotourism to continue to provide sustainable environmental improvements.

The third significant social gap in existing ecotourism models is the exclusion of local actors from actively and equitably participating in ecotourism enterprises. Decisions made about the strategic direction of ecotourism enterprises, ownership and profit-sharing arrangements are most often made by external decision-makers, which often limits opportunities for communities to have significant participation

in the design and management of innovation and decision-making of the ecotourism enterprise as they relate to local socio-cultural and economic realities. Women, youth and informal workers, in particular, are often vulnerable to social exclusion as it relates to ecotourism, thereby demonstrating how ecotourism may be limited in its ability to support inclusive development and social equity [6, 15]. Such dynamics would, therefore, challenge the assumption that all ecotourism enterprises are inherently pro-poor or community-focused. Furthermore, these gaps demonstrate the necessity of creating alternative ecotourism models that are embedded deeper into the principles of co-creation, local ownership and empowerment.

Collectively, the evidence suggests that while ecotourism has provided substantial benefits in terms of increased awareness, jobs and visibility to the destinations, the ecotourism business model has not yet created the substantial sustainable environmental and social transformations required in areas such as Ghana and West Africa that have unique biodiversity richness and high vulnerability to climate change. This realisation has led to an increased interest from researchers and policy-makers in regenerative tourism and hospitality as a means of addressing the negative impact of ecotourism and creating substantially positive environmental and social outcomes for all stakeholders involved. The next section will address this emerging topic within regenerative tourism and hospitality.

2.4. Regenerative Hospitality as a Transformative Paradigm

2.4.1. The Conceptual Foundations of Regenerative Tourism and Hospitality

Regenerative development, which inspired regenerative hospitality, was designed to address the problems of conventional sustainability in environmental planning, agriculture, and ecological/social systems. Regenerative Development restores, renews, and improves the ecosystem and community's future life capacity over time. The original regenerative thought emphasised a whole-systems perspective of development, place-based solutions, and the co-generation of human and environmental impacts, so regeneration views development as an ongoing living endeavour [9, 16].

Regenerative tourism and hospitality were developed in recognition that sustainability practices, while still important and necessary, will no longer be sufficient and relevant for addressing the epic acceleration of climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequality. Instead of just reducing negative impacts, regenerative tourism and hospitality focus on achieving net-positive impacts that restore ecological systems, strengthen social cohesion, and boost cultural vibrancy [3, 8]. Hotel businesses, which are resource-intensive and community-facing, could be leverage points for destination-wide regenerative practices.

Sustainable, eco-friendly, and regenerative hospitality differ greatly. Sustainable hospitality emphasises energy efficiency and mitigation strategies to reduce operational waste, while eco-friendly hospitality emphasises ecologically sustainable design and operations in sensitive ecosystems. These strategies help achieve some environmental stewardliness, but they generally control damage rather than fix degradation [16].

Regenerative hospitality shifts its environmental goals from conservation to regeneration through reforestation, habitat rehabilitation, soil and water rehabilitation, and biodiversity enhancement. Regenerative hospitality's social goals include community co-creation, local ownership, cultural revival, and empowerment, while its economic goals include creating long-term values for the shared prosperity of all parties [9, 10] and developing resilient and ethical investment instead of just maximising short-term profits. Thus, regenerative hospitality advances sustainability by integrating sustainability principles into a systems approach and place-based response.

2.4.2. Significance of Regenerative Hospitality for Ghana and West Africa

Regenerative hospitality is especially relevant to Ghana and the other countries in West Africa due to the combination of environmental issues, economic struggles and limits to development. Climate change increases the vulnerability of West African tourism to climate-related hazards, including deforestation, loss of coastal land, loss of biodiversity, fluctuating rainfall patterns, and increasing temperature. The resulting environmental pressures are eroding the ecological foundations of ecotourism, i.e., forests, wetlands, savannahs and coastal ecosystems, thereby lessening the long-term viability of nature-based hospitality ventures [8, 14]. Environmental degradation will not be stopped or reversed by hospitality models that only reduce the negative environmental impact

of business operations.

Eco-tourism is a viable alternative livelihood for low-skilled economic schemes of unemployed youth, high levels of low-paid jobs in seasonal work do not provide sufficient amounts of skills training and increase young people's ability to positively contribute to economic development. However, regenerative hospitality offers a response to this issue by creating opportunities for local enterprise growth and developing the skills required for young people to assume co-creator, manager and innovator roles within the economies of their respective areas rather than marginalised employees in their local areas [13, 15].

Within West Africa, agriculture, cultural land tenure systems, and customary institutions that guide resource use are essential to the ecology and governance of specific regions. Because of the cultural components involved in the hospitality industry in these regions, by prioritising local cultural constructs, regeneration hospitality reflects a model of sustainability rather than an external imposition of sustainability based on already-created sustainability templates. By creating hospitality development within the sociocultural and ecological context of a particular place, the development of similarities between the concept of eco-tourism in an external context and economy is intended to address the longstanding criticisms of eco-tourism being donor dependent, externally driven, or socially exclusionary [16–18].

2.5. Ecological Regeneration: From Conservation to Restoration

Traditionally, eco-tourism in Ghana and West Africa has focused primarily on conservation and protection through the implementation of restricted access, visitor management, and adherence to environmental standards. While restrictions placed on tourists help to delay degradation of specific protected area ecosystems, in many cases, they have proven largely ineffective at mitigating cumulative ecological damage resulting from activities, including deforestation, land-use change, coastal erosion, and climate variability [5, 7]. As such, regenerative hospitality is a major advancement of the traditional approach to conservation and is achieved by embedding ecosystem restoration into hospitality development projects.

Moving beyond the "do no harm" principle while also recognising that improvements to ecological systems through regenerative practices can create conditions conducive to establishing nature-positive practices, regenerative hospitality can effectively serve as an anchor for this type of action through a reinvestment of tourism-generated revenue into restoration initiatives, and through partnerships with local communities and conservation organisations. Emerging initiatives will embrace a "Restoration and Resilience" Approach to Climate Change in Protecting Vulnerable Destinations [5].

2.6. Transitioning from Eco-Tourism to Regenerative Hospitality

The transition from ecotourism to regenerative hospitality recognises a goal-setting reformulation of tourism development and implementation as well as evaluation; however, it also involves a shift in tourism stakeholders' motivations to develop sustainable tourism in emerging economies [18, 19]. In the case of Ghana and West Africa. The transition from ecotourism to regenerative hospitality is a product of long-standing sustainability issues with the practices associated with ecotourism's continued emergence in a region of West Africa. By both limiting the impact of tourism on local ecological systems and providing avenues for tourists to help restore degraded environments, regenerative hospitality allows the islands where regenerative hotels and resorts are located to return to a "natural" state, and enables the communities where they are located to thrive long-term [8, 16, 19]. **Table 1** summarises the comparison of ecological tourism versus regenerative hospitality for West African countries.

Table 1. Comparison of Eco-Tourism and Regenerative Hospitality in West Africa.

Dimension	Eco-Tourism (Conventional Model)	Regenerative Hospitality (Transformative Model)
Core Orientation	Impact mitigation and conservation compliance	Net-positive socio-ecological regeneration
Underlying Logic	"Do less harm" to natural environments	"Leave places better than found"
Environmental Focus	Protection and preservation of existing ecosystems	Active ecosystem restoration (reforestation, biodiversity recovery, soil and water regeneration)

Table 1. *Cont.*

Dimension	Eco-Tourism (Conventional Model)	Regenerative Hospitality (Transformative Model)
Relationship to Nature	Nature as a resource to be conserved and showcased	Nature as a living system to be restored and co-evolved with
Role of Hospitality Enterprises	Service providers supporting conservation goals	Agents of regeneration and destination stewardship
Community Participation	Often consultative or labour-based	Co-creation, shared ownership, and long-term stewardship
Benefit Distribution	Frequently uneven; risk of leakage to external actors	Prioritizes local value retention and equitable benefit sharing
Cultural Engagement	Cultural elements as attractions or add-ons	Cultural revitalization and indigenous knowledge integration
Economic Model	Short- to medium-term revenue generation	Long-term shared value and destination resilience
Business Performance Metrics	Visitor numbers, revenue, certification compliance	Ecological recovery, social inclusion, resilience, and financial viability
Governance Structure	Often centralized or externally driven	Adaptive, multi-level public–private–community governance
Response to Climate Change	Limited adaptive capacity; reactive measures	Proactive climate adaptation and resilience building
Inclusivity (Women & Youth)	Limited access to leadership and ownership	Explicit pathways for youth entrepreneurship and women's participation
Knowledge Base	External expertise and standardized sustainability models	Knowledge co-production combining scientific and indigenous knowledge
Long-Term Sustainability Outcome	Risk of stagnation or degradation over time	Enhanced destination capacity to thrive across generations
Relevance for West Africa	Partial fit with communal land tenure and informal economies	Strong alignment with communal governance and place-based development

Source: Author's construct.

Table 1 illustrates that regenerative hospitality does not supplant ecotourism; it complements and further bolsters the development of ecotourism in response to issues in the West African market that impede the efficiency of ecotourism as a catalyst for change. The tables support the theory presented in this paper that regenerative hospitality presents a more favourable platform to support tourism development in areas characterised by communal land ownership structures as well as climate vulnerability.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks that support the regenerative hospitality paradigm are threefold and form an analytical foundation for the current research. The first framework, sustainability and systems thinking, considers all parts of tourism destinations as interdependent on one another in order to determine how they exist and operate (for example, water, food, and employment are interconnected) [20], which means that unless the systems that are being used and developed within these landscapes are interconnected with other systems (i.e., eco-certification or other, etc.) the orders are unlikely to yield a holistic effect.

The second framework, regenerative development theory, provides direction as well as support for the regenerative hospitality paradigm in its movement away from being focused on sustainability to actually restoring and renewing the system itself. Regenerative development theory focuses on understanding how place is essential to stakeholder collaboration and the development of relationships between humans and their environment [9, 16].

The third framework, community-based tourism (CBT) and the governance system of Indigenous Peoples, is a critical element in the application of regenerative hospitality concepts in Ghana and West Africa. CBT scholars have promoted the concept of local ownership and decision-making authority as a necessary condition for attaining equitable outcomes in tourism, while the governance systems of Indigenous Peoples include the idea of collective management of the resources that are shared among a community. When viewed in conjunction with the other two theoretical frameworks, CBT and Indigenous governance emphasise the importance of including local knowledge and capacity in developing opportunities for stakeholders in the economic devel-

opment of tourism [5, 7].

Together, these three theoretical frameworks enable regenerative hospitality to develop from a conversation around stakeholder inclusion to a practice that empowers local people to share decision-making power and authority in order for regeneration to occur and to be culturally relevant to the local community. Finally, the integration of all three theoretical frameworks supports the concept of regenerative hospitality as a transformative paradigm that addresses the limitations of the existing ecotourism model on a socio-ecological and governance level in Ghana and West Africa. Additionally, the integration of all three theoretical frameworks facilitates the formulation of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework.

3.1. Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework

This section brings together concepts previously discussed within a broader framework for transitioning ecotourism into regenerative hospitality in Ghana and West Africa. The purpose of the framework is to serve as both a heuristic and a guide for policymakers; it is not intended to be a prescriptive model. By using this framework, stakeholders involved with tourism destinations will gain a better understanding of key areas of action, how these areas are interconnected, and what pathways exist for implementation in emerging economies.

The review of the literature found that traditional ecotourism models focus on mitigating negative impacts, limiting local community empowerment, and yielding limited ecological restoration outcomes. The Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework offers an alternative. Based on regenerative development theory, systems thinking, and community-based tourism research, this framework explicitly recognises hospitality businesses as key players in advancing social and environmental health in their communities [9, 16].

The Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework, as shown in **Figure 1**, provides conceptual clarity to distinguish regenerative hospitality from traditional ecotourism and sustainability approaches; it is a structured framework for understanding the interaction of ecological, social, economic, and governance areas at tourism destinations, and leverage points for government, community, and industry actors can enable regenerative transitions.

3.2. Core Dimensions of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework

The Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework consists of four interrelated dimensions. These four dimensions are the ecological regeneration, the community co-creation, the regenerative hospitality business models, and the adaptive governance dimensions. Each dimension of the framework acts as a dynamic system, with one dimension reinforcing the other dimensions over time.

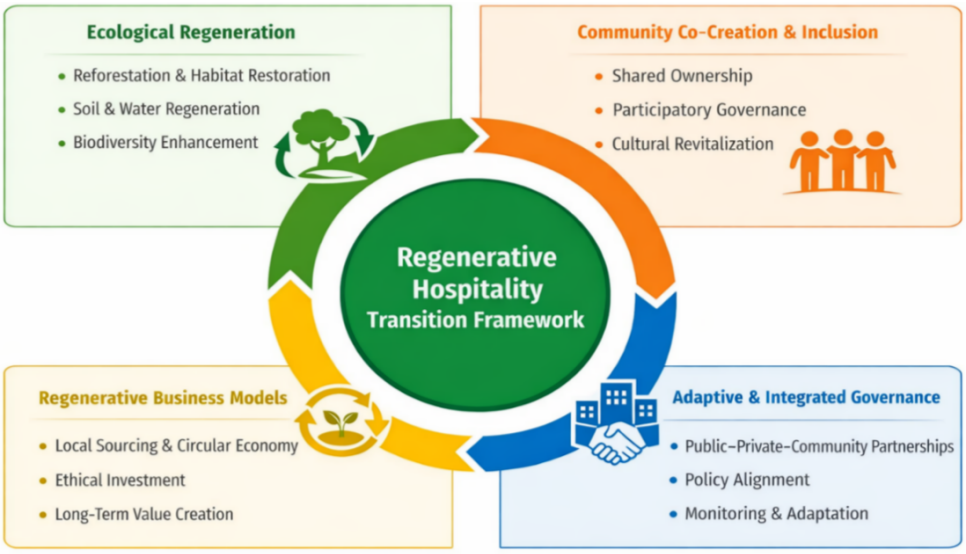

Figure 1. Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework for Ghana and West Africa.

Source: Author's construct.

3.2.1. Ecological Regeneration

The first dimension of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework is the transition from conservation-based Eco-tourism to active Ecological Regeneration. The Ecological Regeneration dimension focuses on restoring Ecosystem function through the processes of reforestation, habitat enhancement, soil regeneration, water regeneration, biodiversity protection, and Climate Adaptive Land Management[8]. In the case of Ghana and the countries of West Africa, tourism assets are linked closely with forests, wetlands, savannas, and coastal Ecosystems. As a result, it is essential that the Ecological Regeneration processes are implemented in order to maintain the viability of the destination during a time of rapid Climate change and land-use pressure.

3.2.2. Community Co-Creation and Social Inclusion

The second dimension of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework focuses on the process of Community Co-Creation. This dimension emphasises the importance of Shared Ownership, Shared Decision-making and Shared Stewardship in regulating the utilisation of the Ecosystem. The process of Community Co-Creation promotes inclusive governance by giving traditional authorities, women, youth, and informal actors equal access and responsibility in governing. The Community Co-Creation dimension promotes social legitimacy by strengthening the mechanisms of Benefit-sharing, Cooperative Business Models and Participatory Planning Processes, which deliver localised Benefits to Communities[15, 21]. Cultural regeneration through the revitalisation of indigenous knowledge, heritage practices and local identities is a fundamental part of this dimension, as it reinforces the authenticity of places through their inherent cultural significance, and creates Resilience within Society.

3.2.3. Regenerative Hospitality Business Models

The third dimension of this framework concerns the economic rationale of regeneration. Regenerative Hospitality Business Models will always place the emphasis on the creation of shared long-term value rather than the maximisation of short-term profit. They will integrate profit, loss, and financial performance together with the impacts of social and ecological outcomes. Major characteristics will include the sourcing of products locally, circular supply chain systems, reinvestment of profits to create economic and community development, investments that have ethical characteristics and a diversified source of revenue to provide for increased resilience[22, 23]. Regenerative Hospitality Business Models will also reduce the issue of leakage to gain an advantage for hospitality enterprise success in destinations within emerging economies, primarily characterised by Small and Medium-Sized Businesses.

3.2.4. Adaptive and Integrated Governance

The fourth dimension of this framework focuses on the importance of Adaptive and Multi-Level Governance within the successful implementation of the transition of an emerging industry towards one that is environmentally sustainable. Tourism is one of the most fragmented sectors in West Africa—the Government of Ghana has broken down the Tourism Industry into many components, including hospitality and leisure, travel and tourism, creativity, fashion, culture, and related tourism policies—and as a result, this fragmentation limits the ability of Government Agencies at all levels to create policy coherence and implement policies. The framework establishes a need for strong alignment between tourism policies, environmental management policies, climate adaptation policies and local development policies, supported by effective policies based on Public-Private-Community Partnerships, with transparent and systematic accountability mechanisms[24]. "Adaptive Governance" allows communities and destinations to effectively deal with uncertainty, learn from practice and alter their Strategic Direction in response to changing circumstances, which is essential in a transitional process (i.e., Socio-Ecological System Regeneration).

3.3. Interrelationships and Transition Pathways

Another defining characteristic of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework is that all four dimensions are based on Systems Thinking and the Multiple Reinforcers Framework of Interconnectedness. All four dimensions have a reciprocal impact on each other. For example, when communities participate as co-creators and beneficiaries of Ecological Regeneration initiatives, Ecological Regeneration initiatives are likely to be successful; however, for Regenerative Business Models to be successful and effective, there

must be supportive Governance Structures and Institutional Alignments. Therefore, if any one of these four dimensions of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework performs poorly, it is very likely that this will restrict the growth and success of other dimensions.

The transition from Ecotourism to Regenerative Hospitality is viewed as an Ongoing Process and Iterative Pathway, as opposed to a Linear Transition Process. As previously stated, destinations may gain entry into this transition through various Methods/Entry Points (Community Empowerment, Business Innovation, Policy Reforms), depending on their Local Priorities and Capacities [16].

3.4. Application of Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework to Ghana and West Africa

As applied to Ghana and West Africa, the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework allows a context-sensitive framework that redefines the development of eco-tourism in Ghana and West Africa towards regeneration. It recognises the existence of communal land tenure systems, the presence and impacts of traditional authorities, and the prevalence of Donor and NGO Supported Initiatives, while also establishing the urgent need for further developing of local ownership, institutional capacity and long-term financial resources. Additionally, the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework provides a framework that is transferable to other emerging economies with similar socio-ecological attributes, thereby creating opportunities for cross-country learning and regional policy harmonization.

3.5. Contribution of the Framework to Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Development Literature

The Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework contributes to the body of literature related to eco-tourism and sustainable development in three ways. First, the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework combines theoretical integration of the regenerative development theory and the hospitality and tourism research domain. Second, the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework is regionally grounded and provides a conceptual framework that reflects the realities of Ghana and West Africa, a region which has received little research coverage in the Literature Associated with Regenerative Tour. Third, the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework provides a tool that can be used to assist in the development of policy, planning for destinations and conducting future empirical research.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is a conceptual approach to literature that integrates across disciplines due to the complex nature of regenerative hospitality in Ghana and West Africa, where empirical research is limited and fragmented. Conceptual literature reviews are widely accepted modalities for developing theory, constructing concepts, and producing frameworks in disciplines where practice is advancing at a rate that surpasses empirical validation [25, 26].

The integrative literature review synthesizes existing knowledge in many fields of study [27], including: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, hospitality management, regenerative development, and community-based tourism into one organized analysis. Whereas systematic reviews are useful when formulating narrow empirical questions, integrative literature reviews enable researchers to theorize and innovate concepts based on the information contained within the integrated body of literature, thus forming a foundation for proposing theories and developing transition frameworks [28]. In the current study, integrating this literature allowed for the development of the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework to illustrate the many and varied social, environmental, and institutional contexts affecting the development of regenerative hospitality practices in developing countries.

4.2. Sources and Scope of the Review

This systematic review established the literature search databases and inclusion/exclusion criteria to increase transparency and scientific rigour. A rigorous search of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar identified peer-reviewed scholarly literature. These databases were chosen for their tourism, sustainability, and development research coverage. The official repositories and websites of key Ghanaian and West African government agencies, international institutions,

regional groups, and non-governmental organisations provided policy documents and grey literature.

Inclusion criteria included: (i) peer-reviewed articles from academic journals; policy reports; and development documents discussing ecotourism, sustainable/regenerative hospitality or community-based tourism; (ii) empirical, conceptual or policy studies that have relevance for Africa, West Africa, Global South or developing countries; and (iii) publications that provided examples of rigorous methodological quality or a substantial theoretical contribution. Seminal articles published before 2005 were accepted; however, those published within the preceding 15 years were prioritised. Studies with no relevance to sustainability regeneration or tourism development, Global North publications with no transferability to Global South, Publications with no scholarly or institutional credibility, and Duplicate/data records from both databases were excluded.

Researchers' specificity strengthened and credentialed study literature. Methodological rigour was addressed by identifying specific literature sources and defining literature use parameters. The review is more credible, replicable, and analytically reliable, supporting integrated policy analysis.

4.3. Thematic Synthesis and Analytical Procedures

The thematic synthesis approach was used as a standard procedure to synthesise the literature through the thematic synthesis approach [29, 30]. The approach allows researchers to synthesise the findings of the research studies from various disciplines and differing approaches into one comprehensive set of findings. The thematic synthesis was completed through three iterations, which represents the standard approach to conducting a systematic and rigorous literature review.

The first phase of the thematic synthesis is the descriptive coding, which involved categorising the themes within the literature into large categories (thematic groups) based on the authors' development of the ecotourism industry's development trajectory, development of sustainability outcomes, governance and participation, regenerative principles and the development of hospitality business models.

Second, within the interpretive coding phase of this study, attention was paid to the search for similarities, contradictions, and key themes. This focus was particularly on the shortcomings of ecotourism models that attempt to lessen their negative impact and new elements of regenerative approaches.

The third phase was the theoretical integration, which involved the linking or associating of the final themes to this study's conceptual frameworks of sustainability and systems thinking, regenerative development theory, and perspectives of community-based tourism. This overall framework enabled the authors to define four core areas of transition: ecological regeneration, community co-creation, regenerative business models, and adaptive governance. The four areas will be leveraged to support the proposed framework on a Regenerative Hospitality Transition.

5. Discussion

5.1. How Regenerative Hospitality Redefines Sustainable Tourism Development in West Africa

The research suggests that regenerative hospitality should take a wider, more holistic view of sustainable tourism development for West Africa and thus, looks beyond just reducing harm, to create positive outcomes for the environment and the surrounding communities. Historically, the focus of sustainable tourism has been around efficient use of resources, adherence to government environmental regulation and preventing negative externalities. While all three of these approaches remain important, they alone will not adequately address the cumulative impacts of climate change, declining ecosystems and socio-economic pressures.

As opposed to viewing tourism development as a place-based process, regenerative hospitality involves active participation by hospitality enterprises in restoring ecosystems, sustaining community welfare, and ensuring long-lasting destination resilience. Within the context of West Africa, particularly Ghana, this means re-positioning eco-lodges, nature-based resorts, and community tourism enterprises as caretakers of forests, wetlands, coastal zones and cultural heritage landscapes. Therefore, sustainability as a term has been revised to indicate enhancing the regenerative capacity of destinations over time rather than maintaining the current condition of the destination [9]. The reframing of regeneration aligns tourism development with regional development priorities that include climate adaptation, rural livelihoods

and inclusive growth.

5.2. Comparison to Conventional Ecotourism Outcomes

The comparison between regenerative hospitality and conventional ecotourism outcomes illustrates major differences regarding intent, process and result. In relation to the other benefits generated by ecotourism, such as increased conservation awareness, additional employment opportunities, and increased destination visibility, West African ecotourism initiatives have created numerous tangible and intangible benefits. However, research indicates that many of these benefits are either minimal or disproportionately experienced by certain groups and are additionally influenced by external variables such as fluctuations in tourist volume, reliance on philanthropic support, and inconsistent governance [5, 7].

Conventional models of ecotourism place the highest priority on: (i) Creating low impact operations as opposed to restoring and revitalizing ecosystems; (ii) Supporting the creation of economically productive opportunities without providing communities with the opportunity for true ownership and decision making over such developments; and (iii) Generating income without relaying a significant portion of income generated back into the development of long-term ecological/sustainability and community systems.

In contrast to typical practices, regenerative hotels focus on creating value through hospitality business models, and mention cognitive, landscape regeneration, and reforestation, as well as economic benefits. Furthermore, regenerative hotels use their business practices to provide a better quality of life for the destination [10]. Therefore, the comparison shows that regenerative hotels can play a role in establishing the framework for West Africa's tourism destination-related development initiatives.

5.3. Contributions to Ecotourism and Sustainable Development Theory

This study makes significant contributions to ecotourism and sustainable development theory in three key areas. First, the study contributes to conceptual clarity by framing regenerative hospitality as an evolutionary advance over ecotourism rather than as a competing paradigm. Establishing the evolutionary relationship between regenerative hospitality and ecotourism aids in bridging theoretical discussions with empirical evidence regarding the shortcomings of sustainability and the need for more transformative tourism models [19].

Second, the context-based theory developed in this study utilises the socio-ecological and institutional aspects of West Africa as context. While most of the literature on regenerative tourism is derived from wealthy nations, this study shows how ideas of regenerative tourism may be interpreted through community land ownership, local governance, and the numerous challenges faced by less-developed economies.

Third, the proposed Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework provides a synthesis of existing literature on ecotourism regarding the integration of community involvement, regenerative business models, and flexible governance within one unified framework. Rather than emphasising end results, this framework establishes transition pathways as a means of contributing to the body of literature about sustainable development, transformation, resilience, and the prolonged evolution of tourism destinations.

Ultimately, this study illustrates that regenerative hospitality is not only a viable method of enhancing tourism results within West Africa but also a theoretical lens through which to rethink tourism and hospitality's role in sustainable development.

5.4. Implications of Regenerative Hospitality on Destination Resilience, Inclusivity & Long-Term Viability

Transitioning to regenerative hospitality creates tremendous potential for enhancing the resilience of destinations. Through restoring ecosystems, increasing the diversity of community livelihoods and building localised governance capacity, regenerative hospitality increases communities' ability to absorb and adapt to shocks associated with environmental, economic and social change. For communities located in regions of West Africa that are vulnerable to climate change, the restoration of ecosystems and the increased diversity of community businesses provide them with a reduced reliance on the fragile nature of the tourism industry and improved adaptive capacity [10].

Regenerative hospitality is rooted in an inclusivity perspective by addressing long-standing concerns regarding eco-

tourism's perceived social exclusionary aspects. A focus on community co-creation, shared ownership, and participatory governance provides opportunities for all groups, especially women, youth, and informal actors, to have meaningful participation in tourism value chains. This equitable distribution of benefits enhances the perceived role of tourism in supporting inclusive development, rather than elite capture [13, 15].

Regarding long-term sustainable development, regenerative hospitality aligns tourism development with intergenerational equity by emphasising stewardship, restoration, and long-term shared value within the tourism business model. When businesses that provide hospitality are committed to reinvesting in the ecological systems and social structures that support tourism, it is less likely that tourism destinations will face resource depletion or a decline caused by tourism. Thus, sustainability is redefined as an ongoing dynamic regenerative process instead of being perceived as an end state.

5.4.1. Policy Implications

Integrating Regenerative Hospitality Concepts into the National Tourism Development Policy

The successful shift from eco-tourism to regenerative hospitality requires purposeful changes within government policies at both the national and sub-national levels. In Ghana, and much of West Africa, previous national tourism policies have largely focused on aspects such as destination conservation, destination marketing and promotion, and tourism visitor increases. Sustainability was often framed within the context of environmental compliance and the reduction of the negative impacts of tourism. Despite the continued relevance of these priorities, the findings from this study indicate that tourism policy frameworks need to integrate into their objectives a regenerative-focused orientation, which may include: the restoration of ecosystems, the co-creation of tourism products with the surrounding community, and the long-term resiliency of the destination.

To effectively integrate regenerative hospitality into tourism policy, tourism strategies must be integrated with climate-adaptive pathways, ecosystem restoration (biological diversity), and rural development. Various policy instruments may include: regenerative tourism guidelines, funding incentives for investment in regenerative hospitality initiatives, and alignment and coordination with national climate/biodiversity efforts [8, 9].

Strengthening Institutional Support for Community-Led and Regenerative Initiatives

The integration of regenerative hospitality into tourism policy will enable tourism policy to extend beyond sectoral silos and place greater emphasis on how hospitality contributes to the achievement of more broad-based sustainable development goals. Research shows that community-based ecotourism programs in West Africa are hampered by limited access to funding and technical expertise, as well as by a lack of the institutional support [7, 13]. Therefore, in some cases, it becomes common for rural communities to depend on outside agencies and models designed by international donor organisations. The proposed approach to regenerative hospitality is based on creating an institutional arrangement that allows communities to be treated as co-owners, co-managers, and long-term stewards of the tourism developments occurring in their areas.

To bridge this gap, policymakers should emphasise financial and material assistance through access to concessional funds, the development of cooperative and hybrid ownership models, and improved legal and regulatory frameworks that recognise the communal land tenure system and traditional governance structures of rural societies. Collaboration among tourism authorities, environmental protection agencies, and local government authorities is also needed to reduce fragmentation and increase coherence among policies. Institutional frameworks and mechanisms to provide such support are critical to effecting the transition of regenerative hospitality from concept to actuality in the emerging economies.

Improving Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Socio-Ecological Outcomes

Recognising that regenerative hospitality requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the social and environmental impacts of regenerative hospitality practices, a common approach to analysing the success of regenerative hospitality practices is to combine traditional indicators of tourism performance (e.g., visitor numbers, revenue generated) with sustainable development indicators (e.g., ecosystem restoration, social inclusion, and community well-being) [15]. By understanding the various components of sustainability, policymakers will have a better ability to assess the long-term sustainability impacts of regenerative

hospitality practices.

The value of M&E frameworks is to provide the proper system of analysis that integrates ecological indicators (e.g., biodiversity recovery, ecosystem health), social indicators (e.g., quality of employment, ownership by local communities, and participation), and economic indicators (e.g., local value retention and reinvestment rates) and can be measured within the national tourism M&E systems. By utilising these measures, it will improve accountability, facilitate development and enable more adaptable policies to be developed to facilitate ongoing improvement in sustainability performance.

Table 2 below indicates an alignment matrix for regenerative hospitality and its relationship to sustainable development. This alignment matrix is specific to West Africa and has been created to enhance the relevance of the policy-related efforts to regenerative hospitality and support your Policy and Practice Implications section with regard to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The matrix indicates that regenerative hospitality is an overall development strategy rather than being limited to an isolated segment of the tourism market. Regenerative hospitality supports the objectives of national and regional environmental protection policies, social inclusion, growth of the private sector, and strengthening of institutions in Ghana and other countries in West Africa. Hence, this supports the claim that tourism policies should focus on developing regenerative solutions rather than only measuring visitor growth.

Table 2. Policy Alignment Matrix Linking Regenerative Hospitality Practices to Sustainable Development Outcomes in West Africa.

Regenerative Hospitality Domain	Key Regenerative Practices	Relevant Policy Areas (West Africa)	Sustainable Development Outcomes	Aligned SDGs
Ecological Regeneration	Reforestation, habitat restoration, biodiversity enhancement, watershed protection, nature-positive operations	Environmental protection, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation	Restored ecosystems; improved biodiversity; enhanced climate resilience; reduced land degradation	SDG 13 (Climate Action); SDG 14 (Life Below Water); SDG 15 (Life on Land)
Community Co-Creation & Inclusion	Community ownership models, participatory planning, benefit-sharing agreements, inclusion of women and youth	Local governance, decentralization, social development	Inclusive growth; strengthened social cohesion; improved livelihoods; reduced inequality	SDG 1 (No Poverty); SDG 5 (Gender Equality); SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities); SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities)
Regenerative Business Models	Local sourcing, circular supply chains, ethical investment, reinvestment in community and ecosystems	Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) development, private-sector development, green economy strategies	Increased local value retention; resilient local enterprises; green job creation	SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth); SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure); SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)
Adaptive & Integrated Governance	Public–private–community partnerships, policy coherence, multi-level coordination, adaptive regulation	Tourism governance, environmental governance, institutional reform	Improved policy coherence; stronger institutions; adaptive destination management	SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions); SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)
Cultural Regeneration	Revitalization of indigenous knowledge, local cuisine, crafts, storytelling, heritage protection	Cultural heritage, creative industries, identity preservation	Cultural continuity; strengthened place identity; enhanced visitor authenticity	SDG 11.4 (Cultural Heritage); SDG 8.9 (Sustainable Tourism)
Capacity Building & Knowledge Co-Production	Training in regenerative practices, skills development, community learning platforms, university–industry collaboration	Education, skills development, human capital policy	Enhanced human capital; innovation capacity; long-term sustainability leadership	SDG 4 (Quality Education); SDG 8 (Skills & Employment)
Climate-Resilient Destination Development	Climate-adaptive infrastructure, nature-based solutions, risk-sensitive planning	Climate policy, disaster risk reduction, resilience planning	Reduced vulnerability to climate shocks; adaptive destinations	SDG 13 (Climate Action); SDG 11 (Resilient Cities & Communities)

Source: Author's construct.

5.4.2. Managerial and Business Implications

Strategic Guidance for Hospitality Businesses

For businesses within the hospitality segment, particularly: community tourism, nature-based resorts, eco-lodges; regenerative hospitality acts as strategic entry to creating long-term value within a business' model by encouraging hospitality operators to consider how they may apply regenerative concepts when making key business decisions, such as the location of a hospitality business, supplier engagement, investments, and stakeholder relationships[10]. Simply following the guidelines established for sustainability certification by destination management organisations is not sufficient for hospitality managers, as they must also reflect upon regenerative methodologies in their approach to conducting business.

Practically speaking, this means utilising concepts related to the circular resource-use economy (no waste), supporting local suppliers, reinvesting a portion of their profits into restoring the local ecosystem and developing communities, and forming long-term collaborative partnerships with local producers and conservationists. Aligning the company's success with the regeneration of the destination provides an opportunity for hospitality companies to improve resiliency (build stronger communities), create unique differentiators in their offerings, and build legitimacy in the eyes of the local communities where their businesses are located.

Capacity Building and Skills Development for Regenerative Hospitality

At an industry level, capacity-building efforts are essential to advancing regenerative hospitality concepts. Many hotel and tourism operators, community tourism operators (e.g., host families), and local communities across Western Africa have limited technical skills and/or managerial expertise necessary to implement regenerative hospitality practices in their business operations. This is particularly true in areas such as ecosystem restoration, participatory governance, measuring impact, and developing new business models using regenerative business principles[16].

Capacity-building partnerships can be developed between industry stakeholders, training institutions (universities, NGOs, development partners), to develop training programmes, mentorship programmes, and opportunities to gain experience (learn by doing) in the field. In addition to technical capacity-building, there must also be an emphasis on knowledge co-creation between scientific experts and local indigenous peoples' knowledge to develop solutions appropriate to the context. Developing local capacity to lead regenerative initiatives will reduce reliance on external consultants or funding from donors or other sources.

Collectively, these policy and practice implications highlight that regenerative hospitality is not only an operational concern for individual hospitality businesses but also represents a broader systemic transition that requires collaborative effort along multiple levels of policy, government, institutions, and the hospitality industry. By developing and aligning national policy, supporting community-level support structures, improving monitoring systems, and increasing the capacity of the hospitality sector, countries like Ghana and other West African countries can help to reposition ecotourism as a key driver for the development of inclusive, resilient, and regenerative tourism.

6. Theoretical Contributions to the Study and Practical Implications

The present research does not only bring new ideas to the scholarship of ecotourism, but it also helps practitioners by reorienting ecotourism from a terminal end (i.e., an ultimate goal) to being a pathway to achieving regenerative development. The research describes regenerative hospitality as a "contextual development paradigm" that is identified as regenerative development for the nation of Ghana and for the West African region overall. Additionally, this research offers a contribution to literature by applying socio-ecological systems thinking, destination governance, and inclusive development to the context of ecotourism and offers practical, actionable guidance to policymakers and practitioners in order to achieve net-positive environmental and socio-economic outcomes when developing tourism in emerging tourism destinations.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions of the Study

6.1.1. Impact Minimisation to Net-Positive Regeneration

In making the distinction between ES (i.e., Ecotourism) and RH (i.e., Regenerative Hospitality), the re-

search advances theory in tourism discipline by providing a clear delineation between (i) THEs focus on conservation and impact mitigation, and (ii) RH's focus on restoring ecosystems, enhancing community capabilities and building the resilience of a destination. Therefore, the concept provides clarity to the sustainability discourse and has decreased the level of ambiguity of the term beyond sustainable tourism.

6.1.2. Contextualising Regenerative Hospitality in the Global South

The study grounded empirical analysis in Ghana and West Africa, thus expanding regenerative tourism theory beyond the Global North's understanding of regenerating tourism in contexts with established formal economies and formal governance. Rather, this research explores the concept of regeneration in an area where informal governance systems such as traditional land ownership and recognised informal practices such as customary arrangements to care for the land and cultural practices, as well as significant development issues, have been identified. Consequently, this research provides insight into creating potential meaningful contributions for improving the relevancy of regenerative concepts in developing regions of the world.

6.1.3. Linking Regenerative Hospitality to Socio-Ecological Systems and Governance

This research advances theoretical thinking in tourism studies by combining socio-ecological systems thinking with destination governance, and understanding tourist destinations as human-environment systems that interact and interdepend. Fragmented institutional arrangements adversely affect sustainability outcomes and the role of adaptive and coordinated governance in promoting regeneration.

6.1.4. Co-Creation and Stewardship of Community Participation

By viewing community participation as more than just participation, this research expands the theory of community-based tourism to include the concepts of co-creation, co-ownership, and stewardship of resources. This re-conceptualization creates a new basis for legitimacy and accountability in tourism development, and enhances long-term commitment by the community towards the sustainable development of tourism.

6.2. Practical Implications for Policymakers

6.2.1. Integrating Regenerative Development Principles into Tourism Policy

Policymakers must provide clear guidelines in national tourism policies for incorporating regenerative hospitality principles in order to provide more than just general commitments to sustainability. This change must entail a shift from compliance oriented to outcome-based policy frameworks, that prioritize delivering ecosystem restoration, community health, cultural revitalization and sustainable destination resilience. In Ghana and the West Africa region, achieving regenerative development must be aligned with existing national development agendas, strategies for climate change adaptation, and biodiversity action plans to ensure that all levels of government are working towards the same goals. In order for regenerative aspirations to become viable public sector policies, it is necessary to have clear policy definitions, measurable objectives, and defined implementation mechanisms.

6.2.2. Coordination of Multi-Level and Cross-Sectoral Governance

The development of effective regeneration tourism depends on the coordinated efforts of many sectors and government levels, including the tourism sector, environment, forestry, wildlife, culture, local governments and infrastructure sectors. Fragmented governance in the tourism sector is common throughout Ghana and West Africa, with each sector having overlapping mandates and few existing coordination mechanisms between sectors, resulting in gaps in implementation of tourism policies and inconsistent outcomes.As a consequence, policymakers need to create formal inter-agency coordination arrangements - such as cross-ministerial committees or destination-level governance platforms - to harmonise planning, regulation and enforcement. Likewise, vertical coordination between national, regional and local authorities is necessary to help regenerate policies appropriately for the context of destination and effectively implement them at the local level. The creation of integrated governance arrangements will improve policy coherence, eliminate duplication of effort,

and further support adaptive decision-making in dynamic socio-ecological systems.

6.2.3. Institutionalise Transparent Community Benefit Sharing Mechanisms

In order for hospitality to provide inclusive and long-lasting results, governments need to formalise transparency and accountability in Community Benefit Sharing agreements between tourism enterprises, protected areas, authorities, and host communities. This includes implementing, but not limited to, revenue sharing from parks' entrance fees, tourism concessions, and heritage site admissions, and Community Development funds tied to tourism performance. In cases where customary land tenancy and traditional authority structures exist, agreements need to be co-designed with Community leadership and be aligned with local governance systems in order to increase legitimacy and trust. Defining clear guidelines to arrange for revenue allocation, establishing procedures for the public disclosure of revenue allocation, and providing the means through which individuals may file grievances are essential to achieving equity across the region, reducing conflict, and building support for conservation and nature-based tourism initiatives.

6.2.4. Invest in Capacity Building and Monitoring Systems

The development of human and institutional resources to implement sustainable hospitality policies and demonstrate their long-term sustainability requires public expenditures.

Decision-makers should also train local administration, park managers, community leaders, and small and medium-sized tourism generators in regenerative-based planning, destination stewardship, financial management, and governance. Each community should also create a thorough monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system for all destinations to assess the social repercussions of activities, such as those on the ecology and biodiversity. Transitioning from evaluating each part of the project as a separate entity to continuous evaluation of the entire destination will enable evidence-based policies, support an ongoing learning process based on project evolution, and hold everyone accountable to meet restoration goals and provide long-term benefits to the community and destination.

6.3. Practical Implications for Practitioners

6.3.1. Design Tourism Products around Regeneration Outcomes

Tourism practitioners, such as ecolodges, tour operators, destination management organisations and community-based enterprises, should proactively design products and experiences that have clearly defined regenerative outcomes. Instead of providing only nature-based or cultural experiences that reduce harm, practitioners can provide activities that directly support biodiversity enhancement, cultural revival and community development. For example, allowing guests to participate in habitat enhancement, providing assistance to community-led conservation efforts, providing heritage interpretation by local custodians and providing experiential learning experiences related to traditional knowledge systems. Embedding regeneration in the core value proposition of the business creates a differentiated product, increases visitor engagement and links financial success to the long-term stewardship of the destination.

6.3.2. Adopt Co-Creation with Communities, and Adopt the Agreement to Partnership

Practitioners should develop formal co-creation processes and agreements with host communities, rather than engage with communities informally and/or ad-hoc. The purpose of the agreement is to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the parties, the sharing of revenue and/or benefits, commitments related to employment and/or procurement and the mechanisms to achieve shared decision-making and conflict resolution. When developing a partnership framework in Ghana and West Africa in particular, where traditional authorities and community ownership of land are significant, the framework must adhere to local governance structures and cultural protocols. By establishing transparent and participatory agreements, practitioners can build trusting relationships with host communities and gain a social licence to operate. In addition, the community will feel they own the tourism initiative and will reduce the likelihood of conflict, exclusion or loss of project viability.

6.3.3. Strengthen Local Supply Chains and Employment Pathways

Regenerative hospitality practitioners should focus on creating and retaining local value through stronger supply

chains, and more inclusive employment strategies. Practitioners can work to increase local procurement of food, crafts, transportation and maintenance services, and invest in the development of suppliers to improve the quality, reliability and access to markets. Furthermore, establishing structured employment and skills development pathways, particularly for women and youth, through apprenticeships, internships, and leadership development programs is essential. By integrating skills development and business improvement into the tourism experience, workers will help to provide additional sources of income, keep more money in the local economy, and enhance the overall benefits of tourism for that region.

6.3.4. Operationalise Regeneration through Performance Metrics

To ensure accountability and ongoing improvement, practitioners must develop performance measures that convert regenerative goals into performance indicators, moving beyond simple environmental compliance or certification checklists to track net-positive returns across environmental, social and economic factors. Performance indicators may include biodiversity and restoration results, water and energy efficiency per guest-night, waste reduction and circularity, local employment quality, and community health metrics. Routine monitoring, transparent reporting and adaptive management based on performance results will create an environment of accountability, and allow practitioners to demonstrate their value to regulators and investors, as well as an ever-increasingly sustainability-focused traveller.

7. Conclusions

This paper explored how regenerative hospitality represents a path away from traditional eco-tourism; therefore, based on an integrative conceptual review of regenerative hospitality literature, the study demonstrate that ecotourism raised awareness about conservation, created jobs, and created more visibility for destinations. Although these successes have consistently occurred, ecotourism achieved many of its results based on focusing only on reducing harm (from the environment), poor local community empowerment, and limited reinvestment in ecosystem restoration. The value that this paper adds to the academic literature is that it illustrates, through utilising a systems approach to understanding regenerative hospitality, how regenerative hospitality represents a systems approach to defining sustainability as more than simply 'doing less harm', but also as a process of actively restoring and enhancing the socio-ecological systems in which we operate.

As such, by integrating regenerative development thought with sustainability/systems approaches and the literature on community-based tourism, this paper has advanced both an overall conceptual understanding through synthesis of current knowledge about regenerative hospitality and developed the Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework (RHTF), which contains four interdependent components – ecological regeneration, community co-creation, regenerative business models, and adaptive governance. This RHTF creates conceptual clarity for tourism operators and actors attempting to transition towards net-positive tourism within the emergence economy context(s).

Although the study contributes to conceptual and policy discussions synonymous with the role of regeneration in hospitality, there are several limitations associated with the research that must be recognised. First, this review-based and conceptual study is primarily dependent on secondary data from the academic literature, policy documents, and development reports. While this type of research enables significant theory development and broad synthesis, it does not provide any empirical data from stakeholders such as community members, hospitality companies, or policymakers. Therefore, the proposed framework for regenerative hospitality has not been empirically validated in any real-life destinations.

Second, the research is conducted in the Ghanaian context and the broader context of West Africa. While focusing on Ghana and West Africa gives the research findings credibility and relevance to those areas, it may make the application of those findings to other developing regions more difficult to apply due to different contexts, systems, and cultures of these developing regions.

Third, the research relies to a certain extent on grey literature (e.g., policy documents and NGO reports), which have relevance to policy, but may differ as it relates to methodological rigour and/or comparability. Thus, even though source selection was done carefully (e.g., following credible sources), there is a risk of interpretation bias.

Fourth, the study does not provide a measurement of

the level of ecological/socioeconomic impact associated with regenerative hospitality practices because there are no data and/or definable indicators within the Ghana and West Africa region. Therefore, there is no empirical basis for asserting that regenerative interventions will lead to specific development outcomes.

Finally, regenerative hospitality is a developing and progressive area of research, and there continues to be a lack of consensus as to the definition of regenerative hospitality. Although there was progress made towards clarifying and contributing to the conceptual development of regenerative hospitality, it is likely the framework will be subject to future refinement as empirical findings and operational metrics continue to develop.

This study has limitations that present opportunities for future research using mixed-method approaches, longitudinal case studies, and comparative studies that will provide empirical validation and/or expansion of the proposed framework.

Hence, as the theoretical framework builds on this study, several possibilities for future research can be recommended. Firstly, empirical qualitative research is needed to identify how regenerative hospitality principles are interpreted, implemented, and function in practice. In-depth qualitative case studies through Eco-lodge hotels, Community Tourism Companies, and Tourism resorts close to protected areas would show how communities, managers, and policymakers perceive and apply their governance structures, community benefit-sharing programs and methods of restoration [5, 7].

Secondly, a cross-comparison of the various cultures across West African Countries and between Global South Countries through their institutional structures, Land Tenure systems and method structures would increase understanding of how they are able to transition to a Regenerative Hospitality Transition Framework, and develop context-specific adaptations. Thirdly, mixed methods and longitudinal research methodologies will be required to assess the socio-ecological impact of a Regenerative Hospitality Transition on the long-term. Quantitative measurements, such as Biodiversity Recovery, Employment quality, Local Value Retention and Community Well-being, as well as the qualitative information that can be provided to evaluate whether or not regenerative hospitality can provide positive cumulative net-impacts over a period of time [8]. The longitudinal studies will give insight into learning processes of how individuals learn and manage climate and market uncertainties.

Therefore, this study provides further evidence that regenerative hospitality is an empirically sustainable theoretical model for the sustainable tourism development of the West Africa region, Ghana and around the world. By changing the emphasis from mitigation processes to regeneration processes and by moving from isolated projects to destination systems, regenerative hospitality can enable tourism to become a force for ecological renewal and social inclusion and resilience to both the climate and market. In effect the implementation of this conceptual vision into practice and continually collaborating with researchers, policy makers, industry actors and community members to ensure a successful regenerative hospitality transition to ecosystem restoration.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, M.N.D.; Literature review, P.Z. and Y.M.A.; Methodology, P.Z. and M.N.D; Y.M.A, Analysis, K.N.-G; writing—original draft preparation, M.N.D.; writing—review and editing, J.D. and K.N.-G; Supervision, J.D.; Project Administration, M.N.D. and Y.M.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or generated in this study. All data was presented in this work.

Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest is there. All the authors agree to the publication this paper to the journal and the paper is not under review to any other journal.

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