RED ROCKS INITIATIVE
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RRISD)

Strategic Plan
2026–2031

Community-Based Tourism and Cultural Promotion for Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development

"Great Vision Needs Great Partners"

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Foreword

Red Rocks Initiative for Sustainable Development (RRISD) was established on a simple conviction: the communities who live closest to Rwanda's natural and cultural treasures should be the first to benefit from them. Tourism, when it is planned with communities rather than for them, can become a powerful catalyst for rural transformation.

This Strategic Plan 2026–2031 sets out how RRISD will turn that conviction into practical, measurable change. It builds on our work on environmental conservation, sustainable livelihoods, climate resilience, community-based tourism, cultural promotion and community empowerment, and it places at its centre the community-based tourism model that we are developing so that rural communities are not merely destinations for visitors, but active participants, owners and beneficiaries of tourism development. Rwanda's living culture, including its dance, music, crafts, cuisine, stories and ways of life, lies at the heart of that model. We will work with communities to protect it, celebrate it and share it with visitors on the communities' own terms.

We strongly believe in partnership. No single organisation can transform rural livelihoods alone. We therefore invite communities, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions, investors, researchers and individuals to join us, to share knowledge and lessons across countries and communities, and to help us build a model that can be replicated and scaled well beyond Rwanda. Great vision needs great partners.

We call upon every partner to see in this plan an opportunity to play a part in its implementation. We also request development partners and other funding institutions to support RRISD to deliver its mandate.

We thank all those who have contributed to the preparation of this plan, and we remain optimistic about its effective implementation as planned.

Gregory BAKUNZI
Founder & Executive Director
Red Rocks Initiative for Sustainable Development (RRISD)

Acknowledgement

The process of developing an inclusive and sustainable strategy that will enable RRISD to build on its achievements and overcome its challenges has been a key priority for the organisation. Anchored in RRISD's vision, mission and objectives, this strategy aims to deliver results in a better, more coherent and more focused manner.

This Strategic Plan will be a useful tool for guiding implementation and resource mobilisation in order to achieve the organisation's agenda. It is also a communication document that raises the profile of RRISD as a Rwandan organisation promoting community-based tourism and cultural heritage as pathways to rural development. It provides the framework within which detailed annual work plans and budgets will be developed, and it will help to engage strategic partners in the pursuit of both financial and non-financial resources.

We would like to express our appreciation to all who contributed to the development of this Strategic Plan: the rural communities with whom we work, our Board and staff, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions at national and district levels, and all the partners and friends of RRISD whose ideas shaped the priorities set out here.

We are grateful in advance to the development partners, investors and other institutions that will support the implementation of this plan.

The Management of RRISD

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AU	African Union
CBT	Community-Based Tourism
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAC	East African Community
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NST2	Second National Strategy for Transformation (2024–2029)
RDB	Rwanda Development Board
REMA	Rwanda Environment Management Authority
RRISD	Red Rocks Initiative for Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1 INTRODUCTION

Red Rocks Initiative for Sustainable Development (RRISD) is a Rwandan non-governmental organisation based in Musanze, Northern Province. It is committed to promoting environmental conservation, sustainable livelihoods, climate resilience, community-based tourism, cultural promotion and community empowerment.

RRISD is developing a community-based tourism model that empowers rural communities to transform their natural and cultural heritage into opportunities for sustainable development. The model connects rural communities with tourism in ways that improve livelihoods, create economic opportunities, reduce poverty and regional inequalities, and enhance the well-being of local people, while protecting the environment, cultural traditions and heritage that make each community unique. Cultural promotion is integral to the model: living traditions such as dance, music, crafts, storytelling and cuisine are safeguarded, celebrated and shared with visitors through authentic, community-led experiences.

This Strategic Plan covers the period 2026 to 2031. It organises RRISD's strategic interventions and prioritises what the organization will do over the next five years to make tourism a catalyst for rural transformation.

1.1 RRISD's Vision

Rural communities that are active participants, owners and beneficiaries of tourism, thriving while protecting, celebrating and sharing the natural and cultural heritage that defines them.

1.2 RRISD's Mission

To develop and scale a community-based tourism model, built on partnerships and shared knowledge, that improves rural livelihoods, reduces poverty and inequality, and conserves and promotes natural and cultural heritage.

1.3 Who We Are

RRISD is a community-centred organisation that brings together communities, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions, investors and other partners. Through collaboration, knowledge-sharing and innovation, RRISD develops practical solutions that strengthen local economies, promote community ownership, conserve and promote natural and cultural heritage and build resilience.

The objectives of RRISD are to:

- **1.3.1** Empower rural communities to turn their natural and cultural heritage into sustainable livelihood and enterprise opportunities, including community-based tourism and cultural enterprises.
- **1.3.2** Improve livelihoods, create economic opportunities, reduce poverty and regional inequalities, and enhance the well-being of local people.
- **1.3.3** Promote community ownership of, and active participation in, tourism development.

- **1.3.4** Develop, package and market authentic community tourism experiences, such as village walks, homestays, farm and cooking experiences and craft workshops, that meet quality and safety standards and attract domestic, regional and international visitors.
- **1.3.5** Protect and preserve the natural environment, cultural traditions and heritage of the communities where RRISD works, and strengthen climate resilience.
- **1.3.6** Promote and showcase the culture of the communities where RRISD works, including dance, music, crafts, storytelling, cuisine and historic and sacred sites, by supporting cultural practitioners, festivals and cultural enterprises and by passing traditions on to younger generations.
- **1.3.7** Bring together communities, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions, investors and other partners to develop practical solutions.
- **1.3.8** Share knowledge and lessons learned across communities and countries, so that the model can be replicated and scaled to benefit rural communities beyond Rwanda.

1.4 Our Values

- **Community ownership:** communities lead, decide and benefit.
- **Sustainability:** economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being go together.
- **Cultural respect and authenticity:** culture is shared on the community's own terms, with free, prior and informed consent, and is never staged in ways that distort or diminish it.
- **Inclusion:** women, youth and vulnerable groups participate and benefit fairly.
- **Partnership:** great vision needs great partners; we achieve more together.
- **Learning and innovation:** we document, share and adapt what works.
- **Integrity and accountability:** we are transparent to communities, partners and funders.

1.5 Organs and Structure of RRISD

The structure and systems of RRISD are designed to provide accountability, participation and transparency. In line with this plan, RRISD's functions are organised as follows:

- **The Board:** provides leadership and policy guidance, approves strategic plans, work plans and budgets, and oversees the Executive Director.
- **The Executive Director and Management Team:** lead day-to-day implementation, represent RRISD to partners and report to the Board.
- **Programme Team:** translates the plan into field activities in the communities where RRISD works.
- **Community Tourism Committees:** community-based structures that participate in planning, decision-making and benefit sharing at community level.
- **Cultural Advisory Panel:** a panel of elders, cultural custodians, artists, artisans and youth representatives that guides the documentation, interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage and endorses cultural protocols.

- **Partner Platform and Working Groups:** multi-stakeholder spaces bringing together communities, businesses, government, investors and development organisations around specific themes.

2 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Strategic Plan 2026–2031 has been developed through a participatory and consultative approach, drawing on RRISD's community-based tourism model, the experience of its Board and staff, and the priorities of communities, government institutions, tourism businesses, development partners and investors.

2.1 Purpose of this Strategic Plan

The purpose of this strategic plan is to provide a planning and guiding framework that enables RRISD to strategise and set priorities that facilitate the achievement of its vision, mission and objectives. It provides the overarching framework for coordinating the efforts of communities and partners in using tourism as a vehicle for rural development.

2.2 Approach and Methodology

2.2.1 Approach

To ensure maximum value to RRISD and its stakeholders, the focus, scope and design of the plan were developed in close consultation with key stakeholders, identified according to their role in, and expectations of, community-based tourism and rural development. The process involved analysing the rural development and tourism context in Rwanda, undertaking a stakeholder analysis and a SWOT analysis, and defining the implementation framework of RRISD.

2.2.2 Methodology

Desk review. Key documents reviewed include RRISD's Community-Based Tourism Model overview; Rwanda's Vision 2050 and the Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2); national climate and green growth strategies and Rwanda's Nationally Determined Contributions; national tourism, culture and environment policies; the UNESCO conventions on intangible cultural heritage and cultural diversity; the African Union Charter for African Cultural Renaissance; the UN Sustainable Development Goals; and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Participatory consultation. Perspectives and insights from communities, cultural custodians, artists and artisans, partners and staff are taken into consideration through interviews, focus group discussions and consultative workshops, so that the plan is owned by those who will implement it.

Analysis and validation. Findings from secondary and primary sources are triangulated to cross-check information and to establish its accuracy. Key achievements, challenges, lessons learned and good practices were used in the planning process, and the draft plan is validated with the Board and key partners before final approval.

3 BACKGROUND

Rwanda has made remarkable progress in conservation, tourism and economic growth, yet rural communities continue to face significant development challenges, including poverty, limited and unequal economic opportunities, pressure on land and natural resources, and exposure to the effects of climate change on agriculture and ecosystems. Regional inequalities persist between urban and rural areas.

Tourism is one of the sectors through which Rwanda earns foreign exchange and creates jobs. The Northern Province, where RRISD is based, is home to some of the country's most valued natural and cultural attractions, including Volcanoes National Park. Yet in many places the link between tourism and the livelihoods of neighbouring communities remains weak. Communities are often visited as destinations rather than engaged as owners, partners and beneficiaries; a large share of tourism spending does not reach local households; and local products, skills and enterprises are insufficiently linked to the tourism value chain.

The Northern Province is also rich in living culture. Communities around Musanze hold a wealth of traditions, including Intore dance, drumming and song, storytelling, basketry and other crafts, traditional cuisine, and historic and sacred sites. For many visitors these traditions are among the most memorable parts of a journey to Rwanda, yet they are seldom presented in ways that are led by, and reward, the communities who keep them alive. Cultural performances and crafts are often sold as add-ons to wildlife visits rather than as products in their own right; artisans and performers have limited access to training, fair prices and markets; and traditional knowledge is passed on less and less as elders age and young people move away in search of work. Visitors also tend to stay only briefly in the area, so opportunities to extend their stay through community and cultural experiences remain largely untapped.

At the same time, the natural environment, cultural traditions and heritage that attract visitors are under pressure from unsustainable land use, environmental degradation, climate variability and the erosion of cultural practices. Where communities do not see tangible benefits from conservation and heritage, the incentive to protect them weakens.

There is also limited coordination between the actors that influence rural tourism: communities, tourism businesses, local and national government, investors and development organisations. Evidence on what works in community-based tourism is scattered, and good practices are rarely documented, shared across communities or adapted to new contexts.

Globally and across Africa, there is growing recognition that sustainable, community-led tourism can create jobs, support local enterprises, empower women and youth, and conserve and promote heritage. Visitors increasingly look for cultural and community-based experiences that go beyond sightseeing. This recognition opens an opportunity for RRISD to develop a model that is practical, community-owned and replicable.

RRISD's response is to build a community-based tourism model that brings these actors together. It is more than a tourism initiative; it is a model for community empowerment, cultural renewal and rural development through tourism. With the right partnerships, resources and shared commitment, RRISD aims to create opportunities for rural communities to thrive while protecting the heritage that defines them.

4 SITUATION ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysing the Continental and Global Trend

Sustainable tourism is increasingly recognised as a driver of inclusive growth, job creation and heritage conservation. Travellers are looking for authentic, responsible experiences that connect them with local people, culture and nature, and governments and investors increasingly expect tourism to deliver benefits to host communities. At the same time, climate change, biodiversity loss and inequality require tourism to be planned in ways that protect the resources on which it depends.

Africa has outstanding natural and cultural assets and a young, growing population, but many rural communities near those assets capture only a small portion of the value created by tourism. Community-based tourism, with strong local ownership and fair benefit sharing, offers a pathway to change this.

Culture is increasingly recognised as an economic and social asset in its own right. Performing arts, crafts, food and festivals create livelihoods, strengthen identity and social cohesion, and give destinations a distinctive character. At the same time, globalisation and migration to towns put living traditions at risk, which makes it important that cultural tourism is designed to strengthen, rather than commercialise or weaken, the cultures it presents.

4.1.1 Global Frameworks

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, provides the global framework within which RRISD's work sits. Several goals are directly relevant, including SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth, including target 8.9 on sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities, including target 11.4 on strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production, including target 12.b on monitoring sustainable tourism impacts), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 15 (Life on land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

The Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC, adopted in 2015, emphasizes adaptation, resilience and the role of all stakeholders in responding to climate change. For tourism-dependent rural communities, climate resilience and the conservation of ecosystems are essential to long-term livelihoods.

In the field of culture, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) recognise communities, groups and practitioners as the primary custodians of their heritage and call for its safeguarding with their participation and consent. These principles of community custodianship and free, prior and informed consent underpin RRISD's approach to cultural promotion.

4.1.2 The African Process

The African Union's Agenda 2063, "The Africa We Want", calls for inclusive growth and sustainable development, a strong cultural identity, values and ethics, and people-driven development that relies on the potential of women and youth. Community-based tourism contributes directly to these aspirations by

building on local culture and enterprise and by placing communities at the centre of development. The African Union's Charter for African Cultural Renaissance (2006) further affirms the role of culture in development and calls for the promotion of cultural industries, heritage and indigenous knowledge.

4.2 Analysing the Regional and National Trend

Within the East African Community, partner states recognise tourism, conservation and cross-border cooperation as important to regional development, and there is growing interest in regional circuits and shared learning on community-based approaches.

The Government of Rwanda has placed tourism and environmental sustainability at the heart of its development agenda. National policy directions are contained in Vision 2050, the Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2, 2024–2029), green growth and climate resilience strategies, and sector policies on tourism and the environment, implemented by institutions such as the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) and local governments. These frameworks create a supportive environment for community-based tourism.

Rwanda also recognises culture as a pillar of national identity and development, with national policy and institutions dedicated to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and the creative arts alongside the tourism mandate of RDB. Cultural festivals and heritage programmes show the potential of culture to attract visitors and build national pride. These frameworks create room for partnership with community-led cultural tourism.

Nevertheless, the following challenges remain, among others:

- Limited community ownership of tourism assets and enterprises, and uneven sharing of benefits;
- Limited business, hospitality and market-access skills among rural entrepreneurs, especially women and youth;
- Weak links between community enterprises and established tourism businesses and value chains;
- Limited quality standards, packaging and marketing of community tourism experiences, and limited visibility of community products to visitors and tour operators;
- Limited venues, training and market access for cultural practitioners, artisans and cultural enterprises, and weak protection of their creative work;
- Limited access to finance and investment suited to community-scale tourism enterprises;
- Environmental pressure and climate-related risks on natural and cultural heritage;
- Limited documentation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage to younger generations, with a risk that traditional knowledge, crafts and practices are lost;
- Limited coordination between communities, businesses, government, investors and development partners; and
- Limited documentation and sharing of evidence and lessons on what works.

4.3 Stakeholder Analysis

It is important that all stakeholders in RRISD's core business are fully involved if the set objectives are to be achieved. Inclusivity prioritises the creation of a shared vision and ownership of the strategies used to implement this plan. Only when initiatives are owned and driven by all stakeholders will the model attain a sustainable character. The table below summarises the current status of each stakeholder group and the partnership and role expected of it.

Stakeholder	Current status	Expected partnership and role
Communities	• Hold the natural and cultural heritage on which tourism depends • Often limited ownership of, and benefit from, tourism • Limited access to skills, capital and markets • Less engagement in tourism planning and decision-making	• Participate in and own community tourism products and enterprises • Safeguard natural and cultural heritage • Take part in governance and benefit-sharing mechanisms • Share knowledge and traditions with visitors and partners
Women, youth and vulnerable groups	• Significant potential but limited access to opportunities, assets and decision-making	• Lead and benefit from enterprises and employment • Participate in governance of community tourism structures
Cultural custodians, artists and artisans	• Hold living traditions, skills and knowledge in dance, music, storytelling, crafts and cuisine • Often work informally with limited venues, training, fair pricing and market access • Traditions at risk as elders age and young people migrate	• Lead the selection, interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage • Offer authentic cultural experiences and products to visitors • Mentor young people and pass on skills and traditions • Take part in cultural protocols and benefit sharing
Local government (districts and sectors)	• Responsible for local planning and service delivery • Support community development but with limited tourism-specific resources	• Integrate community tourism in district plans • Facilitate permits, infrastructure and local coordination • Co-implement pilot initiatives • Support cultural events, heritage sites and local cultural calendars
National government institutions (e.g. RDB, REMA)	• Set policy, regulation and standards for tourism and the environment • Growing recognition of the role of communities in tourism	• Structured engagement through MoUs • Policy dialogue on community ownership and benefit sharing • Technical guidance and alignment with national priorities • Align community cultural promotion with national culture and heritage policies

Stakeholder	Current status	Expected partnership and role
Tourism businesses	• Operate tour, accommodation and hospitality services • Potential buyers of community products and experiences, with limited links to communities	• Partner with communities on products, supply chains and employment • Mentor and buy from community enterprises • Practise responsible, inclusive tourism • Include community cultural experiences in itineraries and packages
Development partners and NGOs	• Provide funding and technical support, often short-term and project-based • Interest in livelihoods, climate and heritage	• Provide long-term, flexible support • Share expertise and coordinate efforts • Co-invest in learning and scaling
Investors and financial institutions	• Limited investment suited to community-scale enterprises	• Provide responsible, inclusive investment and financial products • Partner in community-owned or co-owned ventures
Research and academic institutions	• Expertise available but weak linkages with community enterprises	• Collaborative research and evaluation • Contribute to training and evidence-based tools
Media and communications partners	• Limited coverage of community-based tourism and rural stories	• Raise awareness of community tourism and responsible travel • Amplify community voices and success stories • Promote community cultural events, products and itineraries

4.4 RRISD and the International Development Agenda

RRISD is aligned to global and continental agendas in pursuit of its vision and mission, notably Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.4.1 Agenda 2063

Agenda 2063 is structured around seven aspirations. RRISD's work contributes most directly to: (i) a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; (v) an Africa with a strong cultural identity, values and ethics; and (vi) an Africa of people-driven development relying on the potential of its women and youth. Affirmative action to ensure that rural communities are part of Agenda 2063 is cardinal, and community-based tourism that builds on indigenous knowledge, culture and enterprise is one way of achieving it. Cultural heritage, creative expression and indigenous knowledge are central to aspiration (v), and RRISD's cultural promotion work contributes directly to it.

4.4.2 Sustainable Development Goals

Although all 17 SDGs remain relevant, RRISD's major contributions are traced under the following:

- **SDG 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere:** by creating income and enterprise opportunities for rural households.
- **SDG 5 – Gender equality:** by empowering women as entrepreneurs, leaders and beneficiaries. Gender parity is a guiding principle for all RRISD-implemented projects.
- **SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth:** by promoting sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- **SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities:** by narrowing the gap between rural and urban opportunities.
- **SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities:** by safeguarding and promoting cultural and natural heritage (target 11.4) and strengthening community identity and pride.
- **SDG 12 – Responsible consumption and production:** by promoting sustainable tourism practices and local value chains.
- **SDG 13 – Climate action:** by building the climate resilience of communities and their livelihoods.
- **SDG 15 – Life on land:** by protecting ecosystems and biodiversity through community stewardship.
- **SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals:** by bringing together communities, businesses, government, investors and development partners.

4.4.3 Regional Integration

Policies that affect rural communities and tourism are also developed at regional level. RRISD will follow relevant East African Community and African Union processes, share lessons with regional partners and, where appropriate, contribute community perspectives to regional dialogue.

4.5 SWOT Analysis

This plan analysed the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They were identified during the development of this plan, with inputs from the Board, staff and partners.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• A clear, community-centred vision of tourism as a catalyst for rural transformation • Locally rooted in Musanze and the Northern Province, close to major natural and cultural assets • Broad focus linking tourism, conservation, livelihoods and climate resilience • Strong orientation toward partnerships and knowledge sharing • Committed leadership and team • Access to rich cultural heritage and living traditions in the Northern Province that can anchor authentic community tourism experiences	• The community-based tourism model is still being developed and needs further testing and evidence • Limited resource base: unable to do everything we want • Lean team and systems that need strengthening • Limited visibility beyond the Northern Province • Dependence on project-based, short-term funding • Limited in-house expertise and tools for cultural documentation, tourism product development and marketing

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Growing demand for authentic, responsible and community-led travel experiences • Government priority on tourism, green growth and rural transformation • Interest from development partners and investors in inclusive and climate-resilient tourism • Regional and international networks for learning and replication • Digital tools for marketing and booking community experiences • Rising interest in cultural, village and homestay experiences; cultural festivals and events that can extend visitor stays; growing domestic and regional tourism	• Leakage of tourism benefits away from communities • Climate shocks and environmental degradation affecting livelihoods and heritage • Commercialisation or erosion of cultural traditions • Uneven coordination among stakeholders and policy gaps • Fluctuating donor funding and global tourism shocks • Loss of intangible heritage as elders age and young people migrate; competition from mass-produced souvenirs and standardised experiences

4.5.1 Implications of the SWOT Analysis for the Implementation of the Plan

1. RRISD should focus on demonstrating results by testing and refining its model with pilot communities.
2. RRISD should harness its strengths in partnerships to link communities with markets, businesses and investors.
3. It should package and market community tourism circuits and cultural experiences, working with tour operators, digital platforms and national tourism institutions to reach domestic, regional and international visitors.
4. It should raise its profile in the policy arena and contribute evidence and position papers on community ownership and benefit sharing.
5. It should invest in documentation, monitoring and learning so that good practices can be replicated and scaled.
6. It should build safeguards that protect culture, the environment and community interests as tourism grows.
7. It should document and promote local culture with communities and cultural custodians, and build a calendar of community cultural events and experiences that extends visitor stays and spreads benefits.
8. It should strengthen donor and investor relationships and negotiate for multi-year funding for this plan.
9. It should develop sustainability mechanisms, including community-linked revenue, to finance its work over the long term.
10. It should strengthen its internal systems, staffing and governance to deliver at a larger scale.

5 STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

The unique niche of RRISD is that it is a community-centred organisation that brings together communities, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions, investors and other partners to make tourism work for rural communities. RRISD uses a development approach to contribute to the achievement of social, economic, cultural and environmental transformation for the communities it works with. Community tourism and cultural promotion are the two engines of this approach: cultural promotion safeguards and showcases the identity of communities, and community tourism turns that identity and the surrounding landscape into livelihoods.

5.1 Strategic Objectives

5.1.1 Strategic Objective 1: Develop and operationalise a community-based tourism model that gives rural communities ownership of, and fair benefits from, tourism.

Communities are most likely to benefit when they own and manage tourism products, enterprises and decisions. This objective is the core of RRISD's work and focuses on turning natural and cultural heritage into viable, community-owned opportunities. It also covers the design, packaging and promotion of community tourism experiences that visitors want to buy.

Strategy 1: Map community natural and cultural assets and select pilot communities with the participation of local leaders and authorities.

Strategy 2: Develop community-owned tourism products and enterprises, such as cultural experiences (traditional dance and music, storytelling, cooking and craft workshops), nature-based activities (guided village, farm and forest walks), local cuisine, crafts and community-hosted accommodation (homestays).

Strategy 3: Design and package community tourism circuits and itineraries, such as half-day and multi-day village experiences linked to nearby attractions, and establish quality, safety, hygiene and fair-pricing standards, including a certified network of community homestays and community-run visitor information points.

Strategy 4: Build business, hospitality, guiding, interpretation and vocational skills among community members, especially women and youth, including homestay management, food safety, customer care, storytelling and foreign-language skills.

Strategy 5: Link community enterprises to markets, tourism businesses and local value chains, including agriculture, crafts and food production.

Strategy 6: Promote and market community tourism experiences through a community tourism brand, a digital platform for information and bookings, partnerships with tour operators and travel media, familiarisation trips, participation in tourism fairs, and campaigns targeting domestic, regional and school visitors, packaging community experiences with visits to nearby national attractions.

Strategy 7: Establish transparent community governance and benefit-sharing mechanisms, including community tourism committees.

Strategy 8: Empower women, youth and other vulnerable groups to lead and benefit from tourism.

5.1.2 Strategic Objective 2: Protect, preserve and promote natural and cultural heritage and strengthen the climate resilience of communities.

The environment, traditions and heritage that attract visitors must be protected for the long term. Communities that benefit from tourism have a stronger incentive to conserve them. This objective links conservation, culture and resilience with livelihoods. It also recognises that culture is a living asset: when traditions are celebrated and rewarded, communities and young people have reasons to keep them alive.

Strategy 1: Support community-led environmental conservation, including tree planting and ecosystem restoration, and sustainable natural resource management.

Strategy 2: Document and safeguard tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including oral histories, songs, dances, crafts, cuisine and historic and sacred sites, through a community-led inventory, a community cultural archive or heritage centre, and cultural protocols agreed with custodians on the basis of free, prior and informed consent.

Strategy 3: Promote cultural expression and cultural enterprises by supporting troupes, musicians, storytellers, artisans and craft cooperatives with training, product development, quality and branding, performance and exhibition spaces and market access; protect the intellectual property of creators; and organise community cultural festivals, heritage days and events that showcase local culture to residents and visitors.

Strategy 4: Strengthen the transmission of culture between generations through elder–youth mentoring, apprenticeships in dance, music and crafts, cultural clubs in schools, and the recording of elders' knowledge, so that cultural promotion builds pride and skills among young people.

Strategy 5: Promote sustainable tourism practices at community level, including responsible waste, water and energy use and visitor codes of conduct that respect local culture.

Strategy 6: Strengthen climate resilience by diversifying livelihoods and promoting climate-smart practices that complement tourism.

Strategy 7: Raise awareness through environmental and cultural education, especially for schools, youth and women's groups.

5.1.3 Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen partnerships, policy engagement and investment for community-based tourism.

The model depends on collaboration among communities, tourism businesses, development organisations, government institutions and investors. This objective builds the partnerships, policy environment and resources needed to make the model work.

Strategy 1: Establish and sustain a multi-stakeholder platform for community-based tourism and cultural promotion that includes cultural custodians, artists, tour operators and the media.

Strategy 2: Strengthen collaboration with national and local government institutions, including through MoUs, and align with national tourism, culture, environment and climate priorities.

Strategy 3: Engage in policy dialogue and advocacy on community ownership, benefit sharing, inclusive tourism and the protection and promotion of community cultural heritage.

Strategy 4: Attract responsible and inclusive investment and develop partnerships with tourism businesses, tour operators, cultural institutions and financial institutions.

Strategy 5: Mobilise resources from diverse sources to implement this plan.

5.1.4 Strategic Objective 4: Generate, document and share knowledge to replicate and scale the model beyond Rwanda.

Sharing knowledge and lessons learned across communities and countries is an important part of RRISD's approach. By exchanging experiences and adapting successful practices to different local contexts, RRISD aims to develop a model that can be replicated and scaled to benefit rural communities beyond Rwanda.

Strategy 1: Establish a monitoring, evaluation and learning system and collect evidence on livelihoods, conservation, cultural promotion, visitor experience and community empowerment.

Strategy 2: Document best practices, case studies and lessons on community tourism and cultural promotion, and publish them as a vital knowledge-dissemination mechanism.

Strategy 3: Develop a replication toolkit and guidelines, covering community tourism product development, cultural protocols and heritage documentation, that can be adapted to other communities and countries.

Strategy 4: Organise learning exchanges and collaborate with research institutions, networks and partners at regional and international levels.

5.1.5 Strategic Objective 5 (Enabling): Strengthen the institutional capacity and governance of RRISD.

A strong, accountable organisation is needed to deliver this plan.

Strategy 1: Strengthen governance, policies and accountability systems.

Strategy 2: Build the skills and motivation of staff and partners.

Strategy 3: Strengthen financial management, operational systems and the sustainability of the organisation.

6 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

6.1 Introduction

Successful implementation of the 2026–2031 Strategic Plan will depend significantly on a practical framework that is easy to coordinate. The existing structures of RRISD, including the Board that provides oversight, will carry out their respective roles, and responsible management staff will spearhead implementation.

Implementation will require coherent approaches within and outside the organisation to fully exploit RRISD's competitive advantages while leveraging the resources and expertise of other stakeholders. Partnerships will not just happen; they require each component of the model to be active and functional.

6.2 Institutional Arrangement

The strategy demands coordinated implementation across RRISD and with its external partners. Internal implementation will be undertaken through a collaborative approach, with RRISD structures providing strategic leadership, direction and management.

The Board will provide oversight and policy direction and approve annual work plans and budgets.

The Executive Director and Management Team will lead implementation, coordinate partners and report to the Board.

The Programme Team will implement activities in communities and provide technical assistance and capacity building.

Community Tourism Committees will participate in planning and decision-making and oversee community-level benefit sharing.

The Cultural Advisory Panel will guide the documentation, interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage and endorse cultural protocols, festivals and cultural products.

The Partner Platform will bring together communities, businesses, government, investors and development partners to coordinate action and share learning.

6.3 Implementation Phases

The plan will be implemented in three phases, as summarised below, with detailed annual work plans and budgets developed within this framework.

Key Result Area	Phase 1: Foundation (2026–2027)	Phase 2: Pilot and consolidation (2028–2029)	Phase 3: Scale and replication (2030–2031)
KRA 1: Community-based tourism and livelihoods	Map community assets; select pilot communities; establish community tourism committees; design first products and circuits; agree quality and safety standards	Launch and refine community-owned products, circuits and homestays; train operators and guides; build market links; launch the community tourism brand and digital platform	Extend to additional communities; deepen market links and enterprise growth; expand marketing to regional and international markets
KRA 2: Heritage conservation, cultural promotion and climate resilience	Baseline of natural and cultural heritage; establish the Cultural Advisory Panel; begin the community cultural inventory; agree conservation, cultural protocols and sustainable tourism practices with communities	Implement community conservation and restoration; support troupes, artisans and cultural enterprises; hold community cultural festivals and heritage days; run elder–youth transmission programmes; promote climate-smart livelihoods	Institutionalise community stewardship and a sustained annual cultural calendar; extend to new sites
KRA 3: Partnerships, policy and investment	Convene the multi-stakeholder platform; sign initial MoUs; develop resource mobilisation strategy	Engage in policy dialogue; establish first investment partnerships	Scale partnerships; build a pipeline of responsible investment
KRA 4: Knowledge, learning and scaling	Set up M&E framework and baseline; agree documentation protocols	Conduct mid-term review; produce case studies and draft the replication toolkit	Finalise toolkit; hold learning exchanges; final evaluation
KRA 5: Institutional strengthening	Strengthen governance, systems and staffing	Build capacity; address mid-term findings	Implement the sustainability and financing strategy

6.4 Communication

RRISD recognises that information sharing is a critical component of achieving the aspirations of this Strategic Plan. Communication will raise awareness and the level of knowledge among communities and partners, which is a prerequisite for mobilising participation. RRISD will use multiple channels, including its website, social media, newsletters, case studies and other publications, and will amplify community voices and stories in ways that respect culture and consent. Communication will also support cultural promotion and tourism marketing, including a community tourism brand, storytelling, photography and film produced with communities, and digital campaigns that invite visitors to experience community culture responsibly.

6.5 Human Resource Management

Human resources are central to implementation of the strategy and call for adequate knowledgeable and skilled capacity at all levels. Human resource management is therefore a strategic component that requires support with adequate financial resources and staff development initiatives, including mentoring and partnerships with training institutions.

6.6 Resource Mobilisation

Resource mobilisation will call for improved efficiency and delivery of resources, and for harmonising activities and synergies across RRISD and with partners. A resource mobilisation strategy is outlined in Annex III.

6.7 Accountability

Accountability for the implementation of this Strategic Plan and the use of resources is critical, since it will require appropriate use of financial, human and material resources. All staff are responsible and accountable for the use of resources. RRISD will also be accountable to communities, including through regular feedback and reporting meetings, and will maintain safeguarding, anti-fraud and complaint-handling mechanisms.

6.8 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Successful implementation will depend largely on how well activities and outputs are monitored and evaluated. RRISD will use a participatory M&E system in which communities and partners take part in reviewing progress. Annual reviews will inform annual work plans, the plan will be subjected to a mid-term evaluation and review in 2028–2029, and a final evaluation will be carried out in 2031 so that undesired experiences are put right and best practices are replicated.

6.9 Risk Management

There may be several risks to the implementation of this Strategic Plan, including the timely availability of financial and human resources. Possible risks will be analysed and monitored so that precautionary measures are taken in good time. The main risks and mitigation measures are summarised below.

Risk	Area affected	Mitigation
Delays or shortfalls in funding	All key result areas	Diversify funding; develop a resource mobilisation strategy early; phase activities according to available resources
Weak community ownership or unequal benefit sharing	KRA 1	Participatory planning; transparent benefit-sharing rules; community tourism committees with women and youth representation
Erosion or commercialisation of culture	KRA 2	Community-led cultural protocols; visitor codes of conduct; review by the Cultural Advisory Panel; regular community review
Climate shocks and environmental degradation	KRA 1, KRA 2	Diversified livelihoods; climate-smart practices; ecosystem restoration
Tourism demand shocks (e.g. health, security or economic events)	KRA 1	Diversified products and markets; domestic and regional visitors; livelihood diversification

Risk	Area affected	Mitigation
Low visitor numbers or weak market visibility for community experiences	KRA 1	Community tourism brand and digital marketing; partnerships with tour operators; packaging with nearby attractions; domestic and regional markets; seasonal cultural events
Uneven visitor experience or safety incidents at community sites	KRA 1	Quality, safety and hygiene standards; host training and certification; visitor feedback system; clear visitor codes of conduct
Limited commitment from partners or policy gaps	KRA 3	Early engagement; MoUs; evidence-based advocacy; multi-stakeholder platform
Limited staff or institutional capacity	KRA 5	Capacity-building plan; targeted recruitment; partnerships and technical support
Safeguarding and reputational risks	All key result areas	Safeguarding and anti-fraud policies; community feedback mechanisms; regular audits

ANNEX I: LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Indicators will be refined, and baselines and targets set, during the baseline study planned in Phase 1 (2026–2027).

Goal and Outcomes

Focus	Expected results (outcomes)	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
Goal: To enable rural communities to own, lead and benefit from sustainable tourism that improves livelihoods and protects natural and cultural heritage.	**1. Community livelihoods and ownership:** rural communities earn income from, and have ownership of, community-based tourism products, experiences and enterprises.	• Number of community tourism enterprises operating and generating income • Share of tourism income retained by participating communities • Number of women and youth in jobs or enterprises • Reported improvement in household well-being • Number of community tourism circuits and homestays operating • Number of visitors hosted and visitor satisfaction	Stable tourism demand; communities willing to participate
	2. Heritage, cultural promotion and climate resilience: natural and cultural heritage in project communities is better protected, promoted and passed on to younger generations, and communities are more resilient.	• Area under community-led conservation or restoration • Number of communities applying sustainable tourism and climate-smart practices • Cultural heritage initiatives led by communities • Number of cultural practitioners, troupes and artisans supported • Cultural festivals and events held, and number of attendees • Young people taking part in cultural transmission programmes	Supportive environment and land-use conditions
	3. Partnerships and enabling environment: strong partnerships and a supportive policy and investment environment for community-based tourism.	• Number of active partnerships, MoUs and joint initiatives • Policy dialogue processes reflecting community input • Investment and funding mobilised for community tourism	Government interest and willingness to cooperate; investor interest
	4. Knowledge and scaling: the model is documented and adopted	• Case studies, tools and publications produced	Partners willing to share and learn

Focus	Expected results (outcomes)	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
	or adapted by other communities and partners.	• Number of learning exchanges held • Number of communities or partners adopting or adapting the model	
	5. Institutional strength: RRISD is a cohesive, accountable and well-resourced organisation.	• Governance and financial systems reviewed and strengthened • Staff trained and retained • Diversified, multi-year funding base	Leadership committed to accountability and transparency

Key Result Area 1: Community-Based Tourism and Livelihoods

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
1.1 Community assets mapped and pilot communities selected	• Asset maps completed • Pilot communities selected with local leaders	Local authorities and communities agree
1.2 Community-owned tourism products, experiences and enterprises developed	• Number of products, experiences and enterprises launched • Number of visitors hosted • Community income generated	Conducive tourism demand and permits
1.3 Community tourism circuits, homestays and visitor standards established	• Number of circuits and itineraries designed and operating • Number of certified homestays • Quality and safety standards adopted • Visitor satisfaction rating	Hosts willing to meet standards; permits and local authority support
1.4 Business, hospitality and vocational skills strengthened	• Number of people trained • Share of trainees who are women or youth • Trainees in jobs or enterprises	Trainees willing to apply skills
1.5 Market links and value chains established	• Agreements with tourism businesses • Local suppliers linked to the tourism value chain	Businesses willing to partner
1.6 Community tourism and culture promoted and marketed	• Community tourism brand and digital platform launched • Number of tour operators and travel partners selling community experiences • Marketing events, familiarisation trips and campaigns held • Bookings and visitors generated	Access to digital tools and connectivity; partners willing to market

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
1.7 Women, youth and vulnerable groups empowered	• Women and youth in leadership of committees and enterprises • Inclusive materials and approaches developed	Communities open to gender equality and inclusion

Key Result Area 2: Heritage Conservation, Cultural Promotion and Climate Resilience

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
2.1 Community conservation and restoration actions implemented	• Trees planted and survival rate • Area restored or protected • Community conservation groups active	Favourable weather and land-use conditions
2.2 Cultural heritage documented, safeguarded and passed on to younger generations	• Community cultural inventory and archive established • Community cultural protocols agreed • Elder–youth mentoring and apprenticeship programmes running • Number of young people participating	Community consent and leadership; elders and youth willing to participate
2.3 Cultural expressions, festivals and cultural enterprises promoted	• Number of troupes, artisans and craft cooperatives supported • Annual community cultural festival and heritage days held • Cultural products and performances linked to tourism circuits • Income earned by cultural practitioners	Community interest and consent; market demand for cultural products
2.4 Sustainable tourism and climate-smart practices adopted	• Enterprises applying sustainable practices • Households with diversified, climate-smart livelihoods	Communities adopt new practices

Key Result Area 3: Partnerships, Policy and Investment

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
3.1 Multi-stakeholder platform established and functional	• Regular platform meetings held • Number of member organisations	Partners willing to participate
3.2 Policy dialogue and advocacy on community-based tourism undertaken	• Position papers and policy inputs submitted • Engagements with government institutions	Conducive policy climate
3.3 Investment and resources mobilised	• Resource mobilisation strategy implemented • Funding secured and diversified • Investment partnerships established	Donor and investor interest

Key Result Area 4: Knowledge, Learning and Scaling

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
4.1 M&E and learning system functional	• Baseline completed • Annual reviews, mid-term and final evaluations conducted	Communities and partners participate
4.2 Best practices and case studies documented and shared	• Number of case studies and publications • Communication products disseminated	Partners willing to share
4.3 Replication toolkit developed and learning exchanges held	• Replication toolkit completed • Learning exchanges held with communities and partners across countries	Interest from other communities and countries

Key Result Area 5: Institutional Strengthening

Outputs	Performance indicators	Assumptions / risks
5.1 Governance and accountability systems strengthened	• Policies reviewed and approved • Board and committee meetings held • Regular audits	Competent and committed leadership
5.2 Staff capacity strengthened	• Staff training completed • Staff retention	Competent and skilled staff
5.3 Secretariat operations and sustainability strengthened	• Management and financial systems in place • Sustainability and financing strategy developed and implemented	Adequate resources

ANNEX II: INDICATIVE BUDGET

The figures below are indicative planning estimates for the five-year period 2026–2031, expressed in US dollars. They will be reviewed and refined in the annual work plans and budgets and as funding is confirmed.

Output	Estimated cost (USD)	Share of total
KRA 1: Community-Based Tourism and Livelihoods		
1.1 Community assets mapped and pilot communities selected	70,000	2.0%
1.2 Community-owned tourism products, experiences and enterprises developed	380,000	11.1%
1.3 Community tourism circuits, homestays and visitor standards established	120,000	3.5%
1.4 Business, hospitality and vocational skills strengthened	230,000	6.7%
1.5 Market links and value chains established	120,000	3.5%
1.6 Community tourism and culture promoted and marketed	100,000	2.9%
1.7 Women, youth and vulnerable groups empowered	180,000	5.3%
Sub-total	**1,200,000**	**35.1%**
KRA 2: Heritage Conservation, Cultural Promotion and Climate Resilience		
2.1 Community conservation and restoration actions implemented	270,000	7.9%
2.2 Cultural heritage documented, safeguarded and passed on to younger generations	150,000	4.4%
2.3 Cultural expressions, festivals and cultural enterprises promoted	220,000	6.4%
2.4 Sustainable tourism and climate-smart practices adopted	210,000	6.1%
Sub-total	**850,000**	**24.9%**
KRA 3: Partnerships, Policy and Investment		
3.1 Multi-stakeholder platform established and functional	100,000	2.9%
3.2 Policy dialogue and advocacy undertaken	120,000	3.5%
3.3 Investment and resources mobilised	130,000	3.8%
Sub-total	**350,000**	**10.2%**
KRA 4: Knowledge, Learning and Scaling		
4.1 M&E and learning system functional	150,000	4.4%
4.2 Best practices and case studies documented and shared	100,000	2.9%
4.3 Replication toolkit developed and learning exchanges held	200,000	5.8%
Sub-total	**450,000**	**13.2%**
KRA 5: Institutional Strengthening		
5.1 Governance and accountability systems strengthened	100,000	2.9%
5.2 Staff capacity strengthened	150,000	4.4%
5.3 Secretariat operations and sustainability strengthened	320,000	9.4%
Sub-total	**570,000**	**16.7%**
GRAND TOTAL (2026–2031)	**3,420,000**	**100%**

ANNEX III: RESOURCE MOBILISATION STRATEGY

Outline

There is at present considerable interest among development partners, investors and tourism businesses in approaches that make tourism inclusive and sustainable. Many are waiting to see a clear plan of action from RRISD in which they can identify areas for cooperation, and this strategic plan aims to open up those opportunities.

The first step is to develop a resource mobilisation strategy. Initial activities will include putting in place management capacity, developing funding leads and a contact management system, supported by a partner and funder database and tracking system. RRISD will allocate sufficient staff resources to ensure consistent effort, may engage an external consultant, and will prepare marketing and fundraising materials in parallel so that funding sources can be approached without delay.

The strategy will identify the following actions:

1. Securing personnel and management capacity for implementation of the actions to be supported.
2. Developing an efficient funding leads and contact management system.
3. Assessing the key interests of donors, investors and partners.
4. Aligning key messages to mainstream priorities such as poverty reduction, gender equality, climate resilience, heritage conservation, cultural promotion and inclusive economic growth.
5. Developing a programme action plan that ensures effective and measurable interventions, which form the basis of all subsequent funding.
6. Building a network and constituency of partners in Rwanda and internationally for RRISD's work.
7. Developing programmes that respond to the priorities of funders and investors.
8. Developing and implementing a media and government awareness strategy.
9. Developing and implementing a resource mobilisation action plan, including initial contacts, meetings with individual partners, presentations to partner groups, and follow-up activities.

Potential Sources of Support

- Development partners, foundations and international NGOs
- Government programmes and national institutions
- Cultural, creative-industry and heritage funds, and cultural institutions and foundations that support cultural promotion
- Private sector and tourism businesses, including corporate responsibility programmes
- Impact investors, financial institutions and climate and green finance facilities
- Earned income and community revenue-sharing arrangements linked to the tourism model, such as homestay and experience bookings, craft sales, festival and event revenue, and sponsorships

Opportunities for Support

This Strategic Plan outlines a broad range of strategies that offer opportunities for partnership, cooperation and support. **Great vision needs great partners:** RRISD invites all interested partners to join it in turning this vision into a sustainable reality.

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