

Gender and Tourism: How can Tourism Empower Women and Promote Gender Equality?

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Abstract:

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. It is an increasingly important source of income, employment and wealth in many countries. One in 12 of the world's workers are employed in the travel and tourism industry. It is constantly claimed that tourism can be used as a major tool for women empowerment mainly through employment generation. This paper tends to discuss the main issues related with wage disparity between men and women employees, unsafe working conditions for women, status of women in labor force, impact of gender discrimination, job insecurity, and sexual exploitation. Empowerment is defined as a critical aspect of gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human right for all. Tourism is a tool to empower women from various aspects. Tourism could assist women to increase power and control over natural resources; economic empowerment; educational empowerment and political empowerment.

Key Words: gender discrimination, Empowerment, imbalances, autonomy.

Introduction:

Frameworks for Women's Empowerment:

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men is a matter of human a condition for social justice. These are essential to build a sustainable, just, secure and developed society. For decades now, through vibrant movements and political struggles, women have challenged existing gender relations and patriarchal systems to reframe the development dialogue. They have placed issues of violence, race, caste and other forms of discrimination that hit women the hardest; and the need for equality and human rights of women -including social, economic, political, legal, sexual and reproductive rights - at the center-stage of this struggle

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is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

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The women make up the majority of the tourism workforce, but why they tend to be in the lowest paid, sometimes even un-paid, and lowest status jobs? In order to promote gender equality, support opportunities for women and end violence against women, it is important to empower women as a first step. The tourism industry can contribute to this effort by creating opportunities for women and spread awareness of gender issues. Having economic opportunities and education is one of the most important ways for women to empower themselves to seek a better quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. In developing countries, where women have less access to education and often have greater household responsibilities, the low barriers to entry, flexible working hours and part-time work present potential opportunities for employment.

Tourism can also help women break the poverty cycle through formal and informal employment, entrepreneurship, training and community betterment. The results reveal that although women are not as dominant in the hotel and restaurant sector as was thought, their pay in the sector appears closer to men's than in other sectors. There are more women employees in the hotel and restaurant sector than other sectors; there are more opportunities for women to participate in informal and self-employed, home-based work in tourism than in other sectors; and there are more ministerial positions in tourism held by women than in other areas. However, not all women benefit equally from tourism development. Women in tourism promote women's empowerment and protect their rights through better tourism related work. Indeed tourism is improving the lives of women in the developing world. The majority of people employed in tourism worldwide are women, both formal and informal jobs. Tourism offers women opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurship.

Not all the news is good. Women are not as well-represented profession in the hotel and restaurant sector as men. They are still not being paid as much as men and are not receiving the same level of education and training in service as men are.

and encouraging income-generating activities to benefit local communities in destination areas. However, less attention has been paid to the unequal ways in which the benefits of tourism are distributed between men and women, particularly in the developing world. The tourism sector definitely provides various entry points for women's employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium sized income generating activities, thus creating paths towards the elimination of poverty of women and local communities in developing countries. Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for gender equality and women's empowerment. The contribution of women in the business world has increased in recent years, although women are underrepresented in management and leadership. In the tourism industry, the percentage of women who work in the industry is high, but their function is dominated by unskilled, low-paid jobs. Gender stereotyping and discrimination mean that women mainly tend to perform jobs such as cooking, cleaning and hospitality. Much tourism employment is seasonal and fluctuates according to the volatile nature of the industry. If a strong gender perspective is integrated into planning and implementation processes, tourism can be harnessed as a vehicle for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at the household, community, national and global level. At the same time, greater gender equality will contribute to the overall quality of the tourist experience, with a considerable impact on profitability and quality across all aspects of the industry. However, there are a number of conditions under which this potential can be used more effectively. This requires collaboration of all stakeholders - governments and intergovernmental bodies, local government, industry, trade unions, local communities and their different member groups, NGOs, community based tourism initiatives, etc. The increase of the use of tourism's potential whilst safeguarding the natural environment and cultural heritage and increasing social and economic justice should be the goal of further tourism development.

Women's Occupations and Positions in the Tourism Industry:

As in many other business sectors, there is a significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the labour market in tourism. Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations - women are being employed as waitresses, cleaners, travel agencies sales persons, flight attendants, etc., whereas men are being employed as gardeners, construction workers, drivers, pilots, etc. Vertically, the typical "gender pyramid" is prevalent in the tourism sector - lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities are being dominated by women and key managerial positions being dominated by men.

Vertical segregation of the labour market in the service and the administrative / managerial sectors reflects the situation in the labour markets in general. Women around the world have achieved higher levels of education than ever before and today represent more than 40 % of the global workforce. Yet their share of

Informal Sector in Tourism:

The informal sector is the most direct source of income for local communities in developing countries. In the developing world 60% of women (in non-cultural work) work in the informal sector. Much of this is linked directly and indirectly to tourism. The role of women in informal tourism settings such as running home-stay facilities, restaurants and shacks, crafts and handicrafts, handloom, small shops and street vending is significant. But these roles and activities that women perform in tourism are treated as invisible or taken for granted.

The need to acknowledge the important economic contribution of women and ensure for them, access to credit, capacity building and enhanced skills, access to the market, encouragement to form unions, associations and cooperatives to increase their bargaining power and to ensure that their safety health and social security needs are met is critical. Creating opportunities for income generating activities, effective marketing and integrating women's entrepreneurship with various government schemes to promote women's self employment, would be an important component to promote women's participation in tourism development. The sharing of experiences in tourism, understanding and demystifying complex official documents, such as tourism policies, master plans, related to the industry, providing information about access to documents are also important steps community based tourism initiatives, particularly of local women's groups and co-operatives can be an accessible and suitable entry point for women's participation in tourism. They seem to generate more long-term motivation than initiatives from outside. These activities help to create financial independence for local women and help them acquire necessary skills and improve their education, which in turn increase self-esteem and help create more equitable relationships in families and communities

The Representation of Women in Tourism:

The ideological constructs of the advertising industry have infused the tourism, aviation and hospitality industry. In tourism marketing, women are the 'face' of the sector, being the most widely-used objects in tourism promotion after natural beauty and cultural heritage. Women have been objectified and depicted as pleasure providers- their images often exoticised, patronising and misleading. Women are expected to dress in an "attractive" manner, to look beautiful (i.e. slim, young, and pretty) Stereotypical and sexist images of women are often part of tourism promotion in brochures and advertisements. Friendly, smiling and pliant women fitting certain standards of attractiveness, attired in traditional costumes, waiting to submissively serve the customer's every wish is the typical portrayal of women in tourism material. It is a violation of their dignity and rights. It is time the global tourism industry takes responsibility for the way women are used in the selling of tourism.

management positions remains unacceptably low, with just a tiny proportion succeeding in breaking through the "glass ceiling". There are numerous inter-linked factors, which help to maintain gender segregation of the labour market. Among, them are gender stereotyping, traditional gender roles and gender identity - women are seen as being suitable for certain occupations and they see themselves as suitable. In addition, traditional gender roles assign to women the main responsibilities for raising children, caring for the elderly, and doing household work. Thus, women are often forced to choose casual labour, part-time and seasonal employment.

Literature Review:

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 46 per cent of the workforce in the tourism sector comprises women. Amongst countries where tourism is a more mature industry, women account for up to 50 per cent of the workforce. Like most industries, the field of tourism has gendered differences in: salary (Cukier, 1996; Levy and Lerch, 1991; Lundgren, 1993), job opportunities (Seager, 2003), level of employment and job security (Cukier, 1996; Levy and Lerch, 1991). On average, in the ecotourism industry, women need superior qualifications for jobs than men (Cukier, 1996). Furthermore, women are more often affected by underemployment and unemployment because they are given seasonal and/or part-time jobs in tourism (Jolliffe and Farnsworth, 1996).

There are also known to be challenges facing women in tourism. Women are often concentrated in low status, low paid and precarious jobs in the tourism industry. Gender stereotyping and discrimination mean that women mainly tend to perform jobs such as cooking, cleaning and hospitality. Much tourism employment is seasonal and fluctuates according to the volatile nature of the industry. In some destinations links have been found between tourism and the sex industry which could make women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation (UNWTO). Cukier (1996) researched the gendered effects of tourism development and employment in Bali, Indonesia. The overall benefits of tourism included: increases in jobs, opening of new businesses, and self-employment artisan opportunities. Female employee opportunities were restricted by absolutely no access to male jobs (e.g., security guards, drivers, grounds keeping), and the inability to work the graveyard shift because of personal safety and childcare duties.

Tour guides are well paid, prestigious positions, of which only 7% are women. Cukier concludes that tourism creates jobs, but domestic obligations, religious beliefs, already established cultural beliefs regarding gender roles, ability to travel longer distances for work, and child rearing, make them less accessible to women. Because

...this, women supplement income by side jobs (e.g., baking, cleaning) to sustain household livelihood, and rely on social networking for aide in domestic work and childcare or money from relatives living abroad (Levy and Lerch, 1991). More female participation in the future will be fuelled by the growth in the industry. For instance, by 2007, according to India's Tourism Ministry estimates, direct and indirect employment from tourism in India will scale up to 66 million from the current 41 million. The tourism multiplier for every Rs 1 million invested in this sector creates 17 jobs. This is four times the number of jobs - 12 on an average - created for an equivalent investment in other sectors. This holds out special possibilities for the relatively disadvantaged segments of society like unemployed youth, women and the physically challenged.

Research Methodology:

The data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies: interviews with local residents, community leaders, and owners/managers of tourism businesses; participant observation; household surveys.

Results and Discussion:

We found that this area of tourism is particularly suitable to stress the integrated approach to environmental, social and economic aspects of the concept of sustainable development. The tourism industry represents a huge economic factor and its environmental and social impacts are obvious and have been well documented. In addition, integrating gender perspectives into the discussion of tourism is particularly important as the tourism industry is one major employer of women, offers various opportunities for independent income generating activities, and at the same time affects women's lives in destination communities.

However, tourism presents a wide range of income generation opportunities for women in both formal and informal employment. Tourism jobs are often flexible and can be carried out at various different locations such as the workplace, community, and household. Additionally, tourism creates a wide range of opportunities for women through the complex value chains it creates in the destination economy. In terms of employment, we establish that women are well represented but tend to be working at a service or clerical rather than professional or decision-making level. In entrepreneurship, it was found that women are almost twice as likely to be employers in the tourism industry as in other sectors, and often employ more women than men. The results for education are less promising - there are proportionally fewer women graduates in services than in other fields. Tourism offers the potential for women's leadership. However, women still only represent one fifth of all tourism ministers and tourism board chairs. While tourism often contributes to community development

and provides opportunities for women's self-employment, the study finds that women are contributing a large amount of unpaid work in tourism family businesses, especially when compared to other sectors.

Conclusion:

We conclude that acknowledging the problem of gender segregation of labour markets is a general one should not mean that it isn't addressed when discussing tourism. Bringing the necessary changes about requires efforts in all sectors. However, the tourism industry seems to be a particularly good "candidate" for engaging in efforts towards the advancement of women. Due to its size, its rapid growth and its extremely diverse and dynamic nature, the tourism industry has an enormous flexibility. This can enable the industry to develop key initiatives for the advancement of women so that other industries can benefit from initiatives and strategies in the tourism sector as models for their own development. The high percentage of women in the tourism workforce provides a necessary fundamental for the further advancement of women. Globally, tourism offers women opportunities for global leadership.

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