

Concept Note

International Seminar on Women's Empowerment in the Tourism Sector

Why women empowerment in tourism matters?



The importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has been underscored in the United Nations' Sustainable Development **Goal 5- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030**. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life (UNPFA, 2017). A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women full autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of the human rights for all. Moreover, evidence shows that promoting equality will speed up the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, (UNICEF, 2011) and must be a central part of any strategy to create more sustainable and inclusive economies and societies (OECD, 2014).

Much advancement has been made in women empowerment, but women are still far from enjoying the same basic rights, privileges and benefits that men do. Women still earn much less than men, do a disproportionate amount of housework, have fewer rights, less social mobility, and limited access to resources. Research by the World Bank shows that women lag behind men in nearly all measures of economic opportunity in most countries in the world. These inequalities are even more extreme in low income countries. According to the World Bank, countries with greater gender equality are more prosperous and competitive (WBG, 2017).

Tourism employs a higher ratio of women than any other economic sector. Research shows that Tourism has the potential to contribute to greater gender equality and the empowerment of women. Further, it has been proven to provide women with more opportunities for empowerment compared to other industries, giving the sector increased responsibility for the advancement of women. Women are more likely to have a leadership voice in tourism governance than in other areas. According to the UN Global Report on Women and Tourism 2010 by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UN Women, tourism provides better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sectors of the economy. The report found out that women are more likely reach top level positions in tourism, for instance globally there are more female Ministers of Tourism than in any other field. **However, it is also true that in some regions of the world, women are concentrated in the lowest paid, lowest skilled sectors of the industry and carry out a large amount of unpaid work in family tourism businesses.**

Undeniably tourism can also help poor women break the poverty cycle through employment, entrepreneurship, training, and community-based initiatives. Nonetheless, not all women are benefitting equally from tourism development. **While in some regions tourism helps empower women, in other regions, tourism can negatively affect the lives of women** and perpetuate existing economic and gender inequalities; sexual exploitation, exploitation of cheap women labor, lack of education and resources may prevent the poorest women from benefitting from tourism development.

For the tourism industry, there are considerable benefits of a greater gender equality and a fairer inclusion of women at all levels, and in particular, of women in more senior positions.

Greater gender equality in the tourism sector means that:

- ✓ Tourism businesses become more successful through the 'gender dividend', as diverse and more gender equal businesses tend to prosper and the creative and economic potential of women working in the tourism sector are harnessed rather than neglected¹
- ✓ Countries are better able to respond to the growing market for ethical and responsible tourism and to meet the expectations of tourists by ensuring that the benefits of tourism are delivered equitably between men and women
- ✓ Relations between the tourism industry and local communities are improved, as the benefits of tourism are shared more fairly and communities benefit from the developmental benefits that arise from the empowerment of women
- ✓ Women and men are included in tourism in a just and equitable manner, contributing to the economic and social sustainability of the sector

Women empowerment in Tourism matters because it means:

- ✓ Identifying and redressing power imbalances in the sector.
- ✓ Sustainable development and the realization of the human rights for all.
- ✓ Speeding up the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.
- ✓ More prosperous and competitive tourism destinations and societies.
- ✓ Better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership in the sector.
- ✓ Ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity in every region of the world.
- ✓ Ending bad practices such as sexual exploitation in tourism and exploitation of cheap women labor.
- ✓ Reducing child labour and exploitation, if mothers have access to decent jobs, it is less probable that their children will fall in the trap of poverty and exploitation.

¹ See UN Global Compact/Un Women *Women's Empowerment Principles* for more details
http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/human_rights/Resources/WEP_EMB_Booklet.pdf