



The Empowerment of Women in Tourism: Unlocking Opportunities for Growth and Equality

First Author Azadeh Monem darabad

Graduated in Surveying Engineering from Tabriz
State University

Abstract

Tourism is a powerful driver of economic growth and development, with the potential to empower women and promote gender equality. As the world celebrates International Women's Day and reflects on the progress made towards achieving women's empowerment, it is crucial to recognize the role of women in the tourism sector and the challenges they face. This article explores the efforts and initiatives aimed at empowering women in tourism, highlighting success stories, addressing barriers, and advocating for equal opportunities.

The empowerment of women in tourism is a crucial driver of growth, equality, and opportunity. Efforts to address the challenges faced by women in the sector and promote their full participation are essential for achieving sustainable development goals. Through global initiatives, success stories, and collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors, the tourism industry can create an inclusive and empowering environment for women. By unlocking the potential of women in tourism, we can build a brighter future for the sector and the global economy.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women, Tourism



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Introduction

Tourism is a powerful driver of economic growth and development, with the potential to empower women and promote gender equality. As the world celebrates International Women's Day and reflects on the progress made towards achieving women's empowerment, it is crucial to recognize the role of women in the tourism sector and the challenges they face. This article explores the efforts and initiatives aimed at empowering women in tourism, highlighting success stories, addressing barriers, and advocating for equal opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Female Empowerment Theory

Empowerment can be understood as a multifaceted social process that enables individuals to take control of their own lives. An important component of empowerment is individuals' or groups' self-reliance, as well as the empowerment of women. Women's organizations and institutions play an important role as catalysts for women's empowerment.

These organizations and institutions mobilize women, dispel myths surrounding female oppression, and make historic progress on women's issues by encouraging women to thrive both at home and in society.

According to empowerment theory, power is not a limited resource, and empowerment occurs when individuals are connected to one another. As a result, people become more empowered. At the individual level, people can make their problem-solving process more comfortable by working with others and can have an impact on how things are done and problems are solved based on their own sense of empowerment (Scheyvens & Watt, 2021).

In terms of the environment, advocating for changes in institutions and laws that hinder self-help can make it easier for individuals to help themselves. Social work focuses on helping people recognize that they are agents of change, that social workers are peers rather than problem solvers, and that clients are problem solvers. Clients are educated throughout the process about their needs, rights, and options for remediation in order to eventually become empowered.

Individual empowerment provides individuals with the confidence and strength to take action. A person's sense of self-efficacy, which is the development of personal power, strength, or mastery, affects their ability to act in situations where they lack authority. Individual self-efficacy is viewed as an "individualistic" concept as it is based on the idea that believing in one's ability to achieve a goal is a crucial aspect of self-empowerment.

This means that fundamental faith in oneself is all it takes to change one's life. However, a change in self-efficacy cannot be considered empowerment unless there is a corresponding practical change in one's life (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

Organizational empowerment refers to the business procedures and regulations that give subordinates the authority and power to perform their job-related duties. A key component of organizational empowerment is the belief that supervisors provide their assistants with the opportunity to participate in decision-making and give them the authority, responsibility, and knowledge to make decisions. Under this particular view of organizational empowerment, senior managers begin the process and then cascade down the hierarchy by delegating official authority to lower-level employees to carry out their responsibilities (Alim et al., 2023).

Organizational empowerment is often greatly influenced by macro-level factors related to the company as a whole. Corporate procedures, laws, organizational culture, and structure may be among these factors.

Therefore, governments can define organizational empowerment as administrative policies and procedures that allow and assign a higher level of authority and autonomy to perform duties, flexibility to accomplish these tasks, and



expanded participation in decision-making. It is not enough for staff to be empowered; in order to use this authority to perform duties that would normally fall within the purview of their directors, staff need to be guided and trained by their supervisors

The Role of Women in Tourism

Women play a significant role in the tourism industry, accounting for more than 50% of the sector's workforce globally. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism sector provides 101 million jobs worldwide, contributing to 3.4% of all jobs and 10% of the global economy. In many countries, the employment rate of women in tourism exceeds the average rate in other sectors. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that the global share of women in tourism was 55.5% in 2013, with some regions reaching as high as 70%.

However, despite their strong representation, women in tourism often face challenges related to job quality and career progression. Many women are employed in service-oriented roles, which are often low-paid and lack job security. They are underrepresented in management and higher positions within the industry. Nevertheless, research indicates that the tourism sector has the potential to pave the way for women's professional success.

Challenges Faced by Women in the Tourism Sector

Barriers to Entry

While women make up a significant portion of the tourism workforce, there are still barriers to entry that hinder their full participation. Some of these barriers include societal norms, cultural biases, and lack of access to education and training opportunities. Addressing these barriers is essential for creating an inclusive and diverse tourism industry.

Operational Obstacles

In addition to barriers to entry, women in tourism face operational obstacles that limit their opportunities for growth. These obstacles include limited access to financing and resources, lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, and limited representation in decision-making processes. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for empowering women and promoting their leadership within the sector.

Ecosystem Limitations

The tourism ecosystem also presents challenges for women's empowerment. Women often face discrimination, unequal pay, and job insecurity. They are more vulnerable to exploitation and face a higher risk of falling victim to practices such as sex tourism. Creating a sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem requires addressing these limitations and ensuring fair treatment and equal opportunities for all.

Women's Empowerment in Tourism: Global Initiatives

To address the challenges faced by women in tourism, various global initiatives have been launched to empower women and promote gender equality within the sector.

UN Women's Empowerment Principles

In 2010, UN Women and the UN Global Compact launched the "Women's Empowerment Principles" (WEPs). These principles aim to raise awareness among businesses and promote gender equality in the workplace. The WEPs consist of seven principles that focus on leadership, fair treatment, health and well-being, education and professional development, enterprise development, community initiatives, and progress reporting.

The Centre Stage Project

The Centre Stage Project, launched in 2021 by UNWTO, BMZ, and UN Women, is a pioneering initiative that aims to create a people-centered model for tourism development. The project focuses on empowering women and placing their needs at the heart of tourism development. Through training, promotion opportunities, surveys, and awareness campaigns, the Centre Stage Project aims to unlock the potential of women in tourism.

Success Stories: Women in Management Positions

Several hotel groups have made commitments to promote gender equality and empower women within their organizations. These success stories demonstrate the positive impact of such initiatives on women's career progression in the tourism industry.



Accor Group's Commitment to Gender Equality

The Accor Group, operating 3,500 hotels in 92 countries, has made significant strides in promoting gender equality. They have established the "Diversity Charter" and the "Women at Accor Generation" network to support women's career development. The group aims to increase the proportion of women in hotel management positions to 35% by the end of 2015.

Hilton Group's Focus on Women's Empowerment

The Hilton Group, operating 3,800 hotels in 88 countries, signed the "Women's Empowerment Principles" in 2014. They have implemented initiatives to promote women's leadership, entrepreneurship skills training, and partnerships with organizations that support women's education and training.

Radisson Blu Hotel Group's Women in Leadership Program

The Radisson Blu Hotel Group, part of the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, has launched the Women in Leadership program to address the underrepresentation of women in top management positions. The program focuses on individual career plans, personal strengths, and reducing barriers. The group aims to raise the proportion of women in top management positions to 30% by the end of 2016.

Tourism as a Source of Income for Women

Tourism provides accessible opportunities for women to gain income and economic independence, particularly in rural areas. Women in many places have found suitable work in or through tourism, enabling them to support themselves and their families. However, disparities in pay and job security still exist, and efforts to improve these conditions are essential for promoting women's economic empowerment.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women in Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women in the tourism sector. Women were more likely to lose their jobs, have reduced working hours or pay, and shoulder increased care responsibilities. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities and inequalities faced by women in tourism. Building back better requires addressing these challenges and ensuring a more resilient and inclusive tourism industry for women.

Promoting Women's Participation: Public and Private Collaboration

Achieving gender equality in the tourism sector requires collaboration between the public and private sectors. Governments can play a crucial role by adopting policies that promote women's participation in senior management positions, such as mandatory quotas for publicly listed companies and state-owned enterprises. The private sector can contribute by offering targeted professional development programs, creating networking and mentoring opportunities, and promoting an inclusive work environment.

The Importance of Mentorship in Women's Empowerment

Mentorship plays a vital role in empowering young women and girls in the business world. Providing access to mentors, networking opportunities, and resources can unlock their potential for economic transformation. Mentorship programs within the tourism industry can inspire and support women in their career progression, enabling them to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential.

Unlocking the Potential: Gender Equality and Sustainable Growth

Promoting gender equality and empowering women in tourism is not only a matter of social justice, but also a catalyst for sustainable growth. Research has shown that companies with a balanced gender leadership make more money. Moreover, women's decision-making power in travel and tourism, as key purchasers, reinforces the importance of their inclusion and representation. By addressing barriers and inequalities, the tourism sector can unlock immense potential and contribute to a more diverse, prosperous, and sustainable future.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women in tourism is a crucial driver of growth, equality, and opportunity. Efforts to address the challenges faced by women in the sector and promote their full participation are essential for achieving sustainable development goals. Through global initiatives, success stories, and collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors, the tourism industry can create an inclusive and empowering environment for women. By unlocking the potential of women in tourism, we can build a brighter future for the sector and the global economy.



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