

# Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges for Gender Equality

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**Abstract:** *Travel and Tourism, no doubt provides better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sectors of the economy. Besides offering a wide range of income generation opportunities in both formal and informal sectors, Tourism sector offers flexible jobs that can be carried out at various different locations. Thus, tourism has the potential for the economic, social and political empowerment of women through earning with equity and dignity. In United Nation's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) five out of eight goals are directly and indirectly related to women empowerment.*

*In the modern and globalizing world, where sound development practices are encouraged, tourism and hospitality industry could benefit from adopting gender equity practices. Women in tourism are still underpaid, under-utilized, under-educated, and underrepresented. Policy makers and management must take actions towards effective solutions and establish equal opportunity grounds to achieve much better results. 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. This is precisely the domain of this study.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment*

## 1. Introduction

In the modern era, tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. In many countries it plays a pivotal role for earnings foreign exchange and providing direct and indirect employment. Tourism contributes about 5 per cent of the world's GDP and 7 per cent of jobs worldwide. It accounts for about 6 per cent of the world's exports and 30 per cent of the world's exports in services. In developing countries, tourism generates 45 per cent of the total exports in services. Thus, tourism can contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction and community development. Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for gender equality and women's empowerment. Tourism can contribute towards prosperity and employment, but also promotes gender equality which in turn strengthens women's politically, socially and economically.

The Global Report on Women in Tourism 2010 is a first attempt to develop a quantitative framework for monitoring the status of women working in tourism across the globe. If women are starting to be as healthy and educated as men, it has to be insured that they are part of the economy and decision-making processes [1].

Thus, conclusive action on behalf of both men and women, at all levels, remains vital in order to close the gender gap, particularly by ensuring equal pay for equal work, raising the quality of women's employment and ending all forms of discrimination.

Women make up a large proportion of the formal tourism workforce. Women are well represented in service and clerical level jobs, but poorly represented at professional levels. Women in tourism are typically earning 10 per cent to 15 per cent less than their male counterparts. The tourism sector has almost twice as many women employers as other sectors. Women make up a much higher proportion of own-account workers in tourism than in other sectors. A large amount of unpaid work is being carried out by women in family tourism businesses. Similar to the most industries, tourism sector has also gendered differences in salary salary [2], [3], [4], job opportunities [5], level of employment and job security [2], [3].

Tourism does provide a range of activities where women can participate and also create opportunities for entrepreneurship development. Global data on numbers of women and men working in tourism-related professions advocates that the organised tourism sector is a particularly important sector where 46 per cent of the workforce comprises of women (in general, 30- 40 per cent of the workforce is women) (ILO 2007). Of the data available for the years, between 1988 and 2005, it appears that there has been a broad increase in the participation of women in the tourism industry at a global level.

Apart from their overall presence in the industry, other factors indicate that women do not seem to benefit particularly from tourism. Less attention has been paid to the ways in which benefits of tourism are distributed between men and women, particularly in the developing world. In many other sectors, there is a significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the labor market in tourism. Women in the organised sector in tourism are relegated to relatively low skills, low paying or stereotypical jobs like front-desk and reception, housekeeping, catering and laundry services. They face risks of sexual harassment and exploitation and are discouraged from forming unions or associations to consolidate their strength and influence. The proportion of women's to men's wages is less. Women feature significantly more in part time and/or temporary employment and are typically paid less than men for the same work done.

The informal sector is the most direct source of income for local communities in tourism in developing countries. In the developing world, 60 per cent of women (in non-agricultural) 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 ensuring 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.

## 2. Gender Segregation And Occupational Structure: Global Scenario

In general, women are well represented in formal tourism employment. However, women are more likely than men to be working at a clerical level are less likely than men to reach professional-level and as a result, their average take-home pay is lower than men's. positions being dominated by men [6]. The airline industry is an example of a segregated sector. Women dominate sales, ticketing, and flight attendant positions, while the majority of airline CEOs, managers, and pilots are men [7].

TABLE 1: Hotel/Restaurant Employees Who Are Women And Men By Region (%)

Region	Regional average	
	Women	Men
Latin America	58.5	41.5
Caribbean	55.4	44.6
Africa	47.0	53.0
Oceania	46.8	53.2
Asia	35.4	64.6

Source: Source: ILO Laborsta Database, Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010.

Table 1 depicts that women make up a large proportion of formal hospitality and restaurant industry employees, with an average of 49% (whereas men 51%). Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest proportion of women in the tourism industry, followed by Africa. The low figure for Asia hides a wide disparity between Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia with 2% and Thailand with 65%. These high levels of participation demonstrate tourism's potential contribution to income generation for women. Nevertheless, it is important to look more closely at what kinds of jobs women are doing in tourism. This is depicted in Table 2.

TABLE II: Women And Men Hotel/Restaurant Employees By Occupational Status, By Region (%)

Region	Professional		Clerks		Service workers	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Asia	38.9	61.1	49.4	50.6	35.6	64.4
Latin America	36.6	63.4	62.7	37.3	65.5	34.5
Africa	34.9	65.1	56.6	43.4	34.8	65.6
Caribbean	Data not available	Data not available	67.3	32.7	42.9	57.1
Oceania	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
Average*	36.8	63.2	59.0	41.0	44.7	54.83

Source: ILO Laborsta Database, Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010.

Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations - women are being employed as waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agencies sales persons, flight attendants, etc., whereas men are being employed as barmen, 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 being dominated by women and key managerial. This shows us that women's employment in the tourism industry is concentrated in the service and clerical sector. These figures vary by region, with a high proportion of women working in the clerical sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, within these categories there is no information on what specific jobs women and men are carrying out and whether or not these conform to gender stereotypes. In terms of the professional level, the average is similar for all regions for which data is available. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Latin America, where women's participation in the professional level jobs is almost half of that at the service and clerical level. However, in general, although women's participation in this sector is not high, there does seem to be some potential for women to reach management positions within the industry.

Women's entrepreneurship is critical to the tourism industry. Tourism offers significant opportunities for women to run their own businesses. Women are almost twice as likely to be employers in the tourism industry as in other sectors (Table 3).

TABLE III: Women Employers In The Hotel And Restaurant Sector, By Region (%)

Region	In general		In hotel and restaurant sector	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Latin America	23.2	76.8	51.3	48.7
Caribbean	26.4	73.6	32.8	67.2
Africa	20.8	79.2	30.5	69.5
Asia	17.4	82.6	29.7	70.3
Oceania	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
Average	21.95	78.05	36.08	63.92

Source: ILO Laborsta Database, Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010.

Latin America has the highest percentage of women employers in tourism, more than double the proportion in other sectors. In Nicaragua and Panama more than 70% of employers are women compared to just over 20% in other sectors. This pattern is followed to a lesser extent in all regions covered by the study. Again, the data for Asia vary substantially. While in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand more than half of tourism businesses are run by women, in Pakistan, Iran, and the Maldives there were virtually none. This demonstrates that tourism has a strong potential for promoting women's own businesses.

### 3. Tourism and Gender Status: Indian Scenerio

Tourism is one of the key drivers of service sector growth in India. According to the second tourism satellite account (TSA), 2009-10, tourism GDP accounted for 3.7 per cent of GDP in terms of direct impact and 6.8 per cent of GDP when indirect effects are included, bringing it to one of the top sectors of Indian economy in terms of contribution to GDP. In terms of employment, this TSA showed that direct share of employment in tourism service industries is 4.6 per cent (Figure 1) and if indirect share is also included, this goes up to 10.2 per cent.

According to the ILO's Global Employment Trends 2013 report, India's labor force participation rate for women in tourism industry is only 20.5 per cent (whereas men 76 per cent) of the total workforce which is less than the national average female workforce of the country (22 per cent). In tourism industry senior level female employees in India are just 5 per cent compared to the global average of 20 per cent," In India almost 48 per cent women drop out of workforce before they reach the middle of their careers, compared to the Asia regional average of 29 per cent.

The above Tables demonstrate that women can play a tangible role but suffer on many counts. Women entrepreneurship such as stiff competition from male establishments, shortage of raw materials, family conflicts, legal awareness, low risk taking ability, limited financial capacity and requirements of entrepreneurial training. Apart from these basic problems, availability of finance and credit facilities for females is a big issue. Generally banks or other credit lending institutions fail to recognize women entrepreneurial aptitude and do not want to take a chance by providing them financial assistance. Hence the role of the government becomes very important.

Similarly, the formal and informal opportunities tourism provides women can have a significant impact on poverty reduction in rural communities. The proportion of women "own-account workers" is much higher in tourism than in other sectors across all regions. It was found that women are contributing a substantial amount of unpaid labour to home-based tourism businesses as "contributing family workers". Unpaid family workers are vulnerable to exploitation. This is one of the key areas to address in promoting gender equality in tourism.

### 4. Future Contours

Tourism sector can play a significant role in ensuring gender equality but efforts have t made on many level. The following points deserve consideration.

- Awareness of the important economic role that women play in the tourism industry increased legal protection for women in tourism employment along with protections including minimum wages, equal pay, leave facilities, flexible hours, work-from-home facility and arrangements for childcare etc.
- Women's tourism entrepreneurship can contribute a lot once they are provided access to credit, land and property as along with appropriate training and resources.
- Women's own education already employed in tourism and their participation in tourism education and training in different areas of the industry can very useful.

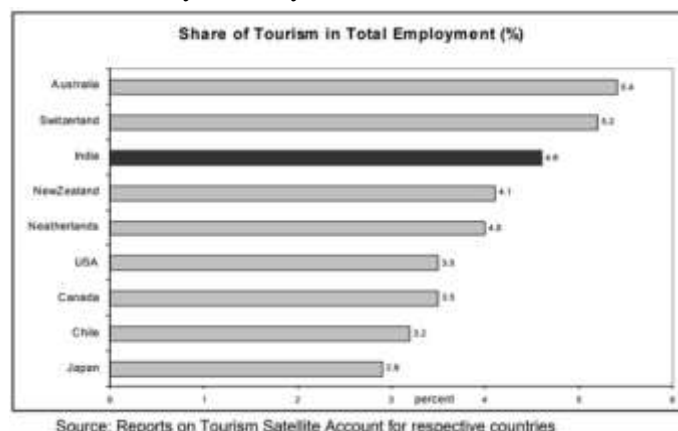


Fig. 1: Direct share of employment in tourism service industries

- Women's tourism leadership in public and private sectors, and community management by establishing leadership programs at the national level and in tourism enterprises can strengthen women's role in tourism.
- Women's contribution to community development is to be recognized and promoted by well recognizing their unpaid work and by monitoring tourism activities carried out at the household and in the community level.
- At the corporate level, gender equality and women's empowerment should be integrated as fundamental components of Corporate Social Responsibility activities in line with United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles.
- Government must come forward to take proactive steps to mainstream gender in tourism policy, planning and operations.
- International community, the private sector, civil society can play a vital role in protecting women's rights in tourism and monitoring women empowerment through tourism promotion. Collaboration with international organization to develop programs and projects dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through tourism should be encouraged.

## 5. Conclusion

Tourism offers vast opportunities for women. Their economic, social, cultural and political empowerment gets strengthened as they become leaders, employers, business entrepreneurs, employees and informal household laborers. They are overrepresented in low-status jobs, often treated unequally or placed in stereotypical occupations and vulnerable to sexual discrimination and exploitation. In the contemporary era, tourism and hospitality industry could encourage and benefited from adopting gender equity practices. Intergovernmental bodies, governments, tourism industry, trade unions and NGOs should take various measures towards gender sensitisation and raise awareness of gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles, particularly regarding the ways they affect women's occupations, hierarchical positions, working hours and wages. Policy makers and management must take actions towards effective solutions and establish equal opportunity grounds to achieve much better results on the basis of utilizing female talent which is being wasted due to gender discrimination, offering them status positions and salaries according to their knowledge and capabilities. It must be emphasized that as gender parity is not just good for women, but best for societies.

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**Dr. Anula Maurya** has for many years been a leading face of women empowerment, born on 12th March, 1958. She received her formal education in Sanskrit language from University of Delhi and doctorate from Meerut University. She also pursued degree of law from Meerut University. Her principal intellectual interests have been to construct anthropology of modernity in which she sees a gender just society, describing facets of aspiration, opportunities and challenges of women.

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Dr. Maurya, has been conferred with “Certificate of Felicitation” for remarkable contribution in the field of Education on the occasion of the First International Women’s Club Foundation Day-2017, held on 30th March, 2017 by International Women’s Club and with “Lifetime Achievement Award” for outstanding contribution in the area of educational planning and administration besides gender development on 8.3.2017 on the occasion of International Women’s Day & 2017 World Girl Child Education & Empowerment Summit at India International Centre, New Delhi by Women’s Agency for Generating Employment. Her sincere effort in the field of community development and welfare, cultural and educational exchange and environmental concern has been acknowledged.



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