

The Impact of Tourism in the Reduction of Gender Inequality

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Abstract

In this study, the role tourism sector on gender equality will be further investigated in order to propose a reliable solution for the ongoing debate on the relationship between gender inequality and tourism sector. The paper will start with a body of literature on the impact of tourism sector on gender equality based on the previous studies. The methodology will be literature review and critical evaluation of the findings. Finally, the study will conclude the fact that tourism sector has a capacity to provide significantly higher amount of specific benefits for women and therefore positively contribute to the establishment of gender equality. The manuscript will investigate the positive contribution of tourism sector on the well-beings of women in three different aspects. First, the economic conditions of women prone to increase in the presence of tourism sector corresponding to new opportunities of employment as well as creating revenues for public spending, specifically to finance the social policies for

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women. Secondly, tourism sector enables social interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds and provide an opportunity for women in a particular destination to observe which cultural rights other women have in other countries and open the eyes of local women for the rights that they can obtain. And third, psychological well-being of women which is measured by Quality of Life (QoL) is likely to increase as they take part in the economic activities and social life. The paper will also suggest a model in order to provide a quantitative analysis for the gender inequality, including the possible related economic and social variables.

Key Words: Tourism, Gender, Inequality

Introduction

Gender inequality is one of the major problems of today's world. Although there are some significant changes in recent years, gender inequality remains as a significant problem, particularly in terms of economic aspects (Blau, 2016). There is still a big debate on whether tourism sector increase the burden on women by expropriating them further or it is beneficial for women employment and gender equality. Some scholars claim that the challenges inherent in gender mainstreaming processes by public policies worldwide are replicated and even exacerbated in the tourism sector (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2015) whereas studies conducted by other scholars depict that tourism is capable of providing specific advantages for women and has a mitigating impact on gender inequality especially in the areas where tourism employment is available

(Khatiwada & Silva, 2015). Nevertheless, the gender research are claimed to remain limited within the tourism enquiry despite three decades of study and the recent increase in investigations (Figueroa-Domecq et. al., 2015). Not even surprisingly, the gender discrimination in the field of tourism is not only limited to the women who are employed in the tourism sector, but rather the discrimination even reflects on the scientific investigation, and studies conducted by women scholars in order to complain how tourism research maintain the invisibility of women in academic field (Munar et. al., 2015).

Some scholars argue that the recent paradigm in the policies regarding to development in tourism should be reconsidered to increase the potential of tourism to a maximum level so that women can be empowered and other steps can be taken to promote gender equality (Ferguson, 2011). Mere presence of tourism will not provide equality by itself, as there are many social and cultural barriers that women need to overcome. Therefore, an understanding that increases the prosperity of women in financial, social and psychological senses is required, not only in the academic field but also in the policies of local and national level of governments.

Historical Development of Gender Inequality

Since the earlier times of human-being, the distinction between two sexes has been showing its impact on all aspects of social, economic, political, cultural and artistic life. Although each society has its own traditions and cultural codes in terms of gender norms, the general tendency

of societies was to “evolve” into patriarchal communities where the role of women have been diminished to private space or house, the definition of women has been made related to family whereas men enjoy their individual lives, independent decisions, and opportunities to engage in social realm. One of the main reasons that has historically widened the gap between men and women is the position of women within the family, as they generally diminish the opportunities for participation into the labor force, and eventually this lack of participation leads to economic dependency of women to the breadwinner (male) of the family, hence reinforcing the gender inequality in the family (Donchin, 2010).

Nevertheless, gender inequality is not one homogenous phenomenon that can be reduced into one aspect such as economic or social, but rather there are many facets of the problem which are diverse and interlinked at the same time (Sen, 2001). For this reason, while gender equality is taken into consideration within the scientific inquiry, the conceptualization shows difference from one study to another. Some scholars focused on economic aspects of inequality whereas some others focus on social properties, such as access to education and health (Arora, 2012). The principal interest of this paper will be economic inequality between women and men based on current social and economic structure, and financial well-being will be assessed through wage differentiation and availability of employment for women. However, the impact of tourism will not be limited to economic gains, since social integration of women also increases as tourism industry provides them an opportunity to get into social life and meet new cultures.

Therefore, social aspects of gender inequality will be included to the conceptualization of inequality of this study.

Besides, although the participation of women has been increasing in the sector of hospitality, scholars claimed that women are mainly working in the inferior positions and poorly paid jobs (Sigüenza, Brotons & Huete, 2013). Male superiority with respect to the understating of “male breadwinner” leads to the perception of males as the head of household and decision makers for the family (Duffy et. al., 2015). Bearing this fact in mind, policies need to be implemented with respect to increasing the prosperity of women in the social realm. Merely increasing the job opportunities while paying significantly less than men for the same job would not increase the welfare of women, if not decrease it by degrading their power compared to men.

In general, the structure and the organization within the labor market do not correspond to equality between genders, as it already reproduces traditional gender roles which maintain the division in the sense that women need to spend much more time and energy compared to men for the domestic, family-related work such as cooking, cleaning, etc., hence men have an advantage in the labor market (Sigüenza, Brotons & Huete, 2013). For instance, cultural structure in lesser economically developed countries discourage the participation of women into labor force, restricting the role of women in the private sphere of house while keeping men active in the public sphere of community (Duffy et. al, 2015). For that reason, presence of tourism sector is capable of mitigating the gap between women and men,

if the policies target at increasing the prosperity of women implemented effectively.

The Contribution of Tourism Sector to Gender Equality

Following the rise of globalization, local economies started to integrate in larger ones, providing benefits to the economic actors. However, distribution of welfare is not independent from the internal dynamics of a particular region, and therefore the impact of globalization generally differs for different groups such as women, people with disabilities, or other type of marginalized groups in rural or urban areas (Arora, 2012). If these differences are not regulated properly by the means of national or local government policies, then the positive influence of any kind of new economic activity will not be realized, and rather the gap increases between advantages and disadvantaged, as in the case of poor-rich gap, as well as the gap between women and men.

It has been claimed that, tourism can offer an alternative for women where they can engage in activism, community leadership, political realm, along with providing opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, and therefore every two of three people in tourism workforce is female and women's chance in tourism employment is twice more than being employers in other sectors (World Tourism Organization, 2011; Figueroa-Domecq et. al., 2015). Studies revealed the existence of women-managed tourism enterprises as well. For instance, homestay tourism in certain destinations including Nepal, Malaysia, Costa Rica and Thailand re mainly

managed by women entrepreneurs (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Especially with the help of these types of entrepreneurships, tourism employment is capable of providing advantages for women, which help to alleviate the devastating impact of gender inequality (Khatriwada & Silva, 2015).

Although the process of tourism development is assumed as being “gender-neutral”, scholars claim that gender dynamics are embedded in the process (Ferguson, 2011), emphasizing the underlying impact of gender discrimination which is not limited to overt practice of sexism, but rather it subtly reproduce the gender roles through sexual division of labor and every day sexism. Hence, construction and reinforcement of new power relations emerging as a result of tourism process cannot be acknowledged properly without understanding the complex structure of gender segregation in tourism and the existing power relations (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996).

In order to provide a better understanding for the complex structure of gender inequality and its relationship with tourism industry, a model will be presented in order to explain the impact of tourism on women with respect to three main variables including economic gains, social inclusion and quality of life.

The Model

There are three important aspects that determine the level of impact of tourism on gender equality, namely economic gains, social integration and psychological well-being of women. To begin with the economic impacts, existence of tourism industry in a particular destination provides an

important source of economic welfare by increasing the job opportunities. Moreover, economic impact of tourism is not limited to employees who are working in the tourism sector. As tourism is a key industry for overall economic development, it makes the emergence of side industry possible, increasing the overall labor demand. Since the aim of this study is to measure the gender equality with respect to tourism activity, absolute numbers will not be sufficient. Tourism may increase the financial gains, hence economic well-being of individuals, but as long as the rate of increase for the income of women is lower than men's income, the gap will be widened and the presence of tourism industry will reflect as a negative impact on the lives of women. Therefore, the rate of wage received by women to total wage will be considered as an indicator for the impact of tourism.

Other than economic gains, social inclusion is an important determinant for the impact of tourism on decreasing gender inequality, and as women participates into the labor force and become visible in the social realm; their social inclusion will be increased. Parallel to the increase in financial well-being and availability of new job opportunities, social inclusion of lower socio-economic classes and financially disadvantaged groups such as women, especially in patriarchal societies as in the case of Nepal, considerably increases (Ancharya & Halpenny, 2013). Furthermore, studies regarding to participation of disadvantaged, socially-excluded groups in tourism sector claim that tourism provide opportunities to promote social inclusion by facilitating social interaction, creating networks among

people, and increasing the possibility of communication (McCabe, Joldersma & Li, 2010; Grant & Kluge, 2012, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgley, 2015). For that reason, the degree of social inclusion is presented in the model as an important indicator of the impact of tourism.

Finally, overall change in the quality of life of women is an important determinant for the impact of tourism on the women living in a particular destination. There is no doubt that quality of life increases with holiday participation (McCabe, Joldersma & Li, 2010), however, the impact is not limited to tourists, and tourism activity also increases the life quality of local stakeholders, and especially those from disadvantaged, underrepresented groups, as in the case of women (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011) through encouragement of intercultural interactions, understanding based on communication, peace, social and economic prosperity apart from economic growth (McCabe & Joldersma & Li, 2010). Although quality of life has many dimensions to be measured, presence of tourism as a reliable economic industry will basically increase the self-confidence of women as they start to take part in the labor market. Economic independence from the family economy not only empowers the position of women in the society, but it also has a significant positive impact on overall life quality for women. The overall well-being of women can be measured by quality of life (QoL) variable in a quantitative manner, indicating the level of psychological wellness of local women in a particular tourism destination.

Hence our model can be considered as:

$$(1) TI = \beta_0 + \beta_1.RW/TR + \beta_2. SI + \beta_3.QL + \varepsilon$$

where,

TI implies the *Impact of Tourism*

RW implies *Total Revenues Received by Women*

TR implies *Total Revenues Received by All Actors*

SI implies *the degree of Social Inclusion for Women*

QL implies *Quality of Life of Women*

β_0 , β_1 , β_2 and β_3 imply coefficients, and

ε implies residual (i.e. the effect of other variables).

Furthermore, total revenues received by women are not necessarily limited to the gains of women working in tourism sector, as agents may receive direct or indirect benefits when a particular region attract tourists, parallel to the emergence of side industries including accommodation, restaurants, small-scale self-employed tourism goods or service providers, and so on. Hence, the total revenue received by women is composed of two main groups, namely direct and indirect revenues. First, women who are employed in the tourism sector receive a direct economic benefit which is equal to wage (W_T). Moreover, tourism enables development of other sectors, and new employment opportunities for women in the side industries

where women receive an indirect economic benefit from tourism industry, which is equal to wage (W_S) as well. Hypothetically, the wage levels for women who are working in the tourism sector and other sectors will be equal to each other in a competitive market structure, as employers will be willing to employ women who would work at lower wages and hence maximizing his profit by lower labor costs. Thus, the estimated Total Revenue Received by Women (RW) will be calculated as:

$$(2) RW = W_T + W_S$$

Where;

$$W_T = W_S$$

To recap, financial gains compared to men, along with the degree of social inclusion and the quality of life of women are the three main variables that are capable of explaining the impact of tourism on women. All of the three variables presented in the model have a positive relationship with the impact of tourism, such that the development of tourism in a particular region increases the job opportunity, enabling women to earn money outside of their families, increasing their financial power compared to men and contributing to their economic independence, and as a result women have a position in social life and their psychological well-being improves with these gains.

In addition to economic and social impacts, there may be other variables that are capable of explaining the variance in the level of impact of

tourism activity on gender equality that the suggested model did not capture. For example, when tourists come to a particular destination, they transform the cultural life of this region through cultural interaction. As a result of adaptation towards the needs of tourists, cultural codes can be re-established, by allowing women have more space and decreasing their burden in terms of domestic labour. Because of this, a residual is presented in the model, which implies the variance that cannot be explained by the two main variables.

The model is suitable for any type of numerical data, since the main target of this model is to measure the contribution of tourism activity to gender equality in a quantitative form. Thus, the provided model is capable of responding to the complex nature of gender inequality, where various social and economic factors interplay, and allowing their measurement by the means of statistical analysis of objective scientific activity, rather than qualitative evaluations where objectivity can be questioned.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, tourism enhances the economic well-being of women and places them a more equal position compared to men only if there are specific, women-targeting policies implemented by local or national governments. Previous studies suggest that women working in the tourism sector have worse conditions and paid less than men (Marrero & Huete, 2013). Likewise in all other sectors, tourism maintains the economic and sexual exploitation of women via atrocious employment practices, unequal

payments and recreating gender roles (Pritchard, 2014; Figueora-Domecq et. al., 2015). Therefore presence of tourism sector would contribute further to inferior position of women in the society and increasing the gender gap in the absence of policies targeting to integrate women into social life by expanding their limit from domestic sphere where they are mainly entitled with food preparation, cleaning, biological and social reproduction of children, caring for the sick and elderly, and so on (Ferguson, 2011; Duffy et. al., 2015).

Engagement of disadvantaged individuals in a society such as minorities, people with disabilities as well as women with community-based local level tourism enterprise has a valuable contribution to economic, social and environmental development (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Studies revealed the significant contribution of community based tourism characterized by community based natural resource management emphasizing the local resident participation and empowerment (Khatiwada & Silva, 2015). All in all, empowerment of women is not only important for the lives of women, but it also plays a crucial role in the future of a society in a particular society, as integration of all individuals, and especially women, would be likely to increase the overall prosperity.

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