

Women Employment in Tourism Businesses: A Case Study of Eldoret Town, Kenya

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Abstract

The tourism industry besides being a leading foreign exchange earner in Kenya is also a source of employment for citizens. Moreover, it has been heralded as an industry that creates diverse employment opportunities for women. In spite of this gender consideration, tourism studies in Kenya have not yet been placed centrally within such a debate. This study adopted a survey research design and used the case study of Eldoret town to investigate the employment of women in tourism businesses. Specifically, the study investigated the extent to which women were employed in tourism businesses. Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were collected through questionnaires and interviews while secondary data was collected from a review of both published and unpublished literature such as books, journals, magazines and the internet. The target population included all employees working in tourism and hospitality enterprises, who were sampled through simple random sampling to get a sample size of 150 respondents. To enhance the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was undertaken. The questionnaires were edited in the light of the results of the pilot study. The data was organized, tabulated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Basic tallies and percentages were done, and significant differences between the tallies were assessed using Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test. All statistical tests were done at an alpha of 5%. Finally, results were presented using percentages, frequencies, means and tables. The findings reveal that women are concentrated in the lowest paid and lowest skilled sectors of the tourism industry. In addition, the study established that lack of female-work friendly practices, empowerment, involvement in the governance of tourism resources, policy, skills, family commitments, and cultural beliefs, nature of work, gender discrimination and inequality in sharing tourism benefits are the main challenges facing women employees in the tourism industry. The study recommends that tackling these gender based obstacles will enable women in Kenya to make a fuller contribution to the economy and improve their families' livelihoods.

Key words: Family livelihoods, Gender consideration, Governance of tourism resources

Introduction

According to Kamaara (2012) gender is the gravitational theme around which human development in all aspects of life revolves. From the moment of birth, individual human persons are socialized on power dynamics as they observe gender relations within the most basic social unit, the family. Traditionally, socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity (gender) expect men to dominate and women to be subordinate. As a response, the feminist and later Women in Development (WID) approaches argued against the development focus on men, especially in the West (Mitullah, 2000). In Africa, women are busy in the farms, engaging in petty trade and generally ensuring the upkeep of families. These efforts are hardly recorded in statistics nor are they directly supported by government policies and programmes (Mitullah, 2000). Feminism calls for equal gender treatment in all spheres of life and challenges ideologies which legitimize and sustain the subordination of women (Mitullah, 2000).

International concerns about the situation of the world's women have enhanced campaigns for more equitable distribution of the world's resources between men and women. It has been noted, all over the world, that women are underrepresented and generally face discrimination and marginalization on the basis of their gender, in spite of modernity and gender empowerment programmes at the dawn of the 21st century (Onsongo, 2006). As a result women rights have long been a key issue for global development and international policy (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). For example, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the entitlement of every person to equality before the law and to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction of any kind such as race or sex (United Nations, 1948; UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established to prepare a single, comprehensive and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). In 1979, the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was created (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). The Beijing Platform of Action, drawn up in Beijing in 1995 and reaffirmed at Beijing+15 in New York in 2010, is the action plan for CEDAW. The plan identifies twelve critical areas of concern. Those most relevant to tourism are poverty, education, training and the economy (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011).

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals which are a set of eight targets ranging from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment by the year 2015 have also brought gender equality to the forefront of the international development agenda (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, when women and men are more equal, societies and economies flourish (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011).

The World Bank (2003) report asserts that although gender equality is a Millennium Development Goal in its own right, increasing research indicates that gender equality is essential for meeting all of the other Millennium Development Goals. For instance, throughout Africa women are a powerful force for growth and development, making important contributions to the economy as workers and entrepreneurs, and to the welfare of their families (World Bank, 2007). In many African countries, however, unequal access to property, discrimination in the labour market, and business-related obstacles hinder women from contributing even more to their countries' growth and well-being (World Bank, 2007).

Most governments assert equal treatment of all citizens regardless of race, sex, ethnic orientation or locality. Besides, the Kenyan Constitution stipulates that women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres (GoK, 2010). The reality is that society has made women believe that their low status role in society is ordained; yet the roles are socially rather than biologically determined (Mitullah, 2000). Female subordination is reflected in low levels of participation in both mainstream economic and political spheres of development. Women are engaged in the social sphere, mainly with subsistence activities, with occasional attempts to enter the economic and political spheres of life (Mitullah, 2000). Women have always taken a heavier load of welfare responsibilities in the capitalist system of production. In the past, the migration of men into the urban areas reduced women to subsistence farmers (Mitullah, 2000). Within the rural setting they care for the old, the sick and the young. Girls and women spend more time than boys and men collecting firewood and water and doing household chores (Mitullah, 2000).

According to Mitullah (2000) comparison of gender performance in Kenya reveals high social, economic and political disparities attributed to historical background as well as cultural and religious factors. In particular, previous studies in Kenya such as the World Bank (2007) analysis reveal that women are contributing actively to the Kenyan economy in spite of the various gender-based constraints such as childcare, illiteracy, lack of meaningful economic activities, cultural beliefs and practices, historical injustices, low levels of education, dual roles in the household economy and the labour market, unequal access to opportunities and assets (Mitullah, 2000). Besides, on average, women work longer hours (12.9 hours) compared with those of men (8.2 hours), yet they earn less because more of these hours are not remunerated (Saito *et al.*, 1994). As a result, women's labour time and flexibility are therefore more constrained than men's (World Bank, 2007). Further, World Bank (2007) report argues that Kenyan women are making a large economic contribution, particularly in agriculture and the informal business sector. Though there is lack of up-to-date sex-disaggregated statistics in Kenya, available data show that women in Kenya are poorer than men, with 54 per cent of rural and 63 per cent of urban women living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2007). The World Bank recognizes that women are more likely to be poor and vulnerable to adverse shocks than men (World Bank 2004). Removing such obstacles can help not only to empower women, but also to unlock the full economic potential of their nations (World Bank, 2007).

World Bank (2007) study reveals that women's employment in Kenya is concentrated in agriculture and the informal business sector, while men tend to dominate in the formal sector (World Bank, 2007). Specifically, women constitute between 65 and 75 per cent of workers in the cut flower sector, 75 per cent of workers in the textiles sector, and about 30 per cent of the estimated workforce in tourism (World Bank, 2007). Besides, more than 75 per cent of women live in rural areas (ILO, 2004), where they dominate the agricultural sector especially in floriculture, tea, coffee, vegetables, cereals, poultry, mangos and oranges.

Gender inequality, which remains pervasive worldwide, tends to lower the productivity of labour and the efficiency of labour allocation in households and the economy, intensifying the unequal distribution of resources (Kamaara, 2012). It also contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty such as lack of security, opportunity and empowerment that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction (Kamaara, 2012).

Tourism and Women Empowerment

According to UN Global Compact (2010) empowering women to participate in economic development at all levels and in all sectors is essential to building strong economies, stable and just societies. Tourism provides significant opportunities for both women and men. In spite of that, questions have been spiritedly raised about the hierarchical and unequal nature of tourism-related work. Men tend to dominate those occupations at the top of the hierarchy, while the labour of women is often classified as semi-skilled or unskilled.

On the other hand, tourism's contribution to employment is estimated to be 6 to 7 per cent of the overall number of direct and indirect jobs worldwide. With one in twelve of the world's workers employed in the travel and tourism industry (UNWTO, 2010). 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 (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). Tourism can also help poor women break the poverty cycle through formal and informal employment, entrepreneurship, training and community betterment (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). However, not all women are benefitting equally from tourism development. In some cases, lack of education and resources may prevent the poorest women from benefitting from tourism development. In some regions tourism helps empower women, while in other regions, tourism negatively affects the lives of women and perpetuates existing economic and gender inequalities (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011).

Tourism has the potential to contribute to greater gender equality and the empowerment of women, in line with the Third Millennium Development Goal. The majority of people employed in tourism worldwide are women, both in formal and informal jobs. Tourism offers women opportunities for income-generation and entrepreneurship. However, women are concentrated in the lowest paid, lowest skilled sectors of the industry. Women are not well represented in the highest levels of employment and management of the tourism industry. Women are more likely than men to be working at a clerical level and are less likely than men to reach professional-level tourism employment, and as a result, their average take-home pay is lower than men's. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in tourism matters for two reasons: First, national governments and international organizations are committed to gender equality through a series of commitments: the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 3. Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental components of just, equitable societies. UNWTO believes that tourism can provide pathways to empowerment, and that the opportunity for tourism to make a difference in this area should be maximized. Second, due to women's concentration in the lower status and lower paid jobs in tourism, their potential to contribute fully is currently untapped. Empowering women to participate fully in economic life is essential to building strong economies; creating more stable and just societies; achieving internationally agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights; and improving the quality of life of women, and consequently, that of communities. For the tourism industry, the impact of greater gender equality and women's empowerment would be highly beneficial, because diverse and gender equitable organizations perform better.

Women Involvement in Tourism Businesses

According to Shakeela, Ruhanen and Breakey (2010) little attention has yet been paid to women's labour market participation and employment in the tourism industry. Women are key participants in the tourism labour market, yet the nature and extent of their involvement is often a point

of contention. For instance, Sinclair (1997) found that women have been excluded from some occupations within the tourism industry due to traditional ideologies of gender and sexuality. There also continues to be wide discrepancies in remuneration between the genders. Furthermore, research indicates that religion, culture and society can influence women's employment (Shakeela, Ruhanen, and Breakey, 2010). Today there are inequalities within the world's labour force that result in disparities between countries and worker segments. For example, a large gender gap continues to remain in many labour markets, indicating limited opportunities for women (ILO, 2007).

Further, studies by Shakeela, Ruhanen and Breakey (2010) reveal that individual women are reluctant in joining the tourism industry due to cultural and religious conflicts attributed to such issues as gambling, prostitution, nudism and alcohol that clash with traditional values. As Shakeela, Ruhanen, and Breakey (2010) found out religion, enclave resort approach, poor employee facilities and the absence of child care facilities are dissuading women from joining the tourism labour market.

As much as tourism provides significant opportunities for women, there is inadequate statistical data to support this assertion. Besides, little attention has yet been paid to women's tourism labour market participation and employment. The purpose of this study was to investigate women's employment in tourism businesses, laying emphasis on Eldoret town.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design and was conducted in Eldoret town. The target population included all employees working in tourism and hospitality enterprises, who were sampled through simple random sampling to get a sample size of 150 respondents. Both secondary and primary sources of data were utilized. Secondary data was gathered from published and unpublished sources such as journals, books and internet while primary data was obtained using structured questionnaires. To enhance the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was undertaken. The questionnaires were edited in the light of the results of the pilot study. The data was organized, tabulated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Besides, basic tallies and percentages were done, and significant differences between the tallies were assessed using Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test (Zar, 1999). All statistical tests were done at an alpha of 5%. Finally, results are presented using tables and verbatim.

Results

A total of 110 out of 150 questionnaires administered were obtained representing an overall response rate of 73%. The usable questionnaires were coded and used for data analysis. The sample showed a generally uneven significant division between male and female respondents ($\chi^2 = 2.95$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Male respondents accounted for 41.8% of the sample and female respondents accounted for 58.2% of the sample. Of the respondents 70.9% were single, 27.3% of respondents were married while 1.8% were divorced or separated. Most ($\chi^2 = 163.19$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$) of the respondents (90.9%) were aged between 21-40 years, 8.2% were aged between 41-60 years while 0.9% represented those aged below 20 years. On education, 74.5% of respondents had acquired college education, followed by 12.7% who had secondary education, 11.8% had university education while 0.9% were had primary level of education. The rest of the responses are shown in Table 1.0.

Study findings revealed that 48.2% were general staff, 18.2% were support staff, and 15.5% were temporary workers, 10.9% were part of management while 7.3% were supervisors. When asked about the departments they were involved in, most ($\chi^2 = 68.9$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.05$) of the respondents (22.7%) were at the reception, while only 0.9% were working at the security department and those in the restaurant and other departments consisted of 20.9% each (see table 1). When asked to state their income, 55.5% of the respondents earned less than Ksh. 4999 per month, an equivalent of less than 62 dollars per month or less than US\$2 dollars a day, which was mainly used to cater for the entire family needs.

Respondents interviewed listed a range of challenges facing women's employment in the tourism industry among them being lack of female-work friendly practices (73.6%), lack of empowerment (74.6%), family commitments (74.5%), cultural beliefs (49%), nature of work (76.4%), gender discrimination (67.3%), lack of policy (70.9%), lack of skills (68.2%), inequality in sharing tourism benefits (73.7%), lack of involvement in the governance of tourism resources (72.7%) and tourism seasonality (76.4%).

Discussion

At its face value, tourism has the potential to contribute to greater gender equality and the empowerment of women. The majority of people employed in tourism worldwide are women, both in formal and informal jobs. Tourism offers women opportunities for income-generation and entrepreneurship. However, a critical evaluation of tourism development presents a less optimistic scenario since women are faced with insurmountable barriers to seizing economic opportunities created by tourism development. The next section of this paper discusses the issues involved.

Hierarchical Status of Women in the Labour Force

Employment is arguably the single most important benefit which tourism offers women in developing countries (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). Employment provides income, economic and social empowerment, and health benefits for women and their families across the globe (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011). However, as discussed in the preceding section, not all formal employment is of equal value in the empowerment of women. Some forms of employment are exploitative, underpaying and promote stereotypical women's work as established in the current study.

Table 1.0: Respondents' demographic characteristics

Information sought	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-square (χ^2)	Degrees of freedom (df)	P-Value	Sample size (n)
Age	Below 20 years	1	0.9	163.19	2	0.001	110
	21-40 years	100	90.9				
	41-60 years	9	8.2				
Gender	Male	46	41.8	2.95	1	0.008	110
	Female	64	58.2				
Marital Status	Married	30	27.3	79.8	2	0.015	110
	Single	78	70.9				

	Divorced/ Separated	2	1.8				
Level of Education	Primary	1	0.9	323.45	3	0.002	110
	Secondary	14	12.7				
	College	82	74.5				
	University	13	11.8				
Occupation	Casual	17	15.5	58.45	4	0.016	110
	Supervisor	8	7.3				
	Manager	12	10.9				
	General Staff	53	48.2				
	Others	20	18.2				
Department	Kitchen	11	10	68.9	9	0.003	110
	Restaurant	23	20.9				
	Accounting	4	3.6				
	Procurement	4	3.6				
	Security	1	0.9				
	Reception	25	22.7				
	Bar	4	3.6				
	Clerical	7	6.3				
	Cleaner	8	7.2				
	Others	23	20.9				
Income	Less than Ksh. 999	3	2.7	77.5	3	0.010	110
	Ksh. 1000- 4999	7	6.4				
	Ksh. 5000- 9999	43	39.1				
	Over Kshs. 10000	57	51.8				

The findings of this study shows that majority of women who work in the tourism industry tend to occupy servile, unskilled and lowly paying positions including waiters, receptionists, housekeepers, cleaners and bartenders. It can be argued that low-paying occupations are much sought after by majority of women because they do not require high academic, vocational or basic skills. Besides, the findings reveal that the well-paying job positions, at managerial and supervisory level, were occupied by men. Consequently, the majority of women earn an insignificant income. For instance, the findings reveal that 55.5% of women employees earn less than Ksh. 4999 per month, an equivalent of less than 62 dollars per month or less than US\$2 dollars a day. In a true equity employment, women would be encouraged to articulate their desires for tourism employment opportunities, to plan and take the necessary actions, which was not the case in this study. In this regard, equal women representation and involvement in the labour force is often difficult to achieve. These findings advocate for the need to empower women through legislation to participate in decision making about, and control over, tourism employment in their countries.

The tourism industry should aim at promoting women's empowerment and protect women's rights through better work. Studies on women's participation in tourism industry raise awareness of both the opportunities and constraints facing women. Employment in the tourism industry has been described by various scholars, such as Richter (1995) as a pyramid with large a number of women at the bottom. Hollingsworth (2006) while studying gender aspects in the Bahamas' tourism industry found that although there are many more women than men in the tourism industry, women mainly worked in lower-paid clerical and cleaning jobs while men worked as hotel and restaurant managers, machine operators and gardeners. Such scenarios were revealed in this study, where majority of the respondents (81.9%) occupied low paying job positions while only 10.9% and 7.3% were managers and supervisors respectively. Related results about Singapore are reported by Li and Leung (2001) who found out that only two females out of 77 made it to the general manager position in the hotel sector.

In addition, the research findings established that the lack of female-work friendly practices, empowerment, policy, skills and involvement in the governance of tourism resources, family commitments, cultural beliefs, gender discrimination, inequality in sharing tourism benefits and nature of work were the challenges facing women employees in the tourism industry. The results also show that the nature of tourism businesses involved long working hours, sometimes even up to mid-night, and working in shifts. Moreover, the study revealed that the enclave-resort approach which estranged women employees from their families and communities for extended periods of time, sexual harassment, the difficulty of having a family while pursuing a high-pressure hospitality career and the absence of child care facilities tend to discourage women from seeking employment in the tourism industry.

These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Li and Leung (2001) and Kattara (2005). For instance, Li and Leung (2001) identify some of the barriers to female entry into hospitality careers such as job discrimination, gender-role stereotyping, long hours and the difficulty of having a family while pursuing a high-pressure hospitality career. Besides, women often lack the opportunity to socialize with the top male managers and therefore do not benefit from the mentoring received by their male colleagues (Li and Leung, 2001). Studies on women employees in tourism industry in Belize by Woods and Cavanaugh (1999) reveal that 40% of the women in the study reported sexual discrimination related to promotion and salaries while 80% saw gender discrimination and sexual harassment as ongoing workplace problems. Similar sentiments were shared by Kattara (2005) who asserted that in Egypt women are less likely to be in top managerial positions in five-star hotels and resorts because of gender discrimination, relationships at work, lack of mentor support and lack of network access. These findings highlight the need for the ministry of tourism to incorporate gender issues in the tourism policy so as to address gender justice in employment.

Exploitation

Exploitation through tourism can take many different forms such as poor wages, dangerous working conditions, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, prostitution, slavery and human trafficking (Hemmati, 1999). The findings of this study show that majority of women (60%) had suffered from sexual harassment either from their fellow employees or the clients at least once in their working period. The experience of one woman manager serves to illustrate this.

In my first job, I encountered one supervisor who thought that he could take sexual advantage of me. He started dating me and when I declined his dates he became very hostile to me. He started frustrating me till I had to quit the job.

For effective productivity, what is required is not gender competition which promotes discrimination or exploitation but gender justice. To move the economy up the value chain, we need both men and women to work closely together in just relations. In case of unequal gender relations these areas will not thrive (Kamaara, 2012). The results also showed that employment in the tourism industry was hampered by child prostitution and illegal human trafficking. It is worthwhile to observe that for instance, sex tourism might appear to provide an escape from the hardships of everyday life, but can result in far greater long-term hardships such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, social dislocation, destitution or drug addiction.

These findings underscore the need for tighter laws on sexual harassment, child prostitution and illegal human trafficking. Besides, this scenario calls for a tourism policy that will address exploitation in regard to poor wages, dangerous working conditions, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, prostitution, slavery and human trafficking in the tourism industry. At the same time, the tourism policy should address affirmative action designed to address discrimination such that women and men working in the tourism industry enjoy the right to equal treatment in employment, fair labour practices and remuneration, reasonable working conditions and formation of trade unions. The potential opportunities for employment cannot be fully realized without active government intervention. In this regard, governments need to establish an effective policy environment and play a stronger regulatory role if sustainable, equity-enhancing tourism is to emerge.

Conclusion

From the preceding sections, it is evident that the current tourism policy has not adequately addressed gender justice. This has led women employees to occupying servile, unskilled and lowly paying positions in the tourism industry while the well-paying job positions, at managerial and supervisory level, are occupied by men. In this regard, equal women representation and involvement in the labour force is often difficult to achieve. Moreover, the findings of this study showed that majority of women (60%) had suffered from sexual harassment either from their fellow employees or clients at least once in their working period. The results also showed that employment in the tourism industry was hampered by child prostitution and illegal human trafficking. In response to the above scenario we recommend that for effective productivity, what is required is not gender competition which promotes discrimination or exploitation but gender justice. In addition, to move the economy up the value chain, we need both men and women to work closely together in just relations.

The findings underscore the need for tighter laws on sexual harassment, child prostitution and illegal human trafficking. At the same time, the tourism policy should address affirmative action designed to address discrimination such that women and men working in the tourism industry enjoy the right to equal treatment in employment, fair labour practices and remuneration, reasonable working conditions and formation of trade unions. If a strong gender perspective is integrated into policy, tourism can be harnessed as a vehicle for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Women workers in the tourism industry should form an association to protect their rights such as safe working environment, equal job opportunities and equal pay.

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