

A Call for Systemic Engagement with Women Issues in Tourism!

Submission to Ministry of Women and Child Development, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, National Commission for Women and Ministry of Tourism

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Tourism development is often rationalised on economic grounds in terms of employment generation, especially for women. Focus only on employment generation without taking into consideration social, cultural, economic and political power relations has resulted in tourism development being divorced from ground realities. This has significant consequences for women living and/or working in and around tourism destinations as well as women tourists.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) in its National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) aims at mainstreaming gender perspective in the development process. National Commission for Women (NCW) has a mandate to ensure effective implementation of the Constitutional rights and other legal measures made to safeguard interests of women. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) has mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence by facilitating the process of coordinating all women specific social-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The National Tourism Policy, 2002 identifies rural and ecotourism as a means for poverty reduction, creating new skills, enhancing participation of women in tourism and thus, facilitating growth of a more just and fair social order. These are fair intentions. However, the results on the ground in terms of women's political, economic, social and cultural empowerment in tourism have been less than satisfactory. A framework disregarding women specific needs and rights in the tourism sector remains an area of least concern for the ministries of Tourism and MWCD, NMEW and NCW.

To corroborate our statement above, we have the following observations:

A. Status of Women in Tourism: It is an undeniable fact that tourism provides opportunities to women in terms of employment and income generation. However, research and narratives of women engaged in tourism have shown that it is an industry that is far from being gender just. Horizontal gender segregation of work, lack of accessibility to higher (and more well paid) positions, wage disparity, unsafe working conditions, lack of support for working mothers are the common features associated with women working in the tourism industry. A study on Women in Bangalore's Hotel Industry indicates that these factors have adversely affected women's career growth. In addition, indifferent attitude of Human Resource (HR) managers towards the issue of sexual harassment is a major concern. The recently passed Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 will be a push for all to constitute an internal complaint committee. However, there is a need for close examination of composition of the committee. This space needs to ensure representatives of employee from all levels to ensure breaking the gendered power hierarchical structure. This is more so in view of the gender segregation of the jobs for example in hotels where most managerial positions are held by men whereas women dominate jobs at lower rungs.

The situation is far worse for women in the informal sector. For e.g. in street vending, with tourism providing an occupational opportunity that is seasonal in nature, attracts many, particularly women to join the vending business. But their needs and rights have not been taken into account. Lack of access to suitable place for business, lack of capital, lack of organisation/ unionization and lack of awareness about government initiatives prevent women street vendors to earn profit from the opportunities offered by tourism. Part time street vendors are not recognised in the National Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014 which goes against women street vendors who mostly work as part time at tourism destinations¹.

The situation worsens particularly in regard to the safety and security of women when evictions take place, a trend that is increasingly being seen in tourist destinations as a process of 'clearing out the unwanted' and creating a façade of beauty. Inaccessibility to the space makes them vulnerable to different forms of exploitations.

Handicraft being largely a home-based industry absorbs large number of women and is also an integral part of tourism. However, women's issues related to lack of capital, inaccessibility to government schemes due to limited

¹ Women Street Vendors and Tourism: Negotiating Lives and Spaces, EQUATIONS, 2012

social mobility, to raw materials and market has remained unchanged. For example, there are big players in the market who tend to occupy prime locations due to their financial and political clout whereas women artisans making lac bangles in Jaipur are forced to choose the interior locations due to unaffordable high rent charges of the front locations.²

On social and cultural front, promotion of high-end, mega tourism projects put severe constraints on land and water resources for people living in tourism destinations burdening the women most. Tourism development has often led to displacement from ecological spaces, loss of traditional sources of livelihood, lack of accessibility to public spaces, lack of accessibility to natural resources like water, fodder, fuel wood. These are issues more true in case of nature-based tourism. Ecotourism is an example for this where forest dwellers are being ousted from the forests which in turn has led to land dispossession, lack of access to forest produces and loss of dignity and livelihoods. Women bear the brunt most, as these are closely related to women's roles and responsibility in family.

Projecting women in tourism promotional materials using language of patriarchy and heteronormativity is a general feature of tourism promotional materials. Beautiful, smiling women fitting certain standards of attractiveness, attired in traditional wear are often picked to cover brochures and other promotional material. Depending on the kind of tourist being targeted, brochures of beach resorts sometimes show women in bikinis in order to attract male tourists. By and large, relaxation of codes in respect to food, dress, liquor, and even sex during vacations is seen intrinsic to tourism. Interaction between such projection of women and perception towards tourism makes women more vulnerable as it conveys the image of women at tourism destinations as available to satisfy the needs of tourists/guests. Such projections contribute in attracting large number of tourists as well as increase in revenue for the state but at the cost of compromising safety and security of women as a member of local community or as a tourist.

Political participation of women as Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) and through spaces like Gram Sabhas needs more attention at tourism destinations. There are incidences, for example in Goa, where illegal constructions came up rapidly during the tenure of EWRs. The political and economic forums that structure and drive tourism development are dominated by men. Silence on women's potential to shape tourism development continues whilst infrastructure led development has had a direct impact upon every woman.

b. Response from the Ministries:

Patriarchal norms, caste and gender find centrality to the nature of participation of women in tourism. However, social and cultural context of women's participation is not paid attention by MoT in its initiatives. For example, MoT has taken initiatives to build capacity of people, focusing on young men and women in the age group of 18-28. Hunar se Rozgar Tak is one such scheme to provide training for house keeping, food and beverages, driving, golf assistants/caddies, stone masonry, bar operations, gardening, front office operations, butler service, and banquet & kitchen services etc. However, the participation of women, as low as 10-20%, mostly from main cities and towns in such programmes has been reported³. Limited social mobility of women, lack of awareness and poor connectivity to places can be possible reason for this. Therefore, the ministry needs to mull over such factors if building skills of women is to be ensured.

The Endogenous Tourism Project⁴ is another example where social and cultural context has its impact on participation of women in decision-making spaces. The Village Tourism Committee (VTC), an institutional framework within the ETP that seeks to address gender issues by challenging existing power structures. However, a review conducted in 2008 highlighted that the social structures proved too hard to break. In Banavasi and Naggar, interplay between caste and gender is evident where women only from upper caste community were represented in VTC. In Raghurajpur, near Puri-Odisha, a temple and crafts village, the Raghurajpur Heritage & Tourism Committee (RHTC – village tourism committee) was completely devoid of women. They were conspicuously absent from all sub-committees except for one, the sanitation committee!⁵

2 Women Artisans: Pinning Hopes on Tourism to Craft Livelihood Options, EQUATIONS 2014

3 Study on Evaluating Effectiveness of Hunar Se Rozgar Tak Scheme, Indian Institute of Travel and Hotel Management, Ministry of Tourism, 2013

4 The Endogenous Tourism Project- Rural Tourism Scheme (ETP-RTS) was a joint project of Government of India- Ministry Tourism and United Nations Development Programme (GoI- UNDP) to support the rural tourism initiatives of the GoI

5 Women Speak! Women's Engagement with Community Based and Nature Based Tourism, Tracing the Maze: A Dossier on Women and Tourism, 2011

The National Tourism policy (2002) identifies 'Safety' as one of the 7 key areas that will provide a thrust to tourism development. However the steps taken by the Ministry demands intensive engagement with the issue. Response of the MoT to the harassment of foreign women tourists is a case in point. The Ministry launched a sensitisation campaign called "I respect women" in 2013. It has taken a long time for MoT to accept the fact that women travellers are not safe at tourism destinations. While the initiative shows recognition of the issue from the Ministry, one wonders if the reason was because India's image globally was taking a beating or they were truly concerned because of the harassment faced by women tourists. If the reason is the latter, why hasn't an initiative like this been taken earlier when so many Indian women tourists have also been faced with similar situations. On the initiative itself, there is lack of information about implementation of the campaign by the state governments. More importantly, there is still a long way to go as one needs to ponder if wearing a badge written "I respect women" is enough to mark a dent on the outlook of society towards women.

Implementing existing mechanisms without acknowledging the gaps in the initiatives on the issue of safety is another area of concern. Safe and Honourable Code of Conduct seems to be the only mechanism. The code was launched by the MoT in 2010 which aims to encourage tourism activities with respect for basic rights like dignity, safety and freedom from exploitation of both tourists and local residents i.e. people and communities. Lack of awareness about the code among state tourism officials and lack of legal enforceability allows service providers such as hotels, restaurants, lodges, guest houses, tour agents, transport operators like taxis, buses, tour guides and other services to escape from their responsibility to make the destination safe and secure. In addition, though women are featured in the code, its implementation has remained limited to the issues related to children. Given the awareness and reluctance to address the issue, we wonder if mild initiatives like the Tourist police and the Code which is a mere guideline are enough to ensure the 'Safety' of tourists and people living in and around tourism destinations as mentioned in the Policy (2002). Moreover, there is a need to mull over the integration of women issues in the code in an appropriate way as they are different from that of the children and each one is serious enough that it needs individual attention.

The gross violation of human rights due to sex tourism and trafficking of women are the shadow side of the booming tourism industry. Flourishing of sex tourism was reported in the media in Kerala⁶ and Andhra Pradesh⁷. Both the reportings highlighted the increasing incidences of girls either lured or forced into flesh trade. However reports of this extreme nature of crime did not receive any response either from MWCD or from the MoT. In absence of NCW's intervention to ensure effective implementation of the Constitutional rights and other legal measures, most women's lives continues to be a daily battle for respect, dignity and equality in private and public spaces.

Coordination between concerned ministries is very much required for development of tourism that cuts across several sectors, depending on the uniqueness and issues at the destination. For example, street vending requires collaboration between MoT, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Ministry of Rural Development. Lack of this co-ordination resulted in the gaps in National Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014 which do not recognize tourist sites like park, market, museums, temples or pilgrim sites and cultural and heritage sites etc. as public place. Likewise, issues of women artisans at tourism destination are overlooked in the initiatives taken by Ministry of Textiles as MoT to promote art and craft. Violation of women's rights and lack of awareness about various schemes designed by different departments for women demands co-ordination between MoT, MWCD, NCW and NMEW. Lack of co-ordination among the ministries/mission has resulted in lack of gender perspective in the initiatives taken by the MoT. Silence of NCW on the issue of violation of women's rights at tourism destination has seen almost negligible implementation of the Constitutional and other legal provisions. NMEW has a mandate to strengthen inter-sector convergence but MoT is absent in the list of partner ministries / departments related to empowerment of women.

These issues have been raised for long and the ministries have tried to address the issues in their own ways. Therefore, the point is not lack of initiatives but if these initiatives are enough to achieve the policy objectives in spirit. It is time that issues are approached in a holistic way. For e.g. MoT cannot adopt a contradicting approach to address the same issue i.e. on one hand they launch a sensitisation campaign and on the other allow tourism promotion featuring women in sexual ways. Further, not adopting a cross-sectoral approach and co-ordination

6 Kerala's flourishing sex tourism Flesh trade on houseboats, youths supplying college girls to tourists, June 30, 2013 <http://daily.bhaskar.com/article/NAT-TOP-kerala-flourishing-sex-tourism-flesh-trade-on-houseboats-youths-supplying-colleg-4306605-NOR.html>

7 India's one month wive,s sex tourism, 15th April 2013,<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Indias-one-month-wives-sex-tourism/2013/04/15/article1545579.ece#Uxht-hQ1hlY>

between respective ministries is another area of concern. For instance, the MWCD needs to chalk out the strategy for its effective implementation of the legislation by adopting cross-sectoral approach.

We call upon the Ministries to recognise tourism as a site for blatant and inhuman exploitation of women. We urge the ministries to ensure achieving the objective in the respective policies and work towards them in spirit, engaging in more systemic ways with to achieve women's empowerment in tourism. We urge that a cross sectoral approach be adopted which inter-weaves initiatives taken by the Ministries to address women's needs and rights in tourism development.

Taking cognizance of the fact, we the undersigned demand the ministries / mission:

- To examine the status of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Tourism from a gender perspective
- To examine initiatives taken by other Ministries focusing on women from a tourism perspective
- To conduct sensitisation programmes for tourism service providers as part of the sensitisation campaign
- To monitor the implementation of the Sexual Harassment at Work Place Act in the tourism industry and initiatives taken by the employers following the provision of Duties of Employer in the Act
- To ensure women specific issues as part of the Safe and Honourable Code of Conduct
- To ensure inter-departmental collaboration between Departments and ministries / mission including NMEW in view of tourism being a complex and inter-disciplinary subject
- Regulate tourism such that women do not pay the price of another person's holiday!