

Women Tourism Entrepreneurs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: Any Way Forward?

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Abstract: This study, done in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, sheds light into the challenges facing women entrepreneurs involved in tourism businesses and the opportunities they can harness in the tourism industry, with particular reference to some gender nuances. The study collected qualitative and quantitative data from respondents, and the data were analysed using content and descriptive analyses respectively. The challenges facing these women entrepreneurs, identified by this study, include lack of financial capital, low business capability, problem of size and scope, racial issues and traditional perceptions, and imperfect business location. Some opportunities for growth identified are local municipality support, internet marketing, and formation of business network for self-support and training. This study recommends business skills training for the women entrepreneurs in the areas of sourcing business funding, creating unique value proposition, product excellence, marketing capability, operational excellence and customer service. Although this study was conducted in a South African province, it has implications for women entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa, and beyond.

Keywords: gender in tourism; women in tourism; tourism business; traditional perceptions; sub-Saharan Africa

JEL Classification: J16; L26; O55; R11; Z32

1. Introduction

Much research has been done in developed countries, especially the United States of America and Canada, regarding women entrepreneurs, but very little has been done on this subject in developing nations (Hisrich & Öztürk, 1999). Some studies have been done in Europe, for example, in Greece investigating women's cooperatives (Koutsou, Iakovidou & Gotsinas, 2003; Lassithiotaki & Roubakou, 2014). Regarding women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, a general study,

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with regard to no nation (Ferguson, 2011) considered empowering women and promoting gender equality in the Tourism industry. Few studies done on women entrepreneurs in developing economies, regarding tourism include those of Hisrich & Öztürk (1999) in Turkey, Bras and Dahles (1998) in Bali, and Gentry (2007), in Belize. It is envisaged that this study, done in South Africa, with respect to women entrepreneurs, will shed more light into the challenges facing women entrepreneurs and the opportunities they can harness in the tourism industry, with particular reference to some gender nuances. Research by Hisrich and Öztürk (1999) in Turkey, indicated that though women entrepreneurs in Turkey showed many similarities with others in other nations, there are differences in aspects such as what motivated women to start a business and challenges encountered, due to differences in social structures of a developing nation. These differences reflect particularly in the impact of wage disparity, occupational segregation, and participation in a sector of the economy not supported by the government. These findings cast some doubts that theories around women entrepreneurs in developed nations need to be carefully evaluated before adapting them to developing economies. This study takes an African perspective to women entrepreneurship in tourism.

The authors posit that in the South Africa post-apartheid era, with the opening up of the tourism industry to the world, women in general, and black women in particular have not derived the full socio-economic benefits of the tourism industry's new dispensation. Women do get involved or employed in the tourism industry, but the level of involvement is low and relatively insignificant, as most are employed in the low-skilled sector of the industry such as housekeeping, vendor, cook assistants, and waitressing, etc. Large, medium and small businesses are mostly owned by male actors, with few micro businesses owned by women. Black women who are already in tourism businesses face racial and gender discrimination even in the new democratic government which deter them from participating fully in tourism entrepreneurship, with more obstacles in their way in the form of twisted cultural practices, traditional stereotypes, difficulty in accessing financial assistance from banks and microfinance/microcredit institutions, land ownership, etc. According to Statistics South Africa (2015), out of about 55 million South Africans, there are more than one million females than males, with females numbering just over 28 million and men numbering just below 27 million. This population distribution is true across all racial groups in South Africa (Black Africans, coloured, Indian/Asian, and Whites). In 2015 (Statistics South Africa), KwaZulu-Natal province had the second highest share of the total population (about 20%) behind Gauteng province (24%) and ahead of Eastern Cape province (about 13%). Gauteng Province is more urbanised than KwaZulu-Natal province, hence KwaZulu-Natal province is chosen for this study as cultural and gender nuances will be more evident in this province. There is a paucity of study undertaken on gender, tourism and development, globally, but with particular

reference to South Africa. This shows that participation of women in tourism, globally and in South Africa is less significant in academic research around entrepreneurship.

In South Africa, tourism has been earmarked by the government (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism) as one of the industries with huge potential of enhancing economic growth and creating job opportunities (DEAT, 1996), hence tourism entrepreneurship is critical for success. It is high time, problems facing women within the industry is addressed to engender resource equity that is not racially or gender biased.

KwaZulu-Natal is one of the nine provinces in South Africa. The Tourism industry is a key contributor to the South African, and more specifically to the KwaZulu-Natal economy. According to South African Tourism (2016), comparing total tourists arrivals, excluding transit tourists in South Africa, a grand total of over one million tourist arrivals was recorded between January 2015 and January 2016, while a grand total of about 878, 000 tourists arrivals was recorded between January 2014 to January 2015 (a positive difference of 15.4%). Focusing on domestic tourism indicators, KwaZulu-Natal was the second most popular province visited for the period between October to December 2015 (21% of tourists, signifying high tourism potential), behind Limpopo (25%) and ahead of Eastern Cape (14%). Trips taken for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) remain the most popular of all trips, and regarding barriers to travel, about two in five of local respondents mentioned unaffordability (42%) while nearly a third stated time constraints (29%) as reasons for not taking a trip in South Africa (South African Tourism, 2016).

2. Literature Review

Eresia-Eke and Gunda (2015) posit that the current state of the global socio-economic situation suggests that individual national economic prosperity, Africa in particular, tends to be measured by the rate of entrepreneurial activities. According to Amos and Alex (2014), economies need to embark on entrepreneurship, which is made possible by emerging individual entrepreneurs (Gurbuz & Aykol, 2008). Entrepreneurship in tourism has attracted quite little research in South Africa, especially as it regards women, hence the value of this study.

International studies on women entrepreneurship are quite few. Koutsou et al. (2003) stated that women embarked on cooperative projects to increase their family income, gain independence, raise their power of control, self-esteem and social status. Regarding women in tourism entrepreneurship, Ferguson (2011) conducted a critical review of global gender and tourism policies, with respect to the World Tourism Organisation and the World Bank and inferred that while tourism

development might in theory enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women, a much reframing of national, regional and international policies is needed to maximise this potential. Bras and Dahles (1998) reported that in Sanur, Bali, although small businesses are subject to government regulations aimed at upgrading tourist destinations, the effects of such regulations still differ along gender lines, but leaving enough room for women to exploit upcoming niches in the tourism market, such as selling on the beach and massage services, which are largely informal. Research by Gentry (2007) in Belize, found that tourism employment is exploiting traditional belief system, with particular reference to gender-based segregation, such as low wages, “housewifisation” of labour, and low education levels; but opportunities do exist to challenge this norm.

The study conducted in rural Greece by Lassithiotaki and Roubakou (2014) assessed the basic entrepreneurship dimensions of rural women’s cooperatives, such as financial aid and needs, cooperative culture, demographic identities of members, business characteristics, and participation; and found that rural women neither evaluate, use nor develop business opportunities and modern business methods. They therefore advised that rural women should adopt modern business methods and entrepreneurial attitude.

Ligthelm and Wilsenach (1993) attest that the high levels of poverty and unemployment being experienced in South Africa means that much pressure must be exerted on the economy to help increase growth rates and to provide all people with access to economic opportunities. Unfortunately, increasing growth in the country will aim to avoid continuous marginalisation and non-recognition of women and their ability in contributing to the economic growth and in changing the economic status of their families. Goffee and Scase (2007) argue that, in Europe, research into female entrepreneurship and the role of women as proprietors and employers had until comparatively recently been largely neglected as an area of serious academic study, despite the fact that greater numbers of women were then choosing self-employment. Also, there is a paucity of study undertaken on gender, tourism and development in South Africa. This shows that participation of women in tourism, globally and in South Africa is less significant in academic research around entrepreneurship.

This paper argues that the South African economic history and tourism policies guiding development do not clearly articulate the involvement of women in the tourism industry and as such women still feel ignored and discriminated against because of gender, class and racial differences. Likewise entrepreneurship is not benefiting the poorest women instead it enhances the living conditions of the average and the rich people of the country mostly those with good social and economic standing. In Africa (South Africa included), women have not yet been allowed to reach their full potential as citizens due to the “cultural and traditional” practices that largely stipulates that women should be at home, cooking and taking

care of children, while their male counterparts go out and work. This study argues that some South African women who are educated still face this dilemma to choose between career and “social acceptance”. Many who venture into the career pathway mostly become employees rather than employer, as society equally perceive men as the “risk-taker”, and not the women. This “lesson” has been ingrained into their minds as girls and it is difficult to change this “moral” as they grow up, hence society dictates what a woman should or should not do. Young and educated South African women are now emancipating themselves from these traditional beliefs and intending to embark more on entrepreneurial activities. This is evidenced by a recent research by Iwu, Ezeuduji, Eresia-Eke and Tengeh (2016) among a South African University students, which found that there is no relationship between gender and culture on the one hand, and entrepreneurial intention on the other hand. However there may be a gap between entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial realisations. Challenges and opportunities facing women who have tourism businesses will therefore be investigated by this research. Iwu et al (2016) found the main barriers to becoming an entrepreneur amongst young South African students to be “lack of financial resources”, “lack of support and assistance”, “unfavourable economic conditions”, lack of profitable opportunities’, and “complex procedures for creating and managing a business”. In a similar vein, Rogerson and Visser (2004) identified factors that constrain the expansion and transformation of the South African tourism industry to include tourism education, human resource skilling, and usage of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). World Tourism Organisation (WTO, 2001) found that there is a strong correlation between a woman’s beliefs in having knowledge, skills and experience to start a formal business and her likelihood of starting. Botha, Fairer-Wessels, and Lubbe (2006) alluded that in extreme cases, society members do not patronise businesses that are run by women, due to cultural, attitudinal, and societal barriers. Brown (1997) posited that in developing countries, limited education and training in vocational studies are barriers to running businesses competitively. Collateral to access loans for business growth and poor credit history are also hindrances. Hence, Brown (1997) argued that though males may not be equally affected by these financial barriers, the situation is worse for women.

3. Research Method and Design

This study used the mixed-method approach to collect data from respondents (qualitative and quantitative research methods). Veal (2011) supported the use of mixed-method of research to reinforce the validity and reliability of research. At the first stage of data collection, qualitative method using face-to-face semi-structured interviews was employed, where ten women who own tourism services (such as accommodations, tour operators, tour guides, arts and craft) from four different tourism district municipalities (out of eleven district municipalities) in

KwaZulu-Natal (Ugu, eThekweni, uThungulu, uThukela) were respondents. Checklist of topics used in the semi-structured interview included mainly business challenges, expectations, management and operational issues. A male who co-own a tourism business (accommodation) with his wife, was additionally interviewed to reduce research bias. Women interviewed reflected the major cultural groups in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Black, Indian and White). Interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and a verbatim transcript made from the interview, subsequently. Ethnographic study was also used in this first stage of research, where one of the researchers observed participants in the study from the point of view of the study subjects, over a period on one month, participating in the respondents' business running, with permission from the business owners. Afterwards, the researcher's personal experience was reflected upon and documented (auto-ethnography) as part of the qualitative research documents. Content analysis of the interviews and auto-ethnography documents were done. Recurring themes were highlighted, and discussed in this paper's next section.

The second stage of this research used variables identified from former research in the literature reviewed, the semi-structured interviews and auto-ethnography to measure challenges and opportunities regarding women entrepreneurship. A structured questionnaire with variables' battery that can be categorised under the nature of women involvement in tourism development, ways of meaningful involvement of women in tourism businesses, challenges that women entrepreneurs face in the tourism industry, and tourism policies, was designed. Questionnaire respondents were 170 tourism entrepreneurs, mostly women (purposely selected) who are tourism business managers or partners in the same four district municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal province, as mentioned earlier, and also women officials from these tourism municipal offices to confirm or disconfirm the findings of the semi-structured interviews and auto-ethnography. Out of the 170 questionnaires completed and returned, 150 (135 women out of whom 5 are lesbians, and 15 men) were used for descriptive analysis, employing IBM's SPSS software (IBM Corporation, 2013). Male respondents were selected at random. Questionnaire consisted of a mix of close-ended and open-ended type of questions.

Finally, the researchers integrated the quantitative and qualitative data for results' presentation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondents' Profile

Semi-structured interviews involved ten women and one man who own tourism products and services enterprises (such as accommodations, tour operators, tour guides, arts and craft) from four different tourism district municipalities in

KwaZulu-Natal (Ugu, eThekweni, uThungulu, uThukela) as respondents. Table 1 below shows the profile of the respondents for the questionnaire survey.

Table 1. Profile of women in tourism business survey respondents (n=150)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Race	Black	68.6
	Coloured	6.7
	Indians/Asians	18.0
	Whites	6.7
Highest Educational level	Primary	6.7
	Secondary	13.3
	Colleges	13.3
	University	66.7
Women in tourism businesses	Owner	40
	Partner	24
	Manager	36
Kind of business the women surveyed are involved in	Bed and Breakfast	30.2
	Guesthouse	11.3
	Hotel	10
	Restaurant	3.3
	Kiosk	13.3
	Camp site	3.3
	Game reserve	3.3
	Other	25.3

From Table 1, it is evident that black women dominate in the racial groups interviewed reflecting the demographic distribution of KwaZulu-Natal province. Most of these women are well educated and close to half of the sample own their own businesses, while the other respondents were partners or managers. The popular tourism business owned by these women is Bed and Breakfast.

From the survey results, other businesses operated by women in the municipalities include accommodation, craft, transport, dance, food and catering, and tour guiding.

The male tourism business respondents were happy that women are complementing the household income, sharing the burden in the provision of income for the families.

4.2. Challenges Facing Women Running Tourism Businesses

Majority of women interviewed and surveyed did attest that they face many challenges as tourism entrepreneurs or managers, and about 70% of them do not have enough capacity or are not sure of their capacity to run tourism businesses (Table 2).

Table 2. Challenges facing women and their capacity to run tourism business

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Women facing challenges	Yes	75
	No	25
Capacity to run business	Yes	31.3
	No	38.7
	Unsure	30

The women who owned tourism businesses were mainly those who used personal savings and their pension to start their businesses. These women are aged as from 35 years, while many of the younger women did not own businesses due to problems of accessing start-up capital. Some challenges facing women in KwaZulu-Natal identified in this research include lack of financial capital, business capability, problem of size and scope, racial issues and traditional perceptions, and business location. These are discussed hereafter.

Lack of financial capital

This include lack of support to source start-up capital and the inability to purchase proper transport vehicles (such as 4x4 safari vans for game drives, cruise boats, coaches, etc.) and office equipment that requires huge capital. Many of the women surveyed or interviewed do not know how to source for business funding. Many women in the industry therefore end up guiding tourists through game reserves and lakes, employed at prices determined by the company that outsourced them, or be employed in hotels, tour operations, restaurants, etc. These women are employed by tourism companies due to their efficient role in service excellence, mostly as front-office staff. Majority of the women interviewed are single, widowed or divorced working-class, hence are “necessity entrepreneurs” complementing their salaries to run their homes and families. Lack of financial capital and the difficulty of accessing this from financial institutions, were viewed by the majority of the respondents as obstacles, and not fear of taking risks, as traditionally believed. Most of the Black women in craft business surveyed do not have a business space and could not afford to rent a curio shop, hence they use pavements in cities to sell their products, outside the mainstream marketplace. Many of them are being harassed by metro policemen who would arrest them and confiscate their stock, for using officially unallocated business spaces for their businesses. These women entrepreneurs belong to the informal sector, where growth opportunities are not high.

Lack of business capability

Many women in tourism businesses, especially those that are successful do not run or own their businesses alone, but work with their male counterparts as partners, or are employed as managers. This reveals the significant contribution the male entrepreneurs may have in the day-to-day running of the business, pointing to the

deduction that women tourism entrepreneurs do not have the necessary capacity or skills to run tourism business. Societal environment and historical background may limit women from taking up challenging tasks, as in Africa, boys are more encouraged to take up challenging tasks than girls. According to Ezeuduji (2015), and Ezeuduji & Rid (2011), unique value proposition, product excellence, marketing capability, operational excellence and customer service are necessary skills required by tourism businesses to be successful. They also suggested stakeholder network and collaboration as key strategies to compete successfully, especially in rural Africa. Some of the women interviewed or surveyed do not have appropriate linkage to the tourism industry, to show their presence, and therefore find it difficult to market their businesses and attract tourists. This poor marketing skill was also observed by one of the researchers, especially amongst craft sellers. They are just scattered everywhere, without signage of their presence. Some of them belong to “self-employed women union”, but this union is not effective in being the “voice” for women in business. It was also reported that lots of exploitations (negative power-play) took place between women crafters and curio shop owners (mostly women too), where many of the owners of curio shops in urban areas bought craftwork from rural women at a very low price (as the rural women are often desperate to earn some money to feed their families, due to poverty), only for the curio shop owners to resell them at exorbitant rates in the cities. This provides evidence that women are also being exploited by their fellow women. The opportunity of business network discussed below is therefore critical for success.

Problem of size and scope

Most of the tourism businesses run by the women are categorised as small and micro enterprises and therefore have a problem of competing with medium-sized and large businesses, with many of them being big conglomerates (safaris and holiday inns) that own a chain of tourism facilities in more than one country in Southern Africa. The big hotels get most of the tourists as the tour operators sell all-inclusive travel packages to them. Entrepreneurs in the townships are forced to rely on spill-over domestic tourists who attend events and ceremonies as well as rituals in cities (such as Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town), who decide to travel more inland. This study argues however that all businesses start small, and if entrepreneurs have the necessary business skills discussed later in this paper, they will be successful and grow if they wish.

Racial issues and traditional perceptions

Some (but not all) of the Black women interviewed posit that White tourists never patronise them. The White tourists patronise White business owners. One of the underlying reasons behind this behaviour may be found in the perception that White business owners are more reliable than Black business owners, especially

among European tourists. Another reason may be found in humans who try to avoid culture shocks, whenever and wherever it is possible.

In Africa, according to the respondents, certain types of business are perceived to be unfitting for a woman. Examples of such businesses in tourism are transport, tour operation and wildlife safari. Women therefore are employed in these businesses to play supporting roles, such as in reservations, reception and bookkeeping. Botha, Fairer-Wessels, and Lubbe (2006) stated that in extreme cases, society does not patronise businesses that are run by women, due to cultural, attitudinal, and societal barriers. Brown (1997) posited that in developing countries, limited education and training in vocational studies are barriers to running businesses competitively. Collateral to access loans for business growth and poor credit history are also hindrances. Hence, Brown (1997) argued that though males may not be equally affected by these financial barriers, the situation is worse for women. Some solace however lies in the recent study conducted by Iwu et al (2016), among a South African university students, which found that there is no relationship between gender or culture and the entrepreneurial intention. For women entrepreneurs, the way forward is provided in the later part of this paper.

Business location

Unfavourable business location may also play a role in attracting tourists to accommodations, as some Black tourism business owners agreed that some White tourists do patronise them, but do not stay more than two nights. Many tourists do not like visiting the townships, due to perceptions of safety and security. It is however deduced by this study that if women entrepreneurs operating in townships have the necessary business skills, the tourists will visit and patronise them, as safety and security issues in South Africa are not only situated in townships. Ezeudji (2013) suggests that strong police presence and proper policing in South Africa will help curb crime, improve safety, and reduce these perceptions.

4.3. Opportunities for Women in Tourism Businesses

Some opportunities however are available to tourism business women in KwaZulu-Natal, and are identified in this research to include local municipality support, internet marketing, and formation of business network for self-support and training. These are discussed hereafter.

Local municipality support for women entrepreneurs

Some municipalities such as eThekweni, provide business cards to tourism entrepreneurs to help them network with customers and business associates, however this is not sufficient to draw tourists to the townships or rural areas. Accommodation facilities rely on municipalities' tourism departments for promotion strategies. It is however envisaged that women entrepreneurs can form

pressure groups to demand more organised support from the local municipalities who are charged with local economic development. A clear and concrete picture of what they want can form basis for discussion and subsequent support from the local municipality tourism office. Areas for support identified by this research include easier access to financial assistance, training for capacity development, and marketing.

Internet marketing

Web presence has become a new form of business marketing (market communication), and few Black women tourism entrepreneurs have access to it, as creating and managing a website involves lot of money from them. Consequently they rely on the traditional word-of-mouth marketing strategy or being visible on the major transport routes or convergence points, as in the case of craft dealers. The local municipality tourism office' support discussed before can lead to a common website being created for the women entrepreneurs in a local municipality, listing their names or business names, physical location and product/service offering. This website can be linked to the official website of Tourism KwaZulu-Natal. The study by Lassithiotaki and Roubakou (2014), in Greece, showed that most women's agricultural cooperatives did operate as small "closed" family businesses. Only few of these cooperatives had permanent staff, and account books were kept by external accountants. They did not employ professional staff for business organisation, management or marketing purposes. They used brochures, local media and participation in local and national exhibitions as means of advertising. Although their cooperatives are advertised in official websites, just a few of them used electronic marketing or commerce. Women entrepreneurs in South Africa in their networks can learn and improve on the Greece situation, augmenting traditional marketing and electronic marketing.

Formation of business network for self-support and training

Some of the women interviewed posit that it is high time Black tourism entrepreneurs formed a business network (association) to help them focus on marketing their businesses together. This network need not be a big union in a municipal area, but manageable clusters of business women in a small geographical area or marketplace, who are keen on collective marketing and bargaining. Women entrepreneurs' marketing efforts need complement the marketing actions of the local municipalities. Training opportunities can also be put forward by the women entrepreneurs to the local municipalities and not-for-profit organisations (when these women speak with one voice) in areas identified by this research, such as in accessing financial capital, creating unique value proposition, striving towards product and operational excellence, customer service, and marketing capability. This will also help women entrepreneurs adopt the modern business methods and entrepreneurial attitude suggested by Lassithiotaki and Roubakou (2014).

The findings of this study, supports largely that of Rogerson and Visser (2004) who identified factors that constrain the expansion and transformation of the South African tourism industry to include tourism education, human resource skilling, and usage of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). It also supported the study of Brown (1997) who stated that in developing countries, limited education and training in vocational studies, collateral to access loans for business growth, are barriers to running businesses competitively. However, this study has new findings, as discussed earlier.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that majority of women tourism entrepreneurs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, are facing some business challenges. These include lack of financial capital, low business capability, problem of size and scope, racial issues and traditional perceptions, and business location. Some opportunities for growth however are available to tourism business women entrepreneurs in KwaZulu-Natal, and are identified in this research to include local municipality support, internet marketing, and formation of business network for self-support and training. Business training is required to help women entrepreneurs in tourism business on the importance of, and knowing how to source for business funding, create unique value proposition, and in areas of product excellence, marketing capability, operational excellence and customer service. These are necessary skills required by tourism businesses to be successful. Women entrepreneurs' network formation and collaboration are key strategies to compete successfully, especially in rural Africa. This study therefore recommend trainings financed by local municipalities and provided by not-for-profit organisations, as ways of improving the business skills of women tourism entrepreneurs. Focussed workshops and seminars geared at addressing women entrepreneurs' needs and challenges can help sustain their businesses and in turn contribute to local economic growth, by ways of paying levies, taxes and providing job opportunities for local people. Women tourism entrepreneurs should consider using brochures, local media and participation in local and national exhibitions as means of advertising and publicity. Strong website presence (local municipality and network clusters) can also help them in electronic commerce. As the continent of Africa is fast developing and the trend remains that many Africans are travelling and acquiring western education at home and abroad, the negative traditional perceptions towards women, especially women in business are disappearing, and will hopefully become a thing of the past in the next decade.

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