

Opening Doors is not enough – EQUALITY, EQUITY and EMPOWERMENT is what Women seek in Tourism

Statement issued on 27th September 2007 – World Tourism Day

This is a joint statement released by **Alternatives (Goa), Council for Social Justice and Peace (Goa), EQUATIONS (Bangalore) and Sakhi Resource Centre for Women (Kerala)** – organisations that have come together to debate issues of women and tourism on the occasion of World Tourism Day.

“When I decided to launch my small tourism business – a small guest house in Goa - I was deceived by what I saw around me. I saw how huge concessions were given to the 5-star hotels- whether of Indian or foreign origin and land and credit at subsidized rates. Access roads, electricity, water supplies, garbage disposal etc were all made easy for them. The government invested in their needs and demands. On the contrary, we the small entrepreneurs had to cope with virtually impossible travails if we started out on a business. My story perhaps illustrates how the system works against the small entrepreneur and weighs heavily in favour of big business. Now I ask – “Is small entrepreneurship welcome or is it not?”

*- **Geraldine Fernandes, a local entrepreneur who runs a small guest house in Benaulim, Goa, India questioning whether tourism has in fact opened doors for women.***

The World Tourism Organisation, in choosing the theme of women and tourism for the year 2007, has focused its attention on this issue for the first time since 1980 – a welcome move indeed! *“Tourism is a sector of the economy that not only employs significant numbers of women, but provides enormous opportunities for their advancement”* states Secretary General Francesco Frangialli, in his customary message on World Tourism Day - 27 September 2007.

The Secretary General’s statement has focused on the potential for women to gain from tourism through employment. Tourism does indeed employ many women. But as experiences like those of Geraldine highlight, the odds against women benefiting are extremely high. The UNWTO must go beyond a position of approbation and look at tourism’s record thus far, both in the empowerment of women and in the exploitation of women. This is essential if there is a serious intent, as we hope there is, in the UNWTO and indeed the tourism industry world wide, to go beyond the rhetoric of women’s empowerment, towards serious engagement and committed action.

The UN, Women’s Empowerment and MDGs

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice. These are essential to build a sustainable, just, secure and developed society. For decades now, through vibrant movements and political struggles, women have challenged existing gender relations and patriarchal systems to reframe the development dialogue. They have placed issues of violence, race, caste and other forms of discrimination that hit women the hardest; and the need for equality and human rights of women - including social, economic, political, legal, sexual and reproductive rights at the center-stage of this struggle.

Global processes from Rio, Copenhagen, Vienna, Cairo and Beijing to Durban, particularly the CEDAW (Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women), the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and its subsequent Beijing Platform for Action, have set out critical concerns and strategic action points. Decades later, the battle for equality, to challenge the status quo, to demand action on women's key concerns, to mobilize civil society in both the global North and South, and to push for a global reordering of the world's resources continues with the same intensity but leaving one with little sense of progress on substantive issues. There has been enormous frustration at the lack of government commitment and accountability to both development goals in general and gender equality commitments in particular.

In one way, the emergence of the MDGs marks the success of global women's movements and broader civil society, which had made the creation of time-bound targets and indicators a key demand for measuring progress on development and rights commitments. However it is accompanied by a concern that the MDGs have met the letter of civil society demands for accountability, but not the spirit. They seek to solve critical problems with measurable targets, without adequately addressing the roots of these problems. Many gender advocates argue that despite being an important tool to measure progress, the MDGs are a far too narrow set of indicators and targets. Their watering down of a human rights framework is another serious matter of concern. The UNWTO Secretary General's statement that seems to simplistically equate women's employment to women's empowerment is a reflection of the dangers of such a watering down.

The Doors that Tourism can and should open for Women

What is the role that tourism has played and can play in this important struggle for equality, equity and empowerment that involves half the world? We have argued that international, national and state level policies on tourism do state a general commitment to women's empowerment but rarely go beyond that to understand and evolve specific measures. Policies and budgets have the potential both to perpetuate gender bias and blindness, and to transform them. Gender disaggregated data, gender-sensitive policies and indicators are essential to building up a picture of the nature and extent of gender inequality. We need to understand the way institutions with their gendered rules work and we need to develop the political will, processes and tools to challenge and change them. Gender audits and gender budgeting are tools that could be employed meaningfully - particularly at community levels. These in turn will impact women's political participation and decision making in the forms of tourism, impacts of tourism, models of tourism and pace of tourism in their communities. It is time tourism recognized women's agency and heard their voices in its development.

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

However apart from the larger overall presence in the industry, which has grown exponentially, many other factors sadly follow the trend of the overall labour market and women do not seem to benefit and be empowered particularly from tourism. As in many other sectors, there is a significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the labour market in tourism. Vertically, the typical "gender pyramid" is prevalent in the

tourism sector - lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities being dominated by women and key managerial positions being dominated by men.

In India women in the organised sector in tourism are relegated to relatively low skill and low paying or stereotypical jobs like housekeeping, front-desk and reception, catering and laundry services. They face very high risks of sexual harassment and exploitation and are discouraged from forming unions or associations to consolidate their strength and influence. The proportion of women's to men's wages is less. Women feature significantly more in part time and/or temporary employment and are typically paid less than men for the same work done.

In the developing world 60% of women who work (in non-agricultural work) are in the informal sector. Much of this is linked directly and indirectly to tourism. The role of women in informal tourism settings such as running home-stay facilities, restaurants and shacks, crafts and handicrafts, handloom, small shops and street vending is significant. But these roles and activities that women perform in tourism are treated as invisible or taken for granted. The need to acknowledge the important economic contribution of women and ensure for them, access to credit, capacity building and enhanced skills, access to the market, encouragement to form unions, associations and cooperatives to increase their bargaining power and to ensure that their safety health and social security needs are met is critical.

Community-based tourism initiatives, particular of local women's groups and co-operatives, are an important way by which women can control and benefit from tourism. There are numerous examples where women and women's groups have started income-generating activities on their own which then feed into or become part of the formal tourism sector. These activities help to create financial independence for local women and motivate them to develop necessary skills and improve their education.

It is also important to note that when tourism displaces people from traditional livelihoods or worse still physically displaces them, the worst affected are women who are engaged in the bulk of ancillary occupations like tobacco cultivation, coconut harvesting, fish sorting and processing which are jeopardized through such displacement. It becomes the prerogative of governments and the industry to ensure that rather than displace them, tourism should build and bolster supplementary livelihood options that women can choose from.

Some Doors that need to close – Exploitation of Women in Tourism

There is a direct correlation between the depletion of natural resources and increased burden on women in daily work in any region of the world. When tourism restricts community access to or contributes to the depletion of natural resources, it is the women not only as homemakers, but also as community members who suffer the most. Women's access to and control over forest produce and water come into sharp conflict when tourism usurps these very resources needed to fulfill their life and livelihood needs. The daily burden on women of finding water for the household or firewood for cooking is oftentimes doubled or tripled. The links between tourism and climate change will unfortunately add to the burden women already bear.

When tourism makes products of culture, it tends to commodify women in particular – although both men and women are impacted by the insensitive selling of culture. With sex tourism being the most negative and prominent example, there is a significant amount of sexual objectification of women working in the tourism

industry. Women are expected to dress in an "attractive" manner, to look beautiful (i.e. slim, young, and pretty) and to "play along" with sexual harassment by customers. Stereotypical and sexist images of women are often part of tourism promotion in brochures and advertisements. Friendly, smiling and pliant women fitting certain standards of attractiveness, attired in traditional costumes, waiting to submissively serve the customer's every wish is the typical portrayal of women in tourism material. We ask that the international community and UNWTO draw attention to the way women are represented in the selling of tourism by addressing this in the code of ethics.

The tourism industry and stewards of tourism development face many serious social and human challenges in the years ahead. The growing links between migration - both voluntary and forced - and tourism needs to take into account the gender dimensions of this global phenomenon. HIV/AIDS not only is driven by gender inequality but entrenches it. Tourism is increasingly seen to have a role in this entrenchment in its links to trafficking, prostitution and sex tourism. Poverty, and in particular urban poverty, which threatens to be an issue of growing magnitude has deep roots in gender injustice. Tourism often wipes out the existence and means of livelihood of the urban poor in an overt manner while continuing to depend covertly on cheap labour and exploitative relationships in order to flourish. The trend of development of tourism in conflict zones and the consequent impacts it has on women who are already battling for survival is another matter of serious concern. Disasters and epidemics have an uneasy relationship with tourism – but gender dimensions are rarely integrated into assistance and reconstruction efforts with the focus being largely on the safety of tourists and revival of tourism infrastructure.

We call upon governments, policy makers, industry, civil society and the UNWTO to engage in more systemic ways with the challenge of women's empowerment in tourism. Perhaps it is time for the UNWTO to declare Tourism's Decade for Women's Rights and Empowerment as a move towards opening the doors to a more just and equitable world for women and men.

This is a joint statement by **Alternatives (Goa), Council for Social Justice and Peace (Goa), EQUATIONS (Bangalore) and Sakhi Resource Centre for Women (Kerala)** who are organising a series of round tables in Kerala and Goa on the theme of Women and Tourism, on the occasion of World Tourism Day.

We would appreciate your circulating this statement widely, especially to the media.

To join us in endorsing it, or for the reports and press releases from the discussions, please contact campaigns@equitabletourism.org