

Gender and Sustainable Rural Tourism: A Study into the Experiences and the Roles of Local Women in the Sundarbans Area of Bangladesh

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Abstract : The key aim of this research is to achieve Sustainable Rural Tourism (SRT) through women's empowerment in the Sundarbans area of Bangladesh. Women in rural areas in developing countries depend on biomass for their survival and that of their family. Yet they have an unequal access to resources as well as decision making, thus making them more vulnerable to any changes in the environment. Women in the developing countries experience gender inequality which is culturally embedded resulting into women having less access to and control over financial and material resources, information, and also a lack of recognition of their contribution as compared to men. Their disadvantaged social position is augmented by their extreme poverty, little or no power they have over their own lives vis-à-vis the disproportionate burden they bear in reproduction and child-raising. Despite the significance of the need to pay attention to gender related issues in sustainable rural tourism (SRT), research remains rather scant. For instance, there is very little research that illustrates the role of women in tourism in the Sundarbans area. Thus empirically, this research seeks to fill a significant gap by focusing on rural areas and in particular focus on considerably under-researched area, namely the Sundarbans women's role in tourism. In order to fully comprehend their experiences and life stories, this research will apply the empowerment theory and consider it along with the research on sustainable rural tourism. Since, women's empowerment can act as a potential tool for SRT development and also examine the role tourism plays in the lives of Sundarbans' women. Methodologically, this study will follow a qualitative research design using an ethnographic approach. Participant observation, semi- structured interviews, and documentation will be the primary data collection instruments in four communities - Shayamnagar, Koyra, Mongla and Sarankhola - in the Sundarbans area. It is hoped that by focusing on the life stories of these invisible women, research is better able to engage with nuances inherent in marginal and significantly under-researched communities.

Keywords : gender, sustainable rural tourism, women empowerment, Sundarbans

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