INTEGRATING GENDER INTO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECTS

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FOR EQUALITY IN TOURISM: CREATING CHANGE FOR WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of international institutions have begun to argue that tourism can promote both gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, there have been very few attempts at integrating a gender perspective into tourism at the levels of both policy and practice. Even where gender has been integrated, this has been done in a superficial way without tackling fundamental questions about inequality in the tourism sector.

In this paper we critically reflect on our participation as gender consultants during several months of a two-year sustainable tourism project co-financed by the European Commission Investing in People programme and managed by a large Spanish public policy institution. The main aim of the project was to produce a Vocational Training Programme for Tourism and one of its main objectives was to integrate a gender perspective. Our brief as experts in gender and tourism was to produce a methodology for identifying good practices that promote women’s empowerment in vocational and educational training in sustainable tourism in the five partner countries (two from Latin America, one from North Africa and two from sub-Saharan Africa).

Here, we trace the various stages of the project to explore to what extent gender was integrated. We set out the main challenges and frustrations and offer some broader lessons for practitioners in gender and sustainable tourism.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AND FORMULATION

When we first examined the project overview it stated: “gender and sustainable development are key cross-cutting axes underlying the project.” In order to achieve this, the training curriculum and programmes would “include contents and methodologies that promote gender equality, equal opportunities and sustainable environmental development through sustainable tourism”. There was, however,
no qualification of what “gender-focused” training should entail - leaving this open to interpretation; nor was there a debate amongst the project partners about the importance of gender to sustainable tourism. The final beneficiaries of the project were intended to be “women and men from [partner countries] who wish to receive training in sustainable tourism and find decent and sustainable work in this field, with particular focus on women” (emphasis added). However, this was not backed up by any specific sub-objectives, such as a quota system or means to ensure that women were systematically trained and supported to find work by the project.

In order to deal with the specific aspects, one of three project Working Groups was dedicated to this theme, with the final goal of identifying “success stories in sustainable tourism training and activity, with emphasis on successful cases of women’s empowerment” (emphasis added). As there was no gender expertise available within the project team, we as consultants were hired to conduct the gender component of this working group. As our work advanced, it became clear that a gender perspective had not been integrated into any of the previous activities – diagnostic; curriculum and training programme design; and pilot testing. As a result, there was no support from the management committee to help the project partners understand the meaning and implications of the commitments to women and gender. This made it very difficult to implement our work plan within the timeframe initially provided by the management committee.

The formulation of this project failed to meet general criteria for successful gender mainstreaming in a number of ways. First, it did not specify how gender is to be mainstreamed. The tools, indicators and research methodologies established were not compatible with the theory and practice of a gender perspective. Second, there was no indication of when this should be done – no milestones were set out for exploring and institutionalising a gender perspective. Third, it was not clear where gender should be discussed. For example, the management committee did not have a gender focal point or group. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there was no specification of who (and how) was to be responsible for mainstreaming gender in
the project. This meant that no gender expertise was considered necessary to ensure that a gender perspective was embedded in all phases of the project. As a result, gender was not integrated in any serious way into the project formulation or budget considerations. This meant, for example, that the diagnostic process was conducted independent of gender analysis and methodologies, contributing to gender becoming merely a “component”, rather than a cross-cutting issue of the project. This critique is depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Optimum situation for gender equality outcomes v/s realities of project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOCUMENTATION PHASE</th>
<th>Realities of Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimum Situation for Gender Equality Outcomes</td>
<td>Realities of Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality included in project rationale, aims and objectives</td>
<td>Included in aims and objectives, not in rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification provided of importance of gender equality for sustainable tourism</td>
<td>No discussion of links between gender and sustainable tourism; 'integrationist' approach to gender mainstreaming; no challenge to dominant sustainable tourism paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity over gender terms such as gender equality and women's empowerment</td>
<td>No definitions of gender terms provided; no specific targets for gender equality or women's empowerment set</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## FORMULATION PHASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optimum Situation for Gender Equality Outcomes</th>
<th>Realities of Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender-sensitive participatory planning is conducted</td>
<td>Gender methodologies not used in project planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-sensitive diagnostic is conducted using gender analysis</td>
<td>Diagnostic does not discuss gender issues; no gender analysis used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender planning is integrated into all phases of the project</td>
<td>Only identifiable target in relation to gender states that 50% of those interviewed must be women; gender and development literature largely neglected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| All members of the project team receive adequate gender training | No gender training provided |
| A gender perspective is internalised by all members of the project team | A gender perspective was not internalised in the project |
| Clear indication of HOW, WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE gender will be mainstreamed | No methodology, targets, actions, milestones identified |
| Provision of adequate gender expertise in project; appointment of gender focal points | No gender expertise in project management team; limited gender expertise in project partners |
| Adequate allocation for gender mainstreaming and specific activities in overall budget | Only 0.05% of overall project budget initially allocated to gender |

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optimum Situation for Gender Equality Outcomes</th>
<th>Realities of Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient time, resources and expertise for successful gender training</td>
<td>Small extension to gender budget to conduct four hour training for Latin American partners; no formal training for Spanish and African partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Terms of reference for hiring gender consultants are circulated to all partners | Terms of reference not shared; validity of gender work contested by partners at later date |
| Resistances to a gender perspective are addressed periodically throughout project | No opportunities to discuss resistances and tensions until the final project meeting |
| Tensions are harnessed to explore gender issues and promote change | Tensions not dealt with, lead to rewriting of the good practices document with a diminished focus on a gender perspective |
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation phase of the project cycle highlights the gaps between what is proposed and what is done, particularly when a project has strong limitations in the formulation and diagnostic stages from a gender perspective. One of the main limitations from a gender perspective was the budget. First, before we were hired, no substantive gender activity had been conducted. Second, our work, for a period of two months, was allocated 0.05% of the total budget, an alarmingly small proportion for a project that set out to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue. Third, it was very difficult to change the budget by the time we joined the project, because the partners had approved the final budget already.

The final product of our work was to be a guide to good practices in gender and sustainable tourism. It involved developing a methodology for the identification of good practices in gender and sustainable tourism and a set of criteria as shown.

Each country was asked to submit completed questionnaires for four sustainable tourism initiatives, from which we selected the two that best met the good practice criteria for each country. We then developed a specific questionnaire for each of the selected initiatives, including participatory tools and methods for gender analysis, such as activity profiles and basic time use surveys.

As the identification phase progressed, it became clear that it would be challenging to find good practices that met even the most basic criteria, beyond a simple counting of the number of women participating. Some of the project partners displayed many common misconceptions about gender analysis: that “gender” is the same as “women”; that women’s empowerment means income generation; that working-class women have the same experiences and needs as women in management positions, etc. Because of this general lack of knowledge on what a gender perspective might entail, we negotiated with the lead organization to conduct a brief gender training session with the Latin American partners during a regional meeting, as well as visiting the four potential good practices in one of the
partner countries. However, the rest of the gender component was conducted by email and Skype, making it very difficult to engage in substantive debate with the partners about competing ideas about gender equality.

Figure 1: Criteria for identifying good practice in gender and sustainable tourism

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AND THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE INITIATIVE.
   - Identify, consult with and include relevant groups of women and men who are participating in the initiative.
   - Implement tools that promote and ensure the collection of information on the needs, interests and priorities of women and men.
   - Strike a balance between the number of women and men participating in the initiative, as well as in terms of the hours dedicated to decision-making.

2. PROMOTING DECENT WORK AND TRAINING FOR BOTH WOMEN AND MEN IN THE INITIATIVE.
   - Include training for women and allow for the consolidation of the skills and knowledge.
   - Identify training needs and methods for both women and men.
   - Undertake training which will ensure access to decent work for women.
   - Promote work that breaks with the roles and stereotypes traditionally attributed to women and men.

3. WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE INITIATIVE.
   - Promote interest in, and sensitivity to, gender issues in the initiative.
   - Encourage the presence and influence of women in public spaces related to both the initiative and the community.
   - Promote the sharing of tasks and responsibilities between men and women in the public and domestic spheres.
   - Promote greater equality between women and men.

We presented a first draft of the good practices guide two weeks before the final project meeting, in order to allow partners to read the document and send their
comments. However, only two partners returned their comments and recommendations within this time frame. This meant we had no opportunity to gauge the general response to the draft. It was at this meeting – held in one of the African partner countries – that the level of conflict over the project’s gender approach became apparent. Instead of the event being focused on highlighting the results of gender mainstreaming during the two years of the project, it addressed what had become the only gender result – the good practices guide in gender and sustainable tourism. As such, this meeting became the point at which all the tensions, pressures and resistances to a gender approach manifested themselves.

Most partners had not grasped the scope of our work and several complained that we had not highlighted “the importance of women in the document”. They had expected the guide to point out the specific qualities that women bring to tourism. Many of the perceptions of the partners – that women manage money better than men; are better suited for service work; provide better customer service; and are naturally more sensitive – represented the kinds of gender roles and stereotypes about sustainable tourism that we were trying to challenge.

Not all partners were hostile to working on gender and some were openly supportive. However, because they had not received training in gender it was difficult for them to make strong arguments to support our case. The different prejudices in relation to gender revealed themselves particularly among the Latin American and African participants. Most of these conversations concluded that “a gender approach destroys families” and that “a gender approach without economic growth is not worth tackling”.

At the end of the meeting, it was clear that it was impossible to do what was asked in the terms of reference. It was agreed that the draft would be changed completely to include new objectives, a definition of sustainable tourism, new content and given a new title. This turned what had initially been a strong gender approach to establishing some criteria for gender and sustainable tourism into a watered-down document focusing primarily on women’s participation in sustainable tourism.
CONCLUSIONS

Our experience of this project raises three key issues for those concerned with gender and tourism. Firstly, throughout the project, gender and sustainable tourism were treated as two distinct categories, a position we found very difficult to challenge. The project coordinators and most of the partners persistently argued that gender should be accommodated within the current framework of sustainable tourism, rather than trying to challenge the key assumptions. As such, we consider that this project missed an important opportunity to develop a gender and sustainable tourism framework and begin to establish guidelines and tools for working in this area. Secondly, the fact that gender was included as a cross-cutting issue but then reduced to an isolated activity with a very small budget raises some important questions. What are the motivations for tourism organizations and institutions for including “gender” in project proposals? Do tourism institutions have a genuine commitment to gender equality, or is this often used as a strategic tool for obtaining finances for other kinds of results? How can external funders ensure that gender is properly integrated into tourism projects, and that staff and resources are allocated in a way that allows for this?

Finally, our findings reflect some of the well-documented challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming. The resistances to a gender approach to sustainable tourism reiterate the highly political and contentious nature of working on gender. Without an experienced facilitator to work through these different perspectives, such resistances can often lead to open hostility, and in many cases the outright rejection of gender approaches. Our experience highlights the perils of failing to challenge embedded assumptions. If lead institutions in the North are unwilling or unable to internalise a gender perspective in their own conceptual frameworks and procedures, there is very little incentive for partner organizations to do so. Integrating a gender perspective into sustainable tourism projects requires commitment to a continual process of change. It cannot be done in a fragmented way or left until the last stages of a project when other issues are of higher priority and there is little budget left.
In conclusion, we argue that gender experts are often contracted to mainstream gender projects “retrospectively”. This limits and constrains the possibilities for contributing to meaningful and sustained change in gender equality and women’s empowerment. It is hoped that this paper will serve to open a debate on how transformative change can be embedded in the policy and practice of sustainable tourism.

NOTES


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Equality in Tourism is a new, independent, non-profit women’s network dedicated to ensuring that women have an equal voice in tourism and an equal share in its benefits. We believe that questions of discrimination have been largely omitted from the theory and practice of tourism and that greater gender equality is an essential component of a sustainable tourist industry. We seek to address the problem by providing specialist advice, research, training and capacity building using our global network of experts.

For more information and to work with us, go to equalityintourism.org.