

Ecotourism and women

A study about Sub-Saharan Women and Ecotourism

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Abstract

Ecotourism is seen as an outcome of environmental movements and uprisings that demonstrated the sustainability limitations of mass tourism. Ecotourism has five key principles which are to encourage community participation, empower vulnerable groups, stimulate environmental conservation, preserve local culture, and deliver economic benefits for the area. It is important with involvement of the community in ecotourism. The involvement of women in ecotourism is important, since women establish a large proportion of the sector and depend on tourism for their own and their families survival. Tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the fastest growing sectors, and a driving force for socio-economic development in the region. Women engage with ecotourism in different ways in the Sub-Saharan African region. Most of the women's roles in ecotourism are linked to societal gender norms in the Sub-Saharan region. The study points out the importance of gender, empowerment, and intersectionality being considered for ecotourism. This, in order for ecotourism to fulfil its main purpose.

Key words: Ecotourism, Sub-Saharan African women, intersectionality, women empowerment, gender equality.

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Introduction

The tourism industry is the fastest growing industry in the world and the future anticipation for a continuous growth in the industry remains encouraging (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 51). In the year 2022, and after the pandemic restrictions, international tourism has been seeing strong and positive results. According to UNWTO, it was estimated that around 900 million tourists were traveling internationally in the year 2022 (UNWTO 2022, 3). There are findings which indicate the tourism industry as a potential source for poverty eradication and economic development in developing economies (Nyasha et al. 2020, 1515). The important role tourism plays in poverty eradication and economic growth is due to the fact of tourism's natural role of involving many different actors, from governmental level to the private sector (ibid). There are different forms of tourism that have been identified across the globe, such as cultural, religious or nature tourism. In the 1980's ecotourism emerged as a new form of tourism. Ecotourism was unlike any other forms of tourism, focusing on environmental protection and supporting economic growth of different partners (Forje et al. 2022, 1). Ecotourism has many definitions, but the most common definitions bring up conservation, natural areas, culture, local benefits, and education as being the common variables for ecotourism (ibid).

Ecotourism is seen as an outcome of environmental movements and uprising that demonstrated the sustainability limitations of mass tourism. Ecotourism projects began as visitations to natural areas for education and enjoyment, but has with time developed into incorporating economic development, cultural preservation, human rights, environmental conservation, and social inclusion (Cobbinah 2015, 179). There are five key principles regarding ecotourism, encourage community participation, empower vulnerable groups, for example women, stimulate environmental conservation, preserve local culture, and deliver economic benefits for the area (Cobbinah 2015, 185). Many developing countries have with time been looking at the potential ecotourism might have, regarding economic development, building up community livelihood and biodiversity conservation (Forje et al. 2022, 2). Ecological benefits from ecotourism refers to services stimulated by the availability of natural resources within or close to the nature-based area. Non-ecological benefits from ecotourism can be employment, income-generation, capacity building as well as multiplier effects. These benefits include physical and non-physical benefits obtained from natural resources and ecotourism activities (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 1-2).

When it comes to ecotourism, it is important with involvement of the community, since it is crucial in development planning (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 693). This is because community-participation can help address economic, social, and environmental impacts as well as it benefits generating support for conservation of natural areas, by making them a part of the process (ibid). Apart from the overall importance of community involvement in ecotourism, it is also important to point out the importance of involving women in ecotourism (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694). This is due to the fact that women establish a large proportion as well as depend on tourism for their own and their families survival (ibid). The involvement of women in general tourism, helps women carve out new roles in their families and their local

communities. This in turn results in women gaining higher status and higher self-esteem in their communities (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 697).

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa area contains all of the African countries, including the African states situated offshore in the west and east coast. North Africa is however excluded from this region (Ezeuduji 2017, 2). In this text the abbreviation SSA will be used when referring to the Sub-Saharan African region. SSA is a region with a rapidly growing population, where in 2018 it was estimated that there will be over a total of 1 billion people living in the region (Euromonitor International 2015). It was estimated that 5 out of 10 fastest-growing economies in the world are located in the region, and that the region as a whole is the second fastest-growing globally (ibid).

SSA is one of the poorest regions in the world, where a noticeable percentage of the region's population are living in extreme poverty (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 2). The poverty levels in the SSA region have been severe, leading to the point where the MDG goals of reducing poverty by half were not met. This means that even if there are ecotourism activities in the region, the poverty remains significant (ibid). However, due to the region's geographical and cultural resources there are opportunities for development of tourism in this specific area (Ezeuduji 2017, 3). Tourism in SSA is one of the fastest growing sectors, and a driving force for socio-economic development in the region (Forje et al. 2022, 1). Tourism sector in the SSA accounted for 6,7 percent of employment and around 8,5 percent of GDP (ibid).

Problem definition

The discourse in tourism is openly constructed towards economic terms. A lot of literature has been sensitive that the social effects of tourism can be both negative and positive (Hirtenfelder 2017, 2). It is believed that tourism usually has positive impacts, especially on women. There is a belief that once women have more access to employment and money, they have more access to decision-making and stronger role in gender relations (ibid). In most developing countries, gender inequality is a major obstacle for development (Irandu & Shah 2016, 249).

Tourism sector contributes to easier economic development and diversification. This is due to its low levels of requirement for capital investment and expertise, which in the context of SSA, means that tourism is a desired economical stimulant (Nyasha et al. 2020, 1516). Women in SSA region, manage most of the hospitality business, with at least 80% of tourism establishments being in Ethiopia, Mali, and Lesotho. The contribution of tourism to economic growth in SSA, contributes to the women who are living in the region, where women are notably poorer and employed in the informal sector (Nyasha et al. 2020, 2017). However, while tourism contributes positively to economic development, there are negative aspects to it, such as environmental degradation and cultural heritage damage (Nyasha et al. 2020, 1518).

When the concept of ecotourism began for the first time, it was seen as a positive alternative to mass tourism, however the view of ecotourism today is uncertain as to the meaning and purpose of it (Cobbinah 2015, 179). There are many who argue that the meaning and purpose of ecotourism is not fully understood and has led to abuse and misuse of the concept. This is done by attracting ecotourists into nature-based programmes under the name of ecotourism, which often results in negative social and environmental impacts (ibid). Although many ecotourism projects have been focusing on enhancing women's incomes and empowering them, there has not been much research done about women's empowerment through tourism (Irandu & Shah 2016, 250).

In the context of SSA, many African communities have a patriarchal nature, which has led to men playing a dominant role when it comes to environmental conservation and development projects (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694). In countries where gender roles are socially established, women and girls tend to have a greater interaction with nature through agriculture and other nature-based activities. This means that women have developed a specialized knowledge due to their interactions with nature (Scheyvens 2000, 235). Due to the fact that women are being left behind in development projects like ecotourism, the development project's meaning is bound to fail. This means that there is a need to involve women regarding ecotourism, since it helps provide the necessary support to sustain ecotourism (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694).

Aim

The aim of this study is to highlight the roles women have in ecotourism in SSA. SSA has been chosen for this study due to the region's economic development and the region's existing gender roles. By understanding the involvement and the different roles women might have when it comes to ecotourism, this study will also be looking at in what way women can benefit economically from ecotourism. This will be done by exploring the following questions:

Research questions:

- What roles do women have in the Sub-Saharan region when it comes to ecotourism?
- Do women in the Sub-Saharan region benefit from ecotourism?

Disposition

This essay begins with a background of tourism. The section then continues to explain the concept of ecotourism and women in both tourism and ecotourism. The background section then continues with facts about Sub-Saharan Africa and the tourism sector in the specific region. The section problem definition brings up the potential issues regarding ecotourism and women, where the lack of studies done with women in ecotourism is mentioned and how there is a need for further studies to be done in this specific area and subject.

The theories that will be applied in this essay are presented after the problem definition, where there will be an intersectionality theory, empowerment theory and gender equality perspective applied. The essay then continues to a method section, where it is explained what method have been done to collect the data, which in this essay is a secondary analysis of qualitative data of scientific articles. After the method section results are being presented where studies done in Botswana, Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and South Africa will be presenting women in these countries and their relationship to ecotourism, with both how women benefit from it as well as disadvantage from it. Then an analysis part of the essay will be applying intersectionality, empowerment, and gender equality perspective on the results. The essay's last section will be a conclusion part, with the background, results and analysis sections concluding the findings of this essay.

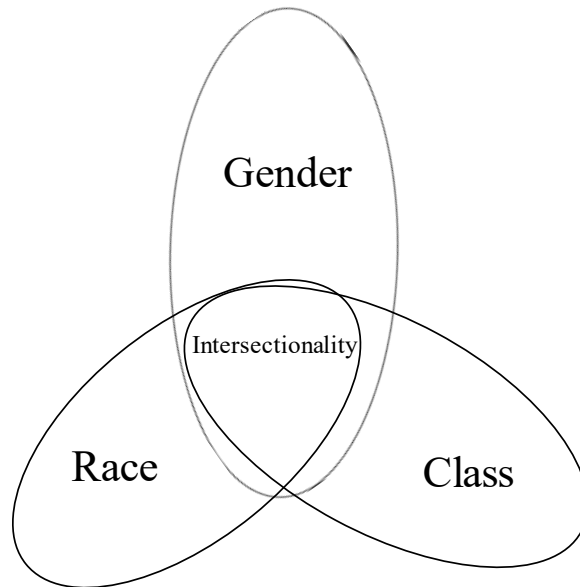
Theory/Theoretical framework:

Intersectionality theory

Intersectionality has its roots from Afro-American feminism and Critical Race Theory, and is used as an analytical tool, method, and disposition. The term was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw and was used to explain the marginalization of African American women in feminist and anti-racist theory and politics (Carbado et al. 2014, 303). Since the launch of the intersectionality theory, activists and scholars have expanded intersectionality to captivate a range of issues, social identities, legal and political systems, and power dynamics around the world (Carbado et al. 2014, 304). As seen in Illustration 1, intersectionality argues therefore that individual identities like class, gender, race, and others intersects and reflects the macro-level forms of oppression and privilege. These forms of oppression and privilege are manifested through racism, sexuality, and sexism (Kelly et al. 2021, 1). Intersectionality presents an implicit critique of erasure of differences and exclusion. Intersectionality also argues that oppression and privilege are shifting depending on the context, as well as all experiences of marginalization are relevant (Kelly et al. 2021, 2).

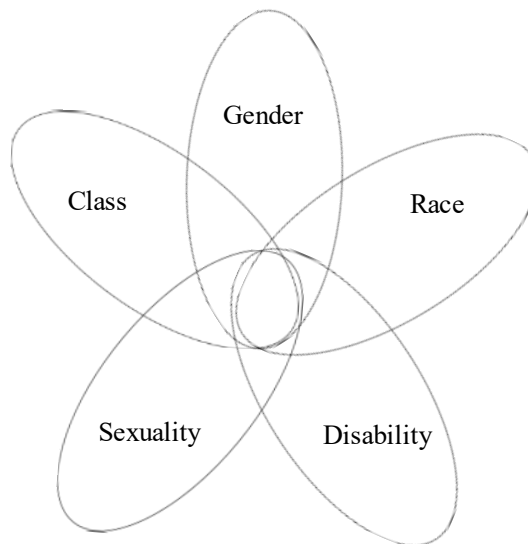
Intersectionality theory has with time spread into an international plan, which has led to a fourth dimension being brought up. Actors of different sexualities, gender and ethnicities have moved intersectionality to engage into an ever-widening range of experiences and structures of power (Carbado et al. 2014, 305). Although intersectionality theory originated in African American women's experiences, the theory itself has not only been focusing on the African American women's experience only. Sumi Cho argues that intersectionality does not necessarily have to only focus on power and experience in relation to race and gender, but it can also engage in other categories like sexuality (Carbado et al. 2014, 306). Therefore, intersectionality theory is not fixed on any particular social position but should rather be seen as a theory that can and does move. Alfredo Artile contributes further to intersectionality theory, by using different models to look into disability. In order to theorize racialization, Artile shows how scholars can mobilize intersectionality theory to go beyond the idea that disability is racialized (ibid), which can be seen in Illustration 2. This essay will mainly be applying the aspects gender, class, and race.

Illustration 1. Kimberlé Crenshaw and her intersectional theory in 1989.



Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory from 1989. Intersectionality argues therefore that individual identities like class, gender, race, and others intersects and reflects the macro-level forms of oppression and privilege (Carbado et al. 2014, 303).

Illustration 2. The elaborated intersectionality theory and its five aspects.



Intersectionality theory today and its five dimensions, based on Alfredo Artile's theory on disability and intersectionality and Sumi Cho's intersectionality theory and sexuality (Carbado et al. 2014, 305-306).

Empowerment

Empowerment can be understood as multi-dimensional, context-specific, and as demanding redistribution of power to marginalized groups (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 2). As seen in Table 1, empowerment can be categorized into four dimensions, social, political, economic, and psychological (Iranu & Shah 2016, 252). Economic empowerment in relation to tourism, includes access to productive resources as well as earning from touristic activities. It is proven by business opportunities, equitable distribution of benefits, employment, sustainable economic gains, and improvement of infrastructure (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 10). When looking at economic empowerment, studies have shown that in an area hosting any form of ecotourism, the local women are usually ignored in formal employment. This is due to societal norms, where women are continually being limited from engaging in economic activities in relation to ecotourism (Iranu & Shah 2014, 253). A political aspect of empowerment, where the involvement of the community from a feasibility stage to implementation and monitoring, will lead to an empowerment among the community. The attitude male community members have towards female members of the community can indicate a lot when it comes to decision-making since it mirrors the societal norms of that society or community. Many times women are being excluded from decision-making in their societies or communities due to the fact that women are being put into the same category as children. This therefore means that women and youth have a need for representation in decision-making bodies in their communities (ibid).

Psychological empowerment in relation to ecotourism, is when the local people are shown respect and interest in their traditional culture which in turn can bring a sense of empowerment among the community (Iranu & Shah 2014, 253). Psychological disempowerment of local people of a community, when ecotourism makes the local people feel inferior or that they have no sense of control over the direction and pace of development in their own community (ibid). Social empowerment refers to a community's perception of unity and integrity, where the signs of a strong and empowered community come from the inclusion of youth and women's groups and good participation in community meetings (ibid). Empowerment can therefore not be understood about improving the wellbeing of individuals. Empowerment requires a broader transformative change in society to overturn unfair structures which hinders the already disadvantaged in a society (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 3)

Table 1. Empowerment and its four dimensions.

Empowerment

- **Political empowerment**- A political aspect of empowerment, where the involvement of the community from a feasibility stage to implementation and monitoring, will lead to an empowerment among the community.
- **Psychological empowerment** A visible respect and interest in the local people's traditional culture can bring a sense of empowerment among the community.
- **Social empowerment**- A community's perception of unity and integrity, where the signs of a strong and empowered community comes from the inclusion and good participation in community meeting
- **Economic empowerment** Includes access to productive resources as well as earning from touristic activities. It is proven by business opportunities, equitable distribution of benefits, employment, sustainable economic gains and improvement of infrastructure

Four aspects of empowerment according to Scheyvens (Irandu & Shah 2014, 253).

Gender equality

Gender equality implies that men and women should enjoy the same rights, obligations, opportunities, and outcomes in all spheres of life. An important aspect of promoting gender equality is to empower women, with a focus on identifying and addressing power imbalances as well as giving women autonomy to manage their own lives (Irandu & Shah 2016, 250). The current literature presents two perspectives on women and ecotourism, where on one hand researchers do not believe that women significantly benefit from ecotourism projects. On the other side, there are researchers who believe that ecotourism can help empower women, since the principle of ecotourism is to empower local communities. By assisting economic sectors, like tourism employing large numbers of women at comparatively high wages, the result will be that it will help improve their economic well-being. However, the reality is that many local women miss out on formal employment in tourism due to societal norms that continue to restrict the types of economic activities in which women may engage. In some cases of development of touristic sites, women miss out on formal employment as women tend to be ignored (ibid). Major challenges for gender equity include access and control of sectors of the economy that generate income (Irandu & Shah 2016, 251).

It is important that gender is considered by advocates for ecotourism for three major reasons and as seen in Table 2. To promote good natural resource management which protects the key

resources of the ecotourism area. In countries where gender roles are socially established, women and girls tend to have a greater interaction with nature through agriculture and other nature-based activities. This means that women have developed a specialized knowledge due to their interactions with nature (Scheyvens 2000, 235). To ensure that ecotourism development benefits from the knowledge and the skills of all the community members. Lastly, due to gender equity being considered a human right. Women and men should both participate in decision-making forums concerning ecotourism development and management as well as the benefits from ecotourism are equitably shared (Irandu & Shah 2016, 249).

Table 2. Three major reasons for gender in ecotourism.

Promoting gender in ecotourism

- **First:** Promote good natural resource management which protects the key resources of the ecotourism area, due to women in socially established gender norms, being closer with nature.
- **Second:** Ensure that ecotourism development benefits from the knowledge and the skills of all the community members.
- **Third:** Gender equity is considered a human right. Women and men should both participate in decision-making forums concerning ecotourism development and management as well as the benefits from ecotourism are equitably shared

Three major reasons to consider gender in ecotourism (Irandu & Shah 2016, 249; Scheyvens 2000, 235).

Method

The method that is used for data collection in this essay will be a qualitative data based on secondary data and analysis of scientific articles where the aim and questions of this essay will be answered. The data that has been collected have been scientific peer-reviewed articles as well as official websites of organizations. Qualitative method is a method that is fit for when looking at distribution patterns among a larger population (Repstad 2007, 22).

Qualitative method is usually within a limited and specific environment, where the goal is to give an overall description of processes and characteristics within the studied environment (Repstad 2007, 23). Secondary analysis is the method of collection of data for this essay is the most fitting for this type of studies, since it provides an opportunity to compare data collected by others in order to avoid replication (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014, 263). The benefit of a secondary analysis method is because this method helps to enable longitudinal research, since the data collected for the research has been collected during different points in time (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014, 263-264). There are however limitations to this method, and one of them is access to data through different data archives as well as the validity of the chosen sources. Another problem is that secondary data frequently only approximate the data that is being employed for a testing thesis (ibid).

When searching for data for this essay, the main sources for information have been the following databases: SöderScholar, Google Scholar and Web of Science. The key words that have been used when searching for information are “Ecotourism in Africa women”, “Women in ecotourism Africa”, “Sub-Saharan ecotourism and women” and “Sub-Saharan women participating ecotourism” in order to find the relevant scientific articles for the background and the results part. When searching for theory/theoretical framework, the following keywords were used: “Intersectionality theory”, “Intersectional theory and feminism”, “Empowerment women among African women”, “Gender analysis in ecotourism Africa” and “Gender equality in tourism” in order to find relevant scientific articles. All of the scientific articles that have been used in this essay have been peer-reviewed. In order to find more information regarding SSA-region google was used. The following keyword was used “Sub-Saharan Africa population” in order to find relevant websites. The chosen cohort for the data in this essay, are the years 2013 to 2022. This is done in order to reflect how the discourse for the subject of this essay has been for the last decade. Due to the size of the SSA region, this essay will be looking at cases from Cameroon, Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria, and Rwanda. The countries have been chosen due to lack of information regarding other countries in the region. The number of articles that have been used in this essay, which are ten articles, is due to lack of information on the subject of this essay for the SSA region.

Results

Women's participation in Ecotourism in the Sub-Saharan Africa region

In the ecotourism camp Meno A Kwena a study was conducted regarding ecotourism women's participation and roles in ecotourism. In the area Meno A Kwena, located in Botswana, a study was done looking at the different roles women and men have when it comes to ecotourism (Hirtenfelder 2017). The village norms and gender roles showed that women were expected to look after children, without the help of fathers (Hirtenfelder 2017, 73). It was also shown that grandmothers were the key enablers for other young women to move to paid labour, and without extended help, there is no possibility for paid labour for younger women (Hirtenfelder 2017, 74). This indicates that the presence of extended families has direct involvement in women's accessibility to tourism jobs without disturbing the existing gender order in the area (Hirtenfelder 2017, 75). The study looked at the hierarchy of the ecotourism camp. It was found that the camp's owners and managers were expats, consisting of two men and one woman. The next level included the safari guides to waiters, where the current guides of the area are only men. The cooking staff was numerically equally gendered. At the lowest part of the hierarchy of the ecotourism camp, are the maintenance people, who are men and the house-keeping jobs where women can be found (Hirtenfelder 2017, 77).

When looking at the reasons behind the differently gendered ascribed roles both genders shared the same views. Both genders considered that men were better suited for maintenance since men are stronger and that women were better suited for housekeeping jobs since women are used to cleaning duties within their own households (ibid). Women and their jobs at the camps were seen as "softer" than their male counterparts, despite housekeeping duties being physically demanding (Hirtenfelder 2017, 80). It's not only the maintenance and housekeeping people who agree with the opinion that women are better suited for housekeeping and men better suited for maintenance. The owners of the ecotourism camp, the manager, other employees and even the guests of the camp agreed to this view (Hirtenfelder 2017, 79).

The reasons behind the gender roles in the Meno A Kwena could be due to Botswana's history of patriarchy, where men take centre stage in all matters concerning ownership and control of resources within the family as well as in their community (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 52). Botswana National Ecotourism Strategy carries the aim of increasing the number of Botswana meaningfully involved in and benefiting from the tourism industry. There are proposed actions such as increasing the number of successful, citizen-owned, and managed tourism enterprises, and increasing the percentage of Botswana employees holding senior positions in tourism enterprises (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 54). The term Botswana refers to the citizens of Botswana, which means that the target population for ecotourism empowerment is the citizens and therefore the strategy holds a gender-neutral stance (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 55).

Women's socially ascribed roles in Botswana society have historically been central to development and subsistence of certain traditional industries (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 55). Generally these roles have revolved around collection of firewood, basket and pottery making, cooking, and performing other traditional female domestic household activities (ibid). In Botswana and outside of ecotourism structures, scarcity of resources and materials have affected women's industries (Lenao & Basupi 2016, 56). There is also evidence where women have been muscled out of the business of collection and sale of resources like palm leaves for basket making and fuel firewood. Men have in some cases even positioned themselves strategically in women dominated production processes, which has led to exploration of women as suppliers of raw materials. Expropriating the only resources and roles women have, has been identified to the potential of alienating them from conservation and environment initiatives including ecotourism in Botswana (ibid).

Similar findings regarding gender roles and employment roles in ecotourism can be found in the Volta Region in Ghana (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018). The study was done with 130 respondents, out of the respondents 69,2% were locals of the area and 57,7% of the respondents were women. When looking at the general amount of people in the area engaging with ecotourism, 76,5% were locals, and 58.9% out of the respondents were women (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160). The study in the Volta Region indicated that women mainly engaged with ecotourism through indirect employment, such as selling food to visitors. Men on the other hand engaged with ecotourism mostly as direct staff, being tourist guides or through decision-making (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160-2161). Overall local clans were more involved than non-locals in tourism, but more non-local women were more involved in indirect employment than non-local men (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2161).

Political involvement in the context of ecotourism in the Volta Region, showed no significant difference between men and women, however there was a significantly lower involvement of non-locals compared to locals of the area (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2162). The study indicated that men were more likely to speak at meetings and share their thoughts on ecotourism matters with the board, than women. This is due to the fact that men and locals in general have more power in their community decisions than women and non-locals. Women in the area are aware of tourism decisions and have expressed a desire to be more actively involved (ibid). Although there are indications suggesting that women are not vocal at formal meetings, this does not mean that the women did not have other means to influence decisions or assert their ideas. However, many women expressed a need for more women to speak at community meetings and share their views. The same need was expressed from non-local people as well (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2162). Both genders shared the view that the reason why men are the ones taking decisions and speaking up in community meetings is due to the roles men have, as they usually are heads of the households (ibid).

Another explanation that the participants of the study had for the lack of women representation in the meetings, was that women tend to be less educated than men or that domestic duties clashed with the community meeting times (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2162). Some women indicated that they were hesitant to speak up due to fear of being shamed

for sharing their ideas in public (ibid). It has also been shown that non-locals in the area are less likely to hear about meetings, which means that non-locals therefore are less likely to discuss ecotourism matters with fewer individuals than the locals of the Volta Region (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2163). Previous ecotourism studies have shown that higher levels of empowerment are often observed among local clans, which creates potential for reinforcing the subordinated position of certain ethnic groups. (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2164). The social and physical isolation of non-locals seems to be in this study in line with commonly observed traditional stratification of Ghanaian communities, which are rooted in colonial and post-colonial territorialization (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2164-2165).

In a study that was done within the Kakum Conservation Area in Ghana, it was revealed that around 29% of the females in the area participated in communal labour activities (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 701). It was found that around 2,8% and 3,4% of the women were involved in ecotourism activities, as they were employed as security for the visitors or as guides. Only 0,6% of the respondents were directly active in the management of the park, holding a position in the local traditional council or the local committee group (ibid). Women in the area agreed to structural and operational barriers inhibiting their full participation in tourism development projects within their community in the Kakum Conservation Area (Nutsugbodo & Mensah 2020, 694). The women identified factors like lack of information and lack of coordination between the various sectors within the community as the operational barriers for full participation (Nutsugbodo & Mensah 2020, 694-695). The women identified structural barrier factors like lack of trained human resources, the elites within their community being dominant in management committees as well as financial restrictions (Nutsugbodo & Mensah 2020, 695). It was also found that there was a significant association between community, level of education and age when looking at the women's perceived personal hinder and effective participation in tourism projects (ibid).

The same issues were brought up in a study that was done on the Kitabi Women Handcraft in one of Rwanda's national parks, The Nyungwe National Park (Umuziranenge 2019). When looking at the participation of women in decision-making, 50% of the women in the cooperative were not satisfied with their participation. This was due to the fact that leaders are still the ones who decide what to do. Many of the women also complained about their suggestions never being taken into consideration in decision-making (Umuziranenge 2019, 83). The women of the cooperative find that the process of decision-making and communication to be passive, since their voices and point of views are missing in the process. Many times the community members are absent when it comes to monitoring and evaluating the processes. As an example, women tend to miss strategic meetings. The management of finance related to tourism revenue sharing is also not transparently clear to all the stakeholders. Another problem related to the women's access to loans through the cooperation is the high rates on the loan and short period reimbursement compared to other financial lending institutions (ibid).

In the Western Highlands of Cameroon (Kimengsi et al. 2019). It was shown that males account for most of the ecotourism activities in comparison to females. When looking at

conservation education, the study showed that there were significantly more women than men, which can suggest that wood-related craftsmanship has lower participation among women due to demand for muscular labour (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 7). In the same study, it was also revealed that some craft items are not to be held or seen by women, based on cultural taboos (ibid). It is estimated that being female increases the probability of choosing art and crafts/cultural heritage but reduces the probability of choosing conservation education (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 8).

The reasons for low levels of participation among women in ecotourism activities in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, could be explained by two factors in this case (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 10). The first one being the fact that some craftsmanship and wood-related art is muscular labour demanding. Another one is endogenous cultural institutions. Endogenous cultural institutions linked to cultural festivals tend to limit the participation of women, especially when it comes to display of certain masquerade, which in the area are considered harmful for women (ibid). It is believed that women are not supposed to set eyes on particular cultural items and masquerades, since it is believed to have serious consequences like failure to conceive (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 10-11). Strong endogenous cultural institutions hinder the participation of women in a wide range of ecotourism promotion activities (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 11).

Identical findings have been seen in the Afikpo Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021). When looking at reasons influencing women's participation in ecotourism in the area, the study revealed that the reasons for women not engaging in were environmental limitations, socio-economic limitations, and financial limitations. The factors for environmental limitations were the fear of sexual assault or harassment as well as some activities being seen as reserved to men only. The factors for socio-economic limitations such as low educational level, marital status, and income. The factor behind financial limitation was due to lack of capital (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 23). The women who engaged with ecotourism did through selling farm produce to tourists and hotels. There were also other ecotourism activities that women engaged in, for example entertainment, guiding visitors, selling general goods, selling artefacts, and providing accommodation (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 22).

Benefits from ecotourism

In one of Rwanda's national parks, The Nyungwe National Park, a cooperative named Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative was started in 2011 with 30 members (Umuziranenge 2019, 80). The members of the cooperative include 28 females and 2 males and is composed of women who had husbands who had been involved in harvesting different resources in the national park for making handicraft products. This was before The Nyungwe National Park was recognized as a National Park. The women themselves used to rely on the natural resources of the park, and therefore the cooperative was established to create alternative incomes for the women, increasing the women's incomes as well as reducing reliance on

natural resources(ibid). In terms of ecotourism in Rwanda, The Nyungwe National Park is the second most prevalent nature-based tourism fascination (Umuziranenge 2019, 79).

The findings of the study that was done on the Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative, indicated that the women were socially and economically empowered. The economic empowerment was through employment, income generating projects and access to loans. The social empowerment was through capacity building and improved family relations (Umuziranenge 2019, 81). The support from donors helped the cooperative to promote income from tourism to purchase the tools needed for weaving as well as connecting the people in the cooperative to lending institutions (ibid). The loans that came through the cooperative allowed the members to start different projects in small trading businesses, livestock, and small agricultural businesses. The cooperative also led to the members receiving training and starting projects of knitting sweaters and baskets which replaced the traditional baskets that were made before from collection of the natural resources of the area (Umuziranenge 2019, 82). The members of the Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative have improved women's lives by partaking in the cooperative, both socially and economically. The cooperative has given the women formal employment and the cooperative has turned to their main source of income and employment (ibid). The socio-economic situation of the women has improved, since they now can afford health insurance, money for food and afford their children's educational fees, through selling their handcrafts to tourists visiting the national park (Umuziranenge 2019, 83).

In another study done in communities close to the Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve in South Africa found that in the community, 75% of the respondents thought that ecotourism contributed to employment creation in their area (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 12). With the help of a chi-square test and from the experiences of the local people in the area, it was confirmed that there is a significant relationship between ecotourism and local economic development. Therefore ecotourism contributes to the community's capacity building (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 13). It was also shown that among the respondents in the study, only 36% understood the concept of ecotourism, which means that the majority of the participants from the communities do not understand the concept of ecotourism (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 14). It appeared that out of the respondents, 30% had no income, where females accounted for 20% out of these 30%. It was shown that no matter how high or low the monthly income the participants of the study had, the income inequality between men and women remained. The higher the monthly income was, the more likely for men to dominate the income category (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 10). These findings regarding income inequality between women and men, could be due to remaining gender discrimination in South Africa (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 11).

In the Afikpo Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021), there have been similar findings regarding women and their income from ecotourism. The study showed that the women engaging in ecotourism earn low income (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 21). Half of the respondents thought that ecotourism contribution to their income was moderate, while only 16,67% had high income contribution to their total income from ecotourism, and 33,33%

had low contribution to their income from ecotourism (ibid). In the study, 41,67% out of the respondents revealed that they used their ecotourism income to invest in agriculture and family support. This implies that the women's incomes are used to satisfy different purposes in their area (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 24). In the ecotourism camp Meno A Kwena (Hirtenfelder 2017), the study looked at the reason behind why women in the ecotourism camp choose the housekeeping jobs, it is mostly because of the need to feed their families and other responsibilities. This motivation was even more intensified in the situation where the father is absent. The payment scale for maintenance men and housekeeping women had little variance, however the variance for maintenance men was more than housekeeping women (Hirtenfelder 2017, 78).

Analysis

According to the results section, SSA-women are involved in ecotourism, in many various ways depending on which country in the region. Throughout all the studies that have been referred to in this essay there have been some common themes considering SSA-women and ecotourism. The essays focus on analyzing the results will be from a gender equity, intersectionality theory and empowerment perspective. The theories of choice for the analysis are due to ecotourism's five principles which are, encouraging community participation, empower vulnerable groups, for example women, preserve culture and deliver economic benefits to the hosting area (Cobbinah 2015, 185). With the help of the theories and the results this essay will bring up the existing disempowerment of women, gender inequality and how with the help of intersectionality theory apprise inequalities within ecotourism projects in the SSA region.

Gender equality implies that both genders enjoy the same obligations, rights, opportunities, and outcomes in all spheres of life (Irandu & Shah 2016, 250). As previously mentioned in the essay, the communities in the SSA region have a patriarchal nature, which leads to men playing a dominant role when it comes to environmental conservation and development projects (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694). Ecotourism is seen as a tool that can help more women in a community getting formal employment. The reality in many cases is different, since local community women tend to miss out on formal employment from tourism, due to societal norms (Irandu & Shah 2016, 251). Major challenges for gender equity include access and control of sectors of the economy that generate income (Irandu & Shah 2016, 251).

In the Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve, South Africa, it was shown that there was a significant relationship between ecotourism and the locals of the area (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 2). However, it was also shown that of the respondents of the study, 30% had no income, and 20% out of the 30% were women. It was also shown that the higher the income the higher the income inequality between the gender was (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 10). The results from the Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve, confirms that there is a clear inequality between both genders, since men are still earning more than women in ecotourism (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 10). Gender inequality can also be found in The Western Highlands of Cameroon, where some

ecotourism activities are considered for men only (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 7). In a study done in Ghana, in The Kakum Reservation, the women of the area agreed with the fact that there are structural and operational barriers for a full participation in ecotourism in tourism development projects in their area (Nutsugbodo & Mensah 2020, 694).

In the Volta region, women only engaged with ecotourism through indirect employment (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160), and the women in the area also indicated a desire to be more actively involved in community meetings regarding ecotourism in their area. This was due to the fact that both men and women believed that it is a role exclusively for men, as they already are heads of their household (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2162). The same patterns of gender inequality can be found in Botswana where women are traditionally ascribed roles whilst men are still in control of the majority of the resources (Lenao & Basupi 2016). It was also proven that jobs that were traditionally assigned to women, were now being expropriated by men, due to ecotourism, and therefore the women have been alienated from their societal assigned roles and from ecotourism ((Lenao & Basupi 2016, 56). In the Meno A Kwena camp, Botswana, the village still upheld the same old gender roles for women and men (Hirtenfelder 2017, 73). Although there were some women who engaged in the ecotourism camp, the majority of them had house-keeping jobs (Hirtenfelder 2017, 78), and this was due to the general belief in their community that women are better suited for house-keeping jobs, since women are “softer” than men (Hirtenfelder 2017, 79). These examples address the power imbalance between the gender and how it affects women generally, but also women engaging with ecotourism.

The Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative, Rwanda, had empowered women’s lives in the area (Umuziranenge 2019, 82), however, 50% of the women in the area felt that they were not satisfied with their participation in the cooperation, since women’s voices were missing (Umuziranenge 2019, 83). In another study done in Nigeria, and in the Afikpo Area of Ebonyi State, women were engaging with ecotourism (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 22), but still their incomes were low compared to the men in the area (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 21). The study also indicated that women’s participation in the area was limited due to factors such as activities reserved for men only, low income, and lack of capital (Ashiegbu & Onyeabor 2021, 23).

All these examples that have been brought to show that there is gender inequality within different ecotourism projects in the SSA. An important aspect of promoting gender equality is to empower women, with a focus on identifying and addressing power imbalances as well as giving women autonomy to manage their own lives (Irandu & Shah 2016, 250). In some cases like the Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative (Umuziranenge 2019, 82), there have been some forms of efforts towards gender equality, however there is still a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality. By identifying and addressing the power imbalances that have occurred in all examples of ecotourism projects in SSA, this can lead to a promotion of gender equality serving the cause to empower women (Irandu & Shah 2016, *ibid*). In order for the ecotourism projects to maintain one of its five principles which is to empower vulnerable social groups, and in many cases women (Cobbinah 2015, 185), there is a need to address the

issues that are causing the women in the SSA to not be able to fully participate nor benefit from ecotourism.

It is therefore important that gender is considered for ecotourism, due to three reasons. Promoting good natural resource management, which protects the resources of the ecotourism area, ensuring that ecotourism development benefits from the skills and knowledge of all the community members, and by considering gender equity as a human right, where both genders equally participate in decision-making concerning ecotourism development and sharing the benefits equally (Iranlu & Shah 2016, 249). The reality of ecotourism does not imply that it will be easy due to many ecotourism communities that are in the SSA region having a patriarchal nature (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694), the equality aspect of ecotourism will not be fulfilled due to the gender inequality in the SSA region. However, by constantly working and addressing the gender inequality in the region and in ecotourism, there is a chance for improvement when it comes to gender equality.

Intersectional theory and its five aspects, gender, race, class (Kelly et al. 2021, 1), sexuality and disability (Carbado et al. 2014, 306) can be a useful tool when looking at women and ecotourism in the SSA region. As this analysis section has already highlighted several times, there are major challenges for gender equality. In the Kakum Conservation Area, Ghana it was revealed that 2,8% of the women that were involved in ecotourism served as security for the visitors and 3,4% of the women were guides in their area. When looking at how many women were directly active with the management of the park and held a position in the local traditional council or the local committee, it was only 0,6% of the women. This suggests that even if there are 0,6% women in the high up in the hierarchy in ecotourism management of Kakum Reservation Area, there are still more women at the lower levels of the hierarchy. When looking at this from an intersectional perspective, there are two things that can be applied to this situation. That within individual groups such as class or gender, oppression and privilege can still be reflected (Kelly et al. 2021, 1). Although the women of different hierarchy belong to the same category, which is gender, the women of the Kakum Reservation Area who belong to the higher parts of the hierarchy are in a more privileged position compared to the women working as security or guides. So, in this context, sexism between the women does not exist, instead it is the class aspect due to some women belonging to higher hierarchy is the interesting difference to bring up. This is because intersectionality argues that oppression and privilege are shifting depending on the context (Kelly et al. 2021, 2).

In the Volta Region, Ghana, the study that was done there indicated that 76,5% out of 130 respondents who were engaging with ecotourism were non-local to the area (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160). Both non-local women and local women were shown to engage with ecotourism through indirect employment (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160-2161). This shows that the individual identity gender (Kelly et al. 2021, 1) could be a reason why more women, both local and non-local, were engaging with ecotourism through indirect employment, while men engaged with ecotourism as direct staff or through decision-making (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2160-2161).

When it comes to political involvement it was found that there was no difference between men and women when it comes to involvement, however the involvement of non-locals was low. This was due to men and locals having more power in the area, compared to non-locals (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2162). Race and/or ethnicity can determine the oppression or privilege depending on the context that a person is within (Kelly et al. 2021, 2). In the Volta Region, the non-locals are being left out from meetings or even from the board staff team due to them being non-locals. From an intersectionality perspective, this situation indicates that the non-locals are in an oppressed situation, due to the fact that there are institutional and physical limitations coming from the local people (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2163). The locals are being oppressed due to their race/ethnicity, which indicates that even if the non-local are men, they will still face oppression due their identity. The oppression of race/ethnicity could be in line with commonly observed traditional stratification of Ghanaian communities, which are rooted in colonial and post-colonial territorialisation (Ramón-Hidalgo & Harris 2018, 2164-2165). When looking at non-local women in the same situation and from an intersectional perspective, they are being both oppressed for their gender and their race/ethnicity, which makes them even more vulnerable from an intersectional perspective.

When looking at the hierarchy in ecotourism camp Meno A Kwena, Rwanda, it was found that at the top owners and managers were expats, with two men and one woman. It was also found that all the safari guides were only men, that the kitchen staff were equally numbered men and women, and that the lower part of the hierarchy, men were maintenance staff while the women had house-keeping jobs (Hirtenfelder 2017, 77). From an intersectional perspective there are several aspects that are important to point out in this situation. As previously mentioned, intersectionality argues that individual identities like class, gender, race, and others intersect and reflect the macro-level forms of oppression and privilege (Kelly et al. 2021, 1). Expats being on the top of the hierarchy, reflects the racism that is still maintained in the area, but it could also reflect class issues in the area. Another aspect to take into consideration for the people on top of the hierarchy is the fact that there are two men and one woman (Hirtenfelder 2017, 77). Even though the woman is on top of the hierarchy, the oppression of the woman is reflected through sexism reflecting the macro-level forms of oppression and privilege (Kelly et al. 2021, 1). The rest of the hierarchy and their oppression is also reflected through class, gender, race, and others (ibid).

In the cases of Rwanda, Nigeria, other parts of Botswana, and other studies in Ghana, the main oppression was manifested through gender inequalities, which in intersectional terms is sexism (Kelly et al. 2021, 1). The sexism was manifested through structural and operational barriers (Nutsugbodo & Mensah 2020, 694), or income inequalities, general gender discrimination (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 11) as well as endogenous cultural limitations (Kimengsi et al. 2019, 10).

When looking at the other aspects of intersectionality, there are two aspects that have not been discussed in this analysis, sexuality, and disability (Carbado et al. 2014, 306). This is due to the essay focusing mainly on gender, race, and class. This essay has tried to apply an intersectionality theory but has found difficulties in applying the theory. It is not because the

theory isn't applicable in the context of ecotourism, but rather due to lack of information regarding ecotourism with an intersectionality perspective, and therefore difficulty to use in this analysis section.

Ecotourism in SSA can be empowering for women. The Kitabi Woman Handcraft Cooperative is one such example where the women of the cooperative were socially and economically empowered (Umuziranenge 2019, 81). When looking at empowerment and its four aspects, there are two empowerment aspects that have not been fulfilled in the cooperative. Half of the women of the cooperative expressed that they felt unsatisfied with their participation in the cooperative and community. The women also expressed that their suggestions were never taken into consideration when it came to the management of the cooperative (Umuziranenge 2019, 83). In this case of the women of the cooperative what they are missing in the empowerment aspects are political aspects and psychological aspects.

Political empowerment comes from the involvement of all of the community members in a society, from feasibility to implementation and monitoring (Irandu & Shah 2014, 253). Psychological aspect is the empowerment of local people through a sense of control over the direction and pace of development within their community (ibid). The women of the cooperative have expressed that they are being left out from decision-making as well as the fact that there is no transparency from the stakeholders regarding tourism revenues in their area (Umuziranenge 2019, 83). Another example from the cooperative that can be applied to psychological disempowerment is the fact that the women of the cooperative are never invited to evaluation and monitoring processes within the cooperative that they belong to (ibid).

In the other cases of SSA women and ecotourism and in the countries Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, Cameroon, and South Africa, it was indicated that the women were engaging with ecotourism in various ways. However, the four aspects of empowerment, which are political, social, economic, and psychological (Irandu & Shah 2016, 252), were either low or non-existing within the SSA region and the ecotourism projects that have been referred to in the results-section above. When looking at the Oribi Nature Reserve, South Africa, the respondents reported that ecotourism in general created a feeling of capacity building within their area (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 13). This feeling of capacity building within their community as a whole could indicate there is a form of social empowerment ((Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 3). Social empowerment refers to a community's perception of unity and integrity, where a strong and empowered community comes from the inclusion of youth and women (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 3). However, when trying to find economic empowerment within the area it was reported that 20% of the respondent women were without income (Gumede & Nzama 2019, 11). Studies have shown that women in areas hosting ecotourism, tend to miss out on formal employment due to societal norms (Irandu & Shah 2014, 253), which seems to be the case in the Oribi Nature Reserve. The case of Oribi Nature Reserve could potentially also indicate that there is no psychological empowerment and political empowerment. This assumption is made due to the fact that the women within the Oribi Nature Reserve, come from a context where gender inequality still remains

(Gumede & Nzama 2019, 11) and therefore the chances for women to participate equally in management of ecotourism or being in control of the development of it is low.

Other countries in the SSA region such as Cameroon where women are excluded from certain roles within ecotourism (Kimengsi et al. 2019), as well as in Botswana (Lenao & Basupi 2016), and in Nigeria (Asiegbu & Onyeabor 2021), the same patterns are seen. When women are being excluded, their sense of social, psychological, economic, and political empowerment turns into disempowerment. Especially when it comes to ecotourism, where the premises empower vulnerable groups, encourage community participation and economic benefits for the area, are three out of five important principles in successful ecotourism management (Cobbinah 2015, 185). The results from this study therefore indicate that the women in the SSA region are being disempowered by ecotourism in their areas.

Without a sense of unity and integrity with their community (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 3), loss of sense of control over development and management, the exclusion of women in decision-making (Irandu & Shah 2014, 253), no business opportunities in ecotourism or sustainable economic gains (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 10), the women in the countries that have been listed above, are being disempowered from ecotourism. The attitude that male members of a community have towards female members, indicate the levels of political empowerment within a society (Irandu & Shah 2014, 253). The political disempowerment of women of the SSA region in ecotourism could be due to the patriarchal nature of many societies in the SSA region (Nutsugbodo et al. 2020, 694). This could also be applied to social empowerment, economic empowerment, and psychological empowerment. In order to empower women in the SSA, there is a need for a broad transformative change in order to overturn unfair structures that hinder the already disadvantaged (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, 3), which in this study is the women living in the SSA region and engaging with ecotourism. It is also important to note that empowerment is not about improving the wellbeing of individuals, but rather the community as whole (Scheyvens & van der Watt 2021, *ibid*). It is therefore important to note that without the empowerment of women, there is no empowerment within a community, and without the empowerment of a whole community there is no chance for women to be empowered.

To conclude, this section it is therefore important to highlight that there are examples of women empowerment from ecotourism in the SSA region, but that there are still things to contemplate in relation to gender inequality, empowerment of women and oppression as well as privileges that come from individual identities. By addressing and identifying the inequality that has occurred to women in ecotourism in the SSA region, this can lead to promotion of gender equality and empowering the women in ecotourism.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this essay has been looking at women and ecotourism in the Sub-Saharan African region (SSA). In this essay it was found that ecotourism has five key principles which are, encourage community participation, empower vulnerable groups, for example women, stimulate environmental conservation, preserve local culture, and deliver economic benefits for the area. This essay has also found that it is important with involvement of the community, since it is crucial in development planning when it comes to ecotourism. There is an overall importance to point out the importance of involving women in ecotourism. The involvement of women in general tourism helps women carve out new roles in their families and local communities, which in turn results in women gaining higher status and higher self-esteem in their communities.

Although there are ecotourism activities in the Sub-Saharan African region, poverty remains significant for the area. However, it has been found that due to the region's geographical and cultural resources there are opportunities for development of tourism in this specific area. Tourism in SSA was found to be one of the fastest growing sectors, and a driving force for socio-economic development as well as the fact that women in the region manage most of the hospitality business. In the context of SSA, many African communities have a patriarchal nature, which has led to men playing a dominant role when it comes to environmental conservation projects and development projects. This means that women are being left behind in ecotourism projects and therefore that ecotourism projects are bound to fail.

This study chose to focus on ecotourism in six countries in the SSA-region, which were Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Rwanda, Botswana, and South Africa. The study found that most of the women engaged with ecotourism through informal employment, where the most common activities were selling food, general goods, artefacts, and handcraft to visitors. When looking at women in ecotourism and income, it was found that there were income inequalities between men and women in ecotourism projects in the SSA region. This was due the fact that the majority of women are informally employed in ecotourism projects. The study also indicated that although there were examples of women empowerment and ecotourism in the SSA region, there was a lack of political involvement of women, which was found out to be due to conservative gender norms. The conservative gender norms were a common theme for why women were not participating in ecotourism, income inequalities and the type of employment women were given in ecotourism. With the help of an intersectionality, gender equality and empowerment perspective this essay the following could be stated. By identifying and addressing power imbalances that have occurred in all examples of ecotourism projects in SSA, this can lead to a promotion of gender equality serving the cause to empower women.

This essay has tried to apply an intersectionality theory, which was difficult to do. This was not due to the fact that the theory was not applicable in the context of ecotourism. It was due to the fact that there was a lack of information regarding ecotourism in SSA-region with an intersectionality perspective. There has been an effort to apply intersectionality theory in the

analysis of the findings and some evidence of sexism, classism, and racism/ethnicity has been found. However, the analysed findings of this essay did not strengthen any further arguments in relation to ecotourism in SSA-region and intersectional theory.

Ecotourism in SSA can be empowering for women. The Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative is one such example of women being socially and economically empowered by engaging with ecotourism. The other areas of the SSA region showed that there was a general lack of empowerment for women. In order to empower women in the SSA, there is a need for a broad transformative change in order to overturn unfair structures that hinder the already disadvantaged. Without the empowerment of women, there is no empowerment within a community, and without the empowerment of a whole community there is no chance for women to be empowered. So, without gender equality, women empowerment, and an intersectional perspective in ecotourism in the SSA region, the concept of ecotourism will therefore fail to follow its key principles.

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