

Community-based tourism development and gender relations in Uganda

Brenda Boonabaana – Graduated 2012

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between community-based tourism development and gender relations in Mukono Parish, South-Western Uganda. The research objectives are: to examine how women's involvement in community-based tourism initiatives is influenced by gender relations; and in turn, how women's involvement in community-based tourism initiatives is influencing the gender relations in Mukono Parish. In this PhD thesis, I draw on the concept of agency and the idea of context-based gender understanding as propounded by the poststructural feminist theory (Aitchison, 2005; Gannon & Davis, 2007; Pradan, 2005; Rosenberg, 2010). The concept of agency recognises the view that women are not passive victims of oppression, but are active agents who participate in structuring their identities and lives. The concept helped me to interrogate how women in Mukono Parish are making decisions to submit to, or resist, gender discourses and practices amidst the current community-based tourism developments in this locality.

Methodologically, I adopted a case study research design and privileged my participant's individual views with their voices represented in this thesis in the form of quotations. Qualitative approaches guided me to conduct fieldwork in which I held in-depth interviews, and collected notes through participating observation activities, and informal interactions in the locality. I also remained aware of, and considered, my personal attributes as a researcher, and therefore, the concept of reflexivity became relevant to this PhD thesis. I considered ethical issues to protect my participants, and I analysed findings (while focused on participant meanings) by reflecting, discovering themes, and teaming up emerging ideas.

This thesis demonstrates that the dominant gender discourses and practices in Mukono Parish are intertwined with Christian religious beliefs to significantly influence women's opportunities to work in community-based tourism initiatives. It also shows that as some women work in tourism, some of the gender roles and relations of the locality are being challenged, while others still remain dominant. This PhD research has theoretical implications for understanding the role of social aspects including religion in influencing women's possibilities to work in tourism developments at the community level. It also expresses the complex dynamics of women's negotiations about how they are submitting to, and resisting, gender discourses and practices amidst the tourism development opportunities in their locality. The study challenges the dominant feminist views, and gender, women's empowerment and development discourses such as socialist feminism, liberal feminism, radical feminism and gender and development approaches (Women in Development, Women and Development, and Gender and Development), that tend to universalise the understanding and practices associated with issues of women, gender and development. The thesis also provides useful development implications by detailing complex constraints and possibilities for women in Mukono to work, or not to work, in community-based tourism developments in this locality.