

## **Community-Based Tourism in the South West Region of Cameroon: Opportunities and Challenges for Women**

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**Abstract:** *Cameroon like many other sub-Saharan African countries has identified tourism as a sector that can enhance the development of local communities by creating jobs and encouraging income-generating activities. This is expected to help reduce poverty and empower local communities. The challenge, however has been to integrate gender concerns into the tourism industry so that both men and women can benefit equally. Using empirical data, this paper addresses the challenges women face in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the tourism industry to reduce poverty and empower themselves. The paper identifies gender issues, cultural and traditional dictates, low education, limited knowledge of their rights as the major challenges that affect women's participation in and benefits from community-based tourism. The paper further identifies rural women's project that can be transformed and sustained as part of the tourism industry. The paper concludes that unless gender is employed as a unit of analysis in the design and conception of local tourism projects in Cameroon, women's empowerment and poverty reduction through community-based tourism remains a myth.*

**Keywords:** *Community-based, tourism, opportunities, challenges*

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### **I. Introduction**

The main aim of this research is to identify and highlight challenges that women face in benefitting from projects that are not gender sensitive. The paper uses the Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Board (Mount-CEO) to examine the extent to which women can be empowered by community-based tourism. The paper examines the activities of the Mount-CEO to determine the opportunities that it presents to members of the communities and especially for women. Specifically, the paper sets out to:

- Examine the developmental opportunities that come along with the establishment of the Mount-CEO as a community-based tourism project in the South West region of Cameroon;
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the Mount-CEO project and the challenges that women face in participating in the project;
- Determine whether the Mount-CEO project does develop the communities involved, reduce poverty and empower community members especially women;
- Identify rural women's project that could be transformed and sustained as part of the tourism industry.

The paper thus contributes to the debate that community-based tourism like all other development projects need to be conceived and implemented from a gender perspective if all members (boys, girls, men and women) of the community are to benefit equally.

### **Statement of research problem**

Although tourism has usually been referred to the "world's largest industry" (Pera & MC Laren, 1999), many countries in sub-Saharan Africa are still struggling to develop their tourism industry. In Cameroon for example, despite the fact that tourism has been identified as a source of revenue for local communities and the nation at large, tourism is still a relatively minor industry. However, the government of Cameroon has not relented in its efforts to promote tourism in its different forms. Community-based tourism is one of the forms of tourism that directly affects the lives of community members. Considering the fact that community members are made up of males and females, this paper uses Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation (Mount-CEO) to analyse the capacity of community-based tourism to empower women. The Mount-CEO has been in existence for over twenty years, covering large number of communities and also involved in different activities (Ndumbe, 2009). Recognising that men, women, boys and girls have different needs, interests, roles and responsibilities, this paper sets out to investigate the following questions:

- What development opportunities does the Mount-CEO, as a community-based tourism project, present to the South West Region of Cameroon?
- What are the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in the Mount-CEO project and what challenges do women face in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the project?

- Does the Mount-CEO project develop the communities involved? Has it helped in reducing poverty and empowering community members especially women?
- What are some of the women's project in these communities that can be transformed and sustained as part of the tourism industry?

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Rationale for Community-based tourism**

Community-based tourism (CBT) is fast gaining grounds in many parts of the world as an alternative to conventional tourism. This is because this form of tourism places the management, preservation and protection of the culture and environment of a local community in the hands of the community members, and thus giving a more authentic view of the locality (Dunn, 2007). It is also assumed that community-based tourism would provide an opportunity for local communities to develop in a more sustainable manner since community members are called upon to protect the cultural and natural heritage that they have so they can sell it to tourists in its original and authentic form. This form of tourism is also referred to as sustainable tourism. Advocates of sustainable tourism acknowledge that the future of tourism depends on the preservation of natural environments and cultural diversity because that is where the industry is based. Tourism therefore, they say, should not grow at the expense of cultural and environmental preservation. CBT is thus applauded because it takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account. This form of tourism is therefore tourism that is managed and owned by the community, for the community and with the aim of making visitors increase their awareness of the community and its way of life (Suansri, 1997).

In community-based tourism projects, local residents invite tourists to visit their communities and through this they earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs, employers, service providers etc. CBT could be considered a form of pro-poor tourism as it is mostly out to improve the economy of the poor. As Meyer (2003) reveals, pro-poor tourism should increase local employment and local participation in decision-making, while reducing environmental impact. However, the challenge has been to incorporate gender concerns into the various forms of tourism so that both men and women benefit equally from them.

### **Gender Concerns**

Since the early 1960s, women and gender concerns have preoccupied development planners because it was realised that women were not benefitting as much as men from development (Moser, 1998; Pearson, 2000). In a bid to make women benefit equally from development, development planners came up with the Women in Development (WID) approach which focused on including women in development processes in their countries mostly by creating development projects that centred on women and their development. Realising that WID did not solve the problem, since it only added women on to already existing development processes without questioning why women were left out in the first place; the Gender and Development (GAD) approach was introduced. This approach does not focus on women only but on the social construction of gender and the power relation between men and women which has made women to be generally poorer than men. The GAD approach stresses the need to involve men in efforts to improve the status of women (Dunn, 2007).

GAD demonstrates the fact that because of the social construction of gender, gender roles and gender power relations, women and men have different needs and interests and thus are affected differently by development and also play different roles in development. Unequal power relation between men and women gives men control over community resources and decisions. This explains why men and women play different roles in the tourism industry. These roles are often unequal, leaving one gender (male) benefitting more than the other gender (female); the lower levels and occupations with fewer career development opportunities being dominated by women and key managerial positions being dominated by men. Tourism is being promoted by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as a tool which can lead to poverty reduction, empowerment and eventually development. It is assumed that as a part of the economy, tourism does not only employ a significant number of women, but it also provides enormous opportunities for their advancement. It is therefore imperative that it be analysed from a gender perspective to determine what barriers men and women face; who has what; who owns what; who makes decisions; who gains; who loses; who controls etc. (ibid)

For the past few years the UNWTO has been committed to the empowerment of women through tourism. This is evident in the UNWTO's Action Plan which has been regarded as part of its "triple commitment" objectives in the framework of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in the support of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

- tourism should benefit the poor;
- protection of our environment and
- empowerment of women ([www.UNWTO.org](http://www.UNWTO.org)).

Women and men participate differently in tourism. Women's participation is usually temporary and on part-time basis because they need to take care of household responsibilities and this temporary or part-time

participation is usually not financially secure. It has also been proven that although gender roles can be perpetuated in the tourism industry, tourism can also provide opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes by promoting entrepreneurship among women. Community-based tourism projects which are normally of small scale are usually very good at giving such opportunities for women's entrepreneurial development (Norris and Wall, 1994). Women can run small business like restaurants, guest houses or home-stay facilities, small shops, street vending, crafts and handicraft production etc which can lead to economic empowerment and economic independence. However, a lot of information about tourism and its opportunities and advantages is circulated using modern technological innovations like the Internet, worldwide web, e-commerce etc. of which very few rural women have the knowledge.

### **The Cameroon Situation**

Although tourism in Cameroon is a relatively minor industry, the government of Cameroon has been struggling to promote it by creating a Ministry of Tourism since the 1970s. Cameroon is generally referred to by Cameroonians as "Africa in miniature" because of its diversity in climate, culture and vegetation from the desert north to the savannah and then to the equatorial rain forest of the south (Neba, 1999). Due to its historical heritage Cameroon is a bilingual country with two official languages – English and French. The South West region is in the equatorial rain forest region of Cameroon and is one of the two (out of ten) English speaking regions. It has a land area of 27,250km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 1.5 million people (Regional Delegation of Tourism, 2009). The region is home to three mountains (Mt Cameroon, Mt Kupe and the Rumpi Mountain), several large forest reserves and a long coastal black beach that opens to the Atlantic Ocean.

Mount Cameroon is an active volcano in Cameroon near the gulf of Guinea with the most recent eruptions in 1999 and 2000. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, Mount Cameroon is one of Africa's largest volcanoes rising to 4,095 metres (13,420 ft) above the coast of west Cameroon (Ministère du Tourisme et des Loisirs, 2013). It rises from the coast through tropical rainforest to a bare summit which is cold, windy, and occasionally brushed with snow. Tourism activities take place around the Mount Cameroon Region. This region extends from the Atlantic coast to the enormous Mount Cameroon which is the highest mountain of West and Central Africa. Due to the volcanic origin, the surrounding soil is rich in nutrients and provides high fertility for both natural vegetation and farmland.

According to the drastic changes in altitude, the natural vegetation is of great diversity and presents a sequence of vegetation forms. These include mangrove forests and freshwater swamps at sea level, evergreen lowland forests, mountain forests and grasslands (savannah) above 2000 m. These different habitats host various endangered and endemic species such as forest elephant, drill, chimpanzee, Francolin bird, as well as antelopes, reptiles and chameleons. It should be noted that Mt Cameroon is a high biodiversity hot spot with different species of rare birds, butterflies, plants (medicinal and economical) and animals (Ndumbe, 2009).

Apart from the exceptional fauna and flora, the volcano itself, the craters and lava flows of recent eruptions, caves, crater lakes and waterfalls attract nature loving tourists and mountaineers to the region. Furthermore, the beautiful coastline with black sand beaches and river estuaries offers many possibilities for swimming and boating. The Botanical Garden and the Wildlife Centre in Limbe are also beautiful touristic sites that also provide good information on plants and animals of the region ([www.mount-cameroon.org](http://www.mount-cameroon.org)). Tourist activities around the Mt Cameroon area carried out by the Mount Cameroon Inter-communal Ecotourism Board (Mount-CEO) include getting tourists to hike up and around the mountain and visiting areas with rare animal and plant species, craters, lakes etc.

Mount Kupe on its part has an altitude of 2400m above sea level, harbouring 25 endemic bird species in about 329 bird species recorded. The Mountain constitutes one of Africa's most important Endemic Bird Areas and according to Birding Africa, Cameroon holds more endemics than any other West African country and some of Africa's most sought after species, are most easily found in Mt Kupe ([www.birdingafrica.com](http://www.birdingafrica.com)). The main tourist activity here is bird watching.

Cameroon also has large forest reserves the largest of which is found in the South west region and was transformed into a national park. The Korup National Park extends over 1,260 km<sup>2</sup> of mostly undisturbed primary forest and is reputedly one of Africa's oldest and richest rainforests in terms of floral and faunal diversity (Ministère du Tourisme et des Loisirs, 2013). It is the most accessible rainforest national park in Cameroon with basic lodging infrastructure and a large network of trails open to visitors. The park is a popular bird watching destination and famous for primate viewing.

The republic of Cameroon also presents many other forms of tourism amongst which are cultural tourism in the Mankon and Bafut fondoms in the North West region. These fondoms present traditional palaces that are over a hundred years old. They also exhibit sacred forests and a rich variety of birds for bird watching and a variety of objects that are unique to the local cultures (Neba, 1999). The North West region also runs many community-based tourism projects like the Centre for Integrated Rural Development and Environmental Conservation (CIRDEN) whose mission is "Improving livelihoods through community empowerment for

sustainable development” (CIRBEN, 2008). They do this thro environmental protection and agro-forestry, ecotourism and museum promotion, information and communication technology, youth/women empowerment and HIV/AIDS. There is also the Belo rural development project (BERUDEP) which promotes village tours. They try to promote responsible village tourism through activities like trekking, horse ridding, bee-keeping, visit to waterfalls, markets and milking cows. In this project, women are actively involved in bee-keeping and other farming activities, market activities and milking cows. These activities of women are usually presented as part of the tourism package.

Of the above tourism projects, the Mount Cameroon Inter-communal Ecotourism Board (Mount-CEO) was chosen for the study and used to analyse the capacity of community-based tourism to empower women, bringing out the challenges and the chances that grass root women’s development projects have to be considered as tourism activities.

### III. Method

This paper is based on a research carried out by the author. It is a strictly qualitative study that made use of both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was got from documents at the Mount-CEO office and the office of the South West regional delegation of Tourism and Leisure. Primary data on the other hand was got from respondents in the field through interviews and focus group discussion. Of the fifteen villages involved in the Mount-CEO project, eight (8) were randomly selected for study. They are Bokwoango, Likoko-Membea, Bova, Mokunda, Bwassa, Bonakanda, Bokova and Bwiteva. Three respondents (2 women and 1 man) were further selected from each village for interview, given a total of twenty-four respondents in all. This number of respondents was chosen because the communities involved are small and the women have relatively similar lifestyles just like the men too. A larger number of respondents would have still have given the same trend of responses.

More women were selected because the focus of the study was on women and their diverse experiences were needed. The stratified random selection procedure was used to select the female respondents. The women of each village were stratified by age. That is women below 40 years of age and women above 40 years of age. One woman was randomly selected from both strata. The male respondent on the other hand had to be above 40 years to ensure experience. Details can be seen in table 1 below.

**Table1: Distribution of respondents by village**

Village	Respondents		Total
	Female	Male	
Bokwoango	2	1	3
Likoko-Membea	2	1	3
Bova	2	1	3
Mokunda	2	1	3
Bwassa	2	1	3
Bonakanda	2	1	3
Bokova	2	1	3
Bwiteva	2	1	3
Total	16	8	24

As mentioned before, primary data was purely qualitative and was got through unstructured interviews and a focus group discussion. Narrative interview was used because during pre-field visit it was noticed that most of the villagers were illiterate and the researcher thought that this would be a more convenient way to gather information from them. The interviews were conducted in Pidgin English which is the lingua franca of English-speaking Cameroon. Interviews also made the respondents more relaxed and gave room for the researcher to explore all the issues under investigation while giving the respondents the chance to explain themselves to the full. It allowed for in-depth information, detailed experiences and multidimensional accounts of the issues.

Apart from the twenty-four (24) interviews conducted with women and men in the communities, the staff of the Mount-CEO project office and the chief of one of the communities were also interviewed. One focus group discussion of women was held in one of the villages. Ten (10) women, who were not part of the twenty-four respondents interviewed, participated in the focus group discussion. The purpose was to add voices and opinions to that got through interviews. Both the interviews and group discussions were conducted with the help of a guide to ensure that the issues under investigations were addressed. Tape recorders were also used extensively during data collection with the consent of the respondents.

#### **IV. Analysis**

Data analysis is purely qualitative. Audio data from interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed and merged with notes taken down by the researcher. After several readings, the data was categorised following preset categories or themes from the research questions. The data of each category was later sorted out according to their relevance to the themes. Both primary and secondary data from interviews, focus group discussion and relevant documents are merged in analysis.

#### **V. Discussion**

Mount Cameroon Inter-communal Ecotourism Board (Mount-CEO) is a nongovernmental organisation that was initiated by the German Development Corporation (GTZ) in collaboration with some of the local councils around the region. It was developed to promote ecotourism as an instrument that would contribute to biodiversity conservation in the Mount Cameroon region. The focus of the project was to develop community-based sustainable tourism that specialises in organising guided tours within the Mount Cameroon region. Unlike what Dunn (2007) postulates that community-based tourism places management, preservation and culture in the hands of community members, the Mount-CEO project is managed by a project team who are not necessarily members of the communities in the project area. That is, the project manager and staff of the project do not necessarily have to come from the local communities.

Furthermore, according to the manager of the Mount-CEO, the Mount Cameroon region covers 92 villages but only 15 are involved in the project which covers an area of about 1750sq km (50km long and 35km wide). The manager revealed that “these 15 villages were identified as primary stakeholders because they were putting a lot of pressure on the mountain and indiscriminately harvesting the very rare species of plants, animals and birds that are on the mountain”. He further went on to say that the aim of the initiators of the project was to give these hunters and poachers alternative means of earning a living and to educate them on how to sustainably conserve the biodiversity of the Mt. Cameroon area. Thus the project targeted men who were the hunters and farmers putting pressure on the mountain. Women of these villages and communities who are mostly food crop farmers and who do not go far into the forest or up the mountain, were therefore not considered as threat to biodiversity and thus were not the direct target of those who initiated the project. The manager also said that “the issue of gender has never really been considered in the project”

The main office of the project has 5 permanent staff made up of a manager, two office assistants, one secretary and one accountant. Of these, the manager and one office assistant are men while the secretary, accountant and one office assistant are women. The main office is the service provider and has 15 village memberships. Each of these villages has a village ecotourism committee. According to the chief of Bonakanda who was interviewed, the village ecotourism committees are made up of “an average of 12 community members mostly comprising of the guides and porters who take tourists up and around the mountain area”. “Not up to five villages have women in these communities and when they do, there are usually about one or two” he continued.

#### **Involvement Of Men And Women In The Mount-CEO Project**

Interview with the staff of the Mount-CEO revealed that the project is mainly involved in hiking up and around Mt Cameroon. The village ecotourism committees identify those who are actively involved in the mountain and who are considered as threats to biodiversity. “You know, we need them to identify the young people who do hunting around the mountain. These are the people who put pressure on the biodiversity and also know their way around the mountain” said one staff. These people are trained as guides and porters for the tourists, as they can easily take tourists to the areas where you have the different rare species of plants and animals. “Unfortunately they are mostly men” disclosed another staff. “For the three years that I have been a secretary here, I have seen only one girl be a guide and she is not very regular” said the secretary. Contrary to the UNWTO’s expectation of tourism providing enormous expectations for women’s advancement and empowerment, the Mount-CEO project has not really had any direct focus on women.

The guides and porters are paid by the project depending on the number of days spent out. Officially, each day for a guide is 6,000FCFA (about 12.00-13.00 USD) and for a porter 5,000FCFA (about 10.00- 11.00 USD) excluding tips that they often receive from tourists. In addition to offering tourists the opportunity of experiencing nature in its original state, the project manager also added that “the project also offers excursions to villages, visits to tea plantations, cultural evenings with dancing and singing, as well as typical traditional meals in the villages for tourists”.

#### **What Development Opportunities?**

According to the project manager of the Mount-CEO, the project offers enormous developmental opportunities to the communities that are involved in the project. He explained that “the project gives room for the socio-economic development of young boys and girls who act as guides and porters to tourists”. He further said that “cultural evenings in villages during village tours do give women the opportunity in their groups to

earn money from entertaining tourists with dances and songs and meals". The project has also carried out work in some communities. However, from the list of activities that the project has carried out, it was realised that it had built two community halls in two of the villages, electrified one village, and extended water supply in another village. According to management "plans are on the way to do same in all 15 villages covered by the project. The project, it was revealed, had also trained 40 Guides and 158 Porters from the 15 villages and only 3 of them have been women.

### **Challenges For Women**

According to the manager of the Mount-CEO, they offer opportunities for development, poverty reduction and empowerment to the communities. Almost all the women interviewed said that they have not directly benefitted anything from the Mount-CEO project but for the fact that some of them have sons and husbands who were either porters or guides. "It is very difficult for girls or women to be porters....it is a very tedious job" said one respondent. "The village also frowns at girls who want to go up the mountain with strange men considering that hiking is usually more than one day and they have to spend the night" added another. It is therefore assumed that women would benefit from the earnings of their sons and/or husbands who are guides and porters. However, this is not always the case. "I have never gained anything from the project. I hear about it all the time but have nothing to do with it" said another woman. Unmarried women and those who do not have grown up male children say they do not gain anything directly from the project except for community projects like halls and electricity in villages where such things exist. When asked who decides what community project should be carried out in the villages, both management and the respondents from the villages said that the village projects are decided by the chief of the village and his council. "Nothing can be done in the community without the approval of the chief" replied the chief of Bonakanda. It should be noted that very few women are members of village councils because of cultural and traditional dictates. The chief further went on to say that his village council is made up of 15 council members and only two are women. This trend, it was revealed, cuts across all the villages with the highest female representation being four out of sixteen in one of the villages.

Almost all women spoken to in the villages said that women and men have different roles and functions at home and in the community. Both men and women are involved in farming but women are the ones taking care of the home while men manage community affairs. Although all woman interviewed thought that women should be involved in managing community affairs and deciding what the community needs, very few are really involved in community management. "We are also part of the community and should be involved in making decisions that concerns us" said one woman. "A woman's place is at home with the children and not in the council with chiefs" said one man.

The highest level of education of all the women interviewed was secondary education while that of men was a Postgraduate diploma. More than half of the women had never been to school before while all the men had at least primary education. Many of the women were not even aware of the fact that as members of the communities involved in the project they had the right to benefit from the activities of the Mount-CEO. They insist that the project is for the hunters and former poachers who had to be given alternative means of livelihood and whose experience of the mountain was needed so they could serve as guides and porters.

Contrary to what the project manager said about opportunities for women during cultural evenings, almost all the women were not even aware that tourists visiting the mountain presented an opportunity for them to reduce poverty and empower themselves. "We hardly come in contact with the tourists" said one woman. "I don't even know that we could entertain the tourists at the level of the village" said another. "The tourists only come here to climb the mountain. They hardly visit the villages" said one man. However, three women acknowledged that they had experienced village tours from tourists and that happened "a long time ago". The rest of the women said they had never witnessed it and did not even know that something like that existed. Nevertheless there was one woman who is running a guest house that the project uses sparingly to accommodate some of its guests.

Although Mount-CEO has been holding seminars and training inviting interested participants from the communities, very few women have had any interests attending. Most often the women either do not think that such meetings concern them. "What they say there is of very little consequence to us" said one woman. "I have so much to do at home for my family and have no time for things like that" said another. Many of them do not even think that such trainings and seminars would benefit them in any way. "We have done all we can to get women to attend our seminars and training sessions to no avail" the manager explained. "I can also understand them" continued the manager "because the few women that attend find it very challenging as their level of education most often does not permit them achieve much". However, it was revealed that, one woman who has been very involved in the project from its inception has had two of her daughters employed by the project and one of them even acting as a guide at one time. She prepares the local meal "kwacoco bible" and sells in front of the project office and to porters and guides and some tourists who are going up the mountain. Coupled with some farming, she acknowledged that she does realise enough money to take care of her family.

In relation to women's projects that could be made part of the tourism package, the women revealed that they were involved in different activities. "Some of us are very good dancers and entertaining tourists will not be a problem" said one woman. They revealed that different groups of women were involved in different activities like dancing, singing, farming, weaving and carving of different traditional items etc. all of which could be transformed into beautiful touristic packages. "We also have many traditional forms of entertainment that the visitors would love".

Sex tourism did not really come out as an issue at the level of the local communities as the visitors rarely visit the villages. However, further discussions with management revealed that when some tourists arrive, they are sometimes seen with young girls in the towns and hotels but when they have to go hiking these girls don't come with them. The girls are usually not from the local communities. All the women interviewed also confirmed that they had not noticed sex tourism around the communities.

## **VI. Conclusion and Way Forward**

This paper set out to examine the opportunities that the Mount-CEO, as a community-based tourism project, offers women and the challenges that women face in making use of these challenges. Specifically, the paper has presented the rationale for community-based tourism and its importance to the community. It has also discussed gender concerns in relation to tourism as a tool for development. The paper presented a synopsis of the tourism situation in Cameroon in general and the Mount Cameroon region in particular. It described the activities of the project; examined opportunities for development and the challenges women face in taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the project. The paper finally draws some conclusions and tries to chart a way forward for a gender-sensitive community-based tourism.

As a community-based tourism project, the Mount Cameroon Inter-communal Ecotourism Board does very little to reduce poverty among women or even empower them. This is because women or gender was not considered as a variable when the project was being conceived. Women were never the target and thus the project concentrates on those who were the target at conception (hunters and poachers). The goal of the project is the conservation of biodiversity and since women were not considered as a threat to biodiversity, they were never targeted. Along the line, when the project started involving communities, women came in as an "add-on" to the project. This however does not seem to be helpful because no particular tourism activities have been designed with women in mind. Even the village tours that are supposed to give women some opportunities to make money through entertainment and feeding of tourists have not been regular as it was not considered a priority component.

Although tourism provides a range of activities where women can participate and it also creates opportunities for entrepreneurship development in local communities, these can only be possible when there is a conscious effort to that effect. Without a conscious effort to engender tourism by Mount-CEO, their policies and activities that are supposedly gender neutral have become gender blind and/or even perpetuate gender bias. As it has been seen the odds against women benefitting from tourism is very high. Cameroon's national and regional policies on tourism do not yet state a commitment to women's empowerment and while there appear to be a global increase in the participation of women in tourism (70% of the labour force in the tourism sector according to ILO), women in Cameroon are yet to make their mark in this field.

From the Mount-CEO experience, it is very important that women be made specific targets of development projects or else it would bypass them. The goal of women's empowerment has to be clearly stated and gender budgeting done to make sure that resources are allocated to achieve every goal.

Tourism needs to bring about innovative opportunities that can make women strengthen their positions and have control over their lives. In the Mount Cameroon region where women's main activity is farming and small informal businesses, women need to be organised in groups to do large group farming of local food crop and/or their groups can be transformed into co-operatives whereby women can apply for credit to run major businesses like restaurants and motels that can become part of the formal tourism sector.

Community-based tourism is said to make use of local skills and knowledge, it is thus imperative that efforts be made to harness the unique skills that women have, and make it part of the tourism package. Women stand out strongly as home and family resource managers, as keepers of culture and tradition especially in relation to local food preparation, traditional ethnic dressing and performing traditional dances and rituals. This knowledge can be harnessed arranged and managed in such a way that it can attract the interest of tourists.

The idea of village tours also needs to be well developed and proposed to tourists so they can visit communities for a few days and women can get actively involved either through restaurants or eating houses serving indigenous food, entertainment (traditional music and story-telling), crafts, farms, home stay, flower gardening, cultural village etc. Women can also be trained to knit woollen caps, mittens, and socks and run tea houses to sell to tourists, considering that the area is very cold. This can make them be able to empower themselves socially and economically.

There is also further need to build women's capacity by giving them related training on and exposure to tourism activities, credit facilities, and change in mind set. This will make them participate actively and also add value to their already existing activities and/or create new ones to suit the demands of tourism. It is also time traditional rulers are sensitised on the importance of making women part of village decision-making body so that their needs and interests can be taken into account when community projects are earmarked. There should be a more practical engagement towards women's empowerment by local and regional administration, rather than the usual rhetoric.

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