

Does Ecotourism Development Promote Rural Women's Empowerment?

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Abstract

Today, the tourism industry is of great interest in the world a sustainable development strategy. In developing countries with an extremely high rural population, such as Iran, ecotourism is considered as a potential for economic growth. Rural women, as a group with has multi-functional roles in the rural household economy, can be considered the leading players in the development of ecotourism. This; article is prepared as a review. To; find related documents, 12,400 articles were found using Google Scholar and the keywords "Ecotourism" and "entrepreneurship." Then, by adding the word "rural women," the number of articles decreased to 384. Then the title and abstract of the articles were examined and those related to this research were selected. Moreover finally, the studies and investigations conducted to answer the following three questions: What is Ecotourism? Is there a connection between ecotourism and empowerment? Can Ecotourism play a role in empowering rural women? Finally, some recommendations have been presented based the findings.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has a growing contribution to climate change and the destruction of biological resources (Borden et al., 2017). As a result of climate change and the growth of environmental concerns, Ecotourism has attracted much attention among activists and academics. Academically, despite the existence of many studies predicting Ecotourism behaviors, knowledge about the demand factors for Ecotourism is still very limited (This Pham & Thi Khans, 2020). With the growing trend, today, the tourism industry is one of the largest and most influential economic sectors in the world. The; Tourism attractions of in developing countries are primarily natural and based on culture, and the social and economic effects of Ecotourism in developing countries are pronounced. Accordingly, Ecotourism is the most significant, and most effective way of transferring money from developed countries to developing nations. The; main goal of Ecotourism is not only to replace conventional economic activities, but also to integrate and combine tourism with local economic activities, because tourism cannot develop in an isolated environment. Ecotourism is trying to identify sustainable development through ecological integrity, increasing participation; participation of local stakeholders, and taking advantage of economic opportunities. Therefore, it should not be assumed that Ecotourism is the solution to all tourism problems (Wondered, 2020). Ecotourism: creates employment at the local level, and this employment is directly related to both tourism itself and various support and resource management sectors. It develops profitable local industries and provides prosperity to the region by constructing of hotels, restaurants, transportation systems, handicrafts, and local gifts and guide services. Ecotourism; attracts foreign currency. And in this way, also helps the local, regional, and national economies (Roshan Ali & Riahi, 2016). Villagers with Ecotourism combine their entrepreneurial mentality and existing capacities and create a new or improved economic activity called rural Ecotourism, which generates a continuous flow of income; Income and wealth for them (Louis & Lemke, 2016). The development of women's entrepreneurship is one of the most vital topics of the contemporary development agenda in many developing countries. Also, entrepreneurship development and empowerment complement each other. The participation of women in various entrepreneurial activities has empowered them in various social, economic,

and cultural fields and has increased their decision-making power inside and outside the family. Empowering rural women can provide the grounds for reducing poverty in the village. And be a step toward rural development (Falah Haghighi, 2014). Therefore, one of the industries that can play a significant role in creating employment for women is tourism-related industries. This industry affects the improvement of the economic situation of rural women. A large part of tourism investment is in rural tourism and nature tourism, while many men in rural areas are forced to leave their country to find a suitable job. Women can take advantage of these created opportunities. for this reason, by creating jobs related to tourism, it is possible prevent illegal migration to a considerable extent and the process of empowerment, and internal development of the society, especially the rural society.

2. Research method

This article is prepared as a review .Google Scholar was used to find articles related to the subject of this research using the keywords of "ecotourism" and "entrepreneurship," and 12,400 articles were identified in this field. Then, by adding the word "rural women," the number of articles decreased to 384. Then the title and abstract of the articles were examined and those related to this research were selected. Moreover finally, the studies and investigations carried out to answer the three questions raised in this article were prepared and presented.

3. Results

The results of this research are presented in three parts to answer the three questions of the current research.

3.1. What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism refers to Eco-travel or Nature-based tourism. In a comprehensive perspective ecotourism literature, Bjork (2000) considers ecotourism; "an activity in which the authorities, the tourism industry, and tourists and local people provide a trip to pristine and special areas for tourists. To study there, enjoy the nature and culture of that place, and not only extract resources, but also contribute to sustainable development. This

concept is a comprehensive view of tourism, and it identifies different types of stakeholders in Ecotourism, but it is somewhat complex in terms of purpose (Thi Pham & Thi Khaneh, 2020). Ecotourism with explosive growth in the tourism industry, is supported by researchers and thinkers. According to the definition of the International Society of Ecotourism (TIES) in 2015, ecotourism is a responsible trip to natural attractions to enjoy, understand and appreciate nature and accompany the traditional culture of communities to preserve the ecosystem and sustain the culture of the local community that educates the community. Local and host plays an important role in it. In this definition, three concepts are emphasized:

- According to this definition, the tourist must be sensitive to the natural environment.
- A trip where the natural environment is under care and protection measures and the unknown culture of the region is known.
- A trip that seeks to increase the welfare of the host community (Wondirad, 2020).

According to Cobinah(2015) Ecotourism; as a sustainable development strategy is based on five principles: a stimulus for environmental protection, encouraging community participation (cooperation and cooperation of local people); Empowerment of vulnerable groups (for example, women); Providing economic benefits and preserving local culture) (Yagoubi, 2017). The main goal of creating and developing Ecotourism residences with native identity and structure is to achieve sustainable rural development by organizing and providing services to tourists and nature lovers. Ecotourism residences are not only for accommodation, but there are various activities such as preparing local foods and drinks, making, teaching, and selling handicrafts, performing shows and traditional music, holding events and tours. Ecotourism is done. The physical location of the residence is part of a tourist attraction due to the architectural style, organic materials used, interior design, and native furniture The participation of the local community in tourism activities and ecotourism residences is very important. For example, in Indonesia, rural tourism projects in the Borobudur region with the participation of villagers, non-governmental organizations, and tourist guides have led to the promotion of tourism services and rural development. Since the rural development based on rural tourism and Eco-tourist lodges takes place while utilizing local knowledge and relying on the traditions of

the local people, Eco-tourist lodges while respecting the native knowledge of the villagers. Which is the result of their valuable experiences over many centuries; tourism services were created almost exclusively in the cities. It takes them to the heart of the villages and helps their real development. On the other hand, the requirements of planning, development, and management of ecotourism are sustainable, resource management, and protection of natural areas. Sustainable development in ecotourism requires that natural, cultural, and other resources be preserved to supply the resources of the local community without sacrificing future needs. Ecotourism is properly developed based on the concept of sustainability Because ecotourism activities are related to the natural environment, historical heritage, and cultural patterns of these areas (Anabastani et al., 2017). Rural entrepreneurship is a new solution for the development of capability and capacity building in rural areas, which reduces the gap between the city and the countryside, and creates equal economic, social, and environmental opportunities, and is also an important tool for achieving sustainable development. (Ali Tavakoli & Mohedi, 2015) One of the strategies introduced by the planners in the direction of the development of rural areas is the hybrid strategy that includes the practical concepts of entrepreneurship and tourism in these areas, which can be used to identify the huge reserves of unextracted businesses and unearned income. Kurds. The importance of entrepreneurship in rural areas is known as an efficient tool in establishing economic and social progress through creating employment and income; Income opportunities, improving living standards and national self-reliance (Puranjana et al., 2015). Social entrepreneurship is a type of entrepreneurship that has attracted the attention of researchers. (Dacin et al., 2010) . Researchers have defined the concept of social entrepreneurship in two dimensions of the process and its results, such as businesses that pursue non-material goals and also organizations that focus on social responsibility, altruism and benevolence, and social values, which are defined as success in this type of entrepreneurship. Economic is also emphasized. Some studies also show a strong relationship between the desire to discover nature and the promotion of social entrepreneurship for rural tourism. Rural; tourism provides the possibility of promoting entrepreneurship by creating and combining existing resources to create new products and serve new

customers and different markets. (Situmorang et al., 2019). Based on this, entrepreneurs in the field of ecotourism, by creating social values and business activities, invest in host communities that are economically weak, create jobs and businesses. Moreover, through educating customers about environmental issues. Examples related to Ecotourism; have shown that Ecotourism places great emphasis on the capacity of society and the equal distribution of economic benefits. Ecotourism is a type of tourism that aims to create comparative advantages for rural people. For example, it is possible for villagers can host tourists, manage the projects themselves and share the benefits. Therefore, all community-based tourism projects should fairly involve local people in both project benefits and management decisions. This; type of tourism allows tourists to discover local habitats and wildlife and appreciate and respect traditional cultures and rituals. Local communities will also be strengthened in protecting these resources by being aware of the commercial and social values of their natural and cultural heritage (Haring & Claudio, 2014). Ecotourism entrepreneurs, who develop ecotourism businesses; can be known as social entrepreneurs in creating business institutions that simultaneously pursue social values and economic benefits. Sustainable entrepreneurs put sustainability goals at the top of their business goals. In other words, before the goal of wealth creation, sustainability goals are important. The main driver of sustainable entrepreneurship is the effective and efficient use of resources to reduce environmental impacts (Swan & Morgan, 2016). Ecotourism entrepreneurship also requires background factors and the provision of environmental conditions for its formation and realization. The development of ecotourism entrepreneurship means a set of background factors and conditions, policies and legal procedures, and behavioral methods by the principles of entrepreneurship, ecotourism and Sustainable development, which by creating support mechanisms, encouraging and new production methods, leads to an increase in entrepreneurial opportunities, interest, motivation and entrepreneurial skills compatible with preserving the environment and the needs of stakeholders in the field of ecotourism (Sojasi et al., 2016). Together with social entrepreneurs, sustainable entrepreneurs create social values by increasing the production of sustainable products and replacing them with conventional products and services. For example, social entrepreneurs may operate in the recycling cycle of products and use these

products as well. This type of business activity serves communities through the reuse of goods or discarded parts. Ecotourism is also one the example of low-impact commercial activities based on protecting natural resources, creating local job opportunities, minimizing economic benefits outside of local communities, and protecting cultural traditions. Is Such events creating social values and social stability? Ecotourism entrepreneurship may also occur when entrepreneurial individuals seek to balance their lifestyles and business enterprises. Studies on the ecotourism industry have shown that activists in this field seek to increase autonomy and control over decisions. Lifestyle entrepreneurs choose this method to escape the obstacles of professional careers. Ecotourism business is included in this category of entrepreneurship. In other words, ecotourism entrepreneurs choose opportunities to manage their activities by following business trends based on personal goals, interests, and desires. Therefore, Ecotourism provides a complete path for an ecotourism entrepreneur with financial, social, sustainable, and lifestyle goals. Although the roles and priorities of Ecotourism; entrepreneurship are still not fully known (Swan & Morgan, 2016).

3.2. Is there a connection between ecotourism and empowerment?

Ecotourism; is especially important for the success of the welfare programs of local people and their environment. For local people to maximize their benefits and have control over ecotourism programs in their areas, Akama (1996) has proposed initiatives aimed at empowering local people: the local community should be involved in decision-making. To be empowered in connection with several types of tourism facilities and environmental protection programs and how to share the costs and benefits of tourism between different stakeholders. (Yagoubi et al., 2017). Ecotourism; helps empower the local community by providing economic, social, political, and psychological benefits. Regular economic achievements resulting from the creation of employment and business opportunities empower society economically. Shuinz's (1999) empowerment framework is designed to provide a mechanism that can determine the effects of ecotourism initiatives on local communities. This empowerment framework can be used by communities and development organizations that plan to develop ecotourism activities. The four levels of empowerment used in this framework (Table 1)

are: psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment. Psychological empowerment occurs when tourism initiatives increase people's self-esteem and pride. Therefore, it can be improved when the sense of pride and self-esteem in terms of visitors' recognition of cultural and natural resources within the community they visit reaches the residents. Also, social empowerment can play an effective role in the economic growth of developing countries. This type of empowerment occurs when tourism activities strengthen local relationships and lead to increased social cohesion. Shiunz's (2000) has defined social empowerment as "a situation in which the sense of cohesion and integration of community members is confirmed or strengthened through activities such as ecotourism." The sharing of community members in the income from ecotourism helps to improve the local livelihood by providing infrastructure, education, and health. This; to live together more harmoniously; therefore, leads to social empowerment. The dimensions of political empowerment are one of the most common aspects of empowerment in tourism planning and development. Residents who become politically empowered in the direction of tourism show political effectiveness and are stimulated to use social and political resources. Knowledge and information, and significantly residents' awareness of residents about the available opportunities, leads to the help of capable people to tourism decision-makers. Sofield (2003) points out that political empowerment mainly occurs in democratic cultures and therefore facilitates the transfer of knowledge and promotion of local leaders. To evaluate the effects of ecotourism in economic empowerment, we must examine the job opportunities created formally and informally, as well as the number of business opportunities created.

Table 1. A framework for determining ecotourism initiatives in local communities.

Types of empowerments	Signs of Empowerment	Signs of lack of Empowerment
Economic empowerment	Ecotourism leads to the creation of sustainable economic benefits for the local community .The improvement of the economic situation leads to the improvement of the water supply system and the construction of houses with more durable materials.	The most benefits of ecotourism go to local elites, non-local operators, and government organizations. Only a small number of people or families have access to the direct economic benefits of ecotourism, while others cannot participate in the distribution of economic benefits due to the lack of capital or appropriate skills.
Psychological Empowerment	The self-confidence of many members of the local community increases due to the presence of tourists and familiarization with cultural values, customs and traditions. Increasing the self-confidence of society leads to their greater desire to seek opportunities for education and learning.	Many people do not share in the benefits of ecotourism. This issue leads to their frustration, disinterest, and discouragement towards the creating local initiatives.
Social empowerment	Ecotourism maintains or increases the balance of the local community. social cohesion improves when individuals and families work together to create a successful	Some people in the society are influenced by non-native values, and because of this, respect for the native culture decreases. Individuals, families, and

<p>Political empowerment</p>	<p>business.</p> <p>Associations and unions that follow eco-tourism activities provide the opportunity to present the opinions of social groups (such as women, youth and other disadvantaged groups), and in this way, Opportunities are provided for the participation of these groups in decision-making structures.</p>	<p>ethnic and economic groups have destructive competition with each other to achieve the benefits of ecotourism</p> <p>Society has autocratic and selfish leadership. Institutions implementing and supervising eco-tourism activities consider the local community as passive members, and they do not participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, most of society feels that they cannot express their opinions regarding what ecotourism initiatives should be, and how they should be designed.</p>
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Source: Yagoubi et al., 2017

This framework can be used for both western countries and developing countries. However, considering that its main idea is the concept of empowerment, perhaps it is more appropriate to analyze the access of indigenous people or more disadvantaged groups in a region to the benefits of ecotourism. In developing countries; if the development plan is well formulated, and carefully managed, ecotourism will lead to an increase in the following:

- Wise use of natural and cultural resources
- Using traditional knowledge, protecting resources, and managing landscapes
- Public participation and empowerment as a self-reliant tourism development model

3.3. Can ecotourism play a role in empowering rural women?

Although achieving sustainable development in all fields (family, social and economic) will not be possible without the participation of women, recent studies have shown that different social and cultural factors, and numerous expectations from women, strongly require their participation. Has limited. These issues are especially evident in rural women. Unfortunately, the role of women in rural development programs is not given importance and that is why many programs and projects around the world have failed. To use women's potentials, one should have a proper understanding of their conditions and activities (Savari et al., 2020). Global statistics have shown that women are 48.5% of the workforce in the world, but compared to men, they face obstacles such a lack of economic mobility and decision-making power. The gender gap is the most critical obstacle due to a lack of access to essential resources, However, forecasts show that in 2025 this indicator will decrease to 25%, which is the result of an increase of 5.8 trillion dollars in the global GDP. The theory of priorities states that entrepreneurship among women is more than is expected; It is much less. These societies state that achieving equal opportunities in economic, and political participation in countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Finland ,respectively have reduced the gender gap. These countries have anti-discrimination laws and policies to protect the family and gender equality in the division of labor and eliminate pressures that lead to the loss of work-life balance, including self-employment. For example, collaboration in childcare has led to an increase in the number of women in the workforce, as well as establishing a work-life balance; It increases entrepreneurship among women. Family-friendly policies have often failed to achieve their goals. Because women who are often self-employed still do their traditional and conventional jobs (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020). Empowering women is a process in which women become aware of the power relations in their lives, and with increasing self-confidence, they can take necessary measures against the challenges of inequality (Oxaal and Baden, 1997).

Rural women have an essential and decisive role in the process of rural development. As far as economically, rural women produce more than half of the food is produced in rural areas. Women are the managers of the household economy; they are responsible for many activities related to the

preparation, storage, and processing of food, and in matters related to the maintenance of livestock, food preparation, fuel collection and rural management, maintaining Natural resources, etc. household economy, handicraft production, ecotourism play a prominent role. It is obvious that a significant share of the income of rural households is obtained through the activities of women, and even in some cases, the share of women's income in the household economy is more than that of men. In food processing, the managerial role of women can be seen from the stage of food production and supply to fuel collection and supply (Arabkhani et al., 2018). Due to the important role of gender inequalities in marginalizing women in social, economic, cultural, and political affairs and the role of these inequalities as an obstacle to the development of societies and to help equality and empower half of the society, which as women, the concept of empowerment has expanded. Empowering women means that they have high self-esteem, and their actions and words show self-confidence and self-assurance, and they have the power to dream with difficulties and hardships, they can correctly evaluate and accurately recognize. To benefit from their abilities and capabilities to achieve their goals. Rapid environmental changes, rapid population growth and increasing unemployment rate are among the existing challenges. The first step in solving problems is to create a creative and entrepreneurial atmosphere. As a result of structural changes in the environment of economic activities, paying attention to the concepts of entrepreneurship and starting small businesses has been welcomed by experts in various scientific fields such as psychology, sociology, and management. Surveys conducted over the past few decades show that women do not have the necessary facilities for empowerment and poverty reduction; Because the existence of many obstacles and restrictions on the way of changing and transforming the economic and social base of women has made any effort to eliminate their poverty difficult (Gadkari Farad et al., 2018). The role of tourism in empowering women is such that the World Tourism Organization (WTO) chose the slogan "Tourism's Open Doors for Women" as the theme of the tourism year on September 27, 2007 (Bezrajmehri, Khadija et al. 2022). There is a two-way relationship between the tourism industry and women, on the one hand, it is effective in empowering rural women, that is, by creating new job opportunities, it provides the basis for the economic growth of rural women, and on the other

hand, they cause the development of tourism. A clear example of this effect is the activity of women in local handicrafts, which brings income to the host community and causes the development of tourism (Tawakli, 2017). Therefore, touristic residences provide a high level of employment for women in the fields of management and providing services to tourists, tour guides, cooking, reception, sales of food products and local handicrafts, etc., which leads to earning Income has increased their participation and presence in society (Yasuri, Watankhah Klorzi, 2014). Sharpley believes that the development of tourism has increased the role of women in traditional and remote communities. Butler also believes that in the case of women, the development of tourism will increase job opportunities, improve the social base, create employment and self-sufficiency, create opportunities to achieve management and leadership positions and increase their opportunities for activity and position. It results in side effects. In other words, tourism development increases the role of women and youth in traditional and remote communities. Also, tourism development increases job opportunities and improves the social, and economic base of women (Mahdavi, 2018). One of the activities of tourism is the establishment of ecotourism residences, and one of its essential principles is the participation of the host family members, and rural women have a high contribution. These residences, managed by many women entrepreneurs in rural areas with historical context, can provide the possibility of resource protection and sustainable exploitation of the natural attractions of the village on the one hand. On the other hand, by creating jobs and increasing income for women and other local communities, migration to cities is prevented (Saqqaei, 2012).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Ecotourism is a free form of tourism to meet economic, social, and aesthetic needs that protect the social environment, natural environment, and cultural and historical heritage. Ecotourism protects biodiversity and increases the local economy in the regions. Tourism plays an essential role in economic and social development and directly and indirectly has a significant impact on improving the livelihood of poor communities. Ecotourism leads to the empowerment of local communities, reducing adverse environmental effects, increasing cultural and environmental awareness, increasing the country's

economic activities, and exchanging experiences among tourists. The development of tourism increases the role of women in traditional societies and increases job opportunities and improves social relations and economic activities of rural women. Studies on social events in the economy of developed and developing countries have shown that social entrepreneurship has a crucial contribution in creating and diversifying entrepreneurial activities, economic growth, freedom, and empowerment of women. It can be concluded that ecotourism entrepreneurship is a field of the tourism industry that emphasizes the features of environmental sustainability and the use of the native and human potential in tourism-prone areas. Since this type of entrepreneurship has a collective and group nature, the results of studies show that rural women entrepreneurs who have ecotourism, their husbands, fathers, mothers, children or relatives participated in this activity with them. Therefore, it seems that social capital among these people is the main indicator in this type of entrepreneurship. Women's participation in various entrepreneurial activities, including businesses such as ecotourism, empowers different social, economic, and cultural fields and increases their decision-making power inside and outside the family. In other words, rural women with a background of family support with strong bonds of commitment and attachment, as well as environmental and infrastructural backgrounds, will have a strong desire to create ecotourism residences and will pursue social and economic capabilities. Based on the findings, solutions to increase the capacity of rural women in ecotourism such as: ecotourism training, creation of ecotourism organizations, exchange of experiences between experienced people, educational tours from successful ecotourism units in different regions, holding exhibitions and seasonal festivals, taking advantage of the virtual space, removing legal obstacles for creating ecotourism residences, creating a national network of successful ecotourism experiences for rural women are presented. Therefore, identifying the factors affecting rural women's entrepreneurship and trying to develop and strengthen entrepreneurial ecotourism in rural development by providing its primary conditions is of particular importance.

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