FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECOTOURISM

Ige Pirnar

Introduction

International tourism industry is changing rapidly towards more environmental approaches which increase the employment rate by positively impacting welfare of local communities. One of these approaches involves ecotourism applications which is very suitable for female entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurship is a rising global trend in developed, developing, and even less developed nations. Within this regard, female ecotourism entrepreneurship matters deeply for communities and for nations since it is closely linked to income generation, increase in the quality of local life, higher employment rates, human capital accumulation and balanced wealth generation, while focusing on sustainability and environmental awareness. Due to the vitality of the topic, this chapter emphasises the understanding and the concept of female entrepreneurship, the characteristics, motivations, constraints, gender-related differences, and other related issues of the female ecotourism entrepreneurs.

Female entrepreneurship

Female established and managed businesses are one of the main growing and popular entrepreneurial trends (Brush & Cooper, 2012). The female entrepreneurship segment is growing fast and as a result, female entrepreneurship becomes an important economic factor since as The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report states that nearly 274 million female-owned and/or established businesses exist in 74 world economies (Hechavarria, Bullough, Brush, & Edelman, 2019). Female entrepreneurship is a vital topic for all areas of managerial and research fields and tourism industry is one of them. Though the female entrepreneurs are rising in numbers, and the literature related to female entrepreneurship is extensive in parallel (Deng, Liang, Li, & Wang, 2020), female entrepreneurs are rather neglected in the tourism entrepreneurship research, even though the numbers in practice are significant (Page & Ateljevic, 2009).

Female entrepreneurship and woman entrepreneurship are both used interchangeably in the literature and have the same meaning. Other terms commonly used for female entrepreneurship are; female business founder and woman business owner (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2003). As for the definition; female entrepreneurs are business people who start up a new business and deal with the business process from the beginning to the end (Hughes & Jennings, 2012; Zapalska & Brozik, 2014). During the entrepreneurial process, they are involved in making independent
business decisions related to the management (Serafinova & Petrevska, 2018). Thus, for Humbert & Brindley (2015) and Santos, Marques, and Ferreira, (2018), organising, leading, self-employment, having entrepreneurial traits like risk taking, and following innovational approaches are important issues which female entrepreneurship definition should include.

**The importance of female entrepreneurship**

Female entrepreneurship is important to individuals, to regions, and to countries due to its economic and social benefits. Though the number of the benefits and the levels of positive impacts change among developed and developing countries, female entrepreneurship positively contributes to all the societies. Thus, the main economic and social contributions of female entrepreneurship involve: increase in the employment rates, women empowerment, economic growth contribution to the prosperity and local wellbeing, increase in innovation and wealth creation in almost all economies (Minniti & Naudé, 2010; Serafinova & Petrevska, 2018). In addition, according to Berger and Kuckertz (2016, p. 5163), “increased levels of female entrepreneurship can contribute to a higher quality of entrepreneurship through conferring greater diversity” and female eco system starters` social contribution is impressive since they usually concentrate on social goals more than economic goals. Kearins and Schaefer (2017) support this factor by indicating that female entrepreneurs are found to be more environment focused and sustainability oriented in general. Female entrepreneurship usually results in better gender equality and decrease in the inequalities between genders in the business sector. Consequently, we may conclude that since gender equality is an issue which is in direct relationship with sustainability, female entrepreneurship positively impacts social sustainability and sustainable development (Dal Mas & Paoloni, 2019).

In addition to the stated ones, the other female entrepreneurship contributions include: improvement in women’s social confidence, increase in female independence and security, reduction of local poverty and better distribution of earnings and wealth within the society (De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014). Further, Kevehazi suggests that (2016: 90) “the key element of social, economic and environmental sustainability is to extend the women’s personal autonomy, their rights, to strengthen their ventures”, which is a net outcome of female entrepreneurship.

**Personal traits and characteristics of female entrepreneurs**

Entrepreneurs, by definition, are people who start, manage, and run a new business where they figure out new markets and/or market needs and implement new ways to satisfy these needs. They are usually high risk takers, they are open to innovation, they are motivated by progress, and they tolerate changing environmental conditions (Pirnar, 2015). Some of the main entrepreneurial attributes, skills, and characteristics for all genders may be stated as (Brush, De Bruin, & Welter, 2009; Fitriati & Hermiati, 2011; Phelan & Sharpley, 2012):

- Commitment, determination, and perseverance
- Motivation for achievement,
- Orientation for opportunity,
- Internal locus of control
- Persistent managerial, planning, decision-making, and problem-solving skills
- Feedback search
- Tolerance for ambiguity, risk-taking, and failure
- Creativity and innovativeness
- Having a high mental and physical energy level
• Having a long-term and strategic vision
• Having a dynamic nature
• Self-confidence and independence
• Team building and communication abilities

Though the female entrepreneurs possess the similar stated entrepreneurial traits as male entrepreneurs, when compared they have special characteristics specific to their gender. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report annually analyses these differences and presents the analysis results. As the report results indicate, the level and the areas of distinction between male and female entrepreneurs vary from country to country (De Vita et al., 2014). As a generalisation, female entrepreneurs are said to be more cautious, more open to the new ideas, more adaptive to changes, and more social needs oriented. In addition, it is understood that they possess more advanced training skills, they give importance to staff training, they encourage their staff more, and they have improved communication, observation, and problem-solving skills (Krueger, 2000; Ramadani, Hisrich, & Gërguri-Rashiti, 2015). The general comparative characteristics of the female entrepreneurs are summarised in Table 14.1.

It is possible to group the female entrepreneurial traits and characteristics under three subcategories as characteristics related to entrepreneurship, characteristics related to socio-cultural values, and characteristics related to gender role as described further.

1. The characteristics related to entrepreneurship: These are the female entrepreneurs’ common traits and characteristics which are usually similar with the male entrepreneurs. Examples of these characteristics include: self-confidence, risk taking nature, assertiveness, creativeness, innovativeness, competitiveness, and wish for economic independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14.1 The general comparative characteristics of the female entrepreneurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience in the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job factors and entrepreneurial traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from sources: Sexton & Bowman-Upton (1990); Woldie & Adersua (2004); Kepler & Shane (2007); Hughes & Jennings (2012); Ramadani et al. (2015); Hechavarria et al. (2017)
2. The characteristics related to socio-cultural values. These characteristics change from region to region and country to country. Though sometimes these characteristics differ as a specific gender, usually they are similar within the same cultural and social groups. In general, they consist of the level of responsibility sharing, attitude towards respectfulness, being protection and security oriented, being open to partnerships, and being good in teamwork and leadership.

3. Third group consists of the characteristics related to the specific gender role of females. Examples of this type of characteristic include: possessing good communication skills, being better in observation and empathy, having better human relations, and being sensitive to social needs.

Ecotourism and female entrepreneurship

Sustainability is a growing trend for general tourism industry and ecotourism is developed as a sustainable solution to the mass tourism’s negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts (Wishitemi, Momanyi, Ombati, & Okello, 2015). Thus, ecotourism is an alternative tourism product that has a high growth potential with an increasing demand. In relation, ecotourism entrepreneurship is a new entrepreneurial area which is suitable to entrepreneurs dealing with agriculture and/or farmers located in rural areas far away from the seashores and beaches. Ecotourism entrepreneurship is promoted as a local solution and as an Indigenous tourism development to many rural region’s socioeconomic problems (Fuller, Buultjens, & Cummings, 2005). Nowadays, be it developed or developing, in many parts of the world local people contribute to tourism activities as ecotourism entrepreneurs who are sensitive to sustainable, natural, and eco-friendly operations (Thompson, Gillen, & Friess, 2018). As ecotourism entrepreneurs, they market local products to tourists and by doing so they promote sustainability of local values and socio-cultural issues (Tekin & Kasalak, 2014).

“Whether it is defined as an investment opportunity, tourism experience, land-use practice or conservation tool, ecotourism is attractive for those interested in private conservation” (Serenari, Peterson, Wallace, & Stowhas, 2017, p. 1793). Hence, Hayombe, Agong, Mossberg, Malbert, and Odede (2012, p. 160) state that “eco-tourism is specific, delivered by small-scale enterprises involving responsible behaviour, contributes to the conservation of biodiversity, lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources and is a learning experience”. All together combined, some of the benefits of ecotourism applications may be stated as (Honey, 2008): improvement of quality of local life, protecting local values and cultures, socio-economic sustainability, environmental protection, biological conservation, community involvement and development, respect for local cultures, women empowerment, local participation, improvement in responsible tourism, increase in the number of tourism business ownership, infrastructure development, increase in employment and increase in tourist awareness and finally, “the community pride resulting from global recognition of local ecotourism” (Cobbinah, Amenuvor, Black, & Peprah, 2017, p. 39).

Benefits gained by female ecotourism entrepreneurs

When the characteristics of the female ecotourism entrepreneurs are examined, some literature emphasises that compared to their male counterparts some of the female entrepreneurs are motivated more by social causes and environmental protection issues and they prefer to be engaged in green and sustainable issues (Braun, 2010; Kearins & Schaefer, 2017; Dal Mas & Paoloni, 2019). This is a very important fact that makes ecotourism a very promising entrepreneurial investment area for female entrepreneurs. Ecotourism is also a suitable area for
female empowerment through sustainability, local economic development, and rural development (Scheyvens, 2007; Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006; Honey, 2008; Wishitemi et al., 2015).

The individual benefits gained by female ecotourism entrepreneurs are many. The most important ones may be stated as (Scheyvens, 2007; Gentry, 2007; Cobbinah et al., 2017; Morgan & Winker, 2020) increased economic independence, additional income, self-realisation and increased social status, and women’s participation in domestic level decision making like the householding spending and in community-level decision making. In addition, ecotourism can provide rural women new job opportunities, more control over resources, and it also helps their own self-development, self-improvement, and greater self-confidence (Belsky, 1999; Gentry, 2007). Female ecotourism applications often result in an increase in the sense of local cultural pride and high level of training (Scheyvens, 2007; Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006). Yet, in some rare cases ecotourism entrepreneurship gives results to declining birth rates. Female ecotourism empowerment is commonly found in female ecotourism entrepreneurship cases (see Table 14.2) and since female empowerment is one of the most important factors to obtain gender equality, it is possible to conclude that female ecotourism applications lead to gender equality resulting in narrowing the gender gap in the local community (Narwan & Mulia, 2019; Lohne, 2019). To optimise these benefits further, “gender equity planning in specific ecotourism projects may operationalise ecological goals of social movement and development”. (Swain & Swain, 2004, p. 4). Thus, when the benefits of female ecotourism entrepreneurship is gathered, it may be concluded that there are psychological, political, social, and economic benefits that affect both the society and the individual as herself (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, Sotomayor, & Knollenberg, 2019).

For better understanding, the benefits provided by pulled and pushed female ecotourism entrepreneurship may be grouped under three categories, as economic, social, and environmental positive impacts as Figure 14.1 indicates (Anup, 2017).

**Motivations of female ecotourism entrepreneurs: ‘push and pull’ factors**

There are many motivations for female ecotourism entrepreneurs to start and run a new business. According to their motivations, Tambunan (2009) groups female entrepreneurs into three groups as change entrepreneurs, forced entrepreneurs, and created entrepreneurs. Tambunan (2009) describes change female entrepreneurs as women who become entrepreneurs without serious planning. They are usually motivated by keeping occupied or started their business as a hobby. The second group of female entrepreneurs are called forced entrepreneurs who become entrepreneurs due to their situational factors. The death of a family member who is in charge of the business or succession approach in a family business are examples for this type where motivation of the female entrepreneur is mainly financial. Third type of female ecotourism entrepreneurs are called created entrepreneurs who are directed, developed, and encouraged to entrepreneurship. Their main motivations are being independent, having control over business and family time, self-achievement, owning her own business, self-realisation, and being her own boss (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017). Created female entrepreneurs also have social motivators like providing employment to others and being an inspiring role model to their children. They are also grouped under pulled entrepreneurs. Hughes (2003) grouped female entrepreneurs according to their motivations into two groups as affected by ‘push or pull’ factors. In this grouping distribution, pulled female entrepreneurs are attracted to start and establish their own business, whereas ‘pushed’ entrepreneurs are forced to their new and own businesses by environmental forces other than themselves. Some of these environmental factors may occur due to unemployment, underemployment, unfair, or unfavorable working conditions (Yetim, 2008), whereas monetary motivations like profit maximisation are also usually termed as a pull motivational factor for female entrepreneurs (Kirkwood, 2009).
Altogether, the main motivations for both forced/pushed and created/pulled female eco-tourism entrepreneurship may be stated as (Hughes, 2003; Dunn, 2007; Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Bakas, 2017; Deng et al., 2020):

- Self-identity, self-achievement, and self-realisation
- Support of family members, succession in family businesses
- Additional income
- Independency (economic and/or own time)
- Entrepreneurial success stories as role models
- Innovative thinking style and creative personality
- Filling up a pass time, as a hobby
- New opportunities and/or new challenges
- Financial entrepreneurial incentives for females
- Successful role models
- Having self-control over time/flexibility work hours
- Trying something new on one’s own
- Self-satisfaction
- Setting a role model example to a friend, relatives, own children
- Social factors like providing job opportunities and employment for people

When the gender differences are examined, it is observed that both male and female entrepreneurs usually have the same important needs like new opportunities, creative and innovative ideas, personal entrepreneurial characteristics, and applicable and flexible business plans with suitable
strategies. Thus, some motivators like additional income and economic and personal independence are the same for both genders; female ecotourism entrepreneurs are choosing to start their own business in order to balance their work and home time and responsibilities since working hours in tourism industry are usually quite long (McGowan, Redeker, Cooper, & Greenan, 2012).

**Female ecotourism entrepreneurship cases and applications**

Female ecotourism entrepreneurs are found to be quite flexible to changes. Many small businesses like small farms or agri-tourism accommodation enterprises have the ability to adapt to prompt changes and their flexible structure also helps them in uncertain environmental conditions. These establishments tend to be very creative and innovative in the crisis times and respond positively to external negative impacts (Bakas, 2017). Some other additional benefits obtained by female ecotourism entrepreneurs are greater community involvement, having a voice in local activities, and though rarely, sometimes new leadership roles in society (Stronza, 2008; Tran & Walter, 2014).

Due to all the stated motivational issues, positive factors, and provided benefits, there are many successful ecotourism applications which are founded, encouraged, and operated by female entrepreneurs. Table 14.2 lists some of these interesting examples, applications, and cases from all around the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Ecotourism Entrepreneurship Cases and Their Location</th>
<th>References (Authors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study of Guyanese Rain Forest</td>
<td>Dilly (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study in the Province of Bohol, Philippines</td>
<td>Pleno (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEELED community-based tourism project, Thailand</td>
<td>Dunn (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case research in the Peruvian Amazon</td>
<td>Stronza (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Entrepreneurship and Rural Tourism in Greece</td>
<td>Koutsou, Notta, Samathrakis, and Partalidou (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of ecotourism project in Lombok, Indonesia</td>
<td>Schellhorn (2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case of the Isecheno Women’s Conservation Group (CBO)</td>
<td>Barry (2012)</td>
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<td>Isecheno, Kakamega, Western Provence, Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case of Barpak village at Gorkha District of Western Nepal</td>
<td>Acharya and Halpenny (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of Beypazar, Turkey</td>
<td>Kose (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of Giao Xuan CBET project in Vietnam</td>
<td>Tran and Walter (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism development and female empowerment in Botswana</td>
<td>Lenao and Basupi (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of women-centred ecotourism enterprises in Bunyoro, Uganda</td>
<td>Mwesigwa and Mubangizi (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of Abai Village, Malaysia</td>
<td>Kunjuraman and Hussin (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of Women Empowerment through Ecotourism Activities in Lower Kinabatangan Area of Sabah, East Malaysia</td>
<td>Kunjuraman and Hussin (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of Bardia National Park, Nepal</td>
<td>Panta and Thapa (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case of 21 Village, province of Edirne, Turkey</td>
<td>Serinikli (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating Women’s Empowerment through Agritourism: Evidence from Andean Communities</td>
<td>Gil Arroyo et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study of a female-only ecotourism cooperative Orquideas project, Mexico</td>
<td>Morgan and Winker (2020)</td>
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As stated earlier, related literature shows that ecotourism entrepreneurship emphasises female empowerment (Swain & Swain, 2004; Lenao & Basupi, 2016). Local rural women perceive ecotourism projects as promoting socio-cultural empowerment of females and they become better educated with the help of provided educational training and self-development programs. Thus, cases and applications related to female ecotourism entrepreneurship indicate that there is a direct relationship between female empowerment and involvement in environmental protection and sustainability consciousness (Pleno, 2006).

The success factors established in successful female ecotourism entrepreneurial applications include: participation in community networking, increase in decision-making, local innovation, collective responsibility, successful environmental awareness, collective sharing of local resources, increased skills and knowledge on leadership and management.

**Challenges of female ecotourism entrepreneurship**

As there are many female ecotourism entrepreneurship benefits, there exists some challenges that women entrepreneurs should face. Some of the most common ones may be stated as: financial problems to start and run the new business, credit and loan obtaining problems, education and training problems, lack of technical skills and knowledge, and networking problems (Dilly, 2003; Mwangi, 2012). In addition, lack of managerial knowledge, need for special ecological and entrepreneurial training, and high competition between domestic and international establishments are also among the challenging technical issues that female ecotourism entrepreneurs have to overcome (Dunn, 2007; Soysal, 2013; Panta & Thapa, 2018). Moreover, the increase in female ecotourism entrepreneurship leads to increased competition for the ecotourism revenues, which may result in social cohesion and social disharmony in time (Scheyvens, 2007). This case is a proven social challenge since, already, some ecotourism entrepreneurs ask for the availability of official mechanisms for even and fair distribution of ecotourism outcomes (Cobbinah et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in some less developed and developing countries, the gender inequalities occurring from a manifestation of local customs and traditions result in female entrepreneurs’ marginalisation (Gil Arroyo et al., 2019). Not only in less developed countries and developing countries, but also in developed countries, female entrepreneurs face already established social gender roles for domestic work and high family demands in childcare leading to the personal need to balance work and home time. Thus, challenging social gender pressures, discriminatory gender practices, and local prejudices for working women become quite common problems for many female ecotourism entrepreneurs from all over the world (Morgan & Winkler, 2020).

**UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the importance of female ecotourism entrepreneurship**

Nowadays, the global world is facing many vital environmental, social, and economic problems and challenges. To overcome these problems and to find sustainable solutions to global challenges, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 (Gratzer & Keeton, 2017).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are defined as “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity” United Nations (2014, 2015a). Further, the SDGs are building upon globally accepted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) where sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet
their own needs” (Uitto, 2016). There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) taking place in the Agenda which need urgent action by all countries. They are stated as follows (United Nations, 2015b, 2018):

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources.
15. Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies.
17. Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

Global female ecotourism entrepreneurship applications play an important role in achieving some of the stated UN SDGs (Uitto, 2016; Nigar, 2018; Lohne, 2019). For example, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG5: gender equality) (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), 2018) include women’s economic empowerment and since women empowerment is one of the main benefits of female ecotourism entrepreneurship (Sarfaraz, Faghih, & Majd, 2014), it highly contributes to the achievement of SDG5 (gender equality) (Guney-Frahm, 2018; United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Indeed, female ecotourism entrepreneurship has a huge potential for women empowerment and with its related benefits as participation in social life, self-identity, self-achievement and self-realisation, independency, having a voice in local population and such, it helps to achieve SDG5 (Demartini, 2019).

In addition, by improvement in the daily life and local QOL, female ecotourism entrepreneurship contributes to SDG3 (promote wellbeing for all). Krasavac, Karamata, and Djordjevic (2019) state that female entrepreneurs promote sustainable practices in economy, social system, and ecology, which further indicates that female ecotourism entrepreneurs support the achievement of ecology related SDGs. To support this fact, Katila, de Jong, Galloway, Pokorny, and Pacheco (2017) emphasise that girls and women have an important role in sustainable different forest-based activities and sustainable ecotourism forestry. Gratzer and Keeton (2017) indicate that especially in mountain forests and mountain areas, ecotourism entrepreneurship is one of the most important “options for ensuring that local communities benefit from protected areas” which interacts with SDGs 1 and 2 (ending poverty and hunger) and SDG15 (land-based conservation). In addition, Minniti and Naudé (2010) and Alarcón and Cole (2019), mention that by providing jobs and promoting
economic growth and development, female ecotourism entrepreneurship supports SDG8 (promote economic growth, employment).

Kanowski, Yao, and Wyatt (2019) suggest that education and training of ecotourism entrepreneurship may improve environmental awareness and entrepreneurial- and technology-related skills of female ecotourism entrepreneurs, while contributing to SDG4 (quality education) and SDG5 (gender equality). Lastly, with the benefits of cultural preservation and facilitating community partnerships (Movono & Hughes, 2020), female ecotourism entrepreneurship has a potential to positively impact SDG16 (peaceful and inclusive societies).

**Conclusion**

Ecotourism is a vital and promising area for women’s empowerment, which directly and indirectly contributes to many of the UN’s social development goals. Yet, women empowerment in ecotourism and female ecotourism entrepreneurship applications are rapidly increasing due to the provided local and individual sustainable, environmental, psychological, economic, and social benefits. Some of these benefits may be stated as: increased economic independence, additional income, new job creation, increased social status, women’s participation in domestic and/or community level in decision making, more female control over resources, self-improvement and greater self-confidence. In addition, female ecotourism applications often result in increase in the sense of local cultural pride, higher female training and gender equality. All these female ecotourism entrepreneurship benefits and motivations increase the popularity of local and international applications since benefits provided are important to individuals, local communities and countries. Thus, to optimise the associated benefits, it is important to understand not only the concept and motivations of female entrepreneurship, but the challenges and outcomes of the application cases. It is also important to realise the success factors established in successful female ecotourism entrepreneurial applications for better local QOL and rural development outcomes. Some of these success criteria may be stated as: participation in community networking, increase in decision-making, local innovation, collective responsibility, successful environmental awareness, collective sharing of local resources, increased skills, and knowledge on leadership and management.

Overall, this chapter focuses on female ecotourism entrepreneurs in terms of traits, characteristics, motivations, challenges, and gender-related distinctiveness. In addition, the interaction points to female ecotourism entrepreneurship cases and the UN’s social development goals are determined.

**References**


Female Entrepreneurship and Ecotourism


