

**Challenges of Including Local women in Community-based Tourism in Maldives
- Case of Baa Atoll**

By

WAHEED, Aishath Shamrath

THESIS

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

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Committee in charge:

Professor Choi, Seulki, Supervisor



Professor Lim, Lisa



Professor Joo, Yumin



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Abstract

Maldives and its booming tourism industry has opened wide doors for visitors to explore beyond the resort sector of Maldives. As for the communities, this research explores their potential for community-based tourism with the introduction of guesthouse industry. Although, the arising issue of low participation of women in community-based tourism has become a concern that needs to be addressed. Therefore, this qualitative research focuses on the barriers women face in being an inclusive part of community-based tourism as well as the factors of low participation. Research is based on two islands of Baa Atoll which are B. Dharavandhoo and B. Maalhos. This study was focused on two parties; local women and local authority- the island council. Data for this research was done through field observations, In-depth interviews of local women and focus group interviews of island council representatives. Data collection methods were triangulated and arranged in a sequential order for a more systematic and easy analysis procedure. Finally, Challenges, Factors of low participation of women and the suggestions by local authorities were clearly identified through a thematic analysis.

Acknowledgements

The motivation to write a thesis on this topic came from the eye-opening experiences I got while working at the Maldives Ministry of Tourism for a period of around 1 year. Having first-hand experience in assessing how community-based tourism works in the Maldives and getting to listen to women sharing about their challenges gave me an insight of how important this topic is. By the grace of Allah, I have been blessed to complete this project despite great difficulties. This paper would not have been possible without the support of my dear parents for being my constant source of inspiration, for believing in me. I cannot thank enough for the host family I stayed in Baa atoll for the warm hospitality, making it feel like home away from home. The comfortable environment provided had a huge impact on a successful trip to collect data.

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I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the local women of Baa atoll Dharavandhoo and Maalhos for their time in giving me the genuine information and their words of encouragement for my research. Also, Dharavandhoo and Maalhos council representatives for the guidance in fulfilling this research objectives by giving validity to my research through sharing their experiences and expertise.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Republic of Maldives which is located in the Indian Ocean lies south-west of India and is an archipelago of 1,192 coral islands grouped into 26 natural atolls. The island nation is believed to have been populated for over 2500 years, contributing to a distinct language, heritage and traditions developed throughout centuries (Mohamed, 2005). The country known as the tropical paradise of the region of southern Asia has continued to receive consistently increasing numbers of tourists since tourism was introduced in the 1970s. According to statistics from the Ministry of Tourism, Maldives tourism arrivals peaked at a record total of 1.70 million tourists during the year 2019, which represented a 14.7% increase from 2018 figures (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The Maldives recovered 10.7 million tourist bed nights, an occupancy rate of 62.3%, and an average duration of stay of 6.3 during the year 2019 (Ministry of Tourism, 2020b). Despite a strong start to 2020 with a 14.4% increase in January arrivals compared to the previous year, the COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to the tourism industry during the year 2020 (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). The prolonged border closure from 27 March 2020 to 15 July 2020, along with other domestic and international measures aimed to combat COVID-19 caused tourism arrivals to 67.4% to 0.56 million during the year 2020. However, the country was heralded among the tourism industry as a rare success of the year 2020, with the unique geographical composition and ‘one-island one-resort’ hotels paving way for the destination to emerge as a safe haven, culminating in winning the ‘World’s Leading Destination 2020’ award at the World Travel Awards (CNN Travel, 2021). Luxurious market being the top target for tourism in Maldives, 166 registered resorts and 155 resorts in operation was recorded as at January 2020. (Ministry of Tourism, 2021) under the one island-one resort policy separating the resorts and the local islands which was considered as another tourism strategy adapted by the Maldives. It is a known fact that

Maldives is highly reliant on tourism for its foreign exchange earnings, making tourism the centre piece of the Maldivian economy. With major challenges such as climate change, lack of land-based natural and mineral resources, Maldives is still going strong on tourism sector. It is proven with the figures given from Ministry of Tourism Year Book published in 2017 that Maldives has continuously reached its goals of surpassing 1 million tourists since 2013. The following table illustrates the change in tourist arrivals and overall bed nights from 2015-2020, using data from the Maldives Monetary Authority Statistics (2021) (Figure 1)



Figure 1: Historical Tourist Arrivals

Note: Adapted from Maldives Monetary Authority (2021) ‘Real Sector Statistics’

Since the industry evolved in the country in 1970s, the luxury resort sector has been the most powerful area of the industry offering luxurious holidays to the tourists. According to the latest statistics on visitors Survey done by Ministry of Tourism (2019), majority of the tourists visiting the Maldives are interested in exploring the beaches, small islands and mostly the underwater beauty; in simpler words, the visitors to Maldives are travelling for the purpose of enjoying the nature with luxury hospitality. That being highlighted, the report also shows that the majority of the surveyed visitors chose to stay in resorts which is 77% of the respondents

and 11% of respondents chose to stay in guesthouses and hotels. According to the Guesthouses Maldives Association, local tourism or community-based tourism was not a much-spoken subject since 1980s since the guesthouses were shut down by the government in May 1984. According to the Rapid Livelihood Assessment by conducted by UNDP Maldives in 2020, the tourism sector has accounted for 28% of country's GDP as at 2018. The Michigan State University data shows that tourism is the largest contributor to the Maldivian economy, contributing to 60% of foreign exchange earnings (2021). Even if tourism has been the largest economic contributor with large potential for more job opportunities, including women in this industry has been a great challenge therefore exploring the reasons for low participation of women in the industry has been an important area even up until today. The results of a survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics with support of the Ministry of Tourism during mid-2019 indicated that local employees accounted 47% of employees on payroll at tourist resorts, only 10% of payroll employees were female, of which only 3 percent were local female employees (UNDP Maldives, 2020).

Tourism Development in Baa Atoll

Maldives consists of many atolls and Baa atoll is one of the finest atolls for Tourism for its unique features and the speed of development to enhance its potential. Baa atoll is considered to be an administrative division of the Maldives which consists of 3 separate natural atolls; southern Maalhosmadulu (Appendix B) atoll which has 9 inhabited islands, the Faadhippolhu Atoll (Appendix B) and the smaller natural atoll Goidhoo Atoll (Appendix B) which consists of 5 islands. The 13 inhabited islands in the administrative atoll have a registered population of more than 14,759 as at end of year 2019, and a resident population of 9,601 which includes 723 foreigners (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). There are about 57 islands which are uninhabited and 16 islands in the region developed as resorts (Ministry of Tourism, 2021b) Baa atoll became a runaway success when the atoll was identified as a UNESCO Biosphere

reserve, where the whole atoll gains its benefits in different ways such as promoting sustainable tourism development and there by attracting more tourists to the atoll every year. The area chains to one of the largest coral reef groups in the Indian Ocean. This found reserve in Baa atoll is home to substantial biodiversity with global attention. There are noteworthy tourist spots in Baa atoll such as the Hanifaru Bay, the marine protected area where tourists are welcome to see, swim with Manta rays and Whale sharks during seasons of the year, as well as the Baiypolhi Mas; the area is known to be the most exciting dive spot in the area. With the flourishing resort tourism sector in this region - invigorated by the unique features of the atoll - tourism has been growing rapidly with many other impactful developments brought in the islands as well. One of the developments is the introduction of community-based tourism; till now there is no one line definition for community-based tourism in Maldives, but is commonly identified as guesthouse industry in inhabited islands and its related businesses. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2021b), over 43 guesthouses have been opened and been in operation across Baa atoll and it has been increasing month by month as tourists are finding new ways to explore the Maldives besides the luxury resort vacation. Community- based tourism maybe not something new for other countries but is a new concept for Maldives and is a fast-trending concept of tourism. Since the beginning of Tourism, Maldives has been thriving on tourism businesses such as running resorts, safari boats (liveaboard vessels) and a handful of city hotels but not guesthouses until a decade ago. The guesthouse industry boomed with the introduction of the first guesthouse opened in Kaafu Atoll Maafushi. This was only possible because of the new administration in 2008, former President Mohamed Nasheed, aimed to introduce guesthouses, to give an opportunity for everyone to have a chance at entrepreneurship, especially the middle class which covers the majority of the country. As much to give an opportunity for the people of Maldives, this industry opened a new door for tourists who want to visit Maldives not just on a luxury vacation but also people who want to travel under a budget;

this was the point where Maldives was officially opened for middle-class budget travellers. It was a win-win for both parties and this resulted in an increase in tourism in Maldives. According to one of the rising tourism-related media companies, as shown on tourism statistics published by the Ministry of Tourism, up to December 2019, there were 605 guesthouses registered throughout the Maldives and there are 604 guesthouses in operation at year end, representing a registered bed capacity of 9,753 and operational bed capacity of 9,743 (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The historical statistics also show that there were 220 guesthouses with capacity of 3209 beds as at the end of 2014 (Ministry of Tourism, 2015). This shows the rising of the guesthouse industry year by year. Looking at the specific statistics of two islands in Baa Atoll which is focused on this research, Maalhos and Dharavandhoo, guesthouse sector in these two islands have boomed with the increasing of budget travellers travelling to the now famous Baa Atoll.

Women in Public Life

According to author Quinn (2011) on the UNDP report of women in public life, it is a world known fact that the gender gap within the public has become a political debate and is a huge challenge to almost all communities in the world. According to the situational analysis on Maldivian women's public life, the government of Maldives has a strong emphasis on empowering women, encouraging and supporting to take on stronger roles within the community. This has been proven the effort made by the government through different commitments and agreements on the principles of gender equality in different national and international platforms. The biggest support on this particular area of concern was settled with the change in the constitution of Maldives (2008) guaranteeing the equality between women and men. Moreover, national policies have been adopted on the subject of gender mainstreaming and included gender perspectives in planning, policy decisions as well as budgeting. In Maldives, gender roles and the responsibilities come from a cultural background

we have adopted. The so-called culture is that it has always been men who have taken the upper level of social hierarchy and women have always come second or faced challenges in reaching the level. This social behaviour has integrated into the Maldivian culture by the influence of South Asian Heritage and as well as the Islamic tradition. Gender inequality in political, social and economic are consequences of the practical, organizational and cultural barriers which women face in participating in the public life in the community. In the Maldivian society, gender identity is defined through where the woman stands in the social sphere as in her socio-economic status and the urban living contrasted with outer islands. Therefore, not all women share the same challenges and opportunities to participate in public life. Despite the efforts made on a national level, even up until this day, women are underrepresented and women's capacity of contributing to the economy is often undermined, especially in the area of decision making and taking leadership roles. In the report by UNDP based on women's public life in Maldives, they have highlighted many important points in the form of recommendations to improve and strengthen the role of women in the community. These recommendations include increasing policy dialogues, raising awareness on these issues, developing government strategies towards improvement of these concerns, building relationships and networking and more.

Problem Statement

Tourism being the highest contributor to the country's GDP and plays a vital role in the development, it is an important factor that both men and women must be equally given the opportunity to work in this sector. According to graph by Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in 2008, only 3% of women are involved in the Tourism Sector. According to the Maldives Population and Housing Census 2014, looking at the employment rate in general, the number of males employed was 146,059 and only 59,511 females were employed. This also shows the low participation of women in employment and especially in Tourism Industry.

Women involvement in Resort Sector in Tourism have been steadily recorded throughout the years. Even though this is the case, participation of women in community-based tourism or local tourism was not recorded well throughout the evolvement of this concept in the Maldives. As guesthouse industry is a huge part of the community-based Tourism, participation of women in this sector have been cleared through the registration system from Ministry of Tourism. According to a personal communication with Ms. Naziya Director of Quality Assurance and Registration section, there is a total of 615 guesthouses has been registered up until 23rd November 2017 and only 29 guesthouses are registered by women. Director also highlighted the fact that the trend of women becoming the in-charge of a tourist facility has been as recent as 26th January 2012 when the first guesthouse started its operation under a woman. This gives a clear idea that women participation in entrepreneurial activity and different areas of community-based tourism are very low. This also brings us to the main focus of finding the challenges of including women in community-based Tourism.

Purpose of Study

This paper is based on a qualitative study on Baa atoll Dharavandhoo and Maalhos which are two of the most dominant islands in community-based tourism in recent years. This paper aims to shed light on an important issue which Maldives need to tackle in the near future. As community-based Tourism is developing in Maldives, it is also hoped to connect Tourism with the locals so that the locals get to be a part of the whole process and receive its benefits; to improve their livelihood etc. Baa atoll being the top-notch destination for Community-based tourism as well as the resort sector, it is important to identify the reasons for low participation of women in the sector in order to find possible solutions to improve the level female involvement and empower women in this sector. Moreover, since Maldives being a part of the United Nations and the evolvement of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 with major targets to reach by 2030, the researcher believes that this is a vital area to be researched about

in Maldives in order to achieve the goals. This specific topic has a direct connection with SDG 5- Gender Equality and Empowering All women and girls and have an indirect connection to SDG 11- Sustainable cities and communities. The researcher believes that by looking at the low participation of women in the community-based tourism in the Maldives in which this research is based on guesthouse industry and other local businesses, a greater effort must be made to empower women and girls in the tourism industry; the industry which the Maldivian economy highly depends on. And by achieving this, it can also have a huge improvement on Sustaining the city in this case islands, and communities of Maldives. During the beginning of this study, many have questioned the researcher why the research was focused on two islands of an atoll so far away from the capital of Maldives. There are many reasons to it, one of the main reasons is that all government and main private intuitions are located in Male' the capital. And it has been known that to tackle challenges for people living in Male' has been way easier than people living in the far islands such as the Baa Atoll. As this research is focused on finding the challenges women face in being included in community-based tourism, the researcher believed that this research would be more worthwhile and would contribute more if the research is focused further away from the capital. Another purpose of this study is to widen this subject and make it important for people to realize this is an area that must be researched about in the Maldives.

Research Questions

- 1- What are the major opportunity gaps for local women in participating in community-based tourism activities?
- 2- What are the contributing factors for low participation of women?
- 3- What are the suggestions by the decision makers to improve the current status of women with challenges?

The research questions were formed based on the problem statement and the purpose of studying this specific area. The research questions give a clear idea on what kind of information should be drawn from the study in order to give a clear answer to the questions at the end of this thesis. With the research questions, this thesis will also focus more on the theoretical approaches which are social and cultural values, highlighting more on the current gender issues along with optimism, participation and the glass-ceiling concept.

Layout of Thesis

It is important to highlight how this paper will be presented in chapters. After the Abstract, giving a quick view on the important highlights of the whole thesis, comes Acknowledgement followed by Tables of Content. This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter includes Introduction, including two topics; looking into the Tourism development in Baa Atoll and Role of women in public life. This is followed by the problem statement, Research purpose and Questions. Chapter two gives importance on the previous research also known as the Literature review. Moving forward with chapter 3 will include Methodology. This part consists of information on design and methods used for this research, it also includes description of three methods; Observation, Interviews and Academic Review, Data Triangulation, Selection of cases and finally Data and analysis procedure, The second last chapter of this research is Chapter 4 which includes Observation of Case 1 and Case 2. Findings and Discussions have been discussed for each research question. Last but not least, chapter 5 is the conclusion which includes the policy recommendations, constraints and limitations of research and noting areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The United Nations have been working toward sustainable development for a long time now. To achieve this, 2015 marked the introduction of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which includes 17 major goals to be achieved by the year 2030. These goals are No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace and Justice Strong Institutions and Partnerships to Achieve the Goals. These goals are subset with 169 targets. (United Nations, 2015)

United Nations World Tourism Organization states that Tourism is potentially one activity that can contribute directly or indirectly to all the SDGs. Sustainable Tourism is a focus of the 2030 agenda and needs clear set plans with ways to achieve them along with resources required for their achievement such as money, technological investment, infrastructure and human capital (UNWTO, n.d.). One of the ways UNWTO promotes sustainability is by encouraging projects for Community Based Tourism (UNWTO, n.d.). As United Nations gears toward achieving the SDGs for 2030, the issues related to gender such as education, empowerment and equality play a vital role. Tourism as per UNWTO is aimed at providing equal opportunities for women through tourism enterprise and employment and education in the form of technical and vocational training spanning borders and communities. These two aspects if properly channelled through tourism can create ripple effects that can push towards the success of the other development goals (UNWTO, n.d.).

Maldives as a country with a beautiful but vulnerable environment and this environment being the main attraction of the tourism industry, which accounts for most of the economy, the SDGs are incredibly important to its development plans. Combined, the need for sustainable practices in the economic activities especially the tourism industry and the SDGs play a vital role in the future of the small island nation. Sustainable practices by tourism providers and tourists together is the way forward and the survival of the country depends on it.

According to López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011), the structure of community-based tourism can be categorized into four. The first is small tourist offices which can also be tourist guides, which most places do not have proper planning for and thus lacking in relevance or importance. The second category consists of mainly local public administrations, NGOs and universities, places that can work together with the local tourism industry. Third, comes the food and beverage and accommodation providers which provide services directly to the tourists. This also includes shops selling locally produced goods. The last category is the supportive ancillary services such as transportation and finance providers. It cannot be denied that a properly implemented community-based tourism project can provide development to the community as a whole.

López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011) also emphasises that Community Based Tourism is a joint effort of different public administrations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private institutions and the local community. They should all get involved and work together to achieve positive outcomes of community-based tourism projects. Graci & Dodds (2010) and Sebele (2010) also concur on the fact that equal stakeholder participation is required for successful implementation of community-based tourism. This is because combination of knowledge and experience will enable devising of feasible, beneficial and sustainable community-based tourism projects.

The research of López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011) was mainly focused on the developing countries and their scope of community-based tourism along with a field study in *Flowers Route* in El Salvador, an economically underdeveloped small geographical area. By now, Community Based Tourism is not a new concept. When such projects are introduced in an area, there are expectations that infrastructure will grow, demand for local goods such as food and art and craft will generate, and cultural showcases will be in demand. This expectation comes because these are the ways in which the community gains from tourism activities.

As the situation stands, tourism generates a demand for accommodation for the travelers. Young travelers are open to homestays and guesthouses, which are cheaper than hotels. This is a positive impact and is more suited for community-based tourism because most commercial hotels are owned by companies and they do not contribute to the development of the area. Most of the time these companies do not even care about the community they operate in, leaving a negative economic and environment footprint. This was the case in the *Flowers Route* in El Salvador, and thus López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011) surmises that community-based tourism can help to change this scenario and bring about positive change in infrastructure development in the area.

Motivation for community-based tourism comes from different areas. For some it is the preservation of environment and natural resources, (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019) (Forsac-Tata, 2016) and (Kamarudin, 2013) while for many others it means development of its infrastructure. Communities have the hope that introduction of tourism means that the community will get facilities such as electricity, water and sanitation, proper roads and transport. It is also one of the ways education, healthcare and trade is developed. It also means financial independence in the form of businesses and generation of jobs (Gonzalez-Alvarez & Solis-Rodriguez, 2011) and (Aldecua & Barón, 2010). Necessity is also a form of motivation in many communities as they are desperate to find a way to earn an income.

Kamarudin (2013), identified seven barriers for communities not participating in community-based tourism. These are “lack of understanding, lack of resources, reliance on volunteers, lack of access to information, absence of representation in decision-making process, the negative perceptions among government representatives towards local communities and finally, tourism policy timeline restrictions.” It is important to note that these barriers become even more pronounced when women try to enter the industry.

Since the introduction of Tourism to Maldives in 1972, most of the tourism activities have been confined to the resorts (Maldives is most famous for the One Island One Resort concept which is the norm among tourist resorts), day excursions to nearby islands and City Hotels in the capital. Community Based Tourism had been limited to the day excursions which included limited contact with locals and at most, the economic and social contribution came from local souvenir shops even though tourists have shown an interest in the workings of the local community. It wasn't until the introduction of Guest Houses targeting mainly at budget travellers, in the inhabited islands that a semblance of community-based tourism began to take place. Ten years later, while the scope has expanded to include the entire country, it still faces opposition to be defined as community-based tourism because most of the time it benefits only the owners of these businesses. Apart from introducing job opportunities, not much in the way of community growth is generated. Even the job opportunities are mostly handed out to foreigners as the labour is cheaper with many high positions occupied by foreigners as well, which is a result of many of these establishments being partnerships with foreign investors. As this is the case, involvement of women in the field is even more of a challenge.

In most communities, even today, the gender roles are defined by cultural norms where the woman is considered the caretaker of the home and family while the man is considered the income earner. In many communities' women partaking in the provision of tourism services is seen as taboo. Women are seen as weak and only good enough to take care of the household.

Ampumuza (n.d) and Forsac-Tata (2016) both observed this in their respective studies the existence of this culture in African countries. Even in the case of Bahias de Huatulco, in Oaxaca (Mexico), states Aldecua & Barón (2010) that even with women taking part in tourism entrepreneurship, the challenges they face are due to the cultural norms that restrict women to be homemakers.

Reverse these gender roles or merge these roles even a little, and innumerable challenges arise. This gender stereotyping is one of the reasons community-based tourism operation is difficult in many communities that share similar conditions. At first glance, Maldives shares many of the similar characteristics with communities, the researches that have been referenced in this review is based on.

Forsac-Tata (2016), states that women and men partake in tourism activities differently. This is because while men are actively involved in tourism activities on a full-time basis, women take part on a freelance or passing basis as they are responsible for taking care of their households and families. This also results in the women not being able to get financial security out of their tourism activities. While this may be the case, tourism can also assist in challenging the gender stereotypes associated through entrepreneurship. Community based tourism can support the entrepreneurial endeavours of women. Women can run small businesses like restaurants, guest houses or home-stay facilities, small shops, street vending, crafts and handicraft production in addition to many others which can lead to economic empowerment and economic freedom. Forsac-Tata (2016), further elaborates that while opportunities may be there, the issue is getting the information out to the rural communities where modern technology such as computers and internet doesn't exist or are limited and while communities may have these facilities, it should be noted that knowledge of how things such as e-commerce works is lacking in many rural communities.

There is further evidence to support that women face more challenges than men when it comes to getting opportunities to advance in entrepreneurial endeavours. Gonzalez-Alvarez & Solis-Rodriguez (2011) discovered that men possessed more social connections, skills, knowledge and experience compared to women and this is the result of opportunities available, where men are more likely to have these opportunities than women. Dahalan, Jaafar, & Mohd Rosdi (2013), reiterates this point in their hypothesis that “there exist gender differences pertaining to business searching opportunities between men and women.” It must be also noted that while this is the case in many countries, in Maldives the societies’ perception of women in the tourism industry leads to women not pursuing the industry even though there are opportunities for learning available.

The Mount -CEO project on which Forsac-Tata based her study on, saw only one female guide, that too as an irregular employee through the three years its secretary has worked there and while UNWTO’s mission includes women engagement in tourism, the Mount-CEO project had not had any direct focus on women. The manager of the project explains that the project is focused on both genders, providing training as guides and porters. Cultural evenings provide women with the opportunity to earn an income by providing food and entertainment (singing and dancing). While they have trained 40 guides and 158 porters from 15 villages, only 3 were women. (Forsac-Tata, 2016).

During the interviews conducted by Forsac-Tata (2016), it was noted that women have not had any direct benefit from the Mount-CEO project and the only benefit some women got was having husbands or sons that were working as porters or guides. One reason that women are not participating is the nature of the job being tiresome and heavy while another more worrisome issue is the negative perception of women who do this job especially if a tour takes overnight. Character assassination occurs where a woman goes on tour with a group of men, whereas it is not the same for a man even if the tour group consists of women. This makes it

troublesome for those women who are unmarried or only have young sons, as they do not benefit in any way. Aldecua & Barón (2010) mentions that challenges are faced by women due to traditional patriarchal societies which limit women to taking care of the family and the house and women who challenge this are considered bad wives or mothers or generally bad women. It must be noted that most working women are burdened with a lot of work, with employment or entrepreneurship adding to their already hectic lives as wives and mothers.

One of the reasons why women get such a bad image in the tourism industry is the sex tourism industry. There are more female sex workers than male, and women are in turn labelled more cruelly than otherwise, ignoring the fact that many women are forced into it. While places in which a legalized system exists and these societies overlook the existence of these systems, the existence of the industry plays a role in feeding into the fears of rural and conservative societies. Women in the tourism industry are labelled in a very bad way and this has prevented women from pursuing a career path or business in the tourism industry. Parents are fearful of sending their daughters as employees because of how society will perceive them. It would also not be a lie to say that these fears are entirely unfounded.

The projects in these villages as Forsac-Tata (2016) discovered were decided by the village chiefs and their councils. Women representation in these councils are almost non-existent, a result of tradition and culture. Even though the women believe that their participation is required in deciding community affairs, there are only a few participating. Women are relegated to only being capable of taking care of the home, a sentiment of many men not shared by the women. Women representation is very limited especially in positions of worth, which is another result of the patriarchal cultures the women are part of thus, resulting in projects not benefiting women in any significant way. López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011), highlights the importance of including women and youth in the planning of community-based tourism, in order to establish projects that can benefit women as much as men. Women in

communities have successfully managed entrepreneurships and households, melding their personal and business life seamlessly (Aldecua & Barón (2010), establishing themselves as contributors to the society through provision of job opportunities and development.

As for learning opportunities, men were more educated than women, where many women did not even have a basic education. Additionally, in contrast to the manager claiming that women get the chance to earn during cultural evenings, many women were not even aware that tourism activities even take place in the region, reveals Forsac-Tata (2016). Due to the lack of education women do not benefit from seminars and workshops conducted by Mount-CEO. This lack of knowledge is highlighted by López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón (2011). The only difference here was that both men and women are in the same predicament. Dahalan, Jaafar, & Mohd Rosdi (2013), stresses that culture plays a role in the learning of women as this was evidenced in their findings.

Women, despite having resources such as culture, crafts and food to market to tourists do not have the opportunity even though they are willing. This shows that women and their empowerment were not considered while formulating community-based tourism projects, writes Forsac-Tata (2016). Kamarudin (2013) and Abukhalifeh & Wondirad (2019), notes the same abundance of resources and creativity and states that in the communities observed by them, influence plays a big role in opportunity and project management, and gender disparity varies, where some communities participate on equal footing by both men and women, others are more centered toward men. Lack of organizations that are specifically targeting the empowerment of women is a barrier to success as well as lack of financial resources (Aldecua & Barón, 2010).

Looking at the situation of Maldives, it is unique in many ways when compared to the other communities cited in this review. While knowledge and education are an issue in many of them,

Maldives enjoys a literacy rate of 97.73% in the age group of 15 years and older (UNESCO, 2020). It is a mission of the Maldivian government to ensure that education is provided to every child. Tourism is an optional subject for Cambridge Ordinary Level students and tertiary education opportunities are available in the field of tourism, starting from vocational training to management level studies. It is entirely another aspect that challenges the development of community-based tourism and the basis of this centers on culture, one of the key points researched in this paper.

Maldives has many resources derived from the natural beauty of this country such as crafts, cuisine and culture which is underutilized. Community based tourism can assist in utilization of these resources and contribute towards development of these communities in a positive and sustainable way, if all the stakeholders are willing to contribute to the success. An alarming pattern that has been observed is that while tourism development is being done, sustainable practices are far from being implemented. Environmental impact assessments are done for the sake of doing it and consequences are ignored when carrying out projects. Changing this for the better will require introspection and vigilant planning.

In a society which is still struggling with the concept of gender equality, it also becomes a challenge as to how this issue is tackled. Issues relating to women are being highlighted every day and as the rights of women are being discussed, it is important to note that despite the progress Maldives has achieved, it is still a long way off achieving gender equality.

In recent years, the impact of private sector on the development in societies have become a large focus. It is proven by the effort of Maldives National Chamber of commerce and Industry (MNCCI), Ministry of Economic Development (MED) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Maldives in 2010 when they specifically highlighted the roles of corporations as a development strategy and starting the whole concept of UN global compact

network and WBCD to introduce business practices in a sustainable manner. UNDP being a huge part of Maldives development through the years, UNDP's Growing Inclusive Market (GIM) initiative aims to promote businesses as a key to eliminate two main concerns which is poverty and inequality. Inequality issues being an utmost concern of the Maldivian society, this concept has gained its popularity in showing that the private sector can also be a huge part of human development in ways which includes making business models which helps the poor to be involved as consumers, producers, business owners or even employees (GIM, 2010). The researcher believes that this is a great initiative as the private sector role is as important especially in a country like Maldives; where the guesthouse industry is run by mostly private sector like most resorts, safaris and involving an encouraging woman is a huge part of development. According to the UNWTO & UN Women (2010) The findings of the global women and tourism suggests that this industry demands inclusiveness particularly women in both formal and informal sector. The researcher finds this as a true statement as for Maldives, tourism does have a potential to include women not only in guesthouse industry but in any area that the women can earn and contribute to the economy of the Maldives.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research design and methods

This research is a case study using various qualitative research methods. This specific design was selected as this research is based on how the island life is structured, focusing on women and finding the opportunity gaps that have been built as a barrier for them to contribute to the community and community-based tourism. In order to explore and explain, three methods have been adapted and used. Observation, Interviews and Academic reviews on community-based

tourism and women. These three methods are triangulated in a sequential order which is Observation-Interviews- Academic Review



Triangulation of the three methods were essential to find connection from each other to get the analysis in the most accurate manner. Observation as the first method in the sequential order is because in order to grasp the reality of the community, observations were made at different times of the day, at different spots. Based on this observation, interviews were conducted with women at their household. With the information retrieved from both Observation and Interviews, a secondary research method was used to find relevant academic writing on the areas of this research.

Observation

In this research, observation was an important and huge part of the data collection. Observation was crucial as this research was not based on the researcher's place of residence (K. Male', capital city) but was based on Baa. Atoll islands. Initially the researcher had very less knowledge about the surrounding of the targeted islands of this research, therefore in order to get a good picture or an idea about the community, the researcher spent 4 days observing B. Dharavandhoo and 3 days observing the community at B. Maalhos.

Keen observations were done at 4 different times of the day at different locations. Morning, Afternoon, Evening and at Night. Morning time was between 6:30 am until 11:00, Afternoon sessions were from 12:00 – 15:00, Evening session was observed from 16:00 – 18:00 and Night was observed from 19:00 – 22:00. Different times were selected as the movements and works by households and authorities and general surrounding varied at different times of the day. As

for locations, the places were selected carefully so that the researcher could maintain observation in the most accurate way. The locations were, households with women aged between 18-35, island council office, guesthouses, beach/ communal area. The researcher used an observation guideline/plan to make the findings more systematic. Observations were done at different locations at different times on different days.

Before beginning the work, the researcher randomly selected the households within the targeted age group, from the list given by the council office. Consent form was read out to the owner of the household before beginning to observe. As for councils, a letter of requisition was sent highlighting the objective of the research and the consent form signed by the researcher's supervisor as a validated document. Observations were made using the following guidelines which were prepared by the researcher. First step of my observation was identifying the objective of observation. Objective of observation was to get familiar with the surroundings, routine of the households, observe engagements and movements in communal areas, and daily operations of councils. Second part of the guideline was to establish the recording methods. Note taking was the method used to record the observation as most people felt uncomfortable to video record their movements. Thirdly, techniques which was used to observe were identified. The main technique was to observe informally but keeping in mind the main objectives of the observation for the research. The last part of the guideline was to analyse what has been observed. In order to make more sense of the observations, interviews were conducted afterwards to connect between the responses, interactions and behaviours.

Interviews

In this research, Individual interviews were the second method of data collection. There were two targeted parties who were interviewed. They were local women aged between 18-35 and policy/decision makers from each island council and tourism ministry. Interviews were

conducted separately in two islands. For interviews, the researcher spent 5 days in Dharavandhoo and 3 days in B. Maalhos.

A total of 17 people from 17 active households were reached out for interview at B. Dharavandhoo. Out of 17, 10 people from 10 households agreed to be interviewed. The researcher followed a systematic interview procedure. First, the researcher and the interviewee set a specific time to interview, set a peaceful environment with no distraction, researcher introduced herself and specified the objective of the interview, read out the consent letter from researcher's supervisor given for interview and with consent of the interviewee, the interview session was started. All of the interviewees gave consent to mention their name, age but not the name of the household. The second party who were interviewed was the island council representative. Island council's representative was selected for interviews as they are the decision makers for the designated island. With decentralization, under the constitution, the island councils are given authority to make decisions. Therefore, interviews from specific parties had a huge impact in fulfilling the research.

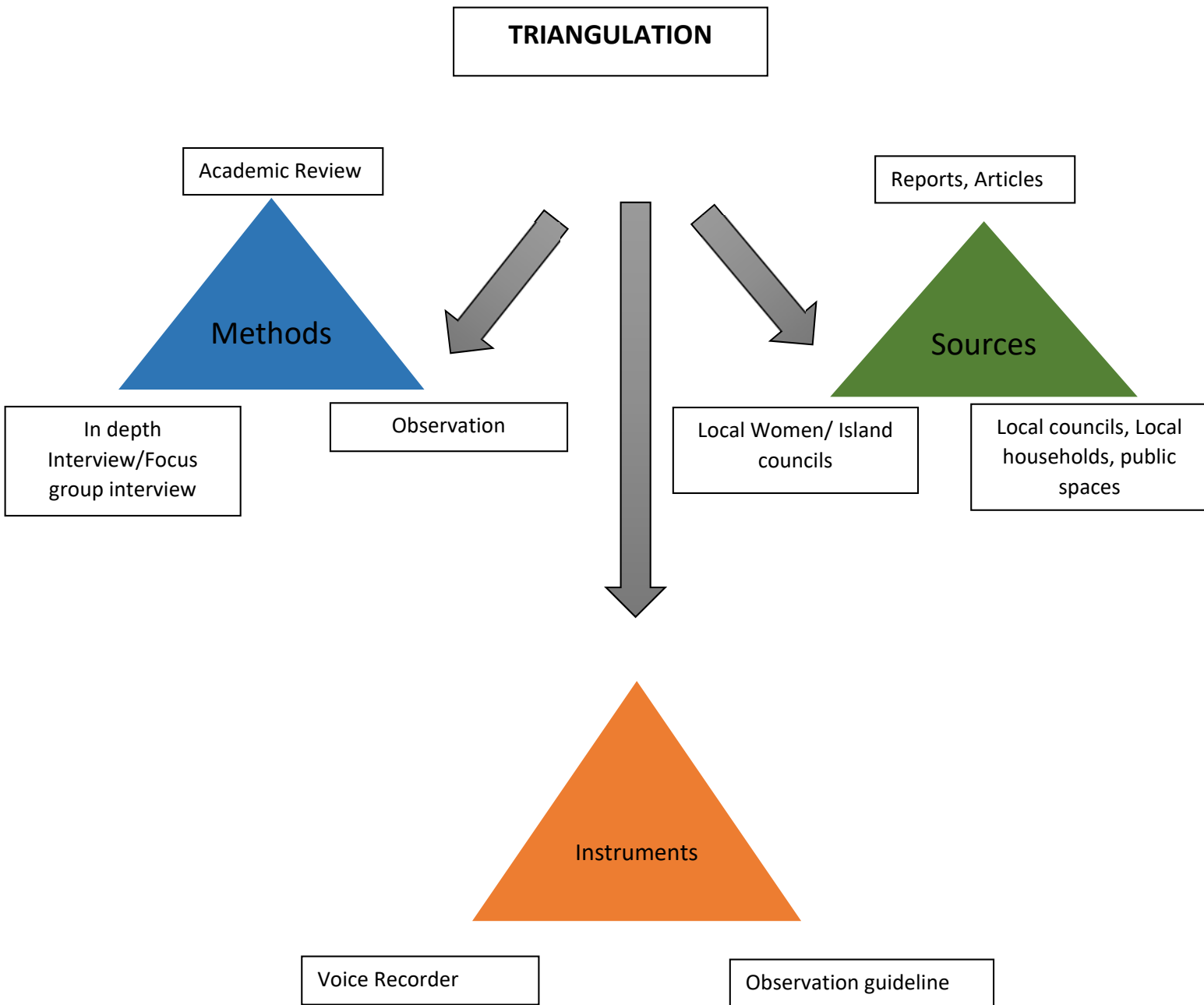
A total of 10 people from 10 different households were reached for interview at B. Maalhos. Out of 10 people from 10 households, 7 people agreed for the interview. The same systematic procedure was carried out for interview in B. Maalhos as well. Second part of interview was conducted with B. Maalhos council member.

Two sets of interview questions were prepared for two parties; interviews with local women and authorities.

Academic Review

In order for data triangulation, academic articles and reports related to the research topic were reviewed in order to get a better understanding of the themes identified in the research. The topics were further related and discussed in this paper.

Triangulation of Data Collection



Selection of Islands

The two islands selected for this study were B. Dharavandhoo and B. Maalhos. As the researcher wanted to focus the study on Baa Atoll, B. Dharavandhoo and B. Maalhos were the most accessible and relevant islands to the research. B. Dharavandhoo is the island where the airport is located. B. Maalhos is just 10 minutes away from B. Dharavandhoo by boat and approximately 5 minutes away from speedboat. Both islands have guesthouses and are near Baa atoll resorts. For this research, it was important to select the islands carefully as to study community-based tourism, the islands must have the proper establishments which tourists can access. Therefore, the researcher selected the islands based on several factors. They are, Island councils must be active, guesthouses must be present, souvenir shops, dive centres, general shops, Island must be accessible to tourists through transportation; by Sea and Air.

Data Analysis Procedure

There were two methods of primary data collection; Observation and in-depth interviews. For observation, the researcher took notes while making observations at different locations and spots. In the note making, the researcher has also noted the similar movements, interactions found in different households. Also, daily operations in the council office were also noted during observation. As for interviews, this was the biggest strength of the data the researcher has received for this research. Interviews were conducted in Dhivehi with local women in households as well as the council representatives. Most interviews with local women lasted upto 1 hour. Interviews were then transcribed to English to proceed with analysis. Data was analysed in themes (Thematic analysis) using manual methods. Two islands were identified as Case 1 (B. Dharavandhoo) and Case 2 (B. Maalhos). Respondents from each case were identified by numbers. Eg: Case 1- respondent 1. All responses were put accordingly.

CHAPTER 4

Findings and Discussions

In this chapter, findings of the data collected will give an understanding of the opportunity gaps as well as the factors to low participation of women. These areas were identified by in-depth interviews based on their opinions, suggestions as well their experiences. Moreover, suggestions from the authority which in this research is the local councils of the islands are thoroughly understood and included in the findings. Later, findings are further discussed by the researcher in order to answer the research question.

Observation of Case 1: B. Dharavandhoo

General observation of inside of selective households

The houses were located in the middle of the island, each house was next to another but is covered by coral filled walls so that the houses were separated from each other. In each of the selective houses, there was coast sand roofless area (compound) which the residence used to dry fishes, put out laundry in the sun, for children to play and dry the utensils of the kitchen mostly. Each house observed had a huge land area. The researcher was given the opportunity to observe these houses at different times of the day during the week and also observe inside. Most houses had many vacant rooms, when asked informally, the owners said they had enough space to keep their family when visiting their home temporarily. The researcher also observed that in most houses, they have the same routine during the specific times. In the afternoon between 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., most women in the houses are done with lunch preparation and are getting their children to get ready for school, as school started at 12:45 p.m. This is also lunch break time to most of the women working at offices such as the island hospital, general and sewing shops and councils. Researcher can observe that women of the house were restless and active till Asr time at 3:30 p.m. Most of them were very occupied with cleaning, gardening,

dressmaking, working on traditional ekel, making buns for island business, doing laundry and some were already getting ready for evening tea, making short-eats for when their children came home from school. Throughout the session, researcher could observe that everyone in the house except seniors are very tech-savvy. Noting that many are using different gadgets; smart phones and uses applications. This was a significant observation made by the researcher. Out of 10 households, 6 households were managed by women, no men (above age 18) were observed within the household. When asked, 4 out of 10 women responded that they were single mothers and 2 women responded that their husbands do not live in the island, they are away for work and comes to the island occasionally. In other 4 households, there were working men and was present at times.

General observation of Dharavandhoo council

Council office, one floor building located next to the island mosque, was observed over 2 days, according to the observation, there were 8 staffs at the office. Most staffs were going in and out of office within the period of 2 hours of observation. Mr Nazeef, a council representative showed around the council office and explained the roles and responsibilities of the members and staffs in the office. Researcher also sat down with Mr. Nazeef to get more information about the island before Interview. The observation was made at their peak hour from 10:00a.m – 12:00 p.m. hours. Council's working hours were from 8:00 am – 2:00 p.m. Observation of Dharavandhoo council was fruitful as the researcher gained insight on the works done within the office.

General observation of public spaces

Early mornings are quiet at B. Dharavandhoo, women come out to sweep the roads and their compounds, some were resting on a woven chair which Maldivians call 'Joali Fathi' with their small children near the beach. Shops were slowly starting to open at as early as 7:00 a.m. so

people's movement were observed that early in the morning. Near the Jetty, researcher observed people getting on ferries to travel to the islands, as there are ferries regularly between islands within Baa Atoll. Luckily, researcher also witnessed bunch of tourists arriving at Dharavandhoo with their backpacks, some were heading to the airport in a buggy, others were escorted to the dive centre located not too far away from the Jetty. At around 9:30 a.m., researcher could observe these tourists walking around the island, curious about what's happening in the houses and picking fruits from fallen trees. They also popped into one of the guesthouses and got themselves some booklets and leaflets. This showed that Dharavandhoo was quite a spot for tourists. Researcher had a brief chat with one of the guides at the dive centre and asked about the turnout of tourists in the island, the guide mentioned that 3 or 4 groups normally visit the island daily, if not for diving, they would visit at least 40 minutes - 1 hour before departure to see the island on their way to the airport. The guide also mentioned "During peak seasons, tourists do visit the island to stay in the guesthouse and experience island life. Guesthouses here are pretty comfortable." (Niyaz, 26) One of the most surprising things the researcher observed was the quietness of the island after 6pm, after sunset. Not much people are around in public areas, except few men and women at the jetty park. Some shops were open till 9:30 pm and the petrol stations were open. Few motorcycles were observed but mostly people in the island moved around by walking and using bicycle, including children. When asked around the island, just 2 shops in the whole island are run by women; one bakery and a small convenient shop. Researcher could observe most of the jobs are filled by men in the island, including council, main corner shops, dive centres as well as guesthouses in the island.

Observation of Case 2: B. Maalhos

General observation of inside of selective households

In this island, houses are built in given plots. while some houses are located near the beach, some houses are also located near agricultural areas where the area is full of huge trees and bushes and the houses are very separated from each other. Researcher observed that there are huge fruit trees in most of the households. Houses were built in concrete and most houses in the island had a backyard or a front yard which they use as children's playing area, sink to wash dishes, dry clothes and some had a carpentry area as well. During the observation, researcher found that in most households, there are extended family living in one space. Observation made between 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. women in houses are very occupied with cleaning, cooking for lunch time and getting their children ready to send them to school. In each household, there were atleast 8-12 people living in one house so the environment seemed very hectic. During the evening, between 3:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., most of households were empty as they go out to the beach with children, and most women go play 'Bashi', a traditional sport which is played by women in Maldives. Most of the households were run by women and the researcher noted that very similar routines were observed in both islands.

General observation of Maalhos council

Researcher's observation session at Maalhos council was scheduled at the peak within office hour. As most of the members of the council were not present at the office, the place was quiet and not much significant activities were noted during the observation.

General observation of public spaces

In early morning, even around 7:00 a.m., very few people are observed on the roads. It is very quiet but the researcher observed few people on the benches near the jetty, also the beach area at that time. Maalhos has one of the most beautiful beaches in the atoll, during the weekend (Friday) researcher observed that many people from nearby islands come to the island for

picnics. Observer also found that a group of 5 tourists arrived in Maalhos on the ferry from 'Ellaidhoo resort and Spa'. When asked around by some locals while observing, they also mentioned that a lot of tourists arrive to the island near to special occasions like Eid where the locals celebrate by making traditional feasts. Observer has found that the island has great potential to cater to tourists as there are active guesthouses, water sports centre as well as a souvenir local shop. Most importantly, researcher could observe the willingness and the hospitality of the locals especially women of the island.

Research Question 1- What are the major opportunity gaps for local women in participating in community-based tourism activities?

This research question was based on to identify and understand the reasons why local women are not or hesitant to participate in community-based tourism activities in the island. As the researcher had in-depth interviews with local women with consent, they started giving a little background of their everyday life to give the researcher a better understanding of how their life is and what they do daily. Observation of the households before the interviews were a great a strength of this research as it gave a better understanding for the researcher before it was actually talked about.

One of the interview questions included if they know what 'community-based tourism' was, most of them were confused to hear the term and was hesitant to answer as they might guess wrong. But when the researcher translated the term to Dhivehi, they were comfortable to answer as related as they could. Case 1 – Respondent 3 (Fasiha, 29) said "I believe it has something to do with society we live in and tourists. Most of the time, we don't even know if tourists are around the island. Even if they do, they probably are looking for a guesthouse." Another respondent, Respondent 8 (Bashira, 35) from Case 1 said that "As you have heard what our life is like, especially with children and with no help, there is absolutely no time to

explore or learn.” This response was also supported by the observation made by the researcher on the background of the daily activities of the households are like; the researcher has observed that women are running the household day and night with taking care of children, doing daily chores so it seemed that they even had very limited to spare to explore their own interests. The responses show that they know there are establishments catering for tourists, but they have very little knowledge of what community-based tourism is. But Respondent 4, 6 and 7 from Case 1 responded that they have a quite good idea of what community-based tourism is as two of them have worked in resorts before and have completed formal education but they specifically mentioned that they do not believe the community receive benefit from the tourists as much as they should. Case 1- Respondent 6 (Mina, 32) specifically said “In this island, there are only one part of people of winning it all, other do not stand a chance.” When asked why, she responded that “Guesthouses are unwilling to take locals even if we have potential so how can we contribute? We are sometimes out of choice.” Case 2- Respondent 3 (Nazeeha, 20) also shared similar response. She highlighted “After my 10th year at school, I was not ready to leave my family instantly. I wanted to gain some work experience in Tourism field, so I applied to two of the guesthouses here, my parents were not very happy about the idea but I did. I did not last too long, I worked at the reception and I am the one supposed to deal with tourists, to show the island, to show them recreational activities but they don’t give me the chance, the management shows excuses, maybe because I am a girl and they think I cannot do it? Later I found they recruited a male foreigner. This is the problem, you, see?” Researcher found that tourist establishments are not supportive of local women recruitments and potential women wanting to pursue in this area are deprived from opportunities. At the same time, researcher also highlighted the fact that time constraint is a huge downfall for local women to pursue the potential in them. It was a goal of the researcher to make the interviewees understand the concept of community-based tourism so that the responses came in more clearly. Responding

to another interview question regarding if they have attempted or if they are doing any business that could contribute to local tourism or community-based tourism, respondents said that they have limited resources when it comes to start a business and earn, Case 1 -Respondent 4 (Naadh, 24) said that “I once started a tiny souvenir shop/space just next to my house, my idea was to collaborate with the guesthouses because I had a friend in one of the there working as a tourist guide, I wanted to sell pendants which me and my sister Aara first started as a project. We started collecting shells for fun, we also made really nice bracelets. We had 2 tourists coming into see our little set up once. We weren’t ready eh, we did not know how to communicate to sell or how to describe, you know what I mean? There are many of my friends who want to start something ourself to earn, but we do not know the first thing about business, really. There is no way to travel another island or Male’ at the moment because my mother is here alone with the rest of my family.” She shared this with hope but highlighting that there are potential people like herself who are in need of proper guidance to start a business or entrepreneurial activities that they could contribute as well as earn from community-based tourism. Researcher was quite impressed by the respondent’s positivity. Case 2 – Respondent 5 (Nunnu, 34) explained a similar occurrence “Okay, so I earned by working in a resort before and I used to travel a lot, I explored a lot of places. Just so you know I am very passionate about Tourism. After few months after my vacation in Philipines back in 2018, I brought two of my friends from abroad to stay at my house in Maalhos, they never had such experience in Maldives before. They had a great time bonding with locals here and they also bought traditional sweets and snacks which my great aunt made from scratch. Basically, what I mean is, this is my understanding of community-based tourism, it should benefit the community while the tourist could enjoy the authenticity of the host country. I want a way for my aunt to earn more by selling these to tourists. But don’t think the system of this country allows for this kind of opportunities” From this conversation, Researcher noted that there are women who are very

passionate about building community through tourism but are unable to do so due to the thinking that there is no platform or an authority to present the ideas. From the in-depth interviews, the researcher identified the possible opportunity gaps that most of the respondents have stressed on including Lack of Awareness on the subject, Time constraints, communication gap, have little no knowledge of start-ups/business or entrepreneurial activities, limited resources and most importantly, lack of platforms to present their ideas. These were the themes identified under the first research question which most of the respondents have highlighted on. The findings suggest that these opportunity gaps women face are very much based on the social construct and it is to minimize these gaps in order for women to take their role in society in their full potential. This would also impact the arising community-based tourism in islands in a large scale. This case study findings also help to shed light on these challenges in different other islands in the atoll as well as other islands across the country due to similar social construct, available resources, opportunity for growth and due to the possibility, that all islands are potential community-based cases due to the arising resort industry in every atoll in the country.

Research Question 2- What are the contributing factors for low participation of women?

It is very clear with observation as well from the interview that there is very low participation of women. The second research question was based to find more of the factors why there is low participation of women in community-based tourism. In order to fulfil this research questions, researcher focused more on identifying specific characteristics rather than general like in the first research question. Interview questions were carefully structured in the way that the researcher could extract the relevant factors from the conversations.

Findings for this research question showed interesting aspects why women's participation are low. Three major factors found were found; Lack of parent's support, societal judgement about women in Tourism related jobs and Lack of Awareness. These factors were highlighted in majority of the respondent's conversations. Case 1 – Respondent 4 (Naadh, 24) said "I want to take this opportunity to tell that most of mothers do not want their daughters to pursue a tourism career including mine. I see the growing industry especially the guesthouse industry. My two friends and I even applied to resorts after grade 10, but my mother wouldn't allow me to go work there nor start an apprenticeship program. She would say 'people won't accept'." Similar responses came from Case 2 – Respondent 7 (Zaisha, 28) "My parents specifically asked me to choose another career than Tourism so I am hesitant to pursue a career in this field. But I cannot lie, I see so much potential in our community if more people supported it. I have a passion to find new ways to explore tourism in my community, if only most people would see it that way but society is too judgmental". The way respondents expressed their thoughts through their experience, frustrated and with disappointment showed that this has been an issue unaddressed for a long time and their dire need to find a solution. Another respondent Case 1 – Respondent 9 (Zau, 30) also highlighted that she believes that there is a certain pressure on women on which career to choose, this is a societal mindset that is needed to change. She addressed this by saying "I feel like many women are trapped in one thinking that we have to choose a specific career, job or even a business that suits the minds of men. Its either staying home or choose what they prefer. This is still the case not only in this island but in many islands as well." Researcher highlighted how this conversation led to the fact that the mindset of people in the society have been shaped to a certain way and their negative judgement towards participation of women. These findings also showed that the researcher could relate the findings of Kamarudin (2013) where the author has identified lack of understanding as one of the factors of low participation of women. From the researcher's understanding, the three

factors were very much interconnected. Due to the lack of awareness of the potential of women and the benefits and the involvement of community-based tourism in the islands, a certain societal judgement is made towards women participating in tourism related activities, due to this, parents especially mothers are hesitant to guide their daughters to pursue tourism as a career nor participate in community-based tourism activities. Exploring the case of these two island cases and identifying the factors of low participation of women was a huge strength for other islands in the atoll and across the country. Findings implies the importance of tackling the factors of low participation women; mindset of people in the communities need be changed especially in regards of women leadership, making community-based tourism activities as inclusive and diverse. This would play a huge role in building a community with parents who are supportive of their children to join community-based tourism businesses, most importantly contribute to the industry. The findings also show that raising awareness regarding community-based tourism, its benefits and the potential of the islands towards this industry is a vital part for community women to be more inclusive and open to more opportunities in the rising industry. Therefore, findings of the cases discussed in this research give huge support to what is needed to be resolved and also improved in other islands across the country.

Research Question 3- What are the suggestions by the decision makers to improve the current status of women in this field?

As the last part of the data collection, interview was conducted with both local council authority members. A total of 3 members were interviewed to fulfil the last research question for this study. Interview questions were structured in a way that the researcher would first understand the role of the council members as decision makers of the islands. Data collection on the challenges identified by the previous interviews, factors of low participation noted down through conversations of previous interviews were presented to the interview session with the local council members.

Tackling the issue of Lack of Awareness

Researcher found that the 3 council members at the focus group interview agreed and are very well aware of the fact that there are so many issues arising within the community due to lack of awareness, in both islands. Case 1 – Council member 1 highlighted that “Despite the relatively young population at Dharavandhoo, elderly leaders of this community play a huge role in the community, with their conservative ways of doing things and them being reluctant to new changes make it a little difficult to change the instilled view on certain areas such as tourism” This showed that most of the negative judgements could be due to this specific reason that the council member has mentioned. It is also found that negative judgments about women’s participation in local or community-based tourism may have impacted a lot of parent’s decisions. In order to find more practical solutions to this specific issue, council members have agreed that there needs to be active participation by the council as an authority to change perceptions about women participation in community-based tourism. The researcher found that the members are very interested and enthusiastic on this subject. Their suggestions included to plan more awareness programs which do not just finish in one session but could conduct continuously and more systematically. Case 2 – council member stated that “What we currently have here is very temporary and don’t make much impact on people in the long term, we need to conduct awareness programs targeted to special groups that need more information on the development of the community which we can solely focus on building through community based tourism” From the positive suggestion by the council member, it showed that they are eager to contribute in educating and changing the mindset of people in the community in order to see good change in the future. Case 2 – council member 1 also added value to the conversation by suggesting a way to keep the track of these awareness programs. He included that “Social surveys could be done throughout the island in a systematic manner so we would know how and what people think, but this might not be easy but it is still possible”. As findings

for this research question, solutions suggested by the authorities would be relevant to be applied in other islands within the atoll as well as other atolls. Raising awareness through continuous education/ trainings targeted for both genders from different age groups would make a huge difference in societal perceptions about certain subjects such as women's leadership in community-based tourism activities, entrepreneurship and most importantly how men could support women in this direction.

Providing more opportunities and women empowerment

The focus group interview enabled council members to agree and disagree on some aspects but their overall commitment towards improvement of the society was very clear to the researcher by their strategic suggestions. Researcher considered it as a strong strength that the feedback by the council members on this subject was very positive. Through the interview, the members were asked on how could they provide more clear paths for more opportunities for women in community-based tourism and activities. Members reflected on their current work towards their efforts in women empowerment and stressed on the fact that councils must be playing a more active role than before. This was supported by Case 1 – council member 1 when he said “Before, all matters to guesthouses in the island are dealt by the Ministry of Tourism, but with new regulations, councils in the islands are given the authority and responsibility of dealing with the guesthouses, now I take this as a great opportunity that we could build and strengthen a good relationship with guesthouse operators and management teams, through them we could also negotiate and find ways to open more opportunities for women to collaborate and most importantly build ‘trust’ in their businesses.” Researcher found that the strategic ideas discussed by the representatives of the council would be a huge support to women wanting to pursue in this area of work and contribution towards building community-based tourism. Another suggestion all three representatives agreed on and supported was to establish women development committee in island level where this could be a great platform for community

discussions, innovation, trainings and education for women. Findings show that there are so many areas that other islands could adapt from what have been identified from these two cases discussed in this research. Introducing women development committees in every island including Baa Atoll islands would be one of the most impactful solutions; encouraging women to take leadership roles, creating opportunities for them to find new ways to establish their ideas in businesses and how to level up their skills to contribute to their community, building stronger bonds between each other and create a better environment for them to be a part of community-based tourism; for the betterment of their island community.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion And Recommendation

Conclusion

This study has explored various important areas specifically the opportunity gaps local women of Baa Atoll; B. Dharavandhoo and B. Maalhos have been facing when it comes to contributing to local tourism in their islands. Despite their enthusiasm, ideas and curiosity to explore community-based tourism, there have been huge barriers that they have not been able to address until today. This research enabled these women to speak up and address what they have been longing to speak about. Therefore, they have been utterly grateful for the opportunity they have been given. With the help of in-depth interviews and observations, the researcher has found that these communities have very potential women figures who could contribute largely to community-based tourism if given the opportunity. The identified opportunity gaps include Lack of awareness on this subject, time constraints, communication gap, limited resources, limited/no knowledge on start-ups or entrepreneurial activities and lack of platforms to present their ideas. Moreover, from the face-face deep conversations with the respondents, the researcher found that there are several and specific factors of low participation of women in

the communities. While some described Education as one of the factors, while most are enthusiastic of the booming tourism in the communities, some families especially mothers are still hesitant to send their daughters to pursue Education in Tourism. Skills are an important aspect of any business; respondents have clearly highlighted that the skill shortage in them is a huge demotivation to start an entrepreneurial activity or a business. This led to highlighting self-esteem as one of the important factors for low participation of women. How people, especially men in the community 'see' them as when they are associated with tourism activities. The last part of the research was focused on to present these factors and opportunity gaps to the local authority which were the councils in each island. Suggestions presented from the council included awareness programs; not only for women but also targeted to men in the island in order to give them information on the arising community-based tourism trends, and to enhance their knowledge on the potential of the islands to receive tourists and to build the community. Secondly, council representatives have highlighted that addressing to the gaps, they plan to have collaborations with guesthouse owners and management teams to find ways to open doors for women to develop skills through their establishments; by offering training opportunities, sponsorship to skill development programs and more. Third suggestion by the council authorities were to establish and strengthen women development committees where women are given opportunities to be elected to leadership roles and establish a firm platform to develop their ideas for the community. Findings from selected cases for this research gives firm ideas for other islands across the country on the type of barriers women face in the islands, where they are deprived from opportunities to enhance themselves and contribute to the rising community-based tourism activities. From the suggestions by the authorities, councils of other islands could also adapt the idea that there are strategic ways to minimize barriers for women and work towards enhancement of community-based tourism together as one supportive community which promotes equality, diversity and inclusiveness.

Recommendation

Within the course of observation and in-depth interviews at these two islands of Baa Atoll, researcher has got insight on different areas which these communities could boost their community-based tourism and as well as minimize the challenges women face in contributing their community. With help of the local governing bodies such as the council, 'Home Stay' programs could be opened to tourists and introduced to these islands. As home stay programs are not yet an introduced concept in anywhere in Maldives, this could be a huge opportunity for the tourists to explore Maldivian culture and tradition first hand by staying at a local home. This could be started as a pilot project. As much as it would be a great opportunity for tourists, this would be an encouragement, hope for women to enhance their skills, to earn and be a part of growing community-based tourism. This could be adapted in many islands such as the two cases selected for this research which are B. Dharavandhoo and B. Maalhos. 'Home stay' as a community-based tourism policy that could be adapted across the country, it has to be carefully studied in different aspects. One of the aspects include safety of the community. The possibility of crimes must be taken into consideration. Therefore, a police station must be present in those islands which this policy is to be adapted. Secondly, as the concept of home stay involves staying in local households to explore the culture and the island lifestyle, researcher finds that maximum health and hygiene standards must be in place. This means that this is something to be cautious about in small communities, the households must provide such an environment for tourists as well as tourists must align with standards that do not disrupt health and hygiene measures. This is vital to be considered in the policy as to secure a healthy environment for all stakeholders.

A second recommendation is summed up based on the observation made during the field visits to the households and observation of movements, engagement of people in public spaces as the researcher found it important to know the surrounding of the community. Second

recommendation is to introduce a community-based online application/platform for promoting community-based tourism in the islands, to showcase souvenirs made by women; traditional snacks, handy crafts and more. This policy recommended by the researcher focuses on improving ICT in the communities. The people of the islands must be aware of the importance of this area in order to improve community-based tourism in a large scale with maximum contribution through online platforms. In order for this policy to be adapted in islands across the country, government and local authorities must give special attention to infrastructural development of the islands; sustainable network connections and other resources which may play a major role in making it more effective for the community. Islands which currently have the resources and government support could easily adapt the strategies recommended. The two recommendations by the researcher were formed in hopes that with exploration and implementation of these recommended strategies, opportunities for growth for women, and contribution to community-based tourism would increase in such potential communities. As councils of the islands play a huge role in the islands, strong local governance could help reach the goals for the community.

Constraints and Limitations of research

In order to make this research a success, there were plans, schedules and certain targets to reach in a specific period of time. As the research was based on Baa Atoll, researcher had to take a flight from Male' to Baa Atoll to collect data. Due to unforeseen circumstances faced during the trip to Baa Atoll, the researcher faced difficulties in reaching targeted dates for data collection during the period. Access to internet was very limited at the location, therefore searching for sources and academic writing was also delayed. During the time at Baa Atoll, Due to the change of environment, researcher had to spend some time to adjust to the new surrounding which was not also taken into account when the plans were made initially.

Researcher hoped to sit in interviews with more local women, but some were very hesitant to speak out on an interview, researcher spent a lot of time out of schedule talking to convince about the research. Researcher fully understood as they were very new to these types of discussions. In this research, the only authority targeted was the island council, no other authorities were involved in finding suggestions. It has been found that there are very limited sources such as articles, papers based on Maldives Community-based tourism.

Further Research

If the research is to be extended, there are several areas that could be included and improved to cover a wider scope of this area. One of the aspects that need to be included in this area of research is to explore 'Home stay' concept further in regards of community-based Tourism. Since Maldives local tourism or community-based tourism is routed towards Guesthouse industry, there is a great need to explore further in this area in order to find ways to encourage and empower women to contribute to the betterment of the community. Home stay could be one of the ways for women to participate in community-based tourism; feasibility and perception of community in regards of home stay programs could be studied. Secondly, research could be extended by studying further on the role of good governance and role of other tourism related authorities such as Tourism Ministry in empowering women in community Based Tourism. In this area, researcher could focus on current policies that needs to strengthen in order to provide more opportunities to women and minimize their barriers within the community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Maldives



Source: WorldAtlas.com

Appendix B: Geography of Baa Atoll and Islands targeted



Source: WorldAtlas.com

Appendix C: Consent form to conduct Interviews

November 26th 2017

From: Professor Seulki Choi

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to you to certify Ms. Aishath Shamrath Waheed, with student ID Number: 201632037, is currently enrolled in Master's Program at KDI School of Public Policy and Management. Ms. Waheed is currently working on her Master's thesis on the challenges of including women in community-based tourism in Maldives, focusing on two islands of Baa Atoll (B. Maalhos and B. Dharavandoo) under my supervision and I have high expectations that Ms. Waheed 's research will contribute to the related academic literature while addressing the current issues and finding possible solutions for women to be more involved in the Tourism Sector of Maldives. Thus, I hereby request your kindness to answer the questions that Ms. Waheed has regarding her research.

I would greatly appreciate your cooperation with this thesis. If you require any additional information, please contact me at chois@kdischool.ac.kr.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Seulki Choi



Associate Professor
KDI School of Public Policy and Management
Email: chois@kdischool.ac.kr
Telephone: 82-44-550-1272
Sejong, Republic of Korea