



Small-Scale Women Entrepreneurs in the Tourism Sector: Do Business Associations Help?

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Abstract

Women-owned enterprises mobilize various resources in order to overcome the structural, institutional and cultural disadvantages which they face. The objective of this paper is to investigate whether the Business Associations (BAs) help these women small scale enterprises in tourism sector to overcome their limitations. A novel contribution of this paper is the analysis of three tourism sectors to study factors that support women entrepreneurs' leadership roles in BAs. This study used a semi-structured questionnaire from 195 women entrepreneurs and 195 men entrepreneurs, as well as key informant interviews, non-participant observation and twenty-four in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs. Respondents own small-scale tourism enterprises in the Hikkaduwa Urban Council (HUC) of Galle District, Sri Lanka. Gender analysis of women's and men's membership, participation and leadership in BAs was conducted. This study found that women entrepreneurs in tourism industry face gender-specific limitations in access to information, training, credit and networks. To overcome these challenges, they gain membership in Business Associations (BAs). However, women's participation in BAs is restricted largely to low-level positions, and leadership positions continue to be monopolized by men. Nevertheless, this study found that women's leadership in BAs varied by sector offering insights into factors supporting women in leadership.

Keywords: *Business Association, Decision-making Power, Gender, Small-scale Enterprises, Sri Lanka, Tourism Industry*

Introduction

Business is one of the ways for women to increase their self-reliance and assert their rights to make choices and control resources, thus eventually challenging and eliminating their own subordination (Keller and Mbeve 1991; Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018). However, social norms which subordinate the women have a huge impact on women's businesses as well as the support systems available in women entrepreneurs. As a result, women-owned enterprises tend to be smaller; and have 30–40% lower profits than enterprises of comparable size owned by men (OECD, 2012).

In Sri Lanka the traditional norms about women's role in society and in the family continue to "persist as stumbling-blocks" for women entrepreneurs (Hewapathirana 2011: 175). As Wellalage and Locke (2013: 116) stated:

"Sri Lankan women are primary caregivers for their families. Bringing up children, preparing food and maintaining the household are the main unpaid duties of all Sri Lankan women. The biggest barriers to women accessing leadership positions are these general norms and cultural practices in the country".

Lower recognition of women as entrepreneurs had been identified as another major barrier to the growth of women's businesses (Hewapirathana 2011). However, women entrepreneurs expressed satisfaction with their businesses, irrespective of size (Madurawala et al., 2016). This can be explained by women's prioritization of their social reputation rather than business success. Women are bounded more tightly to social norms than men as breaking norms has serious social repercussions for women. For women entrepreneurs, "maintaining an unblemished social reputation by adhering to ethical behaviours is given superior value over short-term material gains" (Hewapathirana, 2011: 178). Women entrepreneurs' behaviour is under constant scrutiny, especially their dealings with men. The only way to do this is to avoid the company of men, including business associates, colleagues, counterparts in the government, policy makers, and so on.

Due to these cultural limitations in working with men, and the lack of women in the upper echelons of business and government, women entrepreneurs face more challenges when running their business. Wellalage et al. (2012) pointed out that a masculine or patriarchal corporate culture and the lack of role models are barriers to women accessing leadership

roles in Sri Lanka, even though 28% of Sri Lankan women in paid work were self-employed, mostly in small and marginally profitable enterprises (Department of Census and Statistics, 2010).

Successful entrepreneurs need the support of trusted colleagues, employees, officials, suppliers and buyers. This is a challenge for women entrepreneurs because gender ideologies in Sri Lankan society stigmatise women who socialise with men outside the family. Women therefore use only their kinship ties and networks to support their businesses. This network is limited, and hence, women are unable to meet and gain the support of a larger network of officials, political leaders and other professionals who can support the growth of their businesses. Women entrepreneurs also reported that avenues for learning about market potential or increasing their own skills as an entrepreneur were limited (Madurawala et al., 2016). BAs can play a major role in increasing women's networks, by introducing them to banks, other businesses and suppliers.

Women-owned enterprises mobilize various resources in order to overcome the structural, institutional and cultural disadvantages they face. In this paper, we explore how women perceive Business Associations as a resource to help them overcome these disadvantages. We take Hikkaduwa Urban Council in Sri Lanka as a case study for this purpose. Hikkaduwa Urban Council is one of the most prominent tourist areas in Sri Lanka, and the study focused on enterprises involved in the tourism business, interviewing 390 entrepreneurs (half of them women).

To facilitate more favourable environments and benefits for women entrepreneurs within the tourism sector, this paper argues that BAs need to be more responsive to the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and encourage women in leadership roles. Little research has been conducted on the role of Business Associations from a gender perspective, especially in developing countries.

Literature Review

Women prefer operating Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) because of flexible business hours and the freedom to create innovative products and services for a new consumer market (Hontz et al. 2009: 12). Women start a business to gain some control over their time, and their work/life balance (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018: 784). Prioritizing their gender roles,

women invest in their children's education and food, rather than in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills or expanding their business (Madurawala et al. 2016; McElwee and Al-Riyami 2003; Cliff 1998). Feminist scholars argue that structural discrimination, male dominance and family responsibilities have a negative impact on the performance and development of women-headed businesses (Hearn et al. 2009).

Gender discriminatory practices in the business world also created barriers for women entrepreneurs. Lack of access to information and training, smaller networks in finance and banking, and multiple social roles related to family and childcare were found to be the main reasons behind lower self-confidence and performance among women owners of small business enterprises (Still and Timms, 2000). Flinders University of South Australia (1996 cited in Still and Timms, 2000) found that gendered stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes regarding women's role in business and society was a key factor in the growth and non-growth of entrepreneurial efforts of women and men. Such stereotyped attitudes towards women create multiple barriers for women entrepreneurs in terms of their self-confidence, independence, mobility as well as access to business information, marketing, credit and technology (Vossenber, 2013; Valla, 2001). Despite the increased numbers of women in small business in Australia, "women perceived business to be a masculine-oriented domain, with women suffering exclusion from this 'culture of advantage' which operated against them in the form of gender stereotypes concerning women's capacities, skills and competencies in the world of business" (Still and Timms, 2000: 278). Restricted networking opportunities and social linkages also present major barriers for women entrepreneurs, lowering their business opportunities, access to information and access to training, exposure visits and technical advice (Madurawala et al., 2016). Studying female entrepreneurship in developing countries, Vita et al. (2014) reported that family responsibilities, high fertility rates as well as lack of social legitimacy, low social recognition, inadequate education and training, lack of market information and managerial skills all restrict women's participation in entrepreneurial activities.

One of the avenues through which women entrepreneurs can be supported to overcome these challenges is through Business Associations (BAs). Business Associations (BAs) can be defined as "long-term organizations with formal statutes regulating membership and internal decision making in which the members are individual business people, firms, or other associations not necessarily linked by ownership" or contractual ties (Doner and

Schneider, 2000: 280). According to Costa et al. (2017: 1185), business associations are “intermediaries between business sectors and state/government action through representation, rulemaking and information” and “provide services for their members”.

An association offers tangible and intangible benefits to members including goods, shared physical assets, and indications of trustworthiness and creditworthiness (Olson, 1971). Benefits provided by associations may be classified into two categories: services and influence (Bennett, 1998). Key services provided by BAs include government lobbying, collecting and sharing information, technical support, organizing conferences and exhibitions, conducting trainings, legal assistance, and business certification (Bennett, 1998; Plaza et al., 2014). In terms of influence, BAs strengthen collaboration among members, act collectively to further members’ interests, develop networks both upline and downline, and develop networks within government and private sector (Bennett, 1998). Due to resource constraints, SMEs are more dependent on BAs for services such as information and contacts than multinational corporations (Gashi et al., 2013). Being leaders in BAs are also of importance, since they would be able to utilize BAs to expand their social capital. Doner and Schneider (2000) identified BAs as a possible tool for creating favourable policy environments, and noted that institutional capacity (including networks, trainings, and so on) is a resource that BA leaders can use at their discretion.

BAs provide some benefits to women members and becoming leaders of BAs will greatly enhance their own business, gender stereotypes and women’s exclusion from networks of power and influence work as barriers for women to actively engage with BAs. Researchers (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Brass, 1985; Schein, 2007) have found that men are typically the dominant group in most BAs. To maintain this, men tend to intentionally exclude women from informal interactions through men-only associations and clubs. Socially constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity seem to deeply affect expectations and perceptions of women and men and, consequently, influence their behaviour (Bastian and Zali, 2016). Barriers keeping women out of managerial positions are deeply embedded in the culture and structure of societies and organisations (Arttachariya, 1995).

As the business sector around the world continues to be dominated by men, Acker (1990: 139) notes that organizations and institutions not only display, but also perpetuate male dominance through norms of masculinity which “pervade organizational processes,

marginalizing women and contributing to the maintenance of gender segregation in organizations.” The gendered hierarchy in an organization, Acker (1990) explains, is maintained through arguments about women’s reproductive responsibilities, emotionality and sexuality, as well as through overt controls such as relegating women to lower-levels in the organization, sexual harassment and controls over women’s mobility. While women’s presence in large organizations has been studied considerably, the dynamics of women’s presence in business networks and trade associations are yet to be clearly understood. This study analyses how women perceive BAs in order to gain a nuanced understanding of their participation in BAs.

Objectives of the Research

The objective of this paper is to investigate whether the Business Associations (BAs) help these women small scale enterprises in tourism sector to overcome their limitations.

Research Methodology

Tourism is a fast-growing industry in Sri Lanka, which has been booming since the end of civil war in 2009. The number of tourist arrivals grew 4.5 times, from 447,890 in 2009 to 2,050,832 in 2016 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017). While women’s enterprises are still far fewer than those of men, they have grown at a higher rate in Sri Lankan tourism. This research is focused on the tourism industry in Sri Lanka, and Hikkaduwa, a major tourist destination, is used as a case study. In Hikkaduwa Urban Council (2015), 542 enterprises in the tourism sector in 2014 were owned by men and 197 by women, a growth rate of 37.9% for men and 58.9% for women since 2009. Although women have benefited from the government’s tourism promotion policy, they continue to face challenges in managing and influencing the sector. They face greater difficulty than men in operating their business, and frequently face gender bias in their socio-economic environments (Richardson et al., 2004).

Small Scale Enterprises¹ registered in Hikkaduwa Urban Council (HUC) are spread across 28 sectors, including seven in the tourism industry². Of these seven sectors, accommodation,

¹ According to the Department of Census and Statistics (Amaradiwakara and Gunatilake 2016) in Sri Lanka, a small-scale enterprise is defined as a business that employs less than 25 people.

² They are (i) Accommodation, (ii) Food and Beverage Services, (iii) Recreation and Entertainment, (iv) Transportation, (v) Travel Services, (vi) Tourism – affiliated retail services and (vii) Services.

Food & Beverage (F&B) and tourism – affiliated retail services were selected for the study as they had the largest number of enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs. Table 1 shows the percentage of women and men entrepreneurs in these sectors.

Table 1: Ownership of Small Scale Entrepreneurs in Tourism in HUC in 2014 by Gender

Sector	Business ventures	Men		Women	
		No.	%	No.	%
Accommodation	Guest houses	131	81%	30	19%
	Guest houses with restaurants	46	85%	8	15%
F&B	Restaurants	106	87%	16	13%
	Bakery and short eats centers	17	74%	6	26%
Tourism – affiliated retail services	Groceries	56	79%	15	21%
	Retail shops	81	68%	38	32%
	Ready-made garment shops	59	49%	61	51%
	Tailoring	17	65%	9	35%
	Handicraft shops	11	65%	6	35%
	Communication, photography and printing	18	69%	8	31%
Total		542	73%	197	27%

Source: HUC, 2015

Of the three sectors chosen for study, accommodation sector is dominant in the tourism industry. It requires higher investment, but also offers higher returns than other sectors. It is the most powerful sector within tourism industry, as large capital and land resources are pre-requisites for entry into the sector, and people with access to such resources are socially

powerful and economically strong, and therefore, are mostly men. Less investment is needed in F&B sector compared to accommodation, but it is equally male-dominated. In comparison, tourism – affiliated retail services is large and more women are involved as it requires less investment when compared with the other two sectors. Many women said that they prefer tourism – affiliated retail services due to greater flexibility in working hours, which allows them to balance work and family responsibilities.

Of the 739 small scale enterprises in the three sectors in HUC, 542 were owned by men and 197 were owned by women³. The study interviewed 195 women entrepreneurs; two were not reachable. An equal number of men entrepreneurs were randomly selected in each sector from the list of enterprises of HUC. A total of 390 respondents were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaire. Twenty-four in-depth interviews were conducted to follow up on some of the issues identified in the semi-structured questionnaires and to gain personal insights and experience. One male and female entrepreneur was selected from each sector for in-depth interview. Some of the figures obtained from semi-structured interviews are presented in Table 2, and the respondents' testimonies are analysed as cases and quotes. Five BAs leaders were also interviewed as key informants.

³ According to Ratten and Tajeddini (2018), women own an estimated 30 percent of small enterprises worldwide.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents and Sector

Table 2: Profile of Respondents by Business sector and Gender

	Accommodation		F&B services		Tourism – affiliated retail services	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total no. of respondents	38	38	22	22	135	135
Mean age (years)	44.84	47.18	43.5	41.41	43.73	46.57
<i>Marital status of respondent</i>						
Married	37 (97%)	29 (76%)	21 (95%)	19 (86%)	112 (83%)	113 (84%)
Unmarried	0	1 (3%)	1 (5%)	0	22 (16%)	16 (12%)
Separated/divorced	1 (3%)	8 (21%)	0	3 (14%)	1 (0.01%)	6 (4%)
<i>Education level</i>						
Only completed high school	37 (97%)	36 (95%)	22 (100%)	22 (100%)	135 (100%)	134 (99%)
Completed Bachelors	1 (3%)	2 (5%)	0	0	0	1 (0.01%)
<i>Income from business enterprises (in LKR*)</i>						
0.10mn-3.00mn	16 (42%)	11 (29%)	13 (59%)	14 (64%)	69 (51%)	89 (66%)
3.10mn-6.00mn	8 (21%)	18 (47%)	3 (14%)	6 (27%)	59 (44%)	45 (33%)
6.10mn-8.00mn	7 (18%)	8 (21%)	6 (27%)	2 (9%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)
08.10mn-10.00mn	5 (13%)	1 (3%)	0	0	2 (1%)	0
10.10mn-20.00mn	2 (5%)	0	0	0	1 (1%)	0
Spouse involved in business (% of married couple)	22 (59.5%)	20 (69%)	13 (61.9%)	13 (68.4)	65 (58%)	74(65%)

Source: Field survey, 2015

Note: 1 USD = Approx 140 Sri Lankan Rupee (during fieldwork in Oct-Nov 2015) Women and men respondents do not differ significantly in age and education level (Table 2).

Income from business was significantly different for women and men. More than half (55.4%) of the women-owned enterprises and 44.6% of men-owned enterprises had an annual income of 3 million LKR or less. However, 18.5% of men-owned enterprises earned more than 8.1 million LKR per year, while only 1.5% of women-owned enterprises earned the same amount. Women ran significantly smaller businesses than men despite similarities in qualifications and experience (Table 2).

Significantly more men in all sectors are able to mobilize support from their spouse for their business, while fewer women are able to do so. Annual revenue tends to be higher when both husband and wife are involved in business and this too is common across all sectors. Hence, lack of spousal involvement is a disadvantage for women entrepreneurs.

“I am a widow since 2014. I have one guesthouse which I got from my parents. Earlier, this guesthouse was managed by my husband. After his death, I run this business. I do not have any male support which is important to run a guesthouse. Every day, I encounter rude behavior from the neighbors. My daughters have also experienced verbal abuse from neighbors. This is a guesthouse. You cannot expect only disciplined customers here. You may get ill-mannered people. I have experienced verbal and psychological abuse from customers and neighbors. Often times, I wish to have a man here as the manager. A man could control the situation in the guesthouse better than a woman” (Female, entrepreneur running a business for one year, Accommodation sector, in-depth interview, October 2015).

Women running the business alone face harassments not only from customers and neighbors but also from employees. Gender norms in Sri Lanka make it difficult for women to access authorities and gain trust from all sides of the society.

“I am a widow. My husband started the business. When he died, I had no income to live on. So, I decided to continue the business. It was very difficult for me to run the business. Some workers tried to manipulate me and assert authority over me. They thought, I am just female widow and can be controlled easily. They wanted me to run the business as their wishes. When I went against their decisions, they quit the job and put me into trouble. My husband never had such issues when he was the manager..... I have to tell you this; it is not easy for women to run a business” (Female,

entrepreneur running a business for five years, F&B sector, in-depth Interview, October 2015).

Women also find it difficult to balance work and family. Household responsibilities reduce the time women can devote to the business and networking, which in turn impacts profits and business growth.

“I have been working as a hotel manager since the year after I got married. I have four children. At the beginning, it was difficult to take care of the children and manage the hotel at the same time. My in-laws and husband are supportive, but they always told me that I had to be a good mother than a good manager. They assure they can manage the business without me. But I know I can run our business more profitable than they do without my engagement. I still give the priority for my children than my business” (Female, entrepreneur running a business for 15 years, Accommodation sector, in-depth Interview, October 2015).

Women’s land ownership rates in Sri Lanka are quite low (Jayawardena and Guneratne 2010; Risseeuw, 1992). There are significantly fewer women respondents who started the business with their own land (33.8%) compared to men (48.2%). The lack of land titles reduces women’s access to bank loans.

“When I was trying to get a bank loan for my business, I had to show property as collateral, which I did not have. Therefore, I couldn’t get a loan. I wanted to start a Batik (textile) shop near the tourist zone, but I could not achieve that dream. Now, I am managing a home-based handloom production with the support of family members” (Female, entrepreneur running a business for eight years, Tourism – affiliated retail services, in-depth Interview, October 2015).

Women Entrepreneurs in HUC: Membership in BAs

As seen above, women doing business independently, without the support of spouses, have more difficulty in running the business, fewer land resources, and lack access to loans. In order to overcome these problems, women chose to be members of BAs.

“I am a member of a small Business Association in my area. The key motivation for me to join was to find capital to set up a small food boutique for tourists”

(Female, entrepreneur running a business for five years, F&B sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

BAs are one key resource which women entrepreneurs use to overcome challenges in access to information, training and networks. Activities of BAs in HUC include: negotiating with politicians, policy makers and administrative bodies on a collective basis; share innovative ideas, methods and knowledge; identify future threats and risks; respond to current problems including government policies; welfare activities such as funerals; fund raising for BA events; invite experts to share expertise; respond to legal and environmental issues collectively; negotiate with public and private financial institutes for loans and so on.

In HUC, there are five BAs in the small-scale tourism sector. Women-owned enterprises form only 27% of all enterprises, yet there are more women members (411) than men members (377) if we add all the BAs' members (Table 3). In all, only 197 women-owned enterprises were registered in HUC, which means that a number of women entrepreneurs are members of several BAs. This shows that women entrepreneurs believe that the services offered by BAs will help them in running and expanding their businesses.

Table 3: Number of Women and Men in BAs in HUC

Name of Business Association (BAs)	Membership		Official Positions in BA		Leading initiatives in BAs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
BA1	82	67	12	14	10	7
BA2	45	56	10	9	8	6
BA3	58	71	8	10	8	6
BA4	79	91	11	13	10	7
BA5	113	126	13	10	11	8
Total	377	411	54	56	47	34
%	70%	209%	14% ^{*1}	14% ^{*1}	12% ^{*1}	8% ^{*1}

Source: Field survey, 2015 (Interviews with former secretaries/ chairpersons of Bas)

Note: n=542 (men); n=197 (women)

*1: Percentage among members

Women entrepreneurs join BAs because the networks they form through BAs can offer them better access to information and skills.

“Joining Business Associations gives us access to the industry and we can find ways to enhance our business. They provide opportunities to meet new people and discover the latest techniques. We can learn about the market in meetings where many entrepreneurs participate” (Female, entrepreneur for 19 years, Accommodation Sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

In contrast, men entrepreneurs feel that they do not gain much from membership in BA. As seen below, men consider BA as a waste of time. Clearly, men do not need the support from BA as much as women do.

“Getting membership in several BAs is a waste of time. Time is very important when doing a business. If we close the shop during working hours, regular customers will go to other shops. This could lead to a loss of customers. So I am a member of one BA only. When the meetings are announced, I make an arrangement with my relative to take charge of the business. But she [the relative] is not very competent in managing customers. I believe that membership in many BAs will cause more harm than good” (Male, entrepreneur for 12 years, F&B sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

Belonging to a professional body provides advantages, especially for small businesses, such as increased networking opportunity, obtaining business information and promoting businesses (Hartman, 2017). BAs function as a mentoring and networking forum for women entrepreneurs who otherwise lack access to such resources. Women also have smaller networks outside the immediate family and neighborhood, due to gender roles restricting women to care work. BAs therefore become the main source of information and networks for women.

“I knew I could not succeed without good knowledge of the market, so I had to gain more experience. The association protects us from failure [by providing us with knowledge and advice on business] because the personnel are more experienced than us. They have information about the market, government decisions, tax policies, etc” (Female, entrepreneur for three years, F&B Sector, in-depth interview, October 2015).

BAs advise newcomers about running a business, with older members sharing experiences to help newer ones. This is especially useful for women who have fewer opportunities for training. Only 5.6% of women respondents in this study had ever attended training while 17.5% of men had. Women respondents noted the lack of institutions that could help them overcome business-related barriers.

“In a field like tourism, we are not on par with men because they have more contacts with managers of star hotels. If we keep close contact with such people, the village women brand us as bad women and spread gossip. So, husbands ask us to participate in training only in formal settings like BAs” (Female, entrepreneur for four years, F&B Sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

As evident from the testimonies above, women entrepreneurs gain significant support from BAs, and hence membership of BAs is high among women entrepreneurs. However, male and female respondents were on par in terms of holding official positions in BA (Table 3). Despite such parity, more men were leading initiatives in BAs than women.

Women’s Participation and Leadership in BAs

As seen in Table 3, there is no significant gender difference in participation as 54 women and 56 men hold official positions in BAs. However, there is a significant difference in the type of positions they take up. Women tend to hold less powerful positions such as committee members and assistant secretaries, while men are appointed to positions such as chairperson, secretary, organiser, etc.

“When new positions are allocated in the association, our names are not proposed to higher posts. The men always try to retain higher posts” (Female, entrepreneur for 15 years, F&B Sector, in-depth interview, October 2015).

Women’s participation in BAs is restricted to the general assembly and such fora, and women are not given the opportunity to represent the BA and expand their social network, which is important to their business. When women are denied top positions, they have fewer opportunities to participate in external fora or meet key persons outside the immediate business environment and are thus excluded from circles of power and influence. They are not able to present their concerns, and be heard. Lack of women’s representation also means

lack of role models for women in leadership roles. Although a BA can significantly support women entrepreneurs, the male-dominated structure keeps women disempowered.

“The Association arranges meetings with experts in our field, but often, only leaders can attend such meetings. They can keep in contact with such experts. I heard that some have received money as well” (Female, entrepreneur for three years, Accommodation Sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

Men in BAs resist women’s advancement. Lack of experience and family duties are often used as an excuse to deny women leadership positions in BAs.

“I have been a member of an association for 20 years. I have participated in meetings and been actively involved in policy making and implementation for small-scale businesses. Though I am a senior member, I am not a leader. When I raised this issue, the reason they give is that I am a woman who has a lot of household work and might not have time to make effective decisions” (Female, entrepreneur for 25 years, F&B Sector, in-depth interview, November 2015).

Male entrepreneurs’ resistance to women’s leadership leads to the marginalization of women from the top echelons of BAs, even though they form the larger proportion of BA membership. Powerful positions (president, secretary) within BAs carry considerable recognition and respect in society and with the government. Further, the institutional resources of BAs (Doner and Schneider, 2000) are controlled and distributed by leaders, who are largely men, and denied to women who form the bulk of the BA members. Women’s marginalization from leadership of BAs reduces the visibility of women from positions of power and influence. Over time, women’s invisibility reinforces the cultural notion that women’s capabilities are limited, and reduces women’s access to knowledge and skills.

Sectoral Differences in Women’s Leadership in BAs

Women’s leadership in BAs are generally low, but there are sectoral differences within the three sectors considered in this research. (Table 4).

Table 4: Participation in BAs: Membership, Participation and Leadership by Sector and Sex of Respondents

Types of small-scale enterprises	Respondents who know at least one BA in their area		Membership in BAs*		Office Bearers in BAs*		Leadership in BAs*	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Accommodation n=38 each	32 84%	24 63%	20 63%	20 83%	8 25%	12 50%	9 28%	8 33%
F&B Service n=22 each	16 73%	14 64%	10 63%	6 43%	5 31%	3 21%	6 38%	2 14%
Tourism – affiliated retail services n=135 each	83 61%	95 70%	57 69%	70 74%	38 46%	38 40%	18 22%	15 16%

Source: Field survey, 2015

* Percentage is against the number of men/women respondents who know about BA.

Statistical analysis of respondents' responses show that it is not necessarily the case that women entrepreneurs of larger enterprises take more active role in leadership in BAs. It is also not the case that older women take up more leadership role⁴. The differences are mainly in their self-confidence within the household and in relationships with other members in the BA. Women who are taking leadership roles in BAs tend to be guarantors for others even though their business is not necessarily larger, and they tend to participate in social welfare activities. They perceive that they contribute financially to the household and are able to convince their partners regarding purchase of assets. However, there are also some specific sectoral differences.

⁴ There is no statistical difference in terms of age as well as business profit in 2014 between women who are taking initiatives at BA and those who are not.

Accommodation sector has very few women overall at 17.7% (Table 1), and more than half of them are members of BAs (Table 4). There are significantly more men who know about BAs, but more women participate among those who know about BA. Among the women members in BA, 40% are leaders in BAs. The higher percentage of women BA members who go for leadership position in BA shows how sectors can be of importance to BA leadership. Since accommodation sector is a larger operation than other sectors, they tend to be more influential, and that would also apply to women. It is noted that out of the 8 women entrepreneurs in leadership role in BAs in accommodation sector, five of them are doing business with their husbands (Overall, around 30% of women entrepreneurs in accommodation sector are in business jointly with their husbands). Further, their parents were running the business earlier, and they have inherited the business from them. Such inheritance and support from spouse gave them confidence and secured their status in BAs.

There are more men entrepreneurs in F&B sector with 123 (85%) men and 22 (15%) women, but there are significantly more businesses that are run by husband and wife in this sector compared to others. This might explain why few women have BA membership (6 women) and participate in BA (3 women); mostly husbands represent the business at BAs. There are more women who know about BA, but do not participate; most probably since their husbands are participating. Further, the gender gap between women and men leadership in BAs is highest in this sector. The domination of men in the sector leads to women having fewer leadership roles.

“We would like to become leaders, but we end up thinking that the role is better suited to men because of the commitment required. It is not a simple role because it means representing our whole community. So, there is a big responsibility. Compared to us, men have fewer family responsibilities. So, they can work on community activities. So, we give positions to them. If not, it creates unnecessary burden for us because others will not like it if we can't do our jobs well. Many unmarried young women are becoming leaders now. They don't have burdens like us” (Female, entrepreneur running a business for five years, F&B Sector, in-depth interview, October 2015).

“I chose to start this business two years ago. I am satisfied with it. With a household to manage as well, I cannot have a large business. To earn more, I have to work more. If I become too competitive, I might not be able to fulfil my

duties as a mother. I do everything for my family and my children who have lost their father. So, running a business that matches my capacities is good for me. We women cannot work like the men in this field. This is more than enough” (Female, entrepreneur running a business for five years, Tourism – affiliated retail services, in-depth interview, October 2015).

In tourism – affiliated retail services, ratio of women to men is higher than other sectors with nearly 40% of entrepreneurs being women (Table 1). The ratio of women entrepreneurs whose husbands are involved in the business is significantly lower than other sectors (24.4%). There are more women who know about BA than men, and membership of women in BAs is also high since women themselves need to represent their business. Women feel that trends in this sector change rapidly, and they need to maintain a wider network in order to respond to rapidly changing customer tastes, new ideas and innovations. However, the number of women leaders in BAs remains slightly low at 15 (16% among those who know BA), while 18 men (22%) are leading initiatives in this sector. Women in this sector mentioned that they need to balance their family responsibilities along with their business. So, even though they find that BA membership is necessary for their business, they do not want to take up additional workload associated with being a BA leader because of time constraints.

Conclusions

The study revealed that women entrepreneurs have much difficulty gaining access to resources; hence, they seek BAs’ help to obtain information and make connections. Conversely, women cannot leverage the potential benefits of BAs to expand their businesses substantially because they occupied only low-level positions since men monopolize the BA’s leadership.

According to the study, women business owners in HUC should join BAs to get around hurdles that are specific to gender, like lack of access to training, information, and networking opportunities. However, when women try to enter into powerful networks to develop their trades, they meet a barrier that prevents them from up lifting further. BAs are useful for women entrepreneurs, but the men-dominated BA leadership downgrades women, hindering full utilization of their potential.

The number of women and men entrepreneurs taking official positions in BAs has no significant difference. However, a considerable difference is noted in the type of positions they hold. Men are typically appointed to the chairperson, secretary, and organizer posts, whereas women are more likely to work as committee members and assistant secretaries.

The stereotype linking women with household work suggest that men are more appropriate and effective than women in leadership positions. Therefore, although women are actively joining BAs, the power positions remain with the hands of men. Since women are not assigned to positions, they do not get opportunities to participate in outside forums or meet leading persons external to the immediate business environment. They are thus omitted from the power circle; their needs and opinions are not represented, and they have few role models. A BA can significantly support women entrepreneurs, but gender stereotypes keep women disempowered.

Women entrepreneurs in the accommodation sub-sector have a higher membership rate (83%) than women in other sub-sectors. Among the female members, 33% are leaders in BAs. Since the accommodation business is more prominent than the other businesses, entrepreneurs in this sub-sector tend to be more influential; hence, more entrepreneurs are active in the leadership role. They also enjoy more support from family members, and the inheritance and spousal support have provided them confidence and secured their status in BAs.

Men in the food and beverage services sub-sector show higher membership than women in the same sub-sector. Significantly, more women entrepreneurs in the food and beverages sub-sector run the business with their husbands than in other sub-sectors. More women know about BAs but do not participate, probably because their husbands attend. The highest gender gap between women and men leaders in BAs exists in this sub-sector.

In the tourism – affiliated retail services sub sector, the ratio of women being a member of BAs is the highest among the three sub-sectors (70%), and the number of women are bearing official positions are equal to men. Compared to other sub-sectors, the ratio of women being a member of BAs is the highest in the tourism-affiliated retail services sub-sector. Still, the ratio of women holding positions in BAs is the lowest against the number of men/women respondents who know about BA. Women in this sector often do not get spouse support for

business or have employees, and they struggle to manage the business and the household. Only 37.2% of women's spouses are involved in the business. In the accommodation sub-sector, women entrepreneurs hold more positions than men, while men have more positions than women in the food and beverages sub-sector.

Although BAs have provided essential connections and knowledge to women, the prevalence of men's dominance inside BAs undermines beneficial effects on women. Women in all three sub-sectors tend to receive less powerful positions inside BAs. Women entrepreneurs in the accommodation sub-sector reported the highest number of leaders among women entrepreneurs (in the least powerful positions).

Women are not considered to be leaders in BAs, and except for exceptional women entrepreneurs in the accommodation sub-sector, most women entrepreneurs remain members without holding influential positions in the BAs. Since the accommodation business is more prominent than other businesses, the women entrepreneurs who are engaged in accommodation sector could appear in more influential roles than women in other sub-sectors.

Women entrepreneurs in the food and beverage sector are not nominated for higher-level BA positions, but women entrepreneurs in the tourism-affiliated retail service sub-sector became more interested in BA than other sub-sectors. The present study also confirmed that women are more disadvantaged in accessing business networks and thus join BAs. Women entrepreneurs' connections are constrained since cultural expectations desire women to be good home-makers than income-earners. Hence, women are less likely to be included in informal and high-level connections than men (Brass, 1985).

BAs can encourage to support female entrepreneurs more by providing them with access to training, networks, social support, and bank financing for business growth. Women entrepreneurs could develop confidence and play more prominent and influential roles in BAs by developing strong social support. Women's business associations at the grassroots level can further encourage women to gain self-confidence. Forming structural and psychological empowerment is crucial for active involvement in domestic matters. In that context, entrepreneurs motivated through psychological counselling and adversary programmes to develop their personalities can be created positive attitudes and impacts.

Such activities can make both men and women aware of gendered learning in society and ensure no gender stereotypes, as women are capable of successful employment and career development.

The patriarchal view of women as unsuccessful beings in managing stress impacts women vehemently, limiting their participation and rising into advantageous positions. This suggests the need for substantial progress on women's perception of self-empowerment and, more importantly, alteration of gender norms, roles, and power dynamics, which would help reduce the existing power structures inside BAs. A narrow focus may perhaps worsen them by providing more power to men to control women's powers and decisions. Enhanced policies could be identified among women entrepreneurs, skilled and fit into specific sectors and facilitate them with new strategies to overcome sector-specific barriers identified in this study.

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