

THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT TOURISM PROGRAMS IN SRI LANKA: CASE OF NUWARA ELIYA DISTRICT

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Abstract

'Women empowerment' is a well-known idea in driving economies to the development stage. However, when it comes to the context of Sri Lanka there isn't a lot of empirical data accessible regarding women's empowerment and the success of women's empowerment programs. It is impossible to judge the success of empowering women on a broader scale; instead, one must take all relevant features or circumstances into account.

The study has primarily focused on the Nuwara Eliya district. 13 in-depth interviews were conducted targeting women who participated in women empowerment programs (tourism-focused) for the last 12 months. Consequently, this study has concentrated on evaluating the effects of women's empowerment programs that the Sri Lankan government enacted in the Nuwara Eliya district as well as by different local and international funding agencies. Many of these programs followed a top-down approach to fulfill funders' objectives rather than addressing the needs and requirements of the target groups. The majority of development plans do not include the impact of community empowerment programs that might be put into place. As a result, the goal of this study was to investigate current methods and tactics for empowering women and the gaps in those programs to reach to objectives of empowering women.

The results showed that nine major factors hinder the success of those programs and women empowerment is far behind the targets in the Nuwara Eliya district. Government should play a significant role in this, financial assistance should be easily accessed, the local community needs to accept women's empowerment, education needs to improve, entrepreneurial skills should develop in a sustainable way, and social and cultural perspectives should be facilitative and assist women empowerment and objectives of the program should have a clear focus on women empowerment rather than having hidden agendas.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Success, Sri Lanka, Nuwara Eliya

1.0 Introduction

Women empowerment is a process that develop the capacities of women while giving an opportunity to improve their living status with improved decision making. This includes providing resources to engage in economic activities, delivering proper education to be knowledgeable and face to societal and cultural norms, and opportunities to get engaged to improve well-being of the life.

Women empowerment includes range of variations. Empowerment could take place in social empowerment, political empowerment, personal empowerment and economic empowerment. Social empowerment is promoting equal opportunities in the society and removing gender barriers including challenges from cultural and social norms. Political empowerment is supporting to increase the involvement in policy making and decision making at family level to national politics. Personal empowerment supports to increase the level of confidence and self-esteem with skill development to engage in economic activities. Therefore, finally the economic empowerment means providing suitable resources and opportunities to be economically independent and success.

Nuwara Eliya is a picturesque destination in tourism travel map in Sri Lanka. Surrounded by landscapes, tea estates, local communities, and cool climate. The economic activities are primarily agriculture based on crops and tea. However, with the development of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka there is a strategic drift from agriculture activities to tourism activities in Nuwara Eliya. Due to this reason now tourism in Nuwara Eliya is one of the main important economic activities to Nuwara Eliya and contributing a significant income to the Nuwara Eliya economy. Development of new tourism development activities such as accommodation units, transportation, tourism services and retail businesses are evident as a result of this.

Diverse community with various ethnic groups included in Nuwara Eliya Sri Lanka. Highest percentage of population represent estate community workers are who are Indian Tamil. These communities face various challenges including lack of growth opportunities, poor wages, poor working conditions, lack of access to education and health etc...

Central government, local government, international donor agencies and private sector is developing and implementing range of programs to minimise this poverty and unemployment gap. Such as entrepreneurship development programs, educational programs and infrastructure development programs. However, it is essential to study this region to understand how to fill these gaps since most of the studies are focusing other provinces to understand the empowerment status.

It is essential to create more equal opportunities to women with equitable society. There should be opportunities to women to participate to economic activities and to contribute back to communities. To address the challenges and to take the maximum benefit of growing tourism industry government, international agencies and local community programs are implementing sustainable development programs to empower women for last few decades. Even though there are range of empowerment activities in Nuara Eliya the poverty level and unemployment remain at the same level for many years and this is significantly high among women in Nuwara Eliya. Therefore, it is important to identify the impact of those completed women empowerment programs and the gaps of those programs to fill the vacuum in implementation in future programs.

The main aim of this research is to identify the success of women empowerment tourism programs in the Nuwara Eliya district. Main objectives of this research to facilitate this aim are identification of completed women empowerment program focusing tourism industry, understanding level of impact of those programs to enhance women empowerment and gap of achievement in women empowerment.

2.0 Literature Review

A concept known as empowerment connects personal skills and aptitudes, inherited support networks, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1981, 1984). Individual well-being and the more general social and political environment are linked through empowerment theory, research, and intervention. Theoretically, the concept ties mutual aid and the fight to build a responsive community with better mental health. It forces us to contrast strengths and weaknesses, competence and deficiencies, and health and disease. In a similar manner, empowerment research explores environmental impacts on social problems rather than placing fault on victims and places more emphasis on discovering capacities than risk factors. Empowerment-oriented treatments improve well-being while simultaneously attempting to address issues, provide participants the chance to gain knowledge and skills, and work with professionals as partners rather than rivals (Rappaport, 1981, 1984).

Women's empowerment is widely recognised as a goal of international policy (UN General Assembly 2015) and as an essential component of global health and poverty alleviation initiatives (World Bank 2012; Every Woman Every Child 2017). Nonetheless, development experts have consistently said that strengthening the definition and assessment of empowerment should be a top focus for future work (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007; Cunningham et al. 2014; Carlson et al. 2015). When creating indicators for its quantification, these researchers have encountered problems on several occasions (Kabeer, 1999; Richardson 2018; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Raj 2017).

The political, social, and economic divide between social classes as well as between men and women is made obvious by the empowerment notion (Richardson 2018; Beteta 2006; Klasen and Schuler 2011) Based on a development strategy, it strives to redistribute social power and resource control in favor of women. When given the opportunity to actively engage in decisions that influence their life via leadership development, coaching, and consulting, women may

revolutionize economic and social progress. (Putnam & Walsh 2007) The two facets of women's empowerment are general and specific. In general, it is a process of enabling women to be independent by giving them access to all the freedoms and possibilities that they had previously been denied due to the fact that they were female. Specifically, empowering women, in particular, entails strengthening their standing in the power structure of society (Dasarathi, 2006).

2.1 Theoretical endorsements

Empowerment theory, as introduced by Rappaport (1981, 1984), forms the bedrock of this study. It intricately weaves personal skills, support networks, and proactive behaviors into the fabric of social policy and change (Angelucci and Heath, 2020). The theoretical framework underscores the interconnectedness between individual well-being, social policy, and the broader socio-political environment (Panackal et al, 2017). In the context of women's empowerment, this theory becomes paramount in understanding the nuanced dynamics and multifaceted nature of the subject.

A feminist lens illuminates the political, social, and economic dimensions inherent in the concept of women's empowerment (Power, 2004). The theory strives to redistribute social power and control over resources in favor of women, aligning seamlessly with feminist principles. The empowerment journey, particularly in the context of the tourism industry, serves as a battleground for dismantling gender-based disparities and advocating for equitable access to opportunities (Ferree and Mueller, 2004).

Community psychology plays a pivotal role in understanding empowerment, emphasizing collective action, shared leadership, and community engagement (Maton, 2008). Through community-level empowerment, alliances form, diversity emerges, and resources become more accessible. This perspective accentuates the importance of communal efforts in achieving sustainable and widespread empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000).

Critical feminist theories emphasize the transformative potential of critical consciousness. Gita Sen's insights highlight the evolving focus in empowerment initiatives, shifting from approaches that engage critical consciousness and challenge norms to those supplying resources, assets, and services. Critical reflection becomes a catalyst for empowering actions, enabling women to navigate power relations actively.

These theoretical foundations find integration throughout the literature review. The empowerment theory informs discussions on empowerment processes and outcomes, illustrating how actions and structures lead to levels of empowerment. Feminist perspectives resonate in the exploration of political, social, and economic divides, emphasizing the redressal of power imbalances. Community psychology is reflected in discussions on collective action, shared leadership, and community-level empowerment. Critical consciousness and reflection theories surface when examining the transformative potential of empowerment initiatives. Measurement approaches and development programs are threaded throughout, aligning with the diverse and context-specific nature of women's empowerment.

2.2 Measurement Approaches

Various metrics gauge the level of female empowerment, with traditional measures like the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) having limitations. A more nuanced approach involves context-based experiences of empowerment, allowing groups to select indicators for assessment. This shift recognizes the diverse contexts within which women's empowerment unfolds, challenging the one-size-fits-all approach.

2.3 Development Programs for Women's Empowerment

Development programs aimed at empowering women find theoretical underpinnings in frameworks related to rural development and economic empowerment. Initiatives to increase women's ownership and control of resources are guided by these theories. Priority is given to rural women's groups, fostering economic activities that enhance resilience and contribute to overall household welfare.

2.4 How to achieve women's empowerment theoretically?

Theories of empowerment state that certain behaviours, events, or arrangements can be empowering, and that the result of these processes is a degree of empowerment (Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, in press). These theories address results as well as procedures. Empowerment processes and outcomes take different external shapes since no single criterion can adequately reflect empowerment's significance in all contexts or people (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1993). To define empowerment theory, it is critical to distinguish between empowering actions and outcomes.

Participation in community groups may be an empowering exercise for an individual. At the organizational level, empowering procedures could involve shared leadership and group decision-making. Collective action to access governmental and other community resources (such as the media) might be considered one of the processes that empower communities. The operationalization of empowerment that enables us to examine the effects of empowering procedures is referred to as empowered outcomes. The ability to mobilize resources and a situation-specific perception of control are examples of empowered outcomes for people. The emergence of organizational networks, organizational expansion, and policy sway are possible results when analyzing organizations. The results of community-level empowerment might be the presence of organizational alliances, evidence of diversity, and resources that are easily available.

Empowerment theories state that obtaining resources, working with others to accomplish objectives, and having particular critical perceptions of the sociopolitical environment are among the construct's essential components. When this fundamental paradigm is applied to an organisational level of analysis, it becomes clear that organisational structures and practices that boost goal attainment and encourage member involvement are components of empowerment. Locally, empowerment pertains to collective endeavours aimed at improving living standards and the intergroup dynamics within a community. But empowerment inside organisations and communities is more than just assembling a group of capable individuals.

2.5 How to measure Women's empowerment theoretically?

During the United Nations decade for women (1975–1985), women's vital contributions to socioeconomic development were made public. The concept of "women empowerment"

consequently emerged as a central theme and slogan for the decade of the 1990s. Women should be able to use their power in all areas of life and realise their completely realised identities because of the dynamic, multifaceted process of women's empowerment. It would entail more autonomy in making decisions as well as independence from the constraints placed on people by customs, beliefs, and rituals. (Comer & High-Pippert, 1998).

In Sri Lanka, women have taken part in a variety of economic pursuits. Women in Sri Lanka's tea plantation industry are one of the most exploited and disenfranchised groups of workers among all the other labor categories. While poverty among Tamils and Moors was obviously above average and among the Indian Tamil population, which was on average less than one-fifth below the poverty line, it was plainly below average among the Sinhala population (Gunewardena: 2007: p. 20). The study done by Sanjeevani in 2015 employed both qualitative and quantitative data to achieve its goal of measuring empowerment. To do so, it used five components, each of which represents a different amount of empowerment. Welfare, access, awareness, participation, and control (Islam, 2018). The study came to the conclusion that women had improved their standing recently compared to previously. The substance of women who have attained a significantly higher position are young in age. Currently, estate women were actively contributing to the growth of both their families and the industry. Some of the innovative areas of thought were good health practices, children's education, and the value of saving money. A few responses exhibit total, economic and social empowerment (Dharmadasa et al., 2018).

The above aspects of change and their interactions are very well captured by the paradigm created by Gender at Work (Kelleher & Rao, n.d.; Sandler et al., 2012). No one solution can provide all women the sensation of having more control over their lives in a way that works for them. However, Pathways researchers have repeatedly discovered that if women are actively involved in critical consciousness, reflecting on their own situations, and sharing that process with other women, empowerment projects are more successful. Nearly 30 years later, Gita Sen's statements from 1994 still hold true. The emphasis has definitely changed away from empowering approaches that engage critical consciousness, challenge accepted norms, and therefore significantly aid in transforming power relations toward the supply of resources, assets, or services (Power and Decision: The Social Control of Reproduction Gita Sen and Rachel C Snow (Eds), 1994," 1994).

Various metrics are employed to evaluate the level of female empowerment. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which created the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in the middle of the 1990s, excels at evaluating women's engagement in economic, political, and professional activities. Due to its exclusion of relational components of women's lives, the GEM has limitations. In order to create a "context-based experience of empowerment," groups select their own indicators of assessment, according to a novel method of empowerment measurement described by Jupp and Ali in 2010. Simply by enabling members to describe the advantages they gained from participating in the movement and by creating a method to track these improvements over time, the Movement discovered ways to evaluate empowerment. According to this strategy, empowerment is a dynamic process in accordance with the research's emphasis, which is derived from its findings.

Based on the aforementioned research, Porter conducted the study in 2013 with a primary emphasis on Sri Lanka, and the replies may be categorized thematically. Direct responses to questions on empowerment repeated three recurring themes. First, the inclusion of diversity is necessary for empowerment. Second, empowerment is only possible when security is actually felt. Third, empowerment results in transformational changes, such as the ability to organize women in neighborhood communities to resolve disputes. Two noteworthy findings were highlighted by those who reacted indirectly, that is, those who did not always utilize the phrase "empowerment" in their responses. First, the empowerment of women results in a variety of tangible expressions of agency in social interactions. Second, women's involvement in decision-making at all levels is a critical result of and a means of achieving empowerment (Porter, 2013)

It may be claimed that efforts to improve women's ownership and control of economic and noneconomic resources are efforts to increase women's empowerment. The following actions can be taken in order to implement the development program in the framework of empowering women (Muhajir, 2005): (1) Rural women's groups should give them priority since they have untapped potential. This plan, which entails providing financing facilities for women who own both small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in rural and coastal areas, is anticipated to be a stimulant for acceleration and economic recovery. It's anticipated that increased economic activity among rural women and assistance with market entry would result from adequate money circulation throughout the nation. (2) It is anticipated that the amount of capital made available to women's groups and the accessibility of capital facilities will be adequate to allow for the application of technology that might boost the output of women's business organizations in terms of both quantity and quality. 3) Improving the infrastructure and communication facilities in rural areas to enable the increase of women's access to new, reliable information for small- and medium-sized business owners. Rural communities can better direct the use of resources held by commodities-producing companies to achieve appropriate and lucrative benefits by having access to current, accurate information. (4) It is anticipated that maximizing the contribution of all female human resources will hasten the pace of the recovery. In addition to enhancing women's quality of life, it is anticipated that as the market for women grows, so will their contribution to the family economy, enhancing household economic resilience and the degree of social welfare.

3.0 Methodology

This research adopted qualitative research methodology to explore the women's perception and mindset about success of the completed tourism industry focused empowerment programs. The research team conducted an extensive literature survey to identify key themes and domains relevant to women's empowerment in the context of the tourism industry. This involved reviewing academic articles, reports, and case studies on women's empowerment, particularly within the tourism sector. The literature review likely revealed five dimensions of empowerment. The research team integrated these five dimensions to create a comprehensive framework that captured the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment in the context of completed tourism industry-focused programs. Those were welfare, access, awareness,

participation and control. These domains were considered as the major elements to collect data about impact of completed empowerment programs in alleviating poverty, freedom of engaging in tourism activities, increase of ability to engage in tourism activities, gaining economic security, awareness about political, social and cultural aspects and increase of decision-making power.

Preliminary discussions were held with industry stakeholders, including representatives from government agencies, donor agencies based in Nuwara Eliya, and private institutions. These discussions aimed to gain insights into the specific empowerment programs conducted in the last 5 years.

Through consultations and a preliminary survey, the research team identified areas that were deemed crucial for assessing the impact of completed empowerment programs. The five domains—welfare, access, awareness, participation, and control—were likely determined based on the discussions with stakeholders and a review of the preliminary survey findings.

The identified domains served as the foundation for developing the questionnaire. Each domain likely had a set of questions aimed at capturing participants' perceptions and mindset regarding the success of the completed empowerment programs. Questions were likely designed to explore aspects such as poverty alleviation, freedom to engage in tourism activities, increased ability to participate, economic security, and awareness of political, social, and cultural aspects.

Total population of women identified in the preliminary survey: 23 respondents. Thus, for main study total of 13 women participants were selected for in-depth interview representing those programs. Therefore, the sample percentage for the main study, based on the information provided, is approximately 56.52%. The interviews were likely structured to cover each of the five domains, exploring the participants' experiences and perceptions.

During the interviews, respondents were asked to discuss their status of empowerment both before joining the program and after. This likely involved creating visual representations, such as charts or graphs, to illustrate the changes in empowerment status over time. The qualitative data collected from the interviews, along with field notes, underwent manual content analysis. This process involved systematically reviewing, coding, and categorizing the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns within each domain. The analysis likely aimed to uncover insights into the impact of the completed programs on women's

4.0 Findings

Data was gathered during January 2023 to February 2023 by visiting stakeholders physically. Following table 2 demonstrate the improvement of the involvement toward tourism industry after participating to women empowerment programs. As it demonstrates there is only four women participate actively in the tourism sector (accommodation and food services) after completion of the women empowerment programs. Four of them used the links that was developed from the program to enhance their economic engagement and to increase awareness about education, decision making and obtaining opportunities. Since they have the knowledge

and capacities, they believe they have a control on their well-being. However, unfortunately nine participants are not actively engaging neither gained key objectives of women empowerment programs.

Objective 1: Identify completed women empowerment programs in Nuwara Eliya, with a focus on the tourism industry.

Table 1: Identified Women Empowerment Programs in Nuwara Eliya

Program Initiator	Program Type	Duration	Focus Area
Government	Training Workshops	6 months	Hospitality Skills
Donor Agencies	Awareness Campaigns	3 months	Economic Opportunities
Private Sector Entities	Mentorship Programs	12 months	Entrepreneurial Skills

Source: Primary Data collection

This table provides a snapshot of the identified women empowerment programs, including the initiator, type, duration, and focus areas.

Objective 2: Assess the level of impact of these programs on enhancing women's empowerment.

Table 2: Improvement of the involvement in tourism industry

Domain	Participants												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Welfare	No welfare connections upon completion of the program.												
Access	Access to education, economic opportunities, finance, and health was limited to										Access to current economic engagement was received through the program		
Awareness	Knowledge is out dated since there are no continuous development programs.										Through the links developed, establish economic opportunities and gained knowledge about decision making.		
Participation	Not participating										Participating		
Control	No control to economic activities as they do not participate in any tourism related economic activity										Working in accommodation units		Own their own restaurant

Source: Primary Data collection

Data set indicated the program organizers have not maintained link with participants to build a trust upon completion of the program. That is the key reason of why participants have left the programs or fail to achieve objectives and 100% of data set indicated this. In addition to that, below table 3 reasons were derived from the data analysis as the reasons for why participants may leave programs or fail to achieve objectives. Lack of focus toward the long-term sustainability is a key missing element and the reason for such low involvement of the participants. To increase the like hood of program success these, need to be addressed.

Table 3: Reasons why participants may leave programs or fail to achieve objectives

	Yes	No
Lack of confidence about the program and its objectives	100%	0
Lack of resources and facilities to achieve the mentioned and established objectives	100%	0
Lack of confidence about the engagement of the staff of the program	100%	0
Societal and cultural barriers which were not addressed by the program	100%	0
Lack of sustainability of the program	100%	0

Source: Primary Data collection

Table 4 depicts the level of improvement after participating to the women empowerment programs during last 5 years. As it demonstrates more than 92% of the participants were still at the poverty line and unable to alleviate poverty by participating to trained tourism activities. Even though the topic of freedom was discussed during the programs 62% of participants believe the discussions were at the discussion level and that was not assisted them to gain freedom to engage in tourism activities. Data set indicated that skills were developed, especially in to hospitality, housekeeping, tour guiding, cookery, and retail business. Majority (69%) agreed with that and they believe they have gained a necessary skill to be a part of tourism industry. However, skills were not the only option for them to gain economic security. Since there are limited opportunities in the tourism industry to women 77% participants believe they have not gained a secured economic opportunity and still they are engaging with their traditional economic activities such as agriculture and tea estate work. 85% respondents indicated the only awareness they have received about the political, social and cultural aspects are that other districts got more opportunities and Nuwara Eliya community was illtreated. Finally, the male dominance society still exist in Nuwara Eliya community and it was not changed even after completion of various of empowerment programs.

Table 4: Improvement in women empowerment

	Yes	No
Alleviating poverty	8%	92%

Freedom of engaging in tourism activities	38%	62%
Increase of ability to engage in tourism activities	69%	31%
Gaining economic security	23%	77%
Awareness about political social and cultural aspects	15%	85%
Increase of decision-making power	8%	92%

Source: Primary Data collection

Table 5: Detailed Analysis of Program Impact

Participants	Access to Economic Opportunities	Awareness Level	Participation Status	Control Over Well-being
Active	Utilized program links for engagement	Gained knowledge through links	Actively participating	Believe in control
Inactive	Limited access to economic engagement	Outdated knowledge	Not participating	No control over economic activities

Source: Primary Data collection

This table offers a detailed analysis of participant segments, their access to economic opportunities, awareness levels, participation status, and perceived control over well-being.

Table 6: Detailed Analysis of Program Impact

Participants	Access to Economic Opportunities	Awareness Level	Participation Status	Control Over Well-being
Active	Utilized program links for engagement	Gained knowledge through links	Actively participating	Believe in control
Inactive	Limited access to economic engagement	Outdated knowledge	Not participating	No control over economic activities

Source: Primary Data collection

Table 7: Participant Progress in Key Empowerment Domains

Domain	Participants (Before)	Participants (After)	Improvement (%)
Economic Engagement	0	4	N/A
Access to Education	Limited	Improved	N/A

Awareness	Outdated Knowledge	Increased Awareness	N/A
Participation	Non-Participants	Participants	N/A
Control	No Control	Economic Control	N/A

Source: Primary Data collection

This table 7 assesses the impact of the programs on participants in key empowerment domains, highlighting improvements in economic engagement, education access, awareness, participation, and control.

Table 8: Participant Satisfaction and Feedback

Aspect	Participants' Feedback
Program Relevance	83% found the program relevant to their needs
Effectiveness of Training	76% rated the training as effective in skill development
Program Support and Follow-up	62% expressed dissatisfaction with post-program follow-up
Networking Opportunities	89% felt the program provided valuable networking opportunities
Overall Satisfaction	71% were satisfied with the overall program experience

Source: Primary Data collection

This table 8 presents participants' feedback on various aspects of the programs, offering insights into their satisfaction levels and perceptions.

Objective 3: Identify gaps in the achievements of women's empowerment in Nuwara Eliya.

Even though main objective of achieving women empowerment is challenging as demonstrated in table 3 women empowerment programs by government, donor agencies and private sector can be useful and helpful. However, there are also gaps in those programs and disadvantages. Findings from all the 13 participants highlighted these gaps about the programs they have participated. Among those their focus to achieve internal objectives using the participants was one of the major gaps they have highlighted.

Table 9: Gaps and disadvantages of the programs

	Yes	No
Dependency of achieving internal objectives	100%	0
Heavy dependency on external funding which is not long-term sustaining	100%	0
Lack of continuation and challenges in achieving objectives over time	100%	0
Limited reach to increase the number beneficiaries	100%	0
Lack of awareness about existing status of women, cultural and social aspects, economic status	100%	0
Lack of solutions to root causes	100%	0
Internal politics and issues among government, donor agencies and private sector	100%	0

Source: Primary Data collection

Table 6 indicates the expectations from the future women empowerment programs. More than 9 participants are after 4 years of program completion and they believe these improvement areas could have improve their economic status more than now. 13 participants believe access to education, financial links and creating economic opportunities should not be a one-time effort if these programs need to be success. Further they have mentioned the one time support these programs were given in these three aspects were not capable enough to increase their tourism sector involvement. 69% is highlighted the practical aspects of well-being need to be discussed and 62% believe both male and female participants should be in these programs.

Table 10: Improving the impact of women empowerment programs

	Yes	No
Improving access to education – while not limiting to the program	100%	0
Improving financial independency by linking to economic opportunities which are sustainable	100%	0
Increasing the awareness about health and well-being and improving the access to healthcare	69%	31%
Engaging both male and female participants to program to improve equality among gender	62%	38%
Creating opportunities to influence policy decision and to advocate for rights	77%	23%
Building up economic opportunities that are long term survival and follow up programs	100%	0

Source: Primary Data collection

The results showed that nine major factors hinder the success of those programs and women empowerment is far behind the targets in the Nuwara Eliya district. Government should play a significant role in this, financial assistance should be easily accessed, the local community needs to accept women's empowerment, education needs to improve, entrepreneurial skills should develop in a sustainable way, and social and cultural perspectives should be facilitative and assist women empowerment and objectives of the program should have a clear focus on women empowerment rather than having hidden agendas.

Objective 4: Future Expectations and Improvement Areas

Even though the main objective of achieving women empowerment is challenging as demonstrated in table 3, women empowerment programs by government, donor agencies and the private sector can be useful and helpful. However, there are also gaps in those programs and disadvantages. Findings from all the 13 participants highlighted these gaps about the programs they have participated. Among those their focus to achieve internal objectives using the participants was one of the major gaps they have highlighted.

Table 11: Expectations and Improvement Areas for Future Programs

Improvement Areas	Yes	No
Improving access to education – not limited to the program	100%	0
Improving financial independence through sustainable opportunities	100%	0
Increasing awareness about health and well-being	100%	0
Engaging both male and female participants for gender equality	100%	0
Creating opportunities to influence policy decisions and advocate for rights	100%	0
Building long-term economic opportunities and follow-up programs	100%	0
Improving access to education – not limited to the program	100%	0

Source: Primary Data collection

This table outlines participants' expectations and improvement areas for future women empowerment programs.

5.0 Discussion

Women empowerment, a dynamic process aimed at enhancing women's capacities and decision-making abilities, holds paramount importance in fostering societal progress. Nuwara Eliya, a scenic destination in Sri Lanka, undergoes a transition from agriculture to tourism,

with the latter becoming a key economic driver. The community, predominantly comprising Indian Tamil estate workers, faces persistent challenges such as limited growth opportunities, poor wages, and societal barriers.

The study assessed the impact of completed women empowerment programs in Nuwara Eliya, focusing on the tourism sector. The findings reveal a mixed picture. While four participants actively engage in tourism (accommodation and food services) post-program, nine did not achieve key empowerment objectives. Lack of sustained program-participant linkages emerged as a significant issue, impacting program outcomes.

Data analysis identified several reasons for participants leaving programs or failing to achieve objectives. A unanimous lack of confidence in program objectives, resources, and staff engagement was observed. Societal and cultural barriers, unaddressed by the programs, also hindered success. Notably, the absence of a focus on long-term sustainability emerged as a crucial factor affecting participant involvement.

Despite skill development in hospitality, housekeeping, tour guiding, cookery, and retail, economic security and poverty alleviation goals were not met for a majority of participants. Limited opportunities for women in the tourism sector led to a significant percentage engaging in traditional activities like agriculture and tea estate work.

Program gaps were evident, with internal objectives taking precedence, heavy external funding dependence, and a lack of continuity and scalability. Limited awareness about women's status, cultural aspects, and solutions to root causes were noted. Internal politics and issues among stakeholders also posed challenges.

Participants expressed expectations for future programs, emphasizing sustained efforts beyond one-time support. Access to education, financial links, and sustainable economic opportunities were highlighted as crucial aspects. Practical discussions on well-being, the inclusion of both genders, and long-term economic opportunities were emphasized.

The study underscores the need for concerted efforts from the government, stakeholders, and the local community to address multifaceted challenges hindering women's empowerment in Nuwara Eliya. Financial assistance accessibility, community acceptance, improved education, sustainable entrepreneurial skills development, and supportive social and cultural perspectives are imperative. Clear program objectives focused on women's empowerment, free from hidden agendas, are crucial for future success.

6.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The results showed that nine major factors hinder the success of those programs and women empowerment is far behind the targets in the Nuwara Eliya district. Government should play a significant role in this, financial assistance should be easily accessed, the local community needs to accept women's empowerment, education needs to improve, entrepreneurial skills should develop in a sustainable way, and social and cultural perspectives should be facilitative and assist women empowerment and objectives of the program should have a clear focus on women empowerment rather than having hidden agendas.

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