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TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

A STUDY OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN NEPAL

Recently joined in January 2008, I plan for a preliminary field visit July-August 2008 and the long field visit April-December 2009.

This research will be of interest to:

Policy makers, experts, academia, students, individuals and institutions interested in or working on gender, women's empowerment and trade.

Supervisors

Prof. Nickie Charles
Dr. Caroline Wright

Keywords

gender relations, women's empowerment, sexuality, gendered labour market and trade liberalisation

Background: Nepali women constitute more than half the total population and face gender discrimination despite Nepal's international obligations and domestic policies that never fail to eulogize women's role in society and in the state. Nepal obtained WTO membership in 2004. However, it already has a liberal regime on foreign investment in many sectors, including tourism. A commitment at the WTO effectively means the irreversibility of the country's liberalization policy. Tourism is increasingly becoming a significant part of global trade and an important contributor to the global economy. In Nepal, Tourism has been a mainstay of the economy and a major foreign exchange earner. As per the Central Bureau of Statistics (2002), women workers account for 34.5% of the workforce in the hotel industry, which is a high figure compared to other sectors. The casinos that operate within the five star hotels are well known for attracting young girls. There is an increasing demand for women workers because it is a hospitality sector.

Research Aim: The aim of the study is to analyze the relationship between trade liberalization and women's empowerment in the context of Nepal. I have chosen a case study of the tourism sector, and within that the hotel industry, as a sector which has been liberalized and where women are employed in large numbers.

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the linkages between policies aimed at liberalizing the tourism sector and empowering women.
2. To explore the gendered labour market and gender relations in the hotel industry.
3. To examine the effects of women's paid work on their overall empowerment.

Research Methodology:

1. Questionnaires
2. Interviews: a) Hotel industry workers b) Male family members of selected women workers c) Personnel/administrative managers of hotels/resorts and d) Experts on trade/tourism, labour and gender/women's rights
- 3) Focus group discussion
- 4) Observations