

Agritourism and gender equality in developing economies

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the role of agritourism in fostering women's empowerment and advancing gender equality in developing economies by assessing its capacity to create inclusive economic opportunities, enhance social status, and influence gender norms.

Research Methodology: This study conducts an expansive literature review to examine agritourism's potential to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in developing economies, with Zimbabwe serving as the case study. Comprehensive searches were conducted across Scopus, PubMed, JSTOR, and Web of Science to gather pertinent data.

Results: Gender disparities in economic participation, limited resources, inadequate market access, absence of land titles, and constrained decision-making constitute the primary challenges confronting women in agritourism. Nevertheless, given appropriate support, the emerging agritourism sector presents distinctive opportunities to address these challenges by establishing income-generating activities, promoting skills development, and empowering women in agritourism.

Conclusions: Literature reveals that a few women own land for agritourism, limiting their economic engagement, empowerment, and decision-making. Gender-based discrimination, patriarchal norms, limited assistance, and finances limit their participation. Zimbabwe, like many developing nations, faces similar issues, highlighting the necessity for women's empowerment policies.

Limitations: A key weakness of this study is the reliance on secondary data and the concentration on a single country, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings to other developing economies.

Contribution: The insights presented in this study have the potential to shape policies and practices aimed at empowering women in rural Zimbabwe and beyond, fostering gender equality, and contributing to more sustainable and inclusive models of rural development.

Keywords: *Agritourism, Gender Equality, Rural Development, Women's Empowerment, Zimbabwe*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the intersection of agriculture and tourism has given rise to a dynamic multifaceted phenomenon known as agritourism. This burgeoning field offers developing economies choices for economic diversification and can promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Given the persistence of conventional gender norms in agritourism, it is crucial to assess how agritourism can improve the socioeconomic status of women in developing economies. This analysis aims to contribute to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8), which seeks to promote comprehensive

and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, benefiting both developing economies and the global community.

The predominant position of women in agriculture in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world amplifies their potential engagement in agritourism and the development of rural areas, as emphasised in studies by M. F. Halim, Barbieri, Jakes, and Morais (2017) and ZimStat (2014). Women have historically been involved in agriculture and value-added processing for both the market and home consumption (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011; Pehu, Lambrou, & Hartl, 2009). This is consistent with the prominence of female participation in agritourism. Due to women's increasing participation in agriculture, agritourism and rural development are currently experiencing significant growth worldwide (Hoppe & Korb, 2013).

The indispensable role of women in the creation, maintenance, and innovation of agritourism enterprises is evident but often unrecognized (Anthopoulou, 2010). However, despite their substantial involvement in agricultural production and entrepreneurship, the literature suggests that significant gender disparities persist in accessing agrarian resources, such as land, technology, and inputs, as well as in the acquisition of social and human capital and decision-making authority (Jetter & Parmeter, 2018). These inequalities persist because patriarchal systems do not adequately support women in agriculture and other spheres of economic endeavors (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011; Pehu et al., 2009).

The literature further informs us that women in the agritourism industry earn less money than men (M Farzana Halim, Barbieri, Morais, Jakes, & Seekamp, 2020), most likely due to the challenges they face in the agricultural sector, including limited access to markets and networks. This could be because men control most of these institutions and are not yet ready to work with women as equal partners in the field. Achieving SDG8 in Zimbabwe and other economies will prove challenging as long as women remain marginalized in economic activities.

Assigned traditional family roles for women are frequently viewed as obstacles, as family members often pressure them to prioritize family responsibilities over business ventures (De Clercq, Kaciak, & Thongpapanl, 2022). This pressure is especially prominent in rural societies, where women in developing economies often engage in agritourism. Consequently, women are excluded from contributing to the socio-economic development of their communities and the global economy. Women entrepreneurs, particularly in patriarchal settings such as agritourism, face complex structural barriers, including discrimination from suppliers, buyers, business associates, and even their families (Mashapure, Nyagadza, Chikazhe, Mazuruse, & Hove, 2023).

This challenging environment has the potential to undermine the credibility of distinguished women entrepreneurs, often resulting in negative self-perceptions and a sense of isolation. Therefore, women engaged in agritourism and other enterprises continue to face discrimination worldwide. Thus, the marginalized status of women in many developing economies undermines economic growth, gender equality, and empowerment. To achieve substantial development, developing countries must recognize and harness the potential of women.

1.1 The aim of the study

This study, based on a review of the literature on women in agritourism, aims to evaluate the potential of agritourism in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Zimbabwe and other developing economies. The attainment of gender equality (SDG 5) is posited as a facilitator of SDG 8.

1.2 Hypothesis

Participation in agritourism empowers women economically and promotes gender equality in rural developing economies. To address this hypothesis, the following questions were formulated:

- a) To what extent does agritourism assist in the empowerment of women and gender equality in Zimbabwe?
- b) What are the socio-cultural impacts of agritourism on gender roles, particularly in the context of women?
- c) What are the challenges and enablers of women's active participation in agritourism?

- d) In the context of agritourism, what policy recommendations can be made to policymakers regarding how developing economies can accomplish gender equality and empowerment?

2. Literature Review

In many developing economies, women are widely recognized as the primary force behind the sustenance of the well-being of their immediate and extended families and even entire communities through agritourism (Simba & Nziku, 2022). Exploiting the full potential of women in agriculture is crucial to alleviating the problems of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition on a global scale (Anderson, Reynolds, Biscaye, Patwardhan, & Schmidt, 2021). Hence, it is essential to understand their socioeconomic pursuits within developing economies. In rural locales across the globe, it is predominantly women who constitute the most economically disadvantaged demographic because of their subordination role and lack of resources (De La O Campos, Villani, Davis, & Takagi, 2018; Kabonga, Zvokumba, Nyagadza, & Dube, 2023; Okeke-Uzodike, 2019; Suttie et al., 2018).

Another reason is that women tend to engage in economic activities less frequently than men do, and when they do, Kelley, Singer, and Herrington (2016) observed that their motivation often stems from necessity rather than from opportunity. Thus, Bianco, Lombe, and Bolis (2017) contend that many of these disparities in economic outcomes are linked to the specific sectors in which women tend to operate, where men predominantly occupy spaces controlling all the activities and decision-making. Although the number of women involved in farming has increased in the United States and other parts of the world, it remains unclear whether this greater participation in agriculture translates to enhanced empowerment and gender equality. It should be noted that merely having an opportunity is insufficient unless it is actively leveraged by the firm.

Women in agritourism are doing precisely that by harnessing social media to raise awareness, attract more customers, and expand the reach of their businesses (Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015). For example, Wright and Annes (2016) discovered that agritourism presents a unique context for women's empowerment by offering opportunities for greater equality and empowerment. It is noted that women in agritourism in North Carolina continue to pursue opportunities, from discovery to exploitation, all aimed at benefiting their enterprises pursuing opportunities, from discovery to exploitation. This proactive approach can lead to ripple effects, propelling their businesses further (McGehee, Kim, & Jennings, 2007).

However, it has been revealed that women face greater hurdles in accessing land and credit facilities, which perpetuates their economic inactivity (Hayford & Kloke-Lesch, 2013). Men still tend to confine women to specific social roles that perpetuate oppressive structures (Zvavahera & Chigora, 2023). While women from the Global North may experience certain privileges, the situation differs significantly in the Global South. This contrast could be attributed to the patriarchal systems, norms, and values that fail to endorse women's economic pursuits. Despite comprising 60% to 80% of smallholder farmers in the developing world, women encounter legal and cultural barriers related to land inheritance, ownership, and utilization, resulting in a lower percentage of women landholders (Jetter & Parmeter, 2018).

This percentage varies significantly from country to country, ranging from under 5% in Mali to over 30% in Botswana (Nations, 2017). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the average proportion of female landholders is only 15%, with less than 10% receiving credit and a mere 7% accessing extension services. This indicates that women in this sector face disadvantages, as their contributions are not acknowledged, and men make crucial decisions and derive financial benefits from their efforts. Consequently, even though women contribute to the labor force, they lack control over significant resources. Women engaged in agritourism in Nigeria and many parts of Africa face similar challenges associated with the patriarchal agricultural structure. Notably, unequal land rights emerge as a prominent challenge in this context, persisting even in societies governed by gender-equitable laws. This patriarchal structure is also evident in institutional support systems, which are predominantly male-dominated, including extension agents (Kilby, Mukhopadhyay, & Lahiri-Dutt, 2019).

2.1 The Zimbabwean context

Agriculture is acknowledged as the cornerstone of Zimbabwe's economic development due to its agro-centric nature (Makumbe, 2025). In rural areas, where 67% of Zimbabwean women reside, agriculture is their primary source of sustenance. Despite dedicating daily work hours ranging from 8 to 16 hours, only 15% of these women have land titles (Munemo, Manzvera, & Agbelie, 2022). Women actively involved in various facets of agriculture and value addition for the market in Zimbabwe and other regions encounter numerous challenges, including structural barriers, discriminatory social norms, inadequate support, insufficient funding, and limited access to markets (Development, 2018). These challenges are partially rooted in deeply ingrained patriarchal systems, cultural values and traditional customs (Munando, 2017; Zvavahera, Dikito-Wachtmeister, Pasipanodya, Mwenda, & Achar, 2021).

The subordinate status of women in Zimbabwe hinders their ability to make substantial contributions to local and global economies via agritourism. Similar challenges have been documented in the literature from various parts of the world, suggesting commonality in developing economies. Despite agritourism's growing prominence as a rural development strategy, there exists a gap in its actual capacity to empower women and promote gender equality within the unique socio-economic and cultural context of Zimbabwe (Derera, Croce, Phiri, & O'Neill, 2020; M Farzana Halim et al., 2020; Makumbe, 2025).

This gap primarily stems from the pervasive gender bias entrenched within Zimbabwe's traditional social and cultural frameworks, which severely limits women's access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, and involvement in economic activities (Zvavahera et al., 2021). The existing literature highlights successful examples of women involved in agritourism in certain countries, notably from the Global North, inspiring women in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world, as well as providing valuable lessons for stakeholders. The following section discusses the challenges and opportunities of agritourism in facilitating women's empowerment and gender equality in developing economies.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Feminist theory

This study is grounded in feminist theory, which posits that power structures, social norms, and cultural practices shape ownership and control of most economic resources. Feminist theory acknowledges that patriarchal structures contribute to gender disparities in developing economies (Zvavahera et al., 2021). This approach helps identify barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment and address inequities in the agritourism environment. Understanding and challenging existing power structures, societal norms, and gender roles that perpetuate inequity is central to this analytical perspective. According to the study's aim, feminist theory assists in understanding power dynamics, gender norms and values, access to resources, economic and social empowerment, agency, and decision-making (Zvavahera & Chirima, 2023). These terms are briefly explained below:

- a) Power dynamics and access to resources:** Feminist theory assists in understanding power dynamics in developing economies' agritourism (O'Connor, Carvalho, Vabø, & Cardoso, 2015). This is particularly useful in situations where an individual has decision-making authority, controls resources, and derives financial benefits from agritourism. Using feminist perspectives, this study examines whether women in agritourism have access to and control over resources such as land, financing, and technology. This allows for a critical assessment of whether these resources contribute to genuine empowerment or perpetuate gender inequities.
- b) Challenging gender norms and roles:** Feminist theory encourages understanding how agritourism challenges established gender roles in agriculture (Odhiambo, 2011). It investigates whether women are moving beyond their traditional roles as contributors to farm labor and becoming actively involved in decision-making and entrepreneurial activities. This study aims to determine whether these initiatives promote societal shifts that empower women by dispelling myths and fostering a more inclusive environment.
- c) Social and economic empowerment:** According to feminist theory, economic empowerment is an important component of women's overall empowerment (Boadi, Adibura, Opuni-Frimpong, & Ayiku, 2025; McLaren & Cornell, 2008). This study examines the economic opportunities

that agritourism presents for women, including income generation, entrepreneurship, and financial independence. This study also aims to explore how agritourism contributes to women's social capital from a feminist perspective. Part of this involves examining networks, collaborations, and community support systems that can be strengthened to enhance women's social empowerment in agritourism settings.

d) *Agency and decision-making*

Feminist thought emphasizes the value of women's agency and autonomy (Ortiz-Rodríguez, Pillai, & Ribeiro-Ferreira, 2017). This study explores whether women actively participate in decision-making at the individual and community levels. The feminist view is used to understand whether women in agritourism have a voice in governance structures and whether their contributions to defining the direction of agritourism efforts are valued in the study area.

Feminist theory provides a solid framework for investigating agritourism's ability to empower women and promote gender equality in developing economies. This assists in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at work within the agritourism sector and their influence on women by critically studying power relations, challenging gender conventions, assessing economic and social empowerment, and addressing intersectionality.

3 Research Methodology

The selection of a systematic approach for conducting a literature review stemmed from its capacity to provide a comprehensive, structured, and unbiased examination of the current knowledge based on the capacity of agritourism to facilitate women's empowerment and gender equality in developing economies. This method facilitates the evaluation, analysis, and condensation of extensive information into more manageable and relevant insights.

3.1 Search process and keywords

The study utilized the following search engines and databases: JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, EconLit, and ProQuest to explore pertinent literature, showcasing a thorough and comprehensive method for obtaining insights on the topic. Additionally, a literature review from the Global North was conducted, providing valuable insights into women's empowerment and gender equality in developed economies.

The following keywords were used to search the relevant literature:

- agritourism;
- empowerment of women;
- gender equality;
- economies under development;
- agricultural practices;
- rural development; and
- entrepreneurship.

Using these combinations of keywords, the researcher expedited the search for relevant material, concentrating on studies, research papers, official reports, and books that discussed the significance of agritourism in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in developing economies. The literature was evaluated for eligibility using government reports, peer-reviewed journal publications, and topic relevance standards.

3.2 Inclusion criteria

The following exclusion criteria were considered:

- studies that directly addressed or significantly contributed to the understanding of agritourism and its role in facilitating female empowerment and gender equality;
- prioritized studies conducted in developing economies to ensure the applicability of findings to the specific context of Zimbabwe.
- included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and reputable reports to ensure the reliability and credibility of the sources.

- prioritised recent publications to capture the latest trends, developments, and perspectives in the field; and
- The included studies draw from various disciplines, such as agriculture, tourism, gender studies, and development, to offer a holistic understanding of the topic.

3.3 Exclusion criteria

The following exclusion criteria were considered:

- excluded studies that did not directly address agritourism or its connection to women's empowerment and gender equality;
- excluded purely theoretical papers or literature reviews that did not present empirical evidence or substantively contribute to the empirical understanding of the topic;
- excluded sources that were not peer-reviewed or lacked credibility, such as blog posts or non-academic publications; and
- excluded outdated studies to ensure that the review reflected recent research and developments.

These criteria aimed to ensure that the literature review encompassed relevant and robust studies that directly contributed to the exploration of agritourism's impact on promoting gender equality and empowering women in emerging economies.

3.4 Synthesis of key findings

The presentation and analysis of the data extracted from the selected studies were based on the identified key themes, patterns, and research questions. The subsequent section presents the study's theoretical foundation.

4 Results and Discussions

The discussion focuses on the challenges and opportunities in the capacity of agritourism to facilitate women's empowerment and gender equality in Zimbabwe.

4.1 Challenges

The analysis identified five obstacles faced by women in agritourism: socio-cultural hurdles, uneven application of legal frameworks, biased economic systems, networking difficulties, and lack of decision-making authority. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of these challenges.

4.1.1 Socio-cultural challenges

The predominant narrative surrounding women in Zimbabwean agriculture primarily revolves around their enduring hardships and recurring cycles of poverty, often overlooking their successes and accomplishments (Bungu, 2019). Socio-cultural factors in agriculture encompass a broad spectrum of elements shaping this sector, including traditional practices, gender roles, community dynamics, and cultural beliefs (De La O Campos et al., 2018). This perspective is echoed by Zaman and Shahid (2023), who observed that traditional familial roles ascribed to women are frequently perceived as hindrances, as family members often pressure them not to compromise their household responsibilities in pursuit of their enterprises. This corresponds with feminist theory, which suggests that women hold disadvantaged positions in society despite their substantial contributions to the agritourism sector. This shows that women's social inferiority has a significant influence on raising their economic status and giving them more power to make decisions. Feminist theory, which advocates for women's empowerment in agritourism through mutually beneficial networks, partnerships, and community support systems, opposes this.

Women's right to land is crucial for achieving gender equality and empowerment, especially in rural communities. For women to have daily sustenance, financial stability, and physical security, they must possess and own land. According to Sulaj and Themelko (2024) and Emelj, Ana, Marina, and Tom (2024), the lack of land ownership in most developing countries impedes women's equality and empowerment in agritourism and puts them at risk of socio-economic vulnerability. This is corroborated by feminist theory (O'Connor et al., 2015), which asserts that men possess decision-making authority inside and outside the home. In addition, the absence of collateral frequently limits women's access to

insurance and credit. Moreover, women have a lower chance of accessing extension services, which are essential sources of knowledge regarding new agricultural technologies in developing nations.

Due to these limitations, women encounter difficulties in adopting contemporary sustainable agricultural practices, impeding their progress in agritourism and related economic endeavors. Addressing these practices and challenges is paramount for advancing gender equality, enhancing agricultural methodologies and attaining food security. Land ownership and equitable resource access are essential for women's self-sufficiency. In impoverished and marginalised regions, as well as areas affected by climate change, where men are compelled to migrate in search of employment, women often bear the sole responsibility for farming and raising children (Castelo, Antunes, & Ashrafuzzaman, 2024).

In Zimbabwe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, women typically dedicate 12 or more hours per week to providing for their families (Jetter & Parmeter, 2018), making agriculture the primary source of their livelihoods. Despite investing a significant amount of time in cultivating land and selling agricultural produce, women face notable barriers in accessing resources and services essential for enhancing productivity, increasing income, and reducing household duties. Labor-intensive and time-consuming activities further impede women's potential in agritourism to enhance their income-earning capabilities. Additionally, factors such as limited education, unequal property rights, and restricted control over resources and decision-making contribute to the challenges women face in this context. These hurdles are often attributed to inadequate government support, a lack of collateral security for accessing funding and business opportunities, and insufficient entrepreneurial knowledge, among other factors. Addressing the needs and rights of women is crucial for the prosperity and growth of poor rural communities worldwide.

4.1.2 Discrepant implementation of legal frameworks

Despite the assurance of gender parity and equitable access to land and other resources in provisions 3, 13, 17, 26, and 76 of the Zimbabwean Constitution, women continue to encounter discrimination in all spheres of life. This challenge extends beyond Zimbabwe, with women involved in agritourism facing land-rights disparities in Nigeria and other developing economies. This suggests that cultural norms often prevail over legal systems in matters of land ownership and access, impeding women's full engagement in agritourism. The irregular enforcement of these policies by the Zimbabwean government and other developing economies further complicates the situation. This lack of political will hampers the attainment of SDG 8, revealing insufficient commitment to supporting female agritourism workers. Considering the historical disadvantages women have endured in various aspects of life, it is imperative to implement deliberate measures to empower women and narrow the gender gap. In line with feminist theory, women are encouraged to transcend their traditional roles and actively contribute to the broader economy (Odhiambo, 2011).

4.1.3 Biased economic systems

It is widely acknowledged that women face significant challenges in accessing opportunities and resources such as financial resources and land. The inherent gender bias within the economic system poses difficulties for women in agritourism when seeking funding, equipment, and other forms of support for their businesses. This aligns with the findings of (Umukoro, Kore-Okiti, & Megbele, 2024), who highlight the land rights disparities faced by women in Nigeria, Africa, and other developing economies. Despite constitutional provisions in Zimbabwe ensuring gender equality and equal access to land and productive resources (provisions 3, 13, 17, 26, and 76), discrimination against women persists (Dziva, 2018).

Women entrepreneurs operating in traditionally patriarchal environments, such as agritourism, continue to encounter complex structural barriers, including biases from suppliers, buyers, business associates and family members (Mashapure et al., 2023). This challenging environment can undermine the credibility of distinguished women entrepreneurs, often leading to negative self-perceptions and a sense of isolation (Panda, 2018). Women engage in entrepreneurial pursuits less frequently than men, and when they do, their motivation is often driven by necessity rather than by seizing an opportunity, as

observed by Kelley et al. (2016). Consequently, discrimination against women persists in agritourism and other businesses worldwide. As Zvavahera and Chirima (2023) explain, feminists strive to promote equality across all spheres of life.

Agritourism offers women the opportunity to diversify their revenue streams, thereby reducing their reliance on a single income source, such as farming. This diversification can enhance financial security for women and their families, serving as a safety net during agricultural market fluctuations or crop disasters. However, merely having the opportunity is insufficient unless it is actively leveraged. In India, for example, women in agritourism are utilizing social media to raise awareness, attract more customers, and expand the reach of their businesses (Jones et al., 2015), demonstrating a proactive approach that can lead to a ripple effect, propelling their businesses forward.

4.1.4 Networking challenges

Agritourism has the potential to enhance networking opportunities for women through clubs and societies, as suggested by the literature, particularly since they often face limited access to markets and information (Zvavahera et al., 2021). The lack of information creates inequitable possibilities for accessing markets and related resources, emphasizing the crucial role of effective communication with key stakeholders, as Riaz, Yanqing, Ishaq, Raza, and Siddiqui (2024) have emphasized. Additionally, the external business environment significantly influences the opportunities available to women. Women in the field acknowledge the rising interest in acquiring knowledge about agriculture and the heightened demand for locally sourced foods, mirroring a worldwide shift in consumer preferences, as observed in North Carolina. This trend, highlighted by Sadiku (2022), underscores the need to establish meaningful connections between students and teachers.

A notable obstacle for women in the agritourism industry is the lack of skills in marketing, customer service, and hospitality, which hinders their meaningful participation in the broader economy and their ability to contribute significantly to the establishment of decent work (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2019). Developing these skills can enhance their confidence and enable them to engage in various economic activities, providing them with greater influence over decisions made at home and in society. Consequently, empowerment becomes a means to simultaneously achieve SDG 1 (no poverty), 5 (gender equality), and 8 (decent work and economic growth). The situation in Zimbabwe stands in stark contrast to the principles of feminism.

4.1.5 Limited decision-making opportunities

Owing to the predominant control of resources by men, women often lack the authority to make crucial decisions in economic activities, leading to a lack of financial independence and affecting their overall well-being. Actively engaging in agritourism could afford women a more significant role in domestic and communal decision-making processes. As emphasized by Jetter and Parmeter (2018), empowered women can challenge deeply rooted gender roles and norms that have historically hindered their progress in the labor market.

In India, women participating in agritourism are reshaping the conventional narrative by assuming roles as producers and contributing to the market, thereby enhancing their socioeconomic status (Chatterjee & Prasad, 2019). This transformation implies their potential contribution to attaining Sustainable Development Goal 8 through employment generation and potential involvement in decision-making processes. This aligns with feminist theory, which urges women to question entrenched traditional norms and values that hinder gender equality and empowerment. Considering India's progress as a developing nation, similar initiatives could be extrapolated to other developing countries, such as Zimbabwe, Africa, and beyond. The developments in India correspond with the goals of feminist advocates, as women are transcending conventional gender norms (Odhiambo, 2011).

4.2 Opportunities for women in agritourism

Participation in agritourism affords women the opportunity to enhance their standing within their communities, as demonstrated by Knight and Cottrell (2016). Beyond its economic benefits, agritourism can empower women by reinforcing their self-esteem, sense of identity, and independence,

encouraging their engagement in activities beyond traditional homemaking roles, as noted in studies (Barbieri, Stevenson, & Knollenberg, 2019; Meutia, Yulianti, Sujadmiko, Faedlulloh, & Sanjaya, 2022). This can further catalyze women's empowerment and gender equality (Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015).

While these employment opportunities enable women to assert themselves more prominently in traditionally male-dominated public and private spheres within their communities, Çiçek, Zencir, and Kozak (2017) argue that they can also yield negative consequences, such as the disruption of established gender roles within family and social structures. However, the advantages of women's participation in agritourism outweigh the disadvantages. Generally, within the tourism sector, women often encounter barriers to professional growth, finding themselves relegated to low-skill positions and low income that extends from their traditional family roles, such as housekeeping (Çiçek et al., 2017). This finding aligns with feminist ideology, which advocates women's empowerment in resource ownership and decision-making regarding their economic activities.

4.2.1 Entrepreneurship development

Chant, Moser, and McIlwaine (2015) emphasized agritourism's transformative potential in fostering women's entrepreneurship. Agritourism enterprises can serve as platforms for women to actively engage in entrepreneurial activities, leading to economic growth and job creation, thereby achieving SDG 8. By promoting skill development programs tailored specifically for women in agritourism, there is an opportunity to enhance their capabilities in sustainable agricultural practices and hospitality (Lapuz, Manlapaz, & Francisco, 2024). This holistic approach not only contributes to SDG 8 by promoting inclusive economic growth and employment creation, but also allows women to participate more widely in various sectors (Duflo, 2012).

This emerging trend is increasingly attracting tourists seeking unique experiences beyond the typical sightseeing offerings of a destination (Zvavahera & Chirima, 2023). Agritourism is often seen as a supplementary source of income and caters to a niche market because of its exclusivity. If approached earnestly, agritourism can serve as a significant revenue stream for women. Feminists want to ensure that women assert their place in society and all economic efforts, despite the grim picture painted by the literature from most developing economies. Women can only empower themselves in this manner. They need to stand up for themselves.

4.2.2 Employment creation and rural development

In addition to providing supplementary income, agritourism offers several other advantages. These include improving rural lifestyles (Ling, Yusoff, & Adnan, 2025), generating employment (Lak & Khairabadi, 2022), and preserving cultural heritage, which is the thrust of SDG 8. These collective benefits contribute to promoting rural development. Consequently, women in agritourism in the United States of America are increasingly embracing and integrating agritourism activities into their farming operations, and women in developing countries should emulate the same. In a study conducted in California by Saleh and Ehlers (2025), it was noted that due to the complexity of agriculture, women farmers go beyond their obligations as caretakers to serve as business owners and community stewards. This is a positive development that women in Zimbabwe and other developing economies should emulate. They should strive to participate in the global economy, which is the goal of feminism.

4.2.3 Access to financial resources

Creating mechanisms for women to access financial resources, microfinance, and funding for agritourism ventures is crucial for their empowerment. The government can play a pivotal role in establishing supportive frameworks, while cooperating partners focusing on women's entrepreneurship can contribute through financial assistance and skills development initiatives. This ensures that women have the financial backing needed to initiate and expand their agritourism enterprises, aligning with the goals of SDG 8. Feminist theory emphasises that economic empowerment is a critical aspect of women's overall empowerment and must be supported by access to financial resources. However, in many developing economies, women engaged in agritourism often face significant barriers to accessing these resources.

4.2.4 Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices

Encouraging the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices among women involved in agritourism aligns with SDG 8's sustainability emphasis. By integrating eco-friendly and sustainable farming methods, women contribute to environmental conservation and ensure the long-term viability of their agritourism endeavors.

4.2.5 Market linkages and access

Women's participation in agritourism provides an opportunity to establish direct market linkages by bypassing intermediaries and ensuring fair pricing. This can lead to increased economic returns for women engaged in agritourism (Annes & Wright, 2015). Enhanced market access contributes to SDG 8 by promoting fair trades and inclusive economic growth.

4.2.6 Community engagement and inclusive decision-making

Encouraging women's active participation in community-based agritourism projects is essential for fostering community engagement. Moreover, ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes contributes to a more inclusive and equitable distribution of benefits within the community than the current situation. This aligns with Aboe et al. (2023) argument that inclusive decision-making processes are vital for the success of community projects, linking to SDG 8's aim of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

4.2.7 Technological integration

Leveraging technology in agritourism, such as online marketing, booking systems, and communication tools, provides an opportunity to enhance women's visibility and expand their reach (Ragasa, 2012). This aligns with Palacios-Lopez and López (2015), highlighting the potential of technological integration to empower women by connecting them with a broader audience and facilitating efficient business operations.

4.2.8 Policy advocacy

Policy advocacy is crucial for advancing women's economic empowerment in agritourism. Emphasizing the relevance of gender-responsive policies ensures that the regulatory framework supports equality and inclusivity in agritourism. This is in line with the more general objectives of SDG 8, which emphasizes the development of frameworks for policies that support steady, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. Together, these opportunities provide a thorough framework for investigating how agritourism might greatly advance the achievement of SDG 8 by acting as a potent catalyst for gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas.

4.3 Model on agritourism and gender equality

Considering these findings, this study proposes a model for addressing gender inequality in agritourism in developing economies. Figure 1 illustrates a hybrid model for addressing agritourism and gender equality challenges in developing economies, centered on feminist theory, which highlights gender roles, power relations and the pursuit of equity.

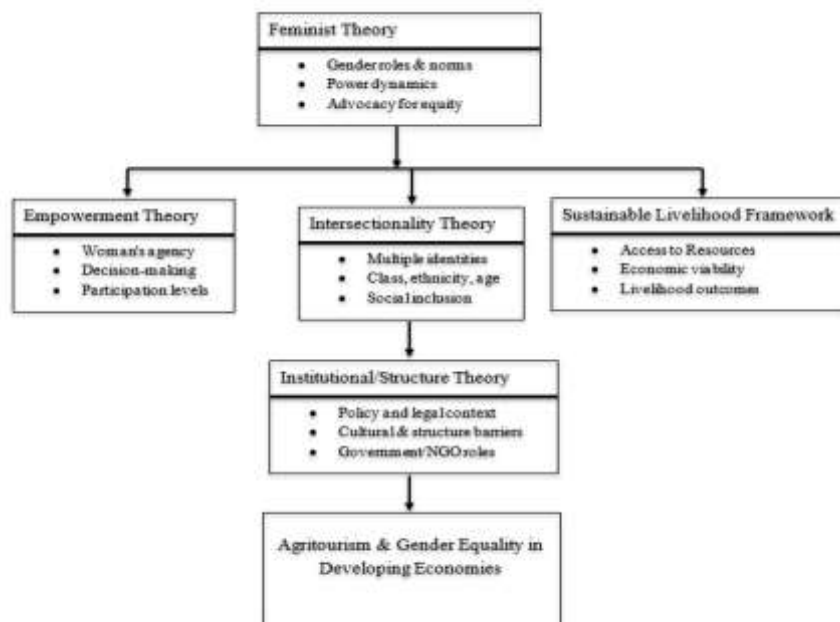


Figure 1: Agritourism and gender equality model
Sources: Researcher's model

Figure 1. Agritourism and Gender Equality Framework

The model incorporates empowerment theory, emphasising women's agency, decision-making, and participation; intersectionality theory, which underscores the varied identities and experiences of women influenced by class, ethnicity, and age; and the sustainable livelihood framework, which examines resource access, economic viability, and livelihood outcomes, to address its limitations and provide a more thorough analysis. This is underpinned by institutional/structural theory, which analyses the overarching policy, legal, cultural, and structural elements influencing women's involvement in agritourism in the study area. Collectively, these theories offer comprehensive knowledge of the challenges and opportunities women encounter in agritourism, integrating ideological, social, economic, and institutional perspectives to inform successful analysis and intervention efforts.

5 Conclusions

The literature review findings indicated limited economic participation, limited empowerment initiatives, and a lack of freedom in decision-making for women. Few women have land titles, which negates their participation in agritourism and other economic activities that can improve their socio-economic status in their communities. This gender-based discrimination highlights the potential for policy recommendations to improve women's participation and socio-cultural shifts in gender roles and community attitudes toward women in the sector. Women in agritourism confront several challenges, such as the community's patriarchal social structure, inadequate government support, a lack of collateral security to obtain funding, a shortage of time or a conflicting role to balance work and family responsibilities, and a lack of relevant entrepreneurial knowledge. Most developing economies, including Zimbabwe, are experiencing this trend.

Women working in agritourism define success in ways that go beyond financial gains. This viewpoint promotes an all-encompassing strategy for achieving entrepreneurial success, including a wide range of goals beyond financial measurements. However, it can be concluded that what is happening in Zimbabwe and other developing economies is contrary to the dictates of feminist theory and the hypothesis of this study. Feminist theory dictates that society is fundamentally patriarchal, perpetuating gender inequality and oppression, and seeks to analyze and dismantle these power structures to achieve social, economic, and political equality for all genders. It can be concluded that participating in agritourism empowers women economically and promotes gender equality in Zimbabwe and beyond.

5.1 Limitations

A notable drawback is the scarcity of literature examining the potential of agritourism to foster women's empowerment and promote gender equality in developing economies, with a specific gap identified in the context of Zimbabwe and other developing economies. Another limitation is that some of the literature reviewed provided evidence of associations but failed to establish a causation. It is challenging to determine whether agritourism directly causes women's empowerment or if other factors are at play. The literature reviewed is from different contexts, regions and times. The diversity in agritourism practices, cultural norms, and economic conditions across developing economies could make it challenging to draw generalized conclusions from the findings.

This study implies the need for further efforts to bridge the gender gap in agritourism, emphasizing the necessity of elevating women to a level comparable to their male counterparts. In summary, the literature reviewed falls short of aligning with feminist principles, which advocate for leveling power dynamics and access to resources, challenging gender norms and roles, promoting social and economic empowerment, and supporting agency and decision making.

5.2 Suggestions

- The Government should integrate gender-sensitive policies within tourism and agricultural programs to guarantee women's active involvement and equitable advantages.
- Reforms in land tenure and support for women's initiatives can supplement women's authority over productive resources.
- The Government and financial institutions should enhance microfinance, low-interest loans, and grant programs specifically designed for women agritourism.
- The Government and key stakeholders should facilitate training women in agricultural management, hospitality, digital marketing, and sustainable practices.
- Women's networks and associations should promote collective ownership frameworks that enable women to consolidate resources, exchange expertise, and enhance their bargaining power.
- The Government and key stakeholders should implement community awareness initiatives to confront misconceptions and emphasize women's leadership roles in agritourism, rather than merely as assistants.

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