GENDER EMPOWERMENT IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: Female bungalow hosts in Vanuatu

Nicole Orsua, Joseph M. Cheer and Madelene Blaer

Abstract

Tourism development's potential to contribute to the empowerment of women in Vanuatu is the central theme of this chapter, which examines the pivotal role that female empowerment plays in sustainable tourism development. The female bungalow entrepreneur in the province of Shefa in Vanuatu is the focus of this qualitative-based enquiry. For women in Vanuatu, considerable barriers predominate and hinder progress towards empowerment and the ability to exercise agency over their lives. Tourism micro-enterprise development in the form of bungalow accommodation holds enormous potential, but without cultural and institutional change, hurdles to female empowerment prevail. Lenses and theories of empowerment are utilized to uncover the impacts that entrepreneurship has had on the bungalow hosts' psyche and on their social and familial relationships, financial stability and political standing within the village. The chapter identifies the implications for future research and strategic policy development.

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Introduction

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of employees in the global tourism industry were women, though there were notable gender gaps in wages, senior management positions and political representation (UNWTO 2019). As Alarcòn and Cole (2019) argue, there can be no sustainability in tourism without gender equality and, thus, this proposition is examined in this chapter. The work poses a fundamental question: 'To what extent do experiences of female bungalow hosts imply progress toward gender empowerment in Vanuatu?' To understand the experiences of the ni-Vanuatu (Indigenous Melanesians native to Vanuatu) bungalow hosts, this chapter will first explore the cultural and historical impacts on gender equality in Vanuatu and the role sustainable tourism has in its development. The second part of the chapter will be an analysis of their experiences through utilizing four dimensions of empowerment developed by Scheyvens and Lagisa (1998) which Scheyvens then applied to ecotourism (1999, 2010). The conclusion discusses the identified barriers to the development of empowerment for female entrepreneurs, recognizing how the implementation of gender-specific policies can help foster gender empowerment in the Pacific.

Vanuatu is a lower-middle-income economy situated in the Melanesia division of the South Pacific (World Bank 2020). It has a curious historical past as a condominium of both France and Great Britain, giving it distinctive Francophone-Anglophone characteristics. Although there are scores of dialects across the country's scattered archipelago, Bislama, a creolised version of English is universally spoken. Over the past two decades, tourism has proved to be a significant economic driver in the South Pacific with international arrivals increasing by around 50% between 2005 and 2015, and Vanuatu is no exception (Everett et al. 2018). 2019 was a record year for Vanuatu, as international air traffic increased by 18.3%, leading to a total of 219,000 arrivals (Air Vanuatu 2020). Vanuatu's tourism growth halted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (DFAT 2020a). In the same year, Cyclone Harold struck Vanuatu's central and upper islands (DFAT 2020b). The closure of borders due to the pandemic led to loss of employment and income for more than 2,000 employees in the formal economy, mostly within the hospitality and construction industries (Tugeta 2020). The economic loss in the private sector between the period of March to June 2020 was estimated atVUV$7.58 billion (US$70 million) (Naupa 2020).

While there is an increase in research surrounding the intersection between tourism and gender empowerment, there is a general lack of understanding, interpretation and implementation of gender equality into the policies and practices of global tourism (Alarcòn and Cole 2019). Nevertheless, gender-sensitive tourism policies at a national level can give rise to eco- nomic empowerment for women in tourism (UNWTO 2019). Expressions of gender inequalities in Vanuatu vary and are most evident in data relating to domestic violence, marrying age for women, education attainment, (under)representation in employment, poor land ownership rights and constraints to accessing money and bank accounts. For every 100 males attending primary and secondary school there is a 10% decrease in female attendance, a gap which widens significantly at the tertiary level (Naidu 2010). Men are employed at a 65% higher rate than women in the formal economy, whereas women are 50% more likely than men to be working in unpaid family labour (VNSO 2016).

The Melanesian economy can be categorized into three categories: formal, informal and non-cash based (Carnegie et al. 2012). The formal economy is defined as engaging in waged or salaried-based work for a registered business that produces goods or services. In the tourism sector, this includes restaurants and cafes, accommodation providers, tour operators and souvenir stores. The informal economy includes paid domestic work and the creation of goods and services for non-registered businesses and does not include lodging of taxes or licensing fees. The non-cash economy refers to unpaid work such as community work, family and household duties, and church and community service.

Gender in tourism

Kinnaird and Hall's (1994) gender analysis represents one of the foremost forays addressing the issue of gender from a tourism development perspective. Margaret Swain's (1995) seminal publication followed, arguing that gender analysis needed to be brought into mainstream tour- ism research as an agent of change, especially as it was not significantly utilized in destination planning. Women spend more hours on unpaid care and domestic work than men (UN 2020), an imbalance that continues when a woman enters formal or informal economies. This imbalance is referred to as 'double burden' (IWDA 2016) and is a common theme in gender-based enquiries in tourism (Alarcòn and Cole 2019; Suarez 2018). Moreover, the identification of the 'third shift' exposes inequity whereby a woman's first shift is the caretaking role, second is household responsibilities, and the third comprises formal employment (Morgan and Winkler 2020).

Sustainable tourism development in Vanuatu

Sustainability in tourism exists on a spectrum with interpretations between opposing ends of 'micro-sustainability' and 'macro-sustainability' (Stoddard et al. 2012). The 'micro' approach to sustainability concerns a business-like structure, whereas the 'macro' approach incorporates a more holistic approach. Gender equality and empowerment are arguably aligned with the 'macro' approach and contextualized within a diverse set of societal goals. Vanuatu's commitment to sustainability is cemented by the *National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2030* (DSPPAC 2016) and the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy (VSTP) 2019–2030 (VDOT 2019). The overall vision of VSTP is 'to protect and celebrate Vanuatu's unique environment, culture, *kastom* (customs and cultures) and people through sustainable and responsible tourism' (2019: 6). Such initiatives are vital to Vanuatu's economy and daily livelihoods because of heavy reliance on tourism (Cheer and Peel 2011).

Female entrepreneurs in tourism

The tourism industry typically consists of small to medium enterprises (SMEs), highlighting the importance of considering the place of entrepreneurship within tourism development. Coincidentally, there remains a significant gender gap when it comes to female entrepreneurship (GEDI 2014). While employment opportunities for women in tourism are increasingly evident, gender equality barriers persist, limiting advancement of female empowerment in tourism (UNWTO 2020). Barriers to entry for female entrepreneurs are often expressed through gender bias laws, anachronistic cultural norms and lack of access to collateral (UNWTO 2019). More broadly, the accommodation sector has been a gateway for women to enter tourism as the responsibilities of operating a guesthouse are compatible with traditional female work, which includes cleaning and cooking. Micro-businesses such as bungalows and homestays are praised for their positive impacts to rural areas by stimulating regional dispersion by driving visitors away from city centre hotels (Scheyvens 1999, 2010), potentially leading to poverty reduction (Scheyvens and Russell 2012) and stimulating community development (Zapalska and Brozik 2017).

Movono and Dahles (2017) highlight that, while tourism can create opportunities for female empowerment through entrepreneurship, there tends to be a lack of empirical evidence of instances in which empowerment was fully achieved. A sense of empowerment can be explained as the ability to break through traditional gendered norms, thereby increasing power and decision-making within households and communities. Gaining empowerment does not need to be limited to an individual experience and can also be achieved through the creation of female- centric networks and associations (Vujko et al. 2016). These authors note that women usually consolidate resources to create opportunities in which they can nurture each other's skills and create supportive environments for economic and social empowerment.

Kabeer (1999) divides empowerment into three categories: (1) resources, which are not only material goods but also include social and human relationship gains that assist with the ability to make decisions for oneself and one's family; (2) agency, or the capacity to drive decision-making is explained by individuals having the opportunity to not only define personal goals but also to work toward achievement, even in the face of adversity; and (3) achievement occurs when resources were combined with agency, and one was able to make strategic choices about one's life. Therefore, resources, agency, and achievement are the building blocks for empowerment. However, it is important to acknowledge that empowerment is multifaceted and evolves with societal progression (Tucker and Boonabaana 2012). Scheyvens and Lagisa (1998) classify four key dimensions of female empowerment: economic, psychological, social and political. Here, we apply these four dimensions of empowerment to help identify barriers that exist for female bungalow entrepreneurs in Vanuatu.

A qualitative method of enquiry

A qualitative research methodology approach was applied to analyse emotions, perceptions and experiences of ni-Vanuatu female bungalow entrepreneurs. Phenomenology was selected, as it is grounded in the human experience and is ideal to describe the experiences of the local hosts (Pernecky and Jamal 2010).The application of feminist phenomenology adds 'conceptual rich- ness to gender theories' by putting women at the centre of the study (Gardiner 2018: 291) and highlights the unique experiences of female bungalow hosts in what is a largely patriarchal society. To ensure academic rigor 'bracketing' was utilized, a process by which the researcher recognizes and actively attempts to set aside their own inherent biases and preconceived notions that affect the analysis. However, hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that the researcher cannot be separated from the world they are studying (Larkin et al. 2006), and feminist phenomenology is reflexive by nature (Bensemann 2010). To reconcile these opposing views regarding the proper location of the researcher's reflections, Creswell (2013) notes that researchers utilizing bracketing while embracing their experiences through descriptive data often apply bracketing before analysing the experiences of the study's respondents. Two types of descriptive data are applied here: 'textual description' for the experiences of respondents and 'structural' data when referring to the lead researcher's participant observations of the environment in which the interviews took place.

Five semi-structured interviews were employed in which discussion topics were predetermined and a conversational style allowed for diving deeper into participant responses (Galletta and Cross 2013). Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Purposive sampling was employed to align with time and practical constraints and led the researcher to develop close links with tourism sector stakeholders before the commencement of fieldwork, which was supported by the Vanuatu Department of Tourism. The small sample (Table 12.1) suited the exploratory nature of this study while confirming the dearth of female entrepreneurship in the sector. The data analysis was guided by 'interpretive phenomenological analysis' (IPA), an inductive approach that utilizes concept mapping to uncover themes in the participant's responses. From these overarching themes, subthemes are then uncovered.

Findings and analysis

Despite the utilization of a small sample size, demographic patterns did emerge (Table 2). None of the hosts had an education level higher than secondary school, and this finding was consistent with data concerning gender-based participation in Vanuatu's education sector (Naidu 2010) (as highlighted earlier). All the women were married with more than two children, indicating that they had domestic duties in addition to their bungalow responsibilities. The participants ranged in age from their 20s to 60s, and only one had prior work experience in the formal economy.

Island	*Total number of listings*	*Total number owned and operated by men*	*Total number owned and operated by couples*	*Total number owned and operated by women*
Efate	11	5	4	2
Nguna	6	3	2	2
Pele	9	5	3	1
Total	26	13	9	5

Table 1 Bungalow ownership in Shefa province (Source: Authors)

Respondent	*Age*	*Gender*	*Island of residence*	*Level of education*	*Relationship status*	*Number of children*	*Years of operation*	*Decision making of the opening*
R1	55-64	Female	Efate	Secondary	Married	Two	6 to 9	Three months
R2	35-44	Female	Nguna	Secondary	Married	Four	10 or more	Three years
R3	55-64	Female	Nguna	Primary	Married	Five	3 to 5	Six years
R4	35-44	Female	Nguna	Secondary	Married	Four	10 or more	Not Applicable
R5	25-34	Female	Pele	Primary	Married	Three	6 to 9	Three years

Table 2 Demographic background of the study's respondents (Source: Authors)

Respondent 1 (R1)

Located on the main island of Efate, R1 lives in a northern village next to the boat launch for Ngnua and Pele. She has two bungalows, the first of which was built in 2012 as a homestay experience and attached to her home. The second is a freestanding unit completed in 2016 that incorporates modern and traditional designs (Figure 1). In addition to the bungalows, she opened a small shop located in her village.

Respondent 2 (R2)

Located in Nguna, R2 does not have any experience working in hospitality or tourism prior to building her first bungalow more than a decade ago. She started with a building that had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a service area. Over time, she added four standalone structures and the final building was for the toilet and shower. Her previous work experience was as an entrepreneur, as she opened a small village shop in 2015. R2's commitment to her enterprise is apparent by the fact that she engages in the vast majority of the work, despite being married and having four children.

Figure 1 Bungalow belonging to Respondent 1 (R1). Source: N. Orsua, February 2020.

Respondent 3 (R3)

R3's bungalow was a long building with two bedrooms and a large common area that opened out onto a large porch overlooking the water. Her husband and his two brothers established the enterprise, though he was the only surviving brother. R3 and the wives of the deceased brothers oversaw daily operations and were an example of a self-help group (see Vujko et al. 2016), involving women sharing their resources, time and responsibilities. In the start-up process, the three brothers would meet to make business decisions, which included their wives. At the time of the interview, the three women and one surviving brother met to make decisions about the operation. They utilized an overseas-based administrator who paid their salaries based on the work contributed, which came from the money that was deposited into the bungalow's bank account.

Respondent 4 (R4)

R4's situation was unique compared to the other participants. She was the elected manager of a village-owned bungalow enterprise, another example of a self-help group. The four bungalow units were owned and under collective control by women villagers, an arrangement that was compared to an association. Every two years a manager is elected and a committee of five women was formed to facilitate bungalow operations. In addition to managing bungalows, R4 worked at a local primary school overseeing the food programme. The bungalows were not a significant part of life in the village, they were 'just there'. This response indicated that, though the women of the village had identified the opportunity for having bungalows as an economic stimulus for the community, there was no emphasis on maximizing profitability through consistent occupancy. The association had a bank account for the bungalows into which proceeds were deposited. Annually, an appointed treasurer paid the participating women their share of the profits.

Respondent 5 (R5)

The village of Worearu on the island of Pele had five bungalow establishments, with the first erected by R5's father. After watching her father run his bungalow, she suggested the idea to her husband, who then built the first structure in 2016 (Figure 2). R5 was the youngest participant and had three children, the youngest was a toddler who she parents alone when her husband works overseas. He was away during the interview and, upon his return, she had planned to expand her business by adding another bungalow. Unlike R1 and R2, who received unpaid assistance from family members, R5 employed family members. As a result, the bungalow sup- ported both her immediate and extended family.

The collection of resources

All participants are members of the informal and non-cash based economies, having little experience in the formal economy prior to building their bungalows. R1 cleaned for expatriates and sold produce at the roadside markets. R3 also sold produce on the roadside. R4 worked for an expatriate in 2012 as a housekeeper on a private island estate before becoming the head chef of this establishment. R2, R3 and R5 spoke of the importance of financial resources to fund the construction of the bungalows. R2 and R5 received financial and emotional support from family members. R2 and her family decided to start the bungalow enterprise in 2007, taking three years to complete. The delay in completing the first bungalow, especially the bathroom and kitchen, was because they 'didn't have enough money'. To fund construction, R2 utilized the proceeds from her small village shop and her father's boat business. However, the income from these ventures was not regular and 'when the money stopped flow[ing], we stop. When [the money was] back, we build'. R3 sold fruit, vegetables and nuts at the markets in Port Vila to help fund the establishment of her family's bungalow, which took six years to complete. In contrast, R5 relied on her husband's earnings from working overseas, opening her bungalow after three years of intermittent construction.

Figure 2 Bedroom belonging to the bungalow of Respondent 5 (R5). Source: N. Orsua, February 2020.

Agency: the opportunity to define one's goals, even in the face of adversity

R2 indicated that the decision to open a bungalow was made with her family, specifically her parents who assisted in collecting the financial resources to build the infrastructure. The inclusion of family members in the decision-making process did not diminish R2's agency because it became clear she was the primary labourer. R4 worked in a self-help group, though the village women all decided to join the association and take on the responsibility of managing the bungalow when elected. It is important to note that if a woman leverages self-help groups it does not diminish her decision-making capacity and, therefore, does not discount her agency (Vujko et al. 2016). While R5's decision-making process to become an entrepreneur included her husband, his involvement does not diminish her autonomy, as she was the driving force behind the business plan. R3 was the only participant whose goal was not to own her own bungalow, as it was her husband and his brothers that decided to start the business.

The economic dimensions of female empowerment

Empowerment often starts with an increase in resources (Kabeer 1999), which can lead to ending women's economic dependency on men and creating economic empowerment (Movono and Dahles 2017) as well as freedom of financial choice (Moswete and Lacey 2015). The experiences of the ni-Vanuatu respondents suggest that the hosts did not achieve the indicators of Scheyvens' (1999, 2012) nor Moswete and Lacey's (2015) definition of economic independence. However, all the hosts (except for R3) achieved the ability to make financial decisions regarding their businesses. When addressing how revenue earned from the bungalows was utilized, two clear categories emerged: (1) to reinvest (and help to maintain) the business and (2) to support family members. While hosts may not have achieved economic independence at home, R1, R2 and R5 had the autonomy to make financial decisions regarding the needs of the bungalow business. R4 was part of a collective decision-making process, as the association members voted on property updates and maintenance schedules. Therefore, in terms of the instances indicated, it was clear that respondents were active participants in business decision-making.

When it comes to family expenses, R1, R2 and R3 all indicated that they utilized money earned on basic family necessities (shelter, food and clothing), needs (education and utilities) and medical expenses. It was not discerned whether the respondents had equal decision-making power as their spouses when it came to household financial decisions. R1, R2 and R5 indicated that earnings from their bungalow also went to support their extended family. R2 and R5 had children in their households with no access to childcare assistance while working. The burden of childcare would be classified as part of the Melanesian non-paid economy, reinforcing the traditional role of women in the household. Lack of childcare is an indicator of economic disempowerment, as it can be a barrier for women to enter the paid workforce. However, the idea of paid childcare could be framed as a Western preconceived notion of empowerment and was bracketed by the researcher. In village communities, it is more common to have unpaid childcare assistance and, therefore, may not be an indicator of disempowerment in the context of Vanuatu.

When asked about challenges experienced, R1 replied: 'sometime[s] no money'. She explained that there were times when she did not have the money required to purchase the ingredients for the meals included in her overnight rates. In these instances, she had to borrow ('took credit') from her small village shop. When asked if she had any plans on expanding her business her response was: 'yes, but money talks', indicating that lack of funds was keeping her from building a kitchen. R4 identified money as a challenge through disagreement amongst the association members regarding the bungalow's nightly rate. The bungalows were not consistently occupied, and when they were, occupants were mostly from non-governmental organization (NGOs) or governmental agencies requiring discounted rates. The association members were not always

pleased with the discounted rates that R4 negotiated, indicating a different perspective to her revenue management strategies.

The psychological dimension of female empowerment

Psychological empowerment is defined as dignity, self-esteem/pride and self-worth (Scheyvens and Lagisa 1998).The participants were asked questions that address self-image and feelings associated with operating their bungalow enterprise to uncover psychological impacts. The findings concluded that the hosts exhibited dimensions of all indicators and definitions of psychological empowerment. When asked about challenges she experienced as a host, R2 spoke about negative perceptions from members of her village. When asked how she overcame the negativity, she stated: 'One thing about business, you have to be a good person at all times. If I know that person is talking about [me], I do positive. I do everything good'. What she was describing was a sense of dignity that was developed as a result of being an entrepreneur, a facet of psychological empowerment identified by Scheyvens (1999, 2012). Her dignity was expressed through her understanding that she must retain a sense of composure when faced with criticism from her community. R2 articulates the criticism against her as an entrepreneur from the other women in her village, expressing:

> My friends say they are saying negative stories, saying I am proud. Sometimes I focus on the bungalow and no time for village work, and they say I forget about them. Mamas get together every week, but when there are guests, I don't know... [They] think I forget about village needs.

In communities where female entrepreneurship was limited, negative reactions from fellow female villagers toward the pioneering female entrepreneur were observed in which reluctance to accept a pioneering female entrepreneur leads to the female villagers perpetuating traditional gender roles rather than accepting new dimensions (Movono and Dahles 2017). Pioneer female entrepreneurs are the societal outliers that become agents of change, increasing the social capital in their community for women, even if they are not aware of their social capital gains (Diaz- Carrion 2018). For this study, the definition of social capital concerns 'social relations that generate benefits for women' (2018: 109). Diaz-Carrion (2018) also notes that this lack of awareness creates conflicting opinions between what is deemed appropriate behaviour for women based on traditional roles, compared to behaviour influenced by social progress and the creation of new gender roles. R2 articulated experiencing cultural constraints when asked about how she believes members in her village felt about her being a female entrepreneur. It became clear why R2 did not want to call herself 'proud' as there appeared to be a negative perception of her entrepreneurship activities in her village.

Respondents were also asked how owning their own business makes them feel. R2 responded with:

> I am not proud, but happy that I am running a bungalow business. Not proud [because] of so many challenges [that I] have over[come], some, but not all... Am happy and glad [to] run own business and can do it on my own. Because they depend on [me] for everything.

In this context, the word 'they' refers to her family. Her answer displayed self-reliance, higher self-esteem and faith in her own abilities. R2 overcame numerous obstacles to gain the levels of achievements she has experienced. The respondents were asked if owning their own bungalow caused a change in their self-identity or self-image. In response, R5 answered: 'Yes, I learn a lot from how I run the business, [because] I don't know anything before, and I faced challenges and overcome. At first Shefa [Travel, a division of The Department of Tourism] helped a lot. [I am] not really experienced but going on well now'. While displaying an increase in self-esteem and self-reliance, R5 stopped short of allowing herself to be proud of her hard work, as did R2.

According to a Shefa Travel representative, pride in ni-Vanuatu culture tends to have a negative connotation, as it implies that individuals are 'thinking highly of themselves... they will not use (pride), but the term happy covers the term pride as well' (pers. comm. February 2020). Being proud of their businesses was apparent through the appearance of their accommodation establishments, which were clean, tidy, bright and colourful, showcasing shells and flowers as decorations. R5 drew a connection between her self-worth and supporting her family, stating: 'I feel glad [because] it is very helpful for me and my family. Guests give money to develop [the] needs of family and for kids to go to school and get [an] education'. Her experience supported the theory that female entrepreneurs are more likely to re-invest their earnings into their children's education (Kirkwood 2009). R5 was able to support her children and extended family, enabling her to feel a sense of self-worth and pride.

The social dimension of female empowerment

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2019) argues that gender dis- criminatory laws and cultural constraints are challenges for female entrepreneurs in tourism. In Vanuatu, there is a saying that 'women work, men talk' (Bronwen 2002: 12), indicating that it is not uncommon for women to be left with household and caretaking responsibilities. The hosts received support from daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and parents but made no mention of support from husbands. The exclusion of assistance from male members of the family may have indicated the existence of the double burden effect, which is the imbalance of responsibility of the non-cash economy. All respondents were asked about their household responsibilities and if any changes to those responsibilities have been made since opening their business. These ques-tions were asked to identify whether respondents had experienced the 'double burden' effect, which was alluded to earlier.

R1 continued all her normal household chores when there were guests, which she felt was manageable with support from her daughter and daughter-in-law. R2 indicated that the 'bungalow is very demanding, sometimes all day. Not every time, but now with help from Mom can go home some'. In addition to her responsibilities at the bungalow, she still conducted household chores such as 'small shopping sometimes...some small cleaning. Parents run [the] shop [and] parents help a lot'. R5 responded:

> Husband travels a lot so [I] take on a lot of responsibility. So, it's good to have family help and they all receive money to help support. We work together to set up for guest and it's not all for my sake, it benefits all.

When asked about the affects the bungalow had on the family's financial situation, especially in the context of her extended family, R5 commented that the bungalow made family members 'happy' as they receive a 'small amount of money'. There was no mention of daily tasks that their husbands were responsible for, or assisted with, during any of the interviews.

R3 expressed that 'village life is a busy life' in which 'there [is] a lot expected in [the] village and at home'. As noted in the methods section, there were a limited number of women in the Shefa Province who operated their own bungalow businesses. This finding suggests that bungalow ownership does not yet seem to be widely accepted as women's work. This was not surprising, as there were cultural constraints imposed upon the participants by community members. R2's experience with negative sentiments within her village was similar to that of the female-shared accommodation entrepreneur in Fiji who also experienced jealousy from her female villagers (Movono and Dahles 2017). As Movono and Dahles (2017) explain, this participant was able to overcome the barrier of social jealousy and eventually gain a higher social status (which led to political empowerment) by encouraging other female villagers to become entrepreneurs themselves. At the time of the interview, however, R2 had not overcome such social barriers.

It became evident during the interviews that women had responsibilities within the village in addition to their family and household needs. Building upon the third shift theory (Morgan and Winkler 2020), it can be argued that women experience four shifts when becoming an entrepreneur. Their first and second shifts were at home, their third shift being the responsibilities to their village, and their fourth shift their bungalows. When they became entrepreneurs, the needs of their guests superseded those of the community. Even R4, who was an elected manager, felt the tension between managing and community responsibilities. The women in her village met bi-weekly to talk about life and the church and to sew, cook and weave. However, if there were guests then R4 and committee members could not attend, postponing the gathering. Only R5 did not feel any animosity in her village regarding her bungalow business. Her experience may have been because her village had a higher concentration of bungalows than the other villages, and, therefore, it was more socially acceptable to be an entrepreneur. The village's acceptance of accommodation entrepreneurs was then extended to R5, showcasing that women can gain the social capital necessary to challenge existing gender roles in Vanuatu.

Conclusions and research implications

This chapter explored the pivotal role that female empowerment plays in sustainable tour- ism development by examining the lived experience of ni-Vanuatu women entrepreneurs in the shared accommodation sector. All respondents experienced challenges securing financial resources to build their bungalows and were often subject to disruption when funds ran out. Four faced jealousy or a lack of understanding from their fellow female villagers when their businesses would interfere with the amount of time available for village activities. There was no indication that the respondents' husbands assisted with the day-to-day operations, with women receiving support from their parents, in-laws and children. Respondents also had successes and achieved indicators of psychological empowerment: 'dignity', 'self-worthiness', 'self-reliance' and 'pride'. They contributed to the financial improvement of their own nuclear family and their extended families. While economic independence and social empowerment have not yet been fully achieved, it is evident that hosts are in the process of working toward empowerment. In the social sphere hosts have gained social capital, a key ingredient in challenging gender norms and a building block for social empowerment. While not all women will use their acquired social capital to challenge norms, some will, which could lead to empowerment in the political arena. Political empowerment is acknowledged as one of the more insurmountable challenges, as it requires overcoming social biases toward cultural gender roles (Cole 2018a) and is an area that could be explored in further research. The lack of political empowerment achieved by the respondents suggests that traditional ni-Vanuatu gender roles must be changed before ensuring gender equality and empowerment in Vanuatu's tourism industry (Cole 2018b).

The Vanuatu Department of Tourism recently released the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2021–2025 (VDOT 2021), identifying four themes for recovery: well-being, resilience, diversification and sustainability. Although there is no discussion in the strategy addressing the cultural and social barriers impacting the entrepreneurial advancements and experiences of women, the prime minister of Vanuatu launched an updated National Gender Equality Policy 2020–2030 in August 2021 (Daily Post 2021). The policy included strategic areas addressing women's economic empowerment as well as climate and disaster resilience and acknowledging a whole governmental approach.

Future research recommendations include a longitudinal study across all provinces of Vanuatu, as this research provides a snapshot in time from which comparative analysis can be made. A longitudinal study would create the opportunity to observe whether the social capital gains uncovered in this research would lead to social and political empowerment. Further research is required to address the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on women entrepreneurs in tourism and their levels of empowerment. Early research suggests that the pandemic will cause a regression on gender equality and empowerment in vulnerable

countries (Park and Inocencio 2020). Empowerment itself is ascertained through the building of social capital and is, therefore, an important component of community resilience. For South Pacific Indigenous communities to build resilience and withstand external shocks that impact the global tourism industry, implementation of strategic gender policies is vital. There is a need to educate men and women on the uneven distribution of household responsibilities as well as showcase the rewards that female entrepreneurs and their families can receive from running successful businesses. Programmes that encourage the use of self-help groups to combat jealousy and create a collective voice for lobbying for gender issues at both a political and village level would be valuable. As showcased in this chapter, stakeholder engagement is one tool by which the assessment of Indigenous female empowerment can be developed through the implementation of gender specific tourism policies. The four dimensions of empowerment (Scheyvens 1999, 2010) can assist with the analysis of a community's degree of female empowerment, especially by uncovering areas in which empowerment and disempowerment exist. However, this research shows that the inclusion of capacity building through social capital is an important building block to achieve female empowerment. Disempowerment arises when challenges and barriers that hinder advancement through the empowerment process are present. Through the identification of barriers to the empowerment of women, the development of strategic policies can occur, thus, paving the way toward the achievement of empowerment across all levels – economic, psychological, social and political.

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