

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Inclusion in Uganda's Tourism Sector: Evidence from Great Lakes Safaris Limited

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ABSTRACT

Aim of study: Tourism ranks among Uganda's most dynamic economic sectors, yet gender disparities remain deeply entrenched within several of its occupational categories, professional tour guiding being among the most visible. This study aimed to generate rigorous empirical evidence on the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that hinder women's participation in tour guiding within Uganda's tourism industry, adopting Great Lakes Safaris Ltd, one of the country's most established indigenous tour operators, as an instrumental case. Methodology: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. From an accessible population of 360 employees drawn from the company's Kampala head office and its regional operational stations, a sample of 189 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula at a 95 percent confidence level and selected through stratified random sampling, complemented by purposive sampling of managers and key informants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and chi-square tests of association; supplementary qualitative material drawn from open-ended items and interviews was analysed thematically. Findings: Women's participation in professional tour guiding was rated very low by the substantial majority of respondents. Family responsibilities, cultural norms and gender stereotyping, employer preference for male candidates, limited access to professional training, and workplace safety concerns emerged as the most significant barriers, several of which showed statistically significant association with respondent gender, while institutional support mechanisms were widely perceived as inadequate. Conclusion: Uganda's tourism industry is unlikely to realise the full value of its human capital, or to advance an inclusive growth agenda, unless tour operators, training institutions, government agencies, and development partners act jointly to dismantle the structural barriers that continue to constrain women's participation in professional tour guiding.

Keywords: Women tour guides, gender barriers, tourism employment, Uganda tourism, Great Lakes Safaris

ARTICLE INFO

Received: [06/07/2026]

Accepted: [14/07/2026]

Published: [19/07/2026]

Issue Period: July – August 2026 (Bi-Monthly)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2026.6306>

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1. Introduction

Tourism is frequently described as an industry of movement, discovery, and human connection, and in Uganda it has emerged as one of the most dynamic contributors to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and rural livelihoods. Each morning, safari vehicles depart from Kampala and Entebbe carrying visitors toward the national parks, mountain gorillas, and cultural landscapes that have positioned Uganda as one of East Africa's leading ecotourism destinations. Behind these journeys, however, lies a story that receives comparatively little scholarly or policy attention: professional tour guiding, arguably the most visible occupation within the tourism value chain, continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by men, while women occupy markedly more peripheral positions within the sector.

International evidence indicates that women constitute close to half of the global tourism workforce, yet their representation is unevenly distributed across occupational categories. Women are heavily represented within accommodation, food and beverage, and handicraft enterprises, but remain significantly underrepresented in managerial, technical, and field-based occupations such as tour guiding and safari driving (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). This occupational imbalance has been documented across several African tourism economies, including Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Namibia, and Uganda exhibits a comparable pattern: women participate actively in hospitality and catering services yet remain scarce within safari operations, wildlife interpretation, and expedition leadership roles.

The persistence of this imbalance is puzzling given that contemporary tour guiding depends far more on communication ability, destination knowledge, and intercultural competence than on physical strength, attributes in which women are, at minimum, equally capable. Understanding why occupational segregation nonetheless endures requires close empirical attention to the socio-cultural, institutional, and organisational mechanisms operating within specific tourism enterprises, which is the task this study undertakes using evidence from Great Lakes Safaris Ltd.

Uganda's tourism sector has grown substantially over the past decade, underpinned by exceptional biodiversity, mountain gorilla conservation, and an expanding portfolio of cultural and adventure tourism products. National tourism strategy documents increasingly frame the sector as a vehicle for inclusive economic transformation, and government agencies have articulated commitments to gender-responsive employment across priority economic sectors. Yet policy commitment at the national level does not automatically translate into inclusive hiring and career-development practice at the level of individual tour operators, where recruitment decisions, training budgets, and organisational culture are actually determined. This gap between stated national aspiration and organisational practice is precisely the space this study seeks to illuminate, using a single but nationally significant tour operator as its empirical anchor.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite recent government and private investment aimed at expanding Uganda's tourism sector and strengthening its contribution to economic diversification, the industry continues to underutilise a substantial share of its available workforce because women remain largely excluded from professional tour guiding. Recruitment processes within several tourism companies continue to reflect implicit assumptions regarding physical endurance, mobility, and availability for extended field assignments, while women encounter comparatively limited access to specialised training, wildlife certification, and mentoring. Left unaddressed, this imbalance not only constrains individual women's career trajectories but also narrows the pool of talent and perspective available to an industry that depends increasingly on service quality and visitor experience as sources of competitive advantage.

This study investigates the multidimensional hindrances limiting women's participation in tour guiding, using evidence from Great Lakes Safaris Ltd, and organises the inquiry around seven barrier dimensions identified from prior scholarship and refined through the present fieldwork:

1. **Family responsibilities** — Traditional gender roles continue to assign women primary responsibility for childcare, domestic labour, and elder care, making occupations that involve prolonged travel, overnight assignments, and irregular schedules difficult to reconcile with household obligations. Work-life balance constraints of this kind have been shown to affect women's retention and advancement across the wider hospitality and tourism workforce (Lee & Kang, 2022).
2. **Cultural norms and gender stereotypes** — Cultural expectations regarding mobility, modesty, and interaction with strangers discourage women from pursuing occupations that require independent travel or work within remote, male-dominated environments. Social Role Theory explains this pattern by proposing that society, rather than biological capability, constructs beliefs about which occupations are considered appropriate for each gender (Eagly, 1987).
3. **Employer recruitment preference** — Employers operating in physically demanding tourism segments frequently perceive men as more suitable for wildlife encounters, long-distance driving, and camping assignments, a bias that persists despite scant evidence that women perform these roles less effectively (Alrwajfah, Almeida-García, & Cortés-Macías, 2020).
4. **Workplace safety and security concerns** — Tour guides frequently operate within isolated national parks and remote conservation areas. Although these environments carry risk for all employees, women guides report additional concerns regarding harassment and gender-based violence, concerns that can discourage participation even where actual incidents remain infrequent (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2020).
5. **Institutional and professional training support** — Women often report reduced access to wildlife certification, driving instruction, leadership development, and mentoring, which limits their progression once employed. Institutional support of this kind is increasingly regarded as a precondition, rather than a supplement, to sustainable gender equality in tourism employment (Alsawafi, 2016).
6. **Educational and career-development opportunities** — Limited exposure to tourism training programmes and internships restricts young women's entry pathways into professional guiding, reinforcing the perception that the profession is not a realistic career choice for women (Zhang, Lai, & Wong, 2024).
7. **Organisational culture and leadership representation** — The near-absence of women in senior guiding and leadership positions perpetuates a cycle in which low female representation reinforces the perception that guiding is inherently a male profession, a pattern documented broadly across the tourism labour market (Pritchard, Morgan, Ateljevic, & Harris, 2015).

2. Literature Review

Gender equality has become one of the defining priorities of sustainable tourism development, yet access to tourism employment opportunities remains unevenly distributed between men and women. Although women constitute nearly half of the global tourism workforce, they remain concentrated in lower-paying and less visible occupations, while technical and field-based positions such as tour guiding continue to be dominated by men (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). This occupational segregation reflects broader labour market inequalities rather than differences in competence: women often possess communication skills, empathy, and intercultural competence that are highly valuable within tourism, yet institutional and social barriers frequently prevent these capabilities from translating into equal career opportunities (Figuerola-Domecq, de Jong, Williams, & Torres-Delgado, 2022).

Scholarship on gender and tourism has repeatedly documented occupational segregation as a defining feature of the sector. Horizontal segregation concentrates women in customer-facing and administrative roles, while vertical segregation restricts their access to leadership and field-operations positions, a pattern observed as far back as Swain's (1995) foundational analysis of gender in tourism and reaffirmed in more recent bibliometric reviews of the field (Aitchison, 2000; Yang & Schänzel, 2024). Within Africa specifically, women participate actively in accommodation, catering, and cultural tourism enterprises, but comparatively few occupy positions as wildlife guides or safari drivers, largely because patriarchal social

structures assign women primary responsibility for household and caregiving duties (Boonabaana, 2014). Studies from the Middle East report similar dynamics: in Jordan's Petra region, women's employment in tourism remained constrained by social and religious expectations despite clear interest in economic participation (Alrwajfah et al., 2020), while in Oman, university students perceived cultural attitudes and limited institutional encouragement as key deterrents to women's careers in tourism (Alsawafi, 2016).

Beyond socio-cultural expectations, institutional practices reproduce inequality through recruitment and training systems that implicitly favour male applicants for physically demanding tourism roles (Aitchison, 2001). Safety concerns compound these barriers: female tour guides and hospitality workers report elevated exposure to harassment, both in the field and increasingly through social media, which can suppress career aspirations even where formal safeguards exist (Alrawadie & Alrawadie, 2020). Encouragingly, tourism is also recognised as possessing unique potential to advance gender equality when paired with deliberate policy attention: Alarcón and Cole (2019) argue that sustainable tourism development is unattainable without an explicit gender-equality agenda, while critical feminist tourism scholarship has long called for research that centres women lived experiences rather than treating gender as an incidental demographic variable (Aitchison, 2001; Pritchard, 2014).

A growing body of evidence links women's work-life balance constraints directly to retention outcomes in tourism and hospitality employment, reinforcing calls for flexible scheduling and family-friendly practices as a matter of workforce strategy rather than accommodation alone (Lee & Kang, 2022). Systematic reviews of the female tourism literature further confirm that risk perception, workplace safety, and institutional support remain the dominant themes shaping women's participation across destinations (Zhang, Lai, & Wong, 2024). Scholars increasingly argue that removing barriers alone is insufficient; sustainable gender equality within tourism organisations requires proactive institutional support encompassing gender-responsive recruitment, mentoring, leadership development, flexible working arrangements, childcare assistance, professional certification pathways, and anti-harassment policy. Organisations that implement such measures tend to report greater workforce diversity, stronger employee commitment, and improved service quality, while for developing tourism destinations such as Uganda, collaboration among government agencies, universities, tourism associations, and private operators is regarded as central to improving women's participation in field-based tourism occupations (Alsawafi, 2016; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022).

Within Uganda specifically, prior research has largely explored tourism development, conservation, and destination competitiveness, while empirical investigation of the organisational barriers affecting women tour guides remains limited (Boonabaana, 2014). This gap is notable given that professional tour guiding is among the tourism sector's most visible and reputation-defining occupations. The present study addresses this gap directly by generating organisational-level evidence from Great Lakes Safaris Ltd.

2.1 Research Gap

Three specific gaps in the existing literature motivate this study. First, much of the empirical work on gender and tourism employment in Africa has been conducted at the destination or national level, using aggregate labour-force statistics rather than organisation-specific survey data, which limits its usefulness for guiding the recruitment and human-resource decisions made by individual tour operators. Second, comparatively few studies combine descriptive statistics with inferential testing when examining gendered perceptions of workplace barriers, leaving open the question of whether observed differences between men's and women's perceptions statistically meaningful or merely descriptive artefacts of a particular sample are. Third, existing Ugandan case evidence has generally relied on small, exploratory samples that constrain the confidence with which findings can be generalised even within a single organisation. The present study responds to each of these gaps by grounding its analysis in a single, well-established tour operator, by applying a formally derived sample size and chi-square testing alongside descriptive statistics, and by extending the sample well beyond the scale typical of prior organisational case studies in this field.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which argues that occupational inequalities arise primarily from socially constructed expectations of appropriate gender roles rather than from underlying differences in capability. Applied to tourism, the theory suggests that recruiters, communities, and women themselves internalise assumptions about which occupations are 'naturally' suited to men or women, producing self-reinforcing cycles of occupational segregation that persist even where formal barriers to entry have been removed. The theory provides an appropriate lens for interpreting why women remain underrepresented in Uganda's tour guiding profession despite possessing comparable educational qualifications and professional competencies to their male counterparts, and it structures the interpretation of findings presented in Section 6.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the current level of women's participation in professional tour guiding activities at Great Lakes Safaris Ltd
- To identify the socio-cultural, institutional, and occupational barriers limiting women's participation in tour guiding
- To evaluate the organisational and external support mechanisms available for promoting women's participation in Uganda's tour guiding profession

4. Methodology of Research

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, complemented by a smaller qualitative component drawn from key informant interviews and open-ended questionnaire items. The descriptive-correlational design was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe existing organisational conditions, quantify the prevalence of specific barriers, and test the statistical association between selected variables, rather than manipulate variables experimentally.

4.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted at Great Lakes Safaris Ltd, a privately owned Ugandan tour operator specialising in wildlife safaris, gorilla trekking, chimpanzee tracking, birdwatching, and cultural tourism. The accessible population comprised 360 employees drawn from the company's Kampala head office and its regional operational stations serving Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Queen Elizabeth National Park, and Murchison Falls National Park, including professional tour guides, reservation officers, administrative staff, drivers, and managers.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula, $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, at a 95 percent confidence level ($e = 0.05$). With an accessible population of $N = 360$, the formula yielded a minimum sample of 189 respondents ($n = 360 / (1 + 360(0.05)^2) = 189.5$, rounded to 189). Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling, with strata defined by occupational category (guiding, reservations, administration, and management) to ensure proportional representation across departments, complemented by purposive sampling of senior managers and key informants possessing specialised knowledge of recruitment practice and organisational policy.

4.4 Data Collection Instruments

Two principal instruments were used. A structured questionnaire, comprising both closed- and open-ended items organised into sections covering demographic characteristics, perceived level of women's participation, barriers to participation, and institutional support, was self-administered to the full sample. An interview guide containing open-ended questions was used to conduct semi-structured key informant interviews with departmental managers and human resource personnel, generating contextual detail that enriched interpretation of the quantitative results.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review of the questionnaire by academics with expertise in tourism management and research methodology, ensuring alignment between instrument items and the study's conceptual framework. Reliability was strengthened through consistent administration procedures, clear and unambiguous item wording, and a pilot check with a small subset of respondents prior to full administration, which allowed ambiguous items to be revised before data collection proceeded.

4.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics, principally frequencies and percentages, to summarise respondents' demographic profile and perceptions. Cross-tabulation and chi-square tests of independence were subsequently applied to examine whether selected barrier variables were statistically associated with respondent gender, providing a firmer inferential basis for the study's conclusions than descriptive statistics alone. Qualitative responses obtained through interviews and open-ended questionnaire items were analysed thematically, with responses organised into recurring themes relating to family responsibility, cultural expectation, employer preference, workplace safety, and institutional support.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained through the relevant institutional procedures prior to commencement of the study, and permission to conduct the research was granted by the management of Great Lakes Safaris Ltd. Participation was entirely voluntary and respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used solely for academic purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected, protecting respondent anonymity throughout the research process.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents the study's descriptive and inferential findings in the sequence implied by the research objectives: respondent profile, perceived level of women's participation, and the barrier dimensions identified in Section 1.1, before closing with a chi-square test of the association between gender and perceived employer preference. Presenting the barriers in this order, rather than alphabetically or by statistical magnitude alone, allows the discussion in Section 6 to trace how each barrier operates at a different stage of the employment lifecycle, from initial career aspiration through recruitment, deployment, and long-term retention.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 189)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	62.4
	Female	71	37.6

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–30 years	43	22.8
	31–39 years	118	62.4
	40 years and above	28	14.8
Education	Certificate	24	12.7
	Diploma	123	65.1
	Bachelor's degree	42	22.2
Work experience	Less than 2 years	19	10.1
	2–5 years	42	22.2
	6–9 years	113	59.8
	Above 10 years	15	7.9

Source: Field survey.

The demographic profile confirms that the organisation's workforce remains predominantly male, with almost two-thirds of respondents being men against just over a third women, itself illustrating the central issue investigated in this study. Majority of respondents (62.4%) were aged between 31 and 39 years and held diploma-level qualifications, while almost sixty percent reported between six and nine years of work experience. This profile suggests that the perceptions captured in the survey came from an experienced, moderately well-educated cohort with substantial first-hand familiarity with recruitment practice, promotion patterns, and workplace culture within Uganda's tourism industry, lending credibility to the findings that follow.

Table 2. Perceived Level of Women's Participation in Tour Guiding

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Low	142	75.1
Low	37	19.6
Very High	10	5.3

Source: Field survey.

Three out of every four respondents (75.1%) described women's participation in professional tour guiding as very low, while a further 19.6 percent rated it merely low; only a small minority (5.3%) considered participation high. This finding extends beyond organisational staffing levels: it reflects a broader structural imbalance within Uganda's tourism labour market, where women continue to be concentrated in support functions rather than field-based operational roles. The pattern corresponds closely with international evidence that tourism continues to exhibit strong occupational segregation despite rising female participation in the wider service economy (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019).

Table 3. Family Responsibilities as a Barrier to Women's Participation

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	165	87.3
No	24	12.7

Source: Field survey.

Nearly nine out of every ten respondents (87.3%) identified family responsibilities as a major barrier limiting women's participation. This finding should not be read as evidence that women are less committed to professional careers; rather, it illustrates how an unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour restricts women's occupational choices, a pattern consistent with broader evidence linking work-life balance constraints to reduced retention of women in tourism and hospitality occupations elsewhere (Lee & Kang, 2022).

Table 4. Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes as a Barrier

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	156	82.5
Disagree	33	17.5

Source: Field survey.

More than four-fifths of respondents (82.5%) believed that cultural expectations significantly discourage women from pursuing careers in professional tour guiding. This result reinforces the propositions of Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which holds that occupational inequalities emerge largely through socially constructed expectations rather than biological difference, and mirrors comparable findings from Jordan and Oman, where community attitudes were similarly found to constrain women's tourism employment (Alrwajfah et al., 2020; Alsawafi, 2016).

Table 5. Employer Preference for Male Tour Guides

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	132	69.8
No	57	30.2

Source: Field survey.

Just under seventy percent of respondents perceived that employers favour male candidates when recruiting professional tour guides. This perception illustrates what may be termed institutional bias, whereby organisational practices unintentionally reproduce historical inequalities even in the absence of explicit discrimination; women consequently encounter a double barrier, first overcoming societal stereotypes and then competing within recruitment systems already shaped by those same stereotypes (Alrwajfah et al., 2020).

Table 6. Perceived Workplace Safety Concerns Among Female Employees

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Safety is a concern	149	78.8
Not a concern	40	21.2

Source: Field survey.

Almost four-fifths of respondents (78.8%) considered workplace safety, including exposure to harassment during remote field assignments, to be a genuine concern affecting women's willingness to take up guiding roles. Qualitative accounts obtained during key informant interviews suggested that concerns centred less on the risk of wildlife encounters, which affect all guides regardless of gender, and more on interpersonal safety during overnight camping assignments and prolonged travel with unfamiliar groups, a concern documented in comparable research on female tour guides elsewhere (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2020).

Table 7. Access to Professional Training and Wildlife Certification

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Adequate access	27	14.3
Inadequate access	162	85.7

Source: Field survey.

An overwhelming majority (85.7%) of respondents perceived women's access to professional training, wildlife certification, and mentoring as inadequate. Respondents indicated that occasional training opportunities exist, some supported by non-governmental partners, but that these remain insufficient in scale and consistency to meaningfully alter recruitment and promotion patterns. This finding is consistent with the broader argument that institutional support functions as a precondition for, rather than a supplement to, sustainable gender equality in tourism employment (Alsawafi, 2016; Alarcón & Cole, 2019).

Table 8. Institutional Support for Female Tour Guides

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Support available	28	14.8
Support limited	161	85.2

Source: Field survey.

Consistent with the training-access findings above, many respondents (85.2%) believed that organisational and external institutional support for women in tour guiding remains limited. Taken together, Tables 6 through 8 suggest that the barriers to women's participation extend well beyond recruitment decisions at the point of hiring; they persist throughout the employment lifecycle in the form of restricted access to safety assurances, skills development, and structured career support.

Table 9. Chi-Square Test of Association Between Respondent Gender and Perceived Employer Preference for Male Guides

Respondent Gender	Perceives Employer Preference (Yes)	Does Not Perceive Preference (No)	Total
Male (n = 118)	74	44	118
Female (n = 71)	58	13	71
Total	132	57	189

Chi-square test: $\chi^2(1, N = 189) = 8.94, p = .003 (p < .05)$.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between respondent gender and perceived employer preference for male tour guides. The test revealed a statistically significant association, $\chi^2(1, N = 189) = 8.94, p = .003$, indicating that female respondents were significantly more likely than male respondents to perceive that employers favour male candidates during recruitment. This result strengthens the descriptive findings reported in Table 5: the perception of employer bias is not merely a generalised organisational sentiment but is disproportionately held by the women most directly affected by it, lending further credibility to the argument that recruitment practices at Great Lakes Safaris Ltd continue to disadvantage female applicants.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Collectively, the findings reveal that women's underrepresentation within Uganda's professional tour guiding industry results from the interaction of multiple structural factors rather than any single barrier operating in isolation. Family responsibilities reduce occupational flexibility, cultural expectations shape career aspirations before women ever apply for guiding positions, employer preferences influence recruitment decisions at the point of hiring, safety concerns affect the sustainability of guiding careers once undertaken, and limited institutional support restricts professional advancement thereafter. These factors reinforce one another across the employment lifecycle, producing a self-perpetuating cycle of occupational segregation that strongly supports the assumptions of Social Role Theory: occupational inequality emerges through social expectation rather than through any demonstrated difference in capability (Eagly, 1987).

The chi-square result reported in Table 9 adds an important inferential dimension to this interpretation. That female respondents perceive employer bias significantly more strongly than their male colleagues suggests that the barrier is not simply a shared organisational narrative but a lived asymmetry, one plausibly rooted in differential treatment during recruitment, interview, or deployment decisions. This distinction matters for policy design: interventions aimed solely at shifting general organisational attitudes are unlikely to be as effective as interventions that directly alter recruitment procedures, selection criteria, and accountability mechanisms governing hiring decisions.

Importantly, the findings also challenge persistent assumptions regarding women's suitability for professional tour guiding. Contemporary tour guiding increasingly depends upon destination knowledge, communication, intercultural competence, and customer-experience management rather than physical strength alone, competencies in which women perform at least as well as men (Zhang, Lai, & Wong, 2024). Consequently, increasing women's participation should not be viewed merely as a matter of social justice; it represents an important organisational strategy capable of improving service quality, workforce diversity, and destination competitiveness, consistent with broader evidence that gender-inclusive tourism development strengthens, rather than dilutes, sector performance (Alarcón & Cole, 2019; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022).

For Uganda, strengthening women's participation in tour guiding aligns directly with national development priorities and with international commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The broader lesson from this case, echoed in comparable service-sector research within East Africa's travel economy, is that sustainable competitiveness cannot rest on infrastructure and route or product expansion alone; it depends equally on how effectively an organisation utilises the full diversity of its available workforce. Great Lakes Safaris Ltd, and Uganda's tourism industry more broadly, should therefore treat gender-responsive recruitment, mentoring, and structured institutional support as central pillars of workforce strategy rather than peripheral corporate social responsibility initiatives.

6.1 Practical Implications

The findings point to several practical priorities, distinguished here by stakeholder. For Great Lakes Safaris Ltd and comparable tour operators, the priority is to review recruitment criteria so that selection is based on demonstrable competence, such as destination knowledge, communication skill, and customer-service capability, rather than on gender-based assumptions about physical endurance or availability for extended field assignments; the significant gender difference detected in Table 9 suggests that recruitment procedures merit particular scrutiny rather than general attitudinal messaging alone. Operators should also formalise mentoring arrangements pairing experienced guides with newly recruited women, extend consistent workplace safety protocols and reporting mechanisms to remote field assignments, and track gender representation across recruitment, promotion, and training as a standing performance indicator rather than an occasional audit item.

For training institutions and industry associations, the evidence in Table 7 suggests that expanding access to wildlife certification, guiding qualifications, and driving instruction for women, including through targeted scholarships and structured internship placements, would directly address one of the most consistently cited barriers. For government agencies, notably the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities and the Uganda Tourism Board, the findings support incorporating measurable gender-inclusion targets into sector development strategies and tour-operator licensing frameworks, alongside recognition schemes that reward operators demonstrating inclusive recruitment practice. Development partners and conservation non-governmental organisations, meanwhile, are well placed to fund mentorship programmes and safety-focused interventions that respond directly to the concerns identified in Table 6, complementing rather than substituting for reform at the level of individual tour operators.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, the study focused on a single tour operator, which, despite its scale and national prominence, limits the generalisability of findings to Uganda's broader and more heterogeneous tourism industry. Second, while the sample size of 189 permitted meaningful inferential analysis, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time and cannot establish causal direction between the barriers examined and women's participation outcomes. Third, the study relied substantially on self-reported perceptions, which may be shaped by respondents' individual experiences, position within the organisation, and organisational loyalty. These limitations suggest that findings should be interpreted as robust organisational evidence rather than nationally representative estimates, and future research would benefit from replicating this design across multiple tour operators to test the generalisability of the barriers identified here.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study makes a clear contribution to the still-limited body of empirical research examining women's participation in professional tour guiding within Uganda, and it does so with a methodological rigour, encompassing a formally derived sample size and inferential statistical testing, that extends beyond the largely descriptive treatment found in earlier organisational studies of this kind. The evidence presented offers tourism operators, policymakers, training institutions,

and development partners a practical and theoretically grounded basis for designing interventions capable of improving gender equity, workforce diversity, and the long-term sustainability of Uganda's tourism sector.

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