

# Empowering women to accelerate transformation, growth of tourism industry

More than 200 women from the African region gathered in Port Elizabeth for the annual Women in Tourism (WiT) Conference themed *Sustainable Tourism: A Tool for Radical Socio-Economic Development for Women* - a platform for dialogue on the challenges that affect the socio-economic empowerment of women, funding constraints, and the establishment of support structures and incentives.



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Speaking at the opening of the conference, Minister Tokozile Xasa said: "We must unite to work together to influence government's policies and programmes. Collectively, our active participation can result in a transformed and inclusive industry."

"We formally began our journey to elevate women in the tourism industry at our inaugural conference in 2014. Over the years, we have gained strides in establishing the WiT conference as a recognised platform that addresses the socio-economic concerns of women in our sector, and the continent."

## Representation of women at executive and senior management positions low

"Women have an important role to play in transforming the industry and growing tourism. The empowerment of women, especially at decision making and executive levels, needs to be accelerated, for them to make a meaningful contribution to the industry," said Xasa.

A baseline study conducted by the Tourism BBBEE Council on the *State of Tourism Transformation* revealed that only 11% of enterprises had black women representation at boards, executives and senior management positions and that the overall rate of transformation was slow.

“Radical social and economic transformation has been prioritised to accelerate the process of empowering South Africans, especially women and the youth, to play a meaningful role in building a sustainable economy.”

“It is concerning that the representation of women at executive and senior management positions is low. Our collective participation is critical to transforming this sector. Rise up, and let us proactively strive to make this sector inclusive,” added Xasa.

## **Enabling safer communities and an equitable tourism industry**

The WiT conference took place at the backdrop of the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children campaign under the theme: *Count Me In: Together Moving a Non-Violent South Africa Forward*. Women and men in tourism added that voice in support of the campaign by signing pledges – committing to enabling safer communities and an equitable tourism industry.

“We acknowledge and applaud the men who joined us in pledging to protect women and children, and in building the representative tourism industry. Together, we can end the cycle of abuse,” said Xasa.

## **Resolutions**

The conference concluded inter alia with a consensus on the following resolutions:

- The current Advisory Committee will work with the WiT Provincial Chapters to develop a constitution for the formation of an autonomous body that will drive women empowerment initiatives
- The WiT Provincial Chapters will act as support structures that will coach and mentor new entrants into the industry
- The department will facilitate public-private partnerships that will capacitate women in aspects of financial education and management
- Through the Tourism Incentive Programme, the department will assist women to gain access to domestic and international trade shows to market their products

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