

## **Women Participation in Accommodation Business: With Special Reference to Homestay Business in Mizoram**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the transformative impact of engaging Mizo women from all districts of Mizoram in the accommodation business as a sustainable livelihood strategy, delving into the socio-economic and cultural context of the Mizo community, emphasizing the challenges faced by women and the potential of the accommodation sector to empower them. By employing qualitative research methods, including interviews, surveys, and participant observations, the participation in the accommodation business as homestay owners and the outcomes on their socio-economic status, investigating how the accommodation business serves as a catalyst for women's economic independence, self-esteem, and community development, and analyzing the role of education and skill development in enhancing women's capacity to manage and operate successful accommodations enterprises. Furthermore, the study examines the impact of this empowerment on the overall well-being of Mizo women, their families, and the community at large, with findings expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women's empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and community development, providing insights for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders to design and implement targeted interventions that support and amplify the positive outcomes observed in the Mizo women engaged in the accommodation business, advocating for the recognition of women as key agents of change and economic progress, emphasizing the significance of their active participation in sustainable livelihood initiatives for the betterment of society.

**Keywords:** Women, Entrepreneur, Accommodation sector, lodging, homestay

## Introduction

Women have the right to be treated equally with men in every aspect of their jobs and studies. Women's empowerment is crucial for the overall development of the community and the active participation of women in economic activities and decision-making, thereby contributing to overall economic development. In the accommodation sector business, women strive to thrive, demonstrating perseverance and hard work. Women in the accommodation sector embark on their entrepreneurial journey early on, driven by the need to provide for their families. From the early days to the present, women have faced challenges but have steadfastly strengthened their businesses, turning them into successful enterprises through determination and resilience. This journey is exemplified by the profound impact of homestay businesses on the economic empowerment of women, showcasing how these ventures have become a cornerstone of female entrepreneurship, fostering independence and prosperity. The participants widely recognize the substantial contribution of their homestay ventures to their family's overall income, fostering financial independence—a key component of women's empowerment. Moreover, the reported enhancement in living conditions underscores the positive correlation between homestay businesses and improved economic well-being, demonstrating how these endeavors elevate the overall quality of life for women. Importantly, women engaged in homestay businesses exhibit a strong awareness of the local economic implications of their endeavors, reflecting a sense of responsibility and connection to the community. This broader perspective aligns with a comprehensive understanding of economic empowerment, extending beyond individual gains to encompass community development. The ability of women in the homestay sector to provide employment to local personnel not only bolsters the local economy but also positions them as job creators, contributing to a more inclusive economic landscape. The transformative role of homestay businesses in advancing the economic empowerment of women is highlighted by their dual impact on individual financial autonomy and community development.

This echoes the historical precedent where, in the early days, women assumed the responsibilities of hotel ownership, managing businesses while also tending to familial duties. This dual role not only served as a necessity for survival but also contributed to enhancing their economic and social standing within the community. In Mizoram and especially in its capital city

of Aizawl, some of these hotel owners were widows who shouldered the responsibility of family care. Although the demands of the business were considerable, especially when compared to the physical labor of farming, these women persevered and continued to run their establishments. Over time, some women have not only sustained their businesses but also significantly improved them. In certain cases, these entrepreneurs have diversified their ventures by adding other business elements or constructing new properties for rental purposes. This ongoing commitment to entrepreneurship showcases the resilience and adaptability of these women as they navigate the challenges of business ownership and contribute to the economic landscape of their communities.

In the accommodation sector, many girls and women in Aizawl and other districts in Mizoram choose to work after completing their schooling or, in some cases, after attaining a bachelor's degree. This employment serves as a means to sustain their individual livelihoods or contribute to their family's income. Remarkably, a considerable number of employees in this sector lack basic knowledge of the hotel industry but undergo comprehensive training provided by their employers or hotel owners. Given the scale of some businesses, particularly the smaller ones, accommodation sector owners often hire only one or two staff members to manage all essential tasks and departments. This necessitates a multi-functional approach, where the owners themselves take on diverse roles to ensure the smooth operation of their establishments. This dynamic highlights the resourcefulness and adaptability of both the employees and the owners in the accommodation sector in Mizoram.

Homestays have become increasingly popular in Mizoram. Owners are adopting unique approaches to managing their businesses, with some choosing to oversee operations themselves while hiring staff to assist. Others opt for a joint family effort, where guests are cared for and provided with meals in the same manner as the family eats together, with assistance readily available as needed.

## Literature Review

Acharya and Siddiq (2016) study revealed the imperative for women to be treated on par with men across all fields. They argue that the empowerment of women is integral to societal development, contending that active female participation in economic activities and decision-making processes would substantially contribute to overall economic progress. Despite a general increase in the number of women participating in managerial roles, the research reveals that the overall representation of women in managerial positions within the hospitality industry remains low.

According to the study of Acharya and Siddiq,(2016) hospitality industry serves as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environment regeneration and advancement of women. In recent years, there has been a notable uptick in women's participation in the business world, although women representation in management and leadership remains very low. The hospitality sector provides numerous entry points for women's employment and opportunities for generating self-employment through small and medium-sized income-generating activities. This industry is a multifaceted platform encouraging economic empowerment, highlighting its crucial role in contributing to broader societal well-being and women's advancement.

In the study of Ramchurjee (2011),the potential of tourism in job creation and income generation for local communities in destination areas has been demonstrated. However, there has been insufficient focus on the unequal distribution of tourism benefits between men and women, especially in developing nations. The tourism sector offers numerous avenues for women's employment and self-employment opportunities in small and medium-sized income-generating activities. This can pave the way for reducing poverty among women and local communities in developing countries.

The study of Osman et.al. (2008) examined the women-run homestay enterprises in Malaysia. They discovered that homestays are a significant avenue for women's empowerment, offering both economic and social benefits. Their findings suggest that homestay programs heavily rely

on the adaptation of women members within host families, who are primarily responsible for tasks such as food preparation, serving, housekeeping, and cleaning.

The study conducted by Prajapati, et al (2022) explores how the women of Sari Village have been utilizing their skills by hosting visitors, preparing local cuisine, and maintaining homestays, thereby promoting sustainable development and empowering women in society. It suggests that these initiatives may contribute to the growth of families and communities, grassroots development, and the preservation of local customs and culture, particularly among native women. The increasing acceptance of homestays in India is seen as positive news, as homestays offer accommodation facilities to tourists and have the potential to attract visitors amidst the growing demand for travel and tourism worldwide. By providing tourists with the opportunity to experience, observe, and learn about the local lifestyle, homestays enhance visitor engagement and contribute to local economic development. The findings of this study hold significant practical and theoretical implications for both academics and practitioners, especially considering the success of the homestay industry in Uttarakhand. These insights can aid the Homestay Programme in effectively managing tourist resources for community development, thereby enhancing the local economy and creating employment opportunities in rural areas. Homestays are perceived as a form of tourism that can address socio-economic challenges and promote gender equality, benefiting the local population, particularly women, while also addressing political, cultural, and gender disparities. Thus, the homestay programme continues to serve as a valuable asset for local empowerment and community development, particularly for women.

According to Quang et al. (2023), “Homestay tourism program has helped women to generate extra income, strengthen family ties, and increase their social influence while reducing domestic violence. The study of homestay underscores the importance of women’s participation in homestay tourism programme and provides suggestions for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in tourism development”. Their study’s findings indicate that women play a significant role in rural tourism, particularly in homestays tourism. It is revealed that women’s skills in cooking and household care are highly esteemed, leading them to be entrusted with overseeing these tasks in homestays. Travelers are provided with the chance to reside with

local families and immerse themselves in the local culture firsthand. The self-reliance of women is seen as advantageous for their success in the homestay business environment. However, it is also noted that this advantage can be perceived as a disadvantage, as society often assumes that women are only capable of performing simple household tasks. Homestay jobs are deemed suitable for women because they resemble housework, which women typically engage in daily. Consequently, women can adapt quickly to these roles without necessitating specific skills or professional knowledge. It is highlighted that homestays contribute to women's empowerment by enhancing their skills, such as culinary expertise. Despite cooking and serving guests being tasks commonly associated with women's daily responsibilities, they require a certain standard to satisfy the needs of guests. Hence, working at homestays aids in the improvement of women's culinary skills. Women are depicted as playing a supportive role in advising and influencing decision-making, while men handle other tasks such as negotiating with guests, transportation, tour guiding, and marketing. This finding aligns with studies indicating that the tourism industry, particularly homestay tourism, serves as an entry point to employment opportunities for women in rural areas. Overall, the findings suggest that women are engaged in multitasking and strive to balance their family chores with their professional obligations.

The study of Hutchings et al. (2020) explains that the tourism industry has increased the scope of women's employment compared to other sectors, yet the pay scale and the potential for advancement within the industry are exceptionally minimal.

The study of McCall and Mearns (2021), Renaldi and Salerno (2020), and Giampiccoli (2020) suggests that women's involvement in tourism can lead to economic, social, and cultural benefits for individuals and communities through the creation of job opportunities, reduced poverty, and promotion of a more inclusive and sustainable tourism sector.

According to Sarkar (2022), the study reveals that there is scope for further development in accordance with sustainable development principles. In India, the local community must be convinced of the need to support regulations in the interest of long-term sustainability. There is an urgent need for understanding the basics of tourism, development of personality and communication skills, particularly in English and Hindi, as well as a need for basic computer knowledge and successful imparting of tourism education in the curriculum. Additionally, there

is a need for more local community participation and direct involvement. The Indian tourism market is huge and limitless. Furthermore, it shows that their lifestyle is changing for the better as children can study and their parents can earn more money with this. The findings show that homestay businesses create better opportunities for the community.

According to Baikuntha and Elizabeth (2013), homestay tourism emerges as a popular means of women's self-employment in numerous destinations. Additionally, this form of entrepreneurship holds significant for destinations that may not be able to undertake extensive infrastructural investments. It indicates that women's tourism entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in women entrepreneurs and sustainable community development.

The study conducted by Bensemman and Hall (2010) discovered that women are engage in cooperative relationships within rural tourism businesses and analyse women's experiences in the rural tourism accommodation sector. Their findings indicate that women operate their businesses more as hobbies, and these ventures are primarily driven and shaped by non-economic factors, personal preferences, and lifestyle choices.

### **Objectives:**

- To evaluate the socio-economic contributions of women-operated homestay businesses in Mizoram.
- To examine the impact of homestay businesses on women empowerment in Mizoram.
- To assess the institutional dynamics surrounding women's participation in homestay businesses in Mizoram
- To explore the psychological effects of involvement in homestay businesses on women's self-perception, autonomy, and sense of purpose.

### **Homestay business in Mizoram**

In Mizoram, the homestay business was introduced around 2016-2017 by the Tourism department, Govt. of Mizoram, under the NEDP scheme. The department chose Champhai district and selected 6 villages with 35 owners who extended and build one room at their own house to become homestay owners. These owners were inspected by the department. Thirty-five



homestay owners were trained and taught theory and practical skills in Champhai and Aizawl. Champhai district is one of the most visited attractive places in Mizoram. Families help each other with new jobs and also continue their agricultural work or other livelihood activities. The tourism department sponsored rural homestays in Mamit district for 35 families across 6 villages and 7 families from Khawhai village, then Champhai district and now Khawzawl district. There are around 35 private homestay owners in Mizoram, with more being added. Families work together, and some private homestay owners employ staff. Female staff members or family members of these businesses handle everything from visitor relations to hospitality.

Mizoram, located in northeast India, is a landlocked state with Aizawl as its capital and largest city. It is the southernmost state in the northeast region of India, sharing borders with Tripura, Assam, and Manipur, as well as Bangladesh and Myanmar. Covering approximately 21,087 square kilometers, around 91% of its land is forested. With an estimated population of 1.25 million in 2023, it ranks as the second least populous state in India.

In recent years, the traditional jhum farming practices have gradually been replaced by a significant horticulture and bamboo products industry in Mizoram, a state known for its high literacy rate and agrarian economy. It has been observed that the accommodation sector, initiated during the British era for road construction, has evolved over time, with homestays becoming a recent addition and an important industry in the state. Mizoram's population, as per the 2011 census, stood at 1,091,014, with 552,339 males and 538,675 females, indicating a growth of 22.8% since 2001. Despite this growth, Mizoram remains the second least populated state in India. The state boasts a sex ratio of 976 females per thousand males, surpassing the national average of 940. The population density is recorded at 53 persons per square kilometer.

The literacy rate of Mizoram in 2011 was reported at 91.58 per cent, exceeding the national average of 74.04 per cent and ranking second highest among all states in India. It is noteworthy that approximately 52% of Mizoram's population resides in urban areas, a significantly higher proportion compared to the national average. Aizawl district, home to the state capital, accommodates over one-third of Mizoram's population. After agriculture, the major employment opportunities for the people include handloom and horticulture industries, with tourism emerging as a growing industry in the state.



According to the Tourism department of the Govt. of Mizoram, 77 homestay owners in the rural areas were sponsored by the department, and an additional 20 private homestays were listed and registered by the tourism department. Another 26 private homestays were discovered by researchers during their study. The majorities of these private homestays is located in Aizawl and are continually increasing in number each year. Both registered and unregistered homestays are believed to provide similar benefits to guests and the government. The Tourism Department is actively encouraging local homestay owners to register with the government, even offering awards for registered homestay owners. However, the concept of homestays is not strictly adhered to in some cases, as some owners operate them more like hotels. Most homestays have limited rooms, although some offer more than five beds. Facilities typically include basic necessities, with some offering internet access. In certain instances, guests are left to their own devices upon check-in, cooking their own meals with facilities provided in the house. Some homestays are attached to the owner's residence, with the owner present during the guest's stay. Homestay owners from villages often showcase cultural dances, food, and act as tour guides for their guests. However, running a homestay in a village can be challenging if the owners do not have other sources of income, leading many to continue operating small shops, engaging in agricultural farming, or pursuing other employment opportunities.

### **Women and Homestay Business in Mizoram**

Around 15-25 homestay owners were women who run and manage their business for their families. It is believed that women excel in hospitality, particularly in welcoming guests into their homes and ensuring their comfort throughout their stay. Mizo women are known for their exceptional hospitality towards guests, whether they are strangers, family members, or relatives. They consistently provide amenities such as hot water for baths and offer the best food they can afford. In many homestays managed by families, women take on all responsibilities, including organizing accommodations, providing meals, and hosting cultural shows. They also guide guests and offer information about nearby attractions, activities, and local customs. Alongside these duties, women manage household tasks and care for their families, including cooking, cleaning and laundry. Moreover, they actively participate in community development initiatives, collaborating with local organizations or government authorities to promote tourism and enhance

the overall visitor experience. The income generated from running a homestay supports their families financially, contributing to household expenses, education, healthcare, and other needs. Engaging in entrepreneurial activities like homestay ownership empowers women economically and socially, fostering independence and confidence within their communities. From this perspective, the introduction of homestays in Mizoram has led to a shift in women's role in community development. Women who have entered this business have demonstrated competence and have improved their socio-economic status within their communities.

## Methods

The study uses a mixed-method approach to examine the empowerment of women engaged in homestay businesses combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data on the various dimensions of empowerment, including economic, social, institutional, and psychological aspects.

## Background of the Study

The study covers the districts of Mizoram, where lodging facilities have been established. This geographical overview sets the stage for understanding the spatial distribution and accessibility of accommodations within the region. Mizoram, nestled in the gentle hill folds, is described as one of the fabled Seven Sisters of the North East in India, covering an overall area of 21,087 sq. km. The length of the state, stretching north to south, is 277 km, while the width, from east to west, is 121 km. The state shares its borders with three states- Assam, Tripura, and Manipur- as well as with foreign countries, Myanmar and Bangladesh, with the total length of its international border adding up to 722 km. Mizoram is situated between 21.58 north to 24.35 north latitude and 92.15 east to 93.29 east longitude, shaping like a narrow triangle, with the route of the Tropic of Cancer passing near its capital, Aizawl. Mizoram is divided into 11 districts: Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Saiha, Lawngtlai, Kolasib, Serchhip, Mamit, Khawzawl, Saitual, and Hnahthial. Mizoram is a land of hills, rivers, and lakes, with major hill ranges or peaks of various heights running through the state. The average height of the hills to the west of the state is about 1,000 meters, rising gently to 1,300 meters to the east, with some areas having

higher ranges reaching over 2,000 meters. The Blue Mountain (Phawngpui Tlang), situated in the southeastern part of the state, is identified as the highest peak in Mizoram. The presence of numerous rivers and lakes, both large and small, as well as numerous streams flowing down the hills during the rainy season. The climate in Mizoram is generally moderate with no extreme weather conditions. Mizoram is a peaceful and beautiful state with a perfect view of nature, despite being a hilly region, and that the combination of wooded hills, swift-flowing rivers, cascades, and lakes adds to its attraction, charm, and fascination. Flora and fauna are spread out in the forest.

The state is beautiful yet not excessively large, attracting both domestic and international tourists in gradual increments. The state continues to thrive economically, with opportunities arising for locals, particularly through the hospitality sector. In the past, Mizo hospitality was highlighted as a contributing factor, enabling individuals to establish small businesses such as hotels and homestays. Many widowed women have ventured into entrepreneurship by opening lodging establishments to support their families, given their inability to undertake physically demanding tasks like farming or traditional male-dominated jobs. This initiative has led to an improvement in their economic status, and many have sustained their businesses independently or through successive generations. These businesses offer fortunate opportunities for drivers transporting passengers or travelers, as well as for individuals exploring new venues, cultures, and cuisines. These ventures contribute to the state's livelihood by providing lodging, dining, and other services. Despite being a hilly region with narrow highways, traveling through it was depicted as adventurous.

### Research Methodology

Existing literature was first explored on the dimensions of sustainable livelihood. Key themes that could be identified include factors related to the economic dimension, the social dimension, the institutional dimension, and the psychological dimension of sustainable livelihood. A questionnaire was prepared accordingly with key statements (rated on a scale of 1 – 5) that pertain to each aspect of each corresponding dimension. This was handed out to local women entrepreneurs who engage in homestay business and then collected after a week. The mean score

was taken per statement to determine the impact of homestay business on each aspect for each dimension.

## Results & Discussion

In this section, the crucial outcomes of our study are presented and discussed, shedding light on the phenomenon of the homestay business. Through careful analysis, the major findings are uncovered, offering insights into the relevant aspect. These findings not only advance the understanding of the homestay business-accommodation sector but also hold significant implications for the relevant field. The majority of participants do not supplement their income from other sources, indicating the self-sufficiency of homestay entrepreneurship as a primary income source for many individuals in the study sample. These findings collectively emphasize the versatile nature of homestay entrepreneurship and its role in promoting economic opportunities and livelihoods among diverse demographic groups.

## Sample Characteristics

Table 1 shows the characteristic composition of the study's participants. A majority of the participants open their business in the capital city of the state Aizawl, with the majority of them being unmarried. The sample spans different age-groups, with a substantial number of them being within the age range of 31-40, and coming from diverse educational backgrounds, including Hotel Management Graduates. Work experience is predominantly within the 1-5 years range, and the monthly income is concentrated in the Rs.20,000-40,000 brackets. Also, the majority do not supplement their income from other sources.

**Table 1:**  
**Characteristics of the samples**

Demographic Variable	Category	N	%
District	Aizawl	15	28.3
	Lunglei	9	17.0
	Saiha	3	5.7
	Champhai	6	11.3
	Kolasib	3	5.7
	Serchhip	2	3.8
	Mamit	3	5.7
	Lawngtlai	5	9.4

	Khawzawl	6	11.3
	Saitual	1	1.9
Marital Status	Married	23	43.4
	Unmarried	30	56.6
Age	21 – 30	15	28.3
	31 – 40	16	30.2
	More than 40	22	41.5
Education	Below class 10	13	24.5
	Higher Secondary	15	28.3
	Hotel Management Graduate	4	7.5
	Graduate within different subjects	13	24.5
	Master Degree	5	9.4
	Others	2	3.8
Work Experience	1-5 years	31	58.5
	6-10 years	12	22.6
	More than 15 years	10	18.9
Monthly Income	Below 10,000	8	15.1
	10,000-20,000	8	15.1
	20,000-40,000	32	60.4
	More than 40,000	5	9.4
Whether complimented by other sources of income	Yes	17	32.8
	No	36	67.9

**Source: Researcher own compilation**

### Impacts of Homestay Business

The findings from the survey reveal the perceived impact of homestay businesses across various dimensions of empowerment (Table 2). In the Economic Dimension, respondents strongly acknowledged the significant contribution of their ventures to their family's total income, reflected by a mean score of 3.78. Also, the reported mean score of 3.29 for improved living conditions highlights how homestay businesses correlate with enhanced economic well-being, potentially leading to a better quality of life for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, with a mean score of 3.67 for awareness of local economic impact, respondents demonstrated a sense of responsibility and community connection, indicating an understanding of their role in driving economic development at the local level. Moreover, the ability to provide local employment, as indicated by a mean score of 3.21, not only strengthens the local economy but also positions women as job creators.

In the Social Dimension, respondents reported feeling empowered as women, with a mean score of 3.22, suggesting that homestay businesses serve as a platform for self-expression and identity reinforcement. Similarly, the mean score of 3.29 for increased awareness of social development indicates a broader sense of social responsibility among women entrepreneurs, contributing to a more empowered and aware community. Also, the mean score of 3.63 for viewing the business as a respectable way to earn income further strengthens the social empowerment narrative.

In the Institutional Dimension, respondents reported a moderate increase in their sense of being heard, with a mean score of 2.49, suggesting a potential shift in societal roles. However, feelings of having a voice in local decision-making and increased political activity after business engagement scored lower, with mean scores of 2.30 and 2.32, respectively.

Finally, in the Psychological Dimension, respondents reported experiencing a sense of autonomy, personal growth, increased self-esteem, and a greater sense of purpose in life, with mean scores ranging from 3.21 to 3.37. These findings suggest that engagement in homestay businesses goes beyond economic transactions, fostering personal development, self-discovery, and overall psychological well-being among women entrepreneurs.

**Table 2: Impact of Homestay Business on the Different Dimensions of Sustainable Livelihood**

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Facet</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>
Economic	Significant contribution to family's total income	3.78
	Improved living conditions	3.29
	Awareness of local economic impact	3.67
	Ability to provide local employment	3.21
Social	Feels empowered as a woman	3.22
	Increased awareness of social development	3.29
	Views business as a respectable way to earn income	3.63
Institutional	Increase in sense of being heard	2.49
	Feels a voice in local decision-making	2.3
	More politically active after business engagement	2.32
Psychological	Business provides a sense of autonomy	3.21
	Can meet the needs of various situations concerning the business	3.35
	Personal growth	3.3

	Increased self-esteem	3.37
	Increased sense of purpose in life	3.24
	Satisfaction with achievement	3.32

**Source: Researcher own compilation**

## Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted empowerment experienced by women engaged in homestay businesses across economic, social, institutional, and psychological dimensions. These enterprises play an important role in increasing women's financial independence, improving living conditions, encouraging social responsibility, and promoting personal growth and autonomy. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs in homestay enterprises play an active role in community development, influencing social discourse and changing the political environment. Despite problems in reaching complete institutional empowerment, these enterprises have a transforming impact on women's lives, emphasising their importance in promoting gender equality, economic inclusion, and sustainable livelihoods in their communities. Further research and targeted interventions are needed to address barriers to empowerment fully and maximize the potential of women's engagement in the homestay tourism sector.

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