

## 2nd UN Tourism Regional Congress on Women Empowerment in Tourism in Africa

*Theme: Advancing from Empowerment to Leadership: Driving Structural Change in the Tourism Sector in Africa, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe*

29 April – 1 May 2026

**Concept Note** (Draft)

### **1. Background & Rationale**

Women are the driving force of the tourism sector in Africa, representing approximately **70% of the hospitality workforce**. Despite this, they remain disproportionately concentrated in informal roles and are significantly underrepresented in executive leadership. Building on the foundations laid in [Accra](#), Ghana (2019), and in [Freetown](#), Sierra Leone (2024), the **2nd Congress in Zimbabwe** marks a strategic transition.

This Congress moves beyond foundational empowerment toward **institutional leadership**. It focuses on catalyzing policies and partnerships that transform women from workforce participants into the primary architects and decision-makers of Africa's tourism landscape. Strategically aligned with the SDG 5, [UN Women Strategic Plan 2026–2029](#) and the key priority area on Empowering Youth and Women through Tourism of the [UN Tourism Agenda for Africa-Tourism for Inclusive Growth](#), this initiative shifts political and economic systems to achieve gender equality and strengthen institutional accountability.

### **2. Strategic Objectives**

To translate the aforementioned vision into measurable impact, the Congress is structured around the following strategic objectives, designed to drive systemic change and institutional authority within the sector.

- **Foster Economic Inclusion & Financial Readiness:** Facilitate knowledge-sharing on available financial instruments and provide guidance on making women-led tourism SMEs "investment-ready" for regional banks and development partners.
- **Establish Leadership Pathways:** Create institutional frameworks that support the transition of women into high-level executive and decision-making roles.
- **Formalize Institutional Reform:** Advocate for gender-responsive policies and "Gender Budgeting" to be integrated into National Tourism Strategies.
- **Scale Specialized Education & Mentorship:** Expand access to vocational training and formalize a continental network that pairs emerging talent with established industry leaders.

- Strengthen WITLAC's Advocacy Capacity: Empower the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee to serve as a high-level advisory body for regional tourism policy.

### **3. Key Thematic Pillars**

#### I. Policy & Structural Reform

Advocates for gender-mainstreaming within national tourism strategies. By institutionalizing gender-mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting and the production of sex-disaggregated data, we embed equality into legislative frameworks to ensure long-term accountability.

#### II. Capacity Building & Mentorship

Prioritizes access to executive education and vocational training. Through a formal Continental Mentorship Framework, we create a structured pipeline to equip women with the technical skills needed for strategic leadership.

#### III. Digital Innovation & Inclusion

Targets the digital divide by facilitating the adoption of AI, e-commerce, and digital marketing. By fostering innovation, we empower women-led enterprises to compete directly in the global tourism value chain.

#### IV. Finance Access

Focuses on unlocking practical financing solutions for women across the tourism value chain. This pillar promotes access to tailored financial products, including credit lines, grants, guarantees, and blended finance, alongside targeted financial literacy and investment-readiness support.

### **4. WITLAC Advocacy**

It focuses on enhancing the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee's influence with its proposed activities.

### **5. Target Participants**

The Congress will convene approximately **250–300 high-level delegates**, strategically selected to ensure a balance between policy-making authority and entrepreneurial innovation:

- **Policy Makers:** Ministers of Tourism, Education, Finance, Gender, and Economic Planning.
- **Institutional Leaders:** Heads of National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and regional bodies (AU, RECs).
- **The WITLAC Committee:** Members of the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee.

- **Private Sector Executives:** C-Suite leaders from hotel chains, airlines, tour operators, and travel technology companies.
- **Financial Stakeholders:** Representatives from the African Development Bank (AfDB), commercial banks, venture capital firms, and impact investors.
- **Innovators & Entrepreneurs:** Founders of women-led tourism startups and SMEs.
- **Civil Society & Academia:** Representatives from NGOs, gender-advocacy groups, and leading tourism training institutions.
- **Youth Leaders:** Exceptional young women students and early-career professionals in the tourism sector.

## **6. Expected Outcomes & Deliverables**

**The Congress is designed to move beyond discussion, resulting in the following practical outcomes:**

1. The Victoria Falls roadmap/action plan (tbc): A consensus-based statement outlining specific policy priorities for the 2026–2028 period, focusing on increasing female representation in tourism leadership and board-level positions.
2. UN Tourism support for Institutional Gender-Mainstreaming: Practical support on **Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines for the Public Sector in Tourism**

for Tourism Ministries to integrate gender-responsive perspectives into their national tourism strategies, hospitality standards, and procurement processes [and the Gender-inclusive Strategy for Tourism Businesses](#) for the private sector which contains tools to support private sector tourism enterprises of all types and sizes achieve effective and consistent strategies and programmes for gender equality across their operations.

3. Harmonized WITLAC Advocacy Framework: The formal adoption of a unified strategic agenda for the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee, ensuring a consistent voice when engaging with the African Union (AU) and international donors.
4. Strengthened Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: The formalization of collaborative networks between Tourism Ministries, financial institutions, and the private sector to facilitate better market access for women-led SMEs.

## **7. Strategic Alignment**

This initiative serves as a flagship for the **UN Tourism Agenda for Africa – Tourism for Inclusive Growth**. By converging the **UN Women strategic plan 2026–2029 priorities** with the **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** targets, this Congress positions gender equality and women empowerment as paramount for the development of sustainable tourism in Africa.