

What is the Santander BEST Africa programme?

Santander BEST Africa, *Building Equality through Sustainable Tourism*, aims to promote social and economic development by supporting female entrepreneurs and their local environment.

At Santander BEST Africa, we provide technical and economic support to enterprises that promote the advancement and employment of women, encourage sustainability - economic, social and environmental -, contribute to the development of their community in an inclusive manner and are related to the tourism sector - severely affected by the COVID 19 crisis.

The initiative contemplates training and technical assistance to women entrepreneurs, market access, progressive introduction of technologies and financing of business projects, preferably promoted by women, in activities linked to the development of responsible tourism in the region.

The programme is based on two premises: the direct relationship between gender equality and sustainable development, and the role of sustainable tourism as an engine of economic and social development.

Sustainable tourism

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines *sustainable tourism* as “tourism that meets the needs of current tourists and host regions while protecting and promoting opportunities for the future”.

According to the WTO, sustainable tourism should:

- Provide optimal use of environmental resources, a fundamental element of tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of the host communities, preserve their cultural and architectural assets and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure long-term viable economic activities that provide well-distributed socio-economic benefits, including the generation of stable employment opportunities and income and social services for host communities, and contribute to poverty reduction.

Santander BEST Africa promotes responsible tourism. Sustainable, viable tourism, that is fair in the distribution of benefits and in its contribution to poverty reduction. Tourism that respects the socio-cultural identity of the communities, committed to intercultural understanding, the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, the appropriate use of natural resources and the protection and conservation of the natural environment.

Gender equality

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity, which also aims to strengthen universal peace and access to justice.

The 2030 Agenda proposes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 integrated and related targets, referring to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

“Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls” is SDG number 5.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN’s leading development agency, places gender equality at the heart of its work. While it acknowledges the significant progress made over the past twenty years in the area of equality, it also highlights how large inequalities still persist in some regions.

Empowering women and promoting gender equality is key to accelerating sustainable development. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a defence of a basic human right, it also helps to create a multiplier effect in all areas of sustainable development (UNDP, 2019).

Women and tourism

Women represent a large proportion of the tourism workforce. Their participation is twice as high as that of other sectors, although this participation often relates to low-value, low-skill jobs and, to a lesser extent, to jobs at professional and managerial levels. The wage gap between men and women ranges between 10 and 15% for equivalent jobs; this does not take into account the large amount of unpaid work still performed by women in a great number of family tourism enterprises. However, women do participate significantly in tourism. Barriers to entry are lower. The proportion of women who are self-employed in this sector is higher than that observed in other sectors of activity (UNWTO and UN Women, 2011).

Entrepreneurial women are key players in the tourism industry in a large number of African countries. Women overcoming obstacles and difficulties have found a job, a livelihood and a valuable tool to help build their future and that of their communities thanks to self-employment and entrepreneurship, in small and medium sized tourism businesses.