Guidelines for Sustainable Waste Management in Tourism Businesses **with a Gender-Sensitive Perspective**

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

กรมควบคุมมลพิษ
POLLUTION CONTROL DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

TDRI THAILAND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

asean

Table of Contents

Foreword

Guidelines for Sustainable Waste Management in Tourism Businesses with a Gender-Sensitive Perspective

The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors and plays a key role in driving the economy and society of Thailand and many other countries around the world. However, tourism also contributes to environmental challenges, particularly the rising amount of waste generated from travel, services, consumption, and tourist behavior. Tourism businesses therefore have an important role in establishing sustainable waste management systems to reduce negative environmental and social impacts.

Sustainable waste management involves not only environmental practices but also fairness and social equity. Gender is a critical factor that influences the roles and decision-making power regarding resource and waste management across different population groups. For example, in the tourism sector, women usually play key roles in providing services such as cleaning and food preparation–all of which are closely linked to waste production, handling, and separation. Yet, female workers often lack the authority to shape policies and manage waste generated from tourism services, which may lead to negative health impacts for those involved.

This guidelines for sustainable waste management in tourism businesses with a gender-sensitive perspective has been developed to enable tourism enterprises to manage waste effectively and comprehensively. It takes into account the diverse roles and needs of various stakeholders. The document aims to support businesses in designing policies and measures that promote gender equity alongside environmental conservation, thereby contributing to long-term sustainable and inclusive development.

The conceptual framework used to develop this guideline is Reach – Benefit – Empower, which facilitates the design of waste management strategies that positively impact target groups–particularly women workers and vulnerable populations who often play key roles in waste management processes. The framework consists of the following components:

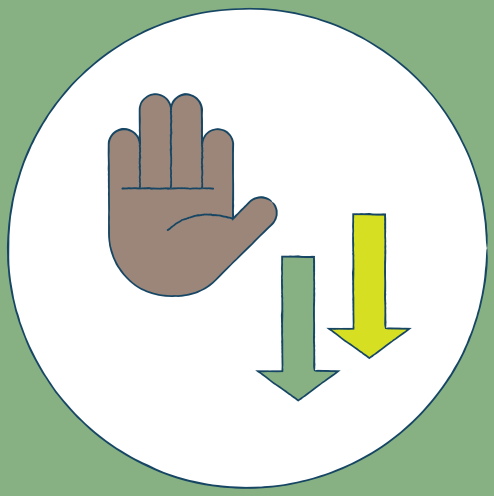
- **Reach** – Tourism businesses should be able to engage with women workers and vulnerable groups, enabling their participation in sustainable waste management through employment, partnerships, and other inclusive opportunities.
- **Benefit** – Target groups, especially women and vulnerable populations, should receive tangible benefits from waste management initiatives, such as fair compensation, training, or other economic opportunities.
- **Empower** – Women and vulnerable groups in the tourism sector should be included in decision-making and policy design to ensure waste management is fair and inclusive.

This gender-responsive guideline for sustainable waste management in tourism businesses is designed to be concise and easy to understand for tourism operators. It recognizes the diverse needs of stakeholders throughout the business value chain–whether they are customers, employees, or suppliers. The guideline adopts the "5R" waste management model (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rot), which emphasizes preventing and reducing waste at the source and managing waste efficiently.

The integration of gender considerations into the 5R model is presented across three chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on strategies for Refuse and Reduce, which aim to prevent waste generation from the outset. These strategies are designed with attention to inclusivity and delivering benefits to tourists, employees, and suppliers, enabling tourism businesses to adopt them in practical ways.

Chapter 2 presents strategies for Reusing and extending the lifespan of products, which contribute to cost savings on business resources. At this stage, materials and items are not yet discarded or removed from the business premises, meaning no waste is generated. This effectively reduces the volume of waste that requires disposal.

Chapter 3 outlines strategies for waste disposal that cover both recyclable materials (Recycle) and biodegradable waste (Rot), which can be composted into fertilizer for use in on-site organic gardens—such as those maintained by restaurants, hotels, or tourist attractions.



CHAPTER 1

Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Refuse and Reduce

"Refusing waste is a strategy that helps tourism businesses avoid generating waste from the outset. This includes choosing environmentally friendly materials over single-use plastics. When combined with efforts to reduce unnecessary products or services (Reduce), refusing waste can effectively prevent the creation of waste at its source. In addition to lowering service costs, this approach also reduces the resources and expenses required for waste management. Tourism businesses may consider the following strategies under the Refuse and Reduce approach."

1.1 Reducing single-use materials

1.1.1 At airports and tourist sites:

- Require shops within the premises to use environmentally friendly packaging instead of single-use plastics.
- Reduce the distribution of paper brochures or maps by encouraging tourists to use digital alternatives such as QR codes or mobile applications.
- Avoid giving away or selling unnecessary souvenirs, especially those made from single-use plastics.

1.1.2 At accommodations, such as hotels and resorts:

- Replace small shampoo and soap bottles with refillable dispensers.
- Provide amenities like combs, toothbrushes, and shower caps only upon request instead of making them readily available in rooms (See example in Figure 1).
- Eliminate plastic water bottles in guest rooms and promote the use of refillable bottles by installing drinking water refill stations (See example in Figure 2).
- Provide waste bins that separate recyclable materials, along with explanations to encourage guests to sort their waste at the source and reduce the burden on cleaning staff, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 1 : Examples of how hotels provide amenity bars, usually at the lobbies, for guests to take to their rooms
Source : TDRI team

Figure 2 : Example of how hotel replace water bottles in guest rooms
Source : TDRI team

Figure 3 : Examples of segregated waste bins in guest rooms
Source : TDRI team

1.1.3 At restaurants and cafés:

- Reduce the use of single-use plastic items such as plastic straws and cutlery, and switch to natural materials like pressed leaf plates or wooden utensils.
- Encourage customers to bring their own containers by offering a deposit system that allows them to receive a discount on their next purchase when the container is returned, or by using reusable packaging.

1.2 Reducing food waste

- Hotels, cafés, and restaurants can plan food preparation based on the expected number of customers each day by recording regular food usage on a monthly basis, especially during peak tourist seasons. This helps forecast customer demand and allows businesses to revise their menus by removing unpopular items that frequently go to waste–thereby minimizing food waste.
- Promote the use of local and seasonal ingredients to reduce food loss caused by long-distance transportation. Businesses can also use high-quality local produce as a unique selling point, particularly if it is organic and grown using compost produced on-site.
- Offer flexible portion sizes, allowing customers to choose options such as small, medium, or large meals–or request reduced quantities of rice or vegetables–to help minimize food waste.

1.3 Reducing waste in management offices

- Shift from paper-based operations to digital systems, such as using e-receipts, e-tickets, or QR codes, and digitizing business data storage. This also facilitates the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data.
- Implement energy-saving systems, such as LED lighting and air conditioners with motion sensors to conserve electricity.
- Avoid selling or purchasing products that contribute to environmental degradation, such as jewelry made from ivory or wildlife, or goods produced through unfair labor practices.
- Support suppliers who adopt environmentally friendly production methods and uphold gender equity principles.
- Donate edible surplus food to organizations that support vulnerable groups, such as shelters for women and children.

Waste reduction in the tourism sector is not merely about minimizing resource use–it must also be approached with gender sensitivity. Women often constitute the primary workforce in waste-related roles, such as hotel housekeeping, restaurant support staff, or informal sector recycling workers. If waste reduction strategies are designed without accounting for gender dimensions, they may lead to unequal burdens and missed opportunities, ultimately resulting in negative social impacts and undermining business sustainability.

Tourism businesses can refer to the strategies outlined in Table 1 to ensure that operations in a female-dominated sector genuinely benefit all stakeholders.

Table 1 : Applying the Reach–Benefit–Empower Framework to Refuse and Reduce

Reach	**Customers :** Provide multilingual information on waste reduction, place signage in visible areas, and ensure accessibility for all groups–for instance, making water refill stations easily accessible to tourists with limited mobility. Note : Women often spend more time in restrooms than men, as they may accompany dependents such as children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. This is one reason why queues at women's restrooms are typically longer. Therefore, for tourism businesses and restaurants that are being built or renovated, restroom facilities should allocate more space to women's restrooms, rather than dividing the space equally between men and women.
	Employees : Communicate the business's resource-saving strategies in advance and gather feedback from staff (ensuring balanced input from both male and female employees) before officially implementing them. Then, provide comprehensive training and collect feedback post-training, disaggregated by gender, to evaluate the impact of these strategies on different employee groups.
	Suppliers : Engage suppliers in discussions about reducing waste and avoiding the use of environmentally harmful materials. Note : Businesses should consider selecting local suppliers and giving opportunities to women-owned businesses (WOBs) with aligned sustainability goals. For example, a souvenir shop might avoid plastic-based items and instead sell handwoven textiles from local women's groups.

Benefit

Customers : To encourage behavioral change, strategies should be easy to adopt and may require added incentives. For example, offer lower prices for dine-in food and beverages (which avoid single-use plastics) than for take-away orders.

Employees : Cost-saving strategies should also ease employees' workloads—for instance, housekeeping staff no longer need to collect numerous single-use toiletry bottles or manage excess waste. However, refilling dispensers should be easy too (e.g., soap dispensers should not be installed too high for housekeeping staff to reach). Technicians—who are often men—should be instructed to install dispensers at inclusive heights.

Note : For hotel operations offering on-request services, safety measures should be in place for female staff who may need to deliver items directly to guests' rooms.

Suppliers : Businesses can highlight how waste-reduction practices can serve as a selling point for broader partnerships. For smaller WOBs with limited cash flow, businesses might consider flexible payment terms—such as a 60-40 installment plan or short payment cycles.

Empower

Employees : Allow representatives of different genders and age groups to participate in designing waste-reduction measures. Support training programs that enable staff to apply new skills in other areas, ensuring training schedules accommodate staff availability.

Additionally, businesses should provide fair incentives for employees who contribute to waste-reduction policies—for instance, bonuses for those who develop innovative ideas that help lower operational costs.

CHAPTER 2

Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Reuse

> Once a business has implemented comprehensive waste reduction strategies, the materials and equipment still in use can be considered genuinely essential. Some of these items may require upfront investment to change their format or method of use. Therefore, reuse and preservation strategies aimed at extending the lifespan of existing materials and products are crucial. These approaches not only help reduce long-term operational costs but also serve as an important method for minimizing waste generated from unsustainable resource use in the tourism sector.

2.1 Reuse strategies for each business type

2.1.1 For accommodation:

- Display signage allowing guests staying for more than one night to choose whether they want their bed linens and towels changed. This reduces water and energy use from laundry operations and also helps preserve fabric quality (See example in Figure 4).
- Refillable soap and shampoo should be provided in biodegradable packaging or in sturdy, hygienic containers that suppliers can refill.
- On-request amenities such as combs and shower caps can be made from reusable materials and sanitized for reuse. These items could be placed in a sterilization cabinet near the lobby for guests to pick up as needed.

Figure 4 : Example of signage to encourage towels reusing
Source : TDRI team

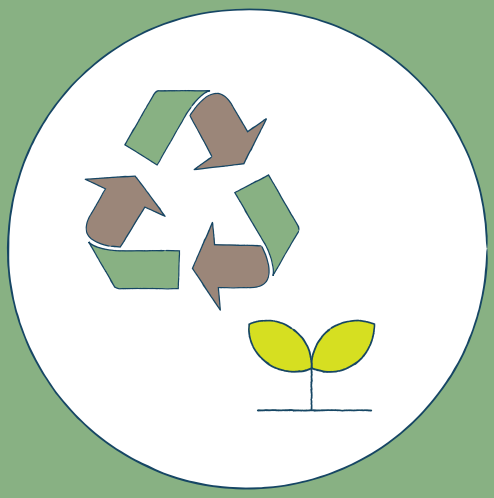
2.1.2 For restaurants and cafés:

- Use reusable tableware such as plates, cutlery, and glasses for dine-in services.
- Implement a deposit system for takeaway containers, where customers receive a refund or discount when returning the containers for reuse.

Similar to Refuse and Reduce strategies, Reuse practices should be designed to create positive environmental and social impacts. It is essential to integrate a gender perspective, as women workers often play key roles in the material handling chain—such as cleaners managing reusable items or suppliers needing to adapt to reuse systems. Businesses can explore specific strategies outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 : Applying the Reach–Benefit–Empower Framework to Reuse

Reach	**Customers :** Provide multilingual guidance on the deposit system for reusable containers, locations of water refill stations, and sterilized amenities. For accommodations, these practices can be communicated in advance via booking confirmation emails to help guests prepare by bringing their own necessary items.
	Employees : Educate staff on how to manage reusable items—for example, how to properly clean, sanitize, and maintain containers and refillable products.
	Suppliers : Clearly explain the business's reuse policies to suppliers so that both parties can plan logistics together, such as the type and frequency of refills for soap and shampoo dispensers.
Benefit	**Employees :** Reduce workload for staff—for example, hotel housekeepers may have less frequent laundry loads and less single-use waste to sort and dispose of.
	Suppliers : Support women-owned and local community enterprises, such as sourcing natural-material containers (e.g., pressed leaf plates) produced by local women's groups.
Empower	**Employees :** Involve women workers in policy design regarding reuse practices, such as setting cleaning and safety standards for reusable equipment.
	Suppliers : Involve women workers in policy design regarding reuse practices, such as setting cleaning and safety standards for reusable equipment.



CHAPTER 3

Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Recycle and Rot

> After implementing strategies to reduce waste through Refuse, Reduce, and Reuse, tourism businesses may still generate a certain amount of waste through their services, including food scraps that require proper handling. The processes of Recycling and Composting (or Rot) are therefore essential strategies to further minimize waste and contribute to the circular economy.

3.1 Key Recycling Strategies in the Tourism Sector

- Sort waste at the source by implementing a simple and easy-to-understand recycling system—for example, using color-coded bins, visual symbols, and clear labels.
- Promote partnerships with small recycling enterprises operated by women or vulnerable groups.
- Develop markets for recycled materials by encouraging hotels and restaurants to purchase products made from recycled content.

3.2 Key Composting (Rot) Strategies in the Tourism Sector

- Separate food waste from hotels or restaurants for composting, to be used in the business's own gardens or agricultural plots.
- Support local farmers by providing access to compost from hotels—potentially establishing a system where the hotel buys back produce grown using the compost, especially organic vegetables.
- Utilize food waste for bioenergy production by partnering with local companies or organizations capable of converting waste into energy.

Reach	**Customers :** Design an easy-to-use waste sorting system accessible to all groups, using intuitive symbols and clear example images to assist those with limited literacy. **Employees :** Educate staff, particularly women workers who are typically responsible for food waste handling, on how to sort and dispose of food scraps and provide training on safe recycling practices. Suppliers: Support women-led recycling businesses, such as shops that purchase plastic waste and turn it into new products. Additionally, tourism businesses can create opportunities for local partners (e.g., nearby farmers) to participate in composting initiatives using food waste generated by the business.
Benefit	**Employees :** Provide appropriate protective equipment—such as gloves and small-sized boots—for female employees who handle food waste. Businesses can also enable staff to earn additional income from producing and selling compost made from food scraps.
Empower	**Employees :** Assign female staff roles in waste disposal systems, such as acting as recycling coordinators within the tourism business, with appropriate compensation for their contributions.

A systematic approach to waste prevention and reduction in the tourism sector must integrate every stage—starting from waste avoidance, reuse of materials, recycling, and composting—alongside efforts to engage all stakeholders. Throughout these efforts, businesses should prioritize gender considerations to ensure that waste management practices are both equitable and inclusive.


HOTEL