

# Awareness Creation at Community Level towards the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Tourism Resources of Bale Mountains National Park and Harena Buluk, South East Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) is one of the most important conservation areas in the Ethiopian Highlands and it is one of the 34 International Biodiversity Hotspots and also qualifies for World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve Listing (BMNP management plan, 2007). However, it is currently facing stiff challenges both from human and natural induced factors. Hence, this project was launched to raise awareness of local communities about the conservation of cultural and natural tourism resources at Dinsho site of Bale Mountains National Park and Harena Buluk woreda. The project team and Research and Community Service Directorate on behalf of Madawalabu University, Bale Mountains National Park Office and Harana Buluk Culture and Tourism Offices were the responsible bodies to implement this project. The project was implemented in two phases and the first phase of the project was implemented from June 10 to June 13/2007 E.C. four consecutive days in Dinsho site of Bale Mountains National Park; whereas the second phase was given from June 18 to 21/ 2007 E.C in Harena Bulluk woreda, Bale Zone. A total of 3000 USD is utilized for successful accomplishment of the project. According to the pre-training and post-training test results, it is possible to say that the project was successful in terms of improving the awareness and knowledge of the participants about conservation of natural and cultural tourism resources and its role for successful sustainable tourism development of the project area. Out of the total 94 participants, 60, 20, 10, 3 and 1 were found at the rank of poor, fair, good, very good and excellent during pre-training test respectively; whereas 4, 5, 15, 45 and 25 were found at the rank of poor, fair, good, very good and excellent during post-training test. The feedbacks of the trainees also confirm the significances of the project for them and recommend the project to be implemented continuously and expand to other tourism sites of the Bale Zone: Madda Walabu Woreda, and its surroundings (Adaba Dodola eco-tourism sites).

## 1. Background of the Project

Tourism, as both an economic and social activity, is frequently described as one of the major phenomena of the modern era, an assertion that reflects its remarkable growth in both scale and scope since the mid-1900s (Sharply and Telfer, 2009). The rapid and continuing growth and spread of international tourism, particularly since the 1990's has been the most influential factor in driving the emergence of sustainable tourism as an approach to tourism development. According to Toth (2002), "sustainable tourism is about creating a balance between socio-cultural, environmental, and economic interests". The notion of sustainable tourism, hence, encompasses three dimensions, namely environmental conservation, economic efficiency and social equity. Sustainable use relies on local knowledge thereby raising awareness has become an important tool towards the recognition of the importance of wildlife, natural and cultural resources as an asset for tourism development and reduced exploitation of those resources (Halstead, 2003).

Recognizing that the conservation of protected areas could not be achieved without the support of local communities, and conservation organizations have seen Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) as a significant part of conservation strategies since the 1970's (Jennifer, 2004). A broad spectrum of capacity development is needed if community based natural resource management and conservancies are to function effectively. In addition, developing alternative and conservation-compatible livelihoods in communities associated with the protected areas is essential to reduce pressure on natural and cultural resources (Kiss, 2004).

In many instances tourism can be seen as a vehicle to empower local communities and protect the environment through the development of new employment opportunities, the enhancement of local economies, preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices, public awareness and education (WCED, 1987). But in realities this assumptions are problematic in many of the countries tourist destinations including Bale and its environments, in which their success has not been widely monitored and gives adequate tourism earnings for the local communities as well as the national economy.

Bale Zone is located between  $3^{\circ} 18' 46''$  -  $10^{\circ} 09' 04''$  N and  $3^{\circ} 18' 03''$  -  $43^{\circ} 04' 24''$  E. and found within altitude ranges of 300m and 4377m, above sea level. Tulu-Dimtu, the highest mountain peak in Oromia regional state and the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain peak in Ethiopia next to

Ras-Dashen (4620 m) is found in this zone. The population size of Bale Zone is 4, 634, 602 of which 4, 489, 827 people are rural and 144, 775 people are urban dwellers and agriculture is the chief economic activity on

which 95% of the population depends on it for their livelihood. Bale Zone is also endowed with magnificent cultural and natural attractions which embrace forests, National Park, waterfalls, wildlife, fertile soils, caves, shrines and numerous unexplored tourism potentials. However, many of the communities are not aware about the conservation of cultural and natural tourism attractions (Sintayehu and Belay, 2014)

Thus, a natural and cultural resource management and conservation programme promotes wise and sustainable management of natural resources, and encourages biodiversity conservation by creating the necessary conditions for sustainable use, providing rural people with income and employment, an impetus for conservation, an empowerment mechanism, as communities participate in tourism decision-making processes and operations, skills and capacity development (Bao, 2008).

## **2. Statement of the problem/Project Rationale**

Community-based wildlife conservation was introduced by the National Parks and wildlife authorities in the late 1980's in communally held areas in order to avoid human-wildlife conflicts and assist rural development and conservation. The CBNRM projects vary in the ways they contribute to sustainable natural resource use, rural economic development, enhanced rural livelihoods and benefit sharing (WWF, 2001). It must be questioned, whether power has been devolved to the rural communities in relation to resource ownership and management (Muller, 2002). The over-exploitation of the earth's natural resources is so severe that it threatens the balance of many ecosystems around the world. In many countries forests are rapidly being cleared for timber and human settlements, and drought due to climate change is increasing land degradation and desertification (Cohen, 1995).

Despite the fact that the Bale Mountains are home to more locally endemic species of mammals and plants than any other place of the country, the settlement of farmers inside the forest has been aggravating the destruction of the natural resources and wildlife. They often depends on its forest products, grazing for livestock and harvest mainly wood for timber production and sale in an illegal ways by ignoring the restriction of settlements inside national priority forest areas in Ethiopia including Dinsho and Harena forest (Williams, 2002; GMP, 2007). In addition, conflict of ownership among the local communities and local government for Sof Umar Cave and Dire Shiek Hussien Shrine recently has been accelerating the deterioration of these cultural and natural resources through negligence and inappropriate use of resource found in these areas (Abadir, personal communication, 2014; personal observation during training provision of 2014 in Sof Umar cave, Dire Sheik Hussein Shrine and BMNP). According to Abadir (2014) (interviewed during need assessment) there is inappropriate resource use in Bale zone along with land-use disputes, human-wildlife conflicts and lack of livelihoods, have altered the orientation of tourism businesses and endanger the survival of the forest and causing environmental degradation and deforestation at alarming rate. Therefore, So as to reduce the amount of energy and raw materials society consumes, as well as pollution and waste it produces; protecting fragile ecosystems and environments; bringing about equitable distribution of wealth between different social groups within the cultural and natural resources in these areas demands considerable skills and effort. A research conducted by Fariborz, Ma'rof and Sarjit (2009) indicated that capacity building on tourism development brings similar significance with this justification.

As a result, there is a critical need to support the conservation and long-term sustainability of unique flora and fauna as well as cultural resources which exist in Bale Zone. Thus, the rational of this project concentrates on capacity building, environmental awareness and training for the locals, women, youth and religious leaders in Dinsho sites of Bale park, and Harena Bulluk woreda particularly about the conservation, promotion and management of natural and cultural resources, wildlife monitoring and equitable benefit sharing among key tourism stakeholders.

In such project it was possible to transmit information like "one person two trees", and the significance of the project in the long term to mitigate global warming and climate change in the region was given due attention during trainings. Most importantly, the contribution and linkage of the project in generating funds through carbon trading and Carbon emission compensation in general in Ethiopia and in Harena forest in particular.

## **3. Project Goal and Objectives**

### **3.1. Project Goal**

This project aims to raise awareness local communities towards the conservation of cultural and natural resources at Dinsho, and Harena woreda, thereby improving the wellbeing of the local communities in the long run.

### **3.2. Immediate Objectives**

- ♥ To intensify awareness campaign in the local communities (women, local chief persons, religious leaders, youth and scouts) toward the conservation of natural resources and wildlife particularly endemic species
- ♥ To widen up the knowledge of local communities (women, local chief persons, religious leaders, youth and scouts) in tourism and heritage management
- ♥ To promote Community-based natural resource management as the way to tackle the environmental problems of Bale Zone

- ♥ To enhance local awareness about the social and ecological benefits of tourism
- ♥ To improve the linkage and cooperation between local communities, private tourism enterprises and NGOs

#### 4. Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries of the Project

The stakeholders who involved in this project were 94 local communities which encompasses 20 religious leaders, 25 local chief persons, 10 scouts, 14 handicraft and souvenir producers 15 women and 10 youth, in Dinsho, and Harena NGOs working on conservation of tourism attractions and Mada Walabu University.

This project included direct and indirect beneficiaries. The direct beneficiaries of this project were 94 local communities of religious leaders, local chief persons, scouts, women and youths, handicraft and souvenir producers. These trainees were selected on the assumption that having trainees taken the training, they are expected to share information to the rest of local people in mosques, churches and meetings. Trainees were selected by Culture and Tourism offices of Bale Zone and respective woredas. The indirect beneficiaries were the local government, the tourism industry, the visitors, the environment, hospitality businesses, tourist attractions found in Bale zone.

#### 5. Project Implementation Strategies

The project team and Research and Community Service Directorate on behalf of Madawalabu University, Bale Mountains National Park Office and Harana Buluk Culture and Tourism Offices were the responsible bodies to implement this project. For this project implementation, two committees were organized. The first committee is the project team or coordinators. This committee was responsible to prepare training manuals and provide training for the participants who have direct and indirect relations with the park. The second committee, which comprised facilitators or representatives from Harana Buluk Culture and Tourism Offices and Bale Mountains National Park Offices, Ethiopian Wolf Conservation project were responsible to facilitate the trainings through writing letters for the participants, informing and encouraging the participants to enable them actively participate in the training.

The project was implemented in two phases and the first phase of the project was implemented from June 10 to June 13/2007 E.C. four consecutive days in Dinsho site of Bale Mountains National Park; whereas the second phase was given from June 18 to 21/ 2007 E.C in Harena Bulluk woreda ,Bale Zone. The project team, in collaboration with the above concerned bodies, conducted or implemented the project in the park in the first and second phase.

#### 6. Inputs Used to Implement the Project

Different materials such as LCD projectors, note books, pens, training manuals were used to implement this project and a total of 3000 USD (for lunch and refreshment fees, per diem and professional fee for trainers, and per diem for district facilitators) was utilized for successful accomplishment of the project.

#### 7. Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts of the Project

##### 7.1. Outputs of the project

- ❖ A total of 94 trainees which includes local chief persons, elders, religious leaders, women and youth who are supposed to be representatives of local have got a good understanding and knowledge of conservation and promotion of cultural and natural tourism heritage attractions, benefits of tourism, natural resource management, tree plantations, wildlife protection, resource ownership, equitable tourism benefit.
- ❖ As indicated from the feedbacks from the participants and the pre-training and post-training test results, it is possible to say that the project was successful in terms of improving the awareness and knowledge of the participants about conservation of natural and cultural tourism resources its role for successful sustainable tourism development of the project area. The pre-training and post-training test result and its impact can clearly be seen as follows:

Table 1: Pre-training and post- training test results

No	Pre-training test			Post-training test		
	Level/rank	Number of participants	Percentage (%)	Rank/level	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
	Poor	60	63.8	Poor	4	4.3
	Fair	20	21.2	Fair	5	5.3
	Good	10	10.6	Good	15	16
	Very good	3	3.35	Very good	45	47.9
	Excellent	1	1.05	Excellent	25	26.5
	Total	94	100		94	100

- ❖ The above table shows that from the participants 60, 20, 10,3 and 1 were found at the rank of poor, fair, good, very good and excellent during pre-training test respectively; whereas 4 , 5, 15 ,45 and 25 were found

at the rank of poor, fair, good, very good and excellent during post-training test. This result might show that the training brings the participants to the next best level. That is it is believed that the training improves the awareness and knowledge of the participants in the training.

- ❖ Training manuals (in Afan Oromo language) on the conservation and protection of natural resources and wildlife, tourism and heritage management, ownership of tourism resources, benefits of tourism, the Roles of Stakeholders collaboration for Sustainable Tourism development, the role of tree plantations, waste managing systems were prepared and distributed for the trainee.
- ❖ One of the most important things in tourism development is cooperation or good relationship among different stake holder so, by this training we believed that good relationship among religious fathers, local chief persons, women, youth, handicraft producers and communities were maintained.
- ❖ The training also brings trainees to have greater understanding about sustainable resource conservation.

### 7.2. Outcomes of the Project

The training is expected to bring the following outcomes.

- Encroachment, over extraction of firewood and building materials in Dinsho and Harena forest will be minimized.
- The threats of species extinction due to over-utilization of resources and the inability of the locals to protect wildlife will be solved.
- The problem of equitable tourism benefit sharing among key stakeholders will be minimized.
- The role of trees in soil conservation and erosion control will widely be encouraged.
- The problem of local ownership recognition for tourism resources will be mitigated to some extent.
- The skill and knowledge of local communities in cultural and natural resource management will be improved.
- Women participation in conservation of cultural and natural tourism resources will be strengthen.
- Community awareness towards the promotion of their cultural and natural resources, and the practice of tree planting in their environment will be improved.
- A strong linkage among local communities, tourism enterprises and local government will be created.

### 7.3. Impacts of the Project

The project anticipate that the following impacts

- Aforestation and rehabilitation of wildlife.
- Sustainable natural resource management and conservation
- Sustainable tourism development.
- Women and youth involvement in handicraft and souvenir production in sustainable methods.
- Recognition of resource ownership.
- Increment of tourist flow through destination reputation.
- Global warming and climate change will be mitigated in the region
- Conservation of cultural and natural heritage will be maintained
- Destination reputation and visitor flow increment.

### 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

After implementing this project, the project team found that the training improved the awareness and knowledge of host community representatives (elders, local chief persons, religious fathers, women and youth) about protection of natural and cultural tourism attractions and trainees have promised to transfer messages about what they have trained to wider community at different levels: at meetings, religious places, local associations etcetera, and play vital roles for the sustainable natural and cultural tourism resources of the project area and the country at large.

Collaborating with Harana Buluk culture and tourism office, Dinsho Town Culture and Tourism Offices and Bale Mountains National Park Offices, Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Program and Frankfurt Ecological society and other tourism stakeholders themselves, it is necessary to prolong the project life and conducting it continuously in other areas such as Dire Sheik Hussein Shrine, Sof Umar Cave and Madda Walabu district.

As we have got evidences from the feedbacks of the trainees and results of the pre- and post-training test given for the trainees, trainees have acquired basic concepts on conservation and promotion of cultural and natural tourism heritage attractions, benefits of tourism, natural resource management, tree plantations, wildlife protection, resource ownership, equitable tourism benefit sharing. The feedbacks of the trainees also confirm the significances of the project for them and recommend the project to be implemented continuously. Therefore, it is advisable to continuously implement such project by including more practical activities how to promote and conserve tourism attractions. Most importantly, the project should be expanded to other tourism sites of the Bale Zone: Madda

Walabu Woreda, and its surroundings (Adaba Dodola eco-tourism sites).

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