

A Review Paper on Challenges and Opportunities for Community Based Ecotourism Development in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people, and Community-based ecotourism (CBE), on the other hand, is a very specific form of ecotourism which is used to describe ecotourism ventures that are characterized by high environmental consideration, increased control and involvement of the local residents, as well as significant benefits for the host community. Ethiopia, due to its magnificent natural and cultural tourism resources, has huge potential to become one of an ideal ecotourism destinations in the world, and there are some promising community based ecotourism initiatives in different parts of the country such as Adaba -Dodola, Semen Mountains National Park, Wonchi Crater Lake and Adwa. The objective of this review paper is to examine the challenges and opportunities for Community Based Ecotourism development in Ethiopia. By its methodological approach, this review is Narrative review since the reviewer summarized the findings of empirical researches which were done in different parts of Ethiopia, and a total of 13 researches were reviewed. The findings from the review of different studies revealed poor ecotourism infrastructure and facilities (trekking pass, parking facilities, all weather roads, camping sites, clean water, electricity and health and other facilities), conflict of interest over resource usage and lack of trained manpower as the major hindering factors for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia. Moreover, the results from the review also identified the presence of abundant ecotourism resources, proximity to honeypot areas and enabling policy environments as the major prospects for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia.

Keywords: challenges, opportunities, community based ecotourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The International Ecotourism Society (2010) described Ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that protects the environment and enhances the welfare of local communities. Moreover, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) defined the term ecotourism in 1996 as environmentally accountable travel and visitation to natural places, to experience and admire nature (and any related cultural features, both ancient and contemporary) which encourage conservation, have a minimal visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples.

Community-based ecotourism (CBE), on the other hand, is a very specific form of ecotourism which implies that the community has substantial control and involvement in the ecotourism project and the majority of the benefits remain in the community, and it has emerged as a valuable tool for poverty alleviation, wildlife conservation and the delivery of responsible and sustainable tourism offerings (Denman, 2001).

Ecotourism has become the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry growing 3 times faster than the industry as a whole (TIES, 2008) Cited in Ambelu(2011).

Ethiopia is a country which is endowed with the vast array of ecotourism resources including cultural, historical, and archaeological and natural resources which are an ideal for the development of sustainable ecotourism. Ethiopia's wildlife is one of the richest and most diversified in Africa with several of its protected areas and wetlands. Out of the total wildlife resources, more than 320 mammals (39 endemic), 918 birds (19 endemic), 240 reptiles (16 endemic), 71 amphibians (30 endemic) and 172 fishes (38 endemic) species are recorded in Ethiopia (Vreugdenhil *et al.*, 2012; Amare, 2015b). The country also has a wide variety of wildlife habitats ranging from alpine moor lands to lowland savannahs with extensive wetlands. Having evolved on relative ecological isolation from the rest of African mainland contains approximately 40% of all land above 2,500 m in altitude (EWCA, 1996).

There are some encouraging community based ecotourism initiatives in Ethiopia such as Adaba -Dodola, which is financially and technically supported by the German Agency of Technical Cooperation or GTZ (now GIZ) on the northern slopes of the Bale Mountains in Oromia National Regional State and a pilot ecotourism project on Semen Mountains National Park (Sisay,2004). In addition, there are some Community Based Tourism initiatives in other parts of the country such as Wonchi crater Lake (in Ambo, Oromia Region), Adwa (Tigray region) and Mekit in north wollo (Amahara region).

The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has initiated the Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) initiative to protect the country from the adverse effects of climate change and to build a green economy that will help realize its ambition of reaching middle income status before 2025 (MoFED, 2013). Hence, Community Based Ecotourism could be one of the best choices to ensure green economy as well

as to realize the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP).

As a result, it is rational to conduct a review on the various studies which have been conducted in different corners of the country regarding challenges and opportunities of Community Based Ecotourism Development which will help provide a multifaceted inputs for policy makers, Ministry of culture and tourism offices, Ngo's, Ministry of Finance and Development, Environmentalists and any other concerned bodies.

The reviewer has not come across with any paper related with the topic except a review paper by Asfaw (2013) who investigated the contribution of ecotourism for livelihood diversification and sustainable natural resource management from eco development paradigm point of view. Hence, it is rational to conduct this paper in order to fill the gap in review regarding the challenges and opportunities of Community Based Ecotourism development in Ethiopia.

Objective of the Review

The objective of this review paper is to examine the challenges and opportunities for Community Based Ecotourism development in Ethiopia.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

By its methodological approach, this review is Narrative review since the reviewer summarized the findings of empirical researches which are done in different parts of Ethiopia regarding challenges and opportunities of Community Based Ecotourism. According to Philip (2009) in narrative review selected studies are compared and summarized and results are based on a qualitative rather than a quantitative level. Hence, the findings of the reviewed studies were paraphrased, narrated and presented thematically.

The reviewed studies included both published and unpublished research works. The published research articles were collected from internet by entering the search terms and phrases such as 'Ecotourism in Ethiopia', 'Challenges of Community based Ecotourism in Ethiopia', "opportunities for ecotourism development in Ethiopia" into the Google search engine.

Only Full length and open access research articles were considered for the review. Consequently, a total of six (6) published research articles were accessed from different journals such as Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources, American Journal of Human Ecology, and Journal of Hospitality and Management Tourism.

Moreover, unpublished researches were also accessed from two renowned universities in the country i.e. Addis Ababa University and University of Gondar which had post graduate program in Tourism during the review period, and six(6) thesis works with the score of very good and above were selected for the review. In addition, 1 unpublished research was accessed from Madda Walabu University Research and Publication Directorate Office. Hence, a total of 13 researches were reviewed.

The reviewed studies were conducted between 2011-2015 in different parts of Ethiopia and the regional distribution of the reviewed studies indicate that six researches were conducted in Amahara Regional State(Semen Mountains National Park in North Gondar, Borena Sayint National park in Wollo, Meket Woreda Wollo,Lake Zengena in Awi Zone, Choke mountains in east and west Gojjam,Alatish National Park in north Gondar);Four researches were conducted in Oromiya Regional State(Wonchi Crater Lake in Ambo, Bale mountains National Park in Bale, Awash National park and Adaba –Dodola in East Arsi); one research was conducted in Addis Ababa ,and the last one was conducted by taking Ethiopia as a case.

3. MAJOR RESULTS

Challenges and Opportunities of Community Based Ecotourism

In this section, the findings from reviewed studies regarding constraints and opportunities of Community based ecotourism in Ethiopia are discussed briefly.

3.1. Challenges of Community Based Ecotourism

3.1.1. Conflict of interest over resource usage and Ownership Problems

Conflict of interest among different stake holders who live around ecotourism resources were one of the frequently stated challenges for community based development. For instance, **Bires (2014)** in his study about the challenges and opportunities for community based ecotourism In Lake Zengena, Amhara region revealed that there was ownership problem between church communities and the government particularly the Banja Woreda Culture and Tourism Office. Similarly, **Ketema(2015)** also found that there is a conflict of interest on the ownership of Wonchi Crater Lake which is found in Oromia regional state , the central Ethiopia.

In addition, **Ambelu (2011)** in his study in Meket wollo,Amhara Region Northern Ethiopia identified that land ownership issues were a challenge for development of community lodges in some of the ecotourism sites ,and conflict over farming land border is sometimes raised by communities where the trekking routes passed adjacent to their farming land. Ambelu stated that unless the resource ownership questions are solved through a series of hastily arranged village meetings, discussion and negotiation, there is the ever-present risk

that tourism will not be adequately supported (or will be resisted) by local communities. Moreover, according to Eshetie (2012) locals have resentment by the direct competition of sheep with the wild life resources of the park. The direct competition of sheep with wild life of the park is leading to predation which cause disease, especially at Mehal Saynt worda. *Eshetie stated that Festuca gilbertiana* is a thin-leaved species which has high demand by the local communities because of its multipurpose functions, and it is used by locals to make hatch, rope, mattress and forage. However, due to the current policy of the park, the locals are prohibited from utilizing this grass which has created great resentment among the local communities. Furthermore, Alemayehu (2011) in his study in Awash National park also reported the existence of inter-ethnic conflict between Kerreyu, Ittu and Afar pastoralists over resource ownership rights of dry-season grazing and access to water points, and conflict between the park scouts and the local Pastoralist is usual practice.

3.1.2. Lack of Cooperation among Stakeholders

Lack of stakeholders integration is one of the repeatedly mentioned challenges for Community Based Ecotourism Tourism development in different parts of Ethiopia. For example, Ambelu (2011) stated lack of cooperation and formal relationship between the Community Tourism Enterprises and other stakeholders as a bottleneck in the study area which possibly emanated from lack of capacity and legal registration amongst Community Tourism Enterprises and support from government offices. Likewise, Berhanu (2013), in his study at Alatish National park, revealed existence of weak integration among different stakeholders and the park office. Berhanu stated that the buffer zone of the park is managed solely by North Gondar natural resource management office with no collaboration with park office, and moreover, Justice Office considers criminal cases such as illegal hunting, fishing and other unsustainable resource utilization as minor cases and sometimes the office leave the case without any penalty. Besides, Alemayehu (2011) and Aynalem (2013) also reported lack of stakeholders cooperation as a challenge for community based ecotourism development in their respective study areas.

3.1.3. Local people's awareness and participation

It is obvious that community based ecotourism development encourages local community's participation and benefit sharing as well as enhance their understanding about both the natural and cultural resource conservation. Nevertheless, most of ecotourism destinations in Ethiopia are not in line with the principles of community based ecotourism. For instance, according to Alemayehu (2011) most of the local people in his study area had no awareness about either ecotourism or community-based tourism and they did not participated at any stage of park management decisions. Similarly, Demeke and Verma (2014), in their study in Bale Mountains National Park, found that 71% of study respondents did not participate in any ecotourism activities though they wished to participate which could be attributed to the limited flow of tourists in the study area.

3.1.4. Lack of basic ecotourism infrastructure and facilities

Basic ecotourism facilities such as accommodations, transportations, health services and other support facilities are extremely essential to enhance the satisfaction of Eco tourists and maximize the length of stay of tourists. However, the findings of this review indicated that most of the ecotourism destinations in Ethiopia are devoid of these facilities and services. For instance,

Ketema (2015) stated absence of well-designed trekking pass, parking facilities, camping sites and land use planning along the lake. Besides, Ketema mentioned lack of transportations and comfortable roads, Eco lodges and other catering facilities around the lake. Similarly, Eshetie (2012) also stated lack of basic facilities such electricity, road network from and to Borena Sayint National Park and health stations as the major problems.

Bires (2014) in his study in Lake zegen Amhara Regional state, revealed shortage of sufficient water, electricity, toilets and other facilities.

Moreover, Berhanu (2015) also reported poor health and accommodation services, very limited shopping, banking and postal service, absence of all-weather roads, and there is no telecommunication service in all kebeles of Quara wereda except Gelegu town.

Demeke and Verma (2014) and Alemayehu (2011) also identified limited transportation and accommodation facilities as a challenge for CBET in their study area. Alemayehu (2011) the community has acute shortage of clean water and local peoples who reside adjacent to the park are forced to use irrigation canal for themselves and for their livestock.

Aynalem (2013) also revealed that tourism infrastructure like accommodation establishments, road transportation, and other destination facilities and services are very poor and limited in number in his study area.

3.1.5. Lack of trained manpower

Tourism professionals play significant role for development of ecotourism since they are capable of planning and organizing ecotourism initiatives or activities effectively which will in turn help increase the satisfaction of Eco tourists in the destinations. However, most of the findings from the reviewed empirical studies suggested that the ecotourism destinations have been challenged due to shortage of tourism/ecotourism professionals. For instance, Alemayehu (2011) pointed out that there is no ecotourism expert or consultant who is in charge of ecotourism or community based ecotourism activities in Awash National park. In addition, in Alatish National Park, there are

only 31 scouts who are too small to keep and monitor the park which covers an area of 2665.7km², but to manage the park effectively, there should be at least 100 scouts, and one marketing and promotion expert, one natural resource management expert and two additional wildlife experts (Berhanu, 2013).. Ambelu (2011) also reported that at District/woreda level, culture and tourism offices have only three staff where the manager is possibly working on the political issues while the rest two employees are responsible for a collection of works found in the office and the qualification of the staff is also a big challenges for CBET development of the study area. Moreover, Bires (2014) also stated shortage of tourism professionals in his study area. According to Aynalem (2013) majority of the staffs at culture and tourism office are not experts in tourism

3.1.6. Inadequate Financial Allocation

Conservation of wildlife and park management is an expensive task, and lack of adequate financial resources for such activities is one of the most profound difficulties facing park managers (Berhanu, 2015). Aynalem (2013) also stated lack of finance as one of the major setbacks for community based Ecotourism in development in Choke Mountain and its environs.

3.1.7. Other Factors

Apart from the afro mentioned major challenges, there are also other constraints which are specific to their study area. For instance, Global Warming, Desertification, and Prevalence of malaria were mentioned as major constraints for community based ecotourism development in Alatish National Park, north west Ethiopia (Berhanu, 2015), and Kassahun,etal.(2015) indicated problems from *non-ecotourism members* as the greatest challenge in Adaba-Dodola community based ecotourism project. On the other hand, Asteray (2011) reported the existence of main road within the boundary of the Semen mountains National Park; Human Induced Pressures such as Settlement, Overgrazing, and deforestation; and Epidemic diseases of the flag species as most challenging issues for Community Based Ecotourism Development in the park. Asteray stated a rabies virus and Foot and Mouth Diseases (FMD) are threatening lives of Ethiopian wolfs and Walia Ibexes respectively, and a rabies virus is transmitted from dog to Red foxes and FMD from goats and sheep to Walia Ibexes which could have long run impact on the park's tourism by reducing the number of tourist arrivals pushed with flagship species of the park.

Ketema (2015) identified unfair benefit sharing, inability of ecotourism to substitute traditional agriculture, illegal land marketing, plantation of eucalyptus tree on the Shore of Wonchi Lake, Institutional constraints as the challenges for community based Ecotourism development in Lake Wonchi crater and its surrounding. Gemechu(2014) in his study in Addis Ababa revealed fast growing construction industry in city and its surrounding, dependence on forest for livelihood, lack of clear budget and weak formal institutions to organize ecotourism at sub city level, Very low income of parks and poor economic benefits for locals, low level of awareness of locals on environmental protection, weak implementation of environmental protection law, deforestation, pollution and the presence of Eucalyptus trees in Addis Ababa and its surrounding areas as constraints for CBET development.

Asfaw (2014) identified shortage of forage/fodder and grazing land; soil fertility reduction, absence of buffer zone, absence of off-farm activities, and expensiveness of agricultural inputs as factors which hinder Community based ecotourism development in Borena Sayint National park, north Wollo, Ethiopia.

Lack of promotion and marketing (Kassahun, etal.2015; Berhanu, 2013); elongate shape of the park (Eshetie 2012; Asfaw,2014), Involuntary relocation of residents and small size of the park(Eshetie,2012);Demand for agricultural land(Asteray,2012;Kassahun,etal.,2015; Asfaw,2014) were distinguished as factors which affect community based ecotourism development in different parts of Ethiopia.

3.2. Opportunities for Ecotourism Development in Ethiopia

3.2.1. Abundance of Potential Tourism Resources

Most of researchers who conducted their study in different parts of Ethiopia revealed the existence of abundant cultural, historical and natural tourism resources as an opportunity to develop community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia (Ambelu,2011; Alemayehu,2011;Berhanu,2013;Aynalem,2013;Bires,2014;Ketema,2015;Eshete,2012;Gemechu, 2014; Asfaw,2014).

3.2.2. Proximity to Honey Pot Areas and major highways

Alemayehu (2011) mentioned the proximity of Awash national Park to Addis Ababa and to the paleo-anthropological and geological tourist destinations deep in the rift valley of the Afar region as an advantage for Community Based Ecotourism development in Awash park. Furthermore, s proximity to the honey pots attractions such as historic route in northern Ethiopia which includes Lalibela, Bahir Dar and Gondar was also identified as a potential strategic opportunity for the access to the market(Bires, 2014; Aynalem, 2013;Ambelu,2011).

However, the findings of the afro mentioned studies contradicts with concepts of ecotourism which is defined as a travel to relatively undisturbed and uncontaminated remote natural areas.

3.2.3. Policy Environments

It was also found that there are various policies in the country which support and creates favorable condition for ecotourism development. For instance, Eshetie (2012) stated that Ecotourism development is priority in Ethiopian tourism development strategy and also Ethiopia's Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) has laid foundations by establishing relevant strategies and policies to address issues on wise use of natural resources and an integrated approach for achieving rapid and sustainable growth to end poverty.

Besides, Federal and Regional Government Policy and commitment's towards Infrastructure Development (Eshetie,2012; Berhanu,2013);Tourism Policy and the new Community Based Ecotourism guideline(Gemechu ,2014); Environmental Policy of Ethiopia(Ayinalem,2013;Alemayehu ,2011);Ethiopia's anti-natalist population policy (Eshetie,2012)and Investment policy of Ethiopia in Travel and tourism industry(Asfaw,2014) were stated as policy environments which could be an opportunity for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia.

3.2.4. Other Opportunities for Community Based Ecotourism

Potential for cross border tourism (*Berhanu, 2013*); construction of road (*Asfaw, 2014*); global increasing demand for ecotourism (*Berhanu, 2013, Gemechu, 2014*); and the Potential Benefit of Ecotourism as a Source of Employment and Income (*Berhanu, 2013; Eshetie, 2012; Gemechu, 2014*) were mentioned as prospects for community based ecotourism development in their respective study areas.

Gemechu (2014) identified presence of Culture and Tourism Offices, Environmental protection offices, tourism promotion clubs and organizations, strong desire to plant indigenous trees, political will to develop ecotourism as an opportunities to develop Community Based Ecotourism Tourism in and around Addis Ababa.

Alemayehu (2011), in his study in Awash national park, identified the existence of some community based initiatives in the Awash falls Lodge, positive attitude towards community-based ecotourism, the presence of sugar plantation which has created alternative source of employment for locals and traditional institutions such as the Gada system of the Kerreyu Oromo and the *Belaadas* of the Afar as an opportunities for community based ecotourism tourism.

Ayinalem (2013) also mentioned the area's unsuitability for agriculture, being a water tower of the upper Nile basin, existence of various Ngos and conservation projects as an advantage for community based ecotourism development in Choke Mountains and its environs.

Eshetie (2012) identified the relative peace and security of the country, expansion of telecommunication service, and Globalization as an opportunity for community based ecotourism development in his study area.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from the review of different studies revealed lack of basic ecotourism infrastructure and facilities, conflict of interest over resource usage and lack of trained manpower as the major hindering factors for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia followed by low awareness towards ecotourism, lack of promotion and marketing, low participation in ecotourism and inadequate finance.

Though eco tourists do not want luxuries and sophisticated service and facilities, they need basic ecotourism facilities such as transportations, accommodations and other support services. Hence, the government, NGOs and any other concerned bodies should strive to fulfill these facilities in order to ensure the development of community based ecotourism.

In addition, it would be better to consult and involve local communities whenever commencing or initiating ecotourism ventures and conservation projects. Moreover, it is recommended to create alternative means of livelihood for local communities who live around ecotourism destinations in order to mitigate the conflict that may arise due to local community's dependence on wildlife resources of protected areas.

Hence, it is recommended to employ well trained professionals in protected areas, culture and tourism offices and any other sectors in the tourism industry. Furthermore, Government, private sector and NGOs should allocate sufficient budget for promotion and marketing of ecotourism destinations effectively and it is also essential to devise awareness creation programs for local communities living in and around protected areas about ecotourism.

Moreover, the results from the review also identified the presence of abundant ecotourism resources, proximity to honey pot areas and enabling policy environments as the major prospects for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia. In addition, Global Increasing Demand for Ecotourism, the Potential Benefit of Ecotourism as a Source of Employment and Income, relative peace and security of the country, expansion of telecommunication service, Globalization, existence of various Ngo's and conservation projects were also stated as an opportunity for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia.

To sum up, Ethiopia has enormous potential and it could be one of the top community based ecotourism destinations in the world if the infrastructural, human resource, marketing and promotion, financial, resource use, awareness and participation constraints are resolved appropriately.

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