



Problems and Prospects of Community-Based Ecotourism Development in Ethiopia

Dr. Muthyalu Meniga Associate Professor, Dept. of Cooperative Studies, CBE, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

Mr. Jemal Ousman Lecturer, Dept. of Cooperative Studies, CBE, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

Ecotourism involves visiting natural areas with the objectives of learning, studying or participating in activities that do not bring negative effects to the environment; whilst protecting and empowering the local community socially and economically. The tourism is considered as a good strategy for sustainable development in the developing countries. The community based ecotourism is a tourism in which local community participate to control and manage the nature, as a result the community attain the benefits of the ecotourism. This research paper is a conceptual and has been prepared based on literature review. Different conceptual and empirical studies related to community based eco-tourism have been reviewed and examined. This paper presents findings based on the secondary data. This paper attempts to identify the problems facing community based ecotourism in Ethiopia and propose some recommendations for development of a modern and sustainable community based ecotourism in the country. The main problems are lack of inherent tourism potential, lack of tourist investment, lack of knowledge and awareness, lack of technical Know-how and weak promotional activity etc. One of the essential elements of ecotourism is the encouragement of active participation of local population in the conservation process and careful consideration should also be made to the distribution of benefits of ecotourism amongst locals. Therefore, the active involvement of local communities in ecotourism development projects is very essential for its sustainability. Local communities have several rooms of participation in ecotourism programs.

KEYWORDS : Ecotourism, community, problems, conservation, environment

Background of the study

According to World Wide Fund for nature (WWF) tourism is the world's largest industry. It accounts for more than 10% of total employment, 11% of global GDP, and total tourist trips are predicted to increase to 1.6 billion by 2020. As such, it has a major and increasing impact on both people and nature. Effects can be negative as well as positive. Inappropriate tourism development and practice can degrade habitats and landscapes, deplete natural resources, and generate waste and pollution. In contrast, responsible tourism can help to generate awareness of and support for conservation and local culture, and create economic opportunities for countries and communities. Travel and tourism are among the world's fastest growing industries and are the major sources of foreign exchange earnings for many developing countries. Ecotourism is responsible travel to nature areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of the local people. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO), sustainable tourism leads to the management of resources in such a way that economic, social, environmental and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled. It is in short a tourism activity that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future (Baker, 2008). Creaco, 2003 in his research study found that sustainable tourism has three interconnected aspects namely environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects.

Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is 'environmentally responsible travel' through undisturbed nature and to enjoy the beauty that promotes conservation and provides economic benefit to the local people (Kaplan, 2013). Community-Based Ecotourism Tourism (CBET), according to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2006), is "a form of ecotourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement on its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community. It fosters sustainable use of land and natural resources." In general, CBE is a kind of tourism that is managed by the community for the tourist destinations. Schevyns (1999) argues that ecotourism ventures should only be considered "successful" if local communities have some measure of control and share equitably in the benefits. Schevyns also suggests that the term "community-based ecotourism" should be reserved for those ventures based on a high degree of community control rather than those almost wholly controlled by outside operators.

Ethiopia has many unique resources for international tourism. It is one of the richest and most diversified potential destinations of international tourism. Regarding the tourism potential of Ethiopia, Briggs (2003) underlined as "... the combination of wonderful scenery, unusual prolific wildlife, and fascinating historical sites makes it [Ethiopia] a wonderful rewarding and constantly stimulating country". It has a unique historical and cultural heritage, magnificent scenery, a surprisingly cool climate, rich flora and fauna, important archeological sites and hospitable people (UN, 2004). Due to this incredible uniqueness, the country has the potential to become one of the most important tourist destinations in the world. Nevertheless, given its potential and actual tourism resources on one hand and compared to other lease developed countries on the other, its tourism performance is not satisfactory (Yusuf, 2004).

According to Kefyalew Alemayehu et al, 2015 the rich natural and cultural attractions are valuable ingredients for community based ecotourism development in Ethiopia. Ethiopia with a land area of 1.12 million square kilometers is a relatively huge country having a wide topography and climate variation. Altitude ranges from 4620 meters above sea level at the top of the Ras Dashen Mountains (where Semien Mountain is found) to 116 m below sea level in the Danakil depression the differences in agro-ecological variations and ecosystems have resulted in wide variations in weather distribution. In addition to these there are many designated protected areas of land in Ethiopia including national parks, wildlife reserves, priority forests, biosphere reserves and community conservation areas

According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) of Ethiopia, the country is endowed with the vast array tourism resources, in the form of cultural, historical, archaeological and natural resources which is great potential for the development of sustainable ecotourism. Even though natural resources in Ethiopia have great contribution for the development of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, most of natural resources are highly exposed to degradation (Demel, 2001).

Ethiopia is one of the few countries in the world that have plenty of cultural, historical, archeological and ecological heritages that are basic for the development of tourism in general and community based ecotourism in particular. Community based eco-tourism can play an important role in conservation and management of natural resources, input to the local communities in income generation and provide many benefits like creation of employment opportunities,

sustainable environment, revitalization of local culture, contribute to rural development in general. There is need to identify problems of ecotourism and take measures to address the issues. Therefore, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to identify problems and prospects of community based eco-tourism.

Objective of the study: This paper main objective is to identify the problems facing by community based eco-tourism and propose some suitable recommendations for the development of a modern and sustainable community based eco-tourism in the country.

Methodology: This research paper is a conceptual and has been prepared based on literature review. Different conceptual and empirical studies related to community based eco-tourism have been reviewed and examined. This paper presents findings from a literature review on previous writings on this topic.

Review of literature

This part presents the relevant concepts and definitions of community based eco-tourism, and also provide previous studies findings.

Definition of eco-tourism: Traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas (cited by Fennell 2001).

Components of ecotourism

- Contributes to conservation of biodiversity
- Sustain the well being of the local people
- Includes interpretation/learning experience
- Involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry
- Delivered primarily to small groups by small scale businesses
- Requires lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources
- Stresses local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people.

Principles of Ecotourism: Megan Epler Wood, 2002 in his paper described the principles of ecotourism. According to him principles of ecotourism are as follows:

- Minimize the negative impacts on nature and culture that can damage a destination
- Educate the traveler on the importance of conservation.
- Stress the importance of responsible business, which works cooperatively with local authorities and people to meet local needs and deliver conservation benefits.
- Direct revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas.
- Emphasize the need for regional tourism zoning and for visitor management plans designed for either regions or natural areas that are slated to become eco-destinations.
- Strive to maximize economic benefit for the host country, local business and communities, particularly peoples living in and adjacent to natural and protected areas.
- Seek to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change as determined by researchers in cooperation with local residents.
- Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment, minimizing use of fossil fuels, conserving local plants and wildlife, and blending with the natural and cultural environment.

Motivation to visit tourist places

Physical motivators: Refreshment of body and mind; health, sport and pleasure.

Cultural motivators: –Desire to see and know more about other

cultures

Interpersonal motivators: –Meet new people, visit friends or relatives

Status and prestige motivators: –Personal development or education

Sustainable tourism: “Tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future” (UNWTO). Eco-tourism: “Ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas that covers the environment and sustains the well being of local people” (Epler Wood, 1996).

The **economic benefits of ecotourism** as identified by different scholars (Anderson, 1996; Koeman, 1998; Dasenbrok, 2002; Ngece, 2002; Lowmen, 2004; Weggro, 2008) include;

Employment opportunities: - it brought employment opportunities to often previously disadvantaged people and a significant amount of the industry remains in the form of small scale projects that can be funded by locals. Since the sector is labor intensive, its expansion generates more employment opportunities at semiskilled, technical and managerial level than an equivalent expansion in other sectors of the economy.

Creating new jobs: - tourist expenditures on lodging, transportation, food, guides and souvenirs are important sources of income for local communities by providing supplemental income to rural farmers, women and young people.

Diversifying regional economies: - it is a relatively decentralized industry that is highly capable of diversifying regional economies of less developed countries which are dependent of primary activities.

Catalyst for development: - tourism activities act as catalyst for the development of other sectors of the economy, that is, it provides strong forward and backward linkages so that induced macro/micro economic incentives as well as motivations for development in the region. Ecotourism stimulates profitable domestic industries like hotels and other lodging facilities, restaurants and other food services, transportation systems, handicrafts, guide serves etc.

Minimize leakage: - being locally owned and operated, ecotourism projects are not caught up in the need to conform to corporate western multinational tourism concerns, and therefore can have a much higher input of local products, materials and labor. This means greater multiplier effects in the local economy and also reduces import leakages and the remittances from expatriate labor which results from large-scale, foreign owned operations.

Development of infrastructure: - the benefits accruing from investment in infrastructure and super structure as air ports, hotels and restaurants, road networks, communications, power and water supply as well as other related public utilities are widely shared with other sectors of the economy, resulting in to greater economic efficiency.

Transfer of income: - tourism is an excellent means for transferring income from wealthy nations and persons to the poorer sections of society. Ecotourism is especially effective in this transfer since travelers often venture in to remote, economically disadvantaged regions.

Environmental benefits

Ecotourism, if properly managed and applied, can also benefit the environment in the following ways.

- Ecotourism is relatively less-pollutant industry, which can enhance the conservation and promotion of natural and cultural heritages.

- Ecotourism will foster responsible tourist behavior, conservation of important wild life habitats and ecosystem.
- Encourages individual conservation efforts- informed tour guides and educational pamphlets can motivate tourists to become environmentalists, thereby promoting conservation efforts.
- Encourages small scale infrastructure construction: - the infrastructure demands of ecotourism industry primarily include the construction of small scale hotels and transport systems, there by maintaining a healthy balance between expanding tourism industry and protecting natural resources.
- Encourages productive use of lands which are marginal for agriculture, enabling large tracts to remain covered in natural vegetation.
- Demonstrates the importance of natural and cultural resources to a community's economic and social wellbeing and can help to preserve them.

Social benefits

Ecotourism development, in addition to economic and environmental benefits, might contribute socially by enhancing local community esteem and provides the opportunity for greater understanding and communication among people of diverse background. Ecotourism helps for political empowerment of local communities and fosters respect for different cultures (helps to develop tolerance). It is also an important vehicle for promoting cultural exchanges (Agrusa and Guidry, 1999; Nepal, 2002 and Weggoro, 2008 cited by Amogne Asfaw Eshetu, (2014)).

The current challenges of community based eco-tourism:

Lack of inherent tourism potential: The development of tourism is impeded by their lack of inherent natural, historical, or cultural tourism sources. Though it is a crucial factor, tourism heritage assets alone cannot make a successful tourism industry.

Lack of knowledge and awareness: In Ethiopia, there is a fundamental lack of basic cognizance of the economic importance of tourism as an industry and its positive impact as a potential source of foreign exchange and employment.

Lack of technical Know-how and weak promotional activity: even there a good awareness, in many cases there is generally a lack of tourism knowledge and professionals. Tourism as a modern industry in recent world, it is also a new and unfamiliar activity in the country. Furthermore, another related problem is the absent or weak promotional activities due to different reasons.

Lack of tourism infrastructure facilities: infrastructure plays an important role in ecotourism development, but the country has lack of infrastructure facilities for the development of successful community based tourism. Main infrastructures are hotels, lodging, transportation communications, and electricity, tourism information, safety and security in the tourism places and absence of other tourist facilities could be an obstacle for the development of ecotourism. Rapid and efficient transport systems play a great role by giving tourists the chance to travel far and gain a greater knowledge of the world (Hayward, 2000).

Lack of tourist investment: finance is the main challenge for the developing countries; it is difficult to access the reasonable financial sources for developing and implementing tourism projects.

Lack of tourism safety: the safety of tourists is among the primary factors for any successful tourism, thus be one of the basic objectives of tourism planning and provisions. Safety related tourism problems, whether it is real or perceived, exert a negative impact on the reputation of the host country. Even such factors as rumors may cause great damage to complete tourism places.

Lack of local community participation

Promotion of local community is the main aspect in community

based ecotourism development process. Community participation is the heart of the community based ecotourism but due to lack of awareness, mobilization, top-down approach still people are not participating in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of activities. It needs more attention to promotion and propaganda to motivate and mobilize local community to involve and implement community based ecotourism development activities.

Insufficient skilled persons

Skilled human resources play an important role in sustainable ecotourism development. Many people are working in tourism sector without having sufficient tourism knowledge. Due to lack of knowledge and professionalism community based ecotourism is not growing fast and community members are not involving and managing the local tourism resources like nature, history, culture, tradition and so on. When local community have specialist human resources to guide and plan the development activities of ecotourism, local people will participate very actively in all phases of the activities.

Potentials of Community based eco-tourism

There are much potential in the country to develop community based eco-tourism. The ecotourism potential of Ethiopia as: Ethiopia's mountains are almost untouched by climbers; Ethiopia's lakes have many varied features of great interest to tourists; birds, wildlife, vegetation, colorful ethnic groups, historical churches and monasteries, extraordinary geological features, amazing caves, local arts and artifacts, and widespread flora and fauna has high potential for the development of ecotourism in the country

There is high demand of tourists, most popular tourist sites of the country are found in Amhara National Regional State, most notably, the Semien Mountain National Park with its amazing scenery, and endemic biodiversity, the Rock Hewn churches of Lalibela, the Castle of Gonder, Lake Tana with its old-aged monasteries, the spectacular Blue Nile fall, Lake Hayk with its scenery, birds and monasteries etc. are the availability of different historical and cultural tourist sites across the country.

Conclusion

Ecotourism can be used as a way to promote community based natural resources management and livelihood diversification. Most of the national parks and protected areas of the country are under pressure from the surrounding communities in search of cultivable land, grazing land, or wood for different purposes. By promoting ecotourism in such areas, it is possible to benefit the locales, diversify their source of livelihoods and manage the resources in a sustainable manner. Concerned bodies, considering its multifaceted contribution, should make every effort to develop ecotourism scheme so as to overcome degradation of protected areas and to improve the livelihood of people living around such areas. The people of the ecotourism spots are directly and indirectly getting benefits from the tourism activity. Ecotourism can help to many poor people from ecotourism spots like boatman, tour guide, rickshaw puller, eco cottage owner, cultural actors, handicraft producer, tea stall or small grocery shop owner, photographer, small and medium entrepreneurs find tourism as a stable source of income.

The local non-government organizations and community based organizations should develop tourism management skills and improve their ability to coordinate with other agencies, commence local research, combine local knowledge with local program and establish CBET networking among themselves and link with others. The government should support community based eco-tourism development programs with formulation and implementation of sound ecotourism policy. One of the essential elements of ecotourism is the encouragement of active participation of local population in the conservation process and careful consideration should also be made to the distribution of benefits of ecotourism

amongst locals. Therefore, the active involvement of local communities in ecotourism development projects is very essential for its sustainability. Local communities have several rooms of participation in ecotourism programs.

To realize the potentials for the development of environmental protection and the promotion of Ecotourism, a concentrated effort would have to be made by individual supporters, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and community organizations.

References

1. Amogne Asfaw Eshetu, (2014) Ecotourism as a viable strategy for livelihood diversification and sustainable natural resource management in Ethiopia (from ecotourism paradigm point of view), *Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources*, Vol. 3(2), pp.040-052
2. Baker N (2008). Sustainable wetland resource utilization of Sango Bay through ecotourism development. *African J. Environ. Sci. and Technol.*, 2(10):326-335.
3. Belsky, J. 1999 Misrepresenting Communities: The Politics of Community-based Rural Ecotourism in Gales Point Manatee, Belize. *Rural Sociology* 64:641-666.
4. Briggs, P. (2003). Ethiopia: the Brandt Travel Guide, 3rd edition. The Globe Pequot Press Inc, USA.
5. Campbell, L. 1999 Ecotourism in Rural Developing Countries. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26:534-553.
6. Creaco, S. (2003). The role of tourism in sustainable economic development. 43rd congress of the European Regional Science Association, August 27-30, Finland.
7. Fennell, D. A. (2001). A content analysis of ecotourism definitions. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 4(5), 403-421.
8. Kaplan, S. (2013). Community based ecotourism for sustainable development in eastern black sea region an evaluation through local communities tourism perception. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (The Graduate School of Natural and Applied Science), Middle East Technical University, Turkey.
9. Kiss A (2004). Is community-based ecotourism a good use of biodiversity conservation funds? *TRENDS in Ecology and Evolution*. 19(5):232-236.
10. Koeman A (1998). Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism.
11. Loon, R., and D. Polakow 2001 Ecotourism Ventures: Rags or Riches? *Annals of Tourism Research* 28:892-907.
12. Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) (2009). Tourism Development Policy of Ethiopia. Retrieved from www.abysinnialaw.com.
13. Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Ethiopia (ND). Ecotourism potentials in Ethiopia. Accessed from <http://www.tourismethiopia.gov.et>
14. Megan Epler Wood, (2002) Eco-tourism: Principles, Practices, and Policies for sustainable development
15. Rozemeijer, N. (2001). Community-based tourism in Botswana: The SNV experience in three community-tourism projects. Gaborone: SNV Botswana.
16. Scheyvens, R. 1999 Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities. *Tourism Management* 20:245-249.
17. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2006). "Community-based ecotourism: Best practice stories and resources." Digital-traveler, Asia Pacific eNewsletter.
18. United Nations (2004). An investment guide to Ethiopia: Opportunities and challenges. New York.
19. WWF International, (2001) guidelines for community based eco-tourism development
20. Yabuta Asami, (2008) Ecotourism from the Local: Sustainable Local Vitalization through Tourism and Interchange
21. Yusuf Abdullahi Sukker (2004). "Some reflections on tourism in the less developed countries-the case of Ethiopia." A presentation at forum of Barcelona.