

A Review on Eco-Tourism Development Challenges in the Selected Eco Tourism Sites of Ethiopia

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Abstract

So far, various studies attempted to study Ethiopia Ecotourism potential are huge and unmatched. However, little is done on the exploring on challenges of tourism development. This article was envisaged with the objective of critically reviewing the key challenges eco tourism development in the selected eco tourism sites (Semin Mountain National Park, Mekit Eco Tourism Site and Guna Mountain Community based Eco tourism site) of Ethiopia. In order, to meet the objective, interviewee and extensive document analysis of relevant literature on ecotourism development challenges was reviewed to give insight on the cutting edge issues on eco tourism development. The secondary and primary data sources portrayed that, the question of grazing land, Human population Pressure, livestock pressure, Agricultural land expansion, absence of tourist facility and infrastructure, host community conflict of interest, human wild life conflict, deforestation, low level of host community awareness, fire destruction, poverty, livelihood issues are the main challenging factors for the selected eco tourism sites of Ethiopia.

Key words: Eco Tourism, Challenges, Semin Mountain, Mekit & Guna Mountain

Introduction

Ecotourism is a new concept, it is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low impact and it is an alternative commercial to mass tourism (Aregawi, 2016). The role of eco tourism is undeniable for the socio economic development of the local communities, for rapid socio economic development, capable of generating foreign exchange reduces unemployment and improving the standard of the people (Ajala, 2008). Increasingly viewed by local and indigenous communities as an important tool for promoting sustainable livelihoods, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation (Blangy and Meht, 2006). The market is now growing at an annual rate of 30% it has a potential for growth and benefited to the local. The empirical evidence urges that eco tourism contributes to economic development and management of resources are undeniable via generating revenues, provides local employment opportunities and develops a sense of ownership of resources. It is widely accepted as a means of achieving several opportunities the local communities have. If eco tourism is properly utilized, it can definitely be an effective source of income, employment and infrastructure developments (Miller, 2001).Whereas, Tourists require a variety of goods and services in destination areas, including accommodation, food and beverages, entertainment, local transport services, souvenirs and so on (Mulugeta, 2015) .

Larger part of the literature analyzing the links between eco tourism and community development assumes that indigenous communities will result in conservation of their natural resources and increased development. Whereas others study further argued that, ecotourism has often failed to deliver the expected benefits to indigenous communities due to a combination of factors , including shortages in the endowments of human , financial and social capital within the community , lack of mechanisms for a fair distribution of the economic benefits of ecotourism and land insecurity. Whereas , others identified as low level of knowledge, low level of local community interest and perception towards eco tourism development ; the resource ownership questions like land ; capacity problems and local level government office staff ; lack of legal registration of CTEs ; conflicting policies and legislations ; communities ' expectation for immediate financial benefits ; quality and standard of products and services , lack of cooperation among stakeholders ; emerging challenges on marketing and booking , establish rules for use and conservation , and sanction rule breakers are the prominent problems in Ethiopia (Gebeyehu , 2011).

These also further strengthened according to Gebeyehu (2011) , Social , economical , environmental , legal and cultural reasons were the main influencing factors over eco tourism development these are lack of investment , absence of tourist infrastructure , dominance of agricultural sector , food insecurity , poor health , and hygiene conditions (Adem , 2008 & Yabebal , 2010). In this regard, Ethiopia is one of the East African countries rich in biodiversity; it is home to many Mountains, National parks and protected wildlife Sanctuaries and reserves which are excellent for ecotourism development (Young,

2012). The reality is factual in Amahara region and it is blessed more with abundance and diversifies eco tourism resources (**Ajala, 2008**). Even though, the Region and Ethiopia has a huge potential to run ecotourism development effectively, the sector is in its infancy stage because of many factors to assure the failure of ecotourism development in and around the sites. In doing so, this was the main driving reason for the researcher to undertake a comparative review in the selected eco tourism sites of Amahara region to pin point a better approach towards an ecotourism development experience.

Objectives

The main objective is undertaking a review on Eco-Tourism Development Challenges in the Selected Eco Tourism Sites of Ethiopia. In order to handle the objectives of the review tried to deal with the following three specific objectives:

1. To identify the Semin Mountain National Parks eco tourism development challenges
2. To identify the challenges in Mekit community based Eco tourism sites
3. To explore the challenges community based Eco tourism development of Guna Mountain
4. To pin point the best approaches to tackle eco tourism development challenges

Review of related Literature

Eco Tourism Concept

Ecotourism, as a niche tourism market, is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Some have claimed that ecotourism is increasing by 25 to 30% a year (**UNWTO, 2012**). Based on its amazing increase, inarguable contribution to economy and society as well as its important role on environment conservation, the tourism industry has been regarded as an efficient development strategy that keeps a balance between improving the living standards of people and maintaining the sustainable use of resources. The idea behind of eco tourism concept, is to create the potential for the empowerment of the community, enhancing their involvement in decision making but also simply making sure that they will and incentive to participate come from the community itself to Wolf (n.d). While, ecotourism implies that the local community owns controls and manages the enterprise, through the establishment of locals. Eco tourism can generate a sense of pride in the local population and make funds available for maintaining or upgrading cultural assets of archaeological ruins, historic sites, traditional crafts production (**World Bank, 2000 cited in UNEP, 2011**).

Significance of Eco Tourism Development

Ecotourism now utilized for its multipurpose of economic development of poverty reduction, livelihood diversification, sustainable natural resource management and local governance, it helps to protect and enhance the natural resources. Many of the world's poor depend directly on the environment through agriculture, forestry or fisheries for their livelihoods that have a great role for land degradation. In order to overcome such environmental issues, ecotourism serves as a powerful incentive to protect natural resources because the basic rationale behind ecotourism is to preserve natural resources while profiting from them through enhancing the special qualities of the site with its flora and fauna (**Eshetu, 2014**).The significance of eco tourism is undeniable to economic potential as an incentive for the protection of resources and culture of the host community.

It would also make the indigenous people think about themselves, learn to empower themselves through the capacity building process, and sustain their resources. Eco tourism can transform people in positive ways by increasing their power, confidence, and environmental awareness, more than just making them richer or give jobs (**WTO, 2005**).According to, **UNEP (2002)**, extended as eco tourism as a growing niche market with the potentials of being an important for sustainable development. If ecotourism properly implemented can integrate conservation and rural development by helping to protect valuable natural areas, by generating income, stimulating economic development through tourism expenditures and providing jobs and a market for local goods (**Adem, 2008 & Fasil, 2010**).

Ecotourism can be an extraordinary tool for conservation. By creating value for an ecosystem, species or landscape, ecotourism can raise much-needed funds to protect and conserve these natural resources. Ecotourism can also be a support mechanism for poverty alleviation, providing employment and income for local people, encourages socio cultural aspects of the local community and offering them an alternative means of livelihood to those that may result in the destruction or overuse of natural resources (**IUCN, 2010**).

Today around the World Ecotourism has been hailed as a solution of a way to fund conservation, and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystem, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries and some claim, and build world peace (**Wagnaw, 2014**). Therefore, ecotourism is becoming the only way to maximize the economic, environmental and social benefits of tourism. Cognizant with it, strong current trends indicate that eco tourism has proven itself to be an important tool for conservation, and in certain cases it has improved the quality of life of local people.

Challenges in Eco Tourism Development

According to **Selesh (2010)**, although, country has diversified eco tourism resources, developing and providing of such ample resource to the market mainly influenced via; market obstacles, low level of community participation, lack of infrastructure, environmental obstacles, lack of integration, institutional obstacles, and employment and training obstacles. The increasing population and dependency of the residents over the resources for agricultural practices, charcoal making, soil erosion, deforestation, land degradation and over grazing make a serious obstacle over eco tourism development (**Gete, 2010**).

Whereas , the most prominent challenges for eco tourism development were ; poor infrastructure (roads, camp sites, lodges, lack of abundant health facilities, hotels and electricity),undiversified level of human power and lack of shopping and commercial facilities, administrative challenges (size, shape, lack of natural buffer zone and serious environmental degradation , grazing , demand for water, demand for fuel wood (**Wagnaw, 2014**).

Lack of in adequate biodiversity management system, population pressure on the natural resources , deforestation for agriculture, unattainable harvesting of forest products for construction of houses , farming tools , furniture, fuel wood, charcoal are the dominant factor for tourism development (**Henok , 2012**), Whereas, according to Aschalew , (**2012**) soil degradation, uncontrolled grazing, and seasonal migration of livestock, wild fire, lack of coordination between stakeholders, awareness of the local community were the major obstacles of eco tourism development. Absence of camping sites, lodges, trekking routes, road networks, air transport, and bank and hotel services in the area (**Tewodros, 2012**). Promotion, distribution of benefits, decision on beneficiaries and decisions related to governance, and regulations are other factors (**Braun, 2008**). Shortages of adequate accommodation services, poor international image. Likewise, weak capacity of tour operator, low participation, low management style, low co ordination of the sector and weak product, absence of related facilities for sports, recreation and entertainment have affected the growth of the eco tourism site (**World Bank, 2006**).

Whereas, others also argued that; loss of biodiversity and inadequate conservation strategy, climate change, alteration of local culture and life style, erosion from hiking, environmental pollution, deforestation, dependencies on foreign supplies and foreign controlled services and leak-age of foreign currency are obscurity for sustainable development of ecotourism has increasingly become a major threat affecting ecotourism development around the world (**Gouvea, 2004**) .

Degradation of natural resources, deforestation, air, soil, and water pollution, extreme weather events (increase in temperature, and precipitation), and presence of eucalyptus trees in the environment , fast growing construction industry, dependence of the local communities on the natural forest for their livelihood, lack of clear budget for tourism and ecotourism activities at sub-city level, low income generated from parks' entrance fee, and poor economic benefits for the local communities low level of local communities' awareness, weak formal institutions to organize ecotourism activities , and limited concern of the local communities for conservation of eco-attractions, poor culture of the local communities about pollution control and waste management, poor culture of local communities to manage forest and protect the natural environment and eco-attractions, and poor culture of visiting eco tourism attractions, implementation and enforcement problem of environmental protection law, and lack of legally enforced measures to protect the natural environment from being destroyed by humans are the major factor for eco tourism development (**Gebeyehu , 2011**).

Methods and Materials

To make a clear understanding on the persistent challenges of ecotourism development in the selected eco tourism sites of Ethiopia. The researcher employed an interview and secondary Data analysis, which could makes the study more comprehensive. Relevant literature on ecotourism development challenges was reviewed to give insight on the cutting edge issues of sustainable eco tourism

development in Semin Mountain National Park, Mekit and Guna Mountain Eco tourism sites of Ethiopia.

Geographic Location of the Study Areas

Simen Mountain; The Simen Mountains National Park (SMNP) is situated between 38 00'-38 12'E and 13 12' – 13 9'N in the North Gondar Zone of the Amhara National Regional State in the northern and north-western part of Ethiopia. The National Park currently encompasses an area of 136 km² of afro-alpine undulating grassland plateau, with precipitous escarpments dropping away to the north and east, giving spectacular views of peaks and canyons.

Meket Eco Tourism Site; it is located in the East highlands of Amhara Region, North Wollo Zone. The total land area of the woreda is 1919.59 Sq. Kms. It is located on the western side of the North Wollo . Meket is bordered by the Wadla in the south, Southern Gondar in the west, Bugna in the north, and Guba Lafto in the east. Its main town, Filekit is laying at about 665 km north of Addis Ababa, 217 km North East of Bahir Dar and 137 km North West of Woldiya town. Its geographical coordinates are 11° 40' 0" North, 38° 48' 0" East (**Gebeyehu, 2011**).

Guna Mountain ; located near to the city of Debre Tabor, Gassay and Kemer Dengaye town in Farta Wereda, South Gonder Zone, and Amhara Region, Ethiopia. It is 130 km away from the capital city of Amahara region, Bahirdar, 35 km from Debretabor, 15 km from Gassay and 10km from kemer Dengaye town. The Mountain is situated on the three woredas of Farta, Lay Gaynt and East Estie of South Gondar Zone, it has located absolutely in a coordinate of 11.7^o11' N latitude & 38.23^o71'E Longitude .The altitude of the Mountain is 4281masl, relatively bordered in the West and North by Farta Worda, North East and South East by lay Gaynt Worda and Eastie to West and South West (**ORDA , 2012**) .

Result and Discussions

Eco Tourism Development Challenges in Semin Mountain National Park

Eco tourism currently in the park becomes basic means of generating income for both the community and local government. The park which has a spectacular landscape which possesses considerable biodiversity and natural resources, as well as many endemic species. However, only limited success protecting these natural assets since it's establishing as eco tourism destination.

Due to the existence of extreme population pressure in and around the national park, crop cultivation , livestock grazing, excessive soil erosion, frequent fires , deforestation , lower level local community attitude towards conservation, absence of optional livelihood for the community, hunting and human wild life conflict related factors ,. All these were that led to severe changes and limited on the success over the development of Eco tourism and its wild life conservation.2a

An interviewee of Semin Mountain National Park triangulated the result , Population pressure , Agricultural land expansion, deforestation , wild fire , wild animal hunting , wild animal disease, low level of community awareness towards the conservation of biodiversity and eco tourism development , human wild life conflict , natural factors such as soil erosion are the main challenges for eco tourism development.

The rapidly growing population, Deforestation, hunting, agricultural expansion, housing development, over grazing are the dominant factor throughout the country (**Demele and Badege, 2001. Berry, 2003**).Whereas, conflict of interest over resource usage and sense of ownership of the sites , unfair benefit sharing, incapability of ecotourism business to benefit the local community equitably, inability of ecotourism to substitute traditional agriculture, illegal land hunting activities and tension among local community are encumbrances a negative effect over the eco tourism sites .

Ecotourism Development Challenges in Mekit Eco-Tourism Destination

Thinking ecotourism has become one of the economic sectors that generate substantial income and maintain conservations of protected areas; now a day's Ethiopian government with host community co operation Mekit worda proposed as community based eco tourism site. However , the past study portrayed that , absence alternative livelihood , high over grazing in the area , the expansion of farming in to un suitable land , low fertility of soil , degradation and ecological imbalances, absence of stake holder co operation for tourism development, deforestation , environmental degradation , climatic and human factors , over cultivation , population increase , and declining farm size , vegetation depletion , problems of tourism marketing and tourist facility.

The result also portrayed via an interviewee since Meket eco tourism site established recently mainly the site is being affected by the challenges of low level of local community awareness , in availability of tourist facility , low level of marketing strategy , expansion of agricultural land and Deforestation.

The above result also demonstrated that Ethiopia eco tourism sites mainly have common challenges via poor infrastructure developments, (roads, campsites, lodges, lack of abundant health facilities, hotels and electricity); lack of well qualified human power, lack of natural buffer zone, serious environmental degradation, over grazing, host community conflict of interest , deforestation , population growth, human wild life conflict, lack of shopping and commercial facilities were the persistent challenges for ecotourism development in any site of Ethiopia (**Wagnaw, 2016**)

Eco Tourism Development Challenges of Guna Mountain

Ecotourism recently is a key to education, conservation of resources, and appreciation of cultures and considered a prime tool for environmentally degraded destination by agricultural activities. In this regard, considering its tourism potentials recently Guna Mountain has opened as a new destination. The mountain is endowed with an attraction of impressive features such as broad altitudinal range, geological and topographic setup catered diverse biological resources, scenic features with unique endemic fauna and flora species associated with the Afro alpine and afro Mountain ecosystems , the Mountain is also the source of many springs , and perennial rivers.

Even though, the mountain is ample potential, the past study proved that there are a number of threats to undertaking community based ecotourism in Guna mountain of these, serious environmental degradation, society interest conflict between the three wordas (East Este,Lay Gaynt, Farta Worda) , high level of grazing in the entire of the mountain , agricultural practice near to the mountain and high level of human encroachment, killing of wild animals, low level of community voluntarism to evacuate the mountain, medium level of accepting the government policy towards the mountain, low level of sense of owner ship and low promotional activity towards the mountain.

The result demonstrated above the interviewee again confirmed that even though the site declared as an eco tourism site recently, it is infancy in its development mainly challenged via the in availability of tourist facilities, question of grazing land, expansion of agricultural land, human government interest conflict, deforestation, erosion, low level of host community awareness are the main challenges factor for its development..

Conclusions

In fact eco tourism is an optional form of tourism for recently getting high attention by the world people for education, conservation of resources, and appreciation of its cultures and considered a prime tool for environmentally degraded destination via agricultural activities. In this regard, the various studies portrayed that, developing countries currently try to expand eco tourism destination throughout the country. Previous studies also point out that, encouraging eco tourism as well in places influenced via degradation and human pressure eco tourism is an optional and pleasing way for the conservation of biodiversity and enhances sustainable development to the local community, at the same time it can give ample room for the community psychological empowerment on the rights over the resource utilization and dividing of benefits equally.

However, because of it is infancy the analysis undertaking over the eco tourism site of Semin Mountain National Park , Meket Eco tourism Site and Guna Community based Eco tourism mostly portrayed that , the question of grazing land , Human population Pressure, livestock pressure , Agricultural land expansion ,absence of tourist facility and infrastructure , host community conflict of interest , human wild life conflict, deforestation , low level of host community awareness , fire destruction , poverty, livelihood issues are the main challenging for eco tourism development. So far, to continue these eco tourism sites as important destinations, for a growing tourism like heart of diverse nature, landscapes and biodiversity as major attractions. Thus, minimizing such threat and problems are the primary objective of the stakeholders. Lastly if properly planned & managed may it will be minimizing the negative impacts and it will strengthen the eco tourism site for further development.

Recommended Approaches

☞ This reviewed focused on the assessment of eco tourism development challenges in the selected Eco tourism sites of Ethiopia. Thinking tourist facility is a primary component for tourism development. Thus, with considering the following approaches the stakeholders a must to give high attention to tackling the persistent challenges in the eco tourism sites.

☞ Education can help to create more awareness about how to conserve their environment and knows more about eco tourism development with its impacts. Thus, the respective administrative districts with the cooperation of Zonal administrative units should give continuous training for capacity building.

☞ Stakeholders prioritized /keep free zoning of the eco tourism sites then take an appropriate decision for setting an alternative solution including incentive, compensation and creating an association for Eco tourism development. Bring the community in to co operation for extensive sustainable development Creating and strengthening locals in sense of eco tourism development limiting the number of tourists and tourist operators based on the carrying capacity of the area, Improving the patterns or logistics of tourism movements to reduce environmental damage or adverse effects, Providing appropriate environmental education to tourist operators and tourists. Whether it is through tour operators, lodges, national parks, private reserves, or different types of ecotourism related activities, Introducing technological improvements to reduce environmental damage via deforestation, Imposing restrictions on the intervention of locals and governments on the site.

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