

Research Article

Community Based Ecotourism as Alternative Livelihood Option in Tourist Destination Sites

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Abstract

Community-based ecotourism is understood as ecologically minded intervention which owned and run by local communities. This study examines contributions of community-based ecotourism as alternative livelihoods options to the local community in tourist destination areas of Ethiopia. The study used cross-sectional survey involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were generated through household survey by using semi-structure interview schedule, on-spot observations and review of different related works and documents. The results of the study revealed that community-based ecotourism opened widow of opportunities for gainful livelihood activities on which local people could be involved. Based on evidences of the study it is concluded that diversifying ecotourism packages along with existing agricultural based livelihood activities have potential to ensure sustainable community-based ecotourism development.

Keywords: Community-based ecotourism, livelihoods, local community, household survey, agricultural.

Introduction

A community-based approach to ecotourism recognizes the need to promote both the quality of life of people and the conservation of resources (Scheyvens, 1999). Recognizing its multiple benefits to sustainable and eco-friendly development, there is a shift from traditionally known packaged based tour towards more ecologically-minded and sustainable models, often called ecotourism (Hewllet and Nicholls, 2013). It was also reported that community destinations in sparsely populated areas could serve as alternative economy path (Kulusjarvi, 2017). Well-planned community based eco-tourism development interventions have the double benefits, in which natural resources are conserved while meeting the economic needs of the local community involved. With this line of view, Isaac and Wuleka (2012) noted that strong arguments have been advanced in support of ecotourism playing a central role in conservation and rural development in Sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, it is considered as an export industry since foreign tourists who travel abroad purchase goods and services with money from their home countries (UNEP, 2013). Community-based ecotourism initiatives and interventions require support, for example, to build and operate hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related facilities through linkages with basic infrastructure services such as energy, telecommunication, environmental services,

agriculture, manufacturing and construction of service provision centers. These tour related physical infrastructures serve as proxy assets to the livelihoods of local communities. Ahmed (2017) in his review of impact of protected areas on livelihoods of local communities noted that there is two way impacts between protected areas and communities as the fate of protected area including national parks are vulnerable of livelihood activities and vice versa. Some authors like Derera (2015) also argue that thought ecotourism is at its infancy stage; significant development is observed in Ethiopia. It is important to understand that sustainable community-based ecotourism development depends on proactive participation of local people in planning and implementation. This could happen when the benefits generated from local tourism related activities are shared among people and become sources of gainful employable livelihood activities. This paper identifies the contributions of community-based ecotourism as source of alternative livelihood portfolios in selected tourist destination sites.

Materials and methods

Study design: The study was conducted in selected tourist destination areas of Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. Cross-sectional survey involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed.

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To generate data, primary and secondary sources were exploited. To reach to representative sample respondents, mix of purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used. First, potential tourist destination areas were purposively taken to be areas of the study. Accordingly, Menze Guassa district from North Shewa Zone, Meket from North Wollo Zone, and Debark from North Gondar Zone, were represented. From selected community-based ecotourism cooperative members, 118 sample respondents were randomly selected proportional to the total number of members in the study areas. The tourist guiders, cooks; mule rent men, car rent men, scouts of protected areas and farmers around tourist destination areas were involved in the study.

Data collection: Data were collected using different techniques and tools. Household survey using semi-structured interview schedule was the main data collection technique. Key informant interviews with experts and on-spot observation of tourist attraction sites, settlement pattern and infrastructural facilities were also part of data collection process. In addition to primary data, secondary data from published research outputs, reports, working papers and policy briefs were used.

Data analysis: Data generated from different sources using different techniques were organized into quantitative and qualitative themes. Data having quantitative nature were mainly analyzed using descriptive statistic with support of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) application software. To see whether there exist differences in involving ecotourism activities, Chi-square test was used. The qualitative data were analyzed using descriptions, narration and explanations based on the contents of available data set.

Results and discussion

Employment opportunities: Ecotourism activities become integral part of a portfolio of livelihoods and assist with livelihood diversification (Ageyman, 2013). Community-based ecotourism in tourist destination sites has created different employment opportunities to organized local people. Range of tourism related activities which include transportation (traditional animal based and car), tour guiding, cooking, food and beverage services, souvenir production and shopping, community lodge, village tour information provision, cultural show and demonstration and security works like guarding and scouting are some of tourist related activities contributing to the livelihoods of local community members in tourist destination areas. Likewise, the study conducted by Abdibeshir *et al.* (2015) indicated that tourism related activities are proven to significantly contributing to socio-economy of people in Konso of Ethiopia.

Data obtained from the household survey of the study show that among the member of the community-based ecotourism cooperatives, 11.9% have reported that they always participate in providing local transportation service to tourists followed by those who participate sometimes in the same activity, representing 26.3% of members (Table 1). Interestingly, among randomly taken respondents, 61.9% of members of ecotourism cooperatives never participate in providing the local transportation. Tour guiding has been important livelihoods activities of people, especially for educated youth around tourist destination sites of Amhara National Regional State. The data obtained from interview of people involved in tour guiding ecotourism activities show that they generate on average 150-350 birr (\$5.6-12.06) per day and in some peak time of tourist arrivals get more depending on the agreements with visitors. Concerning tour guiding, it is also know that 5.8% of people participating in ecotourism regularly engaged in tour guiding activities whereas 15.3% of ecotourism cooperative members participate sometimes depending on the demands. On the other hand, member of community in different tour related activities varies in making them as part of their livelihoods portfolios whereas the resources available are common to all. As it was observed in Wenchi community based ecotourism (Derera, 2015), differences in term of decision making and sense ownership among local communities was observed in the study area.

Cooking different foods based on demand of visitors is also found to be among community based ecotourism activities of cooperatives in which people have involved. From randomly taken members of community-based ecotourism cooperatives, 4.2% participate as regular day-to-day activities. Likewise 8.5% of members participate in cooking different food items to serve mainly local visitors. In this regard it clear that participation of people in cooking food is relatively less than other activities because of the fact that there are gap in attracting tourist to stay for longer times around destination sites and in most cases local food beverage customer tourists are domestics or local origin. Community lodges attract significant number of people from community-based ecotourism cooperative members, especially in areas like Simien Mountains National Park where there is relatively high flow of tourists (Fig. 1). Souvenir making and shopping is very important community-based ecotourism livelihood activities. In connection with this, though it is not the only activity, 22% of ecotourism cooperative members in major tourist destination areas are found to be engaged in shopping of souvenir as important supplementary income generating activity. It is also learned that 3.4% of member of ecotourism are engaged in souvenir shopping as main income generating activities.

Table 1. Ecotourism based livelihood activities and proportion of local people involved (n=118).

Areas of ecotourism based activity	Proportion of people participated	
	Demand based participation in %	As regular activity in %
Local transportation Services	11.9	25.1
Tour guiding	15.3	8.5
Cooking food	8.5	4.2
Local beverage and food services	15.3	5.9
Souvenir making	23.7	3.4
Souvenir shopping	22	3.4
Community lodge service	21.2	5.5
Cultural show	25.4	3.4
Tourist shading	15.3	5.9
Tour information services	16.1	10.2
Village tour	10.1	7.6
Guard and scout	10.1	11.0
Cultural Demonstration	18.1	2.5

Source: Household survey data, 2017.

Fig. 1. Community lodge inside Simien Mountains National Park.



Concerning the activities as important ecotourism based livelihood portfolios, the Chi-square test was run. The result of test ($P=0.835$) at 95% level of confidence suggested that there is no statistically significant evidence showing the gender difference in term of being involved. Similar study was conducted in Ghana and the results show that 18% of community member are engaged in pottery as important income generating activity and demonstration for tourists (Isaac and Wuleka, 2012). On the other hand, home-stays as tourist related activities in India and Cambodia have contributed to community based ecotourism (Bahlla et al., 2016; Goss, 2014). Similarly, the study conducted in Monkey sanctuary of Ghana by Eshun et al. (2014) showed despite the fact that the community based ecotourism has generated different livelihood portfolios, they face bargaining challenges as the case in many tourist destination areas of Ethiopia. This is mainly attributed to insecurity of maintaining these activities as viable means of income generation. Moreover, seasonality of tourist arrivals in the study areas is also reported to be among the challenges of community-ecotourism members.

Livelihood assets building: For sustainable livelihoods, accumulation of asset including human, social, physical, natural and financial play great role (Ellis, 2005; Scoones, 2009). Some of them such as human assets are both means and outcomes of the livelihoods strategies pursued. As it noted above, there are many community-based ecotourism activities being pursued as means of living for communities around tourist destination areas. In addition to generating employable economic activities, community based ecotourism have contributed for accumulation of different assets. In major tourist destination areas of Amhara National Regional State, community-based ecotourism has contributed for strengthening of human, Social and physical assets. As far as human capital is concerned, member of community-based ecotourism cooperative members have got the chance to participate in different capacity building trainings provided by different agencies including cooperative promotions office of respective districts and non-governmental agencies. From randomly taken members of community-based ecotourism, 83.1% of respondent have got training as the result of their involvement. With the same token, significant number of participants representing 82.2% of studied population reported that community-based ecotourism have brought about chance of sharing experiences with members engaged in different activities through which they get knowledge and practical skills. Community-based ecotourism activities are important mechanisms of strengthening social solidarity by which social assets are built. Considerable numbers of participants (86.4%) have reported that because of their membership in community-based ecotourism, the social solidarity is consolidated. The networking and social solidarity in turn has brought relatively better market opportunities compared to other areas where there are no community-based ecotourism interventions.

As explained by 87.3% of respondents, ecotourism intervention has become instrumental in widening market opportunities around major tourist destination areas. Physical assets such as road, financial institutes, telecommunication, electric power, sustainable potable water, which is accessible to all and health institutions have multiplier effect on the livelihood of people. The study questioned how the areas where community-based ecotourism interventions exist have been supported with physical infrastructures to facilitate the communication and marketing. As the result, except the way to Simien Mountains National Park, many of tourist destination areas have not received due attention than the areas where there are no such community-based ecotourism interventions. Despite potentials available for tourist destinations, it is not uncommon to see such gaps in many parts of the country.

Conclusion

Well planned community-based ecotourism interventions with fully empowered owned local people are instrumental to create gainful alternative livelihood options. Despite infancy of interventions, local people around and inside major tourist destinations perceived that it has great potential to bring about alternative to options of for livelihoods. It has opened window of opportunities for more diversified livelihood activities and portfolios including accumulation of human, social and physical assets along with gainful economic activities which could be better means of living for local communities. Above all, the livelihood activities generated from ecotourism are environmental friendly and owned and managed by community so that serve as means of ensuring sustainable development in the era of global warming due to change climate. Though brings gainful window of opportunities for alternative livelihoods of local community, community-based ecotourism interventions in tourist destination areas have been challenged by seasonality tourist arrivals, climate change and related factors such as drought and erratic rainfall, natural resources degradation including deforestation and soil erosion and overgrazing which emanated from ever decreasing trend land per capita.

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