Potentialities of Community Participation in Community-based Ecotourism Development: Perspective of Sustainable Local Development a Case of Choke Mountain, Northern Ethiopia

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Abstract
This study focused on assessment of community participation in Community-Based Eco Tourism (CBET) development to bring sustainable local development in Choke Mountain and its environs. The study employed mixed research approach and data were collected via extensive review literature, questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and field observation. The findings of the study revealed that local communities could be participated in the development of CBET through provision of accommodation services, performing cultural shows, supplying agricultural products, providing tour services, and selling of souvenirs and CBET is a tool for sustainable local development in the rural area of Choke Mountain.

Keywords: CBET; Community participation; Choke mountain

Introduction
The word participation implies that how and to what extent communities are able to share their views, take part in an activity, project, program, decision-making, profit sharing and other issues related to the tourism development process [1,2]. The most important reason for the inclusion of local inhabitants in ecotourism is equity and taking into consideration the conservation of the area through ecotourism development which inevitably entails restrictions in the traditional usage of local resources by the residents [3].

The main underlying concept for the development of community-based ecotourism is the empowerment of local people. This is only possible when ecotourism planning takes into consideration the views, the perceptions and preferences of the local communities [3,4]. Community participation in community-based ecotourism makes the project sustainable and attains the objective in its establishment [2]. Indeed, community based ecotourism is best alternative to improve the poor rural communities and it is a means of maintaining the ecological balance of Choke Mountain [5]. The area has ecotourism potentials such as mountain trekking, caving, paragliding, hiking, photographing, nature touring, wild life viewing, bird watching, pilgrimage, cultural festivals and events, horse riding and experiencing local cuisine.

Site Description
Choke Mountain is found in Northern part of Ethiopia (Figure 1). The catchment area of Choke Mountain covers more than nine woredas. The area lies between 10°42'N latitude and 37°2'52"E longitude. Choke Mountain has different topographical features ranging from 2800 to 4088 masl, which includes plateau, deep incised valleys, escarpments, plains, and gorges [5].

Agro climatically, Choke Mountain region is found within six climatic zones such as upper kola, lower weyna dega, upper weyna dega, lower dega, upper dega and wurch [5]. The average temperature in the area is between 0°C to 30°C and gets rainfall ranges of 200 to 2200 mm.

Choke Mountain is the water tower of the Upper Blue Nile system in Ethiopia. It is the source of more than 23 rivers and 273 small springs which are the main tributaries of Upper Blue Nile.

Figure 1: Map of the study area.

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to these endowments of potential natural tourism resources and intact cultural values of the rural communities of Choke Mountain, the area is suitable for launching any community-based ecotourism projects (Figure 2).

Methods and Materials

This study aimed to assess the potentialities of community participation in developing community-based ecotourism in Choke Mountain and its environs. To pull off the intended objectives, local communities and tourism experts from culture and tourism offices were subjects of the study. The data were collected mainly through questionnaire, in depth interviews and focus group discussion [5].

Self-administered questionnaire, both open and close-ended types were distributed for 56 respondents in the area of ecotourism potentials, community participation, potential ecotourism business which could be run and owned by rural communities of Choke area. Closed ended questions were prepared in three types such as yes or no, multiple and five Likert scale. In depth interviews were conducted with heads of Tourism and Culture office, religious leaders and community leaders. Focus group discussion was conducted with selected farmers in Sinana woreda of Choke Mountain.

Results and Discussion

The result showed that the rural communities of Choke Mountain region could participate in the development of community-based ecotourism in different potential ecotourism business as owner and supplier of the business (Figure 3). Community-based ecotourism is a form of alternative tourism activity which emphasizes the development of local communities and allows them to have substantial control over, and to involve in its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community [3].

Due to its nature, community-based ecotourism brings the customer to the product itself. It ensures the involvement of local communities and provides considerable opportunities for contacts and linkages with the tourist. Besides, community-based ecotourism can pursue the local communities through different activities such as, cultural show, souvenir selling, guiding tourists, general merchants, and conservation of environment and their cultural assets [3]. With this form of eco-tourism, local communities in Choke Mountain could share their environment and way of life with visitors and other service providers while increasing local income and building sustainable local development. By sharing activities such as cultural performances like festivals, home stays, and the production of the local communities could be participating in the development of community-based ecotourism business in the following aspects.

Supplying of agricultural products

Mostly, the livelihood of rural communities in the locality of Choke Mountain is highly attached with agricultural activities. Communities are engaged in different agricultural activities, for instance, rearing of animals (cattle, sheep, goat, horse, mule, donkey, and hens), crop and vegetation production, honey production, and other related activities. Therefore, local communities have the chance to supply agricultural products like beef, poultry, dairy, honey, and vegetation and crop products to the hoteliers or directly to tourists.

As it is presented in Figure 3, 15 respondents assumed that local communities could supply agricultural products. Now a day, beef and Poultry farming are the main activities among the rural communities of Choke areas in terms of commercial production of beef, chicken, and eggs. Due to the growing number of urban households, hotels, restaurants, and cafes, the demand of beef and poultry farming is also increasing. These create good opportunities for the local communities to supply the products too. In light of this, in the area of Choke Mountain and its surroundings, local communities are highly involved in the production of honey and dairy products particularly butter, and it is possible to provide those products for tourists directly or indirectly through service providers.

Performing cultural shows

Since the local communities are the owner of their culture, they actively participate in developing traditional set of core cultural resources such as performing theatrical arts, dance and music, festivals, visual arts, and built monuments of cultural heritage. As it is presented in Figure 3, out of the total respondents, 10 of them replied that local communities could participate in the business of ecotourism by performing traditional cultural shows for visitors. By doing these, communities could be part of tourist entertainer by performing different cultural shows which might be elaborate the stay of tourists in the destination, and in return the money from tourists is remaining in the communities’ pocket.

Figure 3: Alternative ecotourism business for the communities.
Provision of accommodation facilities (food, beverage, and rest services)

Accommodation facilities and services are preconditions to develop community-based ecotourism in the destination [6]. Tourists need the service of food and beverage, and rest during their stay away from the normal environment and home. As it is presented in Figure 3, nine respondents said that local communities could participate in the business of CBET by providing accommodation facilities and services. Rural communities in Choke Mountain and its environs could participate in the provision of food and beverage services and as a result of this, they could get high job opportunities and source of income (Figure 4).

Involving in shopping activities

Information gathered from focus group discussion showed that the rural communities of Choke Mountain and its environs are artistic with traditional skills like wood carpentry, iron smith, pottery, basketry, producing various handicrafts. Therefore, local communities could sale those handicrafts for tourists or residence of the destination and organize themselves in different committee to do shopping business and to sale handicraft products. As a result of this, job opportunities and sources of income could be created. This is supported by 14 respondents (Figure 3).

Providing tour services

As it is presented in Figure 3 above, from the total respondents, 15 respondents believed that local community could participate in the business of community-based ecotourism by providing different tour services. Data collected from in depth interviews showed that:

Along with participating in accommodation and transportation services, local communities in Choke Mountain have great roles in providing different tour services such as providing guiding and e-scout services, renting of horses for ridding, and providing guardianship services for tourists and tourists’ property during their stay. (Key informants, Gojjam Ademe (research directorate Debre Markos University, Feb14, 2013).

Community based ecotourism is tool for sustainable local development in Choke Mountain and its environs

The basic reason for community developments is to provide communities the necessary resources to enhance their livelihood, to protect their natural and cultural heritages and to provide economic opportunity as well. Community-based ecotourism could also promote social development and environmental health to the community through sustainable economic growth. Research conducted in the case of Puerto Princesa, Palawan Island found in Philippines showed that community-based ecotourism can bring numerous socio-economic benefits to the Islanders in terms of generating foreign exchange, creating local employment, stimulating national and local economies, and fostering international peace, and increasing environmental awareness and education [7]. In the same way, as it is presented in Figures 5 and 6, community-based ecotourism can bring socio-economic, cultural, and environmental benefits for the locality of Choke Mountain if it is properly developed (Figure 7).

Furthermore, based on the data analyzed from focus group discussion and interview, community-based ecotourism can bring economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits.

Economical dimension

Through the development of community-based ecotourism, it is possible to establish micro, small, medium, and large tourism business, and these in turn improve the livelihood of rural communities of Choke Mountain and its surroundings. The finding of the research conducted by Mameťa [1] in the case of rural areas of South Africa showed that CBET is a potential source of economic development and poverty alleviation particularly in marginal rural areas with limited agricultural potential. Likewise, the finding of the present study also proved that community-based ecotourism is a tool for producing economically...
empowered communities in the rural areas of Choke Mountain where agricultural productivity is very low. Specifically, young people and women in Choke Mountain will be empowered to mobilize their capacities to manage the resources, to make decisions, and to control all the activities around their lives.

Socio-cultural dimension

One of the notorious benefits of community-based ecotourism is cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of the culture of local communities among outsiders [8]. Similarly, if community-based ecotourism is developed and well managed in the area of Choke Mountain, the local communities are proud of their identity, and they can develop their cultural assets like handicrafts, theater, dance, music, local architecture, local knowledge and skills (building homes, pottery, basketry, custom making the so called “Gojjam Azene”, tracking animals, blacksmith, woodcarving, and jewelry-making).

Environmental dimension

In the same way, through community-based ecotourism, it is possible to create environmental awareness in the mind of local communities in Choke Mountain. As a result of this, the ecological balance of Choke Mountain is maintained with the participation of the communities. If local communities are exposed to the benefits of CBET, they could become increasingly aware of the need for environmental protection for the sustainable management of natural resources. If CBET could be developed, the following environmental benefits would be generated. For example, it improves the water condition of the basin, has impacts on mitigating climatic change, minimizes the impact of agricultural based activities, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, increases environmental awareness, has ecological and hydrological balance.

Conclusion

By its nature, Community-based ecotourism ensures the involvement of local communities from the grass root level to enhance their living standard. In this study, it is ascertained that community-based ecotourism development could be the main means of livelihood improvement for the rural communities of Choke Mountain and its environs. The local community could participate in different activities if community-based ecotourism is developed such as providing accommodation facilities and tour services, supplies agricultural products, handicraft selling, and performing different cultural shows.

In general, community-based ecotourism can bring sustainable community development in Choke Mountain and its surroundings in terms of economic and socio-cultural dimension and it will also be a tool for rehabilitation of the threaten ecosystem of Choke Mountain [9].

The Way Forward

To ensure sustainable community-based ecotourism project development, local communities must undergo various capability-building programs. This in turn, enables the communities to provide them with skills which are needed to manage the tourism activities that are going to be developed in Choke Mountain and its environs. The local communities should be the development actors to assure the sustainability of community-based ecotourism. Communities should be actively participant in the initial planning phase, managing, controlling of the tourism business, and sharing of benefits.

Different measurements should be taken for the conservation of natural and built environment as well as cultural heritages so as to increase socio-economic, cultural and environmental values. Strict rules and regulations should be established to prohibit the illegal community activities like overgrazing, deforestation, hunting, settlement, and vandalism of cultural heritages.

References