

# Review impending of Ecotourism for Sustainable Development in Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Ethiopia is extraordinarily rich in various types of tourist attractions. The potential tourist activities in Ethiopia are birds and wildlife viewing, picturesque scenery landscapes, hiking, boating/canoeing, horse riding, forest exploration, spa bathing, trekking, adventure, and other leisure activities. Hence, birds, wildlife, and vegetation in protected areas, mountains, geological features, caves, rock art, lakes, Eco lodges, and festival places of colorful ethnic groups are among the major ecotourism resources in Ethiopia. Ecotourism contributes economically to gross domestic product, foreign exchange earnings, diversifying regional economies, and it helps as a catalyst to the development of other sectors of Ethiopia beyond the tourism industry. Ecotourism is bringing into has direct and indirect benefits to local communities around the attractions. It brought employment opportunities to create new jobs, development of infrastructure, and transferring income from the wealthy to the poor at the destination. However, basic tourist infrastructures accommodation, transportation, communication, healthcare, and other services essential not fully reached all ecotourism attractions in Ethiopia. Therefore, the growth and transformation plan identified ecotourism, which is a part of tourism as one of the key sectors of economic growth for citizens, and more emphasis is given owing to its role in sustainable resource management in Ethiopia.

**Keywords:** Community based tourism; Eco lodge; Nature-based tourism; Sustainable tourism; Wildlife tourism

## Introduction

The term Ecotourism is said to be originated from North America in the 1980's and was allegedly coined by Hector Ceballos-Lascura in the early 1980s. However, it was not officially used until the Third International Convention on National Parks in 1982. The first mention of ecotourism in the English-language academic literature was by Romeril in 1985 [1].

Even though ecotourism organizations such as the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and The Ecotourism Society (TES) were formed, the term ecotourism has been widely used since the mid-1990's. Several terms relating to ecotourism, such as sustainable tourism, green tourism, rural tourism, community-based tourism, have been come out over the last 20 years [2].

The International Ecotourism Society [3] defines ecotourism as responsible travel that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. Ecotourism as defined by the UNWTO (2002) [4], it is form of tourism that is nature-based, organized by specialized tour operators for small groups, minimizes negative impacts (upon the environment and socio-cultural), and supports the conservation of natural areas.

In the words of Black and Crabtree (2007), ecotourism is the industry that, in its very essence, aims to minimize tourism's negative impacts at the same time maximizing positive impacts on the environment, socio-culture, and economy. Ecotourism is relevant means to measuring the sustainability of tourism more broadly, which is still a contested area of research [5].

Wight (1993), Wallace and Pierce (1996) [6,7] enlightened the principles of developing ecotourism in three key pillars. Accordingly, ecotourism is low-impact tourism that contributes to the conservation of the flora and fauna of natural areas (environment approach). It encourages local participation for the sustainable socio-economic benefit of local communities (development approach) and provides opportunities for learning and meaningful encounters between tourists and the environment/local community (experience approach).

Today, ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. Tourism supports 10% of all economic activity on the planet and 8% of all global employment, with the intention that more contributions are from ecotourism. Ecotourism tourism is growing 3x faster than the tourism industry overall (WTO, 2002). So that, ecotourism is a catalyst of change in household economies, leading to new opportunities for employment, new sources of cash income, and new information about technologies [8]. Ecotourism more than other kinds of tourism it can cause large changes in the household economy because it usually occurs in relatively isolated areas of the world where people are distant from markets and have little income (poor) [9].

The objective of this paper was to assess ecotourism potentials, guesstimate the economic, environmental, and social well-being contribution of ecotourism in Ethiopia. Moreover, the challenges of ecotourism and the future ecotourism policy of Ethiopia have been assessed through this paper.

## Concept of Ecotourism in Ethiopia

The concept of ecotourism is a new phenomenon and it is difficult to explain its significant achievement since the new approach of ecotourism is widely disseminated in Ethiopia. It was introduced in Ethiopia as a component of soil and water conservation under Land Use Planning of Oromia (LUPO) aims to create alternative income-generating options to reduce pressure on natural resources [10]. Then, the government of Ethiopia has recognized the development and promotion of ecotourism and provided consultancy services for a number of potential developers of ecotourism sites [11].

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The Ecotourism Association of Ethiopia (EAE), which was founded in 2003 by committed organizations of the private sector, is basically formed to promote the principles of ecotourism and eco-efficient initiatives in order to address the challenges faced by ecotourism in Ethiopia [12]. Ecotourism Association of Ethiopia (EAE) has been at the forefront of promoting and developing ecotourism in the Country ([www.greenafricadirectory.org](http://www.greenafricadirectory.org)).

Therefore, the Ecotourism Association of Ethiopia (EAE) brings together over 30 private companies ranging from five-star hotels, tour operators to small lodge operators, with a mission to create high standard eco-destinations and facilities that contribute to the alleviation of poverty, upgrading of human resources, promoting Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage and conserving environmental resources (<http://www.ecotourism-association-of-ethiopia-eae/>).

### Ecotourism Potentials in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is extraordinarily rich with varied types of tourist attractions (Ethiopian Tourism Commission, 1995) [13]. The attractions include historical, cultural, archaeological, anthropological, scenic, climatic, flora, and fauna resources. Such a unique combination of attractions within a single country has no match on the African continent, or rarely anywhere else [14]. The good potential of tourist activities like birds and wildlife viewing, picturesque scenery landscape, hiking/trekking, boating/canoeing, horse riding, forest exploring, adventure, and other leisure activities are found in Ethiopia [15].

Ethiopia has been registered ecotourism attractions as world heritage sites by the United Nations Economic and Social Council Organization (UNESCO), namely Simien Mountain National Park (1978), Lower Valley of the Omo (1980), Tiya (1980), and Biosphere Reserves (Kafa and Yayu) (Berhanu, 2003).

### Birds and wildlife viewing

Birds and wildlife are among the major ecotourism resources in Ethiopia. According to Nelson (2009) [16], the ecotourism journeys for bird viewing, botanists, and other ecologists and who are interested in wildlife are also interested in integrated cultural and natural heritages in Ethiopia. There are areas with great diversity and an incredible bird list of over 900 species in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is the 2nd highest count of endemics in Africa after South Africa (<http://simienmountains.org/conservation/challenges>).

The extensive and nice-looking of Ethiopia's natural areas are spectacular places for ecotourists to watch the real African big wildlife. Therefore, many people simply represented Ethiopia as "Home of the Unique Seven". Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), Mountain nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*), Walia ibex (*Capra walle*), Menelik's bushbuck, Swayne's hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus swaynei*), Gelada baboon (*Theropithecus gelada*), and Bale monkey (*Chlorocebus djamdamensis*) are the seven distinctive and large endemic mammals found only in Ethiopia [17].

### Protected areas

Protected areas are essential for biodiversity conservation (Brodnig, 2006). They are the cornerstones of virtually all national and international conservation strategies, set aside to maintain functioning natural ecosystems, to act as refuges for species, and to maintain ecological processes that cannot survive in the most intensely managed landscapes and seascapes extinct [18].

Protected areas of Ethiopia are believed to be the essential tourist destination forever [17]. Ethiopia had only two protected areas

(namely; Awash and Simien Mountains National Park) before 40 years [19]. Today more Ethiopia had 40 protected areas covers about 16.4% of the country's land area [20], and currently have more than 17.1% of its land, ranked third in African country next to Tanzania and Uganda. The number of protected areas in Ethiopia is expanding [21]. More than 55 protected areas (including 21 national parks) were established to protect and conserve the natural ecosystems and wildlife heritage of the country according to Murray (2013) [19].

### Mountains, Geological features and caves

Henze (2007) [22] and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) of Ethiopia have pointed out the ecotourism potential of Ethiopia as Ethiopia's exotic mountains are almost untouched by individual trekkers/ hiking parties and professional climbers. Ethiopia has several mountain areas which could serve to make the country attractive to such people. The Semen chain Mountain, the Bale Mountain, mountains in Wag and Lasta, the Irob region in northeastern Tigray including Geralta, Chilalo and other mountains in Arsi, lone peaks such as Zuqulla in Shoa and Fantalle in Awash National Park are ecotourism attractions in Ethiopia with spectacular scenery that could spark a common interest among a large number of visitors (Paul, 2007). Moreover, battle sites like Adowa Mountain, Machew Mountain, and places of significant political events like Entoto, and Ankober are the most interesting sites for history-loving eco-tourists (MoCT, 2006) [23,24].

The Lowest Point in Ethiopia which is the Danakil Depression also traditionally known as Dalol is a low-lying gigantic rift crack that is still getting wider and volcanic activities of Erta Ale and thermal manifestations (fumaroles and hot springs) are the most popular geological features ecotourism potential in Ethiopia. The north-central highland and rift valley lakes regions are the best places for eco-tourists; lower Awash, as well as Omo valley areas, are places of spectacular natural scenery and activities for geologists and nature-loving Eco tourists (MoCT, 2007).

Caves and rock art have recently begun to attract the attention of Eco tourists in Ethiopia. The known cave of Sof Omar in lowland Bale, which is interesting for its historical and religious connections, is the best Eco tourist's destination in Ethiopia. Some rocks like Tiya (UNESCO registered) have images and carvings of people and animals that are easily accessible now frequently visited by tourists (<http://www.tourismethiopia>).

### Ethiopia's lakes, islands and Eco lodges

Ethiopia's lakes have many varied features of great interest to Eco tourists: birds, wildlife, vegetation, colorful ethnic groups, historic churches and monasteries, and unusual geologic features. The largest lake in Ethiopia, the source of the Blue Nile which has 37 islands, Lake Hayek, Lake Hashenge, the creator Lakes of Hora, Bishoftu, Babogaya, and Kuriftu have great interest of Eco tourists [22]. Bishangari Eco-Lodge located at the Eastern of Langan Lake in the Oromia Region and Village Ethiopia located at Afar Region (Bilen) is examples of the ecotourism supportive infrastructure in Ethiopia [25].

### Festival place of colorful ethnic groups its landscapes

Recently, the cultural landscapes of Konso and Gada system with its festival landscape have been included as a world heritage by UNESCO (Ethiopian cultural and Tourism office, 2016). Celebration of Timket festival is remarkable for the presence of large number of Orthodox Christians walking on streets, some groups singing (chanting) hymn

and it is also customary to see some people on horse to add color to the festival place of tourist attraction (Berhanu, 2003).

## Benefits of Ecotourism in Ethiopia

### Economic benefits of Ecotourism

With respect to natural area finance, many public natural area systems around the world have encountered severe financial difficulties as the number of national parks and other areas has grown while funding has remained stable or declined [26]. As a result, governments, managers, and environmentalists have turned to ecotourism as a source of revenue. Kiss (2004) and Weggoro (2008) stated that ecotourism contributes a great deal of gross domestic product. GDP generated by the ecotourism industry through dealing directly with tourists, hotels, travel agents, airlines, and other passenger transport services, as well as the activities of restaurant and leisure industries [27-29]. According to WTO (2002), a total of 156,327 international tourists visited Ethiopia. According to UNWTO and UN (2010), the international tourists visited Ethiopia more than 400,000 and its lower compare to IGAD member States like Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda.

According to WTO (2002), 77 million USD in revenue was obtained in 2002, with a 5% growth rate compared to 2001. In 2008, Ethiopia received only about 157 million USD. Moreover, the ecotourism industry contributed 35,766.6mill ETB to the country's GDP in 2013. In 2014 it was forecasted to rise by 4.5% to 37,373.6mill ETB (WTTC, 2014). Generally, in the last three consecutive years, tourists' arrival is growing at an average rate of 7% per year in Ethiopia [30].

Therefore, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP of Ethiopia is expected to grow by 4.8% pa to 59, 495.2mill ETB (3.6% of GDP) by 2024 (WTTC, 2014). This also helps for foreign exchange earnings while it provides higher and stable earning for Ethiopia. But, According to UNWTO and UN (2010), the receipt from international tourists who visited Ethiopia is less compare to IGAD member States like Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda.

Ecotourism said to be highly capable of diversifying economies of less developed countries like Ethiopia which is practices ecotourism activities [29]. As Desenbrot (2002) affirmed that ecotourism is also a catalyst for the development of other sectors of the economy, that is, it provides strong forward and backward linkages so that induced macro/microeconomic 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 and guide serves (Lowmen, 2004).

### Environmental Benefits ecotourism in Ethiopia

Ecotourism can play a vital role in conservation and rural development, which are typically environmental benefits of ecotourism [31]. Eco-development appeared in the early 1980s [32], and emphasized the need to restructure society and economics to ensure that development worked with nature [33]. The eco-development paradigm is the deep ecology paradigm that advocates harmony between human and nature [34].

Throughout Ethiopia, there are many designated ecotourism potentials particularly protected areas of land including National Parks, Wildlife Reserves, Priority Forests, Biosphere Reserves, and Community Conservation Areas. These ecotourism potentials especially Forest conservation are beyond act as biodiversity banks, furthermore important for carbon sink (a reservoir of CO<sub>2</sub>) and climate change mitigation strategies in response to climate change in Ethiopia [35].

## Ecotourism contribution for Communities

Ecotourism is found to have direct and indirect benefits to local communities in Ethiopia. Local stakeholders benefited from ecotourism destinations in terms of revenue sharing programs either through cash payments or funding from community-based ecotourism projects [36]. The stakeholders in ecotourism have a common seek which are economic benefits from ecotourism, whether it is sales and profits for operators, user fee revenues for natural area management, or jobs and income for local communities [37].

Ecotourism as a source of employment opportunities and as a means of direct income sources through employment, entrance fees, parking fees, and other charges levied on visitors were perceived as the most direct economic benefits. Local communities also accepted ecotourism benefits by encouraging tourists to buy local goods such as local handicrafts, horse rental services, and horse porter/packer activities [38]. In addition, Ecotourism provides new markets for locally produced goods like cultural clothes, in-house souvenirs materials, pictures of wildlife and traditionally prepared drinks, Ethiopian known jebena coffee, and cultural foods of Ethiopia [39].

Anonymous (2009) [40] also stated that several stakeholders have become beneficiaries through providing hotel accommodation, transport/driving services, communication/information services, tented camps, lodges, labor, and trade activities. The boat group, guide group, horse riding group, and honey group are the most beneficiary group from Ecotourism in Ethiopia. Tour operators also have a significant share of ecotourism. These tour operators have been involved in car and boat renting as well as serving as tour guides.

Therefore, according to Anderson (1996) [41], ecotourism brought employment opportunities for local community nearby attractions. Since it is labor-intensive, its expansion generates more employment opportunities at the semi-skilled, technical, and managerial levels.

Tourist expenditures on lodging, transportation, food, guides, and souvenirs are an important source of income for local communities by providing supplemental income to rural farmers, women, and young people. This is with the intention that, ecotourism creating new jobs, it is likely that support for the natural areas providing the jobs will increase [42].

Members of the community, even those who are not directly involved, often gain some form of benefit (e.g. through community funds). Community-based tourism can create jobs both directly and indirectly as well as additional income for the local population, provide further training opportunities (for example, language, service, restaurant, and hotel business, and guiding) for community members. It strengthens the social and organizational structure within the community and can help strengthen cultural identity and preserve cultural heritage in Ethiopia [43].

Koeman (1998) avowed that ecotourism benefits in the development of infrastructures such as airports, hotels and restaurants, road networks, communications networks, power, water supply, and other related public utilities are widely shared with local community nearby tourist destinations. Ecotourism is also an excellent means for transferring income from wealthy nations and persons to the poorer sections of society. Ecotourism is effective in this transfer since travelers often vent into remote, economically disadvantaged regions like nearby Ethiopian national parks [5].

## Challenges facing Ecotourism in Ethiopia

Even though Ethiopia is surprisingly rich with varied types of tourist attractions, basic tourist infrastructures, and services like accommodation, transportation, communication networks, healthcare and other services very essential are not fully reach all ecotourism attractions in Ethiopia (Binayew, 2014).

The Ethiopian eco-tourism potential, protected areas are distressed by the existence of communities engaged in agriculture and nomadic activities. They are destroying natural resources near ecotourism attractions and the resources of protected areas especially national parks are increasingly facing numerous challenges in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is exceptionally high in biodiversity but exceptionally low incapacity for biodiversity conservation or protected area management. The vast majority of communities nearby protected areas are almost completely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. Consequently, 97% of the original highland vegetation has already been lost in recent decades due to encroaching agriculture, grazing, and settlement by agro-pastoral communities [44].

Increasing population growth, the local communities lost sizeable parts of their land to private and resource shortage to the communities living adjacent to the parks, in turn, have become a serious threat to the sustainability of the national park and its resources (World Bank, 2006) [42]. The local communities want to extract natural resources with little or no concern for sustainable use [45]. The semi agricultural and pastoral local communities have been highly dependent on the resources/wildlife, forest, and water/where the ecotourism attraction is established [46].

Gemechu (2014) [47] also stated fast-growing construction industry, dependence on the natural forest, low level of local communities' awareness, weak formal institutions to organize ecotourism activities, the limited concern of the local communities for conservation of eco-attractions, degradation of natural resources, and deforestation.

Ethiopia also lacks an effective and sound institutional framework and legal bases for ecotourism development in relation to the less emphasis and recognition given to ecotourism and also lack of cohesiveness, integrity, and cooperation among the stakeholders like government, local communities, and NGOs are serious problems stagnated ecotourism Development [41].

## Ethiopian Ecotourism Policy

The Ethiopian government, in its plan for accelerated and sustainable development to end poverty (MoFED, 2006) [48] and in the growth and transformation plan (MoFED, 2012) [49], have identified tourism including ecotourism as one of the key sectors of economic growth and more emphasis is given its contribution as sources growth for citizens. This is supported by the new tourism development policy, the new community-based ecotourism guideline, and Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), and environmental protection offices.

In Ethiopia, tourism plus ecotourism has been effectively recognized as an important sector for poverty reduction. Ethiopian Tourism Organization, targeted tourism marketing development, capacity building, development of new and old tourist destinations as well as cooperation and integration with stakeholders during the First Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I). The government's strategic intent is to make Ethiopia one of the top ten destinations in Africa by 2020 while attracting low-impact high-value tourists

[50]. In addition, the sector has the vision to maximizing tourism revenues and to make Ethiopia one of the top five tourist destinations in Africa by 2025.

The requires achieving ambitious market growth targets which include an increase in tourism arrivals at an average annual rate of 20% per annum to 5 million tourists and increasing also receipts per visitor at an average annual rate of 1.6% to USD 1,100 and increasing total tourism receipts at an average annual rate of 20% per annum to USD 12.5 billion. Lack of infrastructure, capable human resources, accessibility, accommodations, and hotels among the challenges the tourism sector faced in GTP (I) solved in the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) by the government, private sector, and other stakeholders including investors (ENA, July 15, 2016).

## Ethiopia Ecotourism SWOT Analysis

According to Himberg (2006) [51], Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), pointed out Ethiopian Ecotourism Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis on its report shows the status of ecotourism in Ethiopia [52-54].

## Future Work of Line

- Promoting the development of ecotourism and marketing ecotourism potentials in all regions of the country.
- Developing and creating diversified livelihood.
- Encouraging benefit sharing and conservation of natural resources of ecotourism.
- Giving the ownership sense of the local people.
- Increasing the awareness of local communities towards ecotourism or nature tourism.
- Awareness campaign on environmental protection, wildlife conservation, and management should be done among the local people.

## Conclusion

- Ethiopia has diverse ecotourism resources.
- Ecotourism contributes to the Economy of Ethiopia.
- Ecotourism brought employment opportunities and creating new jobs.
- Ecotourism transferring income from wealthy to poor at destination.
- The GTP has identified Ecotourism as one of the key sectors of economic growth for citizen.
- Ecotourism helps for sustainable resource management in Ethiopia.

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