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Challenges and Prospects of Community Based Eco-Tourism in Maichew Cluster, a Case of Ofla Woreda

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to assess the challenges and prospects of community-based ecotourism in the Maichew cluster, a case of Ofla woreda. Community based eco-tourism has become rapidly the most fundamental in-strument to meet sustainable tourism and livelihood option demand across the world at large and Developing Countries in particular. In order to achieve the objective of the study, both primary and secondary data were generated by employing qualitative (using case study, focus group discussion, in depth interview and on spot observation) and quantitative (mainly using household survey and visitor survey questionnaires) methods. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 3 CBET sites and 90 sample households respectively. The quantitative data was analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean when appropriate while qualitative data was used to triangulate and substantiate the study. The research investigated the challenges for developing CBET in the study area. On the other hand, the study also identified several potentials of CBET in the study area. In addition, the issues for empowering community based eco-tourism in terms of economical, social, political and psychological empowerment was identified. The result of the study reveals that several challenges for empowering community based tourism in the study area, Low level of knowledge, interest and perception of local community towards CBET; the resource ownership questions like land; capacity problems of the MCs 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; etc. However, several opportunities like strategic location of the sites, change of local attitude toward CBET, hospitality of local community, the potential tourism resources of the area, successful efforts on marketing and promotion, etc. are identified as a positive factor for CBETE. The issues of CE process is in its infant stage despite local communities showed high interest levels to involve in identifying problems, management, decision-making, problem solving, equitable benefit sharing and tourism operation. Thus, economical, social, political and psychological empowerments of community are not well practiced. To conclude, even if community empowerment can play central role to achieve sustainable tourism development and livelihood option, the process is very limited and in its infant stage in terms of economical, social, political and psychological empowerments.

Keywords: Community Based Tourism; Eco-tourism; Community Empowerment.

Introduction

Over the last half century, the growth and development of tourism as both a social and economic activity has been remarkable. International tourism is notable in particular for its rapid and sustained growth in both volume and value since 1950. Technological developments, particularly in air travel; increases in personal wealth; such as holidays with pay, all of which have enabled more people to travel internationally and more frequently or, more succinctly, contributed to greater international mobility. In 1950, total worldwide international tourist arrivals amounted to just over 25 million. By the start of the new millennium, that figure had risen to more than 687 million and since then international tourism has continued its inexorable growth (Sharpley, 2009). In 2009, over 880 million international arrivals were recorded (UNWTO, 2010).

The substantial growth of the tourism activity clearly marks tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the past century. For many developing countries tourism is one of the main

sources for foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. Globally, as an export category, tourism ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals and automotive products. The contribution of tourism to economic activity worldwide is estimated at 5%. Its contribution to employment tends to be relatively higher and is estimated in the order 6-7% of the overall number of jobs worldwide (UNWTO, 2010). According to UNWTO tourism highlights of 2010, the overall export income generated by inbound tourism including passengers transport, exceeded US\$ 1 trillion in 2009, or close to US\$ 3 billion a day. Tourism exports account for as much as 30% of the worlds exports of commercial services and 6% of overall exports of goods and services (UNWTO, 2010). Apart from a vehicle for economic development, tourism is also increasingly becoming an important sector for instigating cultural and environmental conservation in many countries.

In this regard, Ethiopia is among the worlds least developed countries and some people living below a poverty line equivalent to 45 US cents

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per day out of a population of 90 million; and up to 13 million people at risk of starvation. Over 80% of its population lives in rural areas, with agriculturally-based livelihoods and extremely low levels of off farm income (Mann, 2012).

However, as one mechanism of tackling poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, the potential of tourism was mentioned in World Bank report. Tourism is one of the major economic sectors of Ethiopia and the government has labeled tourism as a priority sector, in part as a tool for poverty alleviation (Mann, 2006). It would be no exaggeration to say that Ethiopia has a cornucopia of attractions of many types ranging from landscape scenery, wildlife, culture, history, and archeology sites that set it apart from its neighbors. Its natural and cultural assets are unique and potentially very productive for CBET.

The challenge is thus to formulate tourism development strategies which specifically harness this benefits into the local community. The effectiveness of tourism in the future will ultimately depend on what form of tourism has to be developed and who will benefit, as well as where, when and how it can be appropriately implemented. Different types of tourism will assume different forms and functions, and how they are developed and managed will also influence the degree to which they can contribute to development. In this regard, CBET has emerged as one of the most promising methods of integrating natural resource conservation, local income generation and cultural conservation in the developing world (Miller, 2004). World ecotourism summit held in Canada by the year 2002 acknowledged the significant and complex social, economic and environmental implications of tourism and the role of ecotourism in ensuring sustainability of the overall tourism by increasing economic benefits for the host community (TIES, 2000).

Although CBET has long been taken as a sustainable development strategy for developing countries like Ethiopia, no such community-owned and managed products have come to the fore in a lasting and meaningful way. This is not to say of course, that there are no attempts to develop CBET destinations rather community participation in tourism has been exceptionally poor and genuine CBET is rare. However, CBET will only bring benefits to conservation and communities if good quality, viable ecotourism products, which reflect market demand, are created and actively promoted. The tourism policy of Ethiopia which is endorsed in 2009 highlights some specific provisions for active participation of local people in tourism. Yet, despite this policy call for community involvement in tourism, there is still no formal mechanism for community participation.

CBET developments are most of the times aimed to realize the betterment of livelihoods for the people suffering from different problems caused by food shortage, population pressure, marginality and decline in productivity of land. Denman state that in CBET communities assume substantial control over, and involvement in; its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community. In line with this it is increasing the strategy to help address economic and social problems in local communities, and as an appropriate and effective tool of environmental conservation (Denman, 2001).

The full and effective participation of local communities in the planning and management of ecotourism has become increasingly debatable issue. At best, ecotourism projects tend to aim for the involvement of local people, and at worst, ecotourism projects can ignore the issue of local participation completely. Such projects frequently fail after a relatively short period of time (Garrod, 2003). The participatory planning approach implies recognition of the need not only to ensure that local stakeholders become the beneficiaries of tourism development but also to integrate them fully into the relevant planning and management processes. This is particularly important in the context of ecotourism, where genuine sustainability can only truly

be aspired to with the effective participation of all of the stakeholders involved (Garrod, 2003).

Even though the degree of benefit accruing to the local economy is unknown; in Ethiopia there are already small scale benefits to the community in general and the poor in particular with considerable difference between regions and the destinations it is unanimously known that the major proportion of the benefits go to the tour operators that are mainly based in the capital city. Next to the tour operators, the local tour guides benefit significantly at local levels. The elites or influential people are also among the most benefited (Kubsa, 2007). This situation leads to debate on tourism development in Ethiopia. Monopoly of the sector by small groups of private investors means that adverse impact on the environment and local communities have received insufficient attention (Connell and Rugendyke, 2008). However, the more local residents gain from tourism, the more they will be motivated to protect the areas natural and cultural heritage and support sustainable tourism activities (Liu, 2003).

Moreover, many challenges still lie ahead in promoting CBET at start up and operational phase on the demand and supply side of tourism management. The challenges facing the tourism industry are complex and numerous. Since tourism sector is a growing sector, most of the local communities are not aware about the economic, social, cultural and environmental significance and impacts of tourism sector and some of the members of local community will not support the community based ecotourism projects. In addition, studies indicate that many community based projects have failed, usually because of lack of financial viability (Mitchell and Muckosy, 2008). As a result, it is still rare to find examples where projects are not initiated, planned or managed by forces outside the community (Belsky, 1999; cited by Miller, 2004).

On the other hand, when the NGOs fully implement the project and hands over management to the community, the project can easily fail because there has not been either initial or sustained support on the part of the community. Despite these obstacles, developing ecotourism is not unreachable idea, but a project that can be realized if the community is embraced and supported by efficient communication and cooperation between the various stakeholders so as to improve the livelihood of rural communities. CBET initiatives all faced some difficulties and constraints in their due course of development and operation to achieve sustainable development, but their experiences provide lesson for others. As a driving force, approaches followed to develop and integrate CBET as a livelihood diversification option, the extent and type of challenges and opportunities faced during the entire phases of CBET development require thorough study.

Some researchers have done studies on community based ecotourism in different parts of Ethiopia. These researches have mainly focused on surveying potentials for community based ecotourism development and value of ecotourism for wildlife conservation and economic development (Micheal, 2008; Cherinet, 2008; Sewbesew, 2010). However, study on the level community empowerment tasks carried out to develop CBET, challenges faced and opportunities realized are remain untouched. In an attempt to bridge these gaps, the study focus on empowering CBET by taking *Maichew* cluster, Ofla woreda as a case study.

The reason why this site is selected as an area of study, *Maichew* cluster, Ofla woreda has a tremendous potential of cultural and natural heritages but from these resources the local community didnt benefit and there is no community based eco-tourism empowerment project which are mainly support the local community livelihood. So, the majority of the households in the area are categorized as chronically food insecure and there are no CBETE practices to improve the livelihood of the local communities as a whole. Besides, no CBET

study has been done so far on issues of empowering CBET. With this assumption this research initiated to study in Ofra woreda.

Main body

Description of The Study Area

Ofra is one of the five rural woredas in South Zone of Tigray region that has 20 *tabias*/ 18 rural *tabias* & 2 urban *tabias*. Its geographical location is in between 39°31' E longitude, 12°31' N latitude. It is bordered with Endamohoni woreda in the North, Raya Azebo woreda in the North East, Alamata woreda in the South East and Amhara regional state in the West. The woreda capital is called Korem & is located 172 km from regional capital and 663 km from Addis Ababa. Its area is approximately 1086.55 sqkm or 133500 ha.

The wereda comprises 25% plain land, 20% gentle slopping, 15% undulating and rugged terrain and 40% steep mountains. It has a total area of 133,500 hectares. Out of this 25275 (18.9%) hectares are cultivated land, 24340 (18.2%) hectares grazing land, 44635 (33.4%) hectares forest and bush land, 1457 (1.1%) hectares lake area and the rest 37796 (28.3%) are waste lands from all *tabias* of the study area. Whereas it is focused on only three major eco-tourism *tabias* Ofra woreda, they are Hashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri, these three *tabias* are bounded by Lake Ashenge. The study *tabias* are characterized by undulating surface having flat lands and mountainous chain. The mountains that surround the flat grazing land, cultivated land and lake area are characterized by gentle to very steep slopes with average elevation ranging from 2440 to 3600 m above sea level (Habtom 2010).

There are three agro-climatic Zones in the Wereda with greater domination of the high land or "dega type. The dega zone comprises about 42% of the Wereda followed by "woina dega" and "kola" 29% each. Rainfall has two seasonal occurrences in a year. During the *kremt* season, rainy season, it ranges from 450-800mm and it reaches between 180-250mm during Belg season. The highest rainfall under normal condition usually recorded during the July month. The Wereda has moderate type of temperature that usually extends between 6° c to 32° c. Moreover, about 33.4% area of Ofra Wereda is covered by natural vegetation and is among the few areas to have such large tree cover in the southern zone of Tigray (OWWSSP, 2004/5).

The livelihood of the region depends on subsistence farming. Livestock husbandry and crop production play a major role in the subsistence farming. The dominant farming system is a highland mixed farming system. The most serious problem for the agricultural production is the shortage of land holding, ranging between 0 and 0.75 ha per household. As a result, farmers are informally owning and cultivating the land up to the lake boundary and some part of the upper sloppy areas which causes much sediment accumulation in the lake.

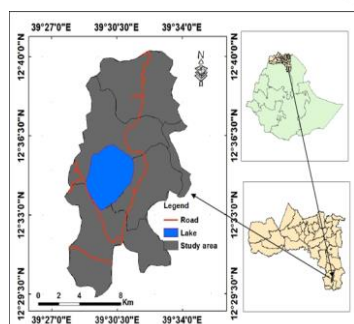


Figure 1: Map of the study area, (Source: Own development by ARCH GIS Classification).

Methods and Data Instruments

Data Instruments: To undertake this study, both primary and secondary data were generated by employing both qualitative (using focused group discussion, in depth interview and on spot observation) and quantitative (mainly using household survey and visitors survey questionnaires).

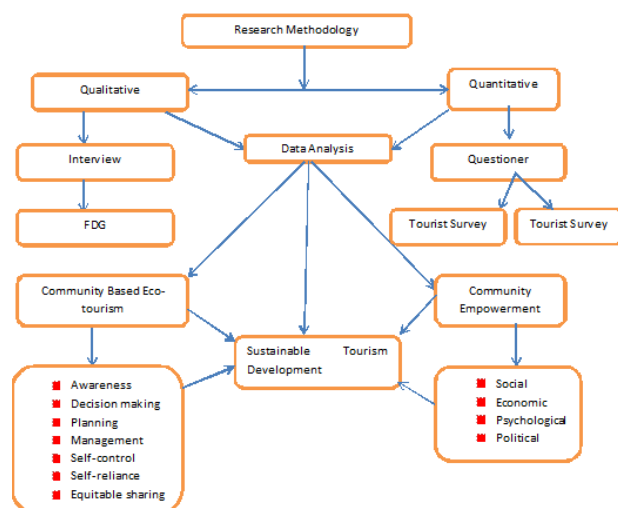
The subjects of the study are both male and female from the host community of the selected CBET sites. The total sample is 90 households using the following sample size determination formula adapted from Israel (1992).

The selected study sites have a total of 557 households; out of which 291, 80 and 186 households live in Ashenge, Menkere, and Mifsas Bahri respectively. By using the above formula, the sample size becomes 84.779 households. Accordingly the sample size made 90 HHs. The distributions of sample size across the CBET sites were proportionally selected based on their size of households. Accordingly 47, 13 and 30 sample households were taken from Ashenge, Menkere, and Mifsas Bahri CBET sites respectively. As far as sampling technique is concerned first, the study area and the study sites are selected with non-probability sampling technique purposively even though the sample households were identified using probability sampling technique.

Questionnaires consists of both open and closed ended questions, were used to obtain information from the selected samples of 90 households from three major CBET sites of *Ofra woreda*. Questionnaire consisting of both open and closed ended questions were prepared in English to generate data from 21 tourists who visited three CBET sites of the study area during the field research period. In addition to questionnaire, focus group discussion (FGD) is the most important data collection tool to generate the qualitative information. In general, The FGDs were conducted in the selected three study sites.

Meaning each CBET sites was one FGD. For these, a checklist of issues was prepared and the participants of FGDs was composed of Management Committees, community representatives, religious leaders, local tour guides, local service providers, guards and other stakeholders. The researcher had a role of facilitating the discussion and took note on important reflections on pre- arranged thematic issues on community role in tourism activities and community based eco-tourism empowerment. For the purpose of this study semi-structured face to face key informant interviews were conducted with five different groups which account for a total of ten key informants. They were taken as key informants based on their knowledge and responsibility in relation to community based ecotourism in the study area. For each interviewee group, independent checklists were prepared. Finally, to supplement the information using different instruments, on spot observation were by the researcher. On-spot observation was the other component of data collection process. It includes observation of the major tourism resources, infrastructure patterns, tourism activities, tourist services and facilities; natural resources particularly forest and lake management and its coverage in the study area, social interaction of tourists with host communities, manmade (cultural) attractions like churches and monasteries, archaeological sites and the conservation practices, and accommodation conditions of visitors. Thus, the researchers opinions on his visit of the study area were assets to the analysis of data gathered from other tools. In an effort to make this research more valid, credible and applicable secondary sources which are important to the study were review. For this purpose, both published and unpublished sources were investigated thoroughly especially books, web pages, policy directives, reports, project papers, magazines, newspapers, annual action plans and so on were critically reviewed. The secondary data (documents, reports, action plans, etc.) were collected from the study area (*Ofra woreda*) and Tigray Culture and Tourism offices as well as other concerned bodies.

Design of the Research



Data Analysis and Interpretation: The information gathered from different sources, were compiled to manage in the most appropriate way. During the completion of the data collection, the household information and visitors survey information were coded and entered into Statistical Package analysis. The results of analysis were interpreted and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, ratio, mean and standard deviation). Qualitative data obtained using FGDs, key informant interviews and observations were analyzed in word narrative way. Pictures, Tables and a simple bar charts were used for present the results of the study.

Result and Discussion

General Characteristics of Sampled Households

This section focuses on the analysis of the basic characteristics of the sample households. This include the principal demographic variables such as gender, age, level of education, marital status, family size and source of income and status of agriculture to support the livelihood of the 90 sample households collected from the three CBET sites selected from the study area. In order to identify variations the data are summarized from CBET sites.

Gender, Age and Educational Status of Sample Households: The survey result of this study for the characteristics of gender, age and educational background of heads of household is well presented below. The overall sample population is 90 (16.2 percent of total household in the sites) of which 75.6 % and 24.4 % respectively constitutes males and females. The distribution of households by the CBET sites accounts 52.22%, 14.44% and 33.33 % for Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri respectively.

With respect to age structure of sample households, the maximum and minimum age of the sample households are 85 and 21 years respectively. The majority of heads of households (32.2%) belong to the age category ranging between 41 to 50 years. The sample households between 15 to 30 years old and above 60 years old account for about 15.6% each. The rest of the sample population is 18.9% and 17.8% were those aged between 31 to 40 years and 51 to 61 years respectively. While, the mean age of the sample household heads is 46.69 years, the mean age of sample household heads of Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri CBET sites is 46.83, 44.81 and 51 years respectively. The data reveal that, on the average, the households are in

the adulthood age category, which could have positive implication in terms of labor resource for tourism sector.

An educated household in the tourism sites is able to understand technical and scientific concepts. Thereby actively participate in tourism development tasks, perform tourism activities up to the standard and manage tourism products properly. All these elements excel the performance of the community tourism destinations and result in a positive return of tourism.

According to survey result, in terms of educational background of the sample respondents, illiteracy rate is found to be higher. Almost 61.1% of the sample household heads are reported to be illiterate without having formal education. Likewise, 16.7 % of the sample population was reported that they can read and write. Most of these households have got limited access to basic education, which is claimed to be acquired through some informal and traditional religious education as well as adult literacy campaigns. On the other hand, about 16.7% and 2.2% of the sample households are found between grade 1-4 and 5-8 respectively. Similarly, about 1.1% of the sample population attended a high school and preparatory level (between 9 to 10 and 11 to 12 grades). Of the total sample size, only a very few (2.2%) of the respondents had acquired one year certificate from teachers training college.

An effort has been made to see the educational status of the sample household heads in the respective CBET sites. Accordingly, 63.8%, 69.2% and 53.3% of the sample households in Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri are illiterate respectively while 19.1%, 7.7% and 16.7% of sample households of Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri CBET sites can read and write but they dont have any formal education. On the merit of this survey, one could say that in the study area included in the sample, the household heads that have no education and low level of education dominate the entire population. Generally, as shown in the above table, 77.8% of household heads were not educated. This in turn, could have its own implication in relation to community based ecotourism development.

	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas bahri		Count	Percent
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Gender								
Male	33	70.2	8	61.5	27	90	68	75.6
Female	14	29.8	5	38.5	3	10	22	24.4
Total	47	100	13	100	30	100	100	100
Age								
15-30	6	12.8	2	15.4	6	20.0	14	15.6
31-40	7	14.9	3	23.1	7	23.3	17	18.9
41-50	19	40.4	3	23.1	7	23.3	29	32.2
51-60	11	23.4	2	15.4	3	10.0	16	17.8
Above 60	4	8.5	3	23.1	7	23.3	14	15.6
Total	47	100.0	13	100	30	100.0	90	100.0
Mean	46.83	-	49.54	-	45.23	-	46.69	-
Educational Status								
Illiterate	30	63.8	9	69.2	16	53.3	55	61.1
Reading and Writing	9	19.1	1	7.7	5	16.7	15	16.7
primary school	3	6.4	3	23.1	9	30.0	15	16.7
Junior and Secondary	2	4.3	-	-	-	-	2	2.2
High school and	1	2.1	-	-	-	-	1	1.1
Preparatory school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Above	2	4.3	-	-	-	-	2	2.2
Total	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0

Table 1: Gender, Age and Educational Status distribution of the Sample HHs. (Source: Field Survey).

Distribution of Marital Status and Family Size of Sample Households: The marital status of the households indicates that the large majority heads of households (86.7%) are married. In contrast, the percentage of sample households who have never been married was very low: 3.3%. From the survey result, it was also possible to learn about 5.6% of the sample households have been living in broken



families due to divorce while the rest 4.4% of sample households were widowed.

According to the interview with the cooks of the CTHEs and CTFEs, there is significant association between marital status of the females and community tourism where majority of the cooks of CTHEs are single and divorced. With respect to family size per household, as it is depicted in table 2 below about 54.4% of the sample households contain between 4 to 6 family members. The mean family size of the sample households was 5.57 persons. The mean household size of Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri CBET site households was 6.02, 5.15 and 5.03 persons with standard deviation of 2.12, 0.86 and 0.57 persons respectively.

The family size data reveal that the great majority of the households (83.3% of the total sample population) are found to have four or more household family members of families under households. This in turn implies that as the family size increases, the dependency ratio of the households will be high. As a result, since current benefit sharing strategy of CTHEs from tourism is on merit of the household heads membership, large family size results important differences among the households income negatively.

	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas Bahri			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Marital Status								
Married	41	87.2	10	76.9	27	90.0	78	86.7
Single	2	4.3	-	-	1	3.3	3	3.3
Divorced	2	4.3	2	15.4	1	3.3	5	5.6
Widowed	2	4.3	1	7.7	1	3.3	4	4.4
Total	47	100.0	13	100	30	100.0	90	100
Family Size								
1-3	4	8.5	4	30.8	7	23.3	15	16.7
4-6	25	53.2	4	30.8	20	66.7	49	54.4
7-10	18	38.3	5	38.5	3	10.0	26	28.9
Total	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0
Mean	6.02	-	5.15	-	5.03	-	5.57	-

Table 2: Marital Status and Family Size of Sample HHs. (Source: Field Survey, 2016).

Source of Income and Status of Agriculture to Support Livelihood of Sample HHs: CBET is taken as one tool of sustainable economic development. However, local economic diversity is important to the sustainability of community based ecotourism projects. A potential problem in the development of ecotourism for rural communities is creating economic dependence on the trendy, fluctuating industry of international tourism (McLaren, 1998, cited by Cusack and Dixon, 2006, p.162). The main livelihood of the study area is agriculture, with mixture of subsistence crops and livestock (OWGAC, 2015). According to the household survey, the major source of income for the sample households is agriculture, where about 95.5% of the respondents get income from agriculture. However, other sources of income like trade, and salary and wage account 15.5% and 13.3% respectively while sales of craft and other non-farm sources account 8.9% and 4.4% respectively.

Source of Income	Count	Percentage
Agriculture	86	95.6
Trade	14	15.6
Salary and Wage	12	13.3
Sales of Craft	8	8.9
Others	4	4.4

Table 3: Source of income of Sample HHs. (Source: Field Survey, 2016).

In an attempt to see the status of agricultural productivity and output to support the livelihood of the sample households as it has been indicated in table 4 below, sample HHs were asked about the status of agriculture to support their livelihood. From the survey result it is

possible to understand that most households in the study area do not possess adequate food production. The majority (61.1%) of the sample households (87.2% in Ashenge, 46.2% in Menkere and 50% in Mifsas) replied that agriculture is not sufficient to support their families livelihood while about 38.9% of the total sample households reported that agriculture is sufficient enough for their livelihood. Those respondents who indicated the insufficiency of agriculture were also further asked to mention the reason for insufficiency. The most frequently mentioned causes include low productivity of land, large family size, drought, pest infestation, livestock disease, lack of sufficient agricultural facilities etc.

Response	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas Bahri			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Is agricultural income adequate for your household?								
Adequate	14	87.2	6	46.2	15	50	35	38.9
Non adequate	33	4.3	7	53.8	15	50	55	61.1
Total	47	100	13	100	30	100	90	100

Table 4: Adequacy of agricultural income for the sample HHs. (Source: Field Survey, 2016).

Moreover, the officials of Ofra Woreda noted that even though due efforts have been made to increase agricultural production through agricultural inputs, extension packages and introduction of agricultural technology; the production increment has been rather limited showing a marginal increase. Thus, alternative livelihood strategies like CBET in this area are very crucial to solve the food insecurity. However, it needs to be highlighted that the effectiveness of managed ecotourism is influenced by the poverty level of the people who live close to the tourist sites.

Eco-Tourism Potentials of the Ofra woreda

According to the survey result, the different ecotourism potentials attractions of the Ofra woreda and its surrounding areas. During the household survey and field observation study area and its surrounding areas comprise impressive attractions of natural and cultural settings that are the prominent sources of ecotourism potentials development. The natural resources of the area are Forests, Hashenge Lake, Birds, Mammals, Weather condition, Hot springs at the valley of the forest, Holla waterfall and Mountain/landscape scenery (Hugumburda in menkere and Mifsas Bahri tabias, Tsibet highest mountains in Tigray region, Ambalagie and Alamata mountains are important for mountain trekking/climbing) while the cultural attractions are dressing styles (such as bufie), Tigile (in Amharic), cultural dances, local handicrafts, folklore/indigenous knowledge Mifsas Bahri archaeological site and religious sites (mosques and churches such as Mehaber Bekurie and St.maryy Adota are important religious sites for tourism development). This shows that, Ofra woreda and its environs have prominent ecotourism potentials that will be important for future ecotourism development. According to (Keivan *et al.* 2006), today, many countries are encouraged to allocate a sizeable amount of investment to the tourism and ecotourism sector since tourism industry generates high income and conserve the environment sustainably.

In general, as it could be observed from finding, the main natural ecotourism potential attractions are the lake, forests, mountains, birds and as well as the wild mammals, which can attract tourists and may contribute to the conservation of natural resources and improves the livelihoods of the local community if they are developed. Holden (2003) also acknowledged that the ecotourism resource in protected areas could generate more revenues, which could benefit the local people and contribute to conservation of protected areas.



Challenges of CBET Development

The Oflla Woreda and its surrounding areas have tremendous potential for community based ecotourism empowerment that can provide the much needed employment and economic growth in the area. Due to different factors and challenges the ecotourism activities were not carried. The communities forwarded different point of view on how ecotourism may not developed in the study area and its surrounding areas. The data or information which was gathered from the survey (questioner) and focus group discussion is almost similar. Therefore, According to the respondents, the remarkable problems that hinder the ecotourism development can be generalized in different factors and challenges. For details each factor is given below; In this part of data analysis two fold of challenges: challenges faced on development of CBET and after CBET are presented by triangulating both quantitative and qualitative data.

Knowledge and Interest of Community toward CBET: Knowledge and interest can affect the degree of community participation and ownership in tourism development. Given that community participation ownership is a crucial element of CBET, low level of knowledge and lack of community interest in CBET development will affect the overall sustainability. Some researchers proved that lack of tourism knowledge is critical barrier that limits the ability of locals to participate in tourism development which contributes to a lack of local tourism leadership and domination of external agents. Limited awareness of CBET can contribute to false expectations about the benefits of tourism lack of preparedness for the changes associated with tourism.

Lack of knowledge of meaning and values of CBET is a significant factor that could affect the participation of communities and efficiency of the tourism sector. Accordingly as it is depicted on table 8 below, to know the extent of understanding that the communities have about CBET; sampled households were asked whether they know what CBET does mean. Majority (96.7%) of the sample households were not familiar with the term CBET while the remaining (3.3%) of the sample households knows the term CBET. Maichew tourism and culture office coordinator and other focus group discussants express that lack o of the CBET project is the main reason for the local communities were not aware about tourism. But, currently some CBET activities on the way to conduct by the different organizations like Tigray culture and Tourism, Mekelle University to the community come to know about tourism and community based ecotourism.

An effort is also made to assess the knowledge of focus group discussants and CTHES staff. In the FGDs some members of the community are not proudly speak that they know what CBET means. But some local people defined CBET in their own understanding. Generally, focus group discussants not similar feelings about CBET being, *"a kind of tourism runs by communities with sound participation of the community to achieve the economic needs of the area."* In this definition the role of CBET in environmental and cultural protection and conservation is forgotten. Informal discussions with local community also reflect the same thing: focused on economic advantages only. This could create extra challenge on the task of ensuring environmental and socio-cultural sustainability.

Response	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas Bahri			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Awareness of community about CBET								
Aware	2	4.3	1	7.7	30	-	3	96.7
Not aware	45	95.7	12	92.3	-	100.0	87	3.3
Total	47	100	13	100	30	100	90	100

Table 5: Distribution of HHs by their Knowledge of CBET. (Source: Own Field Survey, 2016)

Corresponding to this, the sample households were asked to illustrate the source of their knowledge about CBET. Sampled respondents describe that there is no awareness creation activities and projects as well as trainings made by the concerned bodies. To better understand how the community feels and understands community based ecotourism, sample households were also asked whether they know that any community based ecotourism activities are not going on their kebeles. The survey result depicted above in table 8 reveals that the entire sample households (100%) were knew that their kebeles are not practicing CBET.

In line with this, MCs who are in charge of tourism management and participated in the interview explain the current knowledge basis from perspective of benefit that they are not sufficiently start. They stated, all seasons of misunderstanding about tourism and resistances are still not over by the community. In addition they said that, after many consultations and training it is an opportunity to create awareness about CBET.

In a nutshell, the overall results of this study identify knowledge as a critical barrier of CBET in two reasons. Firstly, lack of knowledge about the value of CBET makes things too complicated i.e. resistance were the response of local community. Secondly, lack of knowledge among the community about technical tourism works like bookkeeping, marketing and booking, food preparation, foreign language, etc. are the critical knowledge related barriers that CBET have been facing in the study area. Of course, these issues are challenging even among the literate communities. Here, it is better to underline that lack of educated persons do not only limit the benefit of single households, but also the benefits of the whole community. Thus, effective capacity building and human resource development plan should be mandatory.

Attitude and Feeling of Community towards CBET: The attitude and feelings of communities toward community based ecotourism activities is a fundamental challenge that many of the projects had faced. The knowledge of community has direct effect over attitude. The attitude of community toward CBET should be compared to the interest and thinking of the community in other development projects and economies like agriculture. It is likely that community members are much more interested in projects that they can relate to than to a community based eco-tourism empowerment project or means of livelihood (in this case agriculture to CBET), which is for most community members something that they are not familiar with. This could be much more complicated in projects where the initiative comes from external parties like NGOs.

If the community is not interested in CBT development, the development of CBT will fail, given that community participation is a crucial element of CBT. Therefore it is important to investigate the community interest in CBT development first and foremost. Thus, sample households were asked the question, do you think that you will fulfill your livelihood without farming? As it is depicted in table 9 below and 54.4% of sample households have negative feelings about the new means of household while 45.6% of sample households express their interest for other livelihood options.

Response	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas Bahri			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Do you think you can survive without farming?								
Yes	23	48.9	1	7.7	17	56.7	41	45.6
No	24	51.1	12	92.3	13	43.3	49	54.4
Total	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0

Table 6: Attitude towards other means of livelihood. (Source: Own Field Survey, 2016)



According to this, sampled households were asked to express their feelings when the project will be implemented in their kebeles. The summary of households responses reflects that most of the sample households not interested about the new alternative livelihood option (CBET). According to the result of FGDs initially, the innermost looking toward the CBET was associated with the intention to transferring local residents from their owned agricultural land to other place.

Oflla woreda tourism experts, reflecting their personal experience, noted that *since community-based ecotourism is a new concept for villagers, it has been difficult to convince villagers to adapt to the innovative approaches and procedures about CBET*. This has been very much complicated in the first CBET site, Ashenge. The people don't recognize the opportunities that tourism could offer them. Awareness creation campaigns involving information about CBET and its relationship with economic value and nature conservation were not held in each kebele by the stakeholders. Thus, a strategy to get the consent of some communities still not developed. At this level those who get not convinced with the idea of CBET do the same for the whole community. Eventually, without any consultation, training and explanation made by several community members, the community never agreed about the CBET development.

Lack of coordination: The tourism industry is multi disciplines (multi-sectors) which incorporate a range of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, Religious leaders, and tourists. The importance of community based ecotourism/ nature-based tourism is not lost on national governments. They are fully aware to all institutions that it can bring numerous socio-economic benefits to a country or locality, by generating foreign exchange, creating local employment and raising environmental awareness. As information obtained from the regional tourism office, tourism is not at all a task of to be left for a single institution. Therefore, tourism activity undertaking through the coordination of different institutions to perform inter related activity. As the information obtained from the group discussion, many participants agreed that there is no coordination between the different sectors to develop ecotourism in the locality. While some participants disagreed about this issues and the few participants does not expressed about the cooperation of the different sectors.

Lack of political will and capacity related problem of Government offices: The attention given to the sector by government is another critical challenge for the development of CBET. While CBET is an important means of livelihood diversification in developing countries like Ethiopia, the emphasis given to tourism sector in general and CBET specifically is little. The institutional structure in culture and tourism offices does not consider CBET. An important indicator for this is the absence of any post to give guidance at federal, regional and woreda level culture and tourism offices. Lack of possible guiding principles and support on development of CBET product is identified as a barrier too.

Similarly, the number of staff and their qualification is a big challenge for CBET development work of the study area. At woreda level, culture and tourism offices have only three staff where the manager is possibly working on the political issues while the rest two employees are responsible for a collection of works found in the office. Until, the time of this survey no experts of Tigray Region Culture and Tourism Bureau and Ministry of Culture and Tourism provide technical support for the CTEs. Besides, limitation of capacity on the woreda level government offices is mentioned as a challenge by informants. Culture and tourism related institutions should give due attention to CBET as it is very decisive to achieve sustainable development. In this regard, the regional and federal governments are expected to prepare a guide to

CBET development and a specialized marketing strategy which includes CBET as a core product in the country.

Lack of Marketing and promotional activities: The marketing and promotion activities done to promote the study area to the potential customers are worth important as it is mentioned in the product development part. The researcher identifies two options of marketing tourism product of the study area: either the CTEs themselves or outsourcing the marketing. However, capacity limitation of the community to perform the marketing task is a critical challenge. In addition, limitation in terms of lack of legal registration is limiting the CTEs action to outsource the marketing task to somebody else through memorandum of understanding agreement or contract. To these effects, now a day the marketing and booking become an emerging challenge to the study area tourism activity. This is further complicated with weak government intervention and attention.

As the information obtained from the regional tourism office experts, most of the countries tourism resources were almost unknown internationally and even by the residents themselves, even those who have information about the countrys tourism resource, the bad image that the country has retarded them not to come. At the present time the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is responsible for developing and promoting the tourism products of Ethiopia both inside the country and internationally. However, the promotion still untouched on the natural attractions of the Tigray region specifically in Oflla woreda. Therefore, the lacks of promotional and marketing efforts have an influence in the tourism development. In addition, during focus group discussion most of the participants agreed that lack of promotional works to the natural resources of the study area can hinder the community based ecotourism development of the area.

On the other hand, CTGE have an interest to shoulder the marketing and booking tasks carried out by the CTTSU. Now they are doing the marketing and booking tasks by employing one booking and marketing officer at Mekele and took 20% of the payment as their income for the marketing and booking they carried out. However, they perform informally without agreement with CTTSU.

To conclude, lack of agreement and cooperation against these challenges becomes a critical barrier of marketing and promotion. Hence, for the time being the regional culture and tourism and respective government offices should take the leading role to discuss with relevant stakeholders on how and who should managing the marketing and booking functions effectively so that income of communities from the tourism business will not be in danger. This may involve critical assessment of various options available, for instance, building the existing internal capacity, empowering and legalizing the private enterprises, forging partnership with private tour operators, and the like. In this instance, respective government bodies should exercise their role to settle this kind of issues.

Security Related Concerns: Criminal activity is probably the greatest threat to the tourism industry. Occurrence of acts of terrorism, theft and other crises influence tourists flow to destinations. Tourists will avoid destinations perceived as unsafe. In Oflla woreda, significant violent criminal activity directed against foreign tourists is rare. In principle when the community is interested in tourism business, ensuring security need of tourists becomes easy. The role of community in crime protection is more than everything as nothing is out of the sight of the community. To guarantee security of visitors while they are in visiting the forests and swimming in lake the luggage porters are taken instruction to supervise the action of community. The result of FGDs shows that initially in relation to the negative feeling of the community towards tourism; there were some security related issues directed to visitors like throwing of stones. The survey result depicted below in table 10 reveal that majority of the sampled households (70%) report the absence of security problem while the remaining sampled



households (30%) alert that there is security problem over the tourists. In the case of Ashenge CTE the question of tourist security is a big concern where more than 53% percent of the sampled households were identified the problem of security over the site.

Response	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Mifsas Bahri		Menkere		Ashenge			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Have you noticed any security problem for the visitors?								
Noticed	8	17.0	3	23.1	16	53.3	27	30.0
Not Noticed	39	83.0	10	76.9	14	46.7	63	70.0
Total	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0

Table 7: Prevalence of security problem in CBET sites. (Source: Own Field Survey, 2016.

Three major security related challenges are registered in the Ashenge. The MCs identify bag snatchings and theft of Photo camera and a few night-time robberies like theft of door and other materials on the grinding mill compound. The issue of weak law enforcement and justice system is mentioned by the majority of interviewees and all FGD participants held in Ashenge. The MCs of Ashenge reflects their suffering on the justice system while they faced big illegal matters like the aforementioned one. The justice organ there and police organs are less successful to provide justice and take appropriate measure against those who initiate and involve in illegal activities. Such circumstances are reported eroding confidence of MCs in the ability of the justice organ as a whole to bring justice. As a result, most of them preferred to take their case to the local elders (*Shimageles*) than the Justice system.

Capacity Problem of the MCs: Most of the challenges of community based ecotourism emanates from problems of capacity building. The community has not yet taken the full control over tourism in the study area. Unless, the community becomes empowered to do decisions on the business aspect the sustainability of the sector is under quotation. In community based ecotourism enterprises where the product is based entirely on local community, the standard and sustainability will depend on existing and potential local capacity especially to the MCs and staff. The extent of human empowerment achieved through capacity building is challenge of CBET success.

However, the communities are not empowered enough to take the full decision making power from concerned bodies. Head of Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau put forward that *there is no sufficient capacity building program in the study area, this is a big challenge for the empowerment and achievement of community based eco-tourism*. The probable challenge is creating the CTHEs more empowered and enables them to do the memorandum of understanding agreement signed by the CTHEs with the private sectors and other organs too. Currently many of decisions on the CBET are made by Woreda tourism office. For example fishing activities and pricing of the tour is a good example. As far as, it is community based ecotourism the local community in the form of its CTHEs should be the decision makers instead of government. In fact, support and moderate participation of them is critical. Obviously, with current human resource capacity of the CTHEs, administration of booking and marketing activities by communities would be impossible. In addition, setting the price of tours and the fishing activities is not done without analyzing the propensity to pay and other destination prices. Thus, since the community has no skill on this consultation is critical at this point. When the price of tours and fishing is set for the third time by government, the communities have no says over it. Lack of language skill is another capacity related problem seen in the study area.

In general, capacity related challenges are reasons to the overall attribute of the CBET businesses. To ensure the success and sustainability of the project, training need assessment has to be made for the community. Then technical inputs should be provided to MC of

community members, governments and service providers. Inputs may include training on environmental issues, facilitation skills, problem solving, report writing, micro-project/business design, project implementation and management, implementation of relevant laws, and tourism service techniques and management.

The last of these includes teaching CBET concepts, bookkeeping, accounting, financial management, tour guiding, first aid, hygiene and sanitation, Basic English conversation, computer skills, etc.

Ensuring Quality and Standard of CBET Products: A key part of the businesses future sustainability lies with the ability of CTHEs and CTGE to maintain quality in medium and long term. Quality does not necessarily mean luxury, but attention to detail and understanding customer needs. There are certain areas that cannot be compromised like, cleanliness and hygiene and sufficient infrastructures being at the top of the list. Equally food should be enjoyable to eat, beds should be comfortable and clean, and toilets need to be clean. Careful monitoring of these elements will be the core part of any quality control system. The quality of the product needs to be not just maintained but improved. Limitation in capacity makes the service standards poor gradually thereby dissatisfaction will be the feature of the product. Quality and standard involves the character of staff of CBET business, communities hospitality and food, transport, accommodation and other related service quality and standard.

As the information obtained from the tourist survey that lack of infrastructure development is the main problem for the development of eco- tourism. Generally infrastructure may include road, hotels, air ports, water supply system, electric power, communication system, Banking services and waste disposal facilities. The respondents said that before they built up of the road from Addis to Mekelle via Mehone, tourists were cross through the Ofra woreda. As a result, tourists were observed ecotourism attraction of the area such as lakes and birds but now since the main road were shift through Mehone tourists were not visited the site. In addition as the information obtained from focus group discussion and field observation there is no accessible road for observing different ecotourism attractions in study area like the lake, the forest reserve.

The tourist survey result done to show what tourists feel about the overall experience on the CBET site reflects that 71.4% and 28.6% of the respondents rate their experience not excellent and average respectively. Even though, this survey reveals negative looking of the guests since development come in the world and some other competitive tourism products are open small improvements need to be made on the top of maintaining the quality that was experienced by customers at the start. Therefore, during field observation some quality related challenges which seems simple but detrimental to the image of the area are found. On Ashenge, Menkere and Mifsas Bahri CBET sites the accommodation and infrastructural services are not functioning and there is a need to make the services. Similarly, in both Ashenge and Menkere CBET sites, the Accommodation services are not available.

In the discussion organized by Ofra woreda culture and tourism office held in the Korem town participants mentioned declining of the cleanliness of the products supplied in the private service providers. Some participants demonstrate the lazy washing and absence of accommodation service. In addition, the tourism office representative mentioned dropping off quality of the toilets as no one is maintaining them properly and the restraints service have no well-organized and qualified. Therefore, the tourists are complaining over it.

The other important area of CBET product qualities is the type and character of transportation related with tour service. Transport carrying unit used to reach the starting place of Hugumbrida forest and Ashenge Lake is not organized by, local tour guides and/or the communities; but the surrounding town (Mekele and Alamata) tour and travel agents have made arrangements on behalf of their guests with some local



vehicle operators. Donkeys are used for transporting customers luggage. Horses are also used for transport purpose. The quality and cleanliness of horses and donkeys should be kept in proper provision. For this currently no suggestion and comment is collected from the visitors by the CTEs and other bodies. Customer handling is also another critical element of quality. Tourists were asked to rate the customer handling scale. Accordingly 71.4%, 19%, 4.8% of sample tourists rate the customer handling of the nearby town tour and travel agents and service provider staffs are excellent, above average and below average respectively while 4.8% of sample tourists have no response.

Equally important, the service standard is dependent on the character of the staff participating in service delivery. Staff of every tourism business organization should give due attention to cleanliness and personal hygiene. They should demonstrate the following grooming character; well-shaven or well-trimmed facial hair, clean and well-presented hair, neat and tidy clothing, frequent washing, appropriate use of deodorants or perfumes, fresh breath and either neutral or pleasant body odors, clean and trimmed fingernails. The first of staff are community tourism guides where guests come into contact. Quality of guides is perhaps the single most important piece of infrastructure for the tourists. The extent of knowledge and professionalism that guides have matters the perceived performance of tourism too. To this end, tourists were asked to rate the guiding service performance. Accordingly majority of the tourists (67.7) rate the local guiding service as not excellent while 23.8% and 9.5% percent of the sample tourists rate it as below average and average respectively. Training in guiding technique and knowledge is vital. In line with this, CTGE members were asked to explain the type of training they took to be a tour guide. , the manager of CTGE, explained that by the time of CTGE establishment criterias to select community tourism guide are not based on the experience and academic back ground. Moreover, trainings were not planned to be given for CTGE by government and other stakeholders.

Underlining the strong language skill of guides he stress on the need for further training on culture and natural resources specific to the area. Similarly, the tourists comment on improving of guides knowledge on the interpretation. Pertaining to guiding facilities lack of tourist map showing route of the tourism sites are identified as problem in the area.

Access to Micro Finance and Credit Facilities: The extent to which the community members can meaningfully participate in CBT not only depends on their interest, degree of ownership and available knowledge and skills, but also on the available financial resources. In many cases community members will lack financial resources. The survey result reveals that lack of capital is one of the bottle necks limiting the participation of local communities in small and micro scale tourism businesses next to limitation in knowledge or capacity. Capital is the basis of job creation or other businesses which support local livelihoods. Credit offering is part of popular intervention of the poverty alleviation strategies and a mechanism to improve local economic growth in rural communities because cash income can be low and irregular and there is often a lack of reliable financial support services. Different types of occupations can be practiced by taking credit from financial institutions like vegetable farming, chicken raising, production and furniture businesses, etc. which are directly in touch with CBET value chain within the local economy.

In Oflla woreda there is only one type of formal credit offerings. During focus group discussion provision of credit service for the members of CBET is not much practiced in each kebeles. The major formal sources of credits in the area have been the Dedit micro finance while the informal credit institutions in the study area include money lenders, friends and relatives. The sample households were asked whether credit and saving institutions are available or not. Out of the total sample households more than 55% were proved the absence of adequate credit facilities which enable them to run tourism related

businesses while the sample households which account a total of 44.4% reflect the presence of the credit and finance service. Moreover, FGDs result shows that taking loan to invest in tourism business is not practiced till now. Lack of knowledge and skill on tourism ventures is identified as a cause for this. However, in the provision of credit there needs to be a clear understanding of the poor and vulnerable sectors (including women, widows, and female-headed households) in the community, and to consider them when setting up criteria for loan recipients. There needs to be acknowledgement of these sectors of society in order to help identify strategies that will not exclude them because in most cases the beneficiaries from credit service are wealthy families.

In line to this, one member of the MC Dedit micro finance office in oflla woreda described that credits did not always provide advantages. Instead, it resulted in disadvantages if it was used in the wrong way and if people had taken much more than they could pay back. This can be associated with mismanagement of the loans as most households used it to invest it into their immediate cash need. The misuse of loans by the community is associated with factors like lack of knowledge, poverty, lack of hard work and illness. It is suggested that credit provisions are not a standalone strategy but they should be included and contribute to a more comprehensive community development support plan within CBET. In a nutshell, the concurrent challenges arise after the coming of community tourism loans are the failure of community to pay back the credit due to their use for immediate cash need instead of business.

Legal and Policy Frameworks: Policy and legal environments that support community participation and development are basic requirements of any community based development initiatives. Legal and policy issues that have direct effect on CBET development include tourism policy, land policy, cooperative policy, forestry proclamation, environmental policy, etc. The acts such as Wildlife protection act, environmental protection act, etc., are very supportive, especially in ensuring ecological sustainability. Despite Ethiopian tourism policy endorsed in 2010 description of roles and responsibilities of those taking part in implementing policy; mechanisms to work together are not arranged. As a result, discrepancies among policies are challenged CBET development in the study area. This has been seen as a challenge in cases of cooperative law and land use proclamation.

The critical challenge of cooperative law is determining the scope of the cooperatives mandates. In tourism sector the most important economic impact is the multiplier effect and asset creation and reinvestment. Diversification of livelihood and income options is critical. On the basis of this some of CTHes set grain bank, credit service, grinding mills, etc. However, experts in cooperative office describe that tourism cooperatives should focus only on tourism business i.e. hosting tourists only. The argument was that it is only certain types of cooperatives that can provide some of the suggested services. For instance, some argued that it is only credit cooperatives which could provide credit for their members (in cash or in kind). CTHes should not therefore be allowed to provide these services. However, this argument doesnt seem reasonable because the cooperatives proclamation itself stipulates that cooperatives could be established with multi-mandates, (i.e. as a service and producers cooperative). To conclude, the aforementioned two cooperative policy related challenges are associated with inappropriate interpretation of legal meanings by the experts of cooperative.

The other policy environment which was a challenge for community based ecotourism is the Land Administration and Use Proclamation No. 46/1992E.C. All rural land will be registered and a book of land holding is given to owners. On the other hand, lack of CBET specific guidelines and certification programs at national and regional level is challenging when the development works are going on in the case of Oflla. It is quite inadequate to promote community based ecotourism in



the country as far as guidelines on how to develop eco-tourism services, CBET sites, etc. is not prepared.

Opportunities of CBET

Hospitality of the host community: The community in general and service providing staff in particular has an incredible impact over the satisfaction level of the customers. Hospitality can be considered as a part of a product that tourists will experience while they are looking for rural life, farming technique and meeting people. According to in table 11 below sample households were asked to express whether they appreciate the coming of tourists. To this, all (100%) of the respondents answered that they like foreign visitors visiting their villages. They were also asked how they feel when they meet foreign visitors (happy, disturbed, embarrassed or indifferent). All (100%) of the respondents reported that they felt happy.

Response	Name of CBET sites						Total	
	Ashenge		Menkere		Mifsas Bahri			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Do you appreciate the coming of visitors to your locality?								
Appreciate	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0
Not appreciate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	47	100.0	13	100.0	30	100.0	90	100.0
What do you feel when you meet foreign visitors?								
Happy	47		13		30		90	100

Table 8: Distribution of sample HHs by their feeling towards visitors. (Source: Own Field Survey, 2016).

The tourists recommendations for the attitude of host communities as friendly people, open, honest and welcoming. In the tourist survey, tourists were asked to rate the hospitality characteristics of host communities. Accordingly 71.4%, 19.0%, 4.8%, and 4.8% the respondents rate as excellent, above average, no response and average respectively.

Abundance of Potential Tourism Resources: *Ofla woreda* have a huge natural and cultural tourism resource potential such as, the attractive landscapes, the availability of Lake Ashenge, Hugumbrida dense forest and its scenic landscape, cultural and religious site a good opportunity for developing CBET in the area. According to tourists description the purpose for visiting *Ofla Woreda* is to witness the perfect natural environment and the beauty of the landscape especially along the lake Ashenge and Hugumbrida forest. The products are purely natural and cultural where a balanced way of interaction with the local community is happened. The big view that involves sun set, sun rise towards the lake and landscapes, farmers on work, etc. It is exceptional which advance the products attribute in one step up.

Nature of the Business: The overall result of visitors perception toward the tourism products is very good. Most of visitors describe that instead of paying money for one pocket, paying to the group of community is the important aspect of community tourism. In this regard, it is the only typical purely community based tourism development in the country functioning with local participation. On the other hand, the tourism resources as a product accompanied by local traditional means of transport like pack animals and the candle used for the overnight energy make the challenge for transport and electricity related infrastructure very simple while giving cultural element to the tour. On the other hand, most tourists do not expect luxuries service in the community tourism sites i.e. moderate local services given emphasis. Thus, this is an advantage to the study area in relation to the existing capacity of MCs and local community.

Location: Location is pivotal to the sustainability of CBET ventures as it needs to be accessible to the tourists, preferably in the vicinity to destinations which appeal to the same niche market. Preferable

locations are relatively close to existing highways or airstrips and have an existing road network on the property. In this regard, the proximity of the tourism sites to the honey pots including Mekele, Gheralta and Axum is a potential strategic opportunity for the access to the market. For instance the study area where the travelling starts with takes 3 hours drive from Mekele, Alula Abanega airport.

Marketing efforts: Despite the current emerging challenges on the marketing and booking, the marketing practices performed to attract the potential customers are very successful. Strong positioning of the product has been made since its operation. Especially the media coverage through international magazines like responsible travel is the best experiences.

Support of Donor Agencies: In the areas like *Ofla* where the communities have no financial means to invest in CBET some form of financial assistance is decisive. The support made by different donor agencies is vital for the success of the CTEs establishment and CBET progress. The support from NGOs and the supporting donors to local tourism offices are the source of finance and other resources. In addition, the interest and habit of tourists to support both financially and materially is a good opportunity to strengthen the economic basis of community tourism. Examples of this are a support for Mifsas Bahri CTE development to open an archaeological museum and primary school by German heilbeig University collaborate with Mekelle university. Most key informants state that donors are fascinated about CBET project and they do support if all the appropriate formalities are carried out. However, the negative role of continuous support should not be forgotten.

Policy Calls: Even though, the practices let behind the policy calls which support the principle of CBET are opportunities to sustainable development of CBET in the area. The newly endorsed Ethiopian Tourism Policy paper, Wildlife Development and Conservation policy and GTPII of tourism reflect most principles of CBET development. The tourism policy put communities participation in tourism employment and decision making. Wildlife conservation policy describes the approaches and scales of development and community participation by taking into account ecotourism as one means of conservation. The act such as wildlife protection act, environmental protection act, etc. are very supportive, especially in ensuring ecological sustainability.

Analysis the issues of Community Empowerment towards Tourism Matters

This section analyzed the method and extent of community empowerment on tourism issues in *Ofla woreda*. As indicated in the finding, local communities showed high interest levels of empowerment in identifying problems, management, decision-making, problem solving, equitable benefit sharing and tourism operation while medium interest levels of empowerment in setting objectives and implementation but low interest levels of CE in monitoring and evaluation in study area.

Hence, greater part of the respondents, 72.2% had Very high interest levels of problem solving empowerment on the above tourism involvement issues. Based on these results, economical, social, political and psychological empowerments of community were not that much practiced despite they showed high interest to participate on towards them. It would have been strong support of sustainable tourism development in terms of socio-cultural, economical and environmental dimensions within and around *Ofla woreda* if there had been sufficient community empowerment.

Local people, tourism officials, tourists and tourism businesses conveyed that CE practice is very limited even if it is the best alternative to ensure STD of *Ofla woreda*. To some extent, community involvement still vestiges in participation and not empowerment

particularly in problem identification, setting objective, management, decision-making, evaluation, benefit sharing and other tourism matter. Although most locals are not educated, some had completed primary and secondary high school, they are strongly looking for special training and education pertaining to these matters to cope up with the contemporary world, as tourism is dynamics and easily influenced by information ages/globalization. Noticeably, they agreed that empowerment in these areas required special knowledge, attitude and skills to be empowered.

Empowerment Issues	Very high		High		Medium		Low		Very Low		Scale
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Identifying problems	10	11.1	38	42.2	32	35.6	9	10	1	1.1	High
Management	34	37.8	22	24.4	18	20	11	12.2	5	5.5	High
Setting objectives	7	7.8	28	31.1	39	43.3	13	14.5	3	3.3	Medium
Decision-making	6	6.7	55	61.1	26	28.9	3	3.3	0	0	High
Problem-solving	65	72.2	18	20	7	7.8	0	0	0	0	Very High
Implementation	9	10	19	21.1	34	37.8	22	24.4	6	6.7	Medium
Monitoring & Evaluation	1	1.1	7	7.8	44	48.9	27	30	11	12.2	Low
Equity benefit sharing	39	43.3	33	36.7	12	13.3	6	6.7	0	0	High
Tourism operation	22	24.5	58	64.4	10	11.1	0	0	0	0	High

Table 9: Issues of community empowerment in Ofra woreda. (Source: Own Field Survey, 2016).

Currently, the practices of political, economical, social and psychological empowerments are not at their best levels due to the influences of administration systems, lack of good management of the local tourism offices, the levels of education and few individuals domination to reap the benefits of tourism without considering STD. Specifically, economical empowerment of local community is at its infant stage due to that the process of achieving economic empowerment needs long period but political empowerment is highly correlated with the contemporary governments and practicing well.

Whatever the level of community empowerment, it is very important instrument to ensure economical, socio-cultural and environmental sustainable development. Because it gives power for the community who are capable of solving challenges encountered them and rethinking for the coming generations. Again, sufficient community empowerment enables to diversify tourism activities that avoid over concentrations on single forms of tourism and it is not advisable for locals to become vulnerable for foreign influence like begging, cultural degradation, dependency, imitation and change dressing codes.

Therefore, community empowerment said to be achieved, when the parameters or economical, social, political and psychological empowerments sufficiently practiced by community. Because community is a local or domain characterized by membership, common symbol systems, shared values and norms, mutual influence, shared needs and commitment to meeting them and shared emotional connections. Then, it has become apparent that community empowerment is very effective in terms of economical, psychological, social and political empowerment, as some household representatives informed their participation levels increased gradually even if it is far below expected in each dimension.

Generally, it was clear that community empowerment is very important in terms of economical, psychological, social and political aspects that increase self-reliance, self-employment, self-control, local economic development and sustainable tourism development in Ofra woreda. Presently, it does not bring significant impacts within the community due to it is not sufficiently practiced as expected.

However, some of the local communities were skeptical or reluctant about empowerment on tourism issues, particularly, those who have their own means of income generating activities like government

employees, fishery, trading, agriculture, sporadically practice poultry and sheep. Of course, the agrarian community livelihood alternatives are diminishing from time to time because of cease in agricultural productivity, proscribed cattle rearing and plow farming, external based tourism businessmen dominance and limited local community empowerment. To be more clear with the extent of community empowerment in terms of its dimensions (economical, social, political and psychological empowerment), the following separate intensive discussions conducted with the owners of the issue.

Economical Empowerment: As explained in the study area background, the economic status of Ofra community is hard to mouth or subsistence farming due to diminished livelihood alternatives over time. Presently, better income generating occupations are fishing, livestock, handcraft businesses, cereal crop production and other merchandizes. According to the respondents viewpoints, the lion share of tourism benefit goes to few individuals pockets despite the communal or universal values of tourism resources in Ofra woreda. Tour guides and tour operators (from nearby towns such as Mekele and Alamata), boat service providers, churches and government bodies are predominantly fetched the benefits of tourism while most locals suffered from the negative impacts of tourism.

The main reason for the current lack of local economic development could be that low economic empowerment of the community in addition to capacity limitations. There is very little sharing of household duties or chores among male and female family members, so that females takes nearly all unpaid house duties and responsibilities. Females spent most of their time on household chores and some outside labor works too like selling pottery products, artisan production, collecting firewood and providing service provisions on tea and coffee rooms. Few tour guides, clergymen, external travel agents and tour operators dominated most tourism activities in the study area, so young local communities are enforced to look jobs in Mekele and other parts of Ethiopia due to poverty expansion.

Besides, souvenir shop owners commented that local community empowerment is very decisive but it could not be effective without government intervention. For example, they had the chance to manage their souvenir shops by organizing from the community members but eventually they were not be profitable because each of them were running for their own benefits by sidelining communal goals.

Now, Tigray regional state tourism and culture office is organizing them and oversee their operation by providing training programs and shopping rooms when it needs to do so. Over all, economic empowerment of Ofra agrarian community is not sufficient due to promotional and marketing strategies, capacity limitation, limited knowledge, expansion of poverty and the process of economical empowerment need long period of time.

Social Empowerment: In tourism planning, empowerment is reviewed as a process of social development to encourage and facilitate community responsive tourism. A key element embedded in empowerment is the decision making model in which the decisions made not by participating communities so the decision-making process consumes both cost and time which may lead to a lack of interest from the local community. It is all about social cohesion and organization brought through the development of social empowerment like the formation of local agricultural associations, local tour guide associations and networking among these associations. Social cohesion of Ofra agrarian community is very strong because of nearly all society is Orthodox Christian followers and speaks one common language (i.e. Amharic).

Despite already having a strong network of social organizations, social empowerment verified that their organization skills had further improved through participation in tourism issues. Social empowerment has become increasing among the community due to the opportunity



given to form association by the current government for different purposes. For example, the formation and organization of one to five community organization in the three study areas. These has enhanced community cohesion and have become more concerned with making a good impression to outsiders in cooperation and collaboration with the government and creates an opportunity for the Oflla woreda tourism and culture office for developing social empowerment related with tourism.

Thus, Oflla woreda has become a nice place to visit with friendly people and developing a positive reputation despite strained diplomacy of previous regimes. The extent of social empowerment is growing due to good governance and improved awareness level of society.

Psychological Empowerment: Psychological empowerment strengthens the optimistic about Oflla woreda future, faith in abilities of locals, pride in its indigenous culture and local traditions. Community empowerment is a very effective way to generate pride among locals that their socio-cultural values are superb. Of course, there is no superiority and inferiority among cultures as far as they enabled to express once way of life and conveyed the intended message.

There is high mobilization of the community to conserve the cultural resources of Oflla woreda, particularly, spiritual and material artifacts of church and cultural activities by religious and general local community members. The celebration of holidays are very powerful and a source of pride for many people in the study area.

However, they are concerning about unlimited non-religious human interventions on the unique characteristics and norms of study area churches and cultural ceremonies, which may create impairment on psychological empowerment levels of the community. Therefore, the psychological empowerment of Ashenge, Menkere, and Mifsas Bahri kebeles agrarian community settlement is high except over dependent on religious and traditional legendary rules that psychologically impaired them, especially when diminishing livelihood options have become a concern. In short, the psychological empowerment of the study area agrarian community is good enough except extreme religious and cultural influences on their day-to-day lives.

Political Empowerment: As mentioned in economical empowerment part above, males have less house chores than females, which imply that men were highly involved in politics and other outside affairs than women. It is witnessed that men attend more political affairs than women do throughout Ethiopia. Thus, it is apparent that women are lacking representation in political empowerment arenas. Accordingly, men have more knowledge about political matters than do women. It is also true on political empowerments of women in tourism matters in Oflla woreda.

A major barrier for political empowerment is that a conflict of interest has caused a gap in the political agendas of community members due to communication barriers among the tourism players. Thus, political empowerment in study area agrarian community is highly correlated with the contemporary governments administration system apart other determinant factors. Though it is not sufficient and lack supervision from concerned bodies, the levels of local communities empowerment in political aspect have been below average on community affairs and it practicing it at some extent. A great numbers of local community forwarded that they are proud of their achievements in preserving and conserving age-old cultural and natural resources (Hugumbrida dense forest, Mifsas Bahri archaeological site and Ashenge Lake). Regardless of multifaceted constraints, majority of them showed high levels of interest towards community empowerment. Like limited awareness and autonomous power, dependency, diminishing livelihood options, limited infrastructures, reap benefits by few groups of outsiders, poor integration, poor guiding and limited tourism professionals in the region.

Conclusions

The major finding of the study indicate that, Oflla woreda have a tremendous natural and cultural Eco-tourism potentials such as Lake Ashenge, different bird species, Hugumbrida dense forest, Indigenous forest and bird species, Mifsas Bahri archaeological site, dressing style of the local community. Which are a valuable opportunities for empowering community Based tourism. But, the potential of the area is not scientifically studied and identified. During the site selection competitive advantage the area especially its proximity to the honeypots including Mekelle, gheralta areas and axum is taken into consideration. In addition to this, the hospitality of the local community, the available of supportive donor organizations for community based tourism, the nature of the business is now a days increasing rapidly and other opportunities are a noble potential for community based empowerment.

However, the local community in the study area didnt benefit from these potentials because of the limitation of community based eco-tourism empowerment. Still the study areas have challenges for empowering community based tourism. The most important ones are:

1. Low level of knowledge and understanding among the community is the foremost challenge.
2. Limitation in capacity has another challenge on the quality and standard of service and infrastructure. The system of monitoring service quality and satisfaction itself weak.
3. Lack of promotion, booking and marketing strategy.
4. The study area highly challenged with lack of legal registration and formal system, policies and procedures such as written bylaws an articles for developing the local community tourism enterprises. Legal and policy issues contradict with the existing tourism structures of tourism are critical challenge identified in the study area.

The other results of the study showed that the issues of CE process is in its infant stage while local communities showed very high interest level to involve in identifying problems, management, decision-making, problem solving, equitable benefit sharing and tourism operation. Local people, tourism officials, tourism businesses and visitors conveyed that community empowerment practice is very limited though it is the best alternative to ensure SCBETE. It would have been strong support of sustainable tourism development in terms of socio-cultural, economical and environmental dimensions if there had been sufficient community empowerment since there is high relationship between CE and STD. Then, economical, social, political and psychological empowerments of community are not sufficiently practiced.

Nevertheless, majority of locals showed high interest in CE even if multifaceted constraints encountered them. Like dependency syndrome, illegalities, diminishing livelihood options, limited infrastructures, accumulation of benefits by few individuals, unnecessary competition, poor integration, seasonal variation of tourist flows, and limited autonomous power of locals, poor guiding and limitation of tourism professional human resources in the region are key challenges in the site.

To generalize, even if community empowerment can play central role to achieve community based sustainable tourism development, the process is very limited and its initial stage in terms of economic, social, political and psychological empowerments. This was mainly owing to limited community empowerment despite its significant impacts on sustainable tourism development.



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