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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Challenges and future perspectives of cultural heritage for a sustainable tourism development in Ethiopia: evidences from Rock Hewn Church of Lalibela**

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The rock hewn churches of Lalibela are among the nine tangible sites in Ethiopia registered in the world heritage list. The study was carried out to assess and identify the major challenges and future perspectives of Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela (RHCL) for a sustainable tourism development in Ethiopia. The study used concurrent mixed method of data collection such as questionnaire, interview, observation and document review. A total of 288 respondents from local communities and visitors were used for collecting primary information via semi-structured questioner. The majority of respondents are participating in tourism sector such as in accommodation, shopping, hotel, cooking and traditional performance, serving as priest and being experts in the city administration office of culture and tourism. Despite its importance, regarding the negative impact of tourism; the majority of respondents 70 (63.6%) agreed and 27 (24.3%) disagree for the question "tourism has increased the level of commercialized culture in Lalibela town. Around 87.6% of the respondents were their first trip to visit the RHCL. Hence, among the RHCL Bete Amanuel, Bete Abba Libanos, Bete Medhanealem, Bete Merkorios, Bete Giorgis are highly endangered in the parts such as roof, pillars, interior and exterior parts cracking due to the newly constructed shelter load and geological, climate and biological factors. The conservation and maintenance works used to sustain tourism practices in Lalibela lacks adequacy. Therefore, the stakeholders of the RHCL such as government organizations, local community, civil societies and development investors must work to meet standards for conserving and sustaining tourism development practices in Ethiopia, particularly in Lalibela town.

**Key words:** Conservation, Ethiopia, Lalibela, sustainable, tourism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Travel and tourism industry, with a vast amount of economic, socio-cultural and environmental returns, is one of the most important economic sectors of the world

(Berhanu, 2018). The tourism industry plays multiple roles in the economy, socio-culture, and environment of different countries of the world. The most widely



recognized outcomes of tourism include providing employment, incomes, taxes revenues and foreign exchange (Nicolaidis, 2016; Suleiman and Mohamed, 2010). According to Nicolaidis (2016), tourism is an activity of human beings moving and staying in places outside their permanent residence and environment for recreation, business and trade purposes. UNCTAD (2007) reported that, presently tourism is progressively getting to be a vital economic sector in numerous developing countries.

The industries were one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings and the most viable and sustainable economic development option (UNWTO, 2011). Ethiopia is a country where all the religions, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and traditional belief systems are represented. The country also has a long historical tradition of inter-religious tolerance in which all religions live in peace and love (Berhanu, 2018). Lalibela town is one of the country's leading tourism sites. This town is a religious paradise, especially for Orthodox Christian fellows as it is a unique replica of Jerusalem, with its eleven rock hewn churches with ecclesiastical elements, warm and colorful yearly religious festivals, and an eye catching geographical location. The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are one of the foremost tourist destination sites within the country. The property was among the first twelve sites to be inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List in 1978 (Elene, 2010). Being a living heritage, the site consists of a range of material and non-material cultural components that constitute an important part of the local community and their traditional way of life (Pankhurst, 2005).

Furthermore, Lalibela is the holy city at the heart of Ethiopia. It is perched on an isolated mountain top, with sweeping vistas of the Ethiopian landscape and the eleven rock-hewn churches are simply spectacular, connected by elaborate underground corridors. According to Mitchell and Coles (2009), the churches have in this manner kept on appeal thousands of domestic and international visitors every year. Likewise, Ethiopia is rich in both natural and cultural tourism resources and conversely, it's economic, socio-cultural and environmental role is insignificant due to problems mainly related to the lack of infrastructural development and lack of proper conservation and renovation of cultural heritages (Demoz and Mesele, 2017). In order to make tourism development more sustainable, it is important to look into the problems associated with the conservation preservation and renovation of cultural heritages. In addition, there is also lack of studies concerning the

challenges in conservation and renovation techniques for cultural heritages in Ethiopia. Among other challenges mentioned and lack of attention from UNESCO and other responsible organizations and communities were among the major concerns (Demoz and Mesele, 2017).

Recently most heritages including Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela are threatened by both man-made and natural agents. Among the threats, levels of awareness of local communities about sustainable tourism development, lack of sustainable tourism practice, lack of attention and integrities of responsible parties and absence of skilled personnel in regard to the heritage conservation and renovation practices are the most series challenges of cultural heritage management in Lalibela. It is timely and crucial to address these problems and look for resources which would help to preserve and maintain the heritages. This study therefore, seeks to asses and identifies the challenges and future perspectives of cultural heritage for a sustainable tourism development in Lalibela Rock Hewn Church, Ethiopia.

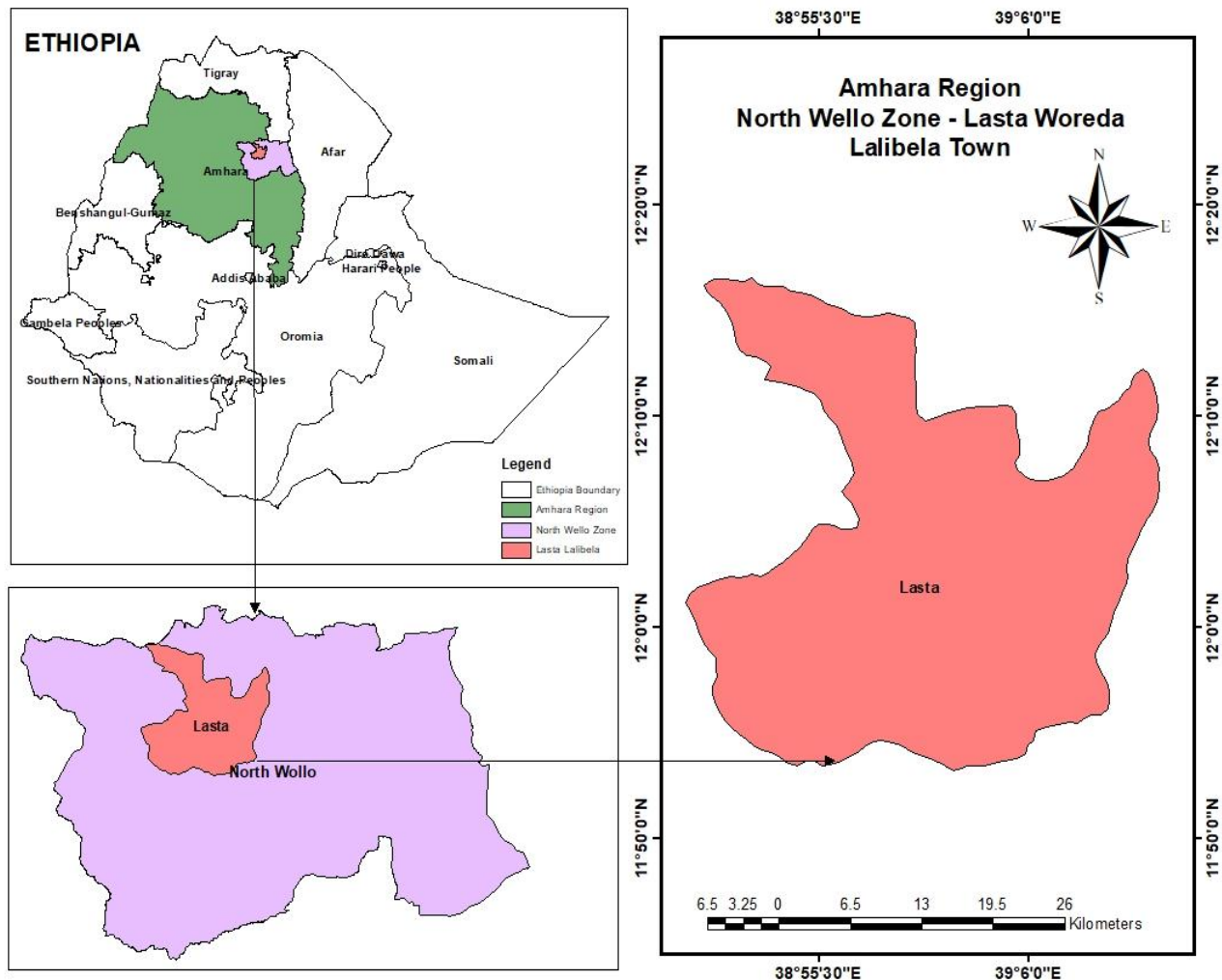
## METHODOLOGY

### Description of the study area

The research was conducted in the town of Lalibela which is found in North Wollo Administrative Zone of the Amhara Regional State and about 700 km north of Addis Ababa. Geographically, Lalibela is situated at 12° 02'034"N latitude and 39° 02'611" E longitude (Figure 1). The landscape of the town is characterized by a rugged topography on a mountain in a picturesque setting at 2630 m above sea level. While crossing the town, various landscape structures ranging from gentle slope to steep slope are easily identifiable. Lalibela and its surroundings are therefore, characterized by impressive landscape features in which the natural landscapes of the province host many rock-hewn and built in cave churches which are the most important tourist sites of the country (Berhanu, 2018). Lalibela Woreda has total population of 118,185 living in 21 kebeles. From this 58648 are male while the remaining 59537 female (Lasta Woreda Communication Office Report, 2018/19). The population is unevenly distributed in varying geographical setting. The main economic activities in Lasta Woreda (peoples who are living in the surrounding of Lalibela Town) are mixed farming, livestock rearing and paid agricultural labor. Crop production is highly affected by frequently inconsistent rainfall in the single, main rainy season. Agricultural performance is also affected by environmental degradation and soil fertility (Amhara Livelihood Zone Reports, 2005).

According to Mengistu (2012), the town is devoid of vegetation, except for small patches of bushes and shrubs. A long period of human occupation, extensive agricultural practices, overgrazing, cutting trees for firewood and rapid growth of population are the major factors usually suggested for the degradation of the

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**Figure 1.** Country map of Ethiopia, showing geographic location of study area, (Map credit: computed by the author).

environment within Lalibela and its surroundings. The church area, the major identity of Lalibela is located along the main gravel surface road, almost at the center of the town. It consists of three groups of churches that connect them. The area covered by these church structures measures around 25 ha (Mengistu, 2012). The eleven medieval monolithic cave churches of this 13th-century 'New Jerusalem' are situated in a mountainous region in the heart of Ethiopia near a traditional village with circular-shaped dwellings. Lalibela is a high place of Ethiopian Christianity, still today a place of pilgrimage and devotion.

#### Research design and data sources

According to Creswell (2003), a mixed methods design is useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Best and Kahn (1989) also suggest that descriptive survey research helps to describe and interpret the actual event that exists now and existed in the past and that have the influence in the present and tries to make the necessary recommendation for adjustment.

Therefore, the study used mixed research design so as to identify the major challenges and future perspectives of RHCL for a sustainable tourism development in Ethiopia. Hence, the study used both qualitative and quantitative research approach in order to augment and enhance it. The key informants of this study were selected purposefully so as to include all the concerned stakeholders. Thus, local community representatives such as clergy's, local guides, Lalibela Town Administration, Culture and Tourism Office experts, domestic and international tourists were the main subjects of the study. This research work was basically depending on primary and secondary data as main sources of information. To collect the primary and secondary data, different instruments including: questionnaires, interviews, field observations, documents and audio-visual resources were used.

#### Sample size and sampling technique

The target population in which the sample for this study were selected as a source of information for the research comprises of

**Table 1.** Sample size of the study.

| S/N                      | Respondent   | Total population                                       | Required sample in (%) | Sample size |
|--------------------------|--|--|------------------------|-------------|
| 1                        | Admin staff and clergy's of the church (Priests and Deacons) | 816  | 10                     | 82          |
|                          | Local Guide  | 195  | >>                     | 20          |
|                          | LTACTO   | 40   | >>                     | 4           |
|                          | Hotel and Loge Owners  | 44   | >>                     | 4           |
|                          | Visitors   | 5327 per month (Average), 178 per day, 1780 in 10 days | >>                     | 178         |
| <b>Total sample size</b> |  |  |                        | <b>288</b>  |

In addition to the above sample size, the researcher was gathered the information from the LTACTO experts and the Church Admin Staff representatives following the interview guide.

Source: Lalibela Church Admin Office and LTACTO 6th month report, 2019.

local community representatives living in the Lalibela town such as the church admin staffs, clergy's, local guides, Lalibela Town Administration Culture and Tourism Office experts (LTACTO) and visitors. Purposive sampling method was employed to determine a representative sample size. Accordingly, from the total of targeted populations 2875 from each category (local communities and visitors) 10% of respondents selected purposively to collect required data about the research problems and alternative solutions. Thus, a total of 288 respondents from local communities and visitors were used for collecting primary information via semi-structured questioner and 10 representatives of local communities were also used for the interview as shown in Table 1.

#### Data collection

According to Best and Kahn (1989), it is necessary to employ multiple methods of data collection in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the qualitative and quantitative research. Therefore, the study used concurrent mixed method of data collection such as questionnaire, interview, site observation and document review to collect the adequate, valid and reliable research data. As described in the above section, the researcher used both primary and secondary data from different data sources. Primary data was collected from local communities such as clergy's, local guides, Lalibela Town Administration Culture and Tourism Office experts (LTACTO) and visitors through questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire were designed and used as the main instrument for primary data collection with the aim to assess the need for conservation of cultural heritages for a sustainable tourism development in rock hewn churches of Lalibela. On the other hand, secondary data such as reports, books, published articles and others were used as secondary sources of data. Observation checklist was used as the main data gathering instrument since the purpose of the study is to identify the challenges and future perspectives of cultural heritage for a sustainable tourism development in Lalibela Rock Hewn Churches. Furthermore, the researcher tried to observe: (1) the tourist attractions in the area and around and free for movement of tourists; (2) tourist amenities and accommodations in terms of water supply and accessibility of sanitary; (3) tourist infrastructure facility such as road availability and easy transport, play stations which can elongate tourists stay, banks ATM, credit card, internet and other

facilities.

#### Data analysis

The collected data through questionnaires were entered in to computer through the use of computer software called Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20, and were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential (statistical) method of data analysis. Descriptive statistics was employed to reveal the main features of the gathered data in the study. Quantitative data was also analyzed, interpreted and reported using frequency distribution and percentages followed by discussion of the most important points. The data gathered through open-ended questions, interviews, observation and document investigation were analyzed qualitatively through descriptive narration.

#### Ethical considerations

The researcher respect the rights, values and desires of interviewees and the necessary institutional consent was communicated with the responsible person of the church administrative leaders and LTACTO experts before conducting the study. Similarly, the informants were briefed about the main objectives of the study before the beginning of data collection. The participants were also transparently informed that the information they provided in the questionnaire and interview was only used for the research purpose and strictly anonymous and dealt with confidentially.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Overview of Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela (RHCL)

The exact period of construction and the number of year that it took for completing them are other blurred issues regarding the RHCL. Some historians attribute their data to the late 12 century. Local tradition dates the

**Table 2.** Categories and list of RCH.

| <b>Group</b> | <b>Name of the church and their chronological order of construction</b> |
|--------------|---|
| First group  | Bete Mariam (House of Merry)  |
|              | Bete Medhanealem (House of savior of the world)                         |
|              | Bete Debre Sinai (House of mount Sinai and Gologotha, twin churches)    |
|              | Bete Gologotha (House of mount Sinai and Gologotha, twin churches)      |
|              | Bete Meskel (House of the cross)  |
|              | Bete Denagel (House of virgins)   |
| Second group | Bete Gebriel (House of St Gebriel)                                      |
|              | Bete Abba Libanos (House of father Libanos)                             |
|              | Bete Merkorios (House of Merkorios)                                     |
|              | Bete Amanuel (House of Emanuel)   |
| Third group  | Bete Giorgis (House of St George)                                       |

Source: Mengistu (2012); <https://whc.unesco.org>.

construction of the church 1150s to the end of 1170s. It is also stated that construction of all of the church was completed within 23-30 years (Mengistu, 2012). The well-known RHCL are eleven in number. According to their location, they are divided into three groups, separated by the seasonal river Jourdan. In addition, local evidences list the churches in their chronological order of construction and their group as stated in Table 2. The life of local community in Lalibela is related to the churches: physically the people live around them, economically the churches are the main sources of income, and spiritually the peoples belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. Each circumstance within the town of Lalibela and its surroundings generally has religious orientation. The church participates in all socio cultural activities. The economic activity of the town is mainly depending on religious activity (involved in tourism), small farming system and commercial activities such as hotels, bars, restaurants and souvenir shops. The town and its rock hewn church has lots of important treasures such as Afro Aygeba Cross, religious festivals (Genna and Timket) and Ashenda culture festival and traditional houses (Tukuls).

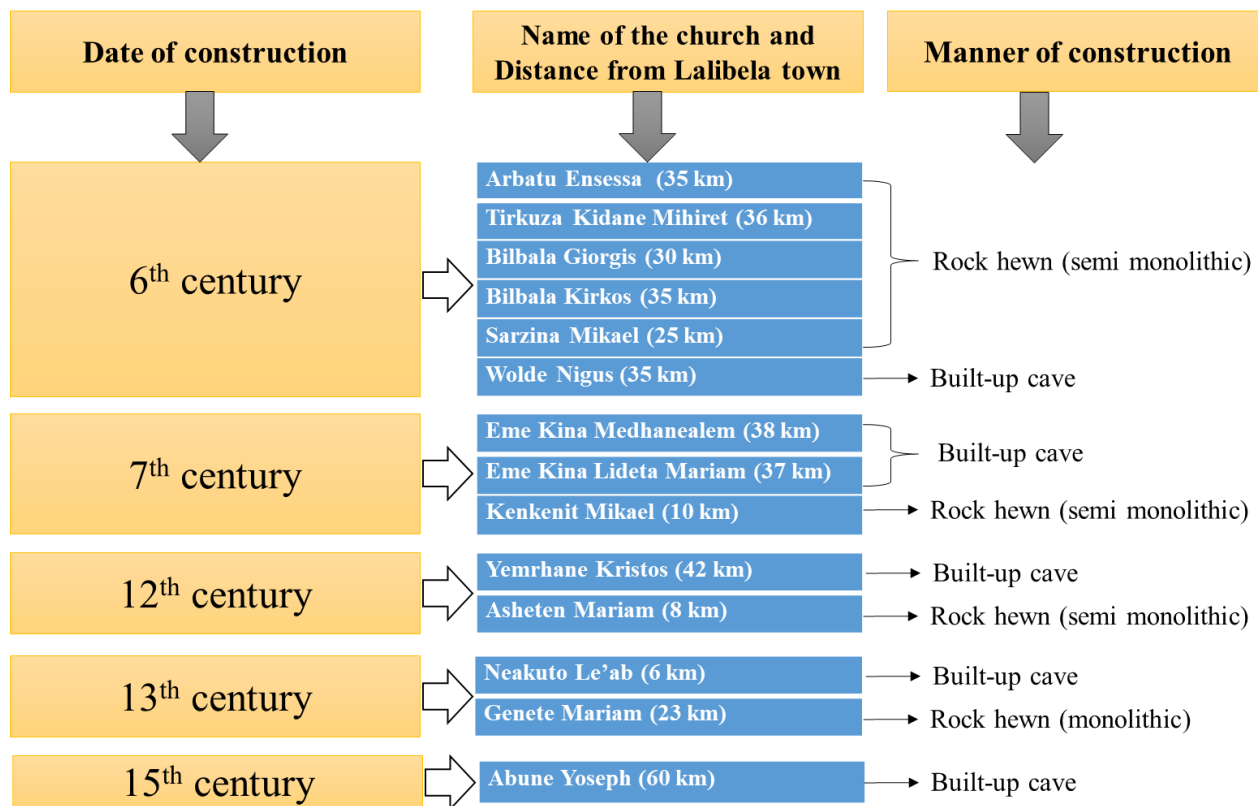
Additionally the town is situated in having different churches in the surrounding which leads the rural communities benefitted in different socio-cultural and economic values. According to the information collected from the Lalibela Town Administration of Culture and Tourism Office (LTACTO), the responsible body (Amhara Regional State and/or the LTACTO did not promote and change it in to tourism business; the cultural and attraction sites found in surrounding of Lalibela town and this affect the flow of visitors in Lalibela and its surrounding. In general, there are a number of well-

known rock hewn churches surrounding those of RHCL (Figure 2).

### **Local communities perception on RHCL**

#### ***Benefits from tourism***

The research result reveals that, tourism has increased the opportunities of employment and the pride over the RHCL. This is because there is a potential demand for hotel and hospitality sector since increasing the construction of hotels and tourist flow. One of the interviewee responses also describes the same result. Secondly, as described in Table 3, the respondents choose the benefits of tourism is mainly for creating the quality way of life in the town. Thirdly, as per the respondents' response, tourism has a potential to create a positive attitude in the minds of the community towards creative or innovative works and attract investment and local development projects to the town of Lalibela. Finally, according to the local community's perception, tourism has fostered the acquisition of new skills for the community of the town, improved the infrastructure facilities and maintained the rock hewn churches of Lalibela better. This matches with the researcher's observation and the information obtained from the interviewees that many tourism activities going on in the study area such as cultural goods and services, souvenirs, paintings, local tour guides etc. Moreover, the majority of respondents are participating in tourism sector such as in accommodation, shopping, hotel, cooking and traditional performance, serving as priest and being experts in the city administration office of culture and



**Figure 2.** Summary of prominent rock churches around the RHCL. Source: LFACTO (2018), unpublished document; Mengistu (2012).

**Table 3.** Respondent’s perception on benefits of tourism to the communities and Lalibela town.

| To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about benefits from tourism?         | Mean | Std. deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| Tourism has increased the opportunity of employment in the town of Lalibela                                | 4.0  | 1.2            |
| Tourism has increased the quality of life in the town of Lalibela.   | 3.6  | 1.2            |
| Tourism has increased my pride over the rock hewn churches of Lalibela                                     | 4.0  | 1.3            |
| Tourism has created a positive attitude in the minds of the community towards creative or innovative works | 3.5  | 1.2            |
| Tourism has fostered the acquisition of new skills for the community of the town                           | 3.3  | 1.4            |
| Tourism has attracted investment and local development projects to the town of Lalibela                    | 3.5  | 1.3            |
| Tourism in Lalibela has improved the infrastructure facilities   | 2.8  | 1.4            |

Source: Own data (2019).

tourism. As per the result, the details of local community perception in regarding the benefits of tourism to themselves and to the town are described in Table 3.

The number of tourist arrivals in Lalibela has been increasing over time (Table 4). For instance, the tourist flow grew nearly by 45% from 2006 to 2011 (Temesgen,

2013). Several factors could be attributed to its increment, among others, the sense of a living heritage and the uninterrupted use of the churches as sacred places of worship leads most visitors to visit Lalibela these days (Elene, 2010). As far as Lalibela is concerned, though it is underperforming as compared to

**Table 4.** Respondent's perception on negative impact of tourism in Lalibela town.

| To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about negative impact of tourism in RHCL? | Levels of agreement | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Tourism disrupts the peaceful ways of life of the community in the town   | Strongly disagree   | 34        | 30.9       |
|   | Disagree            | 29        | 26.4       |
|   | Neutral             | 11        | 10.0       |
|   | Agree               | 13        | 11.8       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 23        | 20.9       |
| Tourism has increased the level of litter in Lalibela town  | Strongly disagree   | 20        | 18.2       |
|   | Disagree            | 29        | 26.4       |
|   | Neutral             | 13        | 11.8       |
|   | Agree               | 30        | 27.3       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 18        | 16.3       |
| Tourism has increased the crime rate in Lalibela town   | Strongly disagree   | 21        | 19.1       |
|   | Disagree            | 29        | 26.4       |
|   | Neutral             | 19        | 17.3       |
|   | Agree               | 22        | 20.0       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 19        | 17.3       |
| Tourism has increased the level of commercialization of the culture in Lalibela town                            | Strongly disagree   | 12        | 10.9       |
|   | Disagree            | 15        | 13.6       |
|   | Neutral             | 13        | 11.8       |
|   | Agree               | 33        | 30.0       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 37        | 33.6       |
| Most tourists visiting rock hewn church in Lalibela are not considerate of local people                         | Strongly disagree   | 21        | 19.1       |
|   | Disagree            | 27        | 24.5       |
|   | Neutral             | 18        | 16.4       |
|   | Agree               | 22        | 20.0       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 22        | 20.0       |
| Tourism has unfairly increased the cost of living in Lalibela town  | Strongly disagree   | 12        | 10.9       |
|   | Disagree            | 9         | 8.2        |
|   | Neutral             | 12        | 10.9       |
|   | Agree               | 24        | 21.8       |
|   | Strongly agree      | 53        | 48.2       |

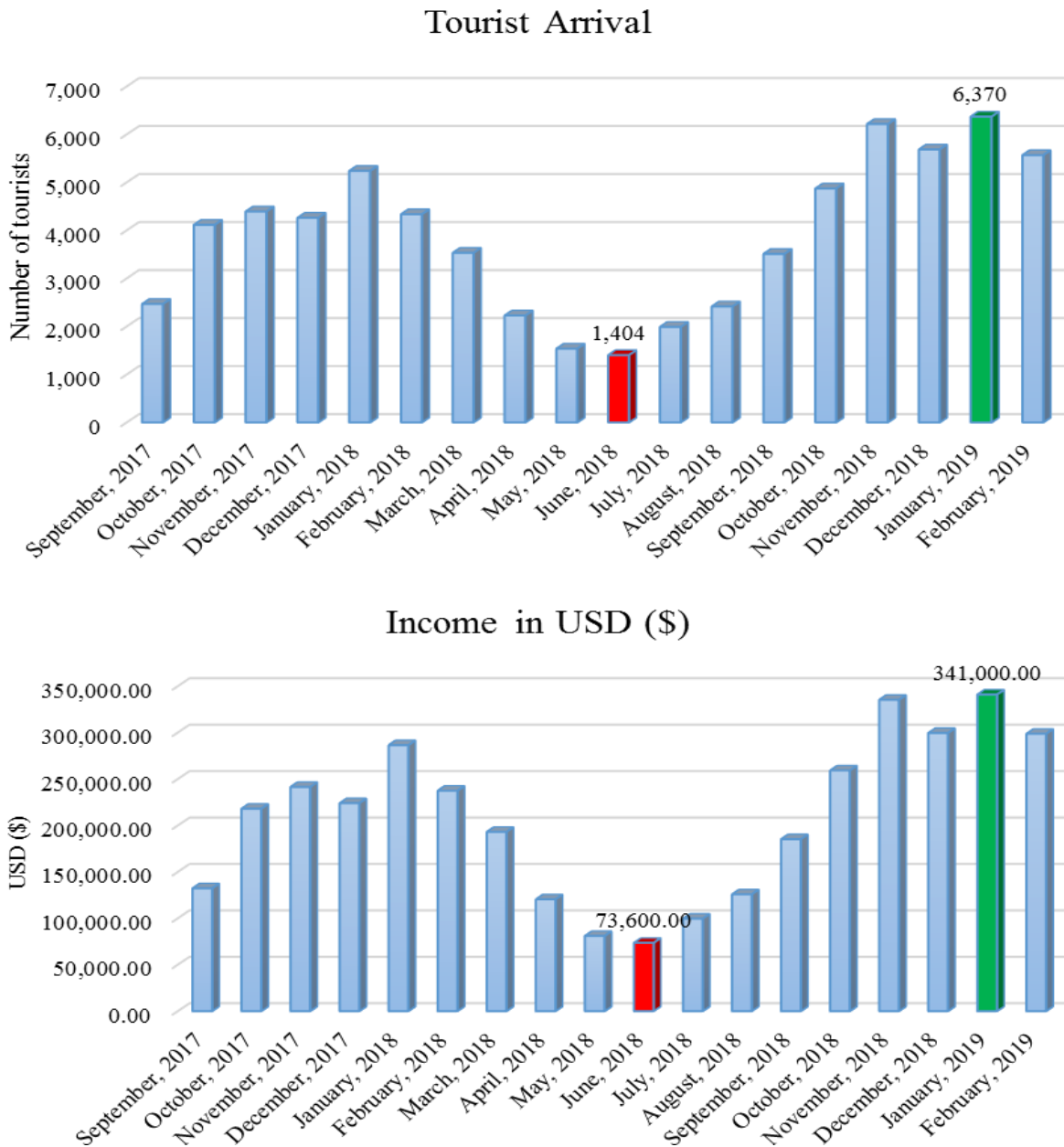
Source: Computed by the author.

other countries' destinations, locally, it is considered as one of the flagship destinations in terms of attracting a relatively large number of tourists. Temesgen (2013) stated in its study that Lalibela is one of the premier destinations in Ethiopia that is able to attract around 90% of the leisure tourists who visit Ethiopia. In particular, during the main Ethiopian religious festivities such as Ethiopian Christmas and Epiphany, a large number of domestic and foreign visitors visit Lalibela. According to

the church administration information, the tourist flow information from September, 2017 up to February, 2019 was described in Figure 3.

#### ***Negative impacts of tourism on communities living around RHCL***

According to the majority of local communities response,



**Figure 3.** Tourist arrival and generated income in USD (\$) between September 2017 - February 2019 in RHCL. Source: The church administration ticket office, RHCL (2019).

63 (57.3) disagreed and 36 (32.7%) agree for the question “tourism disrupts the peaceful ways of life of the community in the town”. From the response of visitors for the survey question “tourism has increased the level of litter in Lalibela town” 49 (44.6) and 48 (43.6%) disagree and agree respectively. On the contrary, 50 (45.5%) disagreed that tourism has increased the crime rate in Lalibela town and reasonable number of respondents 41

(37.3%) also agreed for the question tourism has increased the crime rate in Lalibela town. Furthermore, regarding the impact of tourism such as addictions; the majority of respondents 70 (63.6) agreed and 27 (24.3%) disagree for the question “tourism has increased the level of commercialization of the culture in Lalibela town”. However, as we can see from Table 5 increasing the flow of visitors in the town has its own positive impact in

**Table 5.** The response of visitors in activities related to visitor management issues and levels of satisfaction in RHCL.

| visitor management issues and levels of satisfaction in RHCL                             | Very dissatisfied |      | Dissatisfied |      | Neutral |      | Satisfied |      | Very satisfied |      |
|--|-------------------|------|--------------|------|---------|------|-----------|------|----------------|------|
|  | F                 | %    | F            | %    | F       | %    | F         | %    | F              | %    |
| Strict enforcement of rules concerning improper conduct or behavior                      | 19                | 10.7 | 9            | 5.1  | 58      | 32.6 | 52        | 29.2 | 40             | 22.5 |
| The number of local guides are sufficient  | 7                 | 3.9  | 8            | 5.1  | 46      | 25.8 | 45        | 25.3 | 71             | 39.9 |
| Adequate safety and security provided in the churches                                    | 17                | 9.6  | 8            | 4.5  | 26      | 14.6 | 59        | 33.1 | 68             | 38.2 |
| Sufficient hotel and accommodation services  | 10                | 5.6  | 16           | 9.0  | 34      | 19.1 | 69        | 38.8 | 49             | 27.5 |
| Cleanness and hygiene of the churches  | 32                | 18   | 58           | 32.6 | 33      | 18.5 | 30        | 16.9 | 25             | 14   |
| The signs to various parts of the church were easy to see                                | 21                | 11.8 | 23           | 12.9 | 54      | 30.3 | 62        | 34.8 | 18             | 10.1 |
| The story board and guide books about the church were available and clear                | 49                | 27.5 | 41           | 23.0 | 32      | 18.0 | 36        | 20.2 | 20             | 11.2 |
| The number of public restrooms was adequate  | 66                | 37.1 | 46           | 25.8 | 45      | 25.3 | 14        | 7.9  | 7              | 3.9  |
| Public restrooms were clean  | 50                | 28.1 | 47           | 26.4 | 57      | 32.0 | 20        | 11.2 | 4              | 2.2  |
| The number of trash bins in and around the church was adequate                           | 38                | 21.3 | 51           | 28.7 | 51      | 28.7 | 31        | 17.4 | 7              | 3.9  |
| Paintings, artifacts and other heritages inside the church are well preserved            | 12                | 6.7  | 35           | 19.7 | 52      | 29.2 | 46        | 25.8 | 33             | 18.5 |
| Tour guides had sufficient knowledge about the church                                    | 19                | 10.7 | 3            | 1.7  | 41      | 23.0 | 47        | 26.4 | 68             | 38.2 |
| Local residents are friendly towards visitors  | 9                 | 5.1  | 17           | 9.6  | 32      | 18.0 | 65        | 36.5 | 55             | 30.9 |
| The trip to the rock-hewn church of Lalibela has increased my knowledge about the church | 12                | 6.7  | 4            | 2.2  | 13      | 7.3  | 47        | 26.4 | 102            | 57.3 |
| Hotels and lodging places are comfortable and attractive to visitors                     | 14                | 7.9  | 13           | 7.3  | 42      | 23.6 | 64        | 36.0 | 45             | 25.3 |
| Transportation access to the church is convenient.                                       | 12                | 6.7  | 17           | 9.6  | 45      | 25.3 | 68        | 38.2 | 36             | 20.2 |
| My visit to the rock-hewn church of Lalibela has met my expectations                     | 8                 | 4.5  | 2            | 1.1  | 19      | 10.7 | 72        | 40.4 | 77             | 43.3 |

Source: Own data (2019).

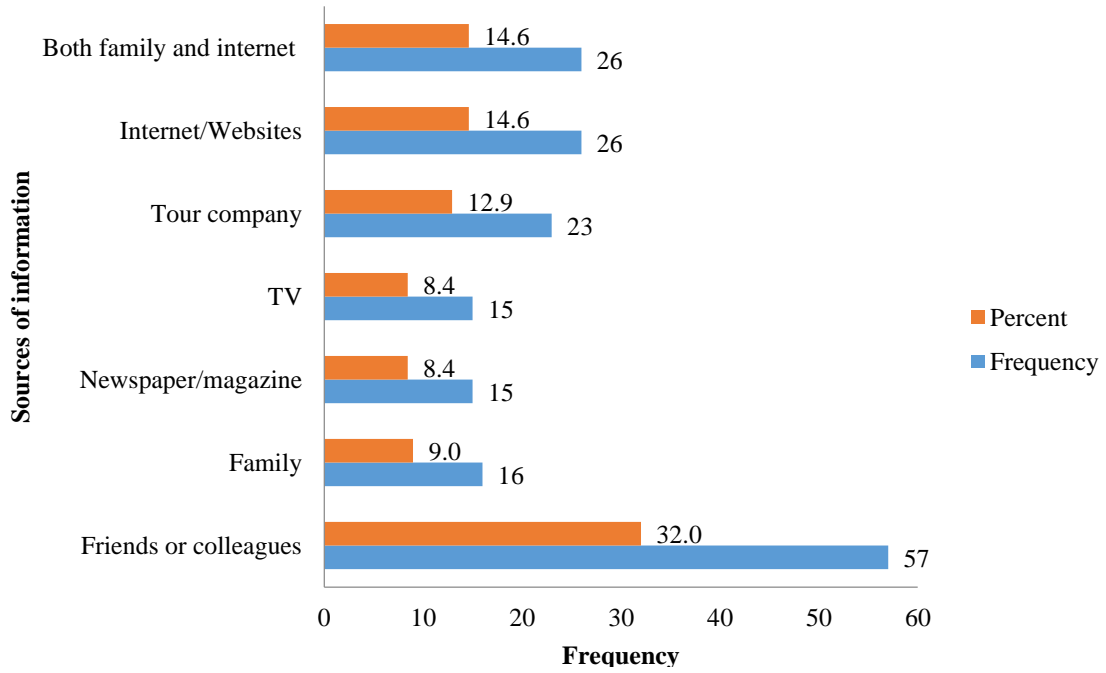
generating income, job opportunity, increasing language skills; adverse practices seemed to be a serious negative influence of tourism in Lalibela town as the majority of respondents claimed that tourism had brought adverse practices to the town in terms of increasing the cost of living, crowdedness, developing dependency relationship, begging and commercialization of the culture in Lalibela town are among the major negative impacts of tourism.

### Visitors perception on RHCL

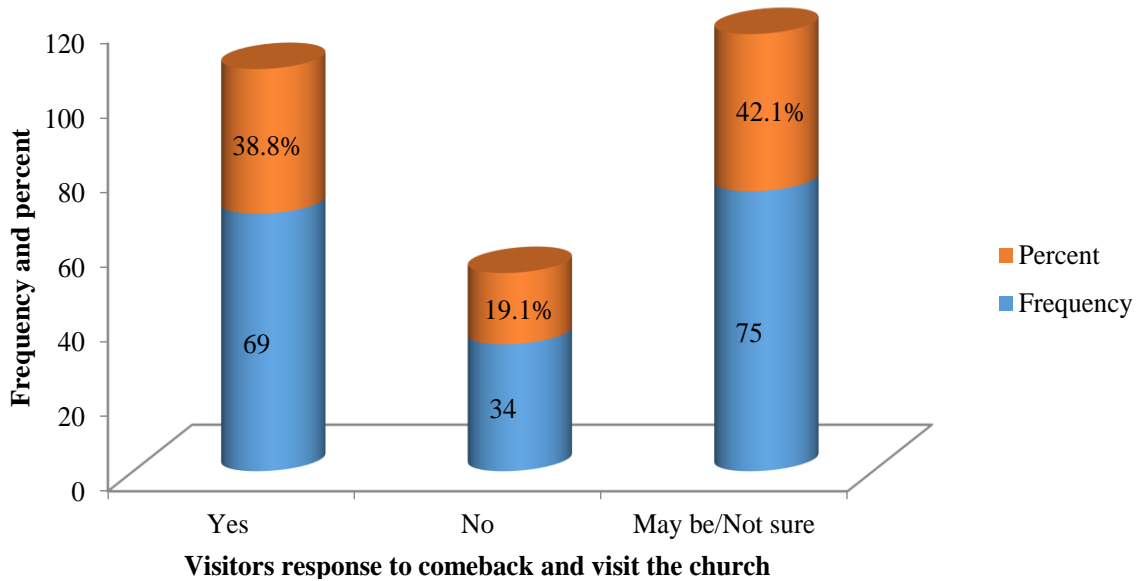
In this research, visitors stated their overall impressions about the rock-hewn churches as well as their levels of satisfaction while they are visiting the RHCL. Most of their positive impressions were focused on the features of the churches. Around 87.6% of the respondents were their first trip to visit the RHCL. The majority of the respondents came to Lalibela mainly to visit the

rock-hewn churches after they got information from different sources. Accordingly, among the total respondents 57 (32%) were mainly from their friends and colleagues, 26 (14.6%) from internet and websites, 23 (12.9%) from tour company and the reasonable numbers of respondents also used their family, TV and newspaper/magazines (Figure 4) as a source of information. As a result, 75 (42.1%) of the respondents were not sure to come back again to visit the church and 69 (38.8%) of





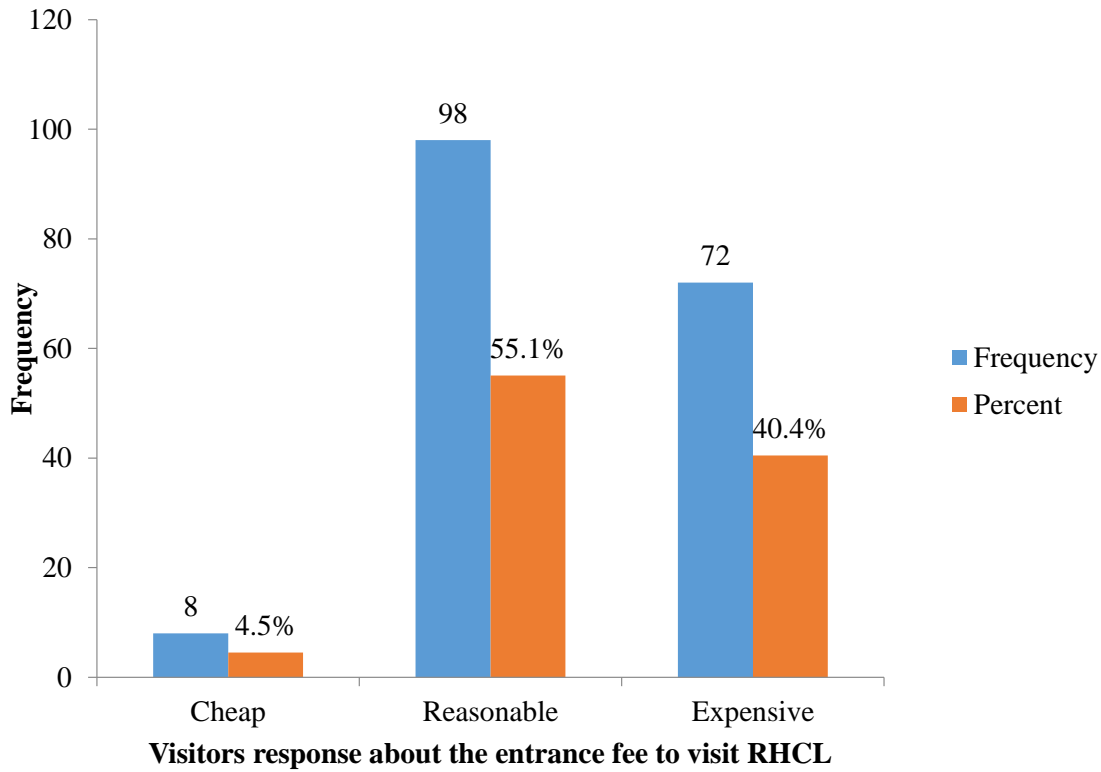
**Figure 4.** Summary for visitor's source of information to visit RHC.  
 Source: Computed by the author.



**Figure 5.** Summary of visitor's response to comeback and visit the church  
 Source: Computed by the author.

sample respondents are willing to visit the church again (Figure 5). This is because the destination site or RHCL is a cultural heritage so that the majority of visitors are

highly interested to visit other tourism sites and they are showing a keen interest to experience other cultures. Regarding the entrance fee, 98 (55.1%) of the sample



**Figure 6.** Summary of visitor’s response about the entrance fee to visit RHCL  
 Source: Computed by the author.

respondents regarded it as reasonable and 72 (40.4%) of sample respondents considered it as expensive (Figure 6). According to the church administration ticket office information, currently the entrance fee per overseas tourist is around \$50.

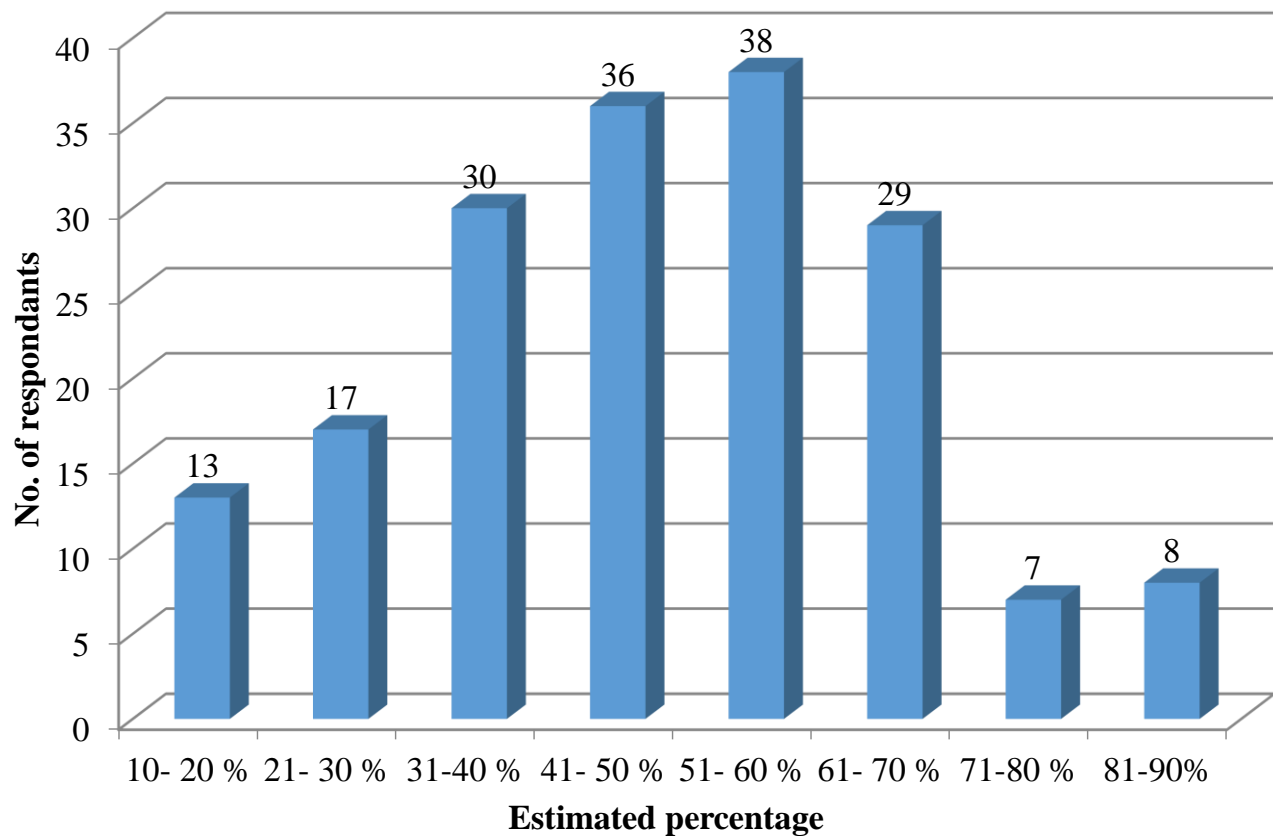
In this research, visitors were also asked about their best guess of the percent chance that the state of degradation or cracking of the RHCL within the next ten years. Figure 7 summarizes the finding by which the majority of visitors 103 (58%) were estimated the state of degradation of the RHCL within the next ten years might be between 41-70%. In addition, the reasonable numbers of visitors also estimated the state of degradation might be 10-40% and 15 (8%) of visitors guess the state of degradation might be between 71-90%. Therefore, according to this research finding, Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela needs immediate conservation and maintenance practices for sustaining tourism development.

**Level of satisfaction**

As it can be inferred from the visitors point of view, out of

the total sample respondents, 92 (51%) respondents are satisfied about the strict enforcement of rules concerning improper conduct or behavior while they are visiting the church, 116 (65.2 %) respondents (45 satisfied and 71 very satisfied) that the number of local guides are sufficient and they are active and fast mover to explain about the historical background of church, 127 (71.3%) of the respondents (59 satisfied and 68 very satisfied) about the availability of adequate safety and security service provided in the churches. With respect to the sufficient hotel and accommodation services, 118 (66.3%) respondents satisfied (69 satisfied and 49 very satisfied) whereas 90 (50.6%) dissatisfied (32 very dissatisfied and 58 dissatisfied) and 34 (19.1%) neutral. However, the hotels and lodges are comfortable and attractive to visitors, the hotel and lodge owners have to deliver quality service to the visitors. Furthermore, 90 (50.5%) respondents (49 very dissatisfied and 41 dissatisfied) that the story board and guide books about the church were available and clear, 112 (62.9%) respondents (66 very dissatisfied and 46 dissatisfied) on the number of public restrooms was adequate and clean.

It can also been seen that 115 (64.6%) respondents were satisfied and 22 (12.4%) respondents were



**Figure 7.** Visitors prediction for the percent chance that the state of degradation of the RHCL within the next ten years.  
**Source:** Computed by the author.

dissatisfied that the tour guides had sufficient knowledge about the church. 120 (67.4%) respondents satisfied (65 satisfied and 55 very satisfied) about the hospitality of the local communities and the local residents are friendly towards visitors. Additionally, regarding the transportation access to the church 104 (58.4%) respondents satisfied (68 satisfied and 36 very satisfied) by which the facilities to the churches are convenient (Table 6). Moreover, the research result reveals that there is a gap in some facilities such as cleanliness and hygienic practices, public restrooms, paintings, artifacts and other heritages inside the church are among the services and facilities by which the majority visitors were not yet satisfied (Figure 7). Unlike this, strict enforcement of rules concerning improper conduct or behavior in the church, sufficient hotel and accommodation services, tour guides sufficient knowledge about the church, hospitality of local residents, attractiveness of hotels and lodges, transportation access to the church are among the services and facilities issues by which the majority of respondents 149 (83.7%) visit to the rock-hewn church of Lalibela has meet their expectations.

## Issues on tourism and heritage management

### *Tourism impacts in Lalibela*

Lalibela is one of the well-known touristic sites in Ethiopia. It is usually identified with the rock hewn churches in the town. The rock hewn churches of Lalibela are among the nine tangible sites in Ethiopia registered in the world heritage list. They are also unofficially considered as one of the eight wonders of the world. As per the interview and observation result of this study, both positive and negative impact of tourism has been seen in Lalibela. Tourism has created new job opportunity according to some sources; about 12% of the local population is believed to benefit from tourism, directly or indirectly (Mengistu, 2012). Local guides, hotel and lodge owners, souvenir shop owners, mule owners and priests at large are among the beneficiaries.

Visitors have influenced a certain extent with many youngsters way of dressing and consumption patterns. There is a desire for products used by the tourists. Tourism has resulted in the broadening of outlook on the

**Table 6.** A summary of observation checklist results on the conservation, accessibility and facility issues of RHCL.

| Name of the Church | Conservation Issues      |                                      | Accessibility and facility issues |                                     |                 |                     |                |                                     | Remark   |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|--|
|                    | Level of physical damage | Needs of conservation and renovation | Cleanliness of the church         | Locations information (Sign boards) | Lighting system | Safety and security | Toilet service | Health services (First Aid Service) |  |
| Bete Medhanealem   | High (3rd)               | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Cracking the roof and external parts of the building |
| Bete Mariam        | High                     | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Mural painting and the shelter load                  |
| Bete Meskel        | High                     | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Deterioration  |
| Bete Denagel       | High                     | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Deterioration  |
| Bete Debre Sinai   | High                     | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Deterioration  |
| Bete Gologotha     | High                     | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Deterioration  |
| Bete Gebriel       | Medium                   | Conservation                         | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Deterioration  |
| Bete Merkorios     | High (4th)               | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Cracking the roof and external parts of the building |
| Bete Amanuel       | Very high (1st)          | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Top of the roof cracking                             |
| Bete Abba Libanos  | Very high (2nd)          | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | The pillars  |
| Bete Giorgis       | High (5th)               | Conservation and renovation          | Medium                            | Medium                              | Poor            | Medium              | Very poor      | Very poor                           | Biological factors and cracking in the corner sides  |

The information stated in this table is only from the authors' observation at the time of data collection. So there is nothing criteria or standard used for ranking the churches

world, and in the adoption of some western values. Many children and youngsters have gotten the chances to learn and speak foreign languages without any expense, especially English. It is because of tourism that Lalibela has gotten some of the indispensable facilities such as the airport,

banking, health service, telephone service, electricity and water supplies and other infrastructure facilities prior too many other towns in Ethiopia. Increased global awareness resulting from tourism has encouraged international organization such as UNESCO and European

Union (EU) to give due attention to and finance conservation works on the church.

Generally the research finding states that, both local community respondents are happy with the visitors who come to their own locality because tourism and has built the country image, maximize

the national revenue, foreign exchange, employment opportunity, create additional income for local community and co-relationship, integrity of cultural belief and behavioral changes. According to the interviewees and local community respondents' points of view, despite its importance, tourism in Lalibela has also resulted in some negative impacts. It has brought certain kinds of negative behavior such as alcoholism and taking drugs etc, up on the younger generation native cultures, the traditional way of life and spiritual value have declined and have been surpassed by alien touristic features. The interviewees also explained that, the cultural as well as the natural physical environment is degrading and there is also a loss of religious objects because of theft and illicit trafficking. Additionally, a great rural-urban migration towards Lalibela is taking place, which resulted in congestion and many unplanned settlement in the town, increasing the cost of living of the town, social crowdedness, developing dependency relationship with visitors, increasing crime and illegal acts in the town are among the most serious negative impacts of tourism in Lalibela.

### **Threats facing the Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela**

According to the research result, currently there are number of factors which lead to physical deterioration of RHCL. In this regard, identifying the nature and scale of destructive forces helps determine intervention methods. It also enables them to take measures before it results in total loss of heritages. Thus, the geography where the churches are located, without doubt, helped preservation of the churches. The churches that better survived the destructive forces of nature and human intervention are those built in caves. The RHCL have survived more than 850 years to date. However, today, they are increasingly collapsing. Both manmade and natural climate are responsible for the decay and deterioration of those irreplaceable treasures (Mengistu, 2012). One of the church administration interviewee elucidated that, the churches beauty and originality is generally decreasing at alarming rate. Hence, as per the filed observation and interview results, the researcher has also identified different challenges facing RHCL in different categories. Some of the major deterioration factors are explained below. Currently, RHCL are facing series challenges due to geological, climatic, natural disasters, biological and man-made (human) factors (Mengistu, 2012; Darbyshire et al., 2003; UNESCO, 1995; Butzer, 1982).

As per the local community's response, agents of deterioration caused by human intervention are very large in number and very dangerous. Many of the problems are related with urbanization. The explosive population growth in Lalibela has resulted in the

emergency of dense settlements near the churches, which has created tension. Continues human occupation and settlement has exposed the site to erosion and environmental degradation. Problems of sanitation and lack of sufficient space for a cemetery, lack of latrines and sanitary infrastructure, limited safe water supply, absence of drainage and waste disposal systems are among the very urgent identified urban problems in Lalibela town. Among the RHCL problems associated with sanitation have largely reduced the aesthetics of the site. For instance, it is very disgracing that visitors of Bete Giorgis should pass along a public toilet constructed adjacent to the church. The clergy man respondent's emphasizes that, the current use of artificial sound system (Loudspeakers) and traffic vibrations have brought harmful tensions on the churches. Additionally, the nearby noisy street mill is the major causes that accelerate internal decay and aging process of the monuments. The electric light is also another identified factor that creates series damage on the ecclesiastical objects. It has caused color fading and deterioration in the material from which the sacred objects are made. Neglect and ignorance are most likely among the major causes for heritage deterioration in Lalibela. For instance, some of *tukuls* are not in a good condition. Some of these traditional houses within the church compound are abandoned. This caused the house to deteriorate overtime, due to lack of maintenance. Furthermore, a primitive way of handling the heritage is also another major factor responsible for the damage to many religious objects. Many treasures are confined in to a very narrow space, some hanging on dirty wall and another lying on dusty floors. It is also because of such kind of backward handling systems that many objects are destroyed by humidity, bats and termites. Unwise conservation resulting from unnecessary human intervention has become the most distractive element of rock churches. Because of unwise conservation, some churches of Lalibela have lost their aesthetic and original character.

### **The current status of RHCL**

According to the observation checklist result and interviewee's response, the researcher has identified the current status of RHCL in terms of physical damage, accessibility and facility issues as follows. As described in Table 6, Bete Amanuel, Bete Abba Libanos, Bete Medhanealem, Bete Merkorios, Bete Giorgis are highly endangered in the parts such as roof, pillars and exterior parts cracking due to the newly constructed shelter load. The aforementioned problems facing the RHCL are due to geological, climate and biological factors. The other groups of RHCL are also in trouble and facing different challenges because of the age of churches, shelter load,

and other climate factors. Therefore, it is recommended that needs for conservation and renovation practices are mandatory to extend the shelf life of the churches and its religious aspect. The conservation practices should be conducted by participate the local communities (indigenous peoples in the town), researchers, and any other expertise to perform effective conservation practice. The researcher has also observed that, the cleanliness of the church, locations information (sign boards) availability and safety and security issues for the whole groups of churches are at medium level in terms of quality and accessibility.

This indicates that, there are some administration problems to intensively work for cleaning the churches, to prepare clear and strong sign boards which can stay for a long, and securing the churches from any terrorist activities. Regarding the toilet and first aid service, there is nothing facility to visitors when they are visiting the RHCL. This problem is very serious and critical which are highly recommended by the visitor respondents. However, the church administration tries to construct toilets and shades for taking rest to visitors, the constructed buildings (toilets and shades) in all groups are not finished yet and they are not giving a service to visitors. This indicates that, the church administration should take immediate remedial action to finalize the buildings via some maintenance works to make them functional and so that they can deliver a service to visitors.

### **Future prospects of RHCL**

Tourism is the fastest growing sector of the industry. The tourism industry contributes to economic growth of many countries and is taken as an essential sector of business for the development of the country. Increased involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals in the promotion of the cultural heritages is resulting observable improvements in the tourism sector.

Among different issues regarding the future perspectives of the RHCL, the following are the prioritized list: Researches which have increased in recent years are also promising in terms of their contribution in indicating the challenges and recommendations of possible solution for the sake of increasing the roles of cultural tourism to both socio-cultural and economic growth of the sector, increasing the flow of visitors and employment opportunity, conserving and maintaining the RHCL, awareness creation to the local community on how to use the cultural heritages and how to conserve the church without missing its cultural history and other importance's.

The role of researches also extends to promotion of

cultural heritages. In addition, currently the church is deteriorating and needs urgent conservation and maintenance works by responsible parties, attentions given to applied researches on rock hewn churches are promising and it obviously maximizing the quality in development of heritage and tourism management aspects by which the damaging factors can be easily solved. Furthermore, the tourism sector is given a higher priority by the governmental and none governmental funding organizations for the issues regarding conservation and maintenance practices which is implemented in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders. There are also numbers of rock churches surrounding RHCL with distance ranges from 6-60km and this can be promising for increasing the tourist flow so that the church and local communities can be benefited. Currently, based on the research findings both the government and funding organizations are highly working on the conservation of cultural heritage tourisms; there are a number of infrastructure development related activities implementing such as transportation facility, awareness creation, conservation issues, hotel service, training and capacity building programs, producing qualified and educated individuals in the tourism and hospitality sector, shopping center and other services are taking in to consideration.

This implies that the futurity of the RHCL and the communities could be bright and it is a huge advantage for sustaining the development of tourism sector in Ethiopia.

### **Conclusion**

The tourism industry plays multiple roles in the economy, socio-culture, and environment of different countries of the world. The most widely recognized outcomes of tourism include providing employment, incomes, taxes revenues and foreign exchange. In Ethiopia, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are one of the most visited attractions in the country.

Lalibela is a small mountain town located in the northern part of Ethiopia. The life of local community in Lalibela is related to the churches: physically the peoples live around them, economically the churches are the main sources of income, and spiritually the peoples belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. Additionally the town is situated in having different churches in the surrounding which leads the rural communities benefitted in different socio-cultural and economic values.

The RHCL have survived more than 850 years to date. However, today, they are increasingly collapsing. Both manmade and natural climate are responsible for the decay and deterioration of those irreplaceable treasures. In addition the research results revealed that, the church

administration has a lot of challenges in related conservation and renovation practices of RHCL.

Among those the following has been identified as the major threats; unclear organizational structure for different duties and responsibilities, absence of recorded and maintained archive documents such as tourist flow information, previous research work, church background histories, administration staff profile and documents regarding previous conservation works which has been done by different donors, lack of integration and communication with the LTACTO, regional and federal tourism offices, UNESCO and other responsible parts and absences of organized promotion/campaign for conservation and maintenance practices.

Hence, Bete Amanuel, Bete Abba Libanos, Bete Medhanealem, Bete Merkorios, Bete Giorgis are highly endangered in the parts such as roof, pillars and exterior parts cracking and the newly constructed shelter load are the damaging factors. The aforementioned problems facing the RHCL are due to geological, climate and biological factors. The conservation practices should be conducted by participating the local communities, researchers, and any other expertise to perform effective conservation practice. In synopsis, the level of awareness of the local communities about the importance of sustainable tourism in Lalibela is very limited. Regarding the issues of conservation and renovation practices, there is nothing published and archived documents kept by the church administration. The integration of responsible parties for conserving and maintaining the RHCL is still at infancy level. Moreover, local communities such as clergy's, hotel and lodge owners, tourism experts and visitors has been recommended the responsible parties to work together in collaboration for solving the series current challenges and maintain the future perspectives of RHCL.

### **Recommendation**

Following the above discussion and conclusions of the main findings of this research, this section outlines main recommendations that could assist the concerned authorities in constructing a framework for developing Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism in the town of Lalibela.

Therefore, based on the data and results of this study the following points are recommended:

1) The overall historical backgrounds of the religious preview, the church admin staff profile, the economic values of the church, visitor flow information, conservation and renovation works done before and/or planned practices to be done should be recorded and archived by the church administration office and LTACTO in the

form of written documents to conserve for the next generation.

2) In order to sustain the religious worship the church admin should implement strict rules and regulations such as setting specific time limitation to visit the churches, use specific area to store the off visitor's luggage, so that the RHCL can be easily protected from any disturbances and interferences during the worship practices. In addition, setting strict enforcement to waste disposal practices to keep the churches cleaned.

3) In some parts of RHCL, the conservation and maintenance works used to sustain tourism practices lack adequacy in relation to the number of local community participants assigned and the practices were not quality in terms of input usage. So, the responsible parties of the church such as government organizations, local community, civil societies and development investors must work together to meet standards for conserving the church.

4) The responsible party should develop conducive, environment to visitors and local communities in terms of transportation facility, road infrastructure, public toilet, café and restaurant service quality according to the standard, cleanliness of the church area, modernizing waste disposal technique, safety and security issues.

5) The church administration, LTACTO, UNESCO and other parties should primarily focused on working collaboratively in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities for conservation and maintenance works for RHCL.

6) The concerned body of the government and other relevant stakeholders should rectify both internal and external challenges for the RHCL.

7) The importance of tourism investment in the areas of human resource development and training of local workers cannot be overlooked. Continuous development of skill enhances not only the heritage conservation and management issues, but also the quality of tourism services and the overall skills and capabilities of the local work force. To this end the following recommendations are forwarded: the ministry of education should take in to consideration to develop curriculums in regarding heritage conservation and maintenance works to support the tourism industry by producing educated personnel in the respected occupation.

8) Finally, the government should review and maintain the most feasible tourism policy especially for heritage conservation management which can make ingenuous contribution for the development of tourism sector in the country.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Towards deconstructing urban tourism within the framework of commercial sex work in Uganda**

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**There is great anxiety that present day urban authorities are not considering the amount of heterosexual activities that are neither among legitimately married couples nor casually relating friends. This anxiety has brought much pressure onto the civil society that aims to promote morality in society in addition to the religious bodies that aim to encourage positive morals among their congregates. Yet, the extent to which commercial sex work is capable of increasing the level of urban tourism in the 21st century is fascinating. Bearing in mind the different challenges and the proof of dearth of statistics on commercial sex work in Uganda, the emphasis of this paper is on how urban authorities can exploit the growing industry of commercial sexual activities to enhance urban tourism. Through an intensive review of available literature, this paper has established that commercial sexual activities are one of the central tourist attraction products in a number of urban areas in Uganda even though it lacks official documentation. Consequently, neither the urban authorities nor the tourism agency cares paying attention to the huge tourism potential hidden in the commercial sex industry. It is encouraged that urban authorities document the number of participants in commercial sex work so that they can be used to enhance urban tourism. This study is useful to urban authorities and other key stakeholders working with urban populations particularly at a time when nations are turning to domestic tourism.**

**Key words:** Urban tourism, commercial sex work(er), urban tourist, selling sex.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The extent to which Commercial Sex Work (CSW) is capable of enhancing the level of urban tourism in the ever changing 21<sup>st</sup> era is fascinating to a number of researchers and policy architects worldwide. A number of studies reveal the degree of stigma related to sex work; in some cases it is inescapable and deeply engrained especially in societies that have strong religious rigidities and beliefs. Scholars such as De Dieu Longo et al.

(2017) and Antebi-Grusizka et al. (2019) attest to this fact and reveal how sex work is often stigmatised and considered illegal, in much of Africa, with CSWs representing one of the marginalised sections. In their study, Fedorko et al. (2021) reveal that during the COVID-19 pandemic, sex workers were snubbed by a number of regimes, omitted from socioeconomic processes and simply left on their own.

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The above view is further supported by a similar study that was conducted in the United States (Tomko et al., 2021); it was indicated that besides being suppressed, stigma among CSWs is shaped within frameworks of societal ostracism and linked to a variety of ill-effects, together with emotional grief, and inferior proportions of healthcare-quest. These revelations reveal the inequity of the challenge facing CSWs virtually in almost every nation and society. In spite all the inequity suffered, CSW remains one of the fastest growing modern-day industries worlds over.

### **Etymology of CSW**

There is a certain degree of muddle over the concept of CSW. It is a term used in a range of contexts with a range of denotations, and if not careful, its meaning can lack clarity. For example, a number of researchers recognise selling and buying sex as CSW (Stenersen and Ovrebø, 2020; Lathan et al., 2021; Charek et al., 2021). Sexual contact includes touching specific parts of the woman's body (mainly in hetero-sexual contact), caressing, smooching, kissing, cradling and sexual intimacy, which are all or individually applicable in a range of contexts in CSW (Busby et al., 2020; Packheiser et al., 2020).

Sex workers are described as male, female and/or transgender adults aged 18 or more years who trade consensual sexual services in return for cash or payment in kind, and who may sell sex formally or informally, regularly or occasionally (UNAIDS, 2014; Jin Tan et al., 2021). A recent study shows a divergence in the way the term CSW is understood and presented with one side suggesting that the notion should be construed as rape since it is forced rather than based on mutual terms (De Dieu Longo et al., 2017). Another group suggests that CSW is a form of work that is conducted by females across the globe but often chastised by society on the basis of religion and other socio-traditional beliefs (Antebi-Grusizka et al., 2019). Yet, failure to recognise the existence of CSW injures a populace that is already vulnerable and undermines positive endeavours to provide helpful services such as knowledge on reproductive healthcare. In particular, when government authorities perceive those engaged in selling sex as offenders or preys and the industry as unlawful, less success is attained (Wolf, 2019). It is, as a consequence, very significant to appreciate the presence of CSWs in our populations in terms of their whereabouts, demographic proportion, areas of concentration and the various forms so that better targeted services can be availed to them in time (De Dieu Longo et al., 2017).

According to Watson and Vidal (2011), CSW is different from sexual contact for leisure since the latter may take place between colleagues, friends and/ or strangers who get caught-up in compromising situations devoid of personal control from one side or both. In this case, there

is monetary exchange but sexual satisfaction with no future sexual attachment between the two individuals is the key driver. This condition happens in cases such as rescue missions, situations of abandonment, to mention a few. As a consequence, CSW means more than just sexual contact between two adults of the opposite sex. However, a number of researchers (such as Sawicki et al., 2019; Antebi-Grizka et al., 2019) have described CSW from a more universal view, and yet in diverse frameworks. They appear to designate CSWs and sex workers synonymously. In their study, Sawicki et al. (2019) describe sex workers as persons who barter sexual services for a reward, for example, monetary, properties or other benefits. In Canada, CSW is described as sex work (Bungay et al., 2021). In much of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), CSW encapsulates a number of issues. In Zimbabwe, they label CSWs as ladies of the night (Makondo and Makondo, 2014). Thus, CSW appears to be designated as adult consensual exchange of sexual services for monetary gain (Bungay et al., 2021).

While several studies appear to concentrate more on targeted socioeconomic interventions in terms of prevention of sexually transmitted infections (such as HIV and AIDS (McMahon et al., 2021) as well as their relationships with particular clients especially those that turn out to be violent, it is significant that the authors take a positivist thinking at this stage. Of particular significance is the study conducted by Watson and Vidal (2011) among men who visit CSWs; it was established that buying sex "allows men to engage in sexual activities that they cannot or feel unable to engage in with non-paying sexual encounters". Also, "in some circumstances, this has included certain types of sexual activity such as oral or anal sex and also sexual activity involving sadomasochistic role-plays". Their study also established that "attraction for some men buying sex is that it appears to represent to them a psychologically safer environment in which to express sexuality". And that "the financial component allows some men to experience sex as more of a transaction, reducing their sense of personal exposure and fears of rejection". It was also found that "buying sex is interconnected with other parts of men's lives, often their careers and/or intimate relationships". And further "buying sex is related to the degree of satisfaction or frustration with one's regular relationship". In short, the notion of selling sex and/or buying sex appears to be deconstructed within different socio-economic-psychological contexts.

The notion of CSW can, likewise, be understood within the framework of positivism, which describes a way of describing the social order that depends on particular systematic proof generated through investigation and measurements so as to expose a factual nature of how the social order functions (Cull, 2021). Positivism is significant in creating ideas that can be verified with the eventual objective of enlightening our realm as soon as these ideas are plainly set out (Edlin, 2021). It is not a

monopoly of natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, as a number of people want us to believe, but positivism can reveal comparable rules functioning on the societal level of humanity such as CSW.

### Statement of the problem

The key attention of this paper is the present state of urban tourism in Uganda, which is one of the main factors contributing to youth employment in the country. There are pointers that the challenge of unemployment is organisational by its nature, which is, a number of youths are either unemployed or underemployed for dearth of opportunities as well as due to the impact COVID-19 has had on economies. This is a big challenge for the growing urban population, seeing that it is dominated by young people, thus, calling for instantaneous attention. It is possible that the challenge of unemployment is partly responsible for CSW as a fall-back position for a number of young people and yet scanty research has been done on this aspect. CSW is real and trendy in a number of countries whether in public or in seclusion; and provides a social and financial support to locals, travelers, and tourists. A study conducted by Ditmore and Melissa (2020) suggests that there were tens of thousands of women from Eastern Europe and Asia working as CSWs in Dubai where a large proportion of their buyers were men from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; and the world-wide male business community. In Uganda, CSW is becoming fashionable in a number of urban centers and involves young and middle-aged ladies who sell sex exclusively to prospective males particularly in non-Christian Guest Houses across the country. Despite listing several factors favorable for the booming urban tourism sector, CSW has not been acknowledged as a potential pull factor for the sector, in a number of Ugandan urban centers. While a number of countries (such as Uganda under the Penal Code Act (ACP, 120) have outlawed the practice rendering it illegal and prohibited, several tourists, upon arrival at tourism sites, start searching for sex sellers.

### Objective of the paper

The main objective of this study is to deconstruct the notion of urban tourism within the framework of CSW in Uganda. In achieving this objective, the following research questions, will be answered: (a) what are the key categories of CSW? (b) What connection can be traced between the new technological dynamics and CSW? (c) What are the major triggers of CSW? And (d) what is the influence of CSW in the potential tourist locations in the country?

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The central approach for this study was a desk review of accessible

literature on commercial sex work-[ers] in Uganda accompanied by other parts of Africa and beyond. Desk research involves a critical and comprehensive analysis of existing studies on a particular theme focussing on obtainable materials, e.g., academic journals, the internet, bulletins and statistical publications. Given that this phase precedes cross-referencing and the organisation of information, authors meticulously report on existing research through summarising and analysing, comparing, identifying common themes and gaps in the knowledge base, and providing directions for future research. Consequently, this approach has demonstrated high levels of efficacy in terms of offering a dependable overview of major literatures on a selected topic.

## OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

### The key categories of CSW

Recent studies have grouped the different categories of CSWs into three, viz.; official professional CSWs, non-professional CSWs, and circumstantial CSWs:

- a) Official professionals (also known as full-service sex workers) either have sex with high class (or wealthy) clients or work in underprivileged vicinities (Du Bois et al., 2021). They are often known as corporate CSWs.
- b) Non-professionals include market and street vendors (such as mobile women who vend salads on streets, students who are involved in occasional transactional sex particularly during holidays and/or weekends (Rosebloom and Fetner, 2001; Sagar et al., 2015; Stewart, 2021), house wives (especially during lunch time or whenever they sneak out for grocery shopping, visitation, partying or funerals (Adhikari, 2014) and unskilled civil servants (those commonly baptized as support staff such as office attendants, cleaners and office gardeners).
- c) Circumstantial sex workers embrace those that frequently feel locked in the business seeing that they lack the capacity to find equivalent engagement as a result of their vulnerability resulting from several situational conditions. Such conditions may include serious life trials, requisite for financial motion as well as the individual achievement by their work (Curtis et al., 2021).

The above three categories of CSWs appear to be intertwined in a number of cases seeing that one is likely to navigate between the categories due to improved financial status or remain stagnant.

### The connection between the new technological dynamics and CSW

There have been numerous dynamics in the CSW over the past decades as a result of increased scientific technologies and many socio-economic factors. These dynamics are informed by the fact that fewer people are in our time working on the streets and there has been a great reduction in the number of visible forms of CSWs as a result of progresses in scientific technologies

(Sanders et al., 2021).

To begin with, much of CSWs nowadays is negotiated with clients and they are facilitated through online spaces. These are known as off-street sex workers (Reynolds, 2021; Giommoni et al., 2021; Vlase and Preoteasa, 2021; Mergenthaler and Yasseri, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Almond and Mallette, 2022). In addition, adult entertainment platforms have become very convenient to both the sex sellers and their clientele in a number of countries, including Uganda (Hill and Lee, 2021). To sum it, dating sites (such as eharmony, elite singles, okcupid, adult friend finder, tinder, silver singles, etc.) are now very common and accessible using the online dating profiles, which a number of CSWs are now making use of to successfully reach out to the wider community of clients (Sharabi, 2021).

While these dating sites are accessible to CSWs, particularly those that are computer literate, they are not the only ones using them. In South Africa, for example, dating sites are handy to the divorced or separated, busy professionals, LGBT community and senior people as well.

In each of the above circumstances, the legality of sex work remains unclear even if a number of countries have permissive legislations. For example, while the UK quasi-criminalisation background presents trading in sex between submissive grown-ups as legal, the dealings and circumstances adjacent to it remain unlawful (Sanders et al., 2021).

While in a number of European countries, selling sex is not forbidden, for countries in central and eastern Europe as well as central Asia (together with Croatia), selling sex remains criminalised to date on the pretext of public order and peace. According to Radačić and Antić (2022), non-criminalisation of trading in sex among much of Europe is particularly strengthened by both the legalisation model and the client criminalisation model in which none of the two renders sex workers criminal. A similar trend was undertaken by the post-apartheid government of South Africa, which decriminalised sex work through a resolution in 2017 (Punt, 2021). In all these, CSW appears to flourish with the growth of scientific technologies and it is expected to grow bottomless in the coming decades.

### **The triggers of CSW in contemporary Uganda**

The concern of CSWs appears to be informed by a number of issues including, but not limited to; technology change, new public management principles, cost of formal education, degree of facilitation in public schools, quality of development programs, corruption and the rise of Mafia groups.

The first is that it is apparently clear that youth unemployment has hit the highest record since time immemorial and the situation is expected to worsen in the

coming decades as a result of dynamic scientific technologies and a fast growing human population (Mkombe et al., 2021; Webb, 2021). From the scientific technological perspective, every nation is struggling to improve their level of technology but they do not appear to appreciate one key challenge that comes with such technologies (Chao and Lenox, 2017). That is, with high technology, a job that was hitherto done by fifty people can now be done faster and better by no more than two people using advanced scientific technologies. The question this brings is that by so doing, we live a balance of about forty-eight people unemployed and such group may never be employed anywhere given that every company is resorting to the same development. Also, the world population is growing at a speed never imagined before in history to the extent that in about twenty years that is, before the year 2050, the global population may have hit a record 10 billion. This number, coupled with the ever advancing technologies, is likely to see hundreds of millions of young people unemployed.

The second is that new public management has come with lots of options through which costs can be cut in a number of public organisations (Brown, 2021). One way to achieving this is through multi-tasking where a manager, be they in the public sector or private sector, is expected to do secretarial work on his or her own and drive his/her car to and fro work as well as other off-site organisational activities. This directly implies that for every multitasking manager (Wu et al., 2021), two employees (a secretary and a driver) are rendered unemployed, which is a huge number in real terms. For instance, if there are fifty million managers, this action presupposes that a total of one hundred million youths have been rendered unemployed as a result of new public management principles and there is dearth of dependable safety nets for the affected category to have tangible benefits through the much preached trickle-down effect.

The third aspect appears to be the cost of formal education which has skyrocketed to the effect that education is slowly becoming a luxury of the wealthy given that the poor cannot afford paying the exorbitant fees (Blanton et al., 2021). For example, a parent in Uganda, taking their child to a private University for a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of surgery (as it is called) requires six million (using the exchange rate of UGX3700 for USD1, this is approximately USD2000) for tuition fees alone. When other requirements, such as accommodation, meals, healthcare, to mention just a few, this figure may well reach up to twelve million (approximately USD 4000) per semester. Yet, this student is expected to study for no less than twelve semesters; the simple arithmetic here brings the total figure to UGX132 million (approximately 44000USD). And a poorly paid primary school teacher who earns about UGX600,000 (approximately USD160), their child will never dream of taking a private medical program at University

(Zikanga et al., 2021). In the end, the child of the poor will only take academic programs that are less-relevant in the world of work thereby increasing the scale of youth unemployment directly.

The fourth issue is closely related to issue three above in that even the poor parent that takes their child to a government-aided school, because of dearth of infrastructure, equipment and human resources, the child studies 'by rumours' due to both high numbers in the classroom (over fifty for every teacher) and dearth of equipment for delivering meaningful scientific knowledge (Okia et al., 2021). For instance, a child in such a school will take on a science combination but will never have access to any laboratory equipment, which leaves that child concentrating on imaginary scientific knowledge and skills. To illuminate this issue; a number of students know that a combination of hydrogen and oxygen yields water but how these atoms are combined remains mystery (Gusango et al., 2021). Are these not the many low cadre healthcare providers hovering the country and beyond, and can anyone insist that we are teaching more sciences (it is now compulsory at lower secondary schools in Uganda) than humanities that our leaders continually scold in virtually any speech? A child from the wealthy parent will enrol in an international school where the ratio of teacher to students is very low (approximately 1 to 25 per class). This, coupled with a well-stocked laboratory, a child is able to meaningfully visualise, actively participate and analyse scientific knowledge with confidence. No wonder, such graduates will never understand the meaning of unemployment even when he/she becomes a member of the Legislative Assembly or a Cabinet Minister at that. Moreover, they are the most dominant due to the financial muscle they can apply to arm-twist the voter and the voting process to their favour (Cheeseman et al., 2021). What kind of legislation or policy will ever come out of such a cohort? Consequently, even if the youths graduate from colleges, they will remain unemployable and/or unemployed due to the divide created by wealth and lack of it in the education system.

The fifth issue appears as a rejoinder of issue four, that is, the quality of development frameworks adopted in a number of less-developing nations have little relevance in terms of curtailing youth unemployment (Solberg et al., 2021).

In the case of Uganda, majority of the poverty reduction programs have, since the year 2000, been censured for failing to translate into the presidential dream of increased prosperity among the poor including the growing number of young people. These programs include Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), the famous National agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Prosperity-For-All (PFA), Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), Youth Livelihood Program (YLP), Women Entrepreneurship Program (WEP), Emyooga and currently, the Parish Development Model (PDM) to

mention just a few (Agole et al., 2021; Galukande-Kiganda and Nalumansi, 2021). The reason behind the persistent failure is straightforward; the technocrats involved in formulating and implementing the programs do not analyse the situation on ground since they have never been there. They fail to appreciate what it means to be poor; they only believe that giving out money to youth groups, women groups or other formations will automatically translate into poverty reduction. They do not reflect on how the target group can invest the money in business when the same people have no food in the house or when their child is sick or when their child cannot go to school due to dearth of school fees. As a consequence, the technocrats have failed to convince the *Wanainchi* (local population) about the feasibility of such programs that are otherwise meant to enhance youth empowerment or youth self-employment.

The sixth concern is that Uganda is one of the countries better known for high levels of corruption almost at every stage of the policy and in every sector. Obtainable studies suggest that corruption in Uganda has become so entrenched that the government agencies often entrusted with fighting corruption end up being caught in the very mess (Mwesigwa, 2021). Cases of the untouchables are very dominant in curtailing efforts against corruption and, in the end; the President has resorted to preaching good morals, threatening to deal with the thieves and being an active participant in anti-corruption walks. To begin with, preaching good morals is a good thing because that is what everyone envisages but when those involved in real preaching (the religious) are not devoid of corruption then preaching loses significance. As a result, a number of religious men and women have failed to provide accountability for the resources entrusted under their care. Adding to this, threatening to deal with the thieves without taking action is as good as not saying anything at all as reports continue to implicate several big shots in government. The only significance is that the *small fish*, as they are commonly labelled, get arrested, sometimes when they are innocent but since a lamb has to be sacrificed, someone somewhere gets arrested as a display that something is being done on corruption. Also, antic-corruption crusades and/or walks are good in awakening the population towards something; this is an effort known among the powerless especially by civil society organisations. There is nowhere in the history of humankind that corruption has been fought through anti-corruption walks and it is not about to happen in Uganda.

The seventh apprehension focuses on the rise of the so called Mafia groups, which have dominated every aspect of life in Uganda and possibly elsewhere albeit at varying degrees (Sidorova and Lyubenova, 2021). These *Mafias* cannot allow any program meant to reduce poverty to succeed because that is where they benefit from. For instance, having high number of street kids roaming the streets of Kampala city and beyond is their pride; having

universal primary education and universal secondary education schools failing to compete with the poorly resourced private schools is their pride; having public hospitals continually running out drugs when huge amounts of drugs are expensively disposed of every year is their pride; having every poverty reduction program fail to create impact on the target group is their pride; having urban insecurity causing mayhem is their pride; having much of the national forests cut down at imaginable pace is their pride; having so many unemployed youths in the country is their pride; having fuel shortages hit the economy for weeks as fuel trucks are stuck in a 'seventy Kilometre traffic jam' at the Kenya- Uganda board in Malaba is their pride; having shortages in sugar when the per capita sugar production is higher than ever before is their pride; having more teenage girls become pregnant is their pride; and the list is endless (Bunyan, 2021; Shukar et al., 2021).

The Mafia groups, in Uganda, have become so sophisticated and dominant that the plight of citizens is their pride since they (the Mafias) accumulate much and often abnormal wealth as the status remains absurd for many a poor. That is why they continually organise groups of vulnerable sections, which are maintained in that status by the Mafia-dominated policy frameworks, to take to the President so he can give them hand-outs for short time endurance.

Descending from the above issues, the idea of CSW, which appears to be streaming from unemployment, is a big challenge, and seems to have persisted for generations, and so attracting serious questions about the relevance of urban authorities. Customarily, it is the prospect of every parent to see their daughter or son maturing into a normal citizen (as seen from the perspective of moral standards rather than modern-day crusading), finds a family and live happily thereafter. According to the Holly Bible (Proverbs 31: 10-31), the notion of a virtuous woman and the complications involved in finding one are catalogued. With the prevailing challenge where dearth virtuous women contributes to singlehood (plus the attendant price, such as CSW), this prospect is a mere artifice to many parents and society as a whole.

In view of the rising urban tourism in Uganda, partly attributable to high youth unemployment, this paper proposes means of deconstructing CSW as one of the urban tourism potentials to be harnessed by urban authorities. While efforts have been put forth by academics such as Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) to investigate the impetus of CSW in the framework of their individual countries' situation, not any of these studies appear appropriate for Uganda where the situation of CSW is to a certain extent blurred. Obtainable studies (for example Logie et al., 2021; Nabunya et al., 2021) on CSW are scarce, and they typically enumerate challenges encountered in the industry, rehabilitation of the actors and offer the way forward. They miscarry in

deliberating on additional topics of CSW and means by which it can be settled as one of the possible potentials for urban tourism, hence this study.

### **The influence of CSW in the potential tourist Locations in Uganda**

Tourists have a wide range of budgets and tastes and, as a consequence, a variety of resorts and hotels have developed across the globe to cater for their needs (Lew, 2021). E.g., majority of the urban tourists prefer simple beach vacations, while others want more specialized holidays, quieter resorts, family-oriented holidays, or niche market-targeted destination hotels. In Uganda, the data from the Uganda Tourism Board (2021) suggests that 98.1% of the tourists spend the entire duration of their stay in paid accommodations. This leaves a paltry 1.9% of tourists having to spend their time with friends and relatives outside the paid accommodations. The statistics further indicate that between 2015 and 2019, approximately 6.3% of tourists were couples who stayed together in the country suggesting that majority of them (93.7%) were not accompanied by their spouses. As such, the act of CSW appears to be practiced at a client's residence or hotel, often referred to as out-call, or at the seller's residence or hotel room rented for the occasion (Lepp, 2002).

It ought to be noted that CSW is a subset of urban tourism, and the growth of CSW can translate into urban tourism. Likewise, for majority, urban tourism involving travelling to an urban area due to [a] certain attraction[s]. As such, urban tourism is not necessarily about certain features or activities, but a wide range of expectations, which an individual envisions when he/she visits a particular area. Uganda has a number of natural and man-made attractions that are important urban tourism sites. These include bird viewing, boat cruising and water sports, hiking and mountain climbing, religious tourism [especially at the Uganda Martyrs shrines in Namugongo] and a number of cultural sites.

Thus, urban tourism is an activity which involves people traveling to and staying in urban centers outside their usual environment for a considerable period primarily for leisure, and not for business and other purposes. This dismisses the common perception of urban tourism as being limited to holiday activity (Andreva, 2007).

Given that one of the world's oldest professions in the English-speaking world, is the business of engaging in sexual activity in exchange for payment. CSW is described as sexual services, commercial sex and a person who works in this field is called a prostitute or a sex worker. It is one of the branches of the sex industry, along with pornography, stripping and erotic dancing (Weitzer, 2005). CSW occurs in a variety of forms, and its legal status varies from country to country, ranging from being an enforced or unenforced crime, to being

unregulated, and to a regulated profession. Lew concurs that international tourism receipts grew to US\$1.23 trillion in 2019, with the tourist arrivals surpassing the milestone of one billion tourists globally for the first time although the United Nations World Trade Organization had estimated that international tourist arrivals would decrease by 58% to 78% in 2020, leading to a potential loss of US\$0.9–1.2 trillion in international tourist receipts.

The Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980 recognizes the prominence of CSW as "an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies, and on their international relations". Tourism brings large amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services needed by tourists; and it also generates opportunities for employment in the service sector associated with tourism. It is claimed that travelling broadens the mind of a traveler. Several factors that include a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest represent the core of the destination marketing mix and create an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers.

In the host destinations, urban tourists are convincingly contented with services that include accommodation facilities that range from low cost home-stays to five star hotels; hospitality, including food and beverage serving centers; health care services like massage parlours; all modes of transport, travel agencies, guided tours and urban tourist guides; cultural services such as religious monuments, museums, and historical places; and shopping. CSW may be considered a form of exploitation. For instance, in Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, CSW is illegal to buy sexual services, but not to sell them, suggesting that the client commits a crime, but not the prostitute or the sex worker. In the Netherlands and Germany, CSW is a legitimate occupation and it is regulated as a profession; yet the act is a crime especially in many Muslim countries, where the prostitutes face severe penalties (Mortimer, 2012).

Just like the medieval residents accepted CSW as a necessary part of their life, CSW continues to play a significant role in society. Mortimer (2012) notes that prostitutes subverted the sexual tendencies of male and active youths, by learning to exist with the establishment of CSW; men were less likely to collectively rape honest women of marriageable and re-marriageable age. To reinforce this argument, Lew (2021) refers to the position highlighted by St. Augustine's claim that "the removal of an institution would bring lust into all aspects of the world." Meaning that without prostitutes to subvert male tendencies, men would go after innocent women instead, thus the prostitutes were doing society a favor. In Uganda, the Penal Code Act (CAP, 120) stipulates that rape, defilement and many other sexual offences are highly punishable and the availability of sex workers is a

big leap in the protection of urban tourists from getting into the *jaws* of such offences. The availability of willing ladies to offer sex to tourists is enough to avert the evil and ill-motives that would have lured urban tourists into problems. Critical looks at the many Annual Uganda Police Crime Reports, major sexual offences that involve tourists have not been recorded. Every year, the Police Crime Reports are full of 'extortion, conning, and defrauding' urban tourists by CSWs.

The role of CSWs can be two-way: positively key to the sex seller in terms of financial or other gains; and to the buyer in terms of the social comfort. A number of CSWs have a list of issues to be met and have resorted to this work to have these ends met. The urban tourists develop such social and sexual desires for CSWs to satisfy their social and sexual desires without committing crimes at different urban tourism sites in Uganda. Accordingly, the Lady Mermaid Bureau which is an association of urban sex sellers with more than 800 members mainly in Kampala city, several urban tourists hire them for 'escort services' rendered during the visitors' period in the country. In return, huge sums of money are paid. This company-making appears to be a strong benefit in the development of urban tourism sector in Uganda.

A number of urban tourist sites in Uganda have ladies whose presence renders such locations most hospitable. In such locations, CSW is not typically a lifetime career choice for the sex sellers. Women usually alternate their career of CSW with petty businesses such as bar attendant services and hawking. Approximately 44% of CSWs in posh hotels, motels and suites seldom turn to CSW in times of financial crises (Zeyno, 2011).

## Conclusion

In this paper, the authors have examined the dual issues, namely commercial sex work(er)s and urban tourism indicating the symbiotic relationship between the two. The various avenues through which CSW has led, leads and will continue to lead to urban tourism in Uganda, and in a number of nations across the world, have been discussed. Whilst we are cognisant of the fact that in a number of countries, CSW is still considered as an illegal and prohibited industry, its existence has not been curtailed. The expansion of scientific technologies through the different social media have deepened the industry and made it safer for both the sex sellers and the sex buyers. This has created an opportunity in which public authorities have less direct interference with the industry, instead treat it as avenue for an urban tourism opportunity. It is settled that CSW is one of the plausible contributors to urban tourism in Uganda.

## Research limitations

Two limitations emerge from this study, namely: first, this

study was entirely based on desk review of available literature and not on primary data, thus, results are likely to vary if a field-based study is conducted. Also, a number of valuable resources could not reach due to limited institutional access as a consequence of selective subscription.

### Research contributions

This study is likely to be useful to urban authorities and other stakeholders working with urban populations particularly at a time when nations are turning to domestic tourism.

### Research implications

This paper suggests that behind CSW is a positive element which authorities can tap into rather than continually rebuking the industry as evil.

### Areas of future research

The study could not exhaust every element on CSW; therefore, future research can be conducted on:

- a) Strategies for harmonising the relationship between the sex-seller and sex-buyer so as to mitigate exploitation and violence;
- b) Practices and challenges faced by social workers offering psycho-social support to CSWs in out-of-the-way urban centres.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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