

Full Length Research Paper

Inside the commons of ecotourism development in Ethiopia: Strategic communal empowerment or marginalization? Evidence from Wenchi community based ecotourism

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This paper examines the quest of empowerment and disempowerment, the way community based ecotourism created the marginalized community throughout its development phase in Ethiopia with evidence from Wenchi Ecotourism development. Descriptive research design was employed where as random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to determine the sample size. The sample representative for the study was 221 samples (196 for local community, 12 guides, 3 experts and 10 community representatives). Interview, focused group discussion, questionnaire and participant observation were used as a data collection instruments. In order to collect the data, community, government officials, and community representatives were a source of data where the sample size was determined by simple random sampling for local community and purposive sampling for the rest. Despite its significant contribution to livelihood augmentation, the finding indicated that Wenchi community based ecotourism created a two group of community: the empowered and the marginalized on the commonly owned resources. Even though the lake is a common pool resource, those members of the community who are beneficiary from ecotourism were the key player and powerful in decision making concerning the lake and its surroundings. Besides, out of 400 households around the lake, only 334 households were incorporated to the ecotourism association which was the reason for the formation for empowerment or disempowerment and resulted in formation of minority on commonly owned resources. Moreover, social network, norms and social trust that facilitates coordination and mutual benefits for environmental conservation and protection is being eroded.

Key words: Ecotourism, empowerment, commons, marginalization, Wenchi.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. It contributes 5% of the world's GDP and 7%

of jobs worldwide. It accounts for 6% of the world's exports and 30% of the world's exports in services where

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tourism generates 45% of the total exports in services in developing countries (World Tourism Organization, 2012). Despite its obscurity, Ethiopian tourism industry shows a significant paradigm shift during the previous period. The history of Ethiopian tourism has been showed a significant growth rate since the imperial periods. Even though ecotourism is at its infant stage, it has shown a significant development in Ethiopia. Besides different impediment, ecotourism has considered as an appropriate strategy for livelihood step up; empowerment of marginalized community and nature conservation while recreating the tourists (Lascuráin, 1988; Fennell, 1999; Liu, 1991). Apart from its value to local community, they are still excluded in making decisions of tourism projects at their doorsteps (Irmgard, 2014).

In the year 1950s and 1960s, community development was introduced to ensure community involvement in decision making, implementation and made them beneficiary from developments (Sebele, 2010). A heavy competition over land and resources resulted in deprive of rural communities of control over and access to the territories and natural resources across Africa (Fred, 2010). As a need to ensure community empowerment, Ethiopian tourism development policy encourages community participation to ensure the sustainable development of the community (Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2009). Despite brainwave at policy level, community participation is limited where large companies dominated the business particularly from the centre resulted in marginalization of the community in line with uncoordinated management of such resources at grass root.

Despite the competing interests on resource sharing, local empowerment is the basic for the sustainable development of Ecotourism (Isaac and Wuleka, 2012). In Contrary, indigenous people whose survival depends heavily on natural resource may perceive tourism as a threat that deprives them (Ross and Wall, 1999); the mere fact beyond what is on the ground is the participation of local community as an essential component for the friendly relationship between tourism and environment (Wahab, 1997). Likewise, community based approach to ecotourism recognizes the need to promote both the quality of life of people and the conservation of resources (Scheyvens, 1999). Hence, the inclusion of community wishes in tourism planning and development at grass root level helps the community to gain economic returns from the development (Murphy, 1985 cited in Sebele, 2010). It is argued that community based natural resource management results in 'win win situation' (Sebele, 2010) even though it is often unclear exactly who is to be empowered; the individual, the 'community', or categories of people such as 'women', 'the poor' or the 'socially excluded' (Cleaver, 1999). The livelihoods of African smallholder farmers are often constrained by poor access to markets and limited entrepreneurial skills for adding value to produce.

Conflicts between local groups and other more powerful actors, including both state agencies and private sector investors, remain widespread across the subcontinent and are often intensifying (Roe et al., 2009). In developing countries like Ethiopia where donors are the frontline role players for its establishment, there is a paradox in community empowerment. In spite of argument of empowerment, there is scant study on whether ecotourism development is a reason for empower community or marginalize community as a result of development phase of Ecotourism in Ethiopia. The finding pointed out that the segmented (partial) empowerment of the community which resulted in damage of the natural resources ecotourism depends. Thus, the main objective of the article is to assess community empowerment in the development phase of community based ecotourism of Wenchi Crater lake, Ethiopia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

Wenchi Crater Lake is one of an impressive, wide and very steep lake in Ethiopia with its dramatic valley located in the central high land of Ethiopia, 155 Km South West of the capital, Addis Ababa. The lake and its surroundings are endowed with indigenous plant species including *Hyginia abyssinica*, *Juniperus procera*, *Olea Africana*, *Schefflera Abyssinica* and *Erica Arborea*. Furthermore, *Colobus guereza*, *Tragelaphus sylvaticus* are mammals that commonly seen whereas *Gyps Africanus*, *Milvus aegyptius*: black kites, *Bostrychia carunculata*, and *Tauraco leucotis* are some of the birds that can be seen. Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism introduced to the lake in 2003 by GTZ in collaboration with Oromiya trade and industry bureau.

Methods

Descriptive research design was employed to describe narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation (Kothaire, 2004). The sample size was determined by the use of simple random sampling technique for questionnaire survey. Lewis (1994). Additionally, 10 community representatives, 12 guides and 3 experts selected via purposive sampling. Accordingly, 221 samples were the part of the study. Field observation, semi-structured interviews, focused group discussion and the analysis of documents have been the principal methods of data collection in order to assess community attitude towards ecotourism development of the lake, their level of empowerment and the problem created as a result of the development on the lake and its surroundings. The data were analyzed by the use of SPSS version 21 for quantitative data. A comprehensive questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the information from different literature and studies and the questionnaire distributed to local community was translated into *Afan Oromo* language.

The data from questionnaires was analyzed through frequency, and percentages, and mean based on the study objectives, theoretical and conceptual frameworks using Likert scales of 5-points. Data collected through Interview was analyzed systematically and based on the techniques of listening and transcription, reduction to units of relevant meaning and summarization.

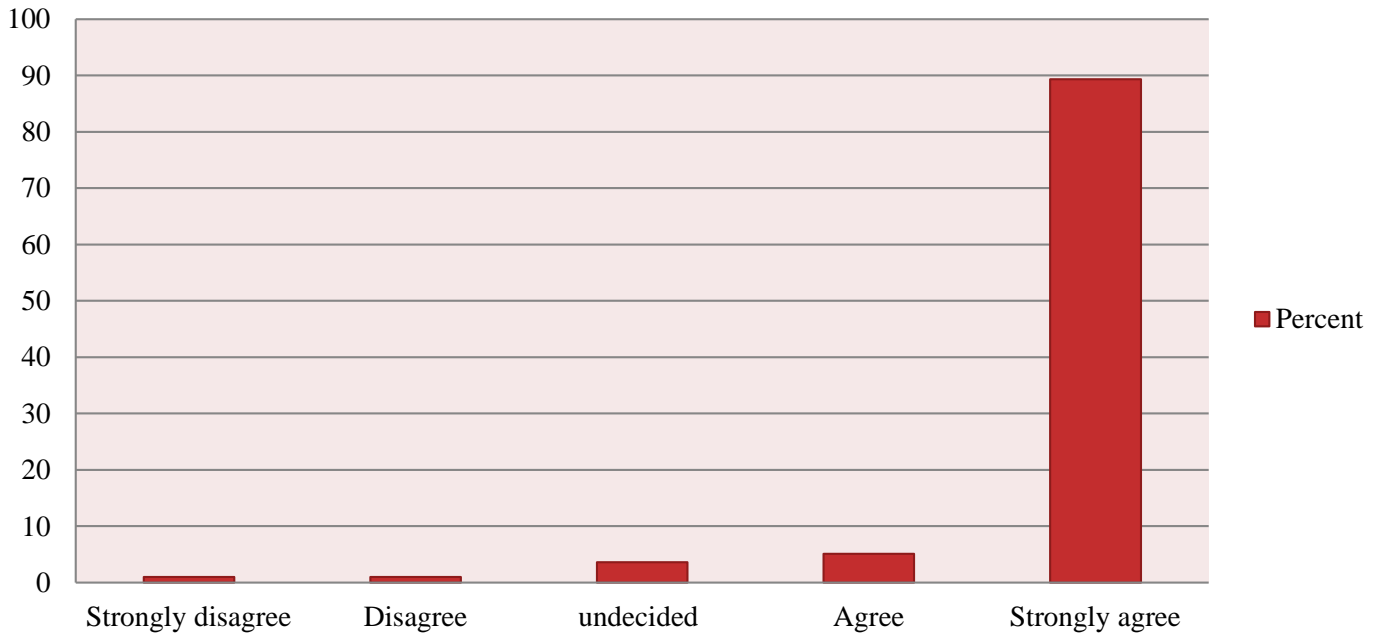


Figure 1. Community attitude towards ecotourism's value for the conservation of culture and nature.

Here ideas were refined and revised in the light of the information gathered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Community of Wenchi Crater Lake and its surrounding has a positive attitude towards ecotourism in which the majority (89.3%) believed that ecotourism helped them to value both the nature and their culture (Figure 1). However, the finding from interview and focused group discussion indicated that despite their appreciation of ecotourism, it caused marginalization of certain group. As a result, two scenarios (the majority and minority) were formed after the ecotourism project. This implies that before the establishment of ecotourism, both the empowered (majority) and marginalized (minority) was the co-owner of the natural resources nearby. Accordingly, Wenchi Crater Lake was the common pool resource of the two communities. In opposition to this, the majority (the empowered) is a decision maker, owner and beneficiary. One of the main reason for the failure of development projects at community level are inability to improve their life after being developed and not just a score on somebody's set of indicators (Irmgard, 2014). However, ecotourism is identified as a potential for empowering marginalized peoples, and conserving biodiversity (Honey, 1999; Scheyvens, 1999; Wearing and Neil, 1999). Apart from this, the finding from Wenchi Crater Lake revealed that community based ecotourism created two groups of people on the power to control the common

resources where the member of the association had a strong influence on decision made on both ecotourism development and the commonly owned resources.

Some authors argued that ecotourism is little more than conventional capitalism with a veneer of socially and environmentally responsible rhetoric (Isaacs, 2000; Duffy, 2002; Cater, 2006; Meletis and Campbell, 2007). Whether ecotourism is a silver bullet or fool's gold (Mills and Porras, 2002), panacea or Pandora's Box (Kruger, 2005), the question of how ecotourism affects the commons merits greater attention. Ecotourism may not only create a marginalized community but also can affect the social interaction between the one who is empowered and disempowered. Tourism as a community development exercise has been shown to create social tensions and disharmony (Wyllie, 1998; Wearing and McDonald, 2010 cited in Irmgard, 2014). Despite the direct benefits from ecotourism development to the lake, there were no strategies that ensure the benefits of the minority. The finding from the interview and field observation shows that there was an electric power, school, and health care for those who are the participant in ecotourism. However, the other side of the community was marginalized from the activity of ecotourism and benefits resulted from the development to the area.

On the other hand, the study showed that 86.3% of them believed that ecotourism improved their livelihood where as 91.5% of the respondents (n=196) believed that ecotourism can strengthen their power of ownership if developed in sustainable manner. And triangulation of data showed that communities who were not included in

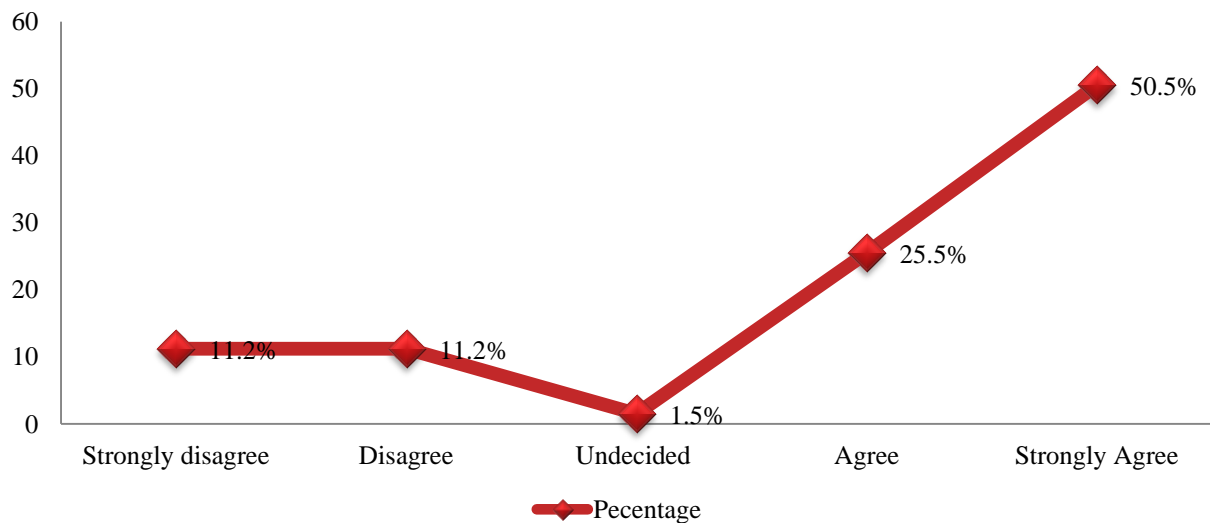


Figure 2. Community attitude towards Social interaction as a result of ecotourism.

the association also had positive attitude towards ecotourism. The community's views of social interaction (Figure 2) as a result of ecotourism development are almost good (50.5% of the respondents strongly agree). However, the interview with 25 Interviewee showed that the relation between those participant and not participant as well the ecotourism association leaders were not good. This can be seen in terms deforestation, deliberate farming of land nearby the lake, and the burning of temporary guest house built around the lake by unknown person.

Moreover, one of the main inclusion requirements is financial capacity to pay membership fee. Besides, in kind contribution may be considered. For instance, if somebody wants to join a boat group, he/she expected to own either a boat or pay membership fee determined by members of the association. This is the situation that made the empowered more empowered and the disempowered more disempowered. This is confirmed with the finding of Stronza (2010) which revealed expanded individual production and extraction, and a new spirit of individualism weaken the traditional social relations and institution, conservation ethics that promotes communal ownership among the community.

The historical background of the association shows that ecotourism to the area was a GTZ financed project in collaboration with Oromia trade and industry Bureau to enhance the livelihood of the community of Wenchi. This may imply that the developers designed the association either where certain group of community did not aware the significance of ecotourism to their livelihood or the developer developed in the way that suits their development policy. This is similar to Cornwall's finding which revealed the process of selection; exclusion and self-exclusion of potential participants are utilized by development actors (Cornwall, 2008).

Power controversy among the association, community and the newly established monastery were also another challenging problem of the lake; the association and the monastery has two different receipts for boat service .i.e. the monastery gives receipt freely in order you can pass by boat to the other side of the lake. However, the boat service providers never allow you to use the service without payment. The monetary benefit beyond power struggle and the intervention of the monastery in ecotourism activity of the lake leads to the conflict of interest between the association and monastery. Furthermore, the interview with boat service provider revealed that the newly established monastery leader is selling charcoal in spite of allowing the community to use the boat service freely. Beyond this controversy, the boat service providers react in opposition to the newly established monastery as they are selling charcoal by ignoring the policy of ecotourism association of the lake. As a result of power controversy among conflicting party, the need for biodiversity conservation and livelihood enhancement, the natural resource is exploited and deteriorated at the middle if the conflicting parties are not reach agreement. When commonly owned natural resources are modified by ecotourism, the long term conservation depends on the price relative to other values of resources. On the other hand, due the inability of ecotourism to support their livelihood and short of land for agriculture in rural areas, the community forced to do so. There is discrepancy between the young and elder on relocation where the youngsters were looking for relocation and resettlement in which they stated their views in the following ways:

"Even though we need to be beneficiary from ecotourism of the lake, we could not be included in the association for our inability to pay entrance fee to the association and

supplementary equipment like horse, boat and others. We do not have a sufficient land to plow but forced to cut tree and other illegal activities on the environment. We asked the government officials to relocate and resettle, but remain unanswered.”

Contrarily, according to interview with elders, they were not looking for resettlement and relocation for the following reasons:

“It is our land and we are indigenous to the area and our fore fathers are also inhabited here where the area is the burial place of our ancestor’s Liban clan of Waliso Oromo. We could not need to resettle other place. We could not survive in another area as we are adapted to the climatic condition of Wenchi.”

The rules and regulation of Wenchi Ecotourism articulates that the member of the association should avail themselves for the better servicing of the customer. If not, they may be deprived of the benefits they are expected to gain from the service during that particular date. Even during the off season, they are expected to do so. Therefore, they were the victim of the seasonality nature of ecotourism which may have an adverse impact on their livelihood. Similar finding by Stronza (2005) confirmed that the price value placed on a resource may be the source of its demise rather than its long-term stewardship. Even though they can engage on another economic activity like trade, agriculture and others, they have to wait all the day for tourist since they do not know when customers came as there is no means of pre-reservation in order to provide a pre-arranged service to various customers and the society in general. This may be due to the domains of community participation are pre-determined and may not include domains relevant to the local people (Laverack, 2003; 2006). In the same way finding from Canada revealed that if a tourism enterprise does not consider local everyday life in its planning, deterioration of the tourism product, conflict between locals and entrepreneurs and, of most concern, community dysfunction will occur (Reid et al., 2000). Moreover, Botes and Rensburg’s (2000) identified the paternalistic role of development professionals, the inhibiting and prescriptive role of the state, an over-reporting of development successes, selective participation, hard-issue bias, conflicting interest groups within communities, gate-keeping by local élites, pressure for immediate results, and a lack of public interest as a barriers to community based developments. As a result, if the community based development is not developed from the community’s perspectives and interests from the very beginning, it results in the failure of the project objectives where the emphasis can be shifted to the resolution of the ownership problem and others beyond the primary goal of the project.

Conclusion

The finding suggests that instead of project developer’s interest and objective, the broad social interest of the commons in line with the biodiversity conservation should be considered in advance. Even though community Based ecotourism has a greatest potential to empower the community, care must be given to who should be incorporated and not since absence of a single group of people expected to be incorporated can have an adverse impact on sustainability of the ecotourism projects, biodiversity conservation and mutual relationship. As a result, the sustainable development of community based ecotourism can create a disempowered people beyond their communal management of natural resources if not considered during the initial stage of the project.

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