



Challenges and Prospects of Community Based Ecotourism Development in Lake Zengena and its environs, North West Ethiopia

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Abstract

The research focused on the challenges and prospects of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) development in Lake Zengena and its environs, Banja Woreda. Awi Nationality Administration has used both quantitative and qualitative approaches employing purposive and simple random sampling. The study used a total of 110 samples to conduct and survey data based on primary and secondary data sources through different instruments including questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussion, field observation and literature review. As a result, this study revealed that Lake Zengena and its environs is not only endowed with natural tourism resources but it is also endowed with a wide range of rich cultural tourism resources. The study also found that the area has many challenges that hinder CBET development. The major hindrances identified include minimal government and stakeholder participation, poor infrastructure, lack of financial support, lack of skilled man power, and the use of lake as a source of "Holly Water" by the church. On the other hand, diverse tourism resources, good accessibility to the main asphalted road, the location of the pathway to the historic route and to the Ethiopian Great Renaissance Dam and the proximity to different destinations were the major opportunities identified. The study stresses that the local community needs to be involved in a range of activities so as to enhance locals' livelihood and more especially, to conserve the environment. Thus, a good tourism development plan along with a sound tourism policy have to be developed in order to utilize the area's huge potential and to make the local communities beneficiaries of the development through engagement with the major challenges.

Keywords: Lake Zengena, community based ecotourism, challenges, prospects, Ethiopia

Introduction of the Study

According to the UNWTO, tourism is a rapidly growing market and is showing remarkable growth in the current global scenario. Tourism makes an enormous contribution to local economies, job creation and sustainable development, and can play a leading role in the transformation towards the desired green economy (UNWTO, 2010). Ecotourism offers a great opportunity for Africa, whereby African countries can base their tourism development on exploiting their natural assets on the condition that the rules of sustainable development – the basis of ecotourism – are respected, especially when involving communities living within and adjacent to the assets. (WTO and UNEP, 2002).

A participatory development approach would be preferable so as to achieve sustainable tourism (Simane et al., 2013). This can facilitate the implementation of sustainable tourism development by creating better opportunities for local people so as to allow them to gain a relatively larger and more balanced benefit from tourism development taking place in their localities. Over 80% of the Ethiopian population is rurally based, and have agriculturally-based livelihoods and extremely low levels of income derive from farming (Mann, 2006). It also has a



great deal of potential for ecotourism development which may be attributed to various protected areas, mountains, lakes, wildlife reserves and many other sites of value for tourists.

The problem faced is how the country can use these abundant resources, especially its potential in ecotourism development to benefit local communities more. The author's concern centered on helping to alleviate the plethora of problems associated with CBET development. It is especially important in this study to identify the many challenges and prospects of CBET in Awi Zone in the case of Lake Zengena. The reason behind the selection of this site is the area is not as such, considered to be a 'honey-pot' tourist destination. This is due to its location within the historic route radius and to date, no studies related to CBET in this potentially rich area has been undertaken.

Ethiopia is endowed with diverse natural resources with a great potential to attract visitors, ranging from both domestic and foreigners, and also from day trippers to overnight visitors (Sintayehu, 2015). However, the abundant resources are not yet fully utilized and the tourism industry is still at its infancy. Awi Nationality Administration is amongst the richest areas when it comes to natural and man-made resources that have good potential for CBET. But, these resources are not yet well exploited by tourists and a variety of stakeholders (SHs). This may be because too little is known about the latent resources. It is in response to this fact, that the researcher conducted research on Lake Zengena which is considered to be a strategic site for the development of CBET in the ANAZ, and thus it requires an extensive in-depth research undertaking. Some researchers have addressed issues related to CBET development in different parts of Ethiopia. They addressed the issues related to problems, opportunities and practices, relating to CBET as a tool for sustainable development (Daniel, 2011; Gebeyaw, 2011; and Mulugeta, 2011). However, studies related to the challenges and prospects for the development of CBET especially in water bodies like Lake Zengena, and the legal framework for CBET in potential destinations of tourism remain untouched. This is because the focus had been given to the 'honey-pot' areas. To fill this gap, this study addresses the challenges and prospects of CBET development in the case of Lake Zengena and its environs.

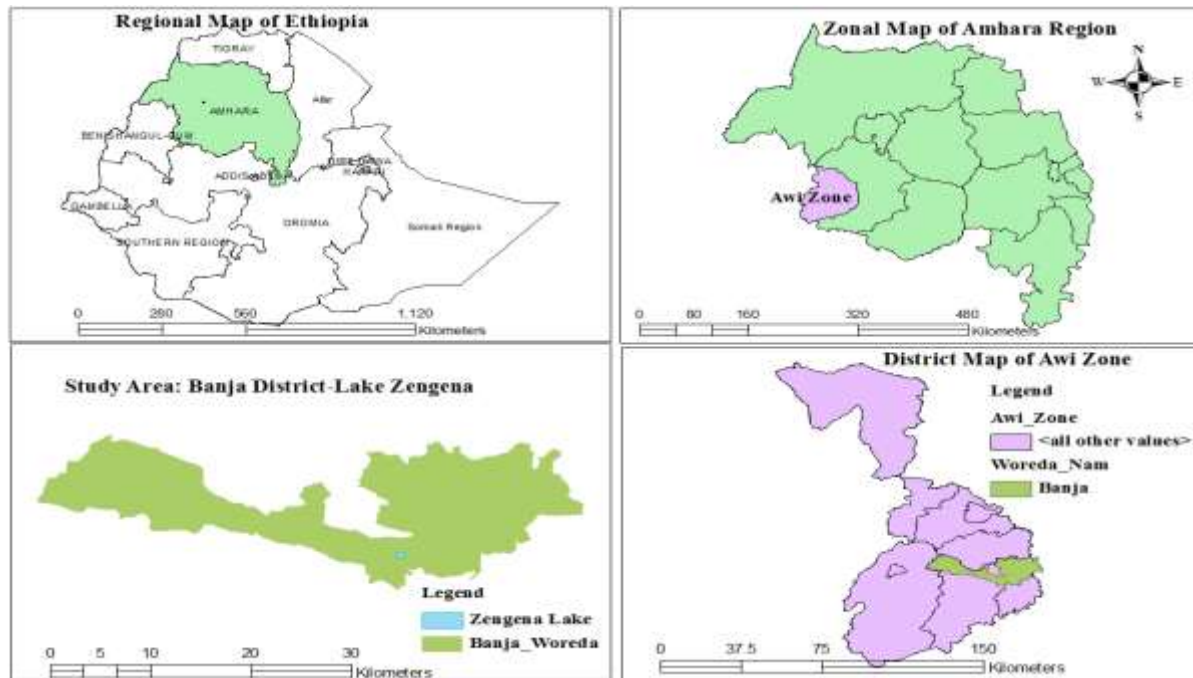
The major objective of this study was to ascertain the extent of the challenges and prospects for developing CBET in Lake Zengena and its environs. The study specifically sought to:

- Investigate tourism potentials of the area for the CBET development,
- Find out the major challenges hindering the development of CBET on Lake Zengena and its environs,
- Find out the possible areas in which the communities could be involved in initiatives to develop community based ecotourism on Lake Zengena and its environs and
- Identify the role of other stakeholders in developing CBET.

Methods and Materials

Lake Zengena is situated in Banja Woreda between coordinates 10°54'50"N 36°58'00"E and it is 5km away from Injibara Town along the main Addis Ababa - Bahir Dar road. Lake Zengena is an attractive lake situated in Kessa- Chewsä Kebele in the southern direction near the main highway between the towns of Injibara and Kessa only 100m from the Addis Ababa-Bahir Dar road at an elevation of 2523masl. (Banja Woreda Statistical Agency, 2013).

Currently there is very little done by local guides and scouts and while it is visited by both domestic and foreign tourists, these are very few in number. The lake is almost a full circle without any indentation, and it is 0.5 square kilo meters wide and 150 -169 meters depth. It is surrounded by both indigenous and non-indigenous plants and trees which are evergreen.



Map 1. The study area,. Source: Author's survey, 2014

To address the issues in this study, entitled Challenges and Prospects of CBET in Lake Zengena and its environs, the researcher employed a descriptive type of research methodology and this was chosen to identify and describe the significant existing conditions and the relationship between important variables. With regard to the approach taken, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to gather information through different data gathering instruments. This study employed purposive and simple random sampling techniques so as to address the stakeholders' issues in the study area. The rationale behind the choice of this design and technique was because the issue needs great detail identification of the problem raised at the selected site. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select sample respondents who were perceived to be aware of detailed points raised during the survey and to select *gotts* surrounding the lake from the Kessa-Chewsa kebele.

For the sake of clarity it is important to explain some terms. The Oromia regional government has fashioned a set of quasi-governmental structures below the *kebele* (neighbourhood) level in rural communities throughout Oromia. Every rural *kebele* is divided into groups of households called *gott*. The *gott* differ in size but typically encompass between sixty and ninety households. Each *gott* is divided into smaller groups of approximately thirty households called *garee*, which means "group". The *gott* oversee the activities of the *garee* and report to *kebele* authorities. The *garee* are thus the more vigorous of the two structures and have the most everyday contact with the households they supervise.

For the rest simple random sampling was employed. The total sample from the total population of the study area is based on the formula adapted from Israel (1992):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where, n= the sample size required
 N= the total population size
 e = the level of precision which is = (±10%)
 where confidence interval is 95% at p=±5 (maximum variability)



The study area is found in Kessa- Chewsa Kebele which has a total of 967 households (HHs) and the study area i.e., Lake Zengena is surrounded within 4(four) 'Gotts' that contains about 316 HHs. So that based on the formula adapted, the total sample can be calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{316}{1 + 316 (0.05)^2}$$
$$n = 316 / (1 + 316(0.0025)) = 316 / (1+1.79) = 467 / 1.79 = 176.536 \approx 177 \text{ samples}$$

These numbers of households will be difficult to supervise due to variety of factors including time and budget. The researcher had limited to use the total of 110 samples purposefully and randomly between each stakeholder, depending on the subjects selected in the study. The reason for the choice of non-probability sampling was due to the location of the lake adjacent to each *gott* (*Zengena gubiti*, *Qes mender*, *Zengena gis* and *Sahouwie*) where samples were taken in areas which surround the lake. In general a total of 89 locals and 21 samples from experts and heads of different bureaus/offices were taken in deciding the suitable sample size.

This study was then based on subjects including: the office employees of: Amhara Region Culture, Tourism and Parks Development Bureau, Banja Woreda Agriculture Office, Banja Woreda Environmental Conservation and Land Use Administration Office, local communities of the study area, religious leaders, local authority of Kessa-Chewsa kebele, associations such as Awi Development Association, and a range of other professionals.

The researcher employed both primary and secondary sources of information as data gathering tools. The primary sources included a questionnaire, observation, focus group discussions (FGD) and key informants interviewing was also used. In addition, reports from the Banja Woreda Culture and Tourism Office and particularly from the ACTPDB were also used. For the secondary data sources the researcher has used related journals, articles, books and folders and brochures from the Banja Woreda Culture and Tourism Office and particularly from the ACTPDB.

The researcher included analysis methods such as the SPSS formula and the interpretation was presented by the use of tables, graphs, and figures for all the quantitative data. The qualitative method of analysis was also used in this study. For the purposes of the reliability of the study, triangulation of a variety of data gathering tools was used in the analysis and presentation of the data.

Results and Discussions

This study selected the respondents from different groups of the sample population: questionnaires were collected from the local communities, experts (culture and tourism bureau, tour guides). The majority of the households (82.7%) in the area depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood, 8% of the households depend on trade, and each 2.7% of them depend on sale of handicrafts, obtaining a salary and/or daily wage, while very few of them (1.3%) depend on other sources of income for their survival. As verified from observation and interviews they are also engaged in other sectors of economy but the income they receive is not significant at all and this makes their existence unsustainable.

Tourism Potentials of Lake Zengena and Its Environs

The researcher sought to analyze and describe the tourism resource potentials of Lake Zengena and its environs mainly in two dimensions: namely the natural and cultural resources



with which the area is endowed. Following is a description of the tourism potential aspects that the lake and its surroundings possess.

The study area is endowed with both rich natural and cultural resources. All the respondents replied that the lake has tremendous potential that might be used for a variety of tourism activities. Those resources that the lake is endowed are found surrounding the lake which are worth a visit for every visitor, and have been witnessed by all of the expert's sampled. They also replied that the resources are mainly natural which takes the lion's share (68.8%) and the rest of the resources are of a cultural orientation (31.2%).

The natural resources of Lake Zengena and its environs include the following: Lake Zengena which is considered to be the main resource of the area, with a large variety of wildlife which includes avian species, reptiles, fish species such as the resilient Tilapia and a host of mammals. The bird species include inter alia, *Alopochenae gyptiaca* (*Dakiye*), *Aquila rapax* (*Chilifit*), *Wattled Ibis* (*Bale-Enitiltit Gagano*). The mammals include the Abyssinian Colombus monkey (*Gureza*), Spotted Hyena (*Jib*), the Anubis baboon (*Monkey/zinjero*), Common bushbuck (*Dikula*), and other mammals which can all be found in close proximity to Lake Zengena.



Image 1. Lake Zengena. Source: Author's own

The other natural resources include nearby mountain's such as Darkan Mountain, in a North Westerly direction which is still untouched by any tourism activity, but with a potentially good view point of the surrounding area. There are also the Gubil mountains', in a South Westerly direction of Lake Zengena and they are covered by very dense forests comprising mainly highland evergreen trees. The birds and mammals found around Lake Zengena can also be found in the mountainous areas. Bamboo Plantations or '*Kerkeha*': are also natural plants near Lake Zengena. Generally speaking, in almost all directions there is an abundance of fresh air and environmental beauty. It is common particularly in the parts of Awi Nationality Administration including Banja Woreda and in Kessa- Chewska Kebele to see local bamboo products.

The cultural tourism resources include the popular Monasteies of Felege Hiwot Kidus Gabriel and also Debre Mihret Kidus Michael, which are located as such having a direct connection to the lake in which the main church itself is found. This is approximately 30-40 meter from the lake's basement. The second monastery is located on the direct opposite of the entrance point to Lake Zengena to the west direction. The monasteries have a close connection with religious practices of the lake such as the Coptoc Church Timket/Epiphany festival, and monthly celebrations of St. Gabriel. The lake is often used as a source of 'Holy water' for the day to day church services and all special celebrations.



Image 2: The faithful going to a festival at a monastery near Lake Zengena. Source: Authors Own

Handicrafts and Other Cultural Assets

The sale of local handicrafts could have a big potential to help develop community business enterprises and thus promoting CBET in Lake Zengena and its environs. The most common handicrafts in the surrounding include those prepared from bamboo trees, horse tails (*Chira*) souvenirs and weaved goods (these are common in Zengena Gubiti *gott* of the kessa-chewsa *kebele*). These itmes could all be manufactured as souvenirs and also used to develop culturally driven art galleries in the area.



Image 3: Souvenir Item Source: Author's own

Ye Sebat bet Agaw Yealem Feresejnoch Mahiber is a typical cultures of the Agaw society which stayed and passed their skills down from one generation to the next without any change

in their original product designs. In addition, a wide range of handicrafts and other cultural assets are also major cultural tourism resources of the study area.



Image 4. “Shimigilina” of the Feresegnoch mahiber in settling disputes, Source: Awi government Communication Office 2012



Image 5. Yesebat Bet Agaw Yealem Feresegnoch Mahiber at annual festive, Source: Banja Woreda culture and tourism office, 2013

Challenges of CBET Development in Lake Zengena and Its Environs

As far as this study was concerned, employing a variety of data collection tools and selecting the appropriate design was a major problem. CBET development in Lake Zengena and its environs, was identified by experts’ as an area in which Government attention (50%) was poor, and there was a lack of community awareness and/or willingness to participate (37.5%). In addition, there was a lack of skilled manpower (12.5%). The aforesaid were all indicated as the



major challenges in the CBET development process at Lake Zengena and its environs. In addition, there are also many other hindrances towards the development of CBET.

The major challenges were summarized as follows:

Lack of good government attention and other stakeholders' participation- All the Respondents' (12) from the culture and tourism bureau strongly agreed that the above issue is a major hindrance to CBET development. 4 of the respondents them also agreed that it was a problem.

Lack of skilled manpower and budget-12 of the respondents agreed that a lack of skilled manpower and finance are amongst the major challenges in seeking to develop CBET. The rest of the respondents (2) disagreed and believe that this was not a factor hindering CBET.

Use of the lake as a source of "holy water" by the church- This practice often creates a conflict of interest between the government and the local community because of the community fearing that it would lose its spirituality of the source of holy water (questionnaires, personal observation and the Kil's).

Lack of infrastructure- the area has problems in suitable roads, poor accommodation services, potable water and poor electricity availability. In addition, modern grinding facilities/grinding mills, are not available for local usage and these are a priority need in such areas as the locals' livelihood depends on (issue raised during interviews and FGD)

Lack of good tourism development policy and land degradation on tourism resources- due to agricultural and negative community attitudes towards tourism and many community conflicts on resource ownership, these are also major challenges to develop CBET in the study area.

Prospects of CBET Development in Lake Zengena and Its Environs

Possibilities for communities' involvement- the majority of the respondents (76%) stated that there is no any initiative made by the local NGOs and government organizations in driving CBET. The rest (24%) of the respondents suggested that there are some initiatives in place. Similarly, as indicated above, the respondents reply to the issue of community participation in decision making and other issues in the development process of tourism by the authorized body in the lake area, was diverse, with 66.7% of them saying that they haven't yet participated in any discussions to obtain their viewpoints, while 33.3% of them replied they have participated in tourism development issues at Lake Zengena and the surroundings. Locals in Lake Zengena and the surrounding areas have been involved and could be involved in the trading of souvenirs (64%), production of souvenirs (62.7%), guiding (29.3%), and working as employees in some of these operations (54.7%) in the lake area. Some suggested that the renting of horses (34.7%) could be useful to develop business. Here, a small number of HH members believed that locals should only be involved in guiding and the renting of horses for out-rides. The areas of involvement that communities are in are not organized by a responsible body as CBET activities – rather, it is a case of communities practicing whatever they wish simply as the alternative means of revenue supporting their livelihood by themselves is non-existent.



Abundance of diverse tourism resources- Lake Zengena and its environs is rich in diverse and abundant natural resources combined with rich cultural resources, both on the lake and in its surrounding area.

Good and aesthetic environment – as per observations, FGD, interviews and questionnaires, Lake Zengena has a good aesthetic environment with breathtaking walkways and camping ground. It possesses a luxuriant look and the lake contains clean potable water. There is beautiful landscape with a highland environment as far as the survey and observations were concerned.

Availability of community associations, good infrastructure facilities and communities' attitude towards tourism- is also an important opportunity to develop CBET in the area. There are community associations like *sebat bet agaw yalem Feresegnoch mahiber* (Horse Associations) and one to five youth associations which offer great opportunities for the development of CBET in the study areas as asserted by 10 of the respondents.

Communities' attitude towards tourism- in the study area there should be a significant opportunity to develop CBET in areas where the resources and the community are highly interconnected. Especially at Lake Zengena where the communities' cultural and religious beliefs are highly attached to the resource. Thus, in such areas the communities should be active participants in the whole process of community based ecotourism development both in conservation matters, and decision making and benefit sharing, so that they will have a more positive attitude towards the sector and its potential offerings.

There is also an opportunity for the development of CBET in Lake Zengena and the surrounding due to the majority of the respondents (8) stating that in previous experiences they had some role to play and this was good. The rest (4) represent those who were neutral, and those who disagreed with experiences of other areas that had developed CBET in potential ecotourism sites in Ethiopia, such as SMNP, Menz Guassa, Meket Woreda.

Tourism policy environment

The FDRE Ministry of Culture and Tourism are paying due attention, while the Ethiopian Tourism Development Policy of 2009 sets out its main policy and strategies so as to guide the sector in a broad based all-encompassing direction. The policy and strategy areas for the development of tourism in the country exist. The policy is thought to be good in policy framework orientation, but as far as this study was concerned in the area in question there is a lack of a suitable implementation plan in the development of tourism. There is also a marked disintegration in the numbers of important stakeholders and those that remain are not collaborating, Furthermore, there is still a lack adequate financing.

Stakeholders are considered to be those main actors who are responsible and beneficiaries in certain developmental processes or operations and thus the success of business. As such, they should play a greater role in developing CBET. Different stakeholders were identified as the major stakeholders viz, regional, zonal, and at the *woredas* level, culture and tourism offices, local communities and land administration and environmental conservation offices of the area, the general administration office, NGOs, Bahir Dar University and Injibara Polytechnic College – all of these should play key roles in different aspects of CBET development in the study area.

Conclusion and Recommendations



Community based ecotourism is undoubtedly a crucial aspect to consider for the Lake Zengena and its environs so as to serve as a tool to enhance the livelihoods of locals and bring sustainable development to the area. This would be through the conservation of the biological, physical and cultural environments. Lake Zengena and its environs are home to diversified tourism resources with a potential to develop community based ecotourism. It is amongst the favoured potential destinations for CBET development. Having such important resources, and activities such as trekking via walk ways and in jungles, swimming, boating, camping, scuba diving, photography and other related projects, the area could be greatly developed. Culturally, the area has a potential to develop religious tourism, event tourism, festival tourism, and rural tourism through especially the development of souvenir shops, craft sales, live weaving experiences and other CBET activities.

There are however numerous challenges that may hinder CBET development in the area. For instance, a lack of government and other stakeholders' participation and attention, poor infrastructural facilities, a lack of skilled manpower and budgets, a lack of market, little awareness of the community towards tourism and the use of the lake as a source of "Holy water" etc. which are all amongst the major challenges faced. On the other hand, the good and aesthetically pleasing natural environment, tourism policy frameworks, the abundance of tourism resources, accessibility to the main road and the location of the area on the way to areas such as Bahir Dar, the capital city Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Great Renaissance Dam, are important aspects to consider.

The existing poverty in the society and environmental degradation in mainly agriculture, the communities poor attitudes towards tourism as an alternative means, are all aspects requiring some urgent attention, and are thus were also amongst the opportunities identified in this study.

CBET requires the high involvement of the local communities and their active participation. This is mainly due to the fact, based on literature studied, that their participation would create a sense of ownership and promote conservation of the resources so that CBET could be developed in the best possible way, thus bringing an alternative option to locals along with other sectors such as agriculture, resulting in sustainable development. In a nutshell, CBET would benefit the local community and enhance their living standards.

In order to utilize the potential resources available and in order to develop CBET by overcoming the identified hindrances and using better opportunities available through the coordination of major stakeholders identified, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- ✓ In order to develop CBET in Lake Zengena and its environs, tourism potentials should be identified, documented and mapped as well as promoted and publicized so as to create much needed enhanced awareness by all stakeholders.
- ✓ Basic infrastructures should be established which can enhance the development of CBET
- ✓ Preparing a tourism destination development plan and formulating tourism development packages should be made, and the study area should also be included in the historic route map for better CBET enhancement.
- ✓ The local communities should be the main role players of the CBET in the study area so that they should participate in all the decision making and be involved in benefit sharing.
- ✓ There should be a comparative advantage among different stakeholders in a win-win approach for all, so as to conserve, plan and develop the CBET in a sustainable manner.

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