



An assessment of ecotourism potential for Community Based Ecotourism Development: The case of Alemsaga Priority State Forest, South Gondar, Ethiopia

Dagnachew Nega*
Department of Tourism and Hotel
Debre Tabor University, Ethiopia
E-mail:dagnetour36@gmail.com

Mulugeta Damtie
Department of Tourism and Hotel Management
Debank University, Ethiopia

Alubel Workie (Assistant Professor)
Head of Tourism Management Department
University of Gondar, Ethiopia

Engdu Gebrewold Weldesenbet
(Assistant Professor)
Research and Community Service Coordinator
University of Gondar, Ethiopia

Corresponding author*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the potential of the forest for ensuring community based tourism development (CBT) in Alemsaga Priority State Forest South Gondar zone. The study was descriptive in design and employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaires, key Informants interviews, focus group discussion, observations and a review of secondary sources were the main data gathering tools. Quantitative data was analyzed through the help of statistical package for social science version 22. Frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean was employed. The study proved that an enabling policy improvement, global increasing demand for ecotourism, potential benefit of ecotourism, site location, expansion of academic institutions, growth attention of governmental and NGOs conservation project to the forest, suitable environment conditions of forests and their vicinity, upgrading and development of new infrastructure development strategies, policies of the government and the abundance of diversified cultural tourism resources around the forest were opportunities for community based tourism development. The main conclusion drawn from this study was that community based tourism (CBT) has multifaceted contributions to make if it is to overcome the destruction of resources which is currently underway and if it is to improve the livelihoods of the people who live around the forest. To assure this, concerned stakeholders should make every effort to develop an effective ecotourism scheme.

Keywords: Alemsaga, potentials, community based ecotourism, forest, Ethiopia.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading and fastest growing industries in the world (Derera, 2015). According to UNWTO (2017), it is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world with an estimated number of 1,235million international tourist arrivals in 2016, with a growth of 3.3% in the year 2016. It is generating \$7.6 trillion worldwide which is 10.2% of GDP and the largest



employment provider worldwide with 292 million jobs created in 2016 and with 1 in 11 jobs in the service industry arena. With a growing interest to spend leisure time in nature and increasing awareness of environmentalism, ecotourism has become one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (UN, 2001). Ethiopia, is investing greatly in sustainable forms of tourism, and especially in ecotourism as a potential and reliable economic sector (Sefrin, 2012; Ambelu, 2012). In this regard, Ethiopia is endowed with unique cultural heritage and attractive natural resources that attract many tourists. The churches, castles, archeological sites, caves are some of the rich cultural resources of Ethiopia. There is also a high diversity of plants and animals in Ethiopia. In addition to these, there are impressive features such as high mountains, rivers, and lakes in Ethiopia. The favorable diversity of climate is the other factor that makes Ethiopia able to attract tourists. Addis Ababa as venue and seat for the Organization of African Unity and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, is another feature which attracts people to Ethiopia (Ministry of Culture and Tourism Office, 2006).

The Amhara region also has significant tourism potential, the most notable aspects is the Simien Mountain National Park with its amazing scenery, and the castle of Gondar, Lake Tana with its old-aged monasteries, the spectacular Blue Nile falls, Lake Hayk with its scenery, birds and monasteries (Meniga & Ousman, 2017; Zemenu, 2013). In addition to these, it has 17 priority State Forest areas that have positive impacts on tourism, as they serve as habitats for wildlife and create attractive green landscapes (Tadesse et al., 2015). Among those sites that have potential for ecotourism development, is the Alemsaga Priority State Forest, which is found in this region. However still a lot remains to be done regarding exploring it well. So, in this study, the ecotourism potential is assessed in terms of site characteristics which include natural features, cultural features, human resource features and site infrastructure needed on the site to support visitor comfort.

Review of Literature

Ecotourism is now one of the key global engines of development. Africa's natural resources, landscapes, wildlife and protected areas must be established as the very basis of its growing tourism sector. It has long attracted travelers from developed countries who are interested in seeing tropical landscapes, wildlife, and indigenous people's culture, unspoiled nature and pleasant climate (UNWTO, 2008; Kiss, 2014).

Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile ecosystems, benefit communities (Nicolaidis, 2015), promote development in poor countries, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate discriminating tourists, and, some claim, foster world peace (Honey, 1999; Nelson, 2004). It offers a great opportunity for Africa, where by African countries can base their tourism development on exploiting their natural assets on the condition that the rules of sustainable development form the basis of ecotourism and are respected, especially when involving communities living within and adjacent to the assets (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environmental Protection, 2002). What is greatly missing is an adequate partnership with all the stakeholders so that the desired outcomes can be obtained to drive the ecotourism development (Nicolaidis & de Witt, 2015b).

As the world largest industry, tourism development greatly requires the use of its abundant tourism resources that have potential to attract tourists. According to Goodwin (1996), the potential of community based eco-tourism development is great. In protected areas (national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, game reserves, eco-parks) it covers more than 12% of the world's land



area (Isaac, 2012). These protected areas are in the front-line in the campaign to conserve biodiversity, as well as to promote ecotourism.

Protected areas are the main focus for the preservation of biological diversity and contribute to the economic development of Ethiopia (Kassahagne, 2013; Amare, 2015). The country is endowed with impressive high mountains, rivers, and lakes. Ethiopia's mountains are almost untouched by climbers while the lakes have many varied features of great interest to tourists; birds, wildlife, colorful ethnic groups, historical churches and monasteries, extraordinary geological features, amazing caves, local arts and artifacts, and widespread flora and fauna all have great potential for the development of community based eco-tourism in the country (Fennel, 1999; Meniga & Ousman, 2017). In addition to these, there are impressive features such as the high diversity of forests which attract tourists to Ethiopia. Basic tourist service and facilities are another factor that makes Ethiopia attract tourists.

Currently various developments related to tourism can be seen and especially over the past decade. Basic ecotourism facilities such as accommodation, transportation, health services and other support facilities are essential to enhance the satisfaction of eco-tourists and to maximize the length of stay of tourists to any areas (Wagnaw, 2013; Tesfaye, 2017). Transport facilities, infrastructural development, increasing accommodation availability, the number of tour-operators, trade missions and security around tourist destinations are all improving significantly. Developments concerning infrastructure and transport are expected to grow. National programs on infrastructural development are now implemented resulting in a constantly growing asphalt-road network (Kassahagn, 2013; Kauffmann, 2008).

Community based ecotourism development takes the social dimensions of ecotourism to a higher stage. It however requires an understanding, and where possible it will strengthen the legal rights and responsibilities of the communities over land issues, resources and development. This should apply to the tenure of community held lands and to rights over tourism, conservation and other uses of lands, enabling the community to influence activity and earn income from tourism (Nicolaidis, 2015). It should also seek to participate in land use planning and development control over private property (Denman, 2001; Wagnaw, 2013).

Research Methodology

Description of the Study Area

Alemsaga Forest is found in the western edge of Farta district of the Qoley Dengors kebele and the north east edge of the Fogera district of the Alemsaga kebele, South Gondar Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. It located a t 11o54'-11o56 AND & 037o55'- 037o57'E (ORDA, 2013). It covers about 814 hectare.

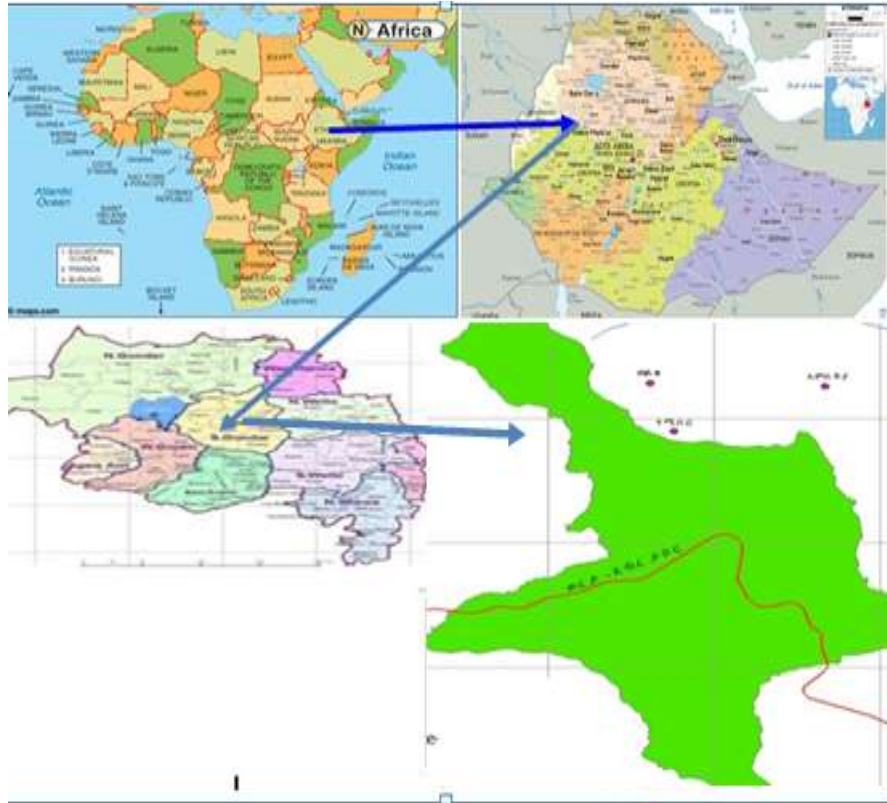


Figure 1. Map of Alemsega Forest
Source: Authors' own, 2018

Methods and Materials

The study applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather information through different data instruments. According to Creswell (2014), a mixed approach is a research approach involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Further, he explained that the core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combinations of quantitative and qualitative approaches provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than using either approach alone. Kothari (2004) explained that a quantitative approach is the generation of data through rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion using statistical tools. Hence, this study used a cross-sectional descriptive research design.

A descriptive design was chosen to identify and describe the significant existing situations and events. According to Singh (2007), cross sectional studies show a snapshot of the existing situation about variables of interest in a sample and are assessed only once to determine the relationship between variables in the study.

The population of the study were all experts (culture and tourism experts at regional, zonal and woreda level, environmental conservation experts, natural and animal resources experts at zonal and woreda, ORDA) of the Amhara region, forest guards, church clerics and local community administrations leaders in the study area who were all the target population of this study. Considering the sources and techniques one is willing to use in gathering data for a given research, primary and secondary data were the major sources of data used. Primary data were



obtained from questionnaires, interviews, checklists, field observations and focus group discussions while, secondary data were obtained from books, research, academic journal articles and official documents. The study used semi-structured face to face key informant interviews which conducted with various participants: one participant was from the Farta Culture and Tourism office, two were from the Amhara Region Culture and Tourism bureau, another two from Amhara region and were experienced experts, one was a south Gondar ORDA coordinator, another participant was from Farta Agriculture and Rural Development, another was from Farta Environmental Conservations and Land Administration, and a further one from south Gondar Culture and Tourism Department - and all of these were heads or experts, while another three participants were from the local community.

The questionnaire consisted of both open and closed ended questions which were used to obtain information from the respondents. The questionnaire covered the general background of the respondents with items such as demographic profile, potentials for CBT, challenges and opportunities for CBT development in the Alemsaga priority State Forest. Closed ended questions were also prepared in two types and used a three point rating scale and also a five point Likert scale (1 was for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree) options. Finally, a total of 105 experts' answered the survey questionnaires which were collected from them.

With regard to the questionnaire, for the purpose of this study all the experts who were working in the Farta woreda and South Gondar zone (culture and tourism office workers, natural resources sectors, environmental conservations and animal resources workers), Amhara region culture and tourism bureau and ORDA workers participated. The data was systematically organized, verified, described, analyzed and interpreted by using both a quantitative and qualitative approach. Qualitative data was analyzed using triangulation and substantiated the study findings, while quantitative data was analyzed through the help of the SPSS (statistical package for social sciences version 22). Thus, the findings of the study were presented in the form of a descriptive statistical method including frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean.

Results and Discussions

Potentials' of Alemsaga priority State Forest for community based ecotourism development

Assessment of the existing potential for community based ecotourism development in the Alemsaga priority State Forest was made on the basis of of three dimensions: natural and cultural attractions, site infrastructure, and human resources and institutional potentials. These components are essential potentials for community based tourism in any destination in general and Alemsaga Priority State Forest in particular. The potentials were documented and identified by using questionnaires, field observations, interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data review methods.

Natural Attractions of the Forest

The assessment of Alemsaga Priority State Forest potentials of its natural attractions for community based ecotourism development were evaluated based on the availability of diversified topographic features, diverse flora, variety of fauna and appropriate environmental conditions for potentials of community based ecotourism development.



Table 1. The mean value of natural attractions potentiality of Alemsaga Priority State Forest for community based ecotourism development

Natural potentiality	N	Min.	Max	Mean	Std.
The Forest has beautiful scenery: spectacular volcanic landscape, gorges, cliffs, etc.	105	3	5	4.29	0.567
The site has diverse flora which helps to attract ecotourists.	105	2	5	4.56	0.865
The Forest has an abundant variety of fauna that are attractive to both domestic and foreign tourists.	105	2	5	4.53	0.867
The Forest has an appropriate environment for community based tourism	105	2	5	4.10	0.909
Grand mean and standard deviation				4.37	0.802

Source: Authors own, 2018

Note: N. Number of total Respondents, Std. =standard deviation, Max. =Maximum &Min. =Minimum, M=Mean
 Source: Author Survey, 2018.

From the above table the beauty of the scenery, spectacular volcanic landscape, gorges, cliffs, etc (m=4.29, Std. =0.567), existence of diverse flora (m=4.56, Std. =865), variety of fauna (m= 4.53, Std. =0.867) and appropriate environment (m=4.10, Std. =0.909). Thus, all mean score values of the respondents show that the forest has highly-diversified natural attractions, which are an important contribution for community based ecotourism development. Ecotourism destination needs to have natural attractiveness of a diverse range of geographic features, rock formations, water sources, variety of fauna and flora life (Wagnaw, 2012). In this approach, Alemsaga Priority State Forest has topographical diversity, unique beauty, diversity of wildlife, appropriate environment, quality of ecosystem and the part wilderness feel of the forest are major elements and have huge potential for community based ecotourism development. A study done by Tadesse et al, (2015) proved that forests have positive impacts on tourism, as they serve as habitats for wildlife and create attractive green landscapes. Another study also confirmed that, forests serve as a source of income by attracting tourists and they serve as recreational facilities; they prevent lakes and dams from silting; and thy also help clean, regulate and distribute water resources (Asfaw, 2012).

Scenery (Landscape, Cave and Cliff)

The landscape of Alemsaga Priority State Forest is composed of unique spectacular volcanic landscapes, gorges and fascinating cliffs. The topography of the area and amazing peaked mountains are covered with trees, shrubs and herbal trees that can be attractive for ecotourists. *Amoral Gedel* Mountain is an amazing mountain peak found in the western part of the forest that has ‘holy water’ that has the potential for therapeutic purpose and is purported to heal individuals from their illnesses. Along the cliff, in the dense afro-montane forest from the upper part of the forest, there are several grand caves. Theses caves are natural rock caves, and they were used as a detention room in war times and as a place to go when one had an epidemic type disease. According to key informants, the cave was used as shelter for patriots during Italian aggression (1935-1941) and also by the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) during the 1991 Ethiopian civil war.

According to key informants’ interviews and researcher field observations, Alemsaga Priority State Forest has extraordinary topographic features and a wide variety of plant and animal species, which are endemic and have great aesthetic value. Hence, the resources are crucial for ecotourism activities, such as photography, nature touring, wildlife viewing, forest exploration,

education, and other nature-associated activities are all some of potential ecotourism aspects in the Forest.



Figure 2. Topographic feature of the study area

Sources: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/70341007@N02/albums/72157631238168930/>

Floral Species

Apart from its amazing scenery, the Forest is a home to different species of flora, with its elevation range between 2180- 2470 msl and it is covered by a second dry afro-montane forest; it is dominated by more than 45 species of plants (ORDA, 2012).The flora species were composed of 42% trees, 29% shrubs and 29% herbs among these seven accounted for 5.6% of the total species composition of the Forest is endemic species , such as *Acanthus sennii*, *Lippiaadoensis*, *Milletiaferruginea*, *Rhusglutinosa*, *Trifoliumschimperi* ,*Verbascumstelarum* and *Viprisdaiielli*. From the endemic plant species 42%, 29% and 29% were trees, herbs and shrubs respectively (Masresha, Soromessa & Kelbessa, 2015).

Fauna Species

Alemsaga Priority State Forest has a large variety of Fauna species. According to ORDA (2012), the most known mammals found in the Forest, include the Abyssinian Columbus monkey (Gureza), Spotted Hyena (Jib), the Anubis baboon, Common bushbuck (Dikula), and other mammals. All of these mammal species are found in different sites of the attractions which are the major sources of ecotourism development. Moreover, the unique feature of flora and fauna species of the forest also has an appropriate environment for community based ecotourism development. As per the researcher's observations, focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaires it was confirmed that Alemsaga Forest has an appropriate environment for community based ecotourism development. Its attractive with lush green landscapes with a *wenadega* environment. It possesses a luxuriant look and clean and breathtaking walkways.



Cultural Attractions of Alemsaga Priority State Forest for community based tourism

Besides natural attractions, Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its immediate vicinity have potential cultural tourism attractions which include both built environment (churches, monasteries, palaces, historical site and precious heritages in the different monasteries and churches, such as parchments books, drums and crosses, which are made from Gold and silver,) and intangible cultural resources (religious and cultural festivals, handcraft products and other special attractions) which are also important attractions for community based ecotourism development.

Table 2. The mean value of cultural attraction of Alemsaga Priority State Forest for community based ecotourism development.

Cultural tourism resource	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Churches and monasteries are the fundamental potential attractions for tourists in the Alemsaga Priority State Forest	105	2	5	4.32	0.628
There are precious moveable heritages in churches and monasteries	105	1	5	3.68	0.244
There are battlefields and historical sites in the Forest	105	3	5	4.30	0.574
There are many religious festival attractions in site and its vicinity; such as Meskel (Finding of the True Cross), <i>Timket</i> (Epiphany) and others	105	2	5	4.31	0.64
There are many cultural festivals and celebrations as attractions in site and its vicinity like the wedding ceremony	105	2	5	4.15	0.769
There are handcrafts workers /products in the vicinity of the Forest		2	5	4.45	0.734
Grand mean and standard deviation				4.20	0.668

Source: Authors own, 2018

Note: N. Number of total Respondents, Std. =standard deviation, Max. =Maximum &Min. =Minimum, M=Mean Source: Author Survey, 2018.

As illustrated, the mean values are Churches and Monasteries, (M=4.32, = Std.), 628 moveable heritages (M=3.68, = Std. 1.244), palaces and historical site (M=4.30, = Std=0.574), religious festivals (M=4.31, Std. = 0.64), cultural festivals (M=4.15, Std. =0.769), and hand crafts and other special attractions (M=4.45, Std. = 0.734). Thus, the mean value total score of the respondents showed that the Forest and its vicinity have high potential for tangible and intangible cultural heritage that can attract the tourists. Taking the above score values into the account, the cultural attractive resources in the study area are discussed below.

Tangible Cultural heritage potential of Alemsaga Priority State Forest

Churches

According to the researcher's field observation and key informant interviews, it was shown that tangible cultural heritages which are found in the Forest are Churches which have a long history and are full of interesting aspects such as sacred parchments, books, drums and crosses, which are made from gold and silver, and some have been the scene of battles. Churches which are found in the forest are those such as *Aba Libanos*, *Kona* and *Dengors Giorgis*. Since their



establishment, the churches have contributed to higher spiritual value for the local communities and location of the churches could be the fundamental potential supports of tourism resources for community based ecotourism development. A previous study has also shown that the existence of cultural and natural tourism resources brings in opportunity to open and encourage new sites as tourist destination development areas (World Bank, 2006).

Battlefields

The other potential of a tangible tourism resource in the study area is a battlefield. Because of the extensive range of fighting between the *Derge* and the current government, the war between them lasted for two years from 1989 to 1990. The fighting was very severe as during that time both the *Derge* and EPRDF fought using modern guns, and the *Derge* used aircraft, cannons, bombs and tanks with machine guns mounted on them, and as a result many soldiers and civilians died or were dislodged from their homes. Therefore, the existence of battle sites in the Forest it could be a valuable potential for military tourism tourists who to see and appreciate the battlefields and site the graves of the soldiers (focus group discussion with Forest security guards and local community leaders).

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Alemsaga Priority State Forest and Its Vicinity

The most fascinating intangible cultural heritage available in Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its environs are the religious festival (such as New Year, Meskel, X-Mass, Epiphany, Easter), cultural attractions like wedding ceremonies, Mancala (Gebeta), Feres gugs (Horse riding), gena (hockey), traditional music and dances, folklore, poems "*kerereto*" and "*fukera*" which serve as a means of strength during tough (Interview with Farta culture and tourism offices workers).

Religious Festivals

It is very well known that Ethiopia is a country of God-fearing people. Therefore, religion plays an important part in the life of people in the in Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its environs, as is the case in various other parts of the country. The *Orthodox Tewahedo* Church ceremonies are unique and impressive; especially those such as *Enqutatash* (New Year), *Meskel* (Finding of the True Cross), *Ledet* (Christmas), *Timket* (Epiphany) and *Fasika* (Easter), which provide colorful ceremonies and celebrations of people who dress in traditional costumes and celebrate the festivals in the Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its environs. Therefore, the Alemsaga Priority State and its vicinity have great potential to further develop religious based tourism activities. Triangulated interview results also assured the researcher that the area has high potential for pilgrimages/religious tourism activities such as for example getting a blessing, visiting churches and monasteries, attending religious rituals, festival and ceremonies and other spiritual activities which are what make the study area unique. In addition to these, there are different Christian festivities that are celebrated from January to March in the forest and its vicinity, which can be attractive to domestic and international religiously oriented tourists.



Figure 3. Photo of *Timket* celebration the vicinity of the Forest
Source: South Gondar Zone Culture and Tourism offices

Cultural Festivals

There are distinctive cultural festivals that are practiced by people who live the vicinity of Alesaga Priority State Forest. Cultural festivals like the wedding ceremonies, local music and dances, *Feresgugis* (Horse riding), *Gena* (Hokey) and tourism related festival including experiencing social holidays and festivals, and local performing cultures - are the most magnificent cultural attractions and these can also attract domestic and international tourists (Farta culture and tourism offices head). The figure below an example of a possible cultural ecotourism resources available around the Forest



Figure 4. Photo of horse riding cultural festival
Source: South Gondar Zone Culture and Tourism offices

Handicrafts

The availability of local handicraft products could have a great potential to help to develop community business enterprises and thus promote community based ecotourism development in Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its environs.

The study area and its vicinity are well known for handcraft products such as, artifacts made from animal horn, traditional garments and wool, jewelry, pottery, wooded objects, netting, weaving, basketry, traditional leather craft products, traditional music instruments, etc. Moreover, the people who live in vicinity of Alemsaga Priority State Forest are very skilled in the metalwork, and regional traditional blacksmithing in which metal is softened as it is put in a fire until it becomes red hot and worked on and then it is air cooled until it hardens and immerses in cold water and withdrawn from it.



Skin work

Blacksmith

Figure 5. Photo of handcraft work the vicinity of the Forest
Source: South Gondar Zone Culture and Tourism offices

Tourism Infrastructure Potentiality of Alemsaga Priority State Forest

Basic ecotourism facilities play an important role in ecotourism development (Meniga & Ousman, 2017). Infrastructure development is essential for the successful development of tourism and can be a particular critical factor in less developed countries, which often have limited infrastructure (Herarty, 1989 cited in Bekele, 2012). Infrastructure is the most influential factor for the development of an ecotourism destination in Alemsaga Priority State Forest because it determines the utilization of potential for developing community based tourism and quality of the attractions available.

The results revealed that by using the infrastructure tools helped evaluate the availability of tourism infrastructure potential in the Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its vicinity which was then assessed based on the availability of basic services/facilities and components like accommodation, standardized roads, health stations, clean water, electricity supply and support services like the internet, mobile phone network, postal services and banking.



Table 3. Mean value of basic services potentiality in Alemsaga Priority State Forest

Basic Services	N	Min.	Max	Mean	Std. D
Accommodation	105	1	3	1.45	0.784
Access the asphalt road	105	1	2	2.63	0.524
Health stations around the Forest	105	1	3	1.56	0.822
Clean water supply	105	1	3	1.64	0.622
Electricity supply	105	1	3	1.31	0.625
Grand mean and standard deviation				1.9	0.675

Source: Authors own, 2018

Note: N= Number of total Respondents, Std. =standard deviation, Max. =Maximum &Min. =Minimum, M=Mean Source: Author Survey, 2018.

As seen in the table, accommodation (M=1.45, Std. =.784), standardized roads (m=2.63, Std. =0.524), Health center (m=1.56, Std. =0.82), Water supply (M=1.64, Std. =0.622.) and Electricity supply (m=1.31, Std. =0.625). Therefore, the mean score of the respondents showed that even though the study area has some accessibility of asphalt roads, the other basic infrastructures are poor or lacking totally. The grand total mean average M=1.9, illustrates that the infrastructure of the study area is observed for the five questions assessing basic infrastructure development of the study area, which is found to be significantly insufficient for community based ecotourism development.

Table 4. Mean value of support services potentiality in Alemsaga Priority State Forest

Support services	N	Min.	Max	Mean	Std. D.
Internet services in and around the attractions	105	1	3	1.23	0.559
Mobile phone network facilities in and around attractions	105	1	3	2.16	0.622
Postal services around the Forest	105	1	3	1.35	0.693
Banking services nearby town	105	1	3	1.59	0.703
Grand mean and standard deviation				1.6	0.644

Source: Authors own, 2018

A Note: N= Number of total Respondents, Std. =standard deviation, Max. =Maximum &Min. =Minimum, M=Mean Source: Author Survey, 2018.

As is clearly seen in the table, internet (M=1.23, Std. =.559), mobile phone network (M=2.16, Std. =.622), postal (M=1.35, Std. =.693) and banking (M= 1.59, Std. =.703). From the mean value we can understand that, internet and postal services are not available whereas, banking in nearby towns and mobile phone network are available but not sufficient in number. Therefore, based on the totals Grand mean (m=1.6) this shows that Alemsaga Priority State Forest and its vicinity were lacking when it comes to support services.

The previous study portrayed that, Ethiopia possesses a plethora of tourist attractions, yet tourism infrastructure is at its infancy stage; tourist products are poorly maintained; access to tourist products are difficult and can be inappropriately expensive; and there is a lack of marketing to attract tourists to the country, and a lack of marketing of tourist attractions once tourists are in the country (Robinson & Jonker, 2016). In the same line of reasoning, Petros and Petros, (2017) studied the case of Dinsho and Goba woreda challenges for community based development, and they confirmed that that absence of sufficient accommodation with food and water services was the main the main challenges for CBT development. Furthermore, a study done by Tesfaye in 2017 which was based on an empirical research review, proved that basic ecotourism facilities such as accommodation, transportation, health services and other support facilities are essential to enhance the satisfaction of ecotourists and to maximize the length of stay of tourists to any area. However, the findings of this review indicated that most of the ecotourism destinations in Ethiopia are devoid of these facilities and services. As found in other studies, the study area has



low potential in terms of site infrastructure features rather than lacking in other potential assessment criteria. However, the site is easily accessible on a main asphalt road and it is in good proximity to the honey pot attractions, such as the historic route in northern Ethiopia, which includes Lalibela, Bahirdar and Gondar.

Human Resource and Institution Potential for CBT

The availability of young and skilled labor; the ability of a community to supply or hire appropriately skilled labor; ability of community members to develop tourism businesses and management skills; the ability of staff and the community to be able to effectively interpret resource features and the time demands of other routine or seasonal activities of the community are important factors for community based ecotourism development (Bekele, 2012). Tourism professionals play significant roles in the development of ecotourism since they are capable of planning and organizing ecotourism initiatives or activities effectively, which will in turn help increase the satisfaction of eco-tourists in the destinations (Tesfaye, 2017). Therefore, the results revealed that using the human resources tools evaluated, the availability of human resources potentials in the Alesmsaga forest are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Human resource potentials

Attribute	Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
There is a young labor force that can be skilled through formal education and short term short term training	Strongly disagree	5	4.8
	Disagree	9	8.6
	Neutral	6	5.7
	Agree	36	34.3
	Strongly agree	49	46.7
	Total	105	100

Source: Author Survey, 2018

As it is clearly indicated in the table of the total amount of respondents answers, 4.8% strongly disagree, 8.6 % confirmed that disagree that there is a good human resource potential. While 5.7% were neutral, 34.3% agreed, 46.7% strongly agreed. Therefore the results show that the highest percentage of respondents (34.3% and 46.7%) agree and strongly agree respectively on the issue. Therefore, Alesmsaga Priority State Forest and its vicinity have rich sources of young labor that can be skilled through formal education and short-term training as a suitable workforce that will have the needed skills to effectively interpret and describe natural as well as cultural attractions in Alesmsaga Forest and its vicinity to tourists.

The result ensured that there is some availability of human resources potential of resources, as the focus group discussions and interviews also assured this, even though, the development of tourism is still challenged by various factors which are problematic. The first is related to trained manpower, and the federal government has emphasized the expansion of higher educational institution is needed, so that looked at on an annual basis there can be higher numbers of students who graduate from the universities that can fill needed positions. Consequently, in Alesmsaga Forest and its vicinity there is indeed some available young labor that can be skilled through formal education and short-term training and they can boost the ecotourism industry. In addition to a trained workforce there are also sufficient levels of young people who can work on low-level operations and provide different supplies like agricultural products (like beef, poultry, dairy, honey, and vegetable and other crop products), produce handicraft goods, and there are some who can perform different cultural shows that tourists also enjoy.



Institutions

The presence of governmental and non-governmental institutions are playing critical roles for developing community-based ecotourism. Gemechu (2014) who studied a case in and around Addis Ababa, identified the presence of culture and tourism offices, environmental protection offices, tourism promotion clubs and organizations as being the most potential bringers for community based development. This is in line with Nicolaides and de Witt (2015).

Table 6. Institutions

Item	Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
There are governmental and also non-governmental institutions which support future ecotourism or community based ecotourism activities in Alesmsaga Forest and its vicinity	Strongly disagree	4	3.8
	Disagree	6	5.7
	Neutral	6	5.7
	Agree	28	26.7
	Strongly agree	61	58.1
	Total		105

Source: Author survey, 2018

As we clearly see from table 4.7. of the total respondents answered 26.7% agreed and 58.1% strongly agree however, 3.8%, 5.7% and 5.7% confirmed that strongly disagree, disagree and were neutral respectively. Therefore, according to the percentage value of the respondents, the majority of respondents revealed that there are various governmental and non-governmental institutions, which can support and develop community based ecotourism, even though some answered 'strongly disagree', 'disagree' and 'neutral'.

Triangulated data through interviews revealed that in the study area there currently exist some very important institutions, among these for example, ORDA and Debre Tabor University, which are working on natural resources conservation in Alesmsaga Priority State Forest. Besides this, developing new technologies and generating information, offer great opportunity to learn and support efforts for the future CBT in the Alesmsaga Priority State Forest.

Conclusion

Currently, Ethiopia is home to many forest areas, national parks and protected wildlife sanctuaries and reserves, which are excellent for ecotourism development. However, the abundant resources are not yet fully utilized and the tourism industry is still at its infancy stage. The findings of this study demonstrated that Alesmsaga Priority State Forest is home to a range of diversified tourism resources potentials. Mainly from its tourism resources potentials viewpoint, is the site vicinity which has been endowed with the attractions of impressive features such as scenic and spectacular volcanic landscapes, gorges, fascinating cliffs and grand caves, with unique fauna and flora species associated with the secondary afro-montane ecosystem and the area is clearly an appropriate environment for ecotourism development. In addition to the natural resource potentials, the study also indicates that the Forest and its vicinity have magnificent cultural attractions, such as, numerous churches and monasteries which house parchments books, drums and crosses, some of which are made from gold and silver. There are also battlefield sites, religious and cultural festivals, handcraft products etc. which can all serve as the main potentials for community based ecotourism development.

The finding also proved that the availability of governmental and none governmental institutions in the vicinity of the study area, can be financial and technical supporters of institutions like ORDA,



and Debre Tabor University and vocational training colleges which have the most potential for community based ecotourism development initiatives. The finding also proved that the area is easily accessible with asphalt roads and proximity to the honey-pot attractions, such as the historic route in northern Ethiopia, which includes Lalibela, Bahirdar and Gondar.

Recommendations

- To develop community based tourism in Alemsaga priority state forest, infrastructure facilities such as, clean water, health center, electricity supply, accommodation, postal, bank and internet services should be developed in a compatible manner with wildlife and natural ecosystems. More importantly, in parallel with ecotourism development, basic infrastructures would facilitate other development, and boost trade and the living standards of the community.
- Community based tourism needs a sense of ownership by all stakeholders, however; still in the study area this is not doing so well. This is due to a lack of promotion and awareness. Therefore, the concerned body should improve the sense ownership participation among local communities, NGO's, private organizations, religious and academic institutions which concurs with what Nicolaides (2015) has said.
- The government, the private sector and NGOs should allocate sufficient budgets for the the promotion and conservations of all natural resources to develop community based ecotourism destinations for the future.
- Different measurements should be taken for the conservation of the natural environment to increase socio-economic, cultural and environmental values. Strict rules and regulations should be established to prohibit illegal community activities like conflict of interest over resource utilization and ownership, free grazing, poaching of wild animals, and agricultural discussion with all stakeholders to ward off the entire part of the forest.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank all the tourism stakeholders who provided valuable information for the effectiveness of the study.

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