

Contribution of Tourism Destinations for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Biodiversity Conservation in Eastern Ethiopia

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Abstract: *Ethiopia has numerous tourism potentials that contribute to comprehensive sustainable development in many ways at both national and local levels. These tourism potentials are not yet utilized as expected due to various factors that require detailed assessments for each destination. Among these potential destinations, Eastern Ethiopia's tourism sites contribute to the country's development, whereas their utilizations for entrepreneurship and biodiversity conservation are not assessed adequately. Based on these notions, this research assessment was conducted with the objectives of profiling the potential tourism destinations, identifying the existing contributions for local youth entrepreneurs, and assessing the challenges facing these places for further study and policy actions. Research Methodology: Accordingly, the purposive sampling method was used for site selection; as a result, East Hararghe, Harari region, and Maya City were included in the sample. Then, potential destinations in each selected site, specific places were identified to mention, Lake Haramaya and its watershed catchment lakes, Gara Mul'ata Mountain, the so-called Dabbal, the historical Lij Iyasu Prince Prison, and Harar Jegol. Moreover, a key informant interview with long-experienced locals was conducted to further strengthen the research. The result shows that these tourism destination sites have contributions to sustainable biodiversity conservation, climate change balance, income for local youths, foreign visitors' attractions, educational research, and water sports. With all these contributions, however, these tourism destinations faced many challenges, such as society's attitude towards these sites is low, less promotion of these sites to*

foreigners, and less attention to engaging domestic tourists and Ethiopian-born diasporas, poor infrastructures, especially for Gara Mul'ata Mountain, the so-called Dabbal, and Lij Eyasu Prince Prison. Therefore, it recommended that the government and other stakeholders should focus on sustainable awareness creation for the surrounding community about the importance of tourism, development of infrastructure, capacity building for small-scale local businesses, tourism managers, guides, community leaders, and registration of these sites at the global level.

Keywords: tourism, conservation, entrepreneurship, eastern, sustainable

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia boasts of rich diversity, and in this continent, biodiversity endowment offers opportunities for economic, social, and ecological development. Whether scuba diving on coral reefs or watching wildlife, most tourists enjoy the natural beauty (animals and vegetation) that surrounds them. However, the high rates of tourist expansion must be balanced against the problems that come with it, such as massive volumes of traffic, trash, a huge area of land and resource consumption associated with travel, and impacts on fragile ecosystems among others. The tourism sector appears to place a long-term emphasis on environmental conservation and protection because of the importance and uniqueness of the environmental quality and biodiversity for tourism, and they encourage and support sustainable tourism operations. Responsible tourism benefits indigenous communities and residents by improving their standard of living while also preserving culture and biodiversity. Ecotourism, a sustainable tourism strategy, is an interface of conservation concerns and tourism interest, a synergy that jointly preserves the environment's quality while protecting nature and promoting tourism. Consequently, Africa's response to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be ineffective unless its biodiversity is conserved and used sustainably.

Eastern Ethiopia is area is endowed with countless natural and cultural tourism resources in both tangible and in tangible forms. Natural Tourism Resources: Lake Haramaya, Mt. Gara-Mullata/Dabbal, Mt. Qundudo (W) and its feral horses, large number of caves, Babile rocks and elephant sanctuary, etc are few of the natural tourism resources the area is endowed with. **Cultural and historical resources:** the rock-paintings of Laga-Gafra, the royal prison of Lij-Iyasu, traditional dishes, music and lifestyle, Harar, Qulubi church, in Dire Dawa Harla medieval city, Laga-Oda pre-historic site. Yet these potentials remain underexplored, underdeveloped and less promoted. Besides it is characterized by limited planning and implementation.

Problem Statement

The long-term viability of the tourism industry and the preservation of its principal attraction (nature) are inextricably linked (Adetola, 2023). Biodiversity conservation is a fundamental obligation of all economic sectors and a unique paradigm in the tourist sector that makes tourism

more biodiversity-friendly. Assets of biodiversity are powerful forces shaping tourism's essence, including the human drive to see and experience the pristine ecological settings.

Objectives

*Profiling the potential tourism destinations,
identifying the existing contributions for local youth entrepreneurs
and assessing the challenges facing these places for further study and policy actions.*

Findings

Assessments of Lake for Tourism Destinations, Environmental and Biodiversity Conservation

These are Highland Lakes (Adele, Haramaya and Tinike) located at the hotspot of touristic cities of Eastern Ethiopia, namely Harar and Dire Dawa. It is characterized by hosting diverse aquatic species (including two fish types) and supporting terrestrial life by nurturing agricultural practices, providing fresh water for residents and biodiversity in the area. It is special marker of human-environment interaction as it had disappeared due to unmanaged anthropogenic and natural problems and revived as a result of collaborative conservation of Haramaya university and different Stakeholders.



Service and benefits of the Lakes:

- Boating & Kayaking
- The balanced ecosystem to agricultural production that mostly affected by rust and wilt disease
- Swimming & Water Sports

- Fishing Tours
- Birdwatching & Wildlife Safaris
- Picnics & Lakeside Camping
- Hiking Along Water Trails
- Rafting
- Kayaking/Canoeing:
- Canyoning
- Fishing/Angling
- Educational tours
- Meditation practices

Besides, the site is providing socioeconomic services for boating service providers, restaurants and hotels, tour guides (from Harar) and farmers irrigating their agricultural lands. Yet, settlement of the residents in the lake catchment, huge disposal of solid and liquid wastes, uncontrolled utilization of water remains the major challenges threatening the sustainability of the lake. Protecting the lake, strengthening the conservation works and promoting the lake would serve as important remedies to multiply the sustainability and impacts of the lake. Besides, registering the lake as World Heritage marking human roles for environmental regeneration could promote the tourism activities in the lake and its environs

Harar Living Museum

Harar, a UNESCO-registered walled city in eastern Ethiopia, stands as one of Africa's most historically and culturally significant urban centers. With a history spanning over 1,000 years, Harar has been a hub of Islamic scholarship, trade, and religious coexistence, earning highest reputation. Its labyrinthine alleys, vibrant markets, and well-preserved heritage make it a living museum of medieval Islamic civilization. Harar's Jugol Wall, built in the 16th century, encloses the old city with five historic gates, protecting its 82 mosques and 102 shrines some dating back up to the 10th century. This architectural marvel, along with Harar's unique urban design, earned it a UNESCO World Heritage status in 2006. Additionally, the city's Shewal Eid festival, a colorful celebration marking the end of Ramadan, was inscribed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage for its rich traditions of song, dance, and communal harmony.

Harar offers unforgettable cultural experiences, including:

- **Hyena Feeding:** Every night, the "Hyena Men" of Harar feed wild hyenas at the city's outskirts a ritual believed to bring protection and good fortune.
- **Eagle Feeding:** At Feres Magala (Horse Market), trained eagles swoop down to snatch meat from visitors a tradition tied to Harar's historic falconry culture.
- **Hakim Hills:** The scenic overlook provides breathtaking panoramic views of Harar's skyline, dotted with minarets and surrounded by lush countryside

However, the narrow focus on heritage-based tourism, and much attention on European based tourists giving less attention to other potential and actual tourism activities, and domestic, diaspora and cross-border tourists are the major drawbacks of tourism development works in the region. On the other hand, the Corridor development initiative and relatively the peace in the Eastern Ethiopia Amidst conflicts and fears in other parts of the country are serving as good foundations. On top of that the registration of the city as World Tourism cities and the inscriptions of its heritages in UNESCO are serving the purpose of tourism development in the area.

Gara Mul'ata Mountain and Lij-Iyasu Prison Site

Grawa is a hilly landscape filled with Natural and manmade wonders portraying geomorphic formations, early human wisdoms and century old royal history located around 560 KM from the national capital and 60 KMs from the main AA-Harar tarmac-road. It entails astonishing scenic Dabal-Garamulata Chained Mountains; historical royal prison complex of Lij Iyasu (the youngest ruler in the history of Modern Ethiopia that introduced transformative leadership during his reign in 1913 to 1916); attractive Gole Rock beds with clear information of era old geologic formations.

The area is very **favorable for tourism activities** such as

- Cultural Site seeing
- Educational visits
- Hiking & Trekking
- Rock climbing
- Bouldering
- Via Ferrata
- Paragliding/Hang Gliding
- Ziplining
- Bungee Jumping
- Cable Car/Gondola Rides
- Photography
- Camping
- Picnicking
- Exploration of geological features

Challenges

Yet the attention given to the heritages are worrisome. Lij Iyasu's Royal prison is seen quickly deteriorating as it has been serving as camps for police force and its exterior compound and the major house is serving as a warehouse for some construction and furniture items. Besides, there is no any visible conservation endeavour underway. The lack of standard Accommodation and amenity infrastructures; poor promotion and marketing efforts are the major challenges of the tourism area. Yet the standard Asphalt-road under construction, governments initiative of tourism

awakening and the construction of youths' parks next to the royal prison could be taken as opportunities for recreation and tourism development in the area.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Recommendation/Policy Implications

- Urgent maintenance Lij Iyasus Prince Prison
- Completion of the road construction
- Introducing New tourism modes and activities to all area
- Promotion and Global registration of Haramaya and Girawa tourism resources
- Capacity building for Tourism Managers, Tour guides and Community leaders
- Supporting Small Scale Tourism business
- Organizing, regional, National and International Events in tourism sites
- Tourism Cluster Development

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