

Full Length Research Paper

Community based ecotourism development in Meqdela Amba, Ethiopia: Current development barriers

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Ethiopia has very distinct natural, cultural and historic products that could attract visitors from all over the world. Meqdela Amba, a community in Ethiopia, is endowed with a unique historical heritage and outstanding biophysical features. The aim of this study was to identify the major barrier of the Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism development in Tenta district. The study used descriptive research design and also both probability and non-probability sampling methods. The data sources used both primary and secondary data, and the research approaches used mixed research method both qualitative and quantitative research. These were generated by employing qualitative (using key informant interview, focus group discussions and field observation) and quantitative (mainly using household survey questionnaires) methods. Checklists were the main data gathering tools with the total target population being 370. A sample of 193 questionnaires was distributed to local communities and 185 were returned. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, to interpret the result frequency and percentage. The barriers identified to Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism site were: lack of marketing and promotion activity, low level of knowledge and attitudes of local community towards community based ecotourism, lack of cooperation among stakeholders, lack of professional guides, lack of major infrastructure and facilities such as accommodation, electricity, and clean water supply. Attention should be given to reducing the major barriers from Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism site.

Key words: Barriers, community based ecotourism, Meqdela Amba, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is land of multiple tourist attractions and visitor friendly people who are conscious about the preservation of its historical heritages. A fascinating range of experiences makes Ethiopia, a land of true discovery being beautiful and secretive, mysterious and extraordinary. In addition to the historical component of tourism attraction, Meqdela Amba is endowed with a unique historical heritage and comprises spectacular

biophysical features that may not even scratch the surface of the real formation of this spectacular gift of nature. It was perhaps for that reason that the popular Emperor Tewodros II selected it as the residency of his kingdom. Meqdela Amba was the capital of Emperor Tewodros during the invasion of British in 1868 (Mulugeta et al., 2012). Meqdela Amba also comprises a number of significant historical sites such as the ruins of Emperor

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Tewodros II palace, the place of suicide of Emperor Tedrowos II and the ruins of a fortress. It also includes the ruins of Meqdela Medhanalem Church, Emperor Tewodros II's swimming pool, Sebastopol and small cannon, the cemetery of Emperor Tewodros II and Fitawrari Gebrye (Personal communication in 2018; Tenta District Culture and Tourism Office, 2018). The other most attractive and outstanding features of this heritage are Saint Michael's church, the famous Girmie cave with a length of more than 60 m and Lam washa cave having a length of 80 m. The Muslim religious centers of the Bajaw Sheikh Bota Haiji Hussein Oumer and Dorih Jifa are the unique gift of the district (Eshetu, 2014).

The stunning nature of the biophysical features, battlefield and the spectacular history of the Meqdela Amba is astonishing, and forms the lion's share that contributes to the international significance of a community based ecotourism destination. However, the rolling and unremarkable topography of the Meqdela Amba has now been almost completely obscured due to many undiscovered challenges. Most livelihoods in Meqdela are fundamentally grounded in the agricultural sector that is vulnerable to food insecurity. This food insecurity has been persistent throughout the district owing to a variety of interrelated economic, social and political factors and environmental crises. It can be argued that poverty has its roots in the notion of access to resources and vulnerability of drought (Moreda, 2017).

While Meqdela Amba and the surrounding Tenta district is rich in cultural heritages and natural beauty which would attract community based ecotourism (Mulugeta et al., 2012), lack of alternative income generation and employment are the main cause of food insecurity in this area. In order to create additional income to the poor, in 2008 Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism was established. This project was also aimed toward exploring the landscape, geological, archaeological, historical and cultural tourism resources; to create public awareness of community based ecotourism through enhancing community participation for empowerment and equitable benefit sharing; and to reduce chronic food shortage, environmental and soil degradation. Other project considerations were with reference to the deterioration of cultural and natural heritage resources, and to improve the livelihood of local communities (Tenta District Culture and Tourism Office, 2018).

Studies have been conducted related to community-based ecotourism in different parts of Ethiopia; for example, Mequanint and Gebremedhin (2015) and Daniel (2011) in Abijata-Shala Lakes National Park; Eshetu (2014) in Borena-Saynt Park; Demissie (2015) in Simien Mountains National Park; Teshome et al. (2015) in Wunania Kosoye Natural Attraction; Demssie (2015) in Simien Mountains National Park; Berhanu and Teshome (2016) in Alatish National Park and Mulugeta et al. (2012) from Gafat to Meqdela; and Teshome and Meskele

(2018) in major tourist destinations in Amhara Regional State. However, none of these studies provides a portrait on the subject of community based ecotourism development barriers and opportunities in the Meqdela Amba mountains historical site remain untouched. In an attempt to bridge these gaps, the research question was to identify the major barriers or challenges currently occurring on Meqdela Amba CBET development.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

The travel tourism industry is becoming an increasingly competitive market place at international level, where only the best-managed and marketed enterprises and destinations are likely to enjoy the competitive market (Asker et al., 2010). For instance, lack of marketing capacity and lack of knowledge on how the marketing structure operates was Caribbean CBET projects (Cooper, 2004). This is because CBET operation requires an effective and appropriate marketing strategy to inform tourists of the existence of the destination and encourage them to have experiences in their travel itineraries (Denman, 2001). An effective institutional framework is considered as one of the principal determinants of successful tourism development (Mody et al., 2018). Whilst many writers highlight broad management issues, the linkage between the institutional frameworks in which ecotourism delivered and the performance in terms of livelihoods of the communities involved was minimally studied (Funnel and Bynoe, 2007). In many destinations with ecotourism potentials, lack of infrastructure (e.g. accommodation) and services (e.g. well-trained guides) were the simply observed challenges (UNWTO-UNEP, 2011). Infrastructure denotes the physical attributes of a location that are necessary for tourism development (Graci, 2008). These physical attributes can range from rubbish pits, a tourism information center, destination site signs, road signs, a hospital or first aid facility, etc.

Marketing is another major barrier to establishing viable community based tourism in rural communities (Forstner, 2004). On the other hand, the movement of tourists to tourism destinations is strongly influenced by climatic conditions and timing of cultural festivals (Amelung et al., 2007). Moreover, the seasonality of tourism causes serious problems in view of the limited facilities and limited number of trekking routes (Gebayew, 2011). The barrier often faced by rural communities is the lack of proper infrastructure (Teshome et al., 2018). In many parts of the developing world, security (that is, political unrest, conflict, terrorism, health scares and natural disasters) is another serious challenge for establishment of community-based ecotourism (Salazar, 2012; Zhao and Ritchie, 2007; Nafbek, 2018). In Ethiopia, particularly in the northwestern part of the country, weak marketing strategy and promotion to attract both domestic and foreign tourists were mentioned as potential community

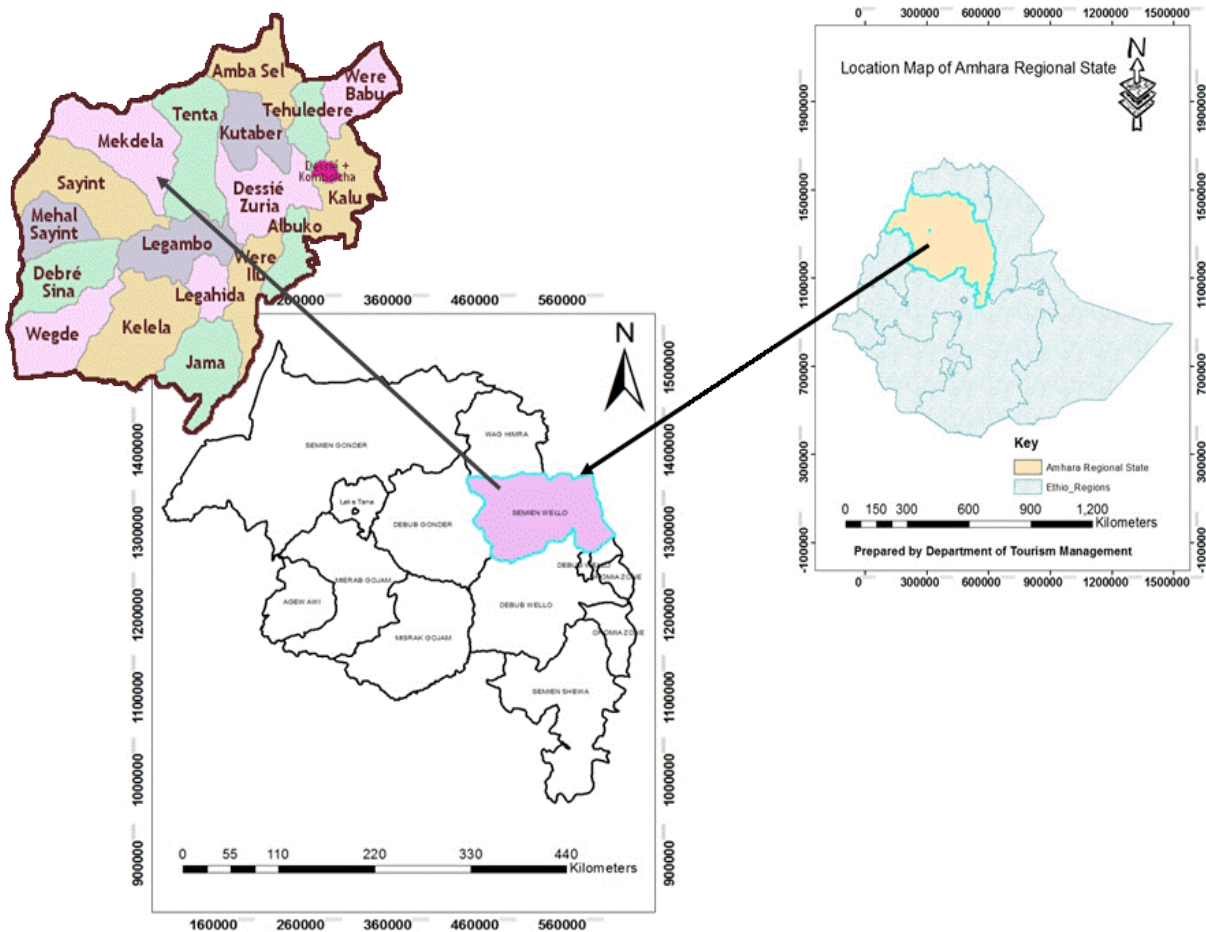


Figure 1. Map of the study area.

based ecotourism development barrier (BoEPLAU, 2014).

Studies showed that Amhara regional state community based tourism destination areas have different challenges, viz; encroachment for settlement in and around the attraction sites, agricultural development and expansion, grazing, deforestation for fuel wood charcoal (Teshome et al., 2015), lack of ownership, lack and loss of proper buffer zone, and lack of qualified human resource to manage CBET development (BoEPLAU, 2014). However, there were no research findings on barriers or challenges of CBET development in Meqdele Amba.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the study area

Meqdele Amba is located in and coordinated at 11°30'N 38°45'E in the Tenta district. Amhara region is located in the western part of South Wollo zone of the Amhara national regional state (Figure 1). Delanta and Ambassel districts in the north, Legambo district in the

south, Dessie zuria and Kutaber districts in the Meqdele and Sayint districts in the west, border the district. The district comprises 31 rural kebeles and 3 rural towns; Adjibar was the capital town of the district. The temperature in the area is mainly related with altitude, however, the mean annual temperatures are only 18 and 25°C, and mean annual rainfall is 1,278.3 mm (JICA, 2011).

The topography of Meqdele elevations in this district ranges from 700 m above sea level where the Bashilo leaves it to 3600 m at its southeastern point on the upper slopes of mount Amba Ferit. Geographically under the Ashangi formation, it represents the earliest fissural flood basalt volcanism in the region. Meqdele Amba is endowed with unique and stunning biophysical features that may not even scratch the surface of the real formation of this spectacular gift of nature, and the basalt flows are several hundred meters to a kilometer in thickness of strongly weathered crushed and tilted basalts.

Research design

Cross-sectional study design was used to describe the existing community based ecotourism challenge and opportunities where mixed research method was employed. When research is conducted in natural settings, supplementing quantitative data with

Table 1. Lists of sample of CBET HH selected by strata sampling method.

No.	List of villages	Total No. of household	%	Total No. of sample size HH
1	Meqdela Amba	61	16.48	32
2	Meqdela Meda	119	32.16	62
3	Selamgei	190	51.35	99
-	Total	370	100	193

Source: Own Survey (2018).

qualitative method helps to investigate, understand and quantify the complex socio-cultural aspects of livelihoods and the impact of development on the local communities from their own perspective (Neth, 2008).

Target population

The target population of the study was 370 local communities residing in Meqdela Amba (61 households from Meqdela Amba, 190 households from Selamgie and 119 households from Meqdela Meda villages). Moreover, professionals from the South Wollo Zone Culture and Tourism Department and Tenta District Culture and Tourism Office, the Debek Kebele Administrative District Culture and Tourism Office, CBET Management Committee, local tour guides, food preparation employees, camp managers and FGD of the study area were the key informants.

Sampling techniques and size

Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were employed. The selected sampling techniques are stratified, simple random and purposive samplings. These techniques are considered as appropriate for complex situations of Meqdela Amba and its environs.

The village was selected using non-probability sampling method because of the relative position to the community based ecotourism site. The interviewer used purposive sampling, and random sampling was used to question respondents in the local community in Meqdela Amba. The target population of the study was 370 local communities residing in Meqdela Amba (61 households from Meqdela Amba, 190 households from Selamgie and 119 households from Meqdela Meda villages). Each kebele has a different number of participants in order to ensure equal representation as each sample kebele has a different number of households. The sample size for quantitative data gathering is determined using Cochran's formula as indicated by Barlett et al. (2001). This study used the following formula to calculate the sample size:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population size (370), e is sampling error (0.05) or 5%.

$$n = 370 / (1 + 370(0.0025)) = 370 / 1.925 = 192.207 = 193$$

Therefore, the total sample size is 193. Since the numbers of people in each sample CBET household was not the same, the need to proportionate for each household and calculate using the

following formula was necessary.

$$n = n(N1/N)$$

where n = total number of sample, N = total number of population, and N1 = total number of population in each villages of household (HH).

The researcher distributed questionnaires to the calculated sample size in each village households based on the proportional ratio (Table 1).

Data collection methods

The primary data was collected using field observation, household survey, questionnaires (both open and closed ended). Key informant interviews and FGD was used to generate the qualitative data.

Method of data analysis

For the quantitative data, completed questionnaires were cleaned, coded and entered to SPSS version 20 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, mean, frequency and proportion was calculated to report findings and inference was based on the study findings. The qualitative data were analyzed using techniques based on procedures in qualitative data analysis (Bunly, 2011). In-depth interviews and free responses from open-ended interviews were grouped based on related issues, analyzed thematically in line with research questions, and interpreted to show a detailed picture of the existing situation on the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Resources related challenge

Inadequate quality of human resource

In the current study, Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism has lack of adequate human resources. As shown in Table 2, 85.5% respondents both strongly agreed and agreed on the statement "inadequate quality of human resource". This result was supported by some scholars in different parts of Ethiopia (Meskele et al., 2016; Teshome et al., 2018; Sisay, 2004). In addition, Eshetu (2014) reported that in developing countries such

Table 2. Barriers of CBET in Meqdele Amba site.

Variable	SD		D		U		A		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Resources capacity										
Inadequate quality of human resource	3	1.6	12	6.5	12	6.5	100	54.1	58	31.4
Absence professional guides	3	1.6	13	7	7	3.8	85	45.9	77	41.6
Nonexistence of finance	3	1.6	10	5.4	8	4.3	104	56.2	60	32.4
Absence of external support	4	2.2	9	4.9	5	2.7	98	53	69	37.3
Lack of cooperation among stakeholders	4	2.2	9	4.9	5	2.7	98	53	69	37.3
Physical challenge										
Encroachment for settlement	3	1.6	15	8.1	10	5.4	95	51.4	62	33.5
Heritage site deterioration by livestock grazing and other impact)	1	5	19	10.3	19	10.3	78	42.2	68	36.8
Inadequate of infrastructure (accesses road and transport)	7	3.8	13	7	7	3.8	109	58.9	49	26.5
Marketing and awareness										
Lack of marketing and promotion	5	2.7	7	3.8	4	2.2	90	48.6	79	42.7
Lack of community awareness	1	0.5	8	4.3	7	3.8	124	67	45	24.5
Lack of local community positive perception	1	0.5	8	4.3	7	3.8	124	67	45	24.5

SD: Strongly disagreed, D: disagree, U: undecided, A: agree, SA: strongly agree.
Source: Survey Result (2018).

as Ethiopia, it is not surprising that one of the industry's biggest challenges is a continuous shortage of qualified and willing labor, whereas adequate human resources are becoming increasingly important to the hospitality and tourism field for several reasons including increasing demand for high quality staff, and increasing consumer demand for quality services.

Regarding the professional guides, 87.5% of the respondents both strongly agreed and agreed on the statements "lack/absence of professional guides to this community based ecotourism destinations", while 8.6% respondents were either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 3.8%

respondents undecided to give their level of agreement. This finding were also supported by the qualitative data collected from culture and tourism office experts and FGD, where the local guide was selected from the local community, and their educational background was between grade 4 and grade 10 level. As a result, local guides did not communicate properly in English language with their customers. Key informants added that, visitors always face big challenges in this destination site due to lack of professional guides and lack of proper communication. Other research outputs supported this finding, that lack of qualified and experienced local guides were the

main community based ecotourism challenge to satisfy visitors in many part of new tourist destinations (Binyam, 2011; Tekeba, 2016).

In the Meqdele Amba community based ecotourism site, the majority (88.6%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed on the statement "nonexistence of finance" in the site (Table 2). Similarly, the overall development of tourism business is perceived as a shortfall and they reported that the current financial support is inadequate and hence government needs to spend more to promote tourism business in the area. Nonexistence of finance in community based ecotourism site reported by other

researchers were due to major barriers like: inadequate financial outlay to develop the infrastructure, inadequate funding for tourism marketing and promotion (Meskele et al., 2016; Teshome et al., 2018) and added that in the country, less attention has been given to heritage conservation and tourism sectors.

Absence of external support for the overall development of tourism business was considered as a gap by 90.3% of the respondents who both strongly agree and agree to statement "on external support". Results show that the current external support is inadequate and hence government needs to spend more to promote tourism business in the area (Table 2). Although community based ecotourism has an enormous potential of bringing economic growth to the local people and make the tourism sector more sustainable (Denman, 2001), the donor community that has continued to offer grants through the government and through local and international NGOs were not available in Meqdela Amba community based destination site. Funds from the donor can facilitate the establishment of community awareness program, build infrastructure upon which tourism thrives, build local capacities, improve marketing system and help to create appropriate partnerships especially between private sector and local communities (Ruhui, 2012).

Lack of cooperation among stakeholders for the overall development of tourism business is considered as a barrier by most of the respondents 90.3% (Table 2). This shows that there was weak collaboration among the stakeholders and perceived as a challenge to Meqdela Amba CBET development. Data from the key informants has supported this finding and they also believed the stakeholders' active participation in a various field of expertise to encourage and support community based ecotourism development. Additionally, another study revealed that lack of cooperation among stakeholders was identified as a bottleneck in and around the study area (Eshetu, 2014). Participation of local government, local community and private sector in the overall tourism development has paramount importance for sustained growth of CBET in Ethiopia (Berhanu and Teshome, 2016; Daniel, 2011; Aynalem, 2013). Because of the absence of coordination and collaboration between institutions, the local community and the private sector leading to duplication of effort, one may push responsibility to the other actors/stakeholders (Manaf et al., 2018).

Physical challenge

Settlement encroachment for the overall development of tourism business was considered as a gap by most of the respondents; 84.9% both strongly agree and agree that the settlement encroachment is inadequate, while 9.7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 5.4% were undecided on their level of agreement with the view that

Meqdela Amba local community has settlement problems in the site. This shows, settlement encroachment to the heritage site was the major barrier to advance community based ecotourism business in the study area. Even the permanent settlement has degraded the heritage sites specially the emperor Tewodos II palace and treasury places. Some local residents in Meqdela Amba even believed the development community based ecotourism were not important, and they recalled that they were opposing the establishment of this business. Prohibiting human settlement into heritage sites would be a difficult task for Meqdela community based tourism development in the study area (FGD 2). In other studies, Demssie (2015) reported such similar challenges in the Simien Mountains National Park that human induced pressures such as human settlement and overgrazing, were the most challenging issues for CBET in the park.

Majority (79%) of the respondents agreed on heritage site deterioration by livestock grazing, while, 15.3% respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 10.3% were undecided, to give positive or negative opinions regarding Meqdela Amba CBET livestock grazing problems to the heritage sites (Table 2). The results indicated that Meqdela Amba heritage site were deteriorating by livestock grazing and agricultural practices. The quantitative findings supported by field observations indicate that there was farmland expansion and livestock grazing in the heritage site. The most important national heritages in the area, which could be affected by expansion of farming activities and livestock grazing are: Emperor Tewodros II palaces and his swimming pool, remains of his treasury heritage sites and remains of Meqdela Medhanielem church. Heritage site and natural resources degradation could affect CBET viewpoints, attraction sites and the surrounding besides absence of buffer zone in historical heritage sites (Eshetu, 2014), no integrated land use management in Meqdela Amba and the Selmegie area (Daniel, 2011) and contribute to its degradation.

Inadequacy of infrastructure (that is, accommodation, accesses road and transport) was agreed upon by 85.4% of respondents. This shows majority of respondents agreed that infrastructural development and transportation accesses to visit Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism site were very poor. The result is consistent with reports from Amhara regional state major tourist destination site by Teshome et al. (2018). Transportation within the Meqdela Amba and the surrounding area was a big challenge for those who were not using private vehicles. In the rainy season, transportation access is closed to the site. According to the FGD discussants and field observation, though the existing infrastructural development has taken place due to the ecotourism projects, they feel that such ventures should be encouraged and promoted in the area. Thus, the availability of clean water and electricity supply were serious infrastructural problems at Meqdela Amba and in

the surrounding community.

Other facilities like banks, insurance and hotels, cafe, post offices, internet access were non-available at the study site (Meskele et al., 2016). Other challenges such as; absence of well-designed trekking passes, parking facilities, camping sites and effective land use planning alongside the lake, lack of transportation and comfortable roads, eco lodges and catering facilities around the lake (Sisay, 2004; Ketema, 2015) were reported. Similarly, in other sites, lack of basic facilities such as electricity, effective road network to and from the tourist destination and lack of health stations were major problems (Eshetu, 2014; Eshetie, 2012). One study conducted around Zengena Lake reported the shortage of sufficient potable water, lack of electricity, toilets and other important facilities as major challenge (Bires, 2014).

Marketing and promotion challenges

Most (91.3%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the lack of marketing and promotion (Table 2), and this was supported by the key informants, that is, experts from culture and tourism office, local guides, and FGD who stated that Meqdela Amba CBET does not have its own web site or other promotion related materials such as leaflet, brochures, and newsletters. In this regard, marketing and promotions was a major barrier in Meqdela Amba community based eco-tourism development in rural communities. The travel tourism industry was becoming an increasingly competitive market place at international and local level (Eshetu, 2014). Therefore, carefully designing the product, knowing the visitors to target and ensuring that marketing strategies reach the right people with the right message was critical to building and sustaining an effective and sustainable CBET operation (Sisay, 2004).

Higher proportion (91.5%) of the respondents agreed on the statement "lack of community awareness creation program" (Table 2). This indicates that there is a lack of awareness among the local community in Meqdela Amba community based ecotourism values. Qualitative data from open-ended questions shows the concept of CBET was new to the local community in Meqdela Amba, and was supported by FGD participants' that CBET values were not known. The importance of community awareness was described in different studies at different times. Low level of community awareness in CBET development can affect the overall performance and sustainability of the business (Teshome et al., 2015). The level of awareness among the locals and officials can be another big challenge for developing CBET (Eshetu, 2014).

For the statement "lack of local community positive perception", 91.5% respondents strongly agreed and agreed (Table 2). This might be due to lack of awareness, and knowledge about community-based

ecotourism and lack of visible economic benefit from the sector. Previous study indicated that lack of awareness was critical barrier on local people active participation in tourism development, and can affect the community attitude (Eshetu, 2014). Tourism benefits the local community in a significant manner by increasing income for the local people, generating new jobs and the concomitant increase in the quality of life of the local communities (Asker et al., 2010). However, the responses for negative perception are larger as compared to the undecided perception. The perception of the local community can affect the acceptance of any business venture (Eshetu, 2014). As the name implies, community-based ecotourism has the local community as an integral part (Er et al., 2012). Host community negative attitude could be a big barrier for the establishment of a community-based ecotourism (Ross and Wall, 1999).

Security and safety

The results from FGD discussants and key informants show there were some security problems occurring with visitors, like throwing of stones and theft. Security and safety were probably the greatest threat to the tourism industry. However, significant violent criminal activity against foreign tourists in Meqdela Amba, were very rare. It is believed that the role of local guides, local residents and communities in crime protection were very crucial as nothing is out of the sight of the community. As per report made by Sisay (2004), orientation given to local guides and luggage porters ahead of the trip could bring peace of mind to visitors.

Conflict over resource ownership

According to FGD discussants and key informants, visitors were not willing to pay an entrance fee to the Meqdela Amba community based heritage site. Perhaps, this has created conflict between the local community and tourists. Moreover, the conflicts frequently happened due to resources ownership since grazing and farming land expansion were prohibited. Resources were currently only used for tourist attraction, for the construction of a community lodge and trekking route; therefore, the local residents' believe that they are excluded from the tourism benefits and have lost their ownership right. One of the preconditions for undertaking tourism businesses is a sufficient level of ownership rights within the local community (Denman, 2001). Similarly, conflict over resources ownership has been reported from many parts of Ethiopian tourism destination sites, for instance, Dniel (2011) in Awash National Park, Gebayew (2011) in Meket Community based ecotourism Wollo, and Teshome et al. (2018) in Amhara Region,

Northern Ethiopia.

Conclusion

The Meqdele Amba study has identified major barriers to CBET, and revealed that resource capacities, the quality of human resource, availability of professional local guides, financial support, and proper cooperation among stakeholders has been found below the standard of CBET. Encroachment in search of land; for settlement, farming and grazing were major challenges. Lack of marketing and promotion, lack of community awareness on CBET, lack of positive perception and lack of adequate infrastructure were the major community based ecotourism development barrier in Meqdele Amba.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Special attention should be given to human resources capacity building to manage the ecotourism business and enhance visitor flows in Meqdele Amba CBET.
- 2) The regional and local government should place special attention to infrastructure development and develop basic tourist facilities and amenities in Meqdele Amba community based ecotourism site and the surrounding environment.
- 3) Government should restore the ruins of Emperor Tewodros II palace, the ruins of Emperor Tewodros II Fortress, the ruins of Meqdele Medhani Alem church and the ruins of Emperor Tewodros II Treasure places in Meqdele Amba site.
- 4) Awareness creation programs should be implemented to increase awareness and improve perception of the local inhabitants on the values of heritage, heritage conservation and community based ecotourism development.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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