

Full Length Research Paper

Development of community based ecotourism in Wenchi Crater Lake, Ethiopia: Challenges and prospects

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This study examines the challenges and prospects of Community Based Ecotourism development in Ethiopia with special focus on Wenchi Crater Lake. Descriptive research design was employed with 194 sample representatives selected through simple random sampling technique and purposive sampling for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The data were collected through key informant interview, informal discussion, questionnaire survey and field observation. The finding shows that contrary to the lake's greatest potential for community based ecotourism, conflict of interest over resource usage and ownership of the lake, unfair benefit sharing, incapability of ecotourism business to benefit the local community equitably, inability of ecotourism to substitute traditional agriculture, illegal land marketing and tension among local community are encumbrances that can impede the sustainability of ecotourism of Wenchi. As a result of such challenges, the sustainability of community based ecotourism development of Wenchi Crater Lake is uncertain despite its potential.

Key words: Challenges, prospects, Community Based Ecotourism, Wenchi Crater Lake, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, as a niche tourism market, is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of tourism industry. Some have claimed that ecotourism is increasing by 25 to 30% a year (UNWTO, 2012) and most tourism forecasters predict ecotourism to grow further over the coming years, driven by consumer concerns over environmental and climate changes. For many rural and indigenous communities, ecotourism has become a doorway to the global economy. As local residents develop lodges, hiking trails and interpretive activities for visitors, they are gaining a foothold in capitalist markets

and bringing returns directly to their communities. For better or for worse, these returns have profound effects on environments, wildlife, cultural traditions, and other common pool resources (Noella and Lisa, 2007). Drumm et al. (2004) also avowed that ecotourism has the potential to reduce the threats pose by conventional tourism to natural areas and to the people who live in and around them via income generation for conservation, local enterprise development and creating employment opportunities, cultural exchange, environmental education, protected area justification and visitor appreciation.

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However, ecotourism as of conventional tourism has challenges to contribute to the sustainable development and environmental conservation in developing countries. While the social responsibility of ecotourism operations is not as apparent (Bitapi et al., 2012), Mokoro (2012) argued that participation, accountability, and inclusiveness as an ingredients to local empowerment. Moreover, Scheyvens (1999) proposed four dimensions of local empowerment consisting of social, economic, psychological and political empowerment, whereas Nelson et al. (1993) claimed that empowerment of local people within the context of environmental protection is one of the tenets of ecotourism. At best, ecotourism projects tend to aim for the 'involvement' of local people and at worst, ecotourism projects can ignore the issue of local participation completely (Garrod, 2003).

Many of the world's natural areas remain under threat: loss of biodiversity and resources for conservation remain inadequate when World tourism arrivals have grown by 23% and are forecast to double by 2020 in which climate change has increasingly become a major threat affecting the very resources on which ecotourism depends – natural areas and local and indigenous communities around the world (TIES, 2006).

Alteration of local culture and life style, erosion from hiking, environmental pollution, deforestation, and leakage of foreign currency are obscurity for sustainable development of ecotourism (Gouvea, 2004). Moreover, dependencies on foreign supplies and foreign controlled services limit the operation despite its considerable attention at global and national levels.

Ethiopia is rich in biodiversity, culture, history and nature, is eager in promoting ecotourism for both domestic and foreign visitors. However, the intense demand from tourists and local communities placed on the ecosystems and natural areas may degrade or even threaten their very existence. However, ecotourism must focus on the ability of local residents to act collectively to control and to be beneficiary in common. The strength of collective action also determines how effectively communities can monitor their resources, especially those being exploited for ecotourism, establish rules for use and conservation, and sanction rule-breakers which are one of the prominent problems in Ethiopia including Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism development.

Despite valuable studies focusing on good governance (Abiot, 2010); water quality of the lake (Malairajan et al., 2003), research are scant focusing primarily on the challenges and prospects of community based ecotourism development of Wenchi Crater Lake. Therefore, the study intends to assess the challenges and prospects of community based ecotourism development of Wenchi Crater Lake. Accordingly, the development of Community Based Ecotourism at Wenchi Crater Lake may be doubtful if there is no fair benefit sharing system, proper land use planning, proper regulatory mechanism of ecotourism and proper integration of ecotourism to community needs, culture and natural environment even

though it is endowed with scenic landscape, culture, natural forest, hot springs, and accessible both from Ambo and Woliso.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Description of study area

Wenchi Crater Lake is one of the popular tourist attractions and interesting ecotourism destinations in Ethiopia. It is located at Haro Wenchi village of Wenchi District on the north western part of Addis Ababa. The Lake is 29 Kms, 38Kms, and 155Kms away from the town of the district (Chitu), and the town of the zone (Woliso) and from the capital, Addis Ababa respectively (Figure 1). Its altitude ranges from 2900 - 3384 meters above sea level. The average annual rainfall is 1420 millimeters. Its depth ranges from 6m-78 m with an area of 560 ha. The average land holding size for a single household is 0.5 hectares and the major crops grown in the area are "enset" or false banana, barely, wheat, and potato. As the farming land is hilly, it is difficult to use oxen plough and the common practice is hand plough. It is renowned for its beautiful Crater Lake and 15th century Monastery. However, Community Based Eco-tourism at Wenchi Crater Lake is a GTZ financed measure started in November 2002 with the cooperation of Oromia Trade Industry and Urban Development Bureau, Trade tourism and Transport Division.

METHODS

Mixed research approach was employed as it allows to generalize results from a sample to a population and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Hanson et al., 2005); better understanding of a research problem by converging numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data (Mertens, 2003; Punch, 1998). Survey design was used to assess the challenges and prospects of Wenchi Crater Lake for community based ecotourism development since it provides empirical evidence (Kelley et al., 2003). The actual sample size used for the study was 194 samples. Simple random sampling technique was used for the local community of Wenchi with sample size of 166. Additionally, 28 subjects were selected through purposive sampling from government officials, community leaders, local guides and staff of Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism.

Questionnaire, interview, informal discussion and field observation were used as data collection instruments. A five point Likert scale was used to ascertain the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements for house hold survey (Likert, 1932). Additionally, scientific journals, published and unpublished materials were used as a source of data.

Data analysis was made by using the SPSS statistical package version 16.0 for quantitative data while Text explanations, transcription and descriptions were used in the case of qualitative data.

RESULTS

In order to assess the challenges and prospects of Community Based Ecotourism of Wenchi Crater Lake, 75.9 and 24.1% of the respondents are male and female respectively. Agriculture is the main source of income (42.8%) followed by tourism (31.3%) and the remaining (12.7%) are trader. Besides the local community, tourism experts were the part of the study from the Zonal, Woreda

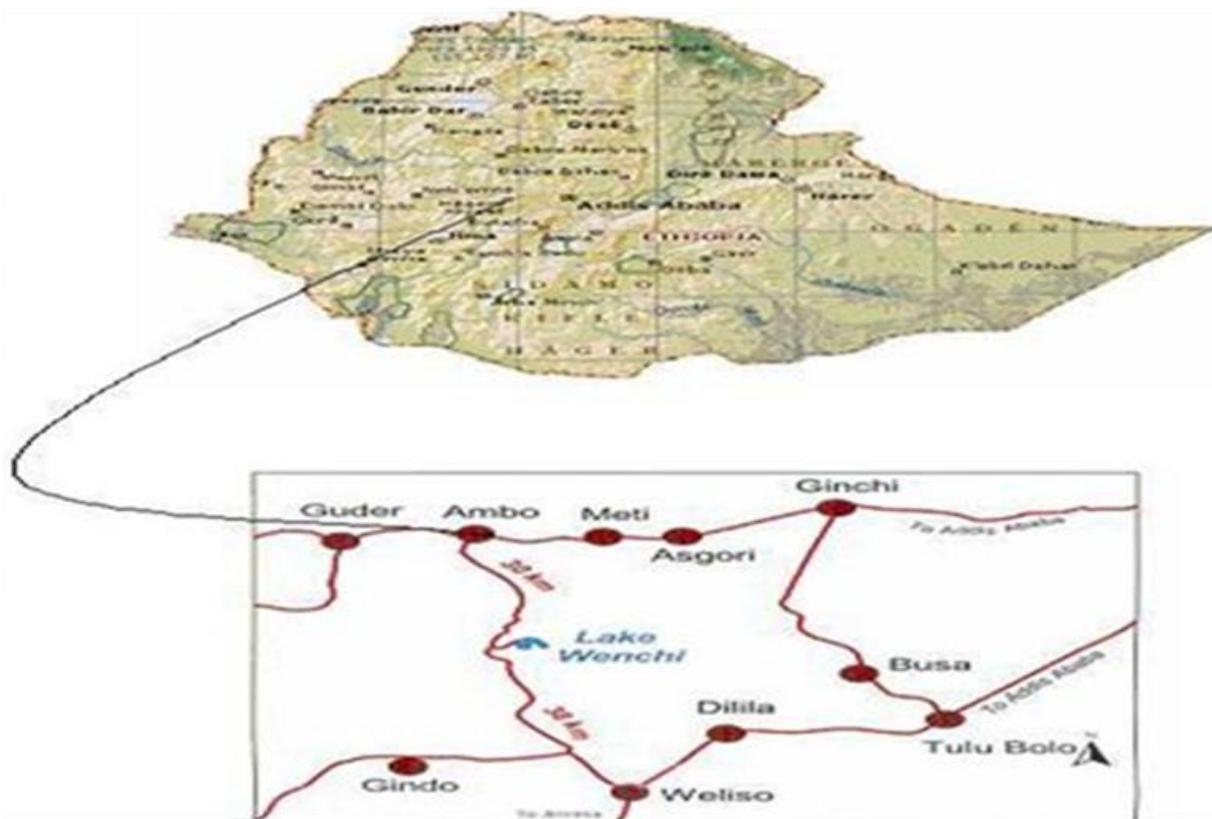


Figure 1. Geographical location of Wenchi Crater Lake. **Source:** Malairajan et al. (2008).

and WETA. Therefore, in order to assess the prospects and challenges of Community Based Ecotourism of Wenchi Crater Lake, a total of 8(eight) tourism experts were involved in questionnaire survey while four (4) tourism experts and 16 community leaders were involved in interview.

Potentials of Wenchi Crater Lake for Community Based Ecotourism Development

The lake is gifted with its natural color, hot springs, waterfalls, and cold water, beautiful and scenic landscape, natural forests, and historical church where the lake is surrounded by hilly mountains and natural forest the so called Kibate forest on the western side. Geographically, the crater is impressive, wide and very steep with its dramatic valley.

Wenchi Crater Lake is a good potential for such tourist activities: hiking, boating/canoeing, horse riding, forest exploring, Spa bathing, medical tourism, trekking, adventure and other leisure activities. Furthermore, the lake provides a picturesque scenery landscape, culture and nature with its ability of ecosystem in accepting managed level of visitors, historical monastery built in the 15th century (Kirkos Monastery), and cultural landscape

being shaped. The lake is suitable to develop ecotourism with the availability of local products to build accommodation and recreational facilities, electricity in the site, gravel road, pathways and parking facilities, and poor with sufficient clean water to meet extra demands of tourists and locals.

Challenges to Community Based Ecotourism Development of Wenchi Crater Lake

Conflict of Interest

Inadequate participation of the locals in ecotourism development process results in inequitable benefit sharing. Simple provision of incentives as a means to exploit resources and marginalize a certain part of a community may intensify over exploitation of resources, loss of confidence on ownership, and increase the annoyance of marginalized community towards further development of ecotourism. As shown in Figure 2, 79.2 % of the local community responded that there is a conflict of interest on the ownership of the Lake and tension among the local communities. For instance, the boat group, guide group, horse riding group and honey group are the most beneficiary group while others not.

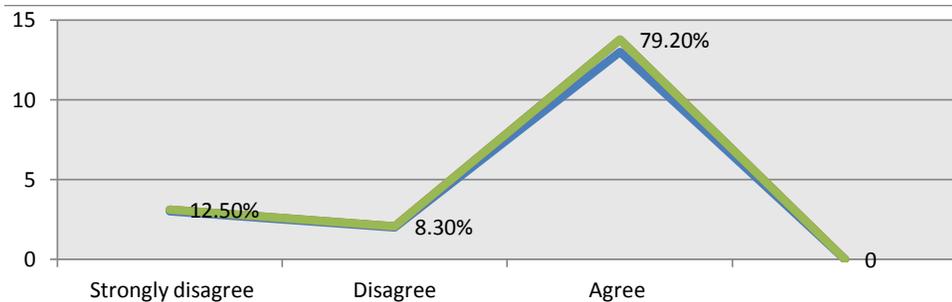


Figure 2. Conflict of interest on ownership of the Lake.

Even though the association pays a land tax as an incentive for those not incorporated in the association, they are against the association. These may not only create an economically marginalized group but also results in deterioration of the communal life and loss of partnership on common goods. Moreover, tourist needs can take priority in the peak season (from December to January) in order to ship the locals on the lake. Similarly, when the Sarova Shaba Hotel was built (in Shaba National Reserve, Kenya), it is water needs took priority and the spring was blocked off from public access (Mclaren, 1998). On the other hand, when Wenchi Ecotourism Association started to charge the community for a fee for the use of the hot springs to cure them from their diseases, and salty water to water their domestic animals, an unknown person burnt the house they built for temporary boarding of local guests according to informants. Such strong confrontation between the conflicting parties may lead to the destruction of resources if not properly managed. Besides the dearth of adequate farm land, intentional cultivation of land for agriculture near the lake is made with the perception that the lake can be filled by soil (being the result of volcanic eruption) according to key informant. While the operation of 'community based ecotourism' has a positive resonance, it is naïve to consider that the development of community based ecotourism is a means to conserve natural resources as it may be a main cause of marginalization of community and conflict of interest which can further deteriorate social relationship among the community and the nature further.

Community-Based ecotourism requires an understanding, and where possible a strengthening of the legal rights and responsibilities of the community over land, enabling the community to influence activity and earn income from tourism (WWF, 2001). Moreover, ecotourism development should achieve three major goals (3P's) namely: Profits (Economic), People (Socio-cultural benefits to communities and tourists) and Place (biodiversity conservation) (Baker, 2008). However, inadequate community participation results in weak capacity of local residents to negotiate equitable and sustainable relationships with other actors and agencies in ecotourism developments (Christopher and Southgate, 2006).

However, Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism appears to leave the place (biodiversity conservation) as a result of conflict of interest on the ownership of the lake. Systematic marginalization and little provision of incentives unfair distribution of benefits gained from ecotourism may further intensify destruction of natural resources and social relations among the conflicting groups.

Illegal land marketing

Even though the country's law prohibits illegal land marketing, it is prominent in the area. This may be due to the fear of ownership on the lake and its surroundings in line with ecotourism development where outsiders are controlling the land adjacent to the lake. There are samples of non functional lodges owned by outsiders near the lake. And out of this, 75% of them are for residential purpose while the remaining is for business purpose although the outsiders have the privileges to the land under the shadow of the country's law. According to Ethiopian rural land proclamation No. 456/2005 article 5 and 8, governmental and non-governmental organizations, social and economic institutions shall have the right to use rural land in line with their development. Additionally, according to Article 5/4, peasant farmers, semi pastoralist and pastoralist who are given holding certificates can lease to other farmers or investors land from their holding of a size sufficient for, the intended development in a manner that shall not displace them, for a period of time to be determined by rural land administration laws of regions based on particular local conditions and objectives (FDRE, 2005), but Oromia regional land proclamation No. 130/ 2007 article 10 sub - article 1 and 2 states that any peasant, pastoralist or semi pastoralist has the right to rent out up to half of his holding while the duration of the agreement shall not be more than three years for those who apply traditional farming, and fifteen years for mechanized farming but not allowed to sell and buy land . In opposition to this, the land owners are certified and the holder of rural land certificate and have privileges to their land which they bought from the local community.



Figure 3. Deforestation and Agricultural land in Kibate Forest and on the Shore of the Lake. **Source:** Field survey, 2013.

Michael (2003) also revealed that the centre and seaside in the urban zone of Brazil are increasingly being occupied by immigrants for they buy houses from locals in order to convert them to tourism facilities which created the tension between local communities and conservation agents. Absence of regulatory mechanism of government in spite of its implementation in developing country results in the loss of right on a resource leads to further poverty as far as they there is no alternative livelihood option. In Ethiopia there is no regulatory mechanism for culture and tourism offices in controlling small and medium enterprise in tourism directly due to lack of legal power given for them to control the operation of SMES in tourism. For the sustainability of ecotourism development of the lake, collaborative efforts and integration of key players is very important.

Environmental degradation

Uncoordinated uses and management practices, lack of transparent and efficient regulatory institutions, and uncontrolled human interactions with the ecosystem led to the rise of massive social and environmental problem. Indeed, Ecotourism aims to promote conservation through a sustainable management regime under a “protection through usage” (UNWTO, 2012). However, WETA seems to be business oriented Community Based Ecotourism Association with overexploitations of nature. Besides segmented community participation, environmental conservation is at its ideal stage. As a result, the sustainability of the lake and its ecotourism venture is in question due to population growth resulted from shortage of land for agriculture and natural feature of the land. The volume of water in the lake is at decreasing rate as springs feeding the lake are desiccating. This is due to plantation of eucalyptus tree where the spring originates which absorbs water and even plantation of eucalyptus tree on the shore of the lake (Figure 3).

Similarly, the findings of Painter and William (1995),

shows that the urgency for survival leaves poor people with no other option than over exploiting natural resources. However, Kusler (1991) argued that ecotourism must have a strong “people element” because failure to involve even a single group may result in destruction of the resources. Despite local involvement, segmented participation leads to further loss of resources and environmental degradation.

Lack of basic ecotourism infrastructure and facilities

Even though ecotourists do not need sophisticated facilities, elongating the stay of tourists and maximizing the customer satisfaction in the service delivery system of ecotourism is significant for the economy of the community surrounding the lake. There are no basic tourist facilities that can maximize the length of stay of tourists. With the exception of gravel road, there are a number of non functional sample lodges that contribute to visual pollution. Additionally, the area lacks zoning of land which can be magnified by absence of well-designed trekking pass, parking facilities, camping sites and land use planning along the lake. Besides the lack of transportations and standardized roads, boarding, eco lodge and other catering facilities are non existence down the lake. However, electric power and water supply is available to the site with unfair distribution among the community.

Institutional challenges to Ecotourism of WETA

Since its establishment, WETA is responsible to SMEs of Wenchi Woreda and South Western Shewa respectively with an objectives of creating social and economic benefits through ecotourism to foster the conservation of natural resources of the area where 8% of the service providers revenue and half of entrance fee go directly to the community in transparent way for the improvement of

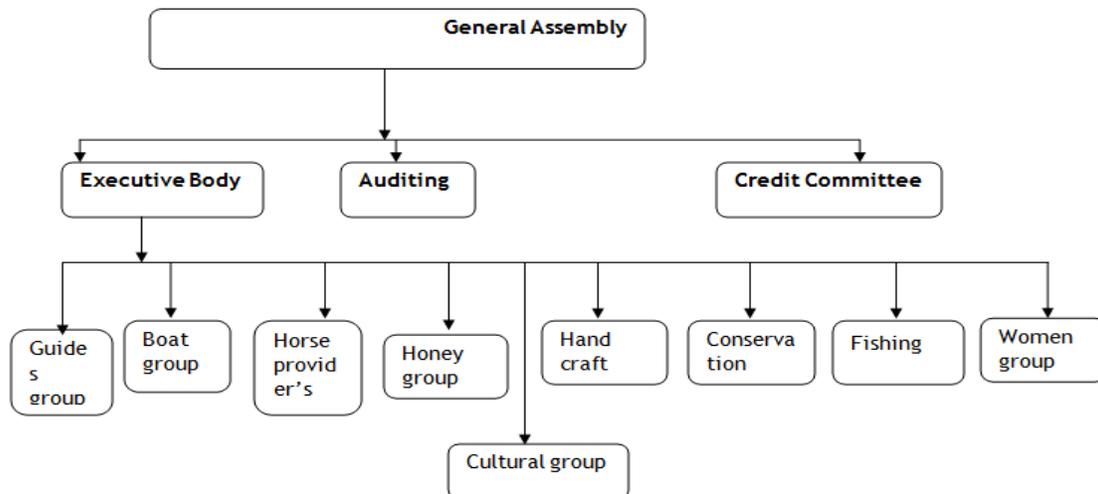


Figure 4. WETA's organizational structure. Source: WETA, 2013.

its services. One of the greatest challenges to achieving ecotourism development is absence of development of national strategies and regulatory frameworks (Honey and Gilpin, 2009; Lindsay, 2003) whereas pertinent policy and institutions are very important for ecological and economic sustainability of ecotourism destinations.

This implies the degradation of natural resources due to organizational commitment to achieve its primary objectives. Similarly, Müller (2000) concluded ecotourism is neither a panacea for the conservation nor can it alone unshackle the economy of local communities. Unless ecotourism is well planned and monitored, the pursuit of maximizing economic benefits may harm the ecosystem and deprive the local communities even further.

There is no responsible body controlling the tourism activities carried out on Wenchi Crater Lake and its surrounding as WETA is directly responsible to South West Shewa SMEs. Except formal reporting relationship in the culture and tourism office receive reports from the zone SMEs, there is no regulatory mechanism by culture and tourism office of the Zone and district (Figure 4). This is due to the legal power is given to SMEs but the culture and tourism have a power only on the technical aspects of the operation. Even though empowerments of women are important, only three women are included in the group of honey producers out of 334 households with the misconception of "women lack the ability to involve in the service provisions of horse riding, guides and boating" according to respondents. This implies women are marginalized as far as ecotourism development in Wenchi Crater Lake is concerned. It is believed that women are closer to natural resources as they collect wood for fire, and fetch water among others, marginalization of women from ecotourism development can lead to the deterioration of natural resources in ecotourism depends.

Similar findings from Costa Rica revealed that

Ecodesarrollo Papagayo promotes itself as an ecotourism destination, but has been accused of not following the principles of ecotourism (McLaren, 1998). Therefore, absence of legal framework and uncoordinated teamwork by concerned stakeholders can result in the loss of significant resources and even may exaggerate the conflict of interest among key players.

DISCUSSION

In spite of its potential, ecotourism development of Wenchi Crater Lake provoked marginalization, illegal land marketing, conflict of interest, women disempowerment, unfair benefit sharing with diminutive incentives and environmental degradation to the surrounding environment. Moreover, Kusler (1991) argued that ecotourism must have a strong "people element" because failure to involve even a single group may result in destruction of the resources. Similarly, Merg (1999) argued that ecotourism is coming with multiple negative impacts on the social, political and environmental set up even though it offers practical solutions to economic growth of developing countries. However, ecotourism has the potential to provide opportunities for the development of the disadvantaged, marginalized and rural areas (Manu et al., 2012). The results from Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism confirms that while the association started to charge the community to pay for hot spring and salty water, they burnt the house built for such purpose which indicates failure involving a single group may result in destruction of resources which confirms the argument of Kusler (1991).

Findings from Wenchi Community based ecotourism confirmed that women are not empowered due to a gender task division for it is believed that women are physically incapable. This implies Wenchi Community

Based Ecotourism does not concern women even though they are the ones who collect wood for fire, and fetch water among others with its negative impacts on the environment. Despite its impact, study shows that experiences from the third world in the promotion of women's empowerment through involvement in ecotourism (Scheyvens, 2002). However, Hall (2001) argued that gender task division stereotypes might hamper women empowerment. Similar to the finding of Hall (2001), despite their closer relation with nature in rural area, the role of women in nature conservation, it is failing to notice in some ecotourism development paradigm.

Lack of regulatory mechanism and standardization in operating ecotourism in Ethiopia is ubiquitous where all SMES are directly reports to and under the supervision of SMES. This implies that the Culture and Tourism offices are powerless except the provision of technical assistants to SMES's organized in tourism industry. In such circumstances, the development of ecotourism might lead to superfluous damage of natural resources in which ecotourism depends. Unfair benefit sharing and marginalization of some groups in ecotourism development and its operation is rampant in Wenchi Community Based Ecotourism. Even though the door is open to those who are interested to join the association, a big money is required to join for they are poor and incapable. If properly adopted, planned and executed, tourism industry will go a long way to economically empower host and locals (Mawere and Mubaya, 2012). Similarly, decline in community participation (Holladay and Ormas, 1995); green washing and institutional pressure to deliver goods in the development paradigm of ecotourism (Zambrano et al., 2010) are challenges to sustainability of ecotourism development. However, Boonzaaier (2012) pointed out that the establishment of institutions based on a traditional authority system can enable role-players at grassroots level to introduce management systems that ensure their needs and affiliated values. In addition, the strength of collective action also determines how effectively communities can monitor their resources, especially those being exploited for ecotourism; establish rules for use and conservation. A careful management and development of ecotourism which may become an advocate of the environmental, economic and social development of the community around ecotourism destination is very important.

The growing economic significance of ecotourism has caught the interest of many people and communities especially in the developing countries. As a result of conflict of interest and fear of ownership on the lake, the quest of illegal land marketing is prominent around Wenchi Crater lake particularly for stranger to the site as they ask to sale the land near the lake. Additionally, competing interests between investors on accommodation for some of the buildings left without finishing and function contributing to visual pollution and damage of the authenticity of the lakes. The present study suggests that if not properly planned, managed and developed, eco-

tourism can bring conflict of interest, social unrest (marginalized community can be created), environmental degradation, women disempowerment and illegal land marketing.

Conclusion

Wenchi Crater Lake has a greatest potential for community based ecotourism with its diversified nature and culture. However, due to conflict of interest on the ownership of the lake, illegal land marketing, lack of basic ecotourism facilities, disempowerment of women, unfair benefit sharing, institutional challenges and environmental degradation, the sustainable development of ecotourism is questioned.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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