Full Length Research Paper

Community participation and involvement in tourism development in Tigray

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the level and role of participation and involvement of local communities in tourism development using a case study of three purposively selected areas; Wukro town, Degum, and Megab. To explore this research topic, it examines the following key concepts: dissemination of knowledge of tourism and tourists among local communities, participation and involvement of local community in tourism benefit and the contribution of tourism development to generate income. To attain the research objectives, the researcher used multiple methods. Based on the findings obtained from multiple methods, this research concludes that the study areas have plenty of cultural, historical, archeological and religious sites. It also concludes that local communities want to take part in the decision making process of tourism in their local area. Local people want to see decisions about tourism development in their area made by consulting local people. Local communities acknowledge that tourism provides employment opportunities, encourages a variety of cultural activities and meeting tourists promotes cross cultural exchange. The tourism businesses create employment opportunities for local people and support different community development activities when they consider it important. However, tourism businesses have not developed specific mechanisms of sharing tourism benefits. But the major reasons for this were: lack of knowledge about what tourism and tourists are, less knowhow what and how to do with regard to tourism businesses, unable to use their local products, less involvement and participation in tourism activities, and weak coordination among the major stakeholders of tourism. The study confirms an awareness creation should be done about how and what tourism businesses will be profitable. It is also recommended that local communities should be empowered in tourism, and stakeholders of tourism should be well organized and coordinated in order to help local communities exploit the huge tourism potential of their areas.

Keywords: Community tourism, Adventure tourism, Stakeholders of tourism, Involvement of tourism, Eco-tourism, Tourism products.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the contemporary leading economic activities in the world. It is an industry that operates by the movement of the peoples from place to place, for a given period of time and with varying reasons for the visit (WTO,
Research results and statistical data have revealed that strategy. countries to move away from dependency on agriculture tourism happens”. Tourism has assisted many developing countries to move away from dependency on agriculture activity is at its low level of practice and per 2007). According to the World Bank’s (2004) report one reason for this continued poverty is the over-dependence on the agricultural sector. The only means of livelihood that the country has is the traditional agriculture activity that they perform for generations. It is also well known that this agricultural activity is at its low level of practice and per formance though registering encouraging performance (Ayele, 2007).

According to Tariku (2006), given its potential and actual tourism resources on one hand and compared to other LDCs on the other, Ethiopia’s tourism performance is not satisfactory. In Ethiopia in general and in Tigray, a regional state in northern Ethiopia, in particular, tourism is always complained for not benefiting the host community of local destination areas mainly in rural areas. Although some change is taking place with regard to tourism, the change is not satisfactory for local communities in Tigray (Chernet, 2008). Tigray is the heart of historical sites. It is the cradle of the country’s ancient civilization. Axumite civilization was one of the greatest and earliest civilizations in the world. Early Christianity had its first seed here. The people’s traditional songs and dances, the religious ceremony and rituals life styles are also worth seeing, (Retrieved from: www.facts about tigrai).

However, this huge tourism potential of the region including the study areas is not yet exploited properly (Berhanu, 2003; Teklehaymanot, 2005). The share of Tigray region from the whole Ethiopia is very low. The regions gross receipt ranges from the country 8.85 million birr in 1990 to 10 million birr in 1993 (Ethiopian tourism Commission, 2002). In the study areas (Gerealta), the average cultivable land is only 20.3% (15353.5 hectare). The remaining 79.7% (60,264.4 hectare) of the land is not suitable (uncultivable) for agriculture, (Tigray Tourism Commission, 2007). According to Chernet (2008), to alleviate poverty and have a better level of living, it is necessary to give due attention to the diversification of rural and urban livelihood and to use tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. However, the majority of local communities of Tigray in general and study areas in particular are not looking towards the promotion and consumption of tourism as a source of livelihood (Berhanu, 2003).

Aims of the study

As to the researcher understanding, there has been no in depth research conducted so far in the tourism sector in the region. Therefore, the aim of this study was to inspire a wellspring of motivation among policy makers and implementers to understand the gaps and to take corrective actions so as to boost the benefits of the sector for local communities at grass root level. It was also expected to help the concerned stakeholders, specifically Tigray tourism and cultural agency to understand issues related to major problems in tourism industry development. Specifically, this research had the following major objectives (1) to examine the degree of the dissemination of knowledge about the benefits of tourism and (2) local communities’ views about the impacts of tourism (3) to examine local communities’ participation and involvement in tourism in the
study areas.

Research design

This research was conducted using descriptive survey because the researcher tried to describe the existing situation. The study was undertaken on purposively selected two clusters namely Gerealta and Wukro clusters. The clusters were selected purposively because the two clusters are assumed to have high tourism potential or due to their profound significance in tourism development and opportunities. At both clusters, three potentialy rich sites were selected purposively. From Gerealta cluster-Megab and Degum villages and from Wukro cluster-Wukro town were selected for this study due to their high tourism potential.

After identifying the target area, the respondents were selected by the researcher using a combination of systematic random sampling(Gerealta) and purposive sampling methods(Wukro town). The total sample size which were taken for this study is 120 respondents (n1 or cluster 1=90, n2 or cluster 2=30, n=120. The sample taken was more than 10% of the targeted population. To achieve the aims and objectives of the research, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through structured household questionnaire, participatory focus group discussions(FGDs), observation and interview. These primary sources of information were also supported by a document analysis as a source of secondary data.

The data collected using questionnaire were analyzed and discussed in the form of tables, and percentage. In addition, a qualitative method of analysis was also used for the data collected from observation, interview and FGDs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the extent of local communities’ participation in terms of decision making process and sharing tourism benefits in the study area’s tourism industry. This also includes analyses of the responses given to the open and closed ended survey questions that aimed to assess respondents’ knowledge of the positive impacts of tourism, how they participate in the industry, how they view their current of level participation in the current decision making process.

Types of tourism potential in the study area

Trekking

Gerealta is potentially favorable for trekking by serving as center to Abiy Addi, Afar region (Dallol depression), and Central highlands of Tigray, and from Yeha via Adwa Mountains to Semen Mountain in North Gondar zone of Amhara region.

Adventure Tourism (Mountain Climbing)

There is a segment of tourism consisting of program and activities with a connotation of challenge, expeditions full of surprises, most often for adults, involving daring journeys and the unexpected performances.

Religious heritage tourism

Gerealta is the home of rock hewn and historical churches that can able to attract the eyes of both international and domestic tourists. The national and religious holidays which are unique and celebrated in the area could be used as ways of attraction.

Professional tourism

In the Gerealta, there is a type of tourism that allows professionals to have direct contact on site with the fields in which they are involved, and where they can increase or exchange knowledge with other professionals. Examples: Agriculture, Anthropology, Botany, and others as well.

Local communities’ knowledge of tourism

Understanding on Tourism sector

According to the information gained from interview (tourism marketing expert), although the international tourism did not develop with the pace that it should have been developed, but when compared with domestic tourism, it is on a better situation both in the region in general and in the study areas in particular. The low level of domestic tourism starts from the lack of knowledge about what tourism is among the local communities. Therefore, it is important to know how the local communities understand what tourism is.

As it is depicted in Table 1, 37(30.8%) respondents replied that they do not know what tourism means. From those who said I do not know, 4(18.1%) of them were in Wukro and the remaining 10(27%) and 23(54.9) of them were from Degum and Megab respectively. From the total respondents, 50(41.7%) of them said tourism means visiting, followed by research and heritages accounting 6(5%) respondents. There are also 25(20.8%) respondents who said tourism is recreation or wildlife visiting. In line to this, a result of focus group discussion confirmed that local communities had very less awareness and knowledge about tourism. An interview
result with responsible tourism heads also stated that the reason why tourism remained underdeveloped was not due to lack of tourism attractions. It was mainly however due to lack of awareness about tourism among local communities because knowledge serves as a stepping stone to invest in the sector. Relatively speaking, the household respondents of Wukro cluster had better knowledge than Gerealta. This implies that the local communities in the town had better access to know about tourism than rural areas.

As it is depicted on the Table 2, the majority of the respondents at the study areas i.e 71(59.2%) replied a tourist is a white person who visit a certain place. The next highest choice regarding the question, 25(20.8%) respondents said a tourist is everyone (both nationals and whites) who visits a certain place. From the whole respondents, 7(5.8%) of them believed that it is nationals that are tourists. There were also17 (14.2%) peoples who replied that they do not know who a tourist is. Therefore excluding those who replied everyone, 95(79.2%) of them did not have an adequate knowledge about who a tourist is. It has been observed from the study that majority of local communities believed tourists are only whites. As it could be observed in the table, the respondents of Wukro had better knowhow than Degum and Megab regarding who a tourist is. This implies that information dissemination about tourists was very rare at rural area of Gerealta.

As it is shown in Table 3, the respondents were asked whether they have come across a teaching on tourism or not. 44(36.7%) respondents replied that they have never been to any kind of teaching on tourism, 76 (63.3%) respondents said they did get a teaching. For those got a teaching, their source of information for the majority of them 46(38.3%) was the media, followed by a friend and a seminar that are 7(5.8%) and 11(9.2%) respondents.
respectively. There were also 10(8.3%) and 2(1.7%) respondents that have acquired the knowledge from government body and school. Here, it has been observed that 44(36.7%) of them did not get teaching(information) from any government body. The researcher was also able to understand their knowledge of tourism at the time of FGDs from the two areas Wukro and Gerealta. It can be said that the Wukro respondents have relatively better understanding than rural one regarding what do tourism and tourist mean. This might be mainly due to their near access to different information sources.

Local communities’ knowledge of the positive impacts of tourism

In order to assess local communities’ knowledge about positive impacts of tourism, respondents from among the local people of the two clusters were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements, using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4 gives the results of responses for each of these statements, ordered from the highest to the lowest mean. When the results are carefully examined, it is clear that the mean scores of all variables are above 4, which implies that overall responses spread between agree and strongly agree. It can also be observed that the difference between the mean scores is small, indicating broadly similar opinions about the impacts suggested by the statements.

Based on both mean and standard deviation scores, it appears that there was strongest agreement to the statement that tourism generates income. This statement gained the highest scores (mean 4.50, SD 0.64). These results suggest that local people understand and appreciate the contribution of tourism as a source of income. Analysis of the focus group discussion with decision-makers supported this. For example, one elected village government official at Wukro commented:

“Believe me! Many people here in the town use tourism as their source of income either directly or indirectly. If you want to prove this ask tourism related services on how much they are getting income for themselves and other poor people”.

The statement that ‘meeting tourists promotes cross-cultural exchange (greater mutual understanding and respect one another’s culture)’ had the second highest score (Mean 4.46, SD 0.69). While this exchange can be positive or negative or both, overall, the findings imply that local people were aware of the fact that tourism presents an opportunity for cultural exchange between them and the tourists for example way of dressing, eating, dancing and others as well. In this aspect the survey results are congruent with focus group discussion conducted at the two clusters where the participants agreed that tourism in the study areas has allowed Black with Black and Black with White people the opportunity to interact. Some of the participants during focus group discussion at Wukro cluster-town said:

“I don’t know why, but some tourists really like to be so close with local people so we normally chat, eat, drink, and dance together. To us this is a great opportunity to learn different cultures! In addition, through meeting tourists, others have established strong friendship with some of them”.

The statement that ‘tourism provides employment opportunities’ had the third highest scores (Mean 4.47, SD 0.67). The results suggest that local communities in the study areas were aware of the positive impacts tourism has on issues like employment. It was also highlighted by focus group discussion that some members of the communities are employed in the tourism industry either directly or indirectly. For example, from the 30 sample respondents of Wukro tourism related businesses, 164 individuals were employed by tourism businesses (restaurants, hotels, pension, and cafe’s), where as in the case of Gerealta due to the presence of tourism activity, some members of local peoples had gained benefit from the sector for instance more than 14 youngsters had gained enough income by serving as local guides by organizing themselves by having the name” Gerealta local guides cooperation association.

Table 4. Local communities’ knowledge of the positive impacts of tourism (N= 120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tourism?</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tourism generate income</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Meeting tourists promotes cross-cultural exchange (greater mutual understanding and respect one another’s culture)</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tourism provides employment opportunity</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tourism encourages a variety of cultural activities by the local population</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Own survey, 2009).
There are also at both areas that had their own business due to tourism establishments.

Finally, the statement that ‘tourism encourages a variety of cultural activities by the local population’ had the fourth highest ranking. This was represented by a mean of 4.38 (SD 0.67). It implies that local communities had some positive views of the direct impact tourism has on cultural activities. This matches with personal observations by the researcher that many tourism activities going in the study area such festivals, exhibitions, painting and farming were linked to the community’s culture.

Understanding tourism as income generator

In order to understand the respondents knowhow on the prevalence of tourists and tourism as income generator, questions have been forwarded to respondents in both sites. They have been asked the question: do tourists come to your village? And if yes, how often do they come? As the results summarized in Table 5, all respondents know that tourists have been coming to their village. A majority of them, 97(80.8%) persons, believed that tourists both international and domestic comes to their area every day. The remaining 22(18.3%) and 1 (0.8%) household respondents were also replied as tourists comes to their village 1-6 days and 1-2 weeks respectively. In this regard, the study area officials stated as there is a flow of tourists. Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Duration of tourists flow (Frequency)?</th>
<th>Study areas of the respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wuko</td>
<td>Degum</td>
<td>Megab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Everyday/always</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1-6 days</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: own survey, 2009)

Therefore, we can say that the majority of the respondents do not have knowledge or do not think tourists like using pack animals. In line with this, a discussion was also made between local communities and responsible bodies to check their perception of hotel and related services. From the discussion and practical field observation of the researcher, there was no sufficient hotel or restaurant services that can able to accommodate tourists in the study areas of Gerealta-Megab and Degum. There are some participants of the discussion who said that some tourists stretched a tent at the periphery of the town and stayed there. Most of them, however, were forced to go to the near by town due to the lack of hotel to use. In the case of Wukro, there are different services that can able to accomodate the tourists. But as the researcher of this study could able to understand from the responsible body i.e tourism office regarding their performance or accommodation to tourists, there was no sufficient accommodation of tourists. In this regard, the participants at focus group discussion stated as they were not able to recieve special training on how to handle customers and provide sufficient services.

The respondents have been questioned in another form to prove if the tourists asked for a place to stay or not. The majority of the respondents i.e 72 (60%) from all study areas said no i.e 33 (45.8%) respondents from Megab, 31 (43.1%) respondents from Degum and 8 (11.1%) household respondents from Wukro town. This clearly indicates that tourists in Wukro shouldn’t ask for a place to say, because there is a number of hotels in the town and have enough information about that, and tourists in Gerealta should not ask for a place to stay because they are well informed by the tour operators they bring them to the site that there is no such a service in the area.

In addition; the interview responses showed that, in a contemporary tourism development especially in areas where they are far away from the major services and for those who want to practice the rural way of life, family accommodation is the best way of consuming the sector. Families accept tourists as their guests, provide every service that they normaly use plus what the tourists claim as a necessity and a great hospitality, and they charge what is fairly proper to their services. In such a situation the tourists enjoy the visit, create a future relation and
friendship. On the other hand, the host family gets income, and develops friendship. Both exchange cultural and social views and experiences. But this kind of accommodation did not exist in the study areas.

**Participation and involvement of local community in tourism benefit**

**Local people's view on means of involving them in tourism**

As pointed out in the literature section, community participation in the tourism industry often depends on the involvement of local people in the tourism development processes. In order to understand the extent of local community involvement in tourism in the study areas, it is perhaps important to assess how these communities in this area like to be involved in tourism and to what extent. One approach to address this is to examine local people’s perceptions over a variety of ways of involving the local community in tourism, and indicate the ways that local people consider to be suitable for involving them in tourism development. In turn, this provides a wider picture of the nature of community involvement local people expect, and establishes the basis through which the current applied ways, if any, in the study area could be compared and contrasted.

Thus in order to determine the extent of local community involvement in the study areas in tourism industry through the household survey questionnaire, respondents were asked on a 5-point Likert scale how strongly they agree or disagree with a series of six statements regarding varying ways of involving local community in tourism. The mean scores of each statement are ordered from the highest mean. Overall, local people viewed all these six ways as an appropriate for involving them in tourism. The mean scores for all variables are above 4, suggesting strong agreement with these statements. In fact, when prompted by an open-ended question of focused group discussion, respondents did not provide any other possibilities that they considered being appropriate ways of involving them in tourism. The results of each variable are presented in the following table below.

As it is described table 6, the respondents had a tendency to support the idea that they should take part actively in the tourism decision-making process. In fact, this was the most popularly accepted option (Mean 4.65, SD 0.52). However, it is interesting and perhaps surprising to see that respondents regarded ‘responding to a tourism survey (Mean 4.36, SD 0.59) and ‘attending tourism related seminars, conference or workshops’ (Mean 4.57, SD 0.51) as appropriate means by which they could be involved to use tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. These results contrast with those from an interview carried out by the researcher with responsible bodies at tourism office in which found out that only a small proportion of the study population were involving or gaining ‘tourism related seminar, conference or workshops' and responding to a tourism survey. It should be noted that, the researcher found at the time of Focus Group Discussion that there was an emerging tendency among respondents to react more positively to these two options (‘attending tourism related seminar, conference or workshops' and responding to the tourism survey. Table 6.

These responses established two factors that could have influenced the respondents’ tendency to support the idea that local people should attend tourism related seminars, conferences or workshops as a suitable way of involving them so as to benefit the local community and to use it as an alternative livelihood option. These were namely, the desire to learn more and the desire to get money. It should be also noted that in the study areas seminars, conferences, and workshops are in most cases associated with sitting allowances or per diems. One participant at focused group discussion held at Megab said that "We also need to attend these seminars, conferences, and workshops. So we can get money and learn at the same time. Every time we hear about seminar is for our leaders, why not for us as well!"

However, regarding the respondents tendency to support the idea that local people should respond to the tourism
Local people’s views and reasons for rating their participation in tourism

Regarding the statement that local people should be consulted when tourism policies are being made, which was the first most accepted option based on qualitative results, the respondents raised various points in favour of their arguments. Supporters at FGD for example, stated that the statement suggests an important idea that would encourage local people to work for the tourism sector. The respondents also felt that the statement would help to ensure policy makers hear, and involve in policy design. The respondents also had the feeling that their involvement in a survey gives them the opportunity to express their concerns and to be heard by outsiders.

The statement that encouraging local people to invest in the tourism sector is an appropriate way to involve local community to get benefit from the sector that can able to sustain their livelihoods was ranked the third (Mean 4.52, SD 0.50). While statement, encouraging and teaching local people to work for the tourism sector is a suitable means for community involvement in tourism benefits, had the fourth highest score (Mean 4.48, SD 0.50).

The idea that ‘sharing tourism benefits’ with the local community is a suitable way of involving local people to use tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy had the fifth highest score (Mean 4.47, SD 0.50). However, based on standard deviation scores, it is surprising that responses for this statement were more widely dispersed from the mean, suggesting that there were relatively more respondents who strongly opposed the idea and who strongly supported it. This could be attributed to what interviews described as ‘a selfish nature of human beings’ in the sense that people are always reluctant to share the benefits they get with others.

In contrast, respondents who did not believe in the idea of consulting local people when tourism policies are being made gave two major reasons. First, they emphasized that the government has got plenty of professionals and experts who can design and formulate good policies for the industry, even without consulting local communities who definitely know little as far as tourism is concerned. Second, their feeling is that the problem with the tourism sector, like any other sector in the study areas, is about the implementation of the policies and not the question of whether local people should be consulted or not as there are already concrete policies in place, but the problem remains poor implementation. Highlighting this, one participant argued,

“The problem here is not consultation. We have many experts to make policies already, but look at what is happening! I am saying the problem is implementation! Officials just put forward their personal interest and leave aside what is stipulated in the policy”.

In this regard, the responsible tourism heads were questioned regarding the presence of tourism policy. They replied as there was no tourism policy not only at regional level but also at the national level.

Whether local people should be financially supported to invest and to use it as a livelihood strategy, participants of focus group discussion provided various views regarding the idea of local people being financially supported to invest and to use tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. Those who supported this idea, which had the third highest ranking, raised five major reasons for their stand. First, they believe the idea will lead to more and improved tourism facilities (hotels, campsites, restaurant, e.t.c), tourism products and services in their area. Second, more employment opportunities will be created by the increased number of investment in their area. Third, the idea will also increase and improve local people’s capacity to invest as entrepreneurs since currently lack of financial capital remains their greatest hindrance towards investing in the industry. Fourth, it aims to increase and improve tourism products and services for tourists as many people will get in to the business, thereby increasing competition. Lastly, the idea is likely to motivate many people to bring in their talents and passions, and consequently speed up their level of benefit in their area. One participant of FGD said:

“As you know, you need financial capital to set up an income-generating tourism businesses. This is why most of us are unable to invest in tourism, it’s not that we don’t like it.”

At the then, in this regard the local leaders argued that as there was a credit access to invest. But the main problem is lack of knowledge where and how to invest. In line to this, they also stated as local NGO called TESFA was working to assist local communities both financially and technically with the aim of Community based tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy for local communities. On the contrary, participate...
those participants of FGD who rejected the idea expressed their fears about tourism businesses being not profitable any more as more people will engage in the same business. According to them, the idea also tends to bring in more tourism investment that required by the market. This will, in return, make many of these investments unviable and redundant as so far there are few tourists who visit their area. In addition, the idea may lead to the loss of valuable financial resources as not all people prefer to invest in tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

At this moment the country follows agriculture development led industrialization (ADLI), in which the higher emphasis is given to the development of agriculture. But agriculture alone could not make any change unless it is supported by other economic activities such as tourism that will be a source of income and livelihood to the families and communities living around the heritage sites.

After analyzing the information gathered using structured questionnaire, interview, FGD, and direct field observation, the following conclusions have been drawn:

Gerealta, eastern Tigray, is the leading figure in its actual and potential tourist attraction sites. There are plenty of cultural, historical, archeological and religious sites. Unlike its potential, the stay over of tourists in the study area and the actual benefit of local communities from tourism is very less. The study identified the following reasons for this result:

1. Lack of knowledge about what tourism and tourists are among the local communities.
2. Poor understanding of tourism as income generators and unable to use their local tourism resources.
3. Less involvement and participation in tourism activities, and weak coordination.
4. The local communities are not well trained on how to produce: - the type, amount and size of the product that could able to accommodate tourists in the study areas.
5. Backward outlook for artisan: In the study areas, locally called “Tebib” - an out caste group of people who have a special ability in doing so. This backward outlook has not yet been eliminated.

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