

Capacitating Employees of Culture and Tourism Offices of Bale Zone and Its 18 Woredas for Sustainable Tourism Development: Training Project

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Abstract

The project aims to enhance sustainable Tourism development through capacitating employees of Bale Zone and its 18 woredas culture and tourism offices who have a great role for in the entire tourism system, with a direct contribution in tourism destination development thereby improving the contribution of tourism for the local and national economic development so as to alleviate the widespread poverty. The tourism sector lacks well-trained intermediate-level staff: insufficient basic knowledge and skills in tourist products and services, target areas, marketing, sales, customer orientation, electronic data processing and computerized booking and reservation systems are often -cited weaknesses. So as to solve such problems and equip employees with specific skills and competences, the project tried to give training on issues: conservation and management of cultural heritage attractions, tourism destination management, tourism destination planning, marketing and promotion of tourism attractions, booking and reservation, principles of travel agency and tour operation, museum management and interpretation, tourism product development, customer care and service. Strategies and measures designed to upgrade skills in the tourism industry show a trend towards more holistic solutions based on partnerships and dialogue between training institutions (universities), the tourism industry and other major stakeholders that go beyond training and regard in a wider sense “learning”, clearly combining teaching and practical experience elements. The project is expected to bring significant impacts such as conservation of environment, destination, wildlife and culture; community development and better livelihood; destination reputation (i.e. good promotion and marketing) and visitor flow increment; formulation of community based sustainable tourism development strategies and destinations management plan, involvement of local people in tourism activities and having sense of tourism resource owner ship, and sustainable tourism development.

Background of the Project

Tourism is now one of the largest and most important industries in the world in terms of employment creation and generation of foreign revenue ((UNWTO, 2013). It is generally and globally acknowledged as being one of the (very) few economic sectors that has more significant growth prospects and is characterized as a catalyst for peace and prosperity. Many countries including Ethiopia are taking tourism in to account as strategic device to alleviate poverty, to achieve Millennium Development Goal as well as Growth and Transformation Plan since it generates foreign currency through attracting tourists and investors in hotel and tourism project Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2009). To achieve such aims the roles of culture and tourism managers have a paramount importance.

Ethiopia is the first in Africa having the highest number of tourism attractions registered under UNESCO world heritage sites (11 of which 1 natural heritage attractions, 10 cultural heritage attractions); however, the country ranks 17 in Africa, and 120 in the world due to set backs like lack of trained work force, lack of infrastructural development, little or no promotion and marketing of tourism destinations (<http://www.waltainfo.com>). For a country like Ethiopia, which is endowed with variety of natural and manmade tourist attractions, tourism paves the road for the development of infrastructure which in turn is a pedestal for the maturity of the whole economy as it gives a hand for the expansion of other sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, trade, transportation and others due to tourism’s multidisciplinary nature. However, tourism, a very fast growing economic sector elsewhere in the world, has not yet been developed in Ethiopia and the country is not benefiting from it to the extent it deserves. It is run by archaic instinct and languishing ever since, while other countries are excelling. This is because those countries have realized its potential and developed their capacity by strategic education and training programs.

Particularly, Bale is endowed with fascinating cultural and natural tourism attractions of which Bale Mountain National Park, Dirre Sheik Hussein Shrine and Sof Umer Cave are registered under tentative list of UNESCO, World Heritage Sites (www.unesco.com). Even though the region is wealthy for such magnificent and marvelous tourist attractions, most of staffs working on culture and tourism offices of Bale zone were not graduated in tourism management (Abadir, personal communication, 2014).

Tourism is still a very specific sector, so specific knowledge about the sector is required. For the workforce, however, there are still general and basic skill needs for everybody. For example, lack of knowledge of conservation of heritage specially intangible heritage properties has been recently recognized by national tourism organizations of some African countries as a lasting problem and even as a competitive disadvantage (Friis,

2001). According to a study conducted by Friis in 2001 about tourism and employment, there are also specific skill needs defined by tourism and heritage managers to possess the following skills and competences: conservation and management of cultural heritage attractions, tourism destination management, tourism destination planning, marketing and promotion of tourism attractions, museum management and interpretation, tourism product development, customer care and service (care, handle and serve guests/tourists, communicate fluently with guests/tourists) and organizing SMME in tourism and hospitality.

Project Rationality

Ethiopia is a growing tourist destination with promising annual growth rates of tourist arrivals that are above the world average growth, the country needs qualified personnel to make use of this opportunity (<http://www.tourethio.com>). Culture and tourism employees, as a core process owner in the entire tourism system, they have direct contribution in tourism destination development. Besides, they have a direct and indirect contacts with visitors, locals and the visited sites, as well as people working across all of the sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry having a variety of roles to play in response to the expectations of the various tourism stakeholders including the tourists, the destination resources, the local communities, the employers, the governmental authorities and the guides. Nevertheless, in Ethiopia particularly, in culture and tourism offices, the majority of the employees have no tourism, heritage and hospitality qualifications (Ethiopian tourism management curriculum, 2013).

Giving training and education for people working in the tourism, heritage and hospitality industry is generally regarded as a high priority, and the industry, perhaps more than many others, is customer focused and relies heavily on personnel who can deliver a high standard of service and have good communication and interpersonal skills, destination management and development, destination marketing and promotion, heritage conservation and management, museum interpretation and management (Kelly, 1998; Dennis, 2007). Such skills are largely achieved through training and educational programs.

The issue of training and education in tourism, heritage and hospitality is being given due attentions in Ethiopia. To do so, the FDRE Ministry of Education has launched tourism departments in Gondar, Axum, Arba Minch, Adama and Madawalabu Universities. If local communities become trained and skilled, the information will be valuable for visitors leading them to be satisfied, the tourism resources conservational roles of the community and tourists will be increased and the money spend by visitors for the guiding services will be maintained within the local economy thereby reducing leakages.

As indicated in tourism development policy of Ethiopia (MoCT, 2009)), the analysis of the current situations of tourism revealed that the implementation of tourism development packages are being hindered by unskilled and untrained human power, for example, during need assessment survey of 14 Woredas Culture and tourism office employees in Bale zone, out of 58 staffs only 9 have qualification in ecotourism, heritage conservation and history and heritage management, the remaining 49 have qualifications in other than tourism, moreover, none of the employees in culture and tourism offices of Dalo Manna woreda, Madawalabu woreda, Barbere wereda, Agarfa Wereda, Dinsho Wereda, Goro woreda ,Goba woreda, Rayitu and Gasera have qualifications in tourism, heritage and hospitality, and they need trainings in tourism, heritage and hospitality issues so as to manage and conserve precious heritage attractions found in the zone(personal communication, Seali, 2014; profiles of staffs of Culture and tourism offices in Bale zone).

This project, therefore, aimed to capacitate and build the capacity of employees working on culture and tourism offices of Bale zone woredas through providing trainings encompassing different interdisciplinary courses. Granting this project enables Madawalabu university play its own role of producing development agent manpower and providing the community services and the achievement of the GTP.

Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries of the Project

The stakeholders of this project were employees working in 18 Woredas Culture and Tourism Offices found in Bale Zone, Non-governmental organizations working on conservation of tourism attractions and Madawalabu University.

This project has direct and indirect beneficiaries. The direct beneficiaries of the project were a total of 36 trainees (all) who are working in Bale Zone Woredas Culture and Tourism offices. The indirect beneficiaries are the local communities, tourism business enterprises, conservation agents, visitors, tour operators or travel agents, hospitality sectors, mega and potential attractions found in the zone as it is generally accepted that if employees are trained and capacitated, tourism attractions are going to be well conserved, protected, managed and promoted as such the economic development, environmental quality and conservation and socio-cultural sustenance of such places will be maintained .

Project Justification

Our country, Ethiopia, is well-off in potential tourism resources but not much benefited from the sector. Hence, in

order to exploit its tourism potential, the country needs to have skilled human power in the field. If the tourism industry is geared and developed properly, it can serve as a supplementary (alternative) economic sector besides agriculture and other industries.

Particularly trends of visitors flow is increasing and the attractions of Bale Zone are becoming popular visitors' destinations in Ethiopia. So as to maintain conservation of tourism attractions, increase the satisfaction levels of visitors, the well-being of the environment, the livelihood of local communities and green local economic development as well as to utilize tourism's contribution for the socio-economic development both at the local and national level and maintain sustainable tourism businesses, undertaking trainings and capacity empowerment programs in different aspects for staffs working in culture and tourism offices is vital in order to enable them to have basic skills and knowledge about certain issues such as tourism development product, destination development and management plan, marketing tourism attractions and museum management. Nowadays, the ability to learn, change, and adapt is increasingly becoming the greatest sustainable competitive advantage (Olga, 2005). Today's workforce faces daunting challenges to cut costs, improve quality, increase production, and develop new products and services at a faster speed. While some tourist destinations struggle or fail, others are able to cope with the increasing demands. Because of these global trends, the value of human capital is even greater now than ever before (Robert, 2006).

The tourism sector lacks well-trained intermediate-level staff: insufficient basic knowledge and skills in tourist products and services, target areas, marketing, sales, customer orientation, electronic data processing and computerized booking and reservation systems are often -cited weaknesses (Mueller, 2002).

Undertaking this project was an urgent issue since it helps to conserve, develop and promote the tourism destinations found in the Zone, and mega destinations (Bale Mountains National Park, Dirre Sheik Hussein Shrine and Sof Umer Cave) to be inscribed in UNESCO world heritage sites as they are currently under tentative lists of UNESCO world heritage sites and UNESCO has its own criteria such as significant to biological and physical evolution of the area, human master piece of creativity (Dirrie Sheik Hussein) and conservation and management of tourism resources are taken under consideration. So as to get such wonder full opportunity, to keep and transfer heritage properties to the next generations , it was rational to launch this project.

Project Goal

- ✘ This project is aimed to enhance sustainable Community Based Tourism development through capacitating employees of Bale Zone and its woredas culture and tourism offices thereby improving the contribution of tourism for the local and national economic development so as to alleviate the widespread poverty.

Specific Objectives

- ✘ To enhance skills and knowledge of culture and tourism offices employees in managing and conserving destinations by offering different interdisciplinary trainings,
- ✘ To increase the satisfaction level of visitors and maintain sustainable visitors flow,
- ✘ To enhance tourism destination planning skills.
- ✘ To improve tourism product development, itinerary preparation skills of employees,
- ✘ To enhance skills of customer care and services (customer treatment and satisfaction, complain handling).
- ✘ To advance the awareness, knowledge and skill level of employees concerning to museum management and interpretations.
- ✘ To sustain strong and conducive linkages between/among different stakeholders and culture and tourism employees,
- ✘ To improve the skills of staffs in promotion and marketing (preparing folders, brochures, e-marketing) tourism attractions.
- ✘ To enhance skills of staffs in conservation and management ecotourism destinations and wildlife tourism resources.

Project Sustainability

It is clear that Madda Walabu University is striving to provide excellence community services in addition to its main purpose of establishment, i.e. producing competent professionals through its different respective schools and departments and conducting problem solving research. Therefore, as part of Madda Walabu University's goal of giving community services, this project is aimed to provide training to Employees working in Bale Zone and its districts Culture and tourism Offices.

After the completion of this project, it will be owned and run by Bale Zone and Weredas Culture and Tourism office in collaboration with Department of Tourism Management of Madda Walabu University. Since there is a rapid growth and advancement in economic, social environmental and technological aspects, this training is not a one time, and it continuous until better performance in tourism development is achieved and to be competitive enough with other countries such as Kenya. Most importantly, the project training will be extending

to training provisions to other regions and zones of Ethiopian Culture and tourism office employees.

Expected Outcomes and Outputs of the Project

Outputs

- ❖ A total of 36 employees working in Bale Zone and Woredas culture and tourism offices had good understanding and skills of customer handling systems,
- ❖ Training manuals on promotion and marketing of tourism destinations, conservation and management of cultural heritage properties, tourism destination management and development plan, museum management and interpretation, travel agency, tour operation and booking, Customer care and service, principles of Tour guides and Sustainable tourism development were prepared
- ❖ Good relationship (linkage) among tourism employees, tourists, NGOs and communities will be created,
- ❖ Employees had greater understanding about sustainable tourism development and resource conservation,
- ❖ Staffs had greater insights on destination conservation, management and promotion aspects.

Possible Outcomes of the Project

- The knowledge, skills and management abilities of employees about museum and interpretation of destination was improved,
- Tourists will be satisfied which is resulted from well management and conservation of culture, environment and destinations,
- Sustainable community based tourism development could be maintained and conservation of tourism attractions would be improved,
- Micro- Medium and small-scale tourism enterprises would be emerged,
- Reputation of the destinations will be created, and tourist flow will be increased.

Project Evaluation

A variety of training evaluation methods was used in each course to ensure that those who felt uncomfortable or unable to learn from one teaching/learning style (such as lectures with overhead transparencies combined with question and answer) would benefit from other styles. Wherever possible, individual learning outcomes might be addressed with multiple methods in the classroom and in the field, including small-group discussions, video viewing and critiquing, written exercises, debates, role-playing activities of many kinds, chalkboard sessions, and practical exercises to demonstrate competencies (e.g. developing itineraries, producing promotional materials...). Trainees were invited to comment at the end of each day, or write in daily reflective feed backs, which learning activities they found beneficial and what they have learned and to indicate areas of improvement.

Trainees' reactions as a means to measure the training relevance could be undertaken via two primary sources of verbal and written feedback forms: a trainee-completed reflective feedback and a post-course evaluation. With respect to the former, each trainee was given a suggestion card, and requested to regularly write or draw. The purpose is to help trainees understand and apply what is being taught in the course and to give feedback on particular aspects of the training content and methods would be outlined verbally and in writing to the trainees.

The second data source for measuring trainees' reactions is through a post-training written evaluation concerning on what to improve and add on existing training topics. The other evaluation approaches includes observations (by the trainers as well as by other non-trainees or facilitators associated with the course).

In general, The Project Team, the Research and Community Services Directorate and Facilitators, officials from Bale Zone and Woredas culture and Tourism offices were responsible to evaluate the project's progress regularly from the beginning of its implementation up to the end of its completion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

After implementing this project training, the project team found that the training improved knowledge and skills of culture and tourism employees of Bale Zone and its 18 woredas on issues of promotion and marketing of tourism destinations, conservation and management of cultural heritage properties, tourism destination management and development plan, museum management and interpretation, travel agency, tour operation and booking, Customer care and service, principles of Tour guides and Sustainable tourism development which will in turn initiate them to take actions so as to improve the quality of their services provisions to visitors and play vital roles for the sustainable tourism development of the project area and the country at large.

Collaborating with Bale Zone culture and tourism office, Dinsh Town Culture and Tourism Offices and Bale Mountains National Park Offices, Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Program and Madda Walabu University Research and Community Service Directorate, it is necessary to prolong the project life and conducting it continuously.

The feedbacks of the trainees also confirm the significances of the project for them and recommend the project to be implemented continuously. Moreover, trainees emphasized that future trainings should incorporate topics such as awareness creation about conservation of natural and tourism resources at community level. Therefore, it is advisable to continuously implement such project by including more practical activities how to promote and conserve tourism attractions. Most importantly, the project should be extended to deliver training provision for those who hadn't got the chance and to other culture and tourism offices of Oromia and other regions and zones of Ethiopia.

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