

# The Current Status of Ecotourism Potentials and Challenges in Sheko District, South-Western Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Ecotourism encompasses two independent issues: the environmental input and the environmental output. The environmental input is the primary attractions which are potentials: not the level of service or facilities provided as part of a product package, but the geographical factor that leads the tourist to a particular destination. The environmental output is the overall net global cost or benefit of the tour operation to the natural environment. Sheko District harbors much ecotourism potential sites which can attract tourists, assessing the potential attractions and challenges are mandatory for future ecotourism development and supporting sustainable use of natural resource. The study aimed at identifying potentials and challenges of ecotourism development in the area. The data was collected by semi-structured interview, questionnaires and fully fledged field site observation. Some data were also accessed from written documents. The data were analyzed by SPSS. The main identified natural attractions potentials of the grassroots destinations are natural forests, caves, waterfalls, natural hot springs (spa) and natural bridges. The respondents mentioned that deforestation was recorded as one of the major challenges as a result from a rapid population growth. Natural attraction sites in the district were facing many challenges because ecotourism activities were not sustainable. The local community's subsistent way of life, inappropriate investment activities were an increasing threat to biological diversity including ecotourism attraction sites in the area.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism; Sheko district; Attraction sites; Potentials; Challenges

## Introduction

Ecotourism encompasses two independent issues: the environmental input and the environmental output. The environmental input is the primary attractions which are potentials, not the level of service or facilities provided as part of a product package, but the geographical factor that leads the tourist to a particular destination. The environmental output is the overall net global cost or benefit of the tour operation to the natural environment. This is an accounting question, which requires the identification, quantification and summation of all costs and benefits through all potential mechanisms, of which there are many [1]. Ecotourism is no panacea. It is important not to exaggerate the opportunities and benefits it can bring. Careful planning and improved knowledge is needed. Ecotourism and responsible tourism should be part of wider sustainable development strategies, whether at a community or an international level [2]. It is important to avoid spending time pursuing ecotourism and raising expectations in circumstances which are highly likely to lead to failure. An initial feasibility assessment should be made before instigating a community based strategy [2]. Ecotourism, often misconstrued as simply taking a holiday in a nature, watching wildlife, or engaging in an outdoor or adventure sport, is distinguished from conventional tourism in that it employs measures to assure that the negative impacts on the natural and cultural environment are minimized and mitigated [2]. Ecotourism is a conservation tool in and around protected areas that were building environmental awareness and cultural respect [3]. Today's protected areas focused on conserving biodiversity and large-scale natural ecosystems. However, these protected areas are facing tremendous challenges [4].

Ethiopia's mountains are almost untouched by climbers; Ethiopian's lakes have many varied features of great interest to tourists; birds, wildlife, vegetation, colorful ethnic group historical churches and monasteries unusual geological features cave local arts

and artifacts of the country are among the major ecotourism attraction resource [5]. Bishangari Eco-Lodge located at Eastern of Langan Lake in Oromia Region and Village Ethiopia located at Afar Region (Bilen) are examples private ecotourism developments in Ethiopia [6].

South western Ethiopia is also the home of for many plant and animal diversity. Among the biodiversity of seven vegetation types in Ethiopia, four types of forest are found in the region [7]. Even if the Sheko District has natural, cultural and associated historical resource, there is weakness in advertising and promoting its potential attractions which result in not visiting by both domestic and foreign tourists and the current status the potentials is unknown. The finding of the study area is vital for the sustainable benefit of the local community in Sheko District, for biodiversity conservation and for other stakeholders in the area. It is also an input as information for future ecotourism development and conservation of important natural, cultural and associated historical resource. Tourism and environmental incentive CSO (Charity and society organizations), government bodies and other stake holders would be aware about the Potentials and opportunities of the district. Identifying potentials opportunities and challenges of the sites play a significant role on shaping the ecotourism Development on the area and inspire further studies in the future.

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## Objective of the Study

The overall objective of the study was identifying the Ecotourism attraction potentials and challenges. Specifically:

- To assess ecotourism attraction sites.
- To identify the opportunities and challenges of Ecotourism in the district.
- Evaluate ecotourism attraction sites in terms of their significance to the local community and preservation of biological diversity
- Evaluate the challenges in terms of their severity to threat of biological diversity and ecotourism attraction sites.

## Materials and Methods

### Description of the study area (Figure 1)

**Location:** Sheko Woreda/district is one of the 10 woredas/districts of Benchi Maji zone located 572 km from the center Addis Ababa, 872 regional center Hawasa and 17 km zonal town Mizan Teferi [8]. The woreda encompasses 23 rural kebeles and one urban kebele total to 24 kebeles administered by Sheko Woreda. The area of the district is 29,248 hectare [9].

**Climate and land settlement:** The Sheko woreda climate is characterized by two climatic zones 13% medium with high land settlement and 87% lowlands. The average temperature range is 20°C -25°C. Annual rainfall range is 1500-1800 mm; elevation ranges 1,500-1700m above sea level [9].

### Data collection methods

Data were collected from May 2015 to September 2015 in four rounds. The first round was field site observation with local guides, second round identifying respondents for interviews and questionnaires, third round conducting interviews and questionnaires

and the fourth round was the second field site observation to come up with undiscovered ecotourism attraction potentials. Data were collected from both primary and secondary data collection techniques; the primary data were collected through semi-structured interview, questionnaires and filed site observation. Questionnaires consisting of both closed and open ended questions that was assisted and filled by the interviewer to solve difficulty of respondents/local communities reading and writing. Checklists were prepared for interview. Secondary data were accessed from written documents.

### Sampling design

Seven Kebeles were purposively selected from 24 kebeles of Sheko Woreda based on potentials. Potentials were selected using field site observation and secondary information to come up with those selected kebeles. Simple random sampling was used to select for interviews and questionnaires. From the total 3501 households in the selected kebeles, 97 households were selected. The Kebele was defined by boundaries of the local council which is the smallest administrative unite consisting of many villages in the current administrative system of Ethiopian government. In the study, a household was considered to be a family of people who lived in one homestead, shared the same food and registered under one name with the kebele.

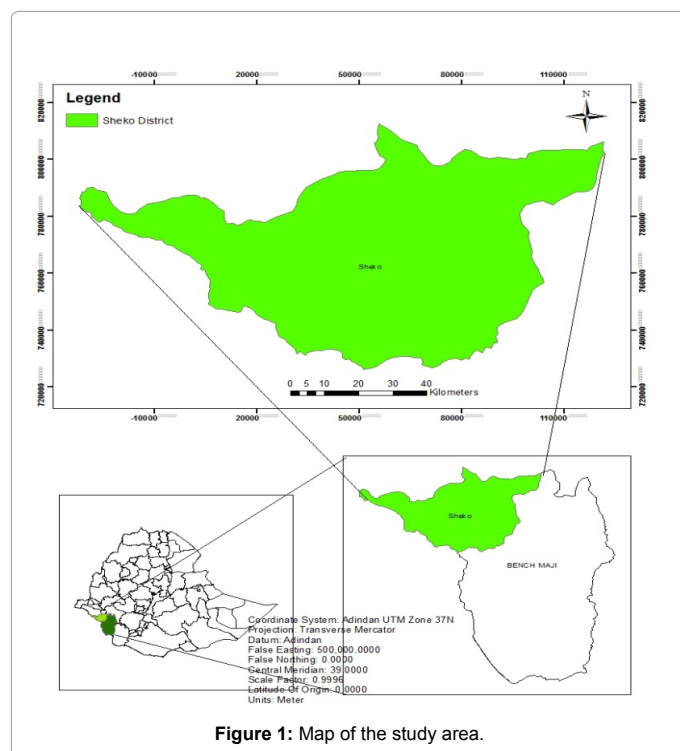
### Data analysis

The qualitative data were analysed by organizing the data firstly in the data sheet by matching patterns in a way that suited the study objectives and then proper improvement (edition) made by using computer to remove unwanted data. respondent's Questionnaire were organized to main challenges and important potentials that were variables measured by scales/order; where the potential site significance measured; five was the highest and one was the lowest scale, challenges severity; 4 was the worst and 1 the least severity. Then analysed using IBM SPSS statistics Version 20 expressed through descriptive statistics and frequency. One way ANOVA was used to find out if there was a significance difference between challenges how dependent variable caused by an independent variable. Correlation was used to differentiate the relationship between potential challenges.

## Results

### Ecotourism potentials and challenges

Many indicators show that the district harbours huge natural forests including other natural attractions in the previous decades. But the potentials are endangered due to agriculture expansion especially widely practicing coffee production in the natural forest thereby cutting most indigenous flora and left only some large tree remnants for the benefit of coffee harvesting. Deforestation that is a dependent variable was the main challenge resulted from rapid population growth that is an independent variable (Table 1). Based on the data collected from interviews and field site observation, Sheko District has not much historical tourism resources comparing to natural resource and cultural resource. Only 9.3% respondents suggested the availability of historical resource, whereas major respondents suggested that the availability of natural and cultural resource in the area (Table 2). After the death of community leaders, their dead flesh placed not in grave but in the cave found a historical heritage. Cultural resources explained by major respondents are local artifacts, traditional justice when a person convicted to crime and Sheko cultural song during festivals and mourning. There is a common consensus, natural attraction potentials are the main splendor of Sheko. Natural forests, caves, important mineral site, waterfall, natural bridge, hot springs and the Sheko Geda



**Figure 1:** Map of the study area.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Agricultural expansion	Between Groups	7.835	2	3.918	137.405	0
	Within Groups	2.68	94	0.029		
	Total	10.515	96			
Investment	Between Groups	0.03	2	0.015	0.373	0.69
	Within Groups	3.805	94	0.04		
	Total	3.835	96			
Sedimentation	Between Groups	0.015	2	0.007	0.094	0.91
	Within Groups	7.326	94	0.078		
	Total	7.34	96			
Poaching	Between Groups	0.409	2	0.204	0.958	0.387
	Within Groups	20.045	94	0.213		
	Total	20.454	96			
Deforestation	Between Groups	7.835	2	3.918	137.405	0
	Within Groups	2.68	94	0.029		
	Total	10.515	96			
Exotic species expansion	Between Groups	0.434	2	0.217	3.364	0.039
	Within Groups	6.061	94	0.064		
	Total	6.495	96			

**Table 1:** One way ANOVA Ecotourism potential Challenges.

	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness			
Do you know the concept of Tourism	Yes	89	91.8
	No	8	8.2
Availability of ecotourism potentials			
Is there any natural attraction in your local	Yes	97	100
	No	0	0
Do you know cultural resource in Sheko District	Yes	92	94.8
	No	5	5.2
Do you know historical resource in Sheko District	Yes	9	9.3
	No	88	90.7
Is there wild forest in your local	Yes	97	100
	No	0	0

**Table 2:** Awareness about the concept of tourism and availability of Ecotourism potentials.

Cattle are found natural tourism attraction resources in the area. The major natural attraction sites are explained as follows.

**Dembi dam and wild forest reserve area:** Dembi Dam was primarily established for Bebek coffee farm project nearby the wildlife reserve area and electrical power generation for Mizan Aman town. The construction of the dam started in 1979 and ended in 1989, providing service in 1986. Presently the dam is not giving service because of alternative electrical power generation of Gilgel Gibe No 1 started service in 2002.

The dam is five to seven km with a depth of 19 meter. Dembi Wildlife reserve consist Natural forest, waterfall and dam. Natural forest harbors many indigenous trees, wild animals and birds. The waterfall is also another pleasure for tourists. The dam is a replica of a natural lake.

**Usika hot spring (spa):** The spa is located 7 km from the main road of Shemi kebele. Spas are covered with surrounding luscious grass. This amazing spa has more than 36 different springs consisting of both hot and cold spa. Another pleasure is found in the river that crosses the spas which creates an opportunity to bathe. Both cold and hot spas have a unique feature that differentiates the spring. The area integrates wetlands and rockland. Usika spa was recorded 4.5052 mean values

Potentials	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Usika Spas	97	2	5	4.5052
Amora gaedel Reserve forest	97	2	5	4.0928
Dembi Dam and Waterfall Reserve forest	97	3	5	3.9278
Kontir Birhan Reserve forest	97	1	5	3.3918
Bridge of God (Sanka)	97	2	4	2.4948
Shasheka Cave	97	1	4	2.2784
Worgu Cave and Waterfall	97	1	3	2.1753
Bardika Cave	97	1	2	1.0412
Valid N (listwise)	97			

**Table 3:** Ecotourism Potentials for their wider significance.

which explain the highest value in its significance to local community comparing to others identified ecotourism attraction sites in the district (Table 3).

**Worgu cave and waterfall:** The cave and waterfall were found 5 km from Sheko town in the south. The destination is a place of many indigenous trees. However the forest has been cleared for coffee production. The waterfall with a 10 m height provides amazing feature. Species of bats were found in the cave. However, agricultural expansion for coffee production causes dual threat on natural forest and the waterfall.

**Sanka God's bridge:** The magnificent Bridge of God is a short isthmus that separates a high length of two cliffs in a short pathway. This natural scenery is covered by natural forest.

**Kontir Birhan natural forest area:** The Kontir Birhan wild preserved forest is located in Shemi Kebele. The forest is an important habitat for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, especially wildlife coffee preservation.

**Amora Gaedel reserve forest:** Sheko peoples argue that the source of Arabica coffee is found in Amora Gaedel. The area is an important site for in-situ conservation of biological diversity. It is also believed that many medicinal plants and endemic flora and wild animals are found. Bardika is a double cave (Table 3) and important scenic landscape attractions are found as potentials of ecotourism (Figure 2).

## Discussion

Ethiopia's has myriad of ecotourism potential and the

development is in its infancy stage. Most of the protected areas of the country are under pressure from the residential communities in search of cultivable land, grazing land, or wood for different purposes. By promoting ecotourism in such areas, it is possible to benefit the residents, diversify their source of livelihoods and manage the resources in a sustainable manner Asfaw [5] and Eshetu [10]. The selected ecotourism potentials in the district are untouched resources but the residential peoples are adversely affecting these potentials through deforestation, agricultural encroachment, illegal killing of animals and distributing exotic species and development in the inappropriate land for investment.



**Figure 2:** Ecotourism potentials of the district-partial (one of Usika spa, Worgu cave and waterfall, Kontir Birhan reserve forest, Dembi dam, Sanka God Bridge and the surrounding luscious grass of Usika spa). Photo by Zenebe Ageru.

Challenges	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Population growth	97	3	5	3.8866
Deforestation	97	3	4	3.8763
Agricultural expansion	97	3	4	3.1237
Poaching	97	1	3	2.2165
Exotic species expansion	97	2	3	2.0722
Investment	97	1	2	1.9588
Sedimentation	97	1	2	1.0825
Valid N (listwise)	97			

**Table 4:** Ecotourism challenges severity rank mean.

Attraction sites	Potentials	Challenges
Amora Gaedel reserve forest	Forest habitat	Deforestation
	Wild animals	Rapid population growth
	Caves	Investment development
	Source of wild coffee	poaching
Dembi Dam, waterfall & reserve forest	Natural forest habitat	sedimentation
	waterfall	deforestation
	Dam as lake	Poaching
		agricultural expansion
Usika spas	Spas	Investment
	river	Lack of mgt
		Agricultural encroachment
The bridge of God(sanka)	The scenic landscape of God's bridge	Deforestation
	Natural forest habitat	Difficult to view the exact location
	Springs	
Kontir Birhan reserve forest	Natural forest habitat	Deforestation
	Source of wild coffee	Investment
		Agricultural expansion
		Exotic Species expansion(eucalyptus)
Shasheka cave	Scenic Cave	
Bardika cave	Scenic Cave	

**Table 5:** Natural ecotourism attraction and their possible challenges in Sheko District, south western, Ethiopia.

Current issue related with protected areas in Ethiopia requires in the light of the unabated population growth, correlated encroachment and misuse and abuse the natural resource. A case study in Nechisar National park mentioned as biodiversity is being lost by mismanagement, increasing competition settlement, deforestation, and overexploitation and poaching [11]. Similar findings in this studied were also observed as according to the respondents that the major challenges are deforestation, agricultural expansion, poaching, exotic species expansion and investment development respectively resulted by rapid population growth (Table 4). The natural attraction sites listed are face diverse challenges (Table 5). Because they are not categorized as protected area, the threats of these ecotourism potentials make it difficult to develop ecotourism activities in future unless they are conserved.

The correlation between deforestation rate and population growth was significant for one time period but not for the other. Two constraints one Policy choices that disregard conservation may cause the natural resource even in countries that are relatively developed. Lack of development in other countries, on the other hand, may increase the pressure on forests to meet the basic needs of the human population [12]. Natural attraction sites in the district are challenging because no ecotourism activities more sustainable [13]. The local community's subsistence way of life and inappropriate investment policies increase the threat of biological diversity in the area (Table 6).

## Conclusion

Environmental inputs are potentials which they need protection and effective management. Many natural attraction sites are identified and their challenges were also indicated. The natural bridge, dense forests, cave, waterfalls and hot springs are the major attraction sites identified. Natural and associated historical resources are found indispensable for an ecotourism destination site. Subsistence way of life of the local communities challenging the potentials may be substantial risk in the near future, if ecotourism activities are not applied for sustainable use of natural resource. Further study and allowing private ecotourism business enterprise in the district are essential to protect



			Agricultural expansion	Investment	Sedimentation	Poaching	Deforestation	Exotic species expansion	Rapid population growth
Spearman's rho	Agricultural expansion	Correlation Coefficient	1	0.078	0.001	-0.1	-1.000**	-0.105	-.814**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.448	0.991	0.33	.	0.307	0
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	investment	Correlation Coefficient	0.078	1	0.062	0.077	-0.078	-0.143	-0.065
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.448	.	0.545	0.455	0.448	0.164	0.527
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	sedimentation	Correlation Coefficient	0.001	0.062	1	0.103	-0.001	-0.084	-0.007
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.991	0.545	.	0.315	0.991	0.416	0.942
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	poaching	Correlation Coefficient	-0.1	0.077	0.103	1	0.1	-.207*	0.079
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.33	0.455	0.315	.	0.33	0.042	0.445
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	deforestation	Correlation Coefficient	-1.000**	-0.078	-0.001	0.1	1	0.105	.814**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.448	0.991	0.33	.	0.307	0
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	Exotic species expansion	Correlation Coefficient	-0.105	-0.143	-0.084	-.207*	0.105	1	0.183
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.307	0.164	0.416	0.042	0.307	.	0.073
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
	Rapid population growth	Correlation Coefficient	-.814**	-0.065	-0.007	0.079	.814**	0.183	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.527	0.942	0.445	0	0.073	.
		N	97	97	97	97	97	97	97

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6:** correlation between challenges evaluated their severity based on respondent response.

natural resource in consistency. Biological diversity (wildlife) in natural forests is another assignment for further study.

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