

Religious Tourism: A Tourism Prototype for Rural Community Development; the Case of Lalibela Area, Ethiopia

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Abstract The main objective of this paper was identifying participatory religious tourism as an alternative tourism model for community advancement, heritage conservation, poverty alleviation, and overall sustainable development in rural areas. Consequently, the paper attempted to assess the awareness, participation level, and benefit-sharing trends of the local community and its impacts on religious tourism development by using primary data collected from 130 residents of Lalibela, Ethiopia, and other stakeholders. By its very nature, tourism development demands the full participation of the local community. However, the data collected from residents, key informants, experts, and the researcher's observation revealed that the local community has limited awareness about religious tourism and tourism at large. Consequently, there is inadequate participation, and poor benefit-sharing from its development. In contrast, though the local community is the main guardians of the heritage, their limited awareness and benefit-sharing influenced their interest. Connected to this, the insufficient participation of the local community in religious tourism activities was generated and aggravated by limited awareness, lack of initial capital, and the absence of government support.

Key Words: Religious Tourism, Rural Community, community development


Introduction

The man has a confirmed traveler since antiquity that traveling has been a characteristic feature of human society and lifestyle. People for long have traveled for different reasons like for gathering and or hunting, discovery, and exploration, conquest and conflict, trade and exchange, visitation and entertainment, and so on (Robinson & David, 2006). There are ranges of historical connections between religion and travel. Such as Prophet Mohammed's migration (the Hijra) from Mecca to Medina in AD 622 and the organizer of Methodism in England, John Wesley traveled over 250,000 miles on hours back to preach sermons (Raj, & Morpeth, 2007). Moreover, there was a mass flow of missionaries to different corners of the world in the medieval period is documented by different reviewers. Therefore, religion has been a powerful force which for long caused people to travel to religious centers in many parts of the world. Travel due to religious impulses is deeply rooted in the narration of mankind and of tourism. Their most frequent form pilgrimage is indeed, thought to be predecessors of the modern tourism phenomenon (Vukonic, 1998).

Religious tourism has been conceptualized in different ways and usually, it is described as visitors activity in which they seek for holy grace,

looking for the proximity, immersion or contact with the sacred (Esteve, 2009). Being sacred for the three monotheistic ancient world religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism, Palestine is most probably the oldest religious tourism destination (Suleiman & Mohamed, 2010). Today, religious tourism is recognized as an ideal source of diversifying the countries' economy (Vijayanand, 2012). Religious tourism is a huge business which accounts for about 25 percent of USA visitors. Moreover, three hundred million to three hundred thirty million tourist visit the world's major religious sites every year earns an estimated 18 billion USD. Above all, tourism professionals forecast that this market might well double by the year 2020 (Religious & Pilgrimage Tourism in Uncertain Times, 2017).

As agreed by most researchers, religious visitation is regularly less sensitive to economic fluctuations in the market. This is due to the fact that they are committed travelers who try to save for their experiences and travel despite their economic states.

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Moreover, they are likely to have clear and known motives for travel than other travelers. Because most of the time religious travels are conducted as part of religious obligations or to accomplish a spiritual mission. Consequently, religious tourism has a great opportunity to appeal to people all over the world, of all ages and nationalities. Above all, most religious travelers prefer to travel in groups rather than individually. Hence, religious tourism can provide a stable flow of income to the area as well as the national economy (More on Religious Tourism, 2017).

Ethiopia, a country in the horn of Africa, has a number of religious sites which attracts a huge number of pilgrims since early. Lalibela, where the majestic Rock-hewn churches are found, has been an ideal pilgrimage site since its construction. However, according to the Lalibela administration and World food projects, the area is under a poverty zone and most of the areas around Lalibela are under food safety net services. Moreover, awareness of the general public on tourism, its participation level and benefit-sharing which may directly or indirectly related to the food crisis of the area and answer the dichotomy between high tourist flow and the poverty of the local community remain unstudied and the problem persists. Hence, this paper is organized with an objective to reveal the significance of community involvement in the religious tourism for heritage conservation, sustainable livelihood as well as sustainable overall development.

Related Literature

Rewards of tourism and religious tourism

Generally, tourism has a great influence on the destination area and host societies with its positive and negative impacts. Tourism is a source of international amity, peace, and understanding but also a destroyer and corrupter of indigenous cultures, a source of ecological destruction, an assault of people's privacy, dignity, and authenticity. However, if tourism is properly managed and controlled, its benefit exceeds its costs and can be the most effective tool for poverty reduction and overall development of many countries (UNWTO, 2011a).

These days, tourism is one of the largest and rapidly developing sectors in the world. As of recent statistics from UNWTO, tourism earns more than 10% of the world's income and employs almost one in ten of the world's workforce. The fast growth rate of tourism and its other contributions like a huge volume of foreign currency gains, infrastructural improvement, and

others highly influence different economic sectors which further enhances the social and economic development of the country as a whole (UNWTO, 2011b).

The benefits of tourism can be seen in socio-cultural, economic and environmental categories. Socio-cultural benefits of tourism directly or indirectly related to the paybacks to the society and their culture generated because of tourism development. Tourism creates cultural interaction and understanding through which some useful cultural values and qualities can be exchanged. In relation to cultural interaction, education from one another and improvement in the way of life of the community is inevitable in tourism destinations. Tourism also advocates the remote and marginal area local community to participate and engage in different economic activities that could result in self-employment, establishing small-scale industries and other tourism ancillary services. On the other way, the depth and breadth of the tourism industry provide job opportunity to the whole range of local community from skilled and semiskilled to unskilled. Furthermore, tourism leads to transfer of technology between hosts and guests that most of the time helps the local community to access technologically developed world. Above all, tourism facilitates local development through improved infrastructure facilities in a tourist destination like electricity, water supply, sewage, communication, government services like security and transportation services. Generally, tourism in one or other way improves the living standard of the neglected and forgotten local community (Swarbooke, 2002). Enrichment of the existing culture and cultural diversity through promotion, appreciation, and funding for the establishment of museums is another role of tourism-related to culture. Culture can also be conserved and preserved using tourism as a tool so that many disappearing and degrading cultures can be safeguarded in the tourist destination (Swarbooke, 2002; Phukan, et al., 2012).

Any activity related to the component of the tourism environment has a direct or indirect impact on the general environment. Well planned, developed and managed, tourism can generate important environmental returns. It justifies and pays for the conservation of natural resources and wildlife, cultural and historic monuments by way of establishing national parks, preserves, sanctuaries, and museums which otherwise may be deteriorated or even disappear. Tourists in nature like an attractive and tidy environment that indirectly promote the quality environment and increase the local environmental awareness (Phukan, et al., 2012).

Economic benefits are the most widely discussed and well-known aspect of the tourism industry. Tourism generates income via different forms of tax and other revenues. The money tourists spend in different sectors during their visit and stay has multiple effects on the economy. The tourism industry has a range of sectors or business which provides a variety of employment opportunity. Research shows that tourism as an industry creates almost one and a half times faster than other economic sectors. Foreign exchange, the exchange of one country's currency for that of another country, is one of the most important paybacks of the tourism industry. Foreign exchange helps to increase the total travel account and balance of payment of the host country (Swarbooke, 2002).

As one type of general tourism, all the benefits mentioned above are also the returns of religious tourism. If it is properly guided and controlled by clearly mentioned codes of conducts, both domestic and international religious tourism can bring change, better, suitable and peaceful life (UNWTO, 2011a). Religious tourism influences the development of the population, settlement, and economy at religious centers (Rinschede, 1992). As religious tourism encompasses pilgrimage, a trip to sacred places and other religiously related travels like a visitation of religious ceremonies, church meetings, and other religiously related conferences and arranged activities, which may be organized at regular bases has a very big influence on the overall development of the site. Religious tourism in general and pilgrims, in particular, have a huge influence on the population development of the religious site (Rinschede, 1992).

Religious travel has become a fashionable inclination in most parts of the world as a means of beliefs and faith in the capabilities of God to guard and guide mankind. The religious practices of Christianity, Islam, and traditional practices have contributed to the growth of tourism in the world. It is clearly known that Christian pilgrims to Israel have built the economy of the country and contributed the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, Islamic religious rituals have tremendous economic benefits to the country and its people. As indicated by the above scenarios and many others all over the world, it is evident that religious tourism can become a means of economic revival to a country and its people (Religious & Pilgrimage Tourism in Uncertain Times, 2017).

Religious tourism is very recently recognized as a way of diversifying countries' economy worldwide (Vijayanand, 2012). Religious tourism also insists on the involvement of local communities in the business. In religious tourism,

the local community is as important as the discerned visitor in protecting and preserving the religious/cultural sites, events and pilgrimages that form the foundation of religious tourism. According to UNWTO (2011a), religious tourism should not be considered as a business instead of a tool for heritage conservation, local community empowerment, and sustainable development. Besides economic, socio-cultural and environmental significances, religious tourism brings a wide and potentially receptive audience to religious sites (Vijayanand, 2012).

Furthermore, tourism has tremendous advantages in delivering pro-poor growth such as; Tourism is generally labor-intensive; Tourism has considerable potential linkage, especially with agriculture and fisheries, which can minimize the 'leakage' effect. Due to high-income elasticity of demand for international tourism, it can offer a relatively rapidly growing market; Tourism provides opportunities for off-farm diversification, particularly in areas that do not attract other types of development options; Tourism can provide poor countries with significant export opportunities where few other options are viable; Tourism products can generate demand for assets such as natural resources and culture, to which the poor often have access; Tourism brings tourists (consumers) to the product rather than the other way around; and Infrastructure associated with tourism development can provide essential services for local communities (Mitchell & Coles, 2009).

Local community participation in religious tourism

Community participation is an old term used not only in tourism but also in other study areas as well as by the general public. In public participation is defined as a commutative action to formulate policies and proposals (Skeffington, 1970). On the other hand, it has been defined as the means by which local people, experts of agencies and that of the government pressures decisions about programs and policies (Brager & Specht, 1987; Marzuki, 2008). Very recently, the concept of local community participation is revised as a process that helps to involve local people in the identification of problems, decision-making, and implementation which can contribute to sustainable development. Local community participation is one important aspect of sustainable tourism development (France, 1998). One of the conditions for success established in these principles is the involvement of stakeholders, including local communities, in order to increase the long-term success of tourism projects. Another condition for success is capacity

building, ensuring success through capacity building programs to develop and strengthen human resources and institutional capacities among local communities (Sanchez, et al., 2011).

The term local community is defined by many scholars and there is no similarity between them and the only common part of these definitions is that all definitions deal with people. However, the most common definition of community is 'an umbrella that covers various distinct stakeholders represented on the one hand by an organized sector that represents people with different interests but shares a common goal and, the other round, those with no interest at all in the shared common goal' (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Sanchez, et al., 2011).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has a community-based planning approach that emphasizes the role of the host community in the tourism experience (Jamal & Getz, 1995). The community-based tourism planning method has as fundamental principles such as 'local residents can participate in the planning process and can exchange information and opinions with planners'; 'they have real-time monitoring to supervise tourism development'; 'make projects and plans of tourism development mutually complementary' (Jiuxia & Jigang, 2007).

The need for community participation in tourism development and in other fields of activity is a key element recognized by national and international organizations. In fact, local community participation has disadvantages, however, as far as the community-based approach is concerned, residents would begin to be part of tourism development, playing the role of resident-responsive. Without residents' participation, the community-based approach would not be possible (Sanchez, et al., 2011). Some of the importance of the local community participation in tourism development is conservation (Sanchez, et al., 2011), sustainable development (Jiuxia & Jigang, 2007; Mair & Reid, 2007; UNESCO, 1999; Drake, 1991); catalyzing effect, Community support (Beeton, 1998), Effectiveness of the planning and management of tourism, Effectiveness of the implementation of intervention and/or investment by the government (Garrod, 2003).

Community capacity building for tourism development

Many writers accepted that tourism is a community development agent that promotes community economic, social, cultural and environmental development. Moreover, many view tourism as an essential tool for economic development, especially in local communities. Tourism also has been one of the most popular strategies for development. Hence

tourism development can enhance local and national development. Tourism also is a development tool used by many local communities to promote community empowerment. Consequently, tourism programs have increasingly positioned high emphasis on community development (Aref & Redzuan, 2009).

Community Capacity Building (CCB) concerns the development of skills and abilities that enable local people to participate in activities like decisions and actions for tourism development (Aref & Redzuan, 2009). In other words, CCB can be seen as the empowerment of local communities to participate in tourism activities, either individually or as a group. Furthermore, community capacity is an essential condition for improving the process of tourism development and enhancing its benefit for local communities. CCB is the "essence of community development" (Smith, et al., 2001). It helps communities to improve their ability to participate in tourism decision making. Therefore, CCB is a process of underpinning the capacity of both individuals and organizations to develop and sustain situations that help all aspects of community life (Blackwell & Colmenar, 2000).

CCB is considered as one of the most significant ways to address tourism development. It is a necessary condition for the development of the tourism industry. Accordingly, community capacity in tourism is the capacity of the people in communities to engage in tourism activities (Cupples, 2005). Here, the decisions and actions of the community are based on their desire to develop their community tourism. Most tourism principal sectors invest in CCB in order to bring tourism development (Aref & Redzuan, 2009).

Community capacity building in a tourism context can be done in three different levels. As shown in figure 1, it can be arranged at the organizational, community, and individual (Kieffer & Reischmann, 2004; Raik, 2002). At the individual level involves the enhancement of skills and knowledge that help individuals to improve their ability to control and influence the relevant aspects of their lives. This level refers to individual citizens. Community Capacity building at the community level reflects the needs to improve power for advocacy and decision making in tourism activities. The process may imply training at the community level. This level refers to informal groups bounded geographically. At the organizational level, CCB requires important changes in the way different helping professionals deliver their services. This level refers to a community organization or set of local organizations. The three most common community capacities in tourism development may cross each other (Raik, 2002).

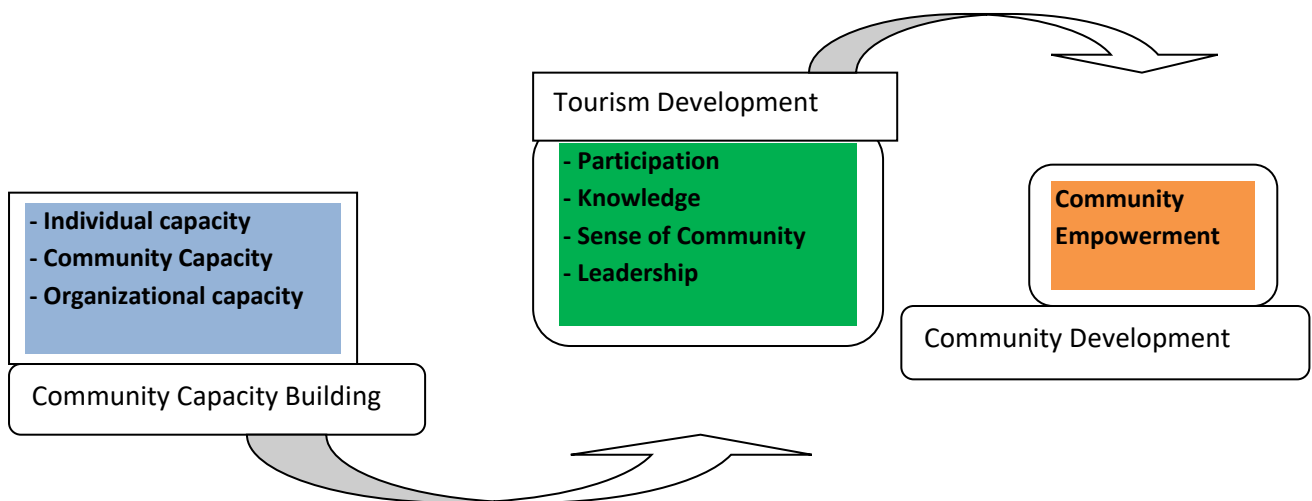


Figure 1: Multifaceted roles of community capacity building in tourism development Source: Adapted from Aref & Redzuan (2009).

Religious tourism for sustainable development

The idea of sustainable tourism has grown out of sustainable development defined as development which fulfills the needs and wants of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (Swarbooke, 2002). Whereas sustainable tourism is tourism development which fulfills the needs of present tourists, local community and principals while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It can be viewed as management of resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (UNWTO, 2011a).

Sustainable tourism delivers the demanded quality services or experiences while at the same time conserves the environment and enhancing the local community's quality of life (Moscardo, 1998). Another way to think about this is that we should pass on to our children a world that is at least as good, and hopefully better, than the one that we inherited. The concept of sustainability has progressed since the 1987 definition to embrace three dimensions or 'pillars' of sustainable development. Economic sustainability emphasizes ensuring the prosperity of society at different levels and supporting the capability of enterprises in the long-term. While social sustainability has a focus on respecting human rights and providing equal

opportunities in society. There is a high emphasis on local communities, recognizing and respecting their different cultures and stay away from exploitation. Environmental sustainability focuses mainly on conserving and managing nonrenewable natural resources, and minimizing the pollution of air, land, and water and conserving biological diversity and natural heritage.

Tourism has a unique position here for its contribution to bring sustainable development and its resistance to the challenges in the environment these days. If developed without concern for sustainability, tourism can harm the natural, cultural or social environment. Conversely, a sustainable approach to tourism, in the long run, benefits the local communities economically, socially, and to raise awareness and support for conservation of the environment (South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC), 2007).

Research Methodology

The Study Area

The study was conducted at the historic town of Lalibela which is found in the *Amhara* regional state of Ethiopia 701 km far from the capital Addis Ababa. The town is known with its hundreds of years old rock-hewn churches. Those monolithic, semi-monolithic and cave centuries-old rock-hewn churches are the fortress of the country's history and culture. Moreover, the town is the most famous

Orthodox Christian pilgrimage sites and star of visits to Ethiopia. Due to the existence of colorful annual religious ceremonies/ events like *Gena/Lidet* (Ethiopian Christmas), Epiphany,

Meskel (the finding of the true cross) and many more, Lalibela is one of the potential religious tourism development areas in the country.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Characteristics categories	No/130	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	80.8
	Female	25	19.2
	Total	130	100.0
Occupation	Agriculture	7	5.4
	Hotel Employee	21	16.2
	Souvenir selling	12	9.2
	Tour guide	13	10.0
	Tour operator	1	.8
	Church employee	6	4.6
	Hotel trade	4	3.1
	civil servant	29	22.3
	Others	37	28.5
	Total	130	100.0

The main subjects of this research were Lalibela city local communities and according to the survey conducted, respondents were predominantly males (81.5%) and the remaining 18.1% were females. Respondents were from different professions including agriculture (5.4%), hotel employee (16.2%), and souvenir selling (9.2%), tour guiding (10 %), and tour operation (0.8%), Church employee (4.6%), hoteliers (3.1%), civil servants (22.3%) and others (28.5%). Moreover, officials and experts were interviewed from different organizations such as culture and tourism bureau, police office Mayer office and others.

Research design, Measures and sampling

The research was descriptive in its design. In order to achieve its objectives both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied. Research questions were assessed via questionnaire, key informant interview, and personal observation. Questionnaires which consist of both open-ended and close-ended questions were systematically disseminated to 130 local community respondents. Furthermore, 8 key informants were selected from the culture and tourism bureau of the study area, the church administrations, hotel managers and tour guides association.

The data collected from the respondents were analyzed by using descriptive analysis tools of SPSS and by narrating the ideas and perceptions of respondents. The analyzed data were discussed and depicted by using a table, graph, and pictures.

Result and Discussions

Community's understandings of tourism and its impacts

The awareness of the local community on religious tourism and tourism in general and its benefits was assessed through a questionnaire. As shown in table 2 item 1, the result revealed that the majority of the respondents have sufficient know-how on tourism and its benefits with a mean value of $M = 4.14$ and a standard deviation of 1.032. This means more than 82% of the respondents believe that they have a better understanding of tourism. However, in contrast, most interviewed experts from different sectors like Lalibela Town Administration Culture and Tourism Department (LTACTD) and Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (ESTDP) raised shortage of knowledge on tourism in general as one challenge of religious tourism development in the area.

Updated awareness and proper implementation of the awareness one has into the real world day to day activities adds the quality of work performed. It is more worthy especially in the travel and tourism industry as the industry is more complex, dynamic, sensitive, perishable, and seasonal in nature. Consequently, the tendency of respondents on the implementation of their awareness was also assessed. As can be seen in table 2 item 2, with the mean value of $M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.205$ a higher proportion of the respondents implements their experiences, knowledge, and information they shared into practice. Hence, though the community may have limited awareness and information gaps

in tourism, they were willing and ready to implement what they have in the real world.

Local community's perceptions and participation in religious tourism development

Most tourism professionals believe that one of the core elements of sustainable tourism development is community participation. This is giving the community the process and capacity to make decisions that consider the long-term economy, ecology, and equity of all communities. Hence, an attempt was made to identify the participation of Lalibela local community in tourism sector in general. The result shown in table 2 in item 3,

indicated that with the mean value $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.030$ the majority of the respondents whether directly or indirectly participates in tourism development activities. Hence, a significant number of Lalibela town communities participate in tourism development activities either directly or indirectly. As personally observed and obtained from the interview, most locals participate in guiding, mule renting, guest-hosting, souvenirs selling, employment on hotels and restaurants, internet room, poultry, handcraft, dairy farm, metal craft, apiculture, coffee house, hotels, car rent and so on.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the local community's understandings, participation, benefits and capacity building practices

No	Item	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I know about Tourism (Religious Tourism) and its benefits.	130	538	4.14	1.032
2	I put all the awareness of tourism or religious tourism into practice.	130	467	3.59	1.205
3	I participate in Tourism development	130	563	4.33	1.030
4	I believe that the local community should participate in Religious tourism development and minimization of problems that affect the progress.	130	446	3.43	1.430
5	I believe that tourism in Lalibela town is community-based and participatory.	130	412	3.17	1.365
6	If done well, Participatory Religious Tourism has better economic benefit than other means of livelihood in the Town.	130	551	4.24	1.147
7	I have shown a clear improvement in my life and livelihood after joining the tourism business.	130	377	2.90	1.386
8	I am entirely dependent on tourism activities in the town.	130	382	2.94	1.519
9	Governmental and non Governmental organizations have built my capacity to participate in religious tourism	130	334	2.57	1.346

As shown in table 2 item 4, a high number of respondents also believe that the local community should participate in religious tourism and should fight against problems that hinder its development $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.430$. Moreover, most people perceive that tourism in the town is community-based ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.365$). However, most interviewed experts identified ignorance of the local community in tourism development activities as the major problems or religious tourism development in the study area.

Since tourism is one of the two major economic activities of the area, people are largely involved in it. However, their participation is limited to income-generating activities; in other words, the local community has not been actively involved in planning, decision-making processes. This is mainly due to lack of information, lack of

awareness, poor tendency to involve the people in planning, deciding, processing, and implementing religious tourism development activities, and weak government interference.

Outcomes of religious tourism

As shown in table 2 item 6, most respondents believe that religious tourism has a better economic benefit than other means of livelihood in the town ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.147$). In particular, about 85% of the respondents recognized the economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefit of religious tourism in the area. Hence, almost all respondents believe that community-based religious tourism has a better economic benefit. According to the tourism office of the town, being the source of huge benefits like income, job

opportunity, and foreign exchange, participatory religious tourism has a better advantage over other means of livelihood in the town of Lalibela.

Table 3: Five years tourist arrival and receipts in Lalibela town

Years	Domestic tourist	International Tourist	Total Arrival	Income receipts from domestic tourists in ETB	Income receipts from international tourists in ETB	Total income receipts in ETB
2008	6784	21641	28425	4857344	37936673	42794017
2009	8445	23597	32042	6046620	41365541	47412161
2010	10875	25225	36100	7772602	45819050	53591652
2011	14149	35169	49318	10161284	67129869	77291153
2012	15492	35437	50929	11190562	83314011	94504573
Total	55745	141069	196814	40028412	275565144	315593556

ETB – Ethiopian Birr Source: Lalibela city administration culture and tourism department 2013

As displayed in table 3, the total number of domestic tourist arrivals showed increment from 6784 to 15,492 in only the 5 years period. The number of international tourist arrivals also reflected a tangible increase from 21,641 in the year 2008 to 35,437 in the year 2012. The receipt columns of the table also show an increment, receipts from domestic tourists increased from 4,857,344 ETB to 11,190,562 ETB in the five years span from 2008 to 2012. On the other hand, international tourism receipts in Lalibela town also showed a rise from 37,936,673 ETB to 83,314,011 ETB in the same duration. As be seen in figure 2, total arrivals and receipts of tourism have shown a dramatic increment in the five years span. During the five years period, the registered total tourists increased from 28,425 to 50,929 and receipts increased from 42,794,017 ETB to 94,504,573 ETB.

Therefore, if tourism is community-based that means the community has the chance to participate in decision-making processes and there is fair benefit-sharing between stockholders, tourism is basic for sustainable tourism development and community empowerment. Especially in Lalibela town where religion and religious attributes are major tourist attractions and other economic

activities are not good options, religious tourism is the best means of destination development and local community empowerment.

Availability of any relative improvement in the livelihood of the local community because of their participation in religious tourism was assessed through a questionnaire. Then as shown in table 2 item 7, less than half of the respondents admitted the changes religious tourism has brought to their life $M= 2.90$, $SD= 1.386$. However, the other half of the respondents couldn't see improvements in their life in connection with religious tourism. Hence, though the majority of the local community participate in tourism, the sector doesn't change their life or it didn't bring significant change in their living standard. Based on the assessment, this is caused by the limited size of their business as most of the local community are engaged in the small businesses like shop, *Tela bet*, coffee house, and others which have little profit and not directly connected to the interest of tourists. Hence, there shall be an act to enhance the role of tourism to the local community. Such as, businesses shall be tourist-oriented to increase their length of stay and shall demonstrate the local culture to boost up the interest of visitors and its favorable impact on the livelihood of the local community.

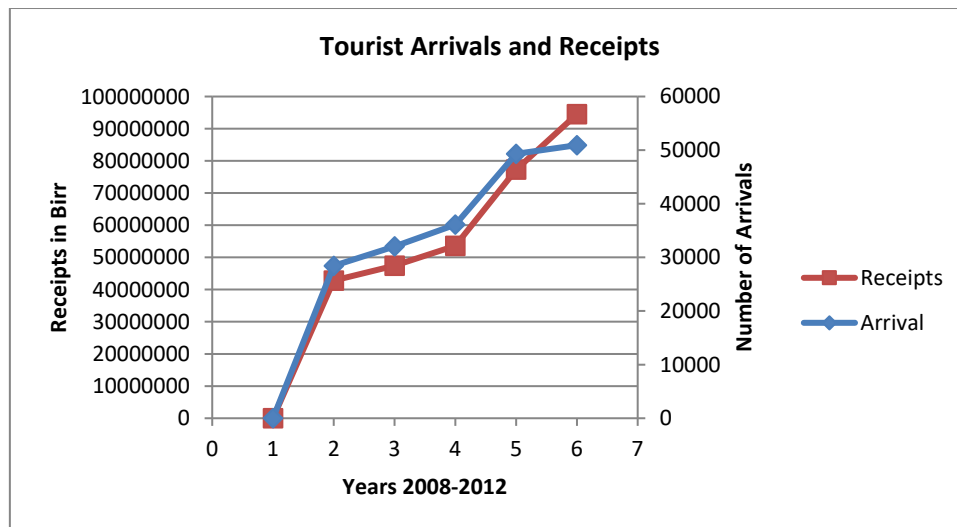


Figure 2: Total tourist arrivals and receipts in Lalibela from 2008 to 2012

The respondents' agreement level on their dependence on religious tourism was measured through the question. Based on the survey, about half of the respondents established their life on tourism $M= 2.94$, $SD= 1.519$ (see table 2 item 8). On the other hand, according to most interviewed scholars, stakeholders, and the area tourism offices, approximately 80% - 90% of the communities live in the Lalibela town are directly or indirectly dependent on the tourism sector. For example, as of LTACTD, 2747 - 3000 locals are directly working in different tourism sectors. Thus, these people and their family are directly and indirectly dependent on the tourism sector. Moreover, based on the data from Saint Lalibela Monastery Administration (SLMA), more than 800 Priests, *Deacons*, Monks, and Nuns with 2-3 families are directly dependent on tourism. Though illegal, lots of the local community generate income and lead their life as well as their family through hassling and bagging. But most of the community has no idea whether they are dependent on tourism or not. As a result, more than a few people have been seen disrespecting tourists, the tourism industry and religious tourism heritage and values.

Capacity Building

Community capacity building is an important tourism development strategy as it helps to effectively address problematic issues and planning of community development is often required to analyze the current status of community development with respect to tourism development. Building the capacity of the community is a vital ingredient for successful and sustainable

community development. Community capacity building programs help especially underdeveloped communities to improve their ability to participate in the tourism decision-making processes (Kieffer & Reischmann, 2004; Aref & Redzuan, 2009). Thus, a question was delivered to local respondents whether they were provided with capacity building training or programs so as to build their financial, skill and awareness limitations.

As shown in table 2 item 9, with the mean value $M= 2.57$, $SD= 1.346$ which is below the average 3 indicates most of the respondents did not get or involved in capacity building programs. More specifically, more than 42% of the respondents voted against the motion. In contrary, LTACTD and ESTDP said that capacity building activity, specifically training on service provision, and heritage conservation was delivered by tourism principal employees exclusively. Since tourism development and community capacity building need to progress hand in hand, destination managers need to work hard on building the capacity of the local community.

Community capacity building plays a central role in tourism development (Kieffer & Reischmann, 2004). Tourism operators often like to invest in local training and community capacity building as a way of contributing to community development (Aref, Gill & Aref, 2010). But this was not the case in Lalibela town. Most communities including the town administrations blame those tourism investors who mobilize a huge amount of money and generate the highest profit from tourism in the area but contributing nearly nothing to the community and the town development. Though some hotels like Mountain

View hotel said that they are contributing to the development of the local community by arranging aids from different countries such as Belgium, most investors accepted their weakness. Different stakeholders called upon the city administration and culture and tourism bureau of the area to organize them so as to contribute to the local community as well as the city overall development.

Barriers of local community participation

As discussed earlier, though most of the respondents participate in tourism, the living condition of the majority remains constant. Thus, there might be lots of barriers that hindered the local community from fully participating in any affairs of religious tourism development processes and be productive. Table 4 below summarizes some of those potential and actual problems which were proposed by subjects of this study.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of barriers of local community participation

Variable	Options		Percentage		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Lack of government consent	22	108	16.9	83.1	1.83	0.376
Lack of trustworthiness among the local leaders and the local community	35	95	26.9	73.1	1.73	0.445
Elite domination	17	113	13.1	86.9	1.87	0.338
Disagreement between government and locals	25	105	19.2	80.8	1.81	0.396
Low level of awareness	66	64	50.8	49.2	1.49	0.502
Group Mean					1.75	

As shown in table 4, out of the total respondents, only 16.9% recognized that lack of government consensus is one of the barriers that hindered the local community’s participation in any tourism issues. Though most of the respondents did not consider the limited support from the government to the local community as an obstruction for all-inclusive participation in the religious tourism, according to the key informants, lack of emphasis from the government for the sector was one of the most significant problems.

On the other hand, 26.9% of the respondents think that lack of trustworthiness among the administrators and the local community is one of the factors that influenced local communities' participation in religious tourism activities as well as in religious tourism development at large. Good administration could be expressed in terms of transparency and accountability of the government for the local community. Though the largest proportions of the respondents were on the side of no mistrust between the government and the local community, according to the key informants there is lack of communication and consensus between the government and the local community. The community had no chance to participate in planning and decision making. Therefore, there was a lack of transparency and accountability among the local leaders and the local community.

Elite domination or dependency on an elite group of the community may influence the participation of another community group mainly those uneducated group. As shown in table 10,

13.1% of the local community responds responded to the domination of elites over the illiterate one as one of the causes of poor local community participation. Cooperation among the stakeholders mainly between the local community and the administration brings effective development. However, in the case of Lalibela town, out of the total respondents, 19.2% stated their conformity on the disagreement between the government and local community as the factor for the limited participation of the community.

Commonly, awareness is one of the most basic things in the smooth development of any business including tourism. Based on the survey conducted, 51% of the respondents believe that a shortage of awareness of the local community is one of the numerous factors that limited the local community’s participation level in religious tourism sectors. Some other causes of limited local community participation in tourism sectors identified include lack of local community consent, mistrust of authorities to local peoples, centralization of public administration, Elite domination, centralization of public administration, low level of awareness, and others.

Local Community’s involvement in Religious Heritage Conservation

Most researchers accept that heritage is linked to the past that represents some sort of inheritance to be passed down to current and future generations both in terms of cultural traditions and physical

artifacts (Hardy, 1988). Similarly, heritages are what elements of the past a society wishes to keep which might be cultural or natural artifacts. Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to the future generation. Heritages are irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. They are our touchstones, our points of reference and identity (Jokilehto, 2005). Ethiopia is rich in natural and cultural heritage. And most of them are religious cultural heritage. Out of these countless tangible and intangible heritage of the country, twelve of them are registered in the World Heritage List. However, the

conservation status of most natural and cultural heritage in the country is at a dreadful level. One of the most famous Ethiopian world heritage sites is Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela.

Table 5 below has displayed the attitude of the local community on the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and its tangible and intangible heritage. In the table, religious heritages protection and conservation status; participation of the local community in heritage conservation activities; a sense of ownership for heritages are surveyed and publicized.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics on the state of religious heritage conservation

Variables	Relative Agreement										M	Sd.
	S.D.(1)		D.(2)		Nu.(3)		A.(4)		S.A.(5)			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Religious Heritages are well protected in Lalibela.	28	22	31	24	16	12	35	27	20	15	2.9	1.4
I participate in heritage conservation activities.	10	8	28	22	11	8.5	47	36	34	26	3.5	1.3
I have a sense of ownership for Heritages in Lalibela.	4	3	6	5	5	4	33	25	82	63	4.4	.99
I believe that local community should participate in heritage conservation.	4	3	3	2	-	-	27	21	96	73	4.6	.87

Table 5 above shows the attitude of the local community on the conservation status of the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and its tangible as well as intangible heritage. Accordingly, most of the respondents (45%) were against the idea that the religious heritages of Lalibela are well protected and conserved. At the same time, the Lalibela Culture and Tourism Bureau accepted the existence of heritage conservation problems in the area. Though the bureau conducts heritage inventory once in two years, monthly inspection and yearly control in 118 different churches in and around the town, heritages are still in big threat. Some of the

threats of heritage conservation mentioned by the department include robbery and lack of adequate museums in the churches. The shelters built ten years ago with an intention to protect the heritages from Sun and Rainfall have grown to be one of the most dangerous threats of the rock-hewn churches. Local community participation in heritage conservation is also assessed in table 5 above. Accordingly, the majorities (62%) of the respondents believe that there is high involvement of the local community in religious heritage conservation activities.



Figure 3: a glimpse of most precious religious heritages of Lalibela town

As a result, the majority (89%) think that the local community feels a sense of ownership for the heritage. Similarly, almost all (94%) of the respondents consider the participation of the local community in heritage conservations as one of its responsibilities. In other words, the respondents believe that everybody who lives in and around the city has a responsibility to conserve their own heritage.

Benefits and Beneficiaries of religious tourism development

Tourism in general and religious tourism, in particular, has multiple social, economic, ecological, and cultural benefits in the destination area as well as in the country at large. International tourism is the world's largest export earner and an important factor in the balance of payments of many countries. It also creates job opportunity, initiates investment, generates foreign exchange, and brings huge revenue in the forms of tax. For

example, International tourists spent USD 919 billion on local airfares, accommodation, meals, shopping, goods and attractions in 2010 (UNWTO, 2011b).

The consequence of this all and other positive impacts of tourism leads to the improvement of the lifestyle of the local community and the development of the country. Because International and domestic tourism combine to generate up to 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product and often a higher share in many small nations and developing countries. In the very arid areas like Lalibela, where other means of livelihood is hardly possible, tourism has significant value. Besides those commonly known benefits of tourism, religious tourism as a separate type of tourism has numerous benefits. Some of them include preservation of religious cultural heritages, appreciates religious and cultural diversity, income for the surrounding community who are guardians of the heritage, and so on.

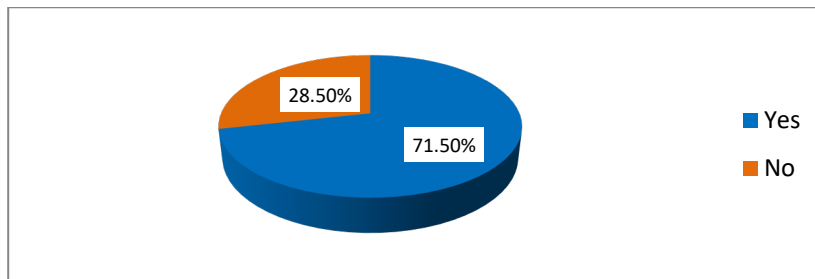


Figure 4: Benefit-sharing level of religious tourism

As shown in figure 4 above, out of the total respondents, 72% were beneficial of the religious tourism industry in Lalibela whether directly or indirectly whereas the remaining 28.50% were not.

This means the majority of the respondents were agreed that religious tourism is supporting their life.

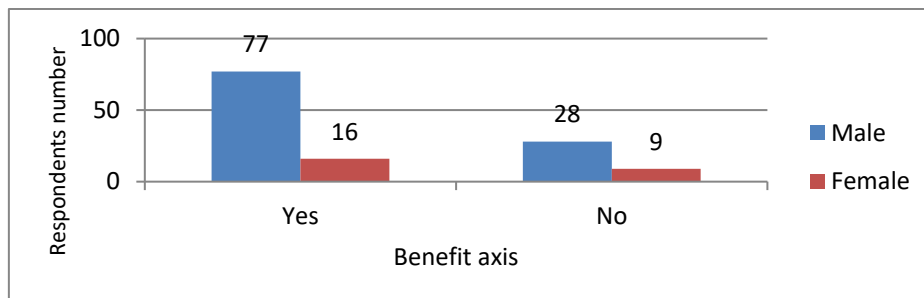


Figure 5: Relationship between gender and benefit-sharing of religious tourism

Using cross-tabulation, a tool of SPSS the relationship between gender and benefit-sharing of respondents was assessed. Accordingly, as shown in figure 5, out of the total of 25 individual female respondents, 16 had the chance to share from the outputs of tourism whereas 9 were not. From males side, total respondents were 105 and 77 were beneficial of tourism while 28 were not. Here, the percentage is 73% male for 64% female and the ratio is 1.14062 is not significant. That means there is no significant relationship between gender and tourism benefit sharing.

Benefits of religious tourism in Lalibela town

Religious tourism together with other types of tourism supports the local economy and contributes to the sustainable development of the area (Gil & Curiel, 2008). The benefits that the local community obtained from tourism in general and religious tourism, in particular, are discussed below. Though religious tourism has multiple benefits, the respondents have got income, job opportunity, water supply, road infrastructure, electric power, educational opportunity, and others.

Table 6: Summary of the benefits of religious tourism in the Lalibela area

Variable	Yes		No		Total		Missing		Total		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Income	42	32.3	51	39.2	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.55
Job opportunity	50	38.5	43	33.1	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.46
Water supply	41	31.5	52	40.0	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.56
Road infrastructures	30	23.1	63	48.5	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.68
Electric power	41	31.5	52	40.0	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.56
Schools and colleges	22	16.9	71	54.6	93	71.5	37	28.5	130	100	1.76
Group Mean											1.6

Income is one of the most common benefits of religious tourism in most of the tourist destinations. Table 6 above shows that out of the total 93 (71.5%) beneficial respondents, 32.3% directly generated income from religious tourism whereas 39.2% were not able to generate direct income.

Tourism is a labor-intensive industry and creates more job opportunities, encouraging young people to stay in local communities. As shown in the above table 8, 50(38.5%) of the total 93(71.5%) respondents who were beneficial of religious tourism, had got job opportunity in different tourism sectors of the area. According to the key informants, there are more than 695 tourism sectors operating in the town. These all tourism business sectors created job opportunity for 2747 individuals. These people were employed in hotels, cafes, restaurants, souvenir shops, guiding, and other small and micro tourism organizations. When we see gender involvement, out of the total number of people who have got job opportunity in the tourism sectors, 1039 were males and 722 were females.

Growth in tourism can stimulate new and expanded community facilities and infrastructure initiatives, such as the improvement of retail, restaurant and entertainment options, transport services, education, and sporting facilities. Based

on the survey conducted, 41(31.5%) of the respondents agreed that religious tourism has brought a better water supply to the area, however, the majority 52(40%) did not agree on this idea. According to them, water supply in Lalibela town has the following problems: there is a shortage of water supply, it lacks sustainability in its services, its distribution is not fair and services are seasonal. As displayed in table 6, 30 (23.1%) of the total 93 (71.5%) respondents believe that religious tourism development has brought road infrastructure in their area. However, the largest proportion of the respondents 63 (48.5%) did say that the road infrastructure of the Lalibela town was very poor and they did not enjoy any benefit related to road infrastructures. In fact, the issue of road infrastructure was also clearly observed by the researcher. According to the observation and interviews conducted with different stockholders, road infrastructure in Lalibela town was very poor and needed to be improved. From the very early 11th century up to these days, Lalibela was a very rural type area because of its poor road facilities. For instance, the road from *Gashena* to Lalibela has a poorly structured raff road. In the town itself most roads were not asphalted or properly designed as a result they were not suitable for a ride or walk.



Figure 6: The road infrastructure of Lalibela town

Now a day's Electric power has become one of the most important elements of our life. As part of the infrastructural improvement which might come because of tourism development, electric light is one of the benefits communities of the destination area enjoy. In the case of Lalibela, 41(31.5%) respondents believed religious tourism enabled them to get electric power in the area while 52(40%) of the respondents did not think so. During the survey, though there was an interruption of power, the researcher did not see any trouble related to electric power.

Education is key to problems. This means the majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the number of educational centers in the town. Though there were 2 elementary, 1 secondary and 1 preparatory school and 1 technical and vocational training center, most of the respondents did not find them sufficient for the local community which is greater than 18,000.

Reasons behind poor benefit-sharing trends

Table 7: Reasons for poor benefit-sharing trends in religious tourism development

Variable	Yes		No		Total		Missing		Total		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Lack of interest	3	2.3	34	26.2	37	28.5	93	71.5	130	100	1.92
Absence of gov't permit	7	5.4	30	23.1	37	28.5	93	71.5	130	100	1.81
Lack of support from the administration	18	13.8	19	14.6	37	28.5	93	71.5	130	100	1.51
Lack of enough initial capital	4	3.1	33	25.4	37	28.5	93	71.5	130	100	1.89
Lack of knowledge	8	6.2	29	22.3	37	28.5	93	71.5	130	100	1.78
<i>Group Mean</i>											1.8

As shown in table 7, out of the total 37(28.5%) unbeneficial respondents, 3(2.3%) were unbeneficial of religious tourism because they were not interested. Moreover, the absence of government permit or governmental regulations were reasons for 7(5.4%) of the total 37(28.5%) respondents for the absence of benefit-sharing from the tourism sectors. On the other hand, lack of governmental support and motivation both morally

and financially was the cause of a large amount of respondents 18(13.8%). In addition, 4(3.1%) of the respondents had no chance to get benefit from tourism because of lack of enough money (working capital). Lack of knowledge was considered as a reason for 8(6.2%) of the total 37(28.5%) respondents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Religion-related pilgrims and visitations in the Lalibela area have a number of benefits to the local community and the country at large. More specifically, it generates income, creates job opportunity, and provides infrastructural development.

In the town where religious tourism is its lifeblood, the local communities' role for the development of the sector is unquestionable. However, the level of local community participation was found inadequate. Moreover, limitations have also been observed among sample respondents in terms of understanding tourism in general and its multiplier effects in particular. Though most respondents perceive that community participation is vital for religious tourism development, insufficient involvement has been evident on the ground. Moreover, the disparity has been observed between know-how and its implications as well as participation and lifestyle improvement. Community-based religious tourism has been perceived as a key for better development of the area and its society among key informants and sample respondents. However, tourism development in the town has been evaluated as nonparticipatory, highly monopolized by few, full of fraud, and disregarded the religious values of the area.

Though the local community was willing and ready to participate in religious tourism activities, their participation remains minimum as confirmed on the survey. Some of the identified reasons behind limited participation of the local community include lack of government consent, administrative problem, elite domination, lack of awareness and training on tourism, corruption specifically nepotism, lack of transparency and accountability of the church administration, monopolization the sector by few rich people and so on.

Despite its limited involvement in benefit-sharing, the community has a strong sense of ownership of the heritages. It was also reached to consensus among the subjects of this study that the heritages were endangered and the community is its immediate preserver. On the other hand, the partiality in benefit-sharing has influenced the local community's participation in heritage conservation activities.

Tourism in general and religious tourism, in particular, requires high involvement of the local community more than any other sectors. Plus almost all tourism resources including religious treasures in the study area are on the hands of the local community. In addition, either in one or other ways tourists need local's help as a tourist - host

relationship is one of the most determining factors for tourists' satisfaction. On the other hand, the poor local community demands tourism to sustain their life. Therefore, in order to develop tourism in a better way and to support the residents' life, the local community should be involved in tourism development planning, decision making, and benefit-sharing processes.

In order to, therefore, increase the local community participation in tourism business and assist its development progress, appropriate attention should be given to the religious tourism by the area administrations besides assigning curious and well-trained leaders in the tourism departments. Moreover, the local community capacity in general and awareness, financial, and skill capabilities, in particular, shall be raised through continuous training and supportive financial initiatives. In addition, there shall be opportunities for the local community to participate in major tourism-related decision-making processes. The youth shall be organized in small and micro tourism businesses especially in providing inputs to the accommodation units such as hotels and service delivering unions. Administrative problems such as corruption, ambiguity, and domination should be mitigated. Furthermore, there should be strong cooperation among tourism stakeholders including accommodation providers, destination administrations, transportation deliverers, guiding unions, community leaders and others. What is more, there shall be just benefit-sharing practices designed to support the local community. Connected to this, there should be a platform that enables the big income-generating accommodation, transportation, destination unit and guiding sectors to contribute to the poor community of the area (people first or pro-poor approach) and or the development of the area.

As one of the major concern of this study, in order to rise or double the benefits of religious tourism and to ensure the beneficiary of the local community, some measurements shall be considered. It may consider promoting the local community participation (applying 'bottom-up approach'), Integrate private and public sectors for sustainable development, encourage domestic tourism, improve infrastructural domains, preservation, protection, and maintenance of tangible and intangible heritage of the area, adhere fair benefit and cost-sharing, create additional tourist products, work intensively on advertisement and promotion of the destination, create linkages among different sectors of economy (agriculture, industry and service (Tourism)). Applying those proposed solutions would play a huge impact on

the sustainable religious tourism development of the study area and the country at large.

Future study suggestions

This study has tried to deliver understandings on religious tourism and its role for rural community development. However, the same research can be conducted with a large sample size by using multivariate analysis statistical tools to distinguish relations among variables. Moreover, since religious tourism sites are mostly owned by the local community an array of issues arise mostly about the sites' governance problems. Therefore, exploratory researches regarding religious sites' governance and administration problems are suggested for future study.

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