

# DEVELOPING THE FUTURE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM AT SOF-UMAR CAVE AND ITS ENVIRONS: UNCOVERING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The main aim of this study is to investigate the possible challenges and prospects in developing the future community-oriented tourism at Sof-Umar cave and its environs after examining the contemporary benefits of traditional tourism to the local community.

**Methodology:** The paper opted for a household survey method employing a mixed research approach. The questionnaire, interview and field observation were used as data gathering instruments whereas samples were systematically selected from Sof-Umar kebele. Descriptive and inferential statistics used to analyze the quantitative data.

**Findings:** The findings showed that the study area has enabling factors for the future-proof of tourism to be community-focused despite the challenges that are most commonly experienced in other parts of the country where this type of tourism has been virtually established.

**Research limitations/implication:** Because of the confinement of the objective to the possibility of making the future tourism community-focused, the study does not happen to show the contextual procedure for the development of this niche tourism. Thus, it's recommended that a straightforward implementation guideline has to be prepared well in advance.

**Originality/value:** This study gives stakeholders fascinating insights into the problems related to the conventional tourism and the need to make the future tourism a community-focused so as to maximize the benefits of the sector and resolve the contemporary conflict.

**Keywords:** *Future Community-based Tourism, Challenges, Opportunities, Sof-Umar Cave, Ethiopia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has shown uninterrupted growth, to become one of the leading economic sectors in the world reaching US\$1245 billion in 2014 (World Tourism Organization ([WTO, 2015](#))). Together with travel, it contributed 9.8% to world GDP in 2015 ([WTTC, 2016](#)). In emerging destinations, the inbound influx is expected to grow at double the pace (+4.4% year) of developed countries (+2.2% a year). That is, emerging economies will be able to draw on average 30 million international tourists a year, compared to their counterparts which are set to be 14 million ([WTO, 2011](#)). Generally, the sector, tourism, is contributing to economic growth and job creation in many parts of the world ([UNWTO, 2016](#)).

Granted its robust performance, tourism is often considered as an optional tool for livelihood enhancement because its development relies on an area's cultural, historic, ethnic, geographic, and natural uniqueness ([Reid 2003](#)). However, [WWF \(2001\)](#) claimed that there have been incidents where tourism has failed to do so. Similarly, [Babar and Khanal \(2007\)](#) asserted that with mainstream tourism, the production, marketing and controlling of the tourism business is dominated either by the private sector or government which enables them to keep a large amount of profits. Though the tourism industry has desirable impacts on the general host destination economy, environment and socio-culture by drawing a large number of visitors, the local community may not show any improvement in their livelihood. This is often in the case where the tourism business is run without the active involvement of the local people (ibid.).

As an alternative to mainstream tourism, community-based tourism (CBT) has appeared to be hailed and flourishing for the time to come. According to [Telfer \(2009\)](#), with alternative development approaches for community empowerment and self-reliance, the concept of community-based tourism came into existence in 1970s. The development of community-based eco/tourism has also received much attention from developing countries and economically impoverished regions around the world ([Fennel, 1999](#)). For the reason that CBT appreciates the management of tourism businesses by local people, it is believed to promote conservation as well as the dispensation of its economic advantages among the marginalized groups ([Lucchetti and Font, 2013](#)), and stimulates local community development in general ([Fennel, 1999](#)). This niche form of tourism, community-based tourism, is about grassroots empowerment ([Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012](#)).

Generally, in the last ten and more years, a community-based development program has appeared to be a predominant approach in assisting a region hit by conflict prevalence ([Parks et al., 2013](#)). Specifically, the development of community based-and- driven tourism is undoubtedly imperative though it may not be a panacea yet. This is further supported by [Timothy \(2002\)](#) that CBT development is deemed to be sustainable than general mainstream tourism is. In light of this, tourism in the study area is of the issue under the conflict of interest in which the government and some locals claim the ownership and act separately thereby. This is further substantiated by the findings of [Zemene and Biruk \(2015\)](#) that conflict over the ownership of Sof-umar Cave between government and locals has been one of the challenges for the development of tourism in the area.

In a point of fact, community-based tourism ought to be viewed as a means not an end in itself in the course of empowering the indigenous group to be in control of their resources, and acquire all the required skills for their development ([Mearns, 2003; cited in Mearns and Lukhele, 2015](#)), and as a tool toward assuring equal power relations ([Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012](#)). Thus, this study investigated the possible challenges and prospects to establish the prospective community-based tourism at Sof-Umar cave and the surrounding area in the way to optimizing the benefits of tourism to the area and resolve the contemporary conflict subsequently. A definition of ‘Community’ given by [Sproule \(1996\)](#) as follows is used for this article;

*A community is a group of people, often living in the same geographic area, who identify themselves as belonging to the same group although they are still complex and should not be thought of as one homogenous group ([Sproule, 1996](#)).*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concepts and Definitions

The concept of community-based tourism has been coined to describe a tourism model manifested with the aim of bringing benefits to the local community by appreciating their active participation and attracting tourists to visit host culture and environment ([Lucchetti and Font, 2013](#)). It has been advocated as a development that helps local communities achieve their triple needs –social, environmental and economic- by presenting a tourism product to market ([Goodwin and Santilli, 2009](#)). Added to these manifestations, it is also conceptualized as a development that promotes equitable distribution of benefits not only to those who have participated in tourism activities but also to the group of communities not participated directly ([Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012](#)). As a result, the yield of community-based tourism spill out to wider community members (ibid).

With high demanding nature to elaborate, definitions are open for debate and are often imperfect. To this end, community-based tourism is in the same boat, as it has been defined in many different ways. In some cases, particularly on the level of community participation, significant differences have been observed over the meanings attached to community-based tourism ([Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012](#)). Given the concept flexibility, it seems to be used with a lack of rigor. It can be reviewed from the academic literature that CBT is defined as tourism that brings local community at the heart of its development over the management of the business and assures generating advantages, thereby benefits both the participant and non-participant groups of the community ([Goodwin and Santilli, 2009](#)), stated that:

*“Community-based tourism development would seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social and cultural well-being of the popular majority. It would also seek to strike a balanced and harmonious approach to development that would stress considerations such as the compatibility of various forms of development with other components of the local economy; the quality of development, both culturally and environmentally; and the divergent needs, interests, and potentials of the community and its inhabitants”(cited in [Goodwin and Santilli, 2009](#)).*

### The rationale for Community-Based Tourism

The rationale of community based tourism has been summarized in the work of [The Mountain Institute \(2000\)](#). Designing effective strategies for environmental conservation has to come in first order of precedence. Policies enacted toward the conservation of environment have straggled to be successful in many cases. It can be learned that local community would be prone to the environment on which the tourism business depends if they are not welcome for participation, and investment might plunge into oblivion thereafter ([Brandon, 1996](#)). In parallel to the environment and economic perspective, moral has become an underlying principle asserting that the management of tourism by local community with decision making delegation in order to assure its long lasting existence and accountability. The other equally important principle is the fair distribution of benefits to wider local community members as costs are shared as well, for instance by restricting access to resources. This became an important point corresponding to the increasing concern over tourism commercialization, monopolization and accumulation by elites.

### ***Challenges of Community-Based Tourism***

As community-based tourism is not an end in itself ([Mearns, 2003; cited in Mearns and Lukhele, 2015](#)) and not a panacea for community development, it has its own challenges and opportunities ([Timothy, 2002](#)). [Mearns and Lukhele \(2015\)](#) compiled the challenges that affect the effective development of community-based tourism from literature as traditional power structures that foster power imbalance, the power imbalance in relation to gender and ethnicity, lack of awareness and knowledge about the tourism industry, deficiency in a marketing capacity, peripheral nature of communities, and unequal access to opportunities for local ownership, lack of education and information, business inexperience, insufficient financial assistance and conflicting vested interests are identified as the barriers for local community participation in tourism development ([Addison, 1996; cited in Okazaki, 2008; Scheyvens, 2000](#)). In general, [Timothy \(2002\)](#) relates the barriers to the implementation of CBT to socio-political traditions, gender and ethnicity, accessibility of information, lack of awareness, economic issues, and lack of cooperation/partnerships among others.

### ***Strategies for Community-based Tourism***

There has to be a strong alliance between tourism resource owners and market intermediaries for community-based tourism to pragmatically exist. In this business linkage process, the community would own resources and follow collective decision-making procedures over the development and management of tourism, while tour operators, on the other hand, use the services and products of community-oriented tourism entrepreneurs such as guides and lodges ([The Mountain Institute, 2000](#)).

In its undefined broad set, community-based tourism may be developed based on existing attractions or come up with new products. Where it is developed in the form of niche products, market opportunities and segments have to be exhaustively identified. On the contrary, with a focus on value addition, existing natural and cultural resources are used as building blocks for CBT to happen. An example might be training local guides in natural history to accompany trekkers – adding value to the trek by providing local guides whose incomes will partly depend on the continued presence and conservation of the features that they are promoting. Although either case aims at generating revenues and maximizing economic profits to the local community, and promoting conservation as well, different options might be considered by concerned stakeholders during the course of developing and marketing tourism products which subsequently become the foundation for designing community-based tourism strategies (*ibid*).

### ***Principles of Community-Based Tourism***

Before developing CBT in line with the following principles, it is necessary to prepare and build the capacity of the host community to manage tourism. CBT marketing should also promote public awareness of the differences between CBT and mass tourism, educating people to realize the importance of CBT as a community tool for resource conservation and cultural preservation. This will attract appropriate tourists for CBT ([REST, 1997](#)).

1. *Recognize, support and promote community ownership of tourism;*
2. *Involve community members from the start in every aspect;*
3. *Promote community pride;*
4. *Improve the quality of life;*
5. *Ensure environmental sustainability;*
6. *Preserve the unique character and culture of the local area;*
7. *Foster cross-cultural learning;*
8. *Respect cultural differences and human dignity;*
9. *Distribute benefits fairly among community members;*
10. *Contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects*

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a household survey as a research method employing a mixed research approach. That is, both qualitative and quantitative. Using [Yamane's \(1967; cited in Israel, 1992\)](#) formula:  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(a^2)}$ , (where n is the number of sampled households, 'N' is the total number of households in the selected kebele and 'a' is 0.05 (95%) confidence level), 188 questionnaires were distributed although only 183 questionnaires collected. A systematic sampling technique was used to contact the heads of households or the next head in the absence of the main head. In addition to the questionnaire, semi-

structured interviews and field observation were employed as data-gathering instruments. The quantitative data was systematically organized, described, analyzed, and interpreted by descriptive and inferential statistics (percentage, mean and Pearson chi-square), and presented in graphs, tables, charts using SPSS software version 20 while qualitative data was analyzed through narration and presented thematically.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Description of the study area

With a total of 63,555 km<sup>2</sup> land surface coverage, Bale zone falls between latitudes of 5°22'-8°08'N and longitudes of 39°32'-42°15'E and bordered with Somalia National Regional State at the east, East Hararge zone at northeast, West Hararge zone at the north, Arsi zone at the northwest, West Arsi at west and Guji at the south (BZFED, 2014). The study focuses on Dawe Qecha Woreda, which is found at a distance of 490km from Addis Ababa and 60km from Zone town, Robe, has 39 rural kebeles. According to BZFED (2014), Dawe Qecha district is located from 5 1/2 to 7° N latitudinal and from 40° to 41° E longitudinal. Dawe Qecha district is known for having both historical and cultural tourist attractions such as Sof-Umar cave located at a distance of about 57km from the district's capital. Sof-Umar limestone cave is the famous sites through which Wabe River flows over the distance of 1.5kms. *Figure 1 indicates here.*

### A Conventional Tourism Subsidy to Local Community

As is clearly indicated in figure 2 below, regardless of the volume, the presence of tourists at Sof-Umar village itself has promoted the pride of the local community which likely remains perpetual. The majority of local community members are proud of their natural and cultural resources for which tourists have traveled a long distance to admire despite the fact that they are excluded both from generating liquid benefits as well as enjoying the social benefits of the sector. It has been noticed from the survey and field observation that local tourism has not yet provided social benefits such as road infrastructure, school, health center, power supply to the locals through an irregular generator-triggered electric service is arguably in place inside the cave. Naturally, a limited number of respondents (12%) who participated in tourism activities have been able to raise income from the sector.

### Tourism vs. Sources of Income

In figure 3, it's indicated that farming becomes the main means of livelihoods constituting about 37% while livestock production and salary from the non-tourism sector follow one another accounting for 35% and 14% respectively. Apiculture, selling timber products and others (like trade) accounted together for about one-tenth of the total economic activities.

In the course of understanding poverty and standard of living, monetary and non-monetary measurement may obviously be employed. Although income is not the only poverty measurement, it can yet reflect the standard of living (Coudouel et al., 2002). To this end, regardless of the means of livelihoods they rely on, the majority of local residents could have been categorized as non-poor- without considering their consumption for the meanwhile as measurement- with a mean income of ETB 12, 770.76. As it is indicated in table 1, more than one-third of the respondents get an annual income that exceeds the national poverty threshold while the remaining sample households live below the poverty line.

In order to understand the simple relationship between participation in tourism and poverty status, the chi-square test was run. From table 2, it can be easily understood that there is no significant relationship between participation/nonparticipation and amount of annual income which determines locals to be considered as poor or non-poor. This is statistically shown that  $P > .05$ ,  $p = .591$ .

### Challenges of Community Based Tourism Development

The impending challenges in making the future tourism a community-focused at Sof-Umar cave and its environs have been thoroughly studied and indicated in figure 4.

In this regard, the absence and poor provision of infrastructures and tourist facilities are mentioned as a major threat to the unborn CBT in the study area. Unquestionably, such problems are quite commonly encountered in the least developing countries like Ethiopia. As can be seen from the figure, nearly all local community respondents (98.4%) are univocally sure that the present limited and poor infrastructure and absence of tourist facilities would be the challenge for the development of community-based tourism. As it's substantiated by the field observation, the uneven rough road to Sof-Umar cave seems almost ignored by concerned stakeholders [typically the central government].

Similarly, the conflict of interest over resource ownership ranked second as a threatening factor constituting more than one-tenth of the total challenges. This was further supported by information gained from an interview with key informants that conflict of interest between the government and very few individuals over the ownership of Sof-Umar cave has intensely existed for the last couple of years. In effect, the dominance of the elite came to be another challenge accounting for nearly



10%. Added to this, poor heritage conservation practice, and low level of awareness toward tourism together account for about one-fifth of the total challenges

Equivalently, the absence of a formal tourism institution is mentioned as another problem for community-oriented tourism to come to exist. Numerically, it accounts for 10.3% of the challenges. Centralization of the local tourism administration/governance, dysfunctional tourism policy and plan are also a challenge sharing 7.4%, 7.7% of the total respectively. Moreover, weak cooperation among tourism stakeholders (such as government, private sectors, local communities), politicizing the participation of local communities, irregular security problem (mainly due to conflict between government and elites), and challenges of access to microfinance and credit all accounted for nearly one-fifth as challenges to the development of the prospective community-based tourism in the study area.

### Opportunities for Community-Based Tourism Development

As it's manifested in figure 5 below, the stunning features of the site are largely considered as an opportunity in reshaping tourism in the area. Shortly, the uniqueness of the site with its cultural values accounted for more than two-fifths of the available opportunities. Though the proper management of the site and its affiliated ritual ceremonies merely accounts for about one-tenth as defy, this inconsiderable trial might push the respondents to firmly consider the attention of government (23.5%) as a favorable opportunity for the future tourism to be destined a community-focused. In parallel, the local community's attention to the site-sharing 15% - would be another opportunity for CBTD.

Added to these, the existence of supportive stakeholders such as academic institutions, NGO's that currently operate in the zone, and the attempt to get Sof-Umar cave inscribed as a world heritage site, and other factors classified under 'Other' category (8.4%) are noted as anticipated opportunities in the course of developing community-based tourism in the study area.

### DISCUSSION

The study area has plentiful resources that have been awaiting both domestic and international visitors. Commensurately, with an endowment of tourist attractions, tourism activity in the area has to generate income for the local communities and significantly contribute to the development of the local economy. However neither the direct nor the indirect benefits of tourism are substantially obtained by the wider local community, rather the available monetary benefit is absorbed either by local government or the elite which is in line with the finding of [Babar and Khanal \(2007\)](#) that substantial amount of income from the conventional tourism flows to government or private sector.

The local community around Sof-Umar cave relies on diversified and mixed means of livelihoods. Despite the aridness of the area, agriculture in general and farming in particular base on the strong ground becoming the major economic activities of the local community. Given the fact that most local community members are excluded from the tourism businesses, the sector has been comparably unable to become the alternative means of livelihood in the village. As it's statistically shown, tourism has not yet made a significant difference among villagers.

Apparently, an alternative form of tourism, which supposedly contributes to the well-being of local communities and the conservation of natural resources through its incentives, is highly hailed in many countries across the world particularly in developing nations. In course of succeeding for what it's meant for, community-oriented tourism has mushroomed to significantly improve the involvement of local communities in its development process. Additionally, it has been discussed in tourism and development literature that a CBT can largely be used as a tool for local conflict resolution. In either case, genuine community-focused tourism has recently been a practicable fashion mainly in marginalized areas so as to optimize the monetary and non-monetary benefits of the tourism industry.

However, the development of alternative types of tourism such as community-based tourism is not an easy task, especially where tourism is embryonic with different challenges possibly affecting its fate. In addition to the challenges that the local community faces in the implementation of tourism projects such as lack of financial resources, infrastructure, know-how, the potential conflict between different public administrations discussed in the study of [Nyaupane et al., 2006](#), this particular study has come up with more challenges.

In particular, Similar to the findings of most studies in the country ([Daniel, 2011](#); [Gebeyaw, 2011](#); [Derara, 2015](#)), the informants unequivocally disclose the wide discrepancies of the interests over the resource ownership of Sof-Umar cave between government and individuals. A known single-family in the community has controlled and owned the cave and been able to exclusively retain its larger tourism benefits. In effect, the small elite dominance will not only become a possible threat for the future community-focused tourism to happen in the study area but also has hindered a sheer number of local residents from participating in tourism activities.

The adverse effect of this elite domination is further supported by the weak cooperation among stakeholders. Importantly, rather than considering a smooth alternative conflict resolution, both sides have been pulling apart the string of cooperation

from the two extremes which has resulted in the abuse and underdevelopment of tourism hitherto. This finding is in line with the study of [Phanumat et al., 2015](#) that although tourism development depends on the cooperation of multi-stakeholders, many stakeholders have a conflict of interest which makes it hard for the collective to reach the main goal together. Moreover, [Himoonde \(2007\)](#) is of the opinion that the local community can be further put aside from participation in ecotourism if there is no strong cooperation among stakeholders.

Despite the potential of the area to keep drawing a large number of tourists regularly, there found that there is limited interest from the community to participate in the conservation of the heritage. This is probably attributed to the retaliation action of villagers for their exclusion and /or lack of enough awareness and limited capacity building. In such a light, it is evidenced that local communities will be prone to the development of tourism and conservation activities if they are denied participation right ([Ross and Wall, 1999](#); [Trent, 2005](#)).

Although the establishment of tourism-related associations will be imminent during the implementation of future CBT, however, it has yet been a challenge itself as local communities worry about the influence of elites and government too in the course. As of now, it's found that the entrance fee for the Sof-Umar cave leaks to Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Office (BZCTO). Other income generated from the tourism activity in the area goes to the elite, not as many as one hand's fingers. Another supporting indicative figure is that the tourism administration is entirely centralized at the regional level with the delegation to zone culture and tourism office. In line with this, it is clear that government does not have a participatory tourism planning and policy as well as a legal framework for local tourism sector which is similar to [Nafbek's \(2016\)](#) and [Nafbek and Berhanu's \(2017\)](#) observation at Wonchi Crater Lake and Bale Mountains National Park that it considerably affected the development of tourism in the corresponding areas.

There are different favorable conditions that strongly assist the effort of making the current conventional tourism a genuine community based around Sof-Umar cave. By and large, the resource gift is one of the main reasons for the existence of tourism activities in a given destination; to this end, Sof-Umar area shares the resemblance. The combination of both spectacular natural resources such as the Sof-Umar cave with its long dark tunneled passage, and fascinating cultural assets of the local Arsi Oromo community especially the practice of the Muda ceremony performed regularly at Sof-Umar cave have the potential to significantly contributes to the effective development of the future CBT.

Besides, the promising cooperation recently began between different stakeholders such as educational institutions, zone culture and tourism office, and the local community to some extent is found to be an opportunity. Although the role and importance of stakeholders vary from one another ([Cooper et al., 2006](#)), it's clearly stated that stakeholders play a significant role through their engagement for sustainable tourism development ([Robson and Robson, 1996](#)). Furthermore, in the study of [Phanumat et al. \(2015\)](#), it is practically proven that through the implementation of multi-stakeholder participation approach in community-based tourism, Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), a public organization which was established in 2003 to implement sustainable tourism concepts in specific areas by coordinating with other public and private organizations in Thailand, could reduce the elite domination and other barriers.

Despite the fact that the government has been reluctant in abolishing the elite dominance over-tourism, there have been attempts recently made to take remedial action for the implementation of proper management and legal administration to the site. However, the engagement of local residents in tourism and the retention of income generated from tourism within the local economy have seemed forgotten momentarily in the government's future tourism direction.

## CONCLUSION

The challenges that will be imminently encountered in the implementation of the future community-based tourism at Sof-Umar cave and its environs are less severe and virtually common to other parts of the country where Community-oriented tourism could have been effectively established. Generally, it can be concluded that the available opportunities will likely outclass the defying factors to transform the reactionary tourism into community-based tourism in the study area to get the best of the sector for the wider local community groups thereafter.

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**Table 1:** Comparison between participants and non-participants in relation to poverty line

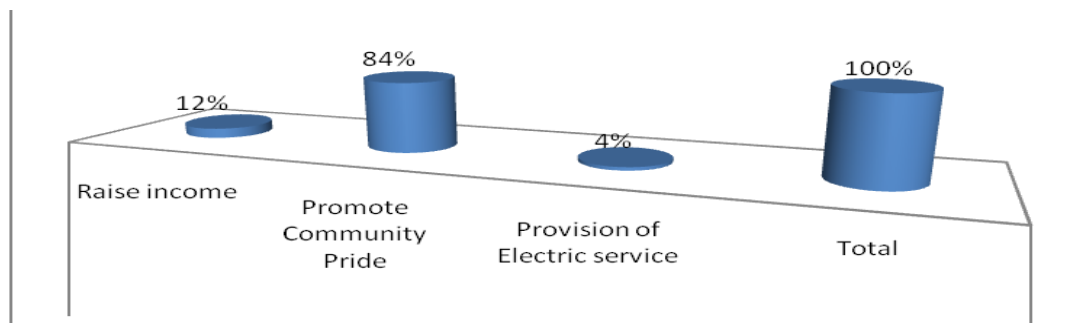
			Do you participate		Total
			YES	NO	
Poverty Threshold	Above	Count	5	112	117
		% within Do you participate	55.6%	64.4%	63.9%
	Below	Count	4	62	66
		% within Do you participate	44.4%	35.6%	36.1%
Total	Count		9	174	183
	% within Do you participate		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2:** Chi-Square Tests between poverty status & participation in tourism

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.288 <sup>a</sup>	1	.591		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.033	1	.856		
Likelihood Ratio	.281	1	.596		
Fisher's Exact Test				.724	.417
Linear-by-Linear Association	.287	1	.592		
N of Valid Cases	183				

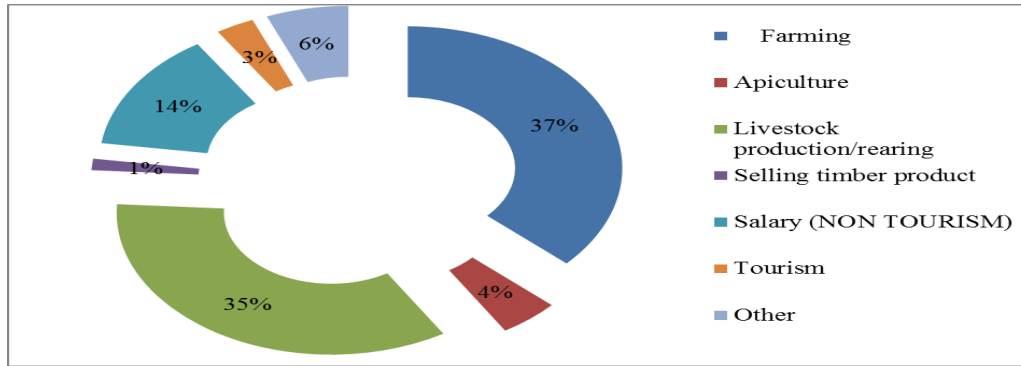


**Figure 1:** Map of the study area (Adopted from General Management Plan, 2007)

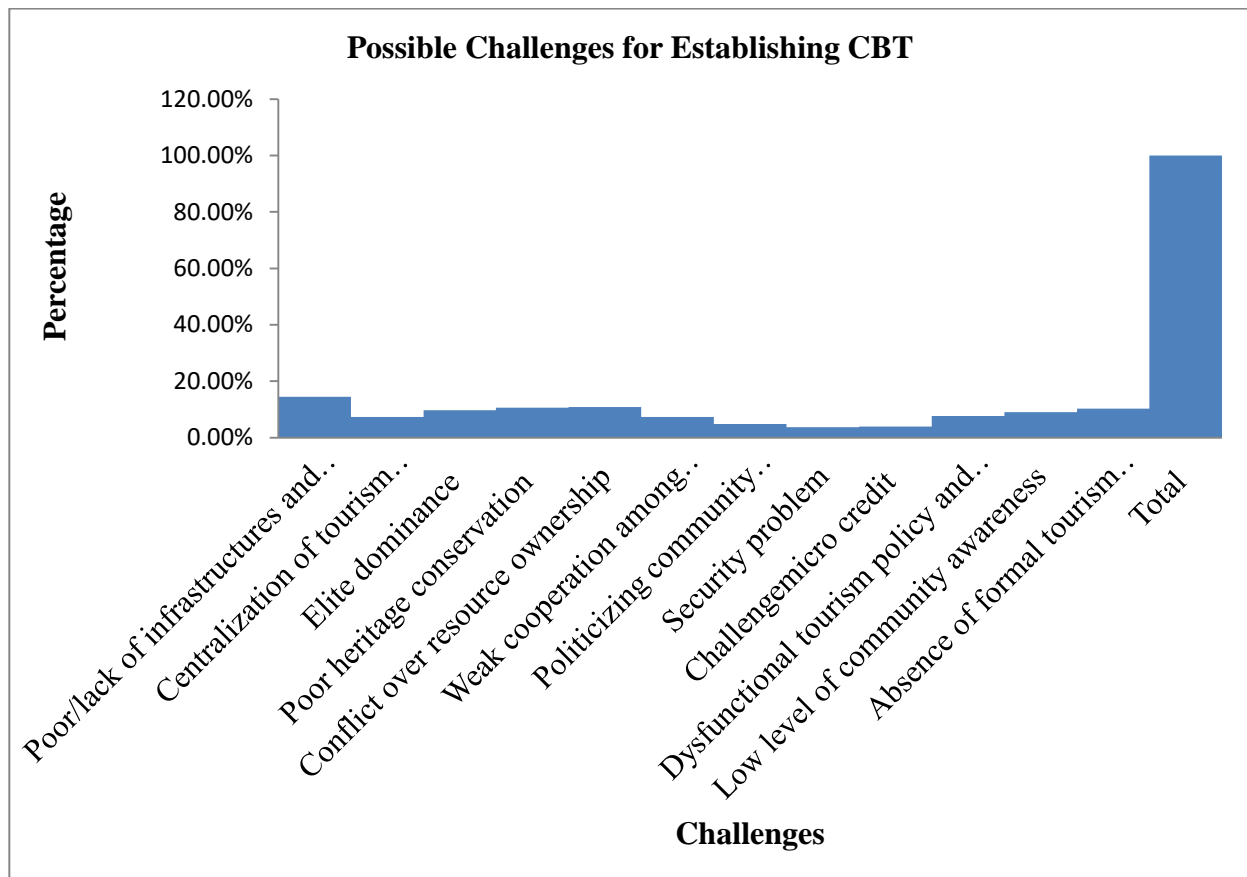


**Figure 2:** Benefits derived from tourism

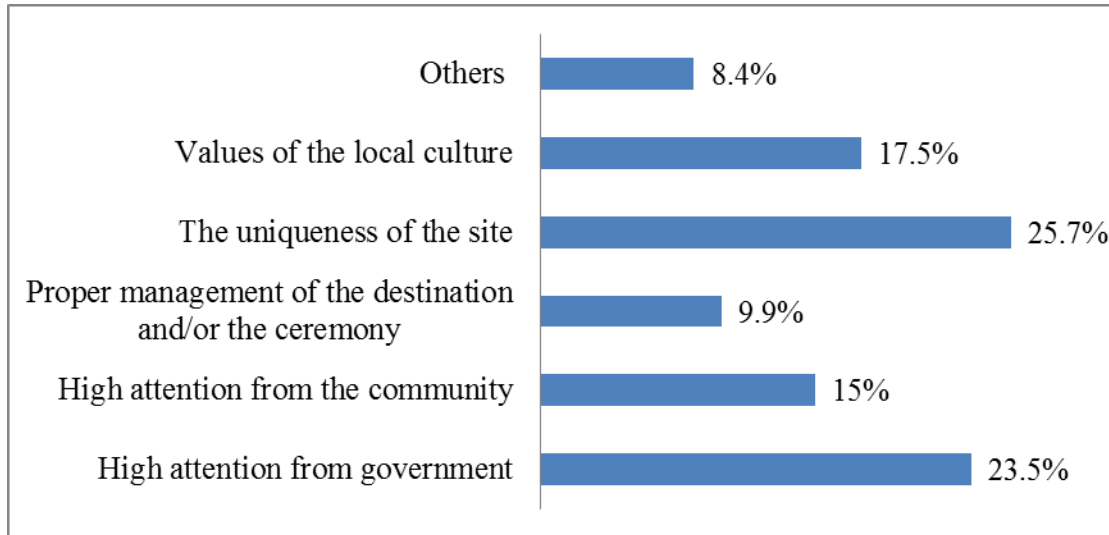




**Figure 3:** Sources of income



**Figure 4:** Possible challenges for establishing CBT



**Figure 5:** Opportunities for the development of CBT