

Tourism Development Endeavours in and around World Heritage Sites in Ethiopia: Practices at Lower Omo Paleontological and Paleoenvironmental Site, SNNPRS

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Abstract

The link between world heritage sites and tourism development has remained ambiguous in Ethiopia. The country is often mentioned on the top list among the African countries with the largest number (nine) of world heritage sites. Of the site's potential for tourism destination development, this study explores tourism practices on the site and their benefits to the local communities. In 2017, fieldwork was conducted for two weeks in selected Lower Omo paleontological and paleoenvironmental sites. A mixed approach was employed to investigate the link between the site and tourism development and community benefits. Data were collected using questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The result demonstrated that international researchers had worked at the sites since 1888 for 129 years. The site was inscribed as a world heritage site in 1980 due to its outstanding discoveries in human evolution and early stone tools. This paleontological site has great tourist attraction potential, but the road to the site was poorly developed. The result further corroborated the absence of tourist information centres, museums, locally trained tour guides, craft products, and hotels and restaurants in and around the site. The efforts to promote the site were also found to be so minimal. As a result, the community's benefit from the available tourism resources was insignificant. Therefore, it is time to promote the site and enhance its advantages through integrated tourism development planning at the Lower Omo Valley of the world heritage site.

Keywords: Paleontology, paleoenvironment, Lower Omo Valley (LOV), Tourism Development, World Heritage Site, Ethiopia

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1. Background to the Study: Problem and Rationale

By the second half of the 20th-century, tourism industry began to develop exponentially as a mass phenomenon globally. Globalization in general, advances in information systems, and the development of means of transportation at the beginning of the 21st century determined the growing dynamics of tourism development which led the tourism business to become a gigantic world economy (Yudina *et al.*, 2016). According to assessments, for example, World Economic Forum (2018), countries like the USA, Great Britain, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, and Turkey have got the highest income from tourism industry. More recently, Brazil, China, Russia, and Indonesia are rapidly growing in tourism. The tourism industry in the international perspective is commonly considering tourism product diversification, search for new tourism potential, cutting the average duration of a tourist trip, provision of alternative means of accommodation and transportation, and reasonable pricing methods in the market (Weidenfeld, 2018; ZAPPINO, 2005; and ILO, 2011).

According to Elena *et al.* (2016), world heritage sites are generally among potential tourism products attracting tourists. The visits to the world heritage sites depend on three interrelated factors: (a) accessibility of the site, (b) inclusion of the sites in the tourist routes, and (c) the role of tour operators. In emerging economies, heritage tourism grows much faster than other tourism attractions. Heritage tourism is viewed as a vital tool for poverty alleviation and community social and economic development (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009).

In the case of Ethiopia, the cultural wealth and natural resources constitute valuable resources ranging from obelisks and monoliths, medieval castles, ancient churches and monasteries, archaeological sites, historic towns and monuments, traditional cultures and festivals, to various fascinating landscape features. Within this framework, Ethiopia registered nine cultural and natural heritage sites at UNESCO's World Heritage Sites, attesting to Ethiopia's heritage's outstanding and universal value. These are the Rock-hewn Churches of Lalibela (1978), Simien Mountains National Park (1978), Fasil Castle (1979), obelisks of Axumm (1980), the megaliths of Tiya

(1980), Lower Valley of Omo paleontological site (1980), Lower Valley the Awash paleontological site (1980), walled city of Harar (2006), Konso cultural landscape (2011) and Ashenafi (2016).

Nowadays, it is universally accepted that cultural heritages are recognized as a tool for development and are being utilized as strategies for poverty reduction. The UN., World Bank, and other development cooperation organizations have incorporated heritages into their agenda as assets to achieve socio-economic development across countries around the globe (Elene and Getu, 2012), and more in specific communities.

The experience of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) countries indicated that local community participation contributed to the sustainability of world heritage sites, thereby benefiting the communities. However, the study by Limpho (2018), through qualitative literature review, revealed that the lack of local community participation in the management of the world heritage sites in some IORA countries resulted in less benefit to the communities.

In contrast, experiences in Mali also indicated that the local population is quite active in the development of World Heritage sites as tourist attractions. According to Deursen and Raaphorst (2014), locals were engaged in various activities, including forming a tourist attraction by building complements, adjusting meals for tourists, opening souvenir shops, arranging local guides, and collecting site tax. Besides these, the local population is also actively involved in the restoration project of the ancient sites.

Similarly, another experience from Kenya showed that world heritage sites are usually used as a marketing tool in the image creation of the country. Local communities' involvement in the country dramatically increased tourist flows bringing employment and income to the local community living in and around the sites (Okech, 2010, as cited in Limpho, 2018). The other study in Kenya by Irandu (2007) proved the presence of closer interaction between Maasai people and world heritage sites. The study result further indicated harmonious interaction in the tourism activity around the sites. Such stable interaction was directly associated with local communities'

active involvement in tourism development, which was linked up with the benefits derived from the industry.

In the case of Ethiopia, the study conducted by Getu (2007) on the management of tourism at the World Heritage Site in the case of Lalibela shows that the local community has benefited from the tourism activities at the site through the development of infrastructure, job opportunities and the general improvement of quality of life. Most respondents in this study believed that tourism positively influences community services, like increased numbers of schools, health centres, improved electricity supply, telecommunications, and accessible public transportation.

Tourism continues to be praised as the largest industry globally (UNESCO, 2008). The sector possesses a demonstrable positive economic impact on the livelihoods of many people living around world heritage sites. Ethiopia can register nine world heritage sites and three intangible cultural heritages in the UNESCO world heritage and representative lists based on the principles and criteria established by UNESCO in 1972 and 2003, respectively (UNESCO, 1972; UNESCO, 2003).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the international significance of the country's cultural and natural heritage resources, the report from the World Tourism Organization (as cited by Elene Negussie and Getu Assefa Wondimu, 2012) revealed that Ethiopia is underperforming in the tourism market. On the other hand, another study by Beyene (2013) implied that the general condition of the country for economic development via the tourism industry is underutilized due to population pressures combined with environmental degradation, poverty, and endangered cultural and natural sites. Furthermore, modernization has undermined the essence of cultural values, and indigenous practices are eroded by globalization. Besides, the country experienced a weak capacity in fostering tourism development at the national and regional level and poor tourism industry infrastructure.

Furthermore, World Heritage Convention (1972) highlights the international legal instrument that plays a pivotal role in the conservation of heritages

which underlined the significance of the local community in the management of heritages (Rössler, 2012). The authors argued that the outstanding universal value of World Heritage sites is based on local values, local experiences, and, most importantly, local conservation efforts. Hence, World Heritage is a success story of local people and communities who make this global heritage possible. However, this approach is far from being implemented in almost all world heritage sites in Ethiopia.

This article focused on the Lower Omo Valley World Heritage site, one of the three world heritage sites (Tiya and Konso Cultural Landscape) in Ethiopia's Southern Nation Nationality and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS). Despite its importance, it is one of the neglected sites in terms of development as a tourist destination. There have been no significant tourist development activities for three decades since the site's inscription as a world heritage site. The tourism resources of the area were not changed into usable products through developing tourist attractions in terms of developing infrastructures for better access, accommodation and promotion of the site. Consequently, the community in and around the site has not reaped the anticipated benefits of the site's development as a tourist destination. Therefore, this study explores the tourism benefits and development situations in the Lower Omo Valley world heritage site.

1.3. Study Area and Objective of the Research

1.3.1. Socio-cultural situations in the area

According to the 2007 Population and Housing Census in Ethiopia, the South Omo Zone had a total population of 577,678 and was projected to be 706,853 in 2016. The community that lives in the world heritage site of the area is predominantly Nyangatom. They are among the sixteen ethnic groups of the South Omo Zone. Similarly, some Murile and Kewegu inhabitants are found in the area. According to the 2007 census, the total population of the Nyangatom *Woreda* was 17,632. However, based on the CSA projection in 2016, the Nyangatom *Woreda* people reached 20,617 (CSA, 2010; 2014).

According to Gebre (2016) and oral traditions, the *Nyangatom*, the Topose, and the Turkan migrated from a place called Karamajong in Uganda 200

years ago to the Kibish area of Ethiopia due to natural disasters. From Kibish, they expanded to the Omo River valley. Currently, they settle between the Omo River in the East and the Kibish River in the west. The Ethiopian Murile lived in Kottien between Kenya and Sudan, and later they migrated to their present settlement in Ethiopia. According to elders, the Kewegu in Nyangatom *Woreda* traces their origin to Biraile, Ari in Mago, and Bacha in Sala-Mago.

The Nyangatom groups rely on pastoralism, livelihoods, and some are engaged in farming. Those who do not have that much livestock are settled along the western bank of the Omo River and the Kibish River and cultivate crops like sorghum, maize, haricot bean and tobacco using flood retreat and small-scale irrigation methods. In Addition, fishing is their secondary activity along the rivers using traditional fishing methods. Cattle, goats, sheep, and donkeys are major components of livestock production (Awoke, 2007). Those who have cattle have herders' huts made from woven twigs in temporary herding camps, which can be packed up quickly. They settle fairly densely during the rainy season based on their clan. At this time, clan issues and social activities like weddings are conducted.

The Murile keep small livestock and grow sorghum, maize, and beans. They subsidize their livelihoods by hunting and collecting honey from the forest. According to the result from Kewegu informants, they derive their livelihoods from apiculture and wild honey collection, cultivation along river banks and flat plains, and fishing and hunting. Sorghum is their principal crop. In Addition, they produce beans, cowpeas, maize, and tobacco.

1.3.2. The Lower Omo Valley Site

The following map illustrates the Lower Omo Valley Site:

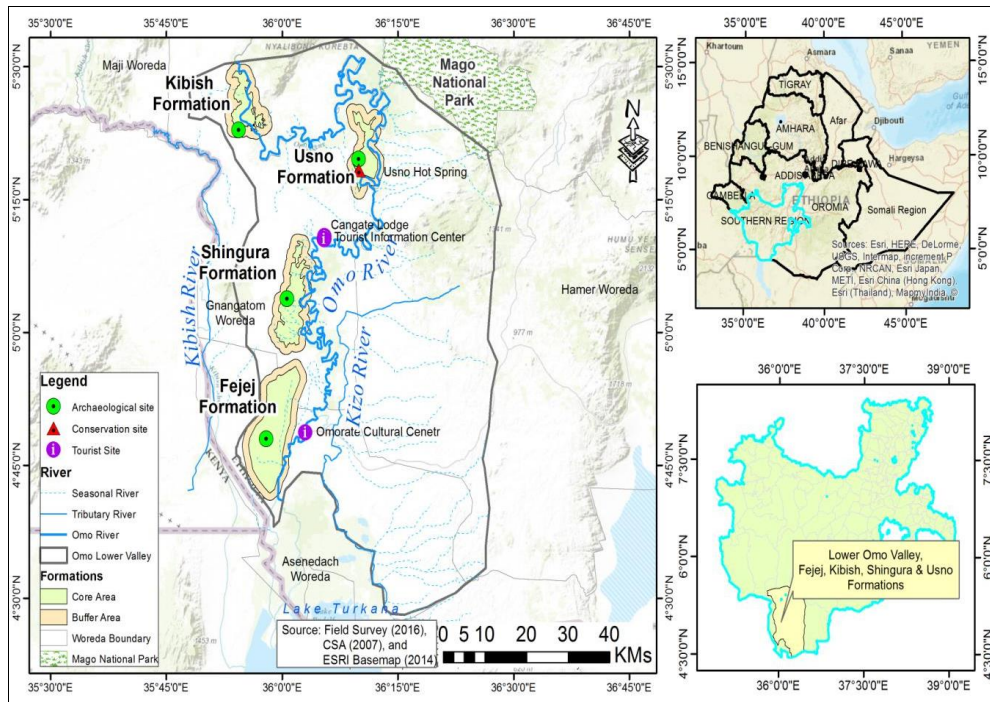


Figure 1. Study Site, the Lower Omo Valley

The first known European discovery of the Omo Valley was made in April 1888 by Count Samuel Teleki and Ludwig Ritter von Holnell, who discovered Lake Turkana. According to French scientists, the scientific investigation was done in 1896 and 1902, marked by Mursi formation of 4-4.5 million and Shingura formation of 3.5–3 million, respectively. However, Camille Arambourg of Mission scientifique de l'Omo's conducted major research in 1933. The French continued to undertake the research in the 1930s. The discovery from 1967 to 1976 contributed 50,000 fossils, four hominids, and stone tools dated 2.4 million (Detrich, 1983; Turton, 1981).

Louise Leakey sent his assistant Heselon Mukirion for a sampling expedition for three weeks during World War II. Then in 1959, Clark Howell, an American anthropologist, conducted a limited survey of the area. The interest in Omo was revived in 1966, coinciding with Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Kenya, where he met Leakey. The Emperor invited Leakey to conduct scientific investigations in Ethiopia in the discussion. The Omo expedition was begun in 1966 by Howell and Leakey. Then, French and American zones were established in Lower Omo and continued

until 1974 (Feibel *et al.*, 1989; Boisserie *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, Flegel *et al.* (2008) explained the discovery of the Kibish formation in 1967.

The discovery of many fossils at the site, especially *Homo gracilis*, has been fundamental to human evolution. Bobe (2011) describes the Omo-Turkana Basin of Kenya and Ethiopia as one of the best records of vertebrate evolution in the world. This discovery includes findings in the Mursi, Usno and Shungura formations. A study by Delagnes *et al.*, 2011 demonstrates the richness of the Shungura formation in geology, palaeoanthropology, and archaeological heritage.

Due to its outstanding discoveries, UNESCO inscribed the site as a world heritage in 1980. The site was inscribed as a world heritage site by its fulfilment that shows human evolution and cultural technology in pre-historic times. There are active research groups from France and the USA doing archaeological, paleontological and geological studies at the world heritage site. For instance, in 2006, 65 sites were found in a survey conducted (Boisserie *et al.*, 2008).

1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following four questions are formulated to be research questions of the study:

- What is the present situation of the Lower Omo Valley world heritage site?
- Are the realities in the Lower Omo Valley world heritage site in line with international tourism promotion standards?
- Are there sufficient infrastructures to accommodate tourist flow?
- Are the local people beneficiaries of the income generated from the tourism sector?

Research hypothesis: the above research questions are intended to be addressed by stating that "tourism development can have socio-cultural benefits for residents of the resource area." Economists have the perception that tourism can lead to economic development in the same way as human and physical capital and exports can bring. In the same manner, this study attempts to assess how far the inhabitants of the Lower Omo Valley world

heritage site are beneficiaries from the income tapped from the tourism sector since the site has been registered as a world heritage site over the last forty years.

1.5. Reviews: Theoretical and Conceptual

To substantiate the sources that could strengthen the finding of this study, the researchers reviewed appropriate sources, both from empirical and theoretical parts. Accordingly, the following sections elaborate on tourism development based on Community-Driven Development Approach, empirical evidence and theoretical framework.

Community Driven Development (CDD) Approach

Community-Driven Development Approach (CDDA) has become indispensable in expounding tourism development around World Heritage Sites. As per the underlying assumptions of CDDA, local community or community groups should be empowered to gain direct control over resources, decisions, and management of the available assets. A participatory development process empowers the local people by budding their skills, knowledge, and the confidence to control, manage and decide on their assets. CBT also advocates for local community potential and directs these potentials towards tourism development in the designated community. As an approach, CBT focus on enhancing increasing community cooperation and participation by assigning roles and responsibilities for various section of the community: youth, educated, uneducated, elderly, women, indigenous people, marginalized group and the like.

Particularly in developing countries, such as Ethiopia, with large heritage sites, empirical evidence shows that Community Based Tourism (CBT) created a different approach to traditional mass tourism. It gives rise to the identification and creation of new tourist attraction sites at different destinations in a community. The CBT approach was cherished because it permits the generation of wealth for the communities and creates job opportunities. Therefore, CBT provides for the local community complementary to the traditional activities of the community livelihoods, which are primarily based on agriculture, livestock farming, and fishing in developing countries (Tomás *et al.*, 2011).

Therefore, a community-driven development approach is quite relevant in developing and managing the tourism practices around World Heritage Sites at Lower Omo Paleontological Site, SNNPRS, Ethiopia. As the study explores tourism developments in the site and its community benefits, the community-based tourism development approach offers a perspective to frame local community involvement, benefits, decision-making, and the management of tourism activities by the local community.

For centuries, tourist attractions, sites, and destinations have attracted visitors from different countries. According to the UNWTO (2015), a growing number of tourism destinations worldwide have created an opportunity for investment in tourism, changing it into a key driver of socio-economic progress by creating jobs and enterprises, export revenues, and infrastructural development. Tourism has been used for socio-economic development (Christie *et al.*, 2013) and national development (World Economic Forum, 2015). It is considered a tool for poverty alleviation in areas with drought and mainly in the rural areas of developing countries (Maza, 2016; The World Bank, 2009). Tourism plays a critical role in creating opportunities for various developments, triggers infrastructural development and generates revenue (Ayeni, 2013).

It is widely acknowledged that Ethiopia possesses remarkable tourism potential in its unique and largely unexplored cultural, historical, archaeological and natural resources. Those resources are the key to attracting visitors and are the basis for building a strong tourism industry. With its deep pre-historic accounts and more than 80 ethnic communities, each with its distinct languages, cultures and traditions, Ethiopia stands out as one of the most diverse countries in Africa (MoCT, 2015).

Ermias and Azmach (2017) discussed that the South Omo zone is rich in cultural tourism resources with a great diversity of natural attractions. Mago National Park, Murrule control hunting area and Omo river, and the deserts of the Omo valley are valuable natural tourism resources. The zone is more suitable for cultural tourism activities, specifically ethnic tourism than nature-based. The diverse cultural practices of the sixteen ethnic communities and their lifestyle and philosophy of life are unique and

mysterious to the outsiders, including most Ethiopians. As a result, it appeals to domestic and international tourists and thus needs to be fittingly commercialised and changed into a special tourism product.

In Addition, the researchers found that all ethnic communities have tourism resources that can attract tourists. However, when it comes to tourist observations and their experiences, only four ethnic communities were visited by more than fifty percent of tourists. These include the Hamar, Mursi, Karo, Dassenech and Ari communities. According to tourist preferences and tour packages, more than 80% of Tour Companies based in Addis Ababa, Hamer and Mursi were the most visited and preferred ethnic communities among the tribes of South Omo. This trend was primarily due to their unique and exotic cultural practices.

The researchers witnessed in their findings that four ethnic communities were not accessible to tourists at all due to four fundamental reasons, including safety and security issues, poor road infrastructure, the great distance from the main towns where there are accommodation facilities and finally, the absence of cultural shows and other tourism products.

Theoretical Framework: Tourism System Theory

Tourism System Theory: tries to explain how tourism and society are brought together. It examines the interdependency, interconnectivity, and responsibility of the different systems in the tourism industry and market (Jakulin, 2017). In line with this, Leiper's model of whole tourism systems in tourism study also conceptualizes tourism as an open system consisting of various interrelated elements: human, organizational, and geographical. And these elements are influenced by the legal, economic and political environment (Lamont, 2008).

Thus, using this theoretical framework, one can reframe tourism practices around World Heritage Sites considering these interrelated concepts. In the Lower Omo Paleontological Site in SNNPRS, Ethiopia, the model can examine the convergence among the local community, the destination, infrastructure, tour operators, tourists, and site resources. This model allows understanding of the potential benefits that the local community can gain from the tourism practices and the development of the market at the site.

Tourism Development Theory: Payne and Phillips (2010: 56–84) refer to the era 1945–1970 as the "golden age" of development theory, while the authors believe it lasted until the 1980s when disenchantment set in (Harrison 1988: 149–183). Irrespective of the exact time frame, though, in the mid-1970s, modernization theory was the dominant perspective, but it was under consistent attack from underdevelopment (world systems) theory, and soon rival advocates were occupying what they saw as radically opposed camps. Ethiopian tourism passes through different developmental circumstances in different country regimes. In some regimes, tourism got moderate attention, and in others, it dimed due to the country's social, political, and economic situation. But now, there are legal frameworks in which attention is given to the sector to develop its potential. Therefore, exploring the tourism resources of the Lower Omo Paleontological Site to develop can be supported by development theory.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was based on both secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data were collected from existing literature (including cultural and tourism policy documents, proclamation no 209/2000 and relevant UNESCO conventions) and primary data from fieldwork. Primary data was generated using a mixed research approach. As Hewson (2006:179) stated mixed approach is: "The combined use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies within the same study to address a single research question." This approach is closely related to the pragmatic paradigm, which rationalizes combined research methods. According to the paradigm, qualitative and quantitative methods are not contradictory but rather complement each other by addressing their respective shortcomings (Hewson 2006). Thus, qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study in a complementary manner.

Field observation, interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and questionnaires were used to generate relevant data. Observation allows the researcher to be closer to the people and observe their behaviour (Bernard 1995). Field observation in this study was conducted from January 23, 2017,

to February 1, 2017, in South Omo Valley to understand the site's situation and resources.

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are the most widely used research methods in social sciences (Bernard 1995; Spradley 1979). Hence, the authors interviewed local community members, researchers, administrators, culture and tourism experts and other concerned bodies. Eight informants were purposefully selected based on their knowledge to understand the opinions, thoughts, and concerns of the societies with other income generation, site management, indigenous knowledge and craftsmanship, and socio-economic situations of the area.

Focus group discussion (FGD) is an important method for generating data on issues best clarified from the group's perspective (Morgan 1997). Two focus group discussions with 12 participants of both genders were conducted to understand group views about the research issues. Since quantitative data were used as complementary to the qualitative data, a sample of 30 respondents was selected, and questionnaires were administered to understand the basic socio-economic situations of the site and the needs of the local community. As the community predominantly depends on pastoral livelihoods, they move from place to place, searching for pastures and water. Hence, accidental sampling was the most convenient method to get community members.

Data analysis is a systematic examination of issues and relationships (Spradley 1979). Data from the surveys were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel Software. The relationships between variables were analysed using descriptive statistical methods of analysis. Qualitative data analysis starts with data collection during fieldwork. Coding and categorizing information into topics/themes are part of the analysis (O'Reilly 2009). Theme analysis, which focused on searching for relationships among the domains (Spradley 1979), was used to analyse the relationships among major issues of the research. Therefore, the data was organized and coded based on the study's objectives into sub-themes and eventually developed into major themes.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Existing situations around the world heritage site

Even though the site's remoteness partly contributes to preserving the site for scientific study, still some threats exist in the area. According to the UNESCO Report, erosion, development projects like housing, demarcation of industrial areas, and agriculture affect the site's preservation (UNESCO 2016). The sites are exposed to wind, flood, and occasional trampling by livestock, plantations, and car movements. For instance, during fieldwork, some fossils were exposed to erosion. Furthermore, from field observation, we understand that there is the absence of maps that show core and buffer zones of the site, site administration, tourist interpretation centre, accommodations in and around the site, craft products that show the culture of the area, and the absence of trained guides all have negative implications for management and development of the site for tourism.

Promotion is one of the important activities in developing tourism. The regional state guidebook briefly mentions that the study area is one of the major world heritage sites of the regional state. It is one of the neglected areas promoting the site for visitors. There was no signboard to show that the site is a world heritage site, so those tourists who pass through the area do not recognize Lower Omo Valley as a world heritage site. There were no brochures or audio-visual materials that promote the sites and show significant relations with other tourist attractions in the area; for instance, the Omo National Park (established 1966), Murile controlled hunting areas, an important bird watching site at Chew Bahir, and the Omo and Kibish rivers.

3.1.2. Existing tourist services

The Lower Omo Valley could be accessed from Addis Ababa, Hawassa, the regional capital and Jinka, the zone capital. The new asphalt road could easily access Kangaten, the *woreda* capital. However, the roads from Kangaten to some sites were sloppy. In Addition, the locations of some sites were difficult to access due to vegetation and rivers. Moreover, there was no place to stay in the area. Only one better local hotel in Kangaten served food

and drink, and had four bedrooms. There was no developed tourist facility in the area. According to informants, in most cases, to visit the Nyangatom villages, visitors had to make a contract with local tour guides, and the tour guides facilitated the visit; sometimes, they organized traditional music and dance as part of the tour package to a village. Depending on the agreement, they usually charge from 300 to 500 birr per person. Tourists can also buy souvenirs from individuals since there is no souvenir shop. There is no payment to the tourism office as a source of income, and there are no regulations concerning generating income from tourism services. This situation was noted to be a major strategic area for the intervention of regional and local government structures toward the site's overall development.

3.1.3. Tourist arrivals

Experts of the regional state tourism promotion explained that tourism grew in the Southern People's Regional State. The same source also shows that South Omo Zone is one of the zones that boast high visitor numbers and income that increased by 134.3% and 243.3%, respectively, between 2011/12 to 2015/16.

Table 1. Tourist arrivals in South Omo Zone

No	Fiscal year	Ethiopian	Foreign	Total	Income in Birr
1	2011/2	18597	19591	38188	10453117
2	2012/3	16800	16300	33100	14610514
3	2013/4	23744	18788	42532	20042349
4	2014/5	48074	19169	67243	29908570
5	2015/6	37112	14081	51193	25429741

Source: South Omo Zone Culture, Tourism, and Communication Office, 2016

The above figures ascertained that tourism has been increasingly important over the five years between 2011/2 and 2015/6, except for some decline in 2015/16 due to political instability and security threats. The revenue also increased in parallel with the increment of tourist arrival in the zone. According to the zone culture and tourism expert, tourism is seasonal. The peak seasons were reported as August and from December to March.

Although there is no statistical data that show annual visitors in the study area, the head of the Culture, Tourism and Communication Office explained that about 20 groups or about 200 visitors might visit the *Woreda*, mainly the Nyangatom villages per year. Informants argue that the major factor for the small number of tourist flow was the lack of accommodations, infrastructure, and promotions. However, the site is unique in diverse paleontological and archaeological findings that show human and other animals' evolution and the technology of tool making.

Overall, community benefits from sites are not at their expected. Few community members get seasonal job opportunities as site guides for tourists and researchers during low seasonal tourist flow in the Nyangatom villages. However, some community members complain about the insufficient attention given by the regional and federal governments to develop tourism in the sites and enhance the community benefit.

3.1.4. Tourism resources

One of the key challenges for tourism development in the area was the failure to identify the availability of tourism resources at each site. Tourism resource mapping and portfolio development is a missing practice in and around the heritage sites. Thus, a question was posed to respondents to identify the tourism resource elements in the Lower Omo Valley in connection with the level of the importance of the available tourism resources for local development (The 2).

Table 2. Importance of Tourism Resources in the Lower Omo Valley

	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Tourism resources as considered important by the respondents	Souvenir Shops	10	33.3
	Cultural Shows	2	6.7
	Wood Work	4	13.3
	Cultural Resources	1	3.3
	Hide Work	9	30.0
	Metal Work	2	6.7
	Translation and Guiding Services	2	6.7
Total		30	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2017

The results from respondents confirmed the prevalence of the greater potential of cultural resources over natural elements in the study heritage site. Hence, cultural tourism was presented as amenable to the planned tourism project among residents. In terms of their level of importance, most respondents (33.3%) stated tourism activities connected to souvenir shops as essential to the area. Of the respondents, 10 (33.3%) mentioned cultural shows and wood goods as resources in the area for tourism business, followed by souvenir shops. Hide work was rated by 30% of the respondents in the first place next to souvenir shops. The respondents' interest in hide-work signified the presence of supplies in the Lower Omo Valley. Hence, the authors that the development, management, and financing of tourism resources connected to hide work would seem more appropriate in enhancing the role of tourism in local development.

The key informants identified resources for the local community's livelihoods and income generation. They identified livestock products, hide work, woodwork, metalwork, their rich culture, and paleontological and archaeological sites as resources for tourism development. Usno, Kibish, and Shungura sites are at a maximum of 40 km from Kangaten town. These sites are rich in fossils and stone tools. Fejej, Murise, and Konso sites which could be potential tourist attractions, are also around the heritage sites. Thus, a tourist interested in paleontological and archaeological heritage can visit many sites in and around the Lower Omo Valley World heritage sites. But most of these sites are not accessible by tourists due to a lack of infrastructure development and a low level of promotional activities.

SNNPRS, in general, and South Omo Zone, in particular, is the culturally diversified area where different societies and cultures exist. This diversity attracts a considerable number of tourists to the area. Hamer, Dassenetch, and Karo are the neighbours of the Nyangatom that tourists highly visit. The Nyangatom is rich in culture but not prompted for tourists. The Nyangatom has ethnographic objects made from wood, metal, hide, and beads that tourists could use as a souvenir.

Villages and settlements of the Nyangatom are some tourist attractions in the area. There are different markets places in and around the sites that

could be used for tourist attractions. Tourists visit Kangaten, Turme, Dimeka, and Key Afer. However, some promotional works are mandatory.

In Addition, based on the observation, there are natural resources on the site. The Omo and Kibish Rivers are around the sites. These rivers are used as a water source for fish and navigation. In Addition, there is hot spring water 4 km from the Usno site or 24 km from Kangaten town. But it has to be developed for tourists as an attraction. Furthermore, the area has a very nice landscape that includes chains of mountains and the Omo Riverbank. Besides, Omo National Park is around the site, which could be a source to attract tourists and extend their trip to the world heritage site.

3.1.5. Local Communities' awareness regarding tourism business operation

This sub-section is devoted to the descriptive portrayal of the results of the tourism business in Lower Omo Valley. It focuses on the knowledge of respondents about tourism, the willingness of the target group to take part in the tourism operation, training needs, spheres or sub-chains involved, and the overall planning for undertaking tourism operations around the world tourism heritage sites Lower Omo Valley.

The assessment was made to understand whether the respondents knew about tourism activity in the area. The majority (73.3%) of the respondents confirmed their prior know-how about tourism activities and operations in the area. These categories of the respondents showed that they get acquainted with tourism as several tourists travel to Hammer and Mursi areas. On the other hand, about 26.7% of the respondents mentioned not knowing about tourism activity. The overall levels of awareness of the respondents about tourism activities in their areas entail that it will require some effort to create awareness for some target groups while channelling most of them with minimal effort in the activity.

Moreover, respondents mentioned that tourists come to the area to visit heritages and Hammer and Mursi cultures. The results showed that the knowledge of tourism activities in their vicinity was there but not well organized in a more beneficial manner for the local community. Awareness about the various tourism activities and operations has become an agenda for stakeholders pulling resources to operate tourism businesses.

Almost all the survey respondents had expressed their willingness to engage in tourism operations by delivering services and goods. The views of the target groups corroborated their aspirations for taking part in local development to benefit themselves, the community and the country through tapping of tourism resources.

i. Experiences and skills required to engage the local people in tourism activity: Tourism development goes hand in hand with the development of skills and knowledge. The experiences and skills in tourism activity have paramount importance to enjoying the tourism industry. Regarding the experiences and skills required to engage local people in tourism activities, most respondents mentioned developing their local knowledge of hiding and woodworks. Thus, there is a need to design training that focuses on capitalizing on how best to address the skills for making hide products, decorations, woodworks, and handicrafts, as the local community members mentioned.

ii. Tourism activities started by the local communities: Respondents mentioned various types of tourism activities as their respective areas of preference. The finding of the study showed that most of the respondents (80%) are interested in engaging in handicrafts business [made from woods and hides] activity followed by cultural food (10%). Few (7%) respondents want to engage as a travel agent, and (3%) are interested in another type of business.

The preferences of local youths and adults on preparation and sale of handicrafts, cultural food and travel agent appeared sounding in the tourism business at Lower Omo Valley.

Table 3. Types of Tourism Sub-chains to Engage in by the Locals in the Omo Valley

	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Types of tourism sub-chains preferred by respondents	Travel Agent	2	6.7
	Handicrafts	24	80.0
	Cultural Food	3	10.0
	Preparations		
	Other	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2017

The presented data shows that the respondents have prioritized the making and selling handicrafts [hides, decorations, and woods work] in tourism activities, followed by cultural food. We observe the essence of good service from people's skills and a quality workforce equipped with the necessary service knowledge and commitment. It is also seen as an integral part of successful economic development.

As tourism is a labour-intensive industry, possession and continuous accumulation of relevant skills and knowledge are essential in creating human capital, a critical resource for developing a competitive, sustainable tourism destination. Therefore, as new entrants, the assessment participants need training. Through training and capacitating the skills of the local people in engaging in the tourism activity, tourism products and services meet tourist satisfaction. Tourism could emerge as one livelihood activity for many local people in the heritage sites at Lower Omo Valley.

iii. Markets for selling tourism products and services: Identifying the target market for supplying local tourism products and services has remained a major factor in identifying and dealing with it. The ranges of the target markets are from international to local, and it also tries to consider the demands of international and local tourists. The figure below presents the survey respondents' opinions on which markets and types of tourists to target under conditions when they run the tourism business.

The findings of the study indicated that nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) would like to target all the markets for international, local and domestic tourists and markets for their tourism supplies in the form of goods and services, while 3% want to target international tourists and 3.3% domestic tourists only. Indeed, it is important to contemplate which of these targeted markets should be developed for local youths' and adults' tourism products and services.

Informants stated that the challenges associated with a lack of marketing strategy. The majority do not seem to own the required knowledge in marketing and fixing the prices of tourism products, let alone at international levels. It becomes requisite to create awareness and provide massive training to different community segments to bring them to the

expected level in tourism goods and services supplies and chains of development around the site. When asked about their market plan and price, only a few mentioned buying and re-selling cultural resources/souvenirs to tourists. They added that it is possible to buy cultural equipment and souvenirs at lower prices to re-sell. However, tourism markets remain unreliable.

From these ongoing arguments, it can be seen that there is a need for local people to provide the necessary skills on how to produce, collect and process local cultural and natural resources into finalized tourism products and services. Furthermore, the absence of appropriate marketing plans and strategies from the locals' side needed to add value to existing tourism resources by considering the interests of tourists than by the simple purchasing and re-selling of tourism products and services.

3.1.6. Tourism business for employment opportunities and livelihood diversification

It has been noted that limited skills and the absence of training contributed to the failure to exploit the opportunity. They noted that if training is provided, most youths and adults could exploit the tourism resources and engage in the tourism business as the sector can absorb many unemployed people. The figure below demonstrates the mechanisms chosen by the respondents on how to engage in the tourism business.

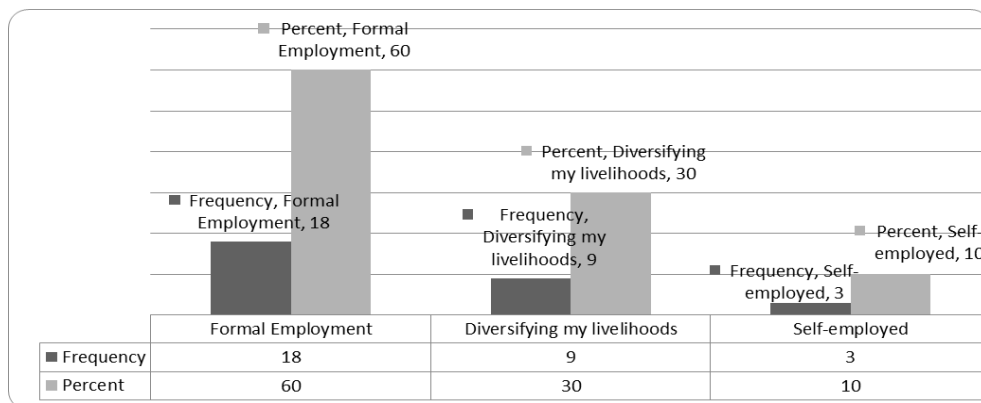


Figure 2. Forms of employment in tourism business operation at the site

Source: Field survey, 2017

The local people opted to engage in tourism activities, ranging from formal and contractual employment (temporary or permanent) to engagement through self-employment. When asked how they would want to be engaged in tourism business activities, the respondents (60%) wanted to engage through formal and permanent employment in a tourism business, 30% as a supplement to their income and the remaining 10% as self-employed. Thus, tourism could be regarded as the most important sector for diversifying the tourism business and livelihoods of the community.

The authors observed that the local community expressed how tourism activities and businesses could support their livelihoods and improve their living conditions. Most of the residents (83.3%) around the Heritage Site have confirmed that income generated through tourism activities could support their daily lives and even develop some assets. Tourism business activities could minimize their unemployment challenges as the jobs could help diversify employment options for local respondents. Such benefits of tourism appear to be the most critical problem that needs to be addressed.

Moreover, participants asked how tourism activity contributes to improving their livelihoods; some participants explained that the income from tourism businesses would enable them to cover various expenses, including food, home utensils, and clothing. Through the income from tourism, respondents could engage in other forms of local investment. Others also mentioned that

the income from the activity would help as revenue for the *Woreda* tourism and cultural office income that can act as a spur to local economic development.

3.2. Discussions

3.2.1. Tourism potential of the study area

The study site remained to be culturally diversified area where different societies and cultures exist. The area is rich in fossils and stone tools. It is especially that the site is unique in diverse paleontological and archaeological findings that show human and other animals' evolution and the technology of tool making. Heritage depicts a destination's historic culture and will draw tourists to cities (Alexandrakis & Manasakis, 2019). Hence, there is a prevalence of the greater potential of cultural resources over natural elements in the study heritage site. This study is supported by Palazzo et al. (2022), which revealed that tourism could help achieve long-term economic growth by safeguarding the environment, preserving natural resources, creating jobs, increasing cultural diversity, and recognizing cultural heritage values.

Livestock products, hide work, woodwork, metalwork, and the rich culture of the local community are resources to be used in tourism development in the area. This finding is supported by Kim et al. (2018) findings that stated tourists prefer to visit sites viewed as more authentic; tourism sites' authenticity is believed to have a favourable impact on their economic values. Like any community, the Nyangatom has ethnographic objects made from wood, metal, hide and beads that tourists could use. The Nyangatom is bordered by Hamar, Dassenetch, and Karo, popular tourist destinations. Tourist attractions in the area include Nyangatom villages and settlements. Tourists frequently visited Kangaten, Turme, Dimeka, and Key Afer villages. Hence, cultural tourism was presented as amenable to any tourism development among residents. According to Hernández-Rojas et al. (2021) and Noonan & Rizzo (2017), tourism and culture are inextricably linked somehow. However, the current study found that the development, management, and financing of tourism resources would seem more appropriate for enhancing the role of tourism in local development.

In Addition, there are natural resources for tourism development in and around the study site. The Omo and Kibish Rivers are found around the sites. These rivers are used as a water source, fish and for navigation. The area has a very nice landscape that includes mountains and the Omo riverbank chains. Besides, Omo National Park is around the site, which could be a source to attract tourists and extend their trip to the world heritage site. The study by Carvache-Franco *et al.* (2022) stated that awareness of traditional cultures in protected areas is an important tourist destination because of their almost pristine ecosystems and distinctive natural features.

3.2.2. Communities' awareness of Tourism Business

As tourism is a labour-intensive industry, possession and continuous accumulation of relevant skills and knowledge are essential in creating human capital, a critical resource for developing a competitive, sustainable tourism destination (Ravikumar *et al.*, 2022; Topler, 2022). Through training and capacitating the skills of the local people interested in engaging in the tourism activity, the necessary tourism products and services can be produced so that tourists are interested in and meet their satisfaction whenever it keeps the quality of the products and services. The experiences and skills in tourism activity are important to enjoying the tourism industry (Ravikumar *et al.*, 2022).

Consequently, this study revealed that the majority of the respondents have prior know-how about tourism activities and operations. These categories of the respondents showed that they get acquainted with tourism as several tourists travel to Hammer and Mursi areas. The overall levels of awareness of the respondents about tourism activities in their respective localities entail that it will require some effort to create awareness for some target groups while channelling most of them with minimal effort in the activity (Buric *et al.*, 2022). Earlier, the knowledge of tourism activities in their vicinity was there but not well organized in a more beneficial manner for the local community. However, long-term tourist development is only achievable with the help of the local community (Ravikumar *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, awareness about tourism activities and operations has become an agenda for stakeholders to pull resources to operate tourism businesses.

Even though there is an awareness drawback to the local people to tourism development, almost all the survey respondents had expressed their willingness to engage in tourism operations by delivering services and goods. Local community members were approached to express how tourism activities and businesses could support their livelihoods and improve their living conditions. According to Prasad's (2022) research, citizens are the primary stakeholders in tourist development, and their support is critical to the tourism industry's long-term viability. Besides, the views of the target groups of the current study corroborated their aspirations for taking part in local development to benefit themselves, the community and the country through tapping of tourism resources. The local people opted to engage in tourism activities, ranging from formal and contractual employment (temporary or permanent) to engagement through self-employment.

Thus, there is a need to design training that focuses on and capitalizing on how best to address the skills for making hide products, decorations, woodworks, and handicrafts, as the local community members mentioned. The community members could engage in various forms of tourism activities. The government and non-government actors need to put in place structures and assistance at institutional levels. It has been noted that limited skills and the absence of training contributed to the failure to exploit the opportunity.

3.2.3. Predicaments

The study heritage site is a source for scientific study. Thus, a tourist interested in paleontological and archaeological heritage can visit many sites in and around the heritage sites. But most of these sites are not accessible by tourists due to a lack of infrastructure development and a low level of promotional activities. Promotion is one of the most important activities in developing tourism. Garay (2019) stated that media is the main factor in developing good tourist destination images. This view is further confirmed by Zhang et al. (2014) and Chen & Phou (2013), who argue that destination image is critical in developing destination brands and directly impacts destination personality. However, no brochures or audio-visual materials promoted the sites and showed significant relations with other tourist attractions in the area. One of the key challenges for tourism development in

the area was the failure to identify the availability of tourism resources in their types with their respective sites. The study by Kah et al. (2022) revealed that the availability of travel information such as product and service quality and the price is critical, but it remains a barrier for marketers due to the multi-dimensional nature of traveller characteristics.

However, this study uncovers there are hardly available maps and tour guides that depicts detailed tourism resources and services, administration, and accommodations in and around the sites. Tourism resource mapping and portfolio development is a missing practice and commonly unknown even among the local people who live in and around the heritage sites. There was no developed tourist facility in the area.

The major factor for the small number of tourists who visited the site was the lack of accommodations and infrastructure to access the sites and site promotion. Moreover, the locations of some sites are difficult to access due to vegetation and rivers. The study observed that visitors make a contract with local tour guides, and the tour guides facilitate the visits; sometimes, they organize traditional music and dance as part of the tour package to a village. Tourists can also buy souvenirs from individuals since there is no souvenir shop. No statistical data centre in the area shows the annual visitors flow to the heritage site. In Addition, there is no payment to the tourism office as a source of income, and there are no regulations concerning generating income from tourism services. This situation needs regional and local government intervention for the site's overall development.

Further, the study area is threatened by natural and human-induced factors. Erosion due to rain, wind, flood, soil compactions by livestock and vehicles and development projects, and agriculture expansions are revealed as threats to preservation sites. However, the study by Alexandrakis & Manasakis (2019) revealed that through the conservation and promotion of heritage sites and protection from climate change and natural disasters, cultural heritage sites would provide a range of market and non-market advantages to society. Further, the Dastgerdi and Sargolini (2019) study shows that safeguarding cultural heritage and establishing climate-resilience strategies

for landscape sustainability necessitates early consideration of how heritage is understood as a useful resource and good territory attribute.

Identifying the target market for supplying local tourism products and services has remained a major factor in identifying and dealing with it (Kah et al., 2022). The ranges of the target markets are from international to local, and it also tries to consider the demands of international and local tourists. To target all the markets for international, local and domestic tourists and markets for their tourism supplies in goods and services. Indeed, it is important to contemplate which of these targeted markets should be developed for local youths' and adults' tourism products and services. This study coincided with Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) findings that stated identify certain tourist groups and supply them with customized tourist packages, thereby contributing to the growth of locations through more effective tourism policies.

Informants have indeed stated the challenges associated with a lack of marketing strategy. Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) reported that market segmentation divides people into subgroups based on their requirements and preferences. Further, they stated that market segmentation has evolved into the primary instrument for efficiently distributing resources, offering numerous particular tactics. Therefore, creating awareness and providing massive training to different community segments to bring them to the expected level in tourism goods and services supplies and chains of development around the site is required from concerning stakeholders.

These limits had deleterious implications for the management and development of the site for tourism. Community benefits from tourism in the sites are not at the expected level of the local community. This result coincided with the Zhao et al. (2022) findings that reported tourists could impact communities in meaningful, positive, and long-term ways; yet, tourism growth may not be seen as meaningful or useful to locals without empowering communities and citizens. Few local community members get seasonal job opportunities with site researchers and guides during the low seasonal tourist flow, mainly visiting the Nyangatom villages. However, most local community members complain about the insufficient attention

given by the regional and federal governments to develop tourism in the sites and enhance the community benefit.

4. Conclusions

It has been widely recognized that Ethiopia is endowed with socio-cultural, natural, historical, archaeological, paleo-anthropological and other tourism potentials. The possession and registration of the World Heritage Site confirm the existence of these potential tourism resources at Lower Omo Valley. The cultural and paleo-anthropological tourism resource available in the Lower Omo Valley constitutes an important area of pursuit for such a development. Nonetheless, the research findings of this article corroborate the existence of meagre efforts to tap the prevailing potential resources and convert them into the more saleable form of tourism commodities and services. The conversion of these resources into goods and services would create opportunities to diversify local livelihoods and generate income for the community members and the government through the tourism value chain.

Although significant tourism potential prevailed, it needs addressing challenges to optimize tourism resources and convince tourists about the uniqueness of tourism resources in a specific area. The empirical field survey around the Lower Omo valley world heritage site revealed constraints that may obstruct the progress of the tourism industry. The major constraints raised by respondents include an absence of appropriate knowledge and skills, lack of transportation, shortages of finance, limited operational materials and facilities, limited accommodation for tourists and the absence of support from the *Woreda* and other stakeholders. From this, it can be concluded that to develop tourism resources in the area, and it should be worth mentioning to improve the constraints mentioned above, particularly the expansion of tourism infrastructure and accommodation.

The community members could engage in various forms of tourism activities. About the contribution of tourism businesses in easing unemployment, respondents are interested in engaging in the tourism sector in the area. The government and non-government actors need to put in place structures and assistance. There is a need for local people to provide the

necessary skills to produce, collect and process local cultural and natural resources into finalized tourism products and services. Furthermore, the absence of sound marketing plans and strategies from the locals' side would call for a need to add value to existing tourism resources by considering the interests of tourists than by the simple purchasing and re-selling of tourism products and services. Thus, tourism could be regarded as the most important sector for diversifying the tourism business and livelihoods of the community. Tourism business activities could minimize their unemployment challenges as the jobs could help diversify employment options for local respondents. Such benefits of tourism appear to be the most critical problem that needs to be addressed.

There are specific local products like '*berkuta*' (headrest and set made from wood) and necklaces, female skirts made from goat skins and decorated with beads, shells and other materials. Handcraft production is becoming a key sub-chain in the tourism industry which is pro-poor in developing countries. There is also a cultural show team at Kangaton who can perform for tourists. The team needs some musical instruments, training, and cultural clothes to present their shows to tourists with the facilitation of the local Culture and Tourism Office. They can also perform for local people during the low tourist season. In Addition, it is important to organize the youth as local tour guides and train them. Currently, those who work as local tour guides know the culture of the Nyangatom but have little knowledge about the world heritage sites in the area. If these guides get proper training, it could facilitate the tourists' visit to the site and enhance tourist satisfaction and locals' income. Also, there is no typical restaurant around the site. Women in the locality expressed their interest in providing food and beverage services. Food could serve to tourists and researchers at the site. Agricultural product supply could be one area of community participation.

5. Implications

This study about the Lower Omo Valley Paleontological and Paleoenvironmental site and its potential for tourism development has enabled us to see the potential of the site and the current state of the site to accommodate tourist flow. The site has an enormous potential, as stated

above, in terms of socio-cultural, natural, environmental, archaeological and paleontological resources. It is a very ideal setting to possess such diverse types of attractions within a limited geographical scope. The fact that the site is registered as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO has promoted the site. Both the federal and Regional governments together with the private sector and the local inhabitants have to devise a destination development plan and implement it. The destination development example that will be set in the Lower Omo Valley for other similar World Heritage Sites and Tourist destinations in Ethiopia.

These days, the state of the art in promoting tourism in a given area or region is making the local inhabitants beneficiary from the outputs. Lower Omo Valley has now a very good asphalted road up to the international standard, which will facilitate easy connections with other tourist destinations in the Southern parts of Ethiopia. Besides, the government of Ethiopia has recently made tourism as one the five major pillars for fast economic development. Tourism centred economic policy, will perhaps, lead to encouragement and growth for local tour guides, travel agents, tour operators, the handcraft industry, and those who are engaged in cultural food and beverages preparation and sales. When the local people are part of the benefit package, they will be more concerned and responsible for their heritages.

Such development of tourism business at local sites necessitates training of key stockholders as capacity building and awareness creation for the general public. Furthermore, market networking within the tourism sector and promotion of the resources in and around the site would have positive implications on the site's potential utilization. In general, capacity building trainings, market networking, and promotion efforts would have significant implications on the overall tourism development endeavours in and around the world heritage site.

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