

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

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### **Abstract**

Ecotourism encompasses two independent issues: the environmental input and the environmental output. The environmental input is the primary attractions which are potentials: not the level of service or facilities provided as part of a product package, but the geographical factor that leads the tourist to a particular destination. The environmental output is the overall net global cost or benefit of the tour operation to the natural environment. Sheko District harbors much ecotourism potential sites which can attract tourists, assessing the potential attractions and challenges are mandatory for future ecotourism development and supporting sustainable use of natural resource. The study aimed at identifying potentials and challenges of ecotourism development in the area. The data was collected by semi-structured interview, questionnaires and fully fledged field site observation. Some data were also accessed from written documents. The data were analyzed by SPSS. The main identified natural attractions potentials of the grassroots destinations are natural forests, caves, waterfalls, natural hot springs (spa) and natural bridges. The respondents mentioned that deforestation was recorded as one of the major challenges as a result from a rapid population growth. Natural attraction sites in the district were facing many challenges because ecotourism activities were not sustainable. The local community's subsistent way of life, inappropriate investment activities were an increasing threat to biological diversity including ecotourism attraction sites in the area. Ecotourism encompasses two independent issues: the environmental input and the environmental output. The environmental input is the primary attractions which are potentials, not the level of service or facilities provided as part of a product package, but the geographical factor that leads the tourist to a particular destination. The environmental output is the overall net global cost or benefit of the tour operation to the natural environment. This is an accounting question, which requires the identification, quantification and summation of all costs and benefits through all potential mechanisms, of which there are many. Ecotourism is no panacea. It is important not to exaggerate the opportunities and benefits it can bring. Careful planning and improved knowledge is needed. Ecotourism and responsible tourism should be part of wider sustainable development strategies, whether at a community or an international level.

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