

# **State of Conservation Report on Simien Mountains National Park, World Natural Heritage Site (Ethiopia)**



**Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA)  
February, 2014  
Addis Ababa**

## NOTE

This report focuses on the current status of the World Natural Heritage Property, the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP), and thus, it may not thoroughly explain all of the achievements and commitments that have been recorded throughout the implementation phases of the corrective measures identified earlier. And it used to highlight and share notes about what is committed and achieved to secure the better future of this world heritage property

The document is believed to summarize the recent developments made on the basis of UNESCO-WHC decisions **30 Com 7A.9** (Vilnius, 2006), **COM 31 WHC-07/31 COM/24** (Christchurch, 2007), **32 COM 7A.9** (Quebec City, 2008), **33 COM 7A.9** (Seville, 2009), **34 COM 7A.9** (Brazil, 2010), **35 COM 7A.9** (UNESCO, 2011), **36 COM 7A.9** (Russia, 2012), **37 COM 7A.11** (Phnom Penh, 2013) and IUCN and UNESCO joint monitoring mission report, 2006.

Therefore, the World Heritage Committee at its 38<sup>th</sup> session will be able to look at the progresses made so far towards implementing the corrective measures and the updated information about SMNP as well as the existing endeavors of all partners towards addressing the current challenges associated with settlement reduction and thereby creating favorable environment for removing the property from the list of World Heritage in Danger.

***Report on the State of Conservation of the Simien Mountains  
National Park and Progress in the Implementation of Corrective  
Measures***

**Name of World Heritage Property:** Simien Mountains National Park

**State Party:** Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority)

**Identification Number:** N 9

**A) Response to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 35 Com 7A.9**

**1. Major Activities and Achievements on benchmarks;**

As to be recalled, the World Heritage Committee welcomed the progress we reported during the **32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup>** sessions. Moreover, the committee in its Decision **33 Com 7A.9** has also welcomed and congratulated our action towards addressing the corrective measures identified earlier. Generally, the state party has been taking the following measures:

**1.1 Strategic action plan to significantly reduce Grazing Pressure;**

According to a rapid assessment carried out in October 2005, more than 586 households were found in the park which comprised of about 3,480 people. The total area under cultivation in the park has been estimated at 2,281 ha. With increasing numbers of households, the total number of livestock is likely to increase as well, although the number of animals per household is likely to decrease.

The grazing reduction strategy document which was developed foresees the establishment of a zoning scheme, with different levels of restricted access for community grazing (core zone, limited use zone, and multiple use zones). However, to implement the objectives of the strategy, a coordinated approach amongst different local stakeholders and the mobilization of resources from the international community is required. It has not been able to complete the strategic action plan to reduce grazing pressure due to financial constraints. Moreover, a more intensified animal husbandry would still require technical infrastructure compatible with national park regulations.

In this regard, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) is working in collaboration with the Austrian Government financed Program and the Agriculture offices in the neighboring Woredas to reduce grazing pressure within the property through on-farm fodder production, introduction of zero-grazing (cut-and-carry system) livestock management techniques and introduction of improved livestock breeds. Furthermore, park patrolling has been intensified to restrict livestock grazing in core wildlife areas of the park such as Chenek, Sankaber, Bwahit, Lemalimo, Mesarerya, Silki and Kidus Yared.

### ***1.2 Finalizing the Re-gazettal of the Extended Park Boundaries into National Law***

The national park was officially gazetted by the Negaret Gazeta of 31 October 1969, according to the legal proclamation document for policies and laws of the Ethiopian Government. Based on the constitution and rules of the country for law, the establishment and up-dates of any bills and decisions must perform stakeholders' agreement, and endorsement from the House of Representatives. The re-demarcation was fully participatory, undertaken through the involvement of the representatives of the local community, officials and concerned experts. Furthermore, the process of re-gazetting the property is commenced and the necessary steps and preconditions to legalize the property are accomplished and the document is sent to the Council of Ministers for final approval. In this regard, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) believes that re-gazetting the park including the new extension wildlife areas into national law is necessary to provide adequate legal protection to the property. Thus, the new park boundaries will be re-gazetted by the House of Parliament before the end of the coming June.

### ***1.3 Boundary Modification Dossier Preparation***

The re-gazettement of the realigned park boundary and inclusion of the new park extensions is currently under process. Once the re-gazettement is finalized an important step will be remaining, namely changing the boundaries of the World Heritage site in order to coincide with the newly established park boundaries. Unless the newly aligned boundaries of the park coincide with the World Heritage property, critical parts of the range of the *Walia ibex* and *Ethiopian wolf* would be excluded from the property's inscription under criterion (vii) and (x).

EWCA and UNESCO - WHC joint role has been placed in the preparation of the Boundary Modification Dossier to include the newly aligned boundaries of the park and coincide with the World Heritage property, otherwise critical parts of the range of the *Walia ibex* and *Ethiopian wolf* would be excluded from the property's inscription under criterion (vii) and (x).

In doing so a team composed of International Consultant hired by UNESCO-WHC and two national senior experts from Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) were appointed to work towards the boundary modification file development, under the responsibility of EWCA. The study was carried out using the budget allocated from UNESCO-WHC (30,000 USD). The team has prepared a draft technical report which still needs some more work so as to improve the draft boundary modification file.

As suggested by the World Heritage Committee in its decision **35COM7A.9**, the State Party has prepared the boundary modification dossier for the property to coincide the newly extended boundaries of the park and include with the World Heritage property in order to secure larger areas of suitable habitat for the *Walia ibex* and *Ethiopian wolf*. Once the re-gazettment is completed, the State Party will submit the boundary modification dossier to the World Heritage Committee to request the recognition of the newly gazetted Park by the World Heritage Committee in near future.

### **1.3 Developing Alternative livelihoods Opportunities**

In order to harmonize the existing resource use competition between inhabitants and imperatives of conservation, Alternative Livelihood Development Project was a mechanism designed for turning wellbeing of those who have usually lived on, to the type of job which do not rely on the use of the park resource.

The alternative livelihood promotion intervention activities which were carried out by the Ethiopian Government and the previous Austrian Government Funded project aimed mainly at reducing the pressure on the park resources from human activities has created pull factors in that some of the off-farm trainees after the training and provision of materials have created assets and moved to the nearby towns by leaving their original place in search of better living place.

Generally, the activities that have considerably contributed towards lessening the pressure on the park include:

- Skill development of the youth through vocational training and supporting them in off farm self employments;
- Promotion of backyard farming and agro forestry practices;
- Community based ecotourism services and other livelihood activities. The performance of these on-farm and off-farm activities has also encouraged community based conservation systems and created sense of ownership by the local community.



**Fig 1: Some of the alternative livelihood mechanisms developed in the surrounding areas of the park.**

One of the success factors in the process is that both Federal and Regional States have been fully committed towards addressing the corrective measures identified earlier. The fact that considerable achievements have been recorded and positive actions were taken towards implementations of the corrective measures indicates the effect of collaborative approaches and collective will of all key stakeholders in the process. For example, active participation and direct involvement of the local communities, elders, the respective woreda (district) and kebele (village) administrations and sector offices, park officers, and their hands-on role to decide and establish the new boundary have enabled to achieve the re-demarcation process.

The continued progress with youth off farm and on farm training which have enabled some park residents to establish viable businesses in nearby towns and relocate to these places. However, the number of beneficiaries of the youth vocational training and other activities aimed at providing alternative livelihoods has been affected by limited levels of funding.

The main difficulty in implementing the corrective measures is limitations of funding available for the livelihood improvement program and the grazing reduction strategy. As indicated above, the state party is fully committed to play its own role and contribute the necessary support. However, the process entails a significant amount of financial resources and involvement of all development partners.

The livelihood project proposal developed about five years ago points out that the whole program requires approximately 8.7 million USD. From the situations on the ground, however revision of the document is being undertaken since we can logically imagine that less amount of the proposed budget even one quarter of it can assist a lot in creating alternative livelihood options for the community living inside the park and ensuring sound conservation of the property.

#### **1.4 Donor Conference**

As to be recalled, Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) together with UNESCO-WHC and other partners had organized donor conference in October 2012 in order to seek the necessary funding for implementation of the grazing and alternative livelihood strategies, which are keys for satisfying the conditions set out in the corrective measures. In response to this proposal, funding was provided to the State Party from the World Heritage Fund to cover the costs of expenditures associated with the conference.

The objective of the conference was to improve nature conservation and develop the livelihoods of the people in the vicinity of the park so that the property can be secured in the long-term, while the agricultural population can profit from the site and secure its rural livelihood in a more sustainable manner. In particular, a process of voluntary relocation of people living inside the national park needs to be initiated in order to safeguard their livelihoods in new localities.

In light of this, a Core Working Group (Task Force) chaired by the higher officials from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) and composed of government and non government institutions was established as a forum to work towards the goal of identification and invitation of major stakeholders involved in park rehabilitation and livelihood improvement, lobbying potential donors and towards the preparation of the workshop. Therefore, the working group was dealing with its duty based on the Action Plan prepared for the fundraising Conference.

The process required the involvement of all development partners to create a forum that enables us to overcome the financial constraints associated with the livelihood improvement and grazing reduction strategy and thereby safeguarding the precious heritage site. In this regard, almost all the invited Governmental, nongovernmental, private and international organizations and individuals attended the conference and showed their willingness to participate and play their own role depending on their areas of interest.

Following the donor conference, GEF-Small Grant Program in Ethiopia, is being working with the State Party to set up community conservation activities at the site using the experience of the COMPACT project, which successfully piloted such activities in pilot sites around the world. Moreover, follow up efforts after the donor conference is being made to set-forth access for the required budget support together with the availed project document for some of the potential conservation partners.

## **2. Others**

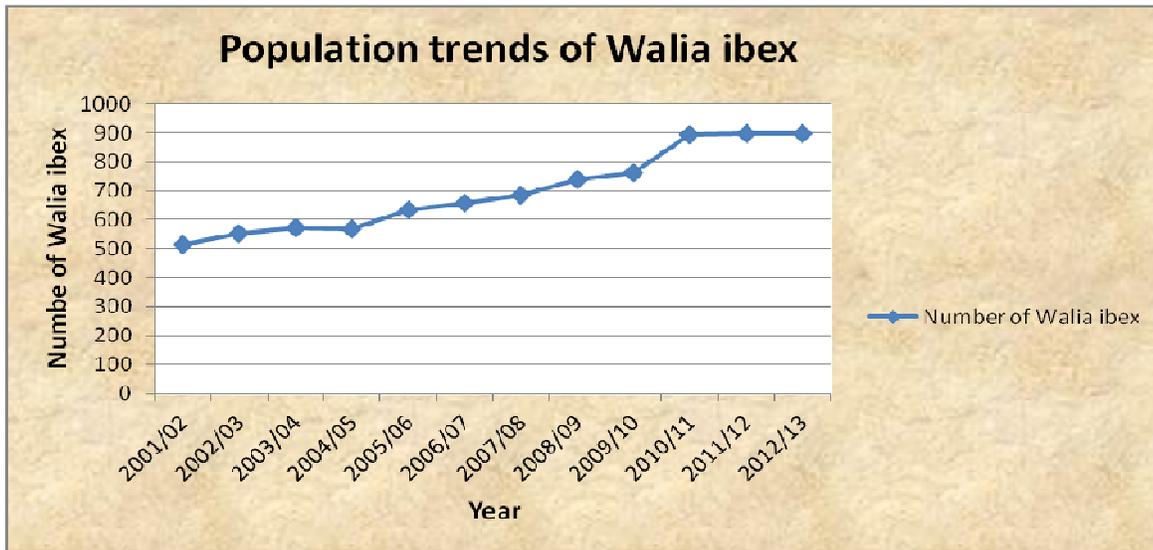
### ***2.1 Key Wildlife conservation and Development;***

The ongoing progress of the SMNP management would be explained by the considerable wildlife population growth. Despite the praiseworthy efforts of the Federal and Regional governments to improve the park wildlife development and protection, the skill development of the youth through vocational training and supporting them in off farm self employments, the participation of the local community in community based ecotourism services, the strict anti-poaching measures, village conferences and meetings in the villages inside and around the SMNP to raise awareness on wildlife's importance and promotion of backyard farming and agro forestry practices resulted in positive development in number of key species such as *Walia ibex* and the *Ethiopian wolf*. These activities have been helpful to rehabilitate the degraded park resources, increasing wildlife population tourist inflow, government revenues and community incomes.

Even though more to remain, current efforts to implement the revised park management plan; preserve the natural integrity and value of the parks which are challenged by human and livestock interferences are praiseworthy. Vital activities to conserve and sustain the unique biodiversity and improve welfare of the communities living in and around the park have been performed.

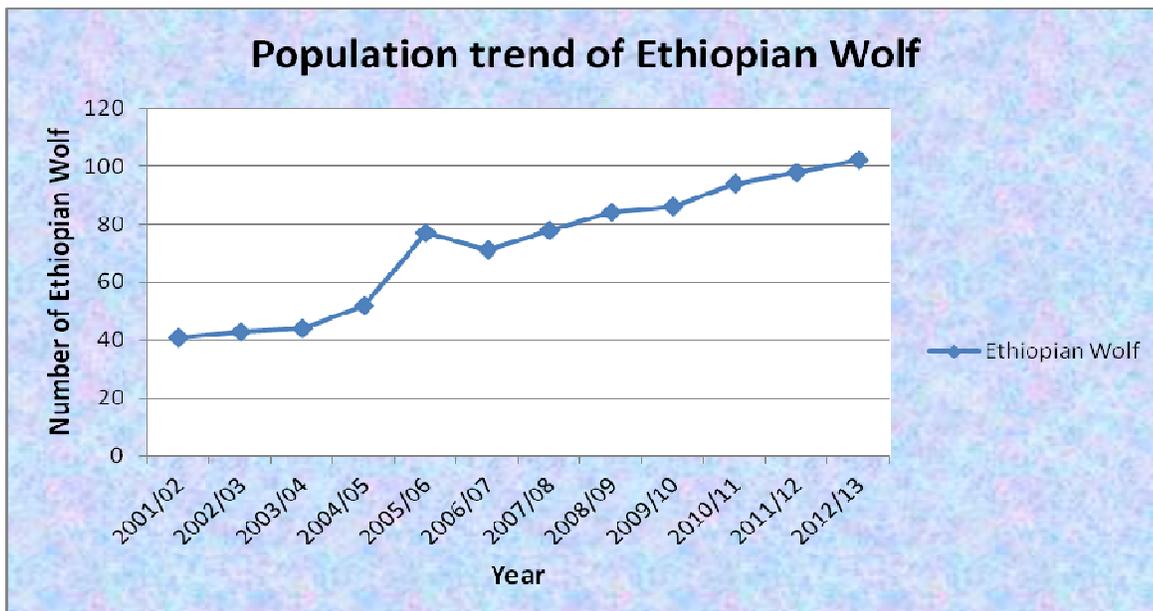
In last year count at 43 different observation points, more than 900 Walia Ibexes have been recorded, with 424 females and 186 calves and juveniles (graph 1). The number of observed Ethiopian Wolf has also increased from 98 to 102 (graph 2).

**Graph 1: Walia *Ibex* Population Trend, from 2001/02 to 2012/13**



**Source:** Data collected from park office 2001/02 to 2012/13

**Graph 2: Ethiopian wolf Population Trend, from 2001/02 to 2012/13**



**Source:** Data collected from park office 2001/02 to 2012/13

## ***2.2 Debark – Mekane Berhan Road Re-alignment;***

A growing effort has been embarked, particularly in mitigating or managing negative impacts of the roads, and in promoting efforts that streams for the realignment of the road through other alternative routes. The re-alignment of this road has already been accepted by the Ethiopian Roads Authority upon the expression of our serious concern of this matter. Thereafter, construction of alternative route through Debark - Sawrie - Beless - Inchet kab - Mekane berhan, which is completely beyond the boundary of the park, is being undertaken. All these existing endeavors virtually mirrored the strong interest of the local communities and all key stakeholders and lay the foundation to build up alternative route for the existing Debark-Mekene berhan road which could significantly reduce the adverse impacts of the existing road.

Moreover, other re-alignment option is also under negotiations with the Federal Roads Authority for the road that was constructed from Debark–Adi arkay–Shire through the property that crosses the recent extension areas of Lima limo completely beyond the boundary of the park.

Similarly, in our attempts to reduce the road traffic and related threats of the park, a park gate was constructed at Sawrie on the main road from Debark town to the national park; providing a permanent presence in the area and thereby checking the Gate traffics and allowing minimum traffic operations. A new gate with outpost has also been functioned since 2007, at Sebat Minche to check the road traffic from Janamora Woreda side, which together with the Sawrie Gate now provide for restricted traffic operations between 8:00 AM in the morning up to 6:00 PM.

## ***2.3 Efforts to Replicate the Positive Experience of Arkuasiye Voluntary Relocation in to Gitch Village***

The issue of settlement within the property dates back to the time of its creation, as several villages land used for agriculture and livestock grazing were included in the park. This problem remained unresolved since the realignment of the park which resulted in the exclusion of numerous villages from the park and, thus, an important reduction in the number of people residing in the park which have been living under poverty. According to a rapid assessment carried out in October 2005, more than 586 households were found living in the park amounting more than 3,480 people whilst 1,477 households living in its immediate vicinity are cultivating plots inside the park. The total area under cultivation in the park is estimated at 2,281 ha.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopian Government has successful experience on voluntary resettlement of 167 households from Arkuasiye corridor outside the property. Subsequently, the State Party is fully committed itself to scale up the 2008/09 Arkuasiye village voluntary relocation experience to other villages inside the property.

Currently, the central concern of the project is the relocation of Gich Villagers on voluntarily basis to nearby Debark Town outside the park and to make open for wider distribution and free movement of the wild animals.

In this regard, a plan supported by different studies and assessments is prepared recently for resettling 418 households outside the property. The asset valuation and resettlement action plan study pointed out that more than **8 million USD** is required for compensation of 418 households at Gitch village only. This budget doesn't include alternative livelihood options and other infrastructure developments.

Even though the state party is committed to address all the bench marks set by the world heritage committee, budget constraint is the major gap to move forward the voluntarily resettlement process.

The settlement process is being led in a systematic ways with the strong collaboration of federal and local governments so as to reduce the human induced pressure on the park. Moreover, different committees at different levels were established from top to grass root level with its own roles and responsibilities whose task is mainly to deal with a step forward on the process of the voluntary relocation program.

The organized task force includes the representatives of the Gitch village to enforce every effort and day to day activities under the high level panel. As the first significant step, this task force has provided a report describing the community mutual agreement for voluntary relocation of their residence from Gitch village to Debark town. And Very recently, the filed operation is being started to realize this agreement in ground.

Therefore, significant financial support is required for the planned voluntary relocation of the Gich village community numbering 418 households and the implementation of alternative livelihood options for local communities both which will cost about 16 million US dollars.

***Therefore, Once again here we request the financial support from AWHF in particular and other conservation partners in general to move forward the voluntary relocation process of the Gitch village with provision of alternative livelihood options.***

#### ***2.4 Development of Tourism Strategy plan for the Property***

The Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) has great potential as an ecotourism destination and much of this has been realized in the recent past. Benefit-sharing with local communities is now running more than 30 million Ethiopian Birr per year and with another 4 million Ethiopian Birr income to central Treasury.

However, a number of challenges and constraints face the delivery of a quality tourism product in the Simien Mountains, ranging from a lack of accommodation, limitations in skilled manpower, to poor quality and insufficient tourism infrastructure. Moreover the volume of tourists in peak season is also beginning to impact the quality tourist experience. Thus, we need to devise new strategies and actions to solve these challenges.

To this end, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) in collaboration with the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has developed a new tourism plan for the property. Therefore, EWCA is being working closely with African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in establishing SMNP as a prime wildlife based tourism destination.

The tourism plan provides a strategic framework for tourism development and related investment in the SMNP and will be annexed to the 2009-2019 General Management Plan already developed by the state party in collaboration with other conservation partners. The plan will serve to guide future tourism development and investment in the park.

The process of developing the plan has involved consultation with key stakeholders in and around the SMNP. Efforts have also been made to consult with Gondar and Addis Ababa based tourism organizations, and to incorporate the expertise of other conservation and development organizations working in the area.

Without robust tourism development planning, there will be a significant risk that in the medium term that tourism will become problematic for the park as a result of overcrowding and poorly regulated tourism development.

With careful development planning, tourism in SMNP can serve as a key driver of revenue, positive conservation outcomes and related local stakeholder benefits. Furthermore, with appropriate tourism management systems and regulations, the park can sustain many times the present number of visitors and a far greater degree of integration with the SMNP's core conservation objectives

### **2.5 Park management**

Emphasis continues to improve SMNP management competence in the conservation of this World Heritage Property. The Ethiopian Government and its International Development Partners expenditure during the last ten years have registered substantial increase, with signifying the increasing political, technical and financial support for the protection of this World Heritage Property. The government resource which allocated to place an effective management structures and recruiting appropriate technical staffs through considerable investment on various conservation measures have greatly contributed to the current achievements (table 1).

With the recent Business Process Reengineering Improvement carried out recently in 2012 has resulted in an increase in the number of park personnel; the recruitment of technical specialists; provision of staff training; increased park budget; and the introduction of new management structures and practices. The new park authority is now well established and a key indicator of success is the significant increase in populations of the park's two flagship species, with *Walia ibex* now numbering 900 (up from 150 in 1996) and Ethiopian wolf numbering 102 (up from 20 in 1996) graph 1 and 2 respectively.

Being one of the national parks administered under EWCA, the SMNP is also enjoying the opportunities created in the recent past and special emphasis is being rendered to ensure the SMNP management competence in the conservation of this World Heritage Property.

The staff and capacity of the SMNP has been considerably strengthened in recent years, as resources have been allocated from EWCA and other partner projects and capacity development initiatives have

been implemented. At present, SMNP employs more than 90 staff (still to be increased in future) including 10 technical staff (e.g. chief park warden, Warden, Deputy warden, ecologist, senior and junior wildlife experts, senior tourism and community development officers) and 70 scouts. Most scouts are based in outpost camps, where they usually stay with their family, and change their outpost camp roughly every two years.

**Table 1: Government Budget Allocation for the Park Management (2004/05 -2012/13)**

<i>Physical Year</i>	<i>Allocated Budget to SMNP</i>
2004/05	566,079.00
2005/06	629,115.45
2006/07	950,296.00
2007/08	1, 194, 222.00
2008/09	1,356,745
2009/10	1,967,890
2010/11	2,010,000
2011/12	9,097,000
2012/13	9,296,800

**Source:** EWCA Annual report (2004/05-2012/13)

## **2.6 Tourism**

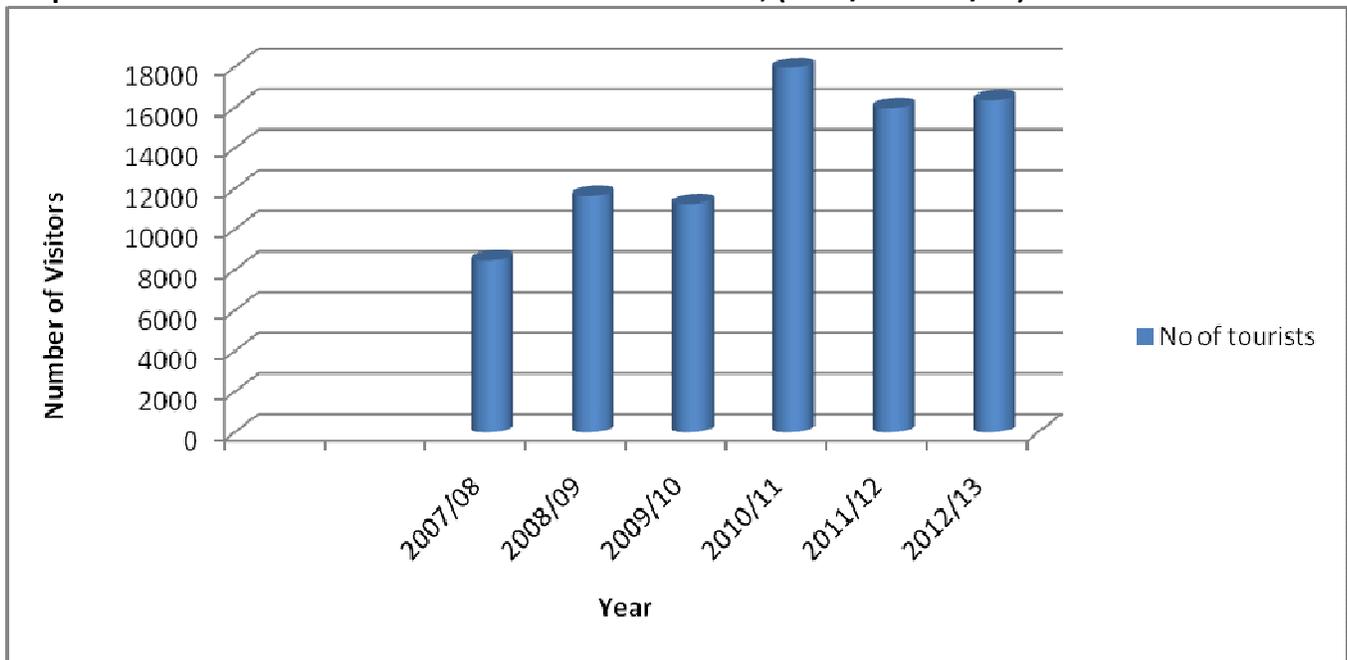
Even though more to remain, current efforts to implement the revised park management plan; preserve the natural integrity and value of the parks which are challenged by human and livestock interferences are praiseworthy. Constructions of park infrastructure and facilities and improving tourist safety within the park have contributed to increased tourist flow and government revenues.

The number of SMNP visitors and participation of local community in tourism activities has been growing significantly and this is believed to strengthen the marriage between conservation and tourism (graph 3). Considering the last year performance, significance difference has been recorded both in tourist arrival and amount of revenue collected from the same.

Besides, the number of local beneficiaries from tourism has grown and this is considered as a model that has to be replicated in other protected areas of the country. Improvements in management capacity of the park and involvement of development partners including the private investors in the tourism sector

mainly account for the significant rise of tourist flow and amount of income both for the government and the local community (graph 4).

**Graph 3. Visitor trend of Simien Mountains National Park, (2007/08-2012/13)**



**Source:** Data collected from park office (2007/08- 2012/13)

The number of park visitors and participation of local community in tourism activities have been growing significantly and these are believed to strengthen the marriage between conservation and tourism. Considering the last year performance, significance difference has been recorded both in tourist arrival and amount of revenue collected from the same (Fig. 3).

The number of people employed in the tourism sector and the revenue generated is also increasing from time to time. The number of visitors recorded 46.8% growth, comparing with the same period of the previous year. Constructions of park infrastructure and facilities and improving tourist safety within the SMNP are believed to have contributed to increased tourist flow and revenues for both the government and the local community.

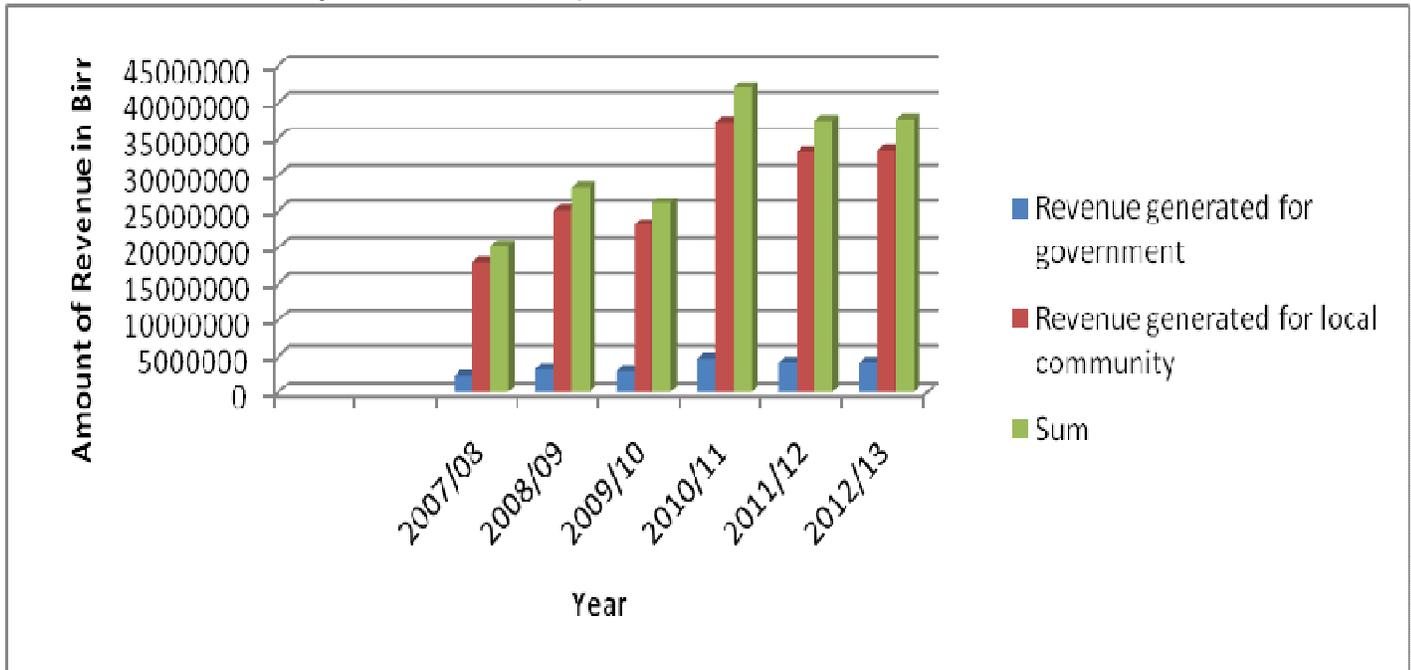
Even though more to remain, current efforts to implement the revised park management plan; preserve the natural integrity and value of the parks which are challenged by human and livestock interferences are promising.

Besides, the number of local beneficiaries from tourism has grown and this is considered as a model that has to be replicated in other protected areas of the country. Improvements in management capacity of the park and involvement of development partners including the private investors in the tourism sector mainly account for the significant rise of tourist flow and amount of income. The other interesting aspect of tourism and travel to SMNP is the growth of private tourism investment most of them are in operation and some are under construction. Often its location advantage to the park gate, private investment in Debark Town is on the rise.

The revenue generated for both the government and community shows the money which is collected with legal receipts in tourist information center such as entrance fee, local guide, cook, mule rent, the money that tourists spent in Debark town and within the park for consumption, accommodation, souvenir and other miscellaneous expenditures part of this data is significantly increasing (graph 4).

By looking the existing data on receipt from tourists at the park gate has increased. The revenue generated for both the government and the community in year **2007/08** was **20,234,960 ETB**: but in the year **2012/13** has increased to **37,653,312 ETB (Graph 4)**. From this tourism income, the revenue generated for the local community in the year **2007/08** was **17,966,590 ETB**: but in the year **2012/13** has increased to **33,480,704 ETB (Graph 4)**. In the same taken, the revenue generated for government in the year **2007/08** was **2,268,370**: but in the year **2012/13** has increased to **4,172,608 ETB (Graph 4)**.

**Graph 4. Trend of Revenue Generated from Simien Mountains National Park for both the government and the local community 2007/08- 2012/13)**



**Source:** Data collected from park office (2007/08- 2012/13)

**2.7 Disease transmission prevention measures;**

Native species in SMNP vulnerable to the transmission of diseases are especially the Walia ibex and the Ethiopian wolf. The large numbers of livestock grazing in and around the park, and the close contact especially between livestock and the Walia ibex, pose a high risk of disease transmission, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the Walia ibex population. It is therefore critical that measures are being taken to limit the risk of disease transmission between domestic animals and wildlife in and around SMNP.

The state party in collaboration with the Austrian Government funded program Animal Health Clinics had been constructed and equipped in the buffer zone of the park, and animal health workers had been working. These clinics are offering vaccinations as well as other treatments for livestock grazing in the park and are working closely with other veterinary clinics, including mobile clinics, and community health workers responsible for animal health in the Kebeles and Weredas around the park. Therefore, the clinics are instrumental in controlling diseases.

The Ethiopian wolf population is potentially threatened by a transmission of rabies from domestic dogs. A policy of zero tolerance of domestic dogs is continued in SMNP and so far rabies has never occurred in the park. The park regulation doesn't allow the local community to enter in to the park with their domestic dogs. If this park regulation is violated, domestic dogs will be automatically killed by rangers. So, now a day's all domestic dogs are allowed only around the houses in the villages and compared to other areas in the country most households don't have domestic dogs. Therefore, some important activities have been performed to bring about the prevention of disease.