

**State of Conservation Report of the World Natural
Heritage Site, SimienMountains National Park
(Ethiopia)**



Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA)

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Note

This report focuses on the current status of the Natural World Heritage Property, the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP), and thus, it may not explain all of the details of achievements and commitments that have been recorded so far. Thus, this report can be used to highlight and share notes about what has been attained to secure the better future of this world heritage property.

To be brief, the major content of this report embraces the progresses made so far with regard to completion of revising the Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy in order to identify priorities for its immediate implementation, conclusion of re-gazettal of the property, existing wildlife conservation efforts, the allocation of significant amount of budget for Gich residents voluntary relocation and associated achievements after the last state report on the property.

The document is believed to give due attention to the past and present 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 **38 COM 7A.43** (Doha, 2014) as well as IUCN and UNESCO joint monitoring mission report (2006) to guide a removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Therefore, the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session will be able to look at the progresses made up to now towards implementing the corrective measures and the updated information about SMNP as well as the existing endeavors of partners in addressing the current challenges associated with settlement reduction and thereby creating favorable environment for removing the property from the listof 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

1) Response to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 38 Com 7A.43

As to be recalled, the World Heritage Committee welcomed the progressive measures reported during the 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th and 38th 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 which encouraged the state party to work hard to attain the remaining procedures. Generally, the state party has been taking the following measures:

1.1 Grazing pressure Reduction Strategy Revision and its Implementation

Along together with the other anthropogenic pressures, it is strongly believed that livestock production practices in and around the Simien Mountains entails an urgent strategic practice.

Livestock grazing is the most pervasive activity and one of the greatest threat to the ecological integrity of the property. Cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and horses are herded throughout the property, with many areas heavily overgrazed.

A 'Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy Document' was prepared in July 2007. This document identifies considerable interventions aimed at zonation of the park for different intensities of grazing, limiting grazing rights, reducing animal numbers, improving animal health and engaging local communities. According to the study, the five year intervention requires approximately 180 million Ethiopian Birr (US\$ 9 million).

However, the draft grazing pressure reduction strategy has a number of shortcomings: lacking any specific verifiable targets for grazing reduction and the use zones were neither clearly defined nor supported by maps that show apparent demarcation of specific areas. Furthermore, it has been uncertain whether any donor could be encouraged to support such an expensive strategy as it entails huge amount of budget.

Apparently, the World Heritage Committee at its latest session in Phnom Penh specifically encouraged the State Party to request international assistance from the World Heritage Fund to review the draft Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy in order to identify priorities for immediate implementation as recommended by the 2009 monitoring mission and in response 43,000 USD was contributed from UNESCO-WHC.

To this end, revision of the draft grazing pressure reduction strategy is being undertaken by a team of senior wildlife managers from EWCA and AWF. During the revision, priorities for immediate implementation of the strategy for reducing Grazing pressure have been identified and this is expected to address the concerns of the previous document and contribute to resolving one the most important issues of the property, the grazing pressure.

Consequently, efforts are being made in collaboration with conservation partners to reduce grazing pressure in the park through awareness creation, restricting significant amount of land from free grazing over time, improving resource protection, law enforcement, provision of different livelihood options and introduction of improved animal and forage

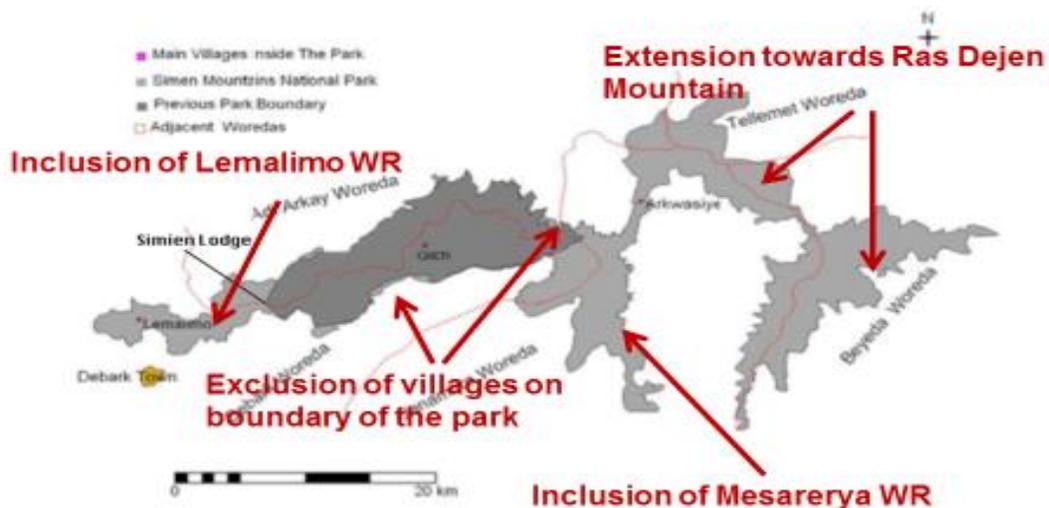
species. However, regardless of these efforts the negative consequences of grazing pressure on vegetation cover and wild life is still persisting and full implementation of the newly developed strategy has to be started the soonest possible.

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. Based on the wildlife conservation and development policy and existing legislations and rules of the country, the establishment and up-dates of any bills and decisions must take into consideration the stakeholders' agreement accompanied by endorsement from the House of Representatives.

Accordingly, re-demarcation of the national park was undertaken in a full participatory way through the involvement of the representatives of the local community, officials and concerned officers. The precise location of points along the agreed boundary line has been recorded by *Geographical Positioning System (GPS)* and these *GPS* records have been used to generate a good map of the property including the new extension areas. 300 concrete beacons have been installed all around the extended park area. To this end, the Council of Ministers approved the re-gazettal process of the property recently and it is believed the recently approval of the re-gazettal of the park boundary including the new extension areas (Fig. 1) into national law will provide adequate legal protection to the property.

Fig. 1: Map of Simien Mountains National Park after Re-gazettal



Since the re-gazettal of the park boundary 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. This is very an essential pace since the newly aligned boundaries of the park which need to be coincided with the World Heritage Property are critical parts of the range of the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf and thus it is definitely in line with the property's inscription under criterion (x).

1.3 Boundary Modification Dossier Development

Since the re-gazettal of the property 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). In this regard, the EWCA and UNESCO - WHC joint role has been vital in the preparation of the Boundary Modification Dossier.

In doing so a team composed of International Consultant hired by UNESCO-WHC and two senior wildlife managers from the EWCA were appointed to work towards the boundary modification file development. The study was carried out using the budget allocated from UNESCO-WHC (30,000 USD). The draft final report has been submitted by the team and currently AWF is working on developing accurate and quality map of the property that will be part of the aforementioned document. Once the boundary modification dossier is finalized, the State Party will submit it to the World Heritage Committee to request the recognition of the Re-gazettal of the Extended Park Boundaries in the world heritage list.

1.4 Settlement Management Strategy and Existing 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 state party has successful experience on voluntary relocation 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 in order to make open for wider distribution and free movement of the wild animals. In this regard, series of discussions going on the issue of relocation, and members of the Gich village communities (which lies at the very core area of the park) are very willing to vacate their homes in the park provided that they got enough compensation and get resettled at Debark town.

To this end, an action plan supported by different studies and assessments was prepared recently for resettling 418 households outside the property. The asset valuation and resettlement action plan study pointed out around **8 million USD** is required for compensation of 418 households at Gitch village only. This budget doesn't include provision of alternative livelihood and social service. The state party showed its commitment by allocating the total budget in to two phases and in return more than 4 million USD is already committed up to date to move forward the voluntarily resettlement process.

The settlement process is being led in a systematic way 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, compensation payment will be started as per the agreement reached with the villagers.

On the other hand, significant financial support is required from the international community and conservation partners in order to fulfill alternative livelihood options and other social services for the voluntary relocation of the Gich village community.

1.5 Provision of alternative livelihoods

The local communities in and around the Simien Mountains National Park earn their livelihood from traditional mixed-farming that consists of crop production and livestock rearing. However, ecological degradation due to encroachment, deforestation for fuel wood consumption, over grazing and cultivation of the Simien Mountains have intensified soil erosion and escalated the human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) in the national park and exposed the smallholder farmers to food insecurity and in turn threatened the national park and the wildlife as well.

Various studies have indicated that conservation efforts without economic incentives, improving local livelihoods and involving the local communities may not have greater impact on biodiversity conservation. This shows that there is direct correlation between economic development and biodiversity conservation.

However, the local people around protected areas are characterized by vulnerability to droughts and food insecurity and high rate of unemployment. These indigenous populations living in and around these protected areas are found in geographically remote and isolated areas. This situation creates conflicts with protected areas for various land uses and use of the resources over the land which is considered to be critical for the survival and development of these indigenous people.

Therefore, empowering the local communities and improving their livelihood is important and indispensable through biodiversity entrepreneurship that consists of various biodiversity income generating activities that are environmentally sustainable to promote alternative livelihoods of the local communities and build their capacity to reduce the

pressure on the property and ensure their sustainable livelihoods so as to reconcile the existing resource use competition between inhabitants and thereby establish harmony between the conservation and livelihood developments.

To this end, a strategy document has been prepared by an international consultant funded by the World Heritage Centre in 2007. This strategy identifies 29 different private businesses and cooperatives through which 586 households currently living inside the park can find alternative sustainable livelihoods. However, the proposed livelihood improvement program have not been completed due to financial constraints. This program entails a significant amount of money and involvement of all development partners and stakeholders. Even though it is believed that further revision of the document needs to be undertaken, the project proposal developed about four years ago points out that the whole program requires 8.7 million USD.

However, from the situations on the ground, we can logically imagine that less amount of the proposed budget 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 World Heritage property.

Following the donor conference conducted on October 2012, some conservation partners are being working in collaboration with EWCA. 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.

The alternative livelihood promotion intervention activities which are being carried out by the different partners (Austrian Development Cooperation Funded program (ADC), GEF-SGP and African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in collaboration with the state party aimed

mainly at reducing the pressure on the park resources from human activities have been creating pull factors in some of the off-farms.

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 stakeholders and partners in the process.

The continued progress with youth off farm and on farm training have enabled some residents in and around the park 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 not been as successful as expected due to limited funding.

Therefore, the state party once again requests international community and conservation partners to provide financial support for alternative livelihood provisions and implementation of the 10 years General Management Plan.

2. Implementation of other measures

2.1 Key Wildlife Conservation and Development

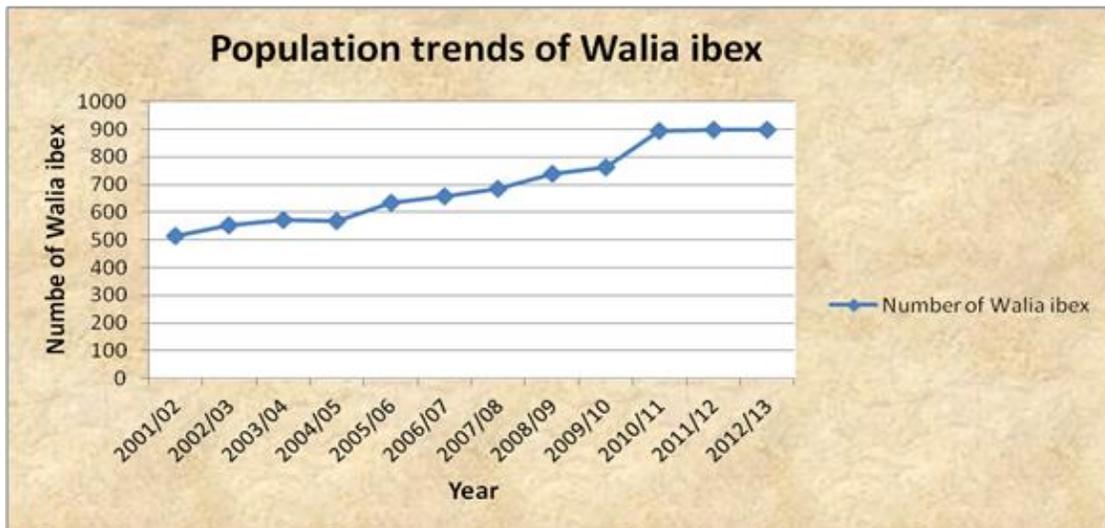
The Simien Mountains National Park located in the northern most part of the country is the first Natural World Heritage Site designated in Ethiopia for its spectacular landscape and its rare and endemic biodiversity species. It is also considered as part of the Conservation International's Eastern Afro-montane biodiversity hot spot due to its global biodiversity importance and its highly threatened status. The Simien Mountains National Park is home of several endemic biodiversity species.

However, there has been substantial decline in number of the endemic species such as the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf due to the Ethiopian civil unrest around the Simien

Mountains National Park from 1989-1990 which caused ecological disturbance and wildlife depletion due to poaching inside the national park.

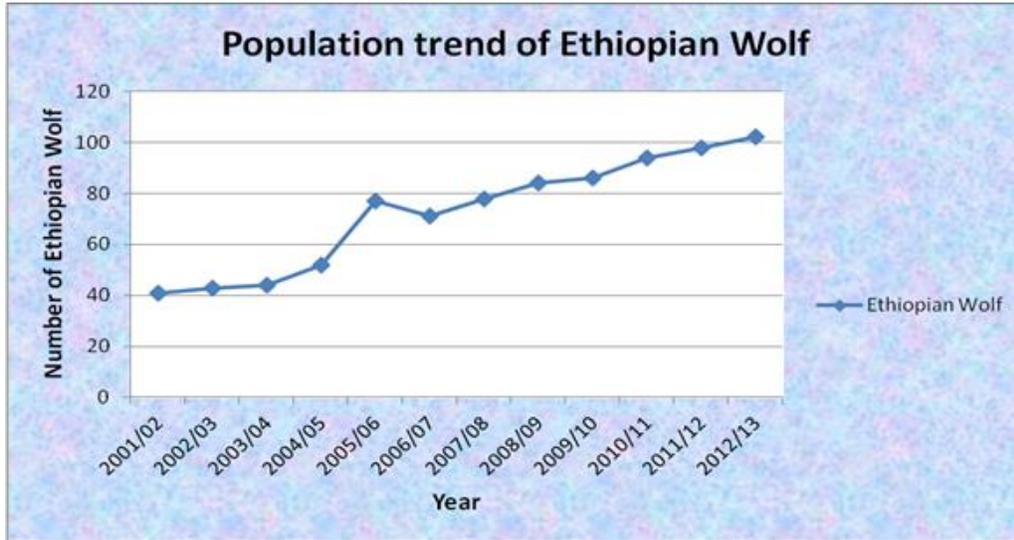
Since the recent past, considerable measures have been taken to take the conservation efforts a step forward. These endeavors include: inclusion of new habitats and habitat conservation, improved relation with local communities and establishment of active anti-poaching team and as a result, the number of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolves has significantly increased in the national park as shown below (Fig.2 & 3).

Fig. 2: Walia Ibex Population Trend, from 2001/02 to 2012/13



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

Fig. 3: Ethiopian wolf Population Trend, from 2001/02 to 2012/13



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

2.2 Management Plan and other Strategic Documents

A comprehensive 10-year management plan has been completed in 2009, together with separate (more detailed) strategy documents dealing with tourism development, settlement, alternative livelihoods and grazing pressure reduction.

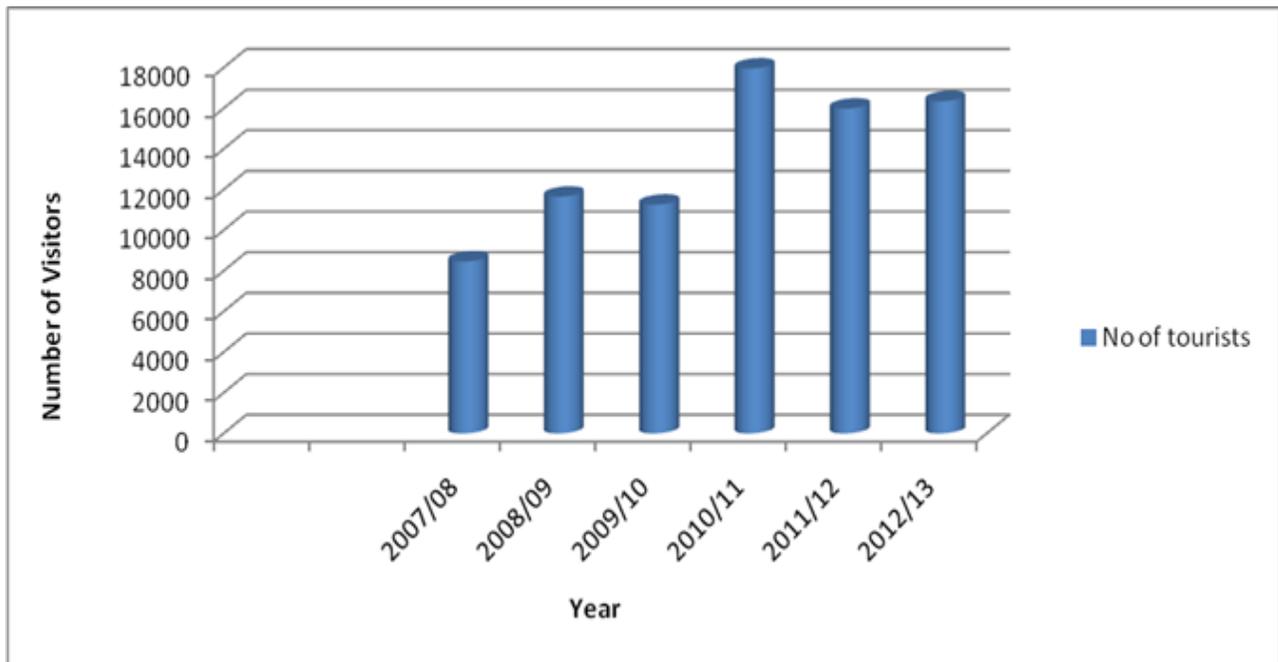
Even though more to remain due to gap of funding availability, the on-going efforts to implement the revised park management plan, preserve the natural integrity and value of the parks which are challenged by human and livestock interferences have been encouraging.

2.2.1 Tourism Development and Strategic Plan

The Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) has great potential for 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.

There has been substantial growth in tourism numbers and revenue (Fig. 4&5), assisted by different infrastructure developments in the country in general and the completion of an up-market lodge in 2006 and new hotels in Debarq and others. The direct benefits from tourism to local communities have done much to improve attitudes towards the park, and gain acceptance for necessary conservation measures.

Fig. 4: Visitor trend of Simien Mountains National Park, (2007/08-2012/13)

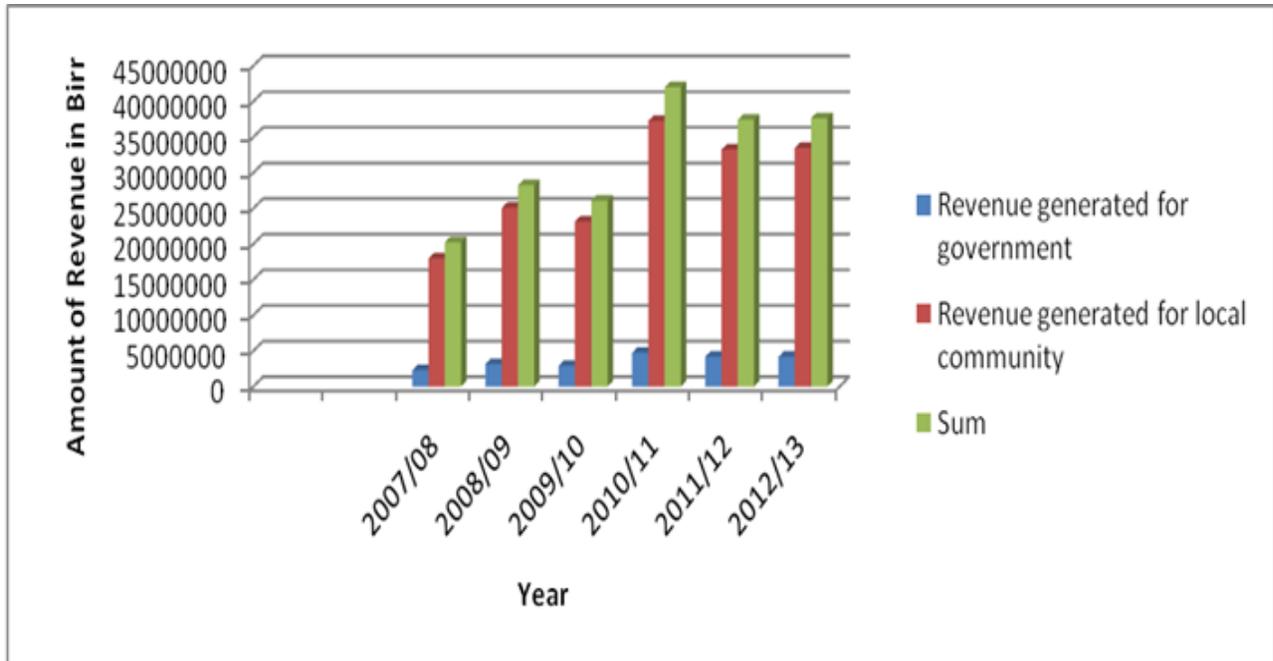


Source: Data collected from park office (2007/08- 2012/13)

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 of tourist experience. 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. Thus, there was a need to devise new strategy and actions to solve these challenges.

Fig. 5: 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)

To this end, the AWF in collaboration with EWCA has developed a new tourism plan in a participatory way for the property and EWCA is being working closely with AWF in establishing SMNP as a prime wildlife based tourism destination. This tourism strategy provided a strategic framework for tourism development and related investment in the SMNP and is annexed to the 2009-2019 General Management Plan. The plan will serve to guide future tourism development and investment in the park.

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

than the present number of visitors and creates a greater degree of integration with the SMNP's core conservation objectives.

2.3 Park Management Capacity and Effectiveness

Special emphasis is given to improve this World Heritage Property conservation status. There has been a gradual, sustained enhancement in management capacity and effectiveness over time due to strong commitment from the state party side as well as technical and financial support from different partners like the Austrian Development Cooperation and African Wildlife Foundation. The government resource allocation to ensure effective management and recruitment of appropriate technical staffs has also contributed significantly to the current achievements.

The staff and capacity of the SMNP has been considerably strengthened in recent years, as resources have been allocated from EWCA and conservation partners and capacity development initiatives have been implemented. At present, SMNP employs around 90 staff including 10 technical staff (e.g. chief park warden, Warden, Deputy Warden, ecologist, senior and junior wildlife officers, senior tourism and community development officers) and around 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.

Community participation has been central to the improvement in management and the state of conservation of the property. Local communities have been involved in key decision-making processes (e.g. development of management planning and strategic plans, boundary alignment), and have been supported in various ways to reduce their dependence on park resources (e.g. through tree planting, introduction of improved breeds of livestock and zero grazing techniques). Environmental education programs have been active to launch awareness among the public and community members have been assisted in organizing themselves into ecotourism associations so that they can benefit directly from tourism.

2.4 Resource protection

The resources of SMNP should be well protected within an expanded park and managed by an efficient and effective team of park employees, including scouts. To this end, a relatively effective resource protection system has been designed and put in place,

In terms of law enforcement capacity, several new guard outposts have been constructed in recent years including the new park extension areas. The number of scouts is increased significantly providing greater capacity for enforcement.

The staff and capacity of the SMNP has been considerably strengthened over time, as resources have been allocated from EWCA and conservation partners and capacity development initiatives have been implemented. However, gaps still remain both in the number and skill of staff, and their commitment to work. This is particularly important with reference to scout numbers and capacity as they are at the front-line to resource protection activities and thus must be properly trained, equipped and managed to ensure that they are motivated, effective and professionally committed.