

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



**Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA)**

**February, 2017  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

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## **Executive summary**

*This report presents the state of conservation of World Heritage property, the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) of Ethiopia submitted to UNESCO as per the decision made at the 40<sup>th</sup> session World Heritage Committee (40 COM 7A.43).*

*The state party has made significant progress in addressing the bench marks of UNESCO in SMNP. These include expansion, re-demarcation and legalization of the park boundaries, development and implementation of different strategic documents (park management plan, tourism master plan, grazing pressure reduction and livelihood improvement strategies), various measures taken to voluntarily relocate Arquaziye, Adiarkai, Debark and recently Gich areas park inhabitants so as to expand the core habitats of the endemic Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolf population. In 2016/17 EWCA and the Gich relocation program committee has given much emphasis to finalize the relocation process of Gich community. Consequently, all the required money compensation concluded (except few members who have court cases and inheritance issues which will be time taking) and following this all the community members have constructed their housing and transferred to the new resettlement site in Debrak town. A number of activities have been done to develop the new required livelihood improvement strategic document for the relocated Gich community. Development partners like Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), the German Government owned bank (KfW), and COMPACT UNDP are working in partnership with EWCA to address the livelihood improvement and national park management issues.*

*The populations of Walia ibex and other endemic species have shown significant increment in the last ten years. The increase in population of key species has also been acknowledged by the findings of various researches and independent documents.*

*The construction of the realigned road has not been completed in time due to poor capacity of the construction companies. Recently government has taken considerable measures in this regard and transferred one of the delayed programs to a new capable construction company while building the capacity of others.*

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

## **Part I- Identification of the Property**

**Name of World Heritage Property:** Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP)

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

**Identification Number:** N 9

## **Part II- State of Conservation**

### ***1. Introduction***

As to be recalled, the World Heritage Committee appreciated the progressive measures reported during the 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> sessions. Moreover, the committee in its Decisions **33 Com 7A.9, 39 COM 7A.10 and 40 COM 7A.43** has also welcomed and congratulated the progressive measures achieved so far towards addressing the corrective measures identified earlier which encouraged the state party to work hard to attain the remaining bench marks.

Therefore, this report provides an emphasis to issues related to Decision **40 COM 7A.43** of the World Heritage Committee that requested the state party to work on various states of conservation aspects in the heritage property in question and to report on the implementation of the 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> session's recommendations, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 41<sup>st</sup> session in 2017.

### ***2. Response to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 40 COM 7A.43***

Generally, the state party together with its conservation partners has achieved the following progressive measures:

#### **2.1. Voluntary Relocation of the Gich Community**

It is to be recalled that EWCA updated the progress of voluntary relocation process of the Gich community in its report for the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the world Heritage Committee. As it had been noted 418 households comprising about 2,508 people occupying more than 3000ha of land within the core area of the park. These people also hold more than 5000 livestock contributing

for overgrazing of the park land. We call the Gich community relocation “Voluntary” not only because it had been undertaken with full participation of all the stakeholders but also it was initiated by the settlers themselves with complete willingness.

The issue of Gich community resettlement started since four decades ago and gradually got acceptance by the people mainly because of tourism development, increase benefit gain by the community and the growing sense of ownership on the park resources. Although the relocation has been carried out up on the request of the communities and the Government “voluntary” decided to handle the issue very carefully to minimize any possible negative impacts that might arise on the local people during and after the relocation process. Accordingly, the National and regional laws and regulations as well as involuntary resettlement of international standards have been considered as one of guiding principles for the Gich community relocation program and this has been confirmed by independent bodies as it was noted in the previous report.

Once the majority of the Gich community becomes willing on their relocation outside the park it was necessary to discuss (Fig. 1) and reach in consensus with the community about the new alternative relocation sites. All possible options were presented and examined for the relocations of the community. The households of the Gich community members synonymously had chosen to be resettled in the nearby town called “Debark”. Accordingly the Debark Town Municipality had taken the full responsibility to prepare appropriate land for the re-settlers.

As it was noted in the previous report the state party allocated more than \$ 7.5 million for the cash compensation of the Gich community in which each of the community members get compensation money based on the asset they hold in their land. Besides, the Debark town Municipality provides plots of land (250m<sup>2</sup>) for each of the relocated community members for the construction of their housing. Besides, considerable amount of land over 1000m<sup>2</sup> had been allocated for Mosque and market places in the same area of Debark town. Our development partner Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) had also allocated \$3.9 million budget for the development of social infrastructural services for the communities in the resettlement site. Alongside the Gich Resettlement Program committee had been working on the required livelihoods restoration strategies and action plan development.

The relocation process had been taken place by the coordination of the Gich Resettlement Program committee which was established for the same purpose by EWCA and the Amhara National Regional State. The committee had finalized the compensation payment and provision of the required plots of land and assisted the relocated people to construct their housing at the resettlement site in Debarok town. Currently the relocated people have completed construction of their housing (Fig.2) and the relocation of the Gich communities outside the park has been fully completed as of June 2016. Currently restoration activities are going on by the Park staff such as cleaning of some left over materials in the abandoned land of Gich area including fences, houses and huts. The park is working towards eradicating the exotic eucalyptus tree species found in the abandoned land and this will be followed by installation of additional beacons along the boundaries. Moreover, the required social and infrastructure services including roads, water and electric power supply in the resettlement site have been developed by different sector organizations found in Debarok town using the funds allocated by ADC.



**Fig.1:** Discussion with Gich local community and the committee member; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)

Regarding compensation payment, except few individuals who has court cases and inheritance issues, all legal re-settler secure their compensation by the help of the Gich relocation program committee. The compensation payment for mosque had its own difficulties as estimation of the values associated with mosque was delayed for some time. Currently, EWCA and the Gich relocation program committee have given strong attention to solve these issues to avoid any compliance in this regard. As the unpaid or remaining budget allocated by the government for

compensation returned back to the government treasury at the end of the budget year (i.e on August, 7, 2016) EWCA is processing again the request of the budget with justification for the Federal Government Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.



**Fig.2:** Houses Constructed by Gich community members at Debarik town; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)

Regarding the improved livelihood strategy, much have been undertaken by the Gich relocation program committee including consecutive discussions with the communities, identifying possible alternative livelihoods and developing the draft livelihood improvement strategy and action plan document. EWCA management recently has reached in agreement to finalize this important document together with consultant hired by KfW. KfW has shown willingness to involve in some parts of livelihood improvement interventions of the relocated Gich Community through our Simien Mountains National Park development partner AWF as the implementing body of the program. Although this initiative of KfW is encouraging, the expected livelihood improvement activities are demanding and tough hence require considerable financial support from donors (international communities and other development partners).

Therefore, once again the state party request financial support from international community and development partners for implementation of livelihood improvement strategy of the resettled community of the Simien Mountains National Park.

## **2.2. Alternative Livelihoods and Development partners**

As noted in the state report of the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the world heritage committee long term partnership had already been in place between EWCA and AWF for the management of SMNP. Besides AWF will become implementing partner of the German Government owned bank (KfW) which has shown its curiosity to allocate significant financial support for livelihood development interventions of the Gich relocated community. Currently the Gich relocation program committee and consultants of KfW have been working on the required draft separate agreement and the livelihood improvement strategy document which will be a binding for the implementation of livelihood intervention program of the relocated communities by different partners.

Currently, the Austrian Development Cooperation Funded program which is the main development partner of the Amhara National Regional State in Simien Gonder zone has processing to continue its partnership in new form. The three year program called Livelihood Improvement and Sustainable Natural Resources Management Program (LISRMP) of ADC has terminated end of December 2016. At the same time study is underway by ADC and Amhara National Regional state to continue its development intervention in new form in Simien Gonder Zone. ADC program has been working in different development intervention in the whole of the Simien Gonder zone in 12 weredas and two National Parks (Simien Mountains and Alitash). The program has consisted of three components including natural resources management, livelihood improvement and Capacity building Components.

The ADC program has been supported the conservational and developmental activities of SMNP for the last 15 years. The UNESCO Bench Marks (corrective measures) of the SMNP were their main focuses area and work very closely with the park staff. The contribution of ADC program in addressing UNESCO Benchmarks in SMNP is highly appreciable and has so many footprints in the park and the nearby community. Many of the existing park infrastructures including the building of the park headquarter (Fig. 3), 14 outposts or scout houses, get entrances, tourism infrastructures (tourist information center, spring development, recreational huts, solar panel services, recreational chairs, three community based lodges, tourist toilets, trekking roads construction, Boundary beacons, sign posts), potable water have been developed by ADC



financial support. Apart from infrastructure development, ADC has been involved in capacity building of the park staffs and community members as well as continuous community awareness raising interventions.



Fig. 3. SMNP Head Quarter in Debarik Town ; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)

This program has greater role in the expansion of the core natural habitat of park land and re-demarcation process of the present park boundary. ADC also provides different alternative livelihood opportunities for communities who were relocated from Arkuaziye, Adirkai and Debarik area of the park land. The program has also focused in addressing the community benefits including in tourist guide associations, cook associations, ecotourism cooperatives. Together with the park office ADC program had trained those relocated people (from Arkuaziye, Adirkai and Debarik area) and also members of the surrounding communities (youth and women) in different business activities including training in masonry, carpentry, artesian, embroidery (Fig. 4A), Bakery (Fig. 4B), beekeeping (Fig. 5) , weaving (Fig. 4C .) and nursery development (Fig.6) . These relocated people had been organized in different small scale business enterprises and also supported by the program and supplied the required working equipments and materials. As noted above the ADC program has also provided fund for infrastructure development of the recent relocated Gich community resettlement site. The program had also been involved in ensuring food security to reduce the surrounding community pressure on the park resources. In line with this the ADC program introduced improved crop varieties, animals (sheep and poultry), and vegetables, for the community's surrounding the park.



Fig. 4:- Some of the Community relocated from the park (Adrkai, Debark) organized and engaged in different business; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)

Currently, ADC is processing to continue its partnership in different form in Simien Gonder Zone restricting itself in two broad programs called park development and food security. The new plan of ADC will be extensive as the plan considers park management at a program level which was one component in the previous program as noted above.



Fig. 5: community memembr inviloved fattening and bee keeping; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)

## Nursery management



Fig. 6:- Nursery management by the community near the SMNP Sources LISNMP-ADC (2016)

Our existing partner AWF has been engaged on provision of training and community awareness raising, implementation of the Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy, development of community owned tourism guest houses, development of new sign posts and in progress in the development of a conservation school. In line with this AWF in partnership with US Forest Service (USFS) and EWCA has organized training for 61 the Simien Mountains Walia Guide Association member and park officers (Fig. 7A).

As it is briefly mentioned on page 14 of this report the grazing pressure reduction strategy implementation is proceeding by the support of AWF. The National Wildlife Tourism development plan is under preparation by AWF and EWCA and the draft is awaiting feedback from relevant parties and will be finalized once adequate input is received. Recognizing that signposting in the park should be restricted to key points and that all signs should be aesthetically pleasing to visitors and locals and meet environmental standards, AWF has worked with EWCA to identify a list of key sites for the development of sign posts(Fig. 7C). Thus, eight new signs were constructed from natural materials (wood, sand and stone) which complement the Park's

ecotourism and improve the professional image of the Park as an international ecotourism destination; replacing the original steel signs(Fig. 7B)..



A;-Guide Training participants



B:- Old signs at SMNP



C:-New signs at SMNP

Fig. 7: showing Training participants and signage ; Source: AWF (2016)

AWF, in partnership with the Adisge Community, Debark Woreda Education office and North Gondar Zone Department of Education, and EWCA, is renovating the Adisge Primary School in exchange for the community’s commitment to help conservation and management of SMNP and its unique wildlife (Fig. 8A). AWF together with EWCA have also developed community owned tourism guest houses in three places to enable the community benefited from the growing tourism in the area. The guesthouses were constructed using local materials (i.e. stone, wood, cow dung, mud, straw, thatch grass, bamboo) and in the local architectural style. In SNMP this is the round “tukul” style house with thatched roofs and stone walls plastered with mud. Village Ways modified this style and developed plans for a cluster of three guesthouses each with a double and single bed. The complexes are completed at three sites with a composting toilet, shower

washroom and an adjacent dining room/kitchen, guide's room, and store/office and started their normal operation (Fig. 8B).



Fig. 8: (A) progress of the Primary school and (B) community lodges; Source: AWF (2016)

Generally the new plan of ADC and the coming KfW financial support will be promising for SMNP and surrounding community to ensure effective conservation and management of the property. Besides, the existing COMPACT programs funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have been involved in supporting community's cooperatives and livelihood improvement in and around SMNP.

Besides, there is a plan by the Gich relocation committee to organize national stakeholders forum to raise fund to implement the strategies developed for livelihood improvements of local community and park management.

### **2.3. Implementation of Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy**

It is recalled that EWCA with the collaboration of development partners AWF and ADC had developed a grazing pressure reduction strategy document and started implementation after introducing the strategy to the communities who are dependent on the limited park resources. Training was also given for all park rangers on the strategies as part of the implementation of the grazing pressure reduction strategy efforts are underway in collaboration with the local community and other stakeholders including intensive awareness raising for the neighboring community, restricting significant amount of land from free grazing, improving resource protection and law enforcement and provision of different livelihood options (Fig.9).

As part of this effort, communication with rangers and park officers on site showed resource protection and law enforcement is improving. Major portions of land inside the park have been

set aside as no livestock grazing zones in major parts of Limalimo, Buyit Ras, Michibign, Sankaber, Set Derek, Chenneck, Siliki, Mesarerya, Kidus Yared, and Ras-Dashen and this year the whole Gich area(Faha, Emetgogo, Gidilgot). The vegetation recovery in these areas is very promising and wildlife species like Walia ibex, Ethiopian wolf and other antelopes have been observed expanding their home range.

Currently, the area of the park designated with no grazing or protected zone has been expanded from 19,167 ha (37%) to 82% (33745.21 ha) as a result of the grazing plan implementation. This shows the free grazing zone has been increased by 12% from that of last year achievement.



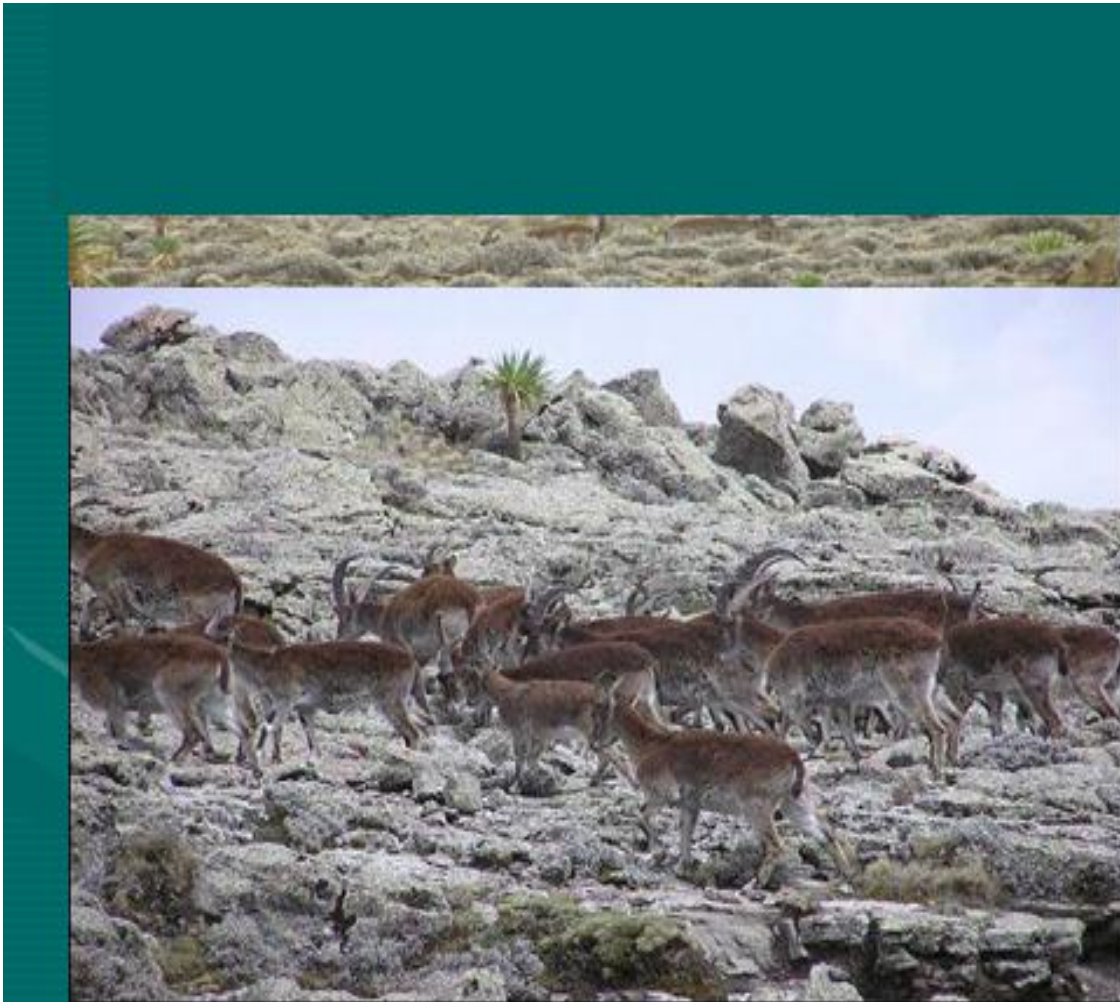
Fig. 9: SMNP Afro-alpine under low (left) and high (right) grazing pressure; Source: AWF (2016)

#### **2.4. Independent study on Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolf population**

The SMNP harbours 21 mammal species considered threatened or endangered. The Walia ibex (*Capra walie*) (Fig. 10), a wild mountain goat with long, heavy scimitar-like horns, is found nowhere else in the world except the Simien Mountains National Park. Considering its outstanding value and the unique features, the property was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978. The inscription was made on the basis of its importance for biodiversity (criterion x) and its exceptional natural beauty (criterion vii). Although Ethiopia has considerable number of World Heritage Sites (WHS), SMNP is the only natural heritage site.

Despite this, the park had been threatened by various human activities that range from expansion of settlement and cultivation to livestock encroachment since most of the park area was known to be used by local communities. These anthropogenic pressures resulted in deterioration of the

park habitats in general and decline of populations of flagship species such as *Walia ibex* and Ethiopian wolf in particular.



**Fig 10: Walia Iebx herd in SMNP; Source: LISNMP-ADC (2016)**

Taking into account the then devastating situation and the continued threats to biodiversity, Government has shown strong commitment since the recent past towards ensuring effective management of SMNP and its key wildlife species. Special attention has been rendered to extend the corridors and core habitats for the species in question and restore the degraded areas as well as enforce laws related to poaching and natural habitat destruction and there is increased sense of ownership from the local community side in ensuring sound conservation of the property. In general, several efforts have been initiated by the government in collaboration with conservation partners to address the aforementioned challenges. As a result, the populations of endemic

species like the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf have shown significant increment in the last ten years (Fig 11 & 12).

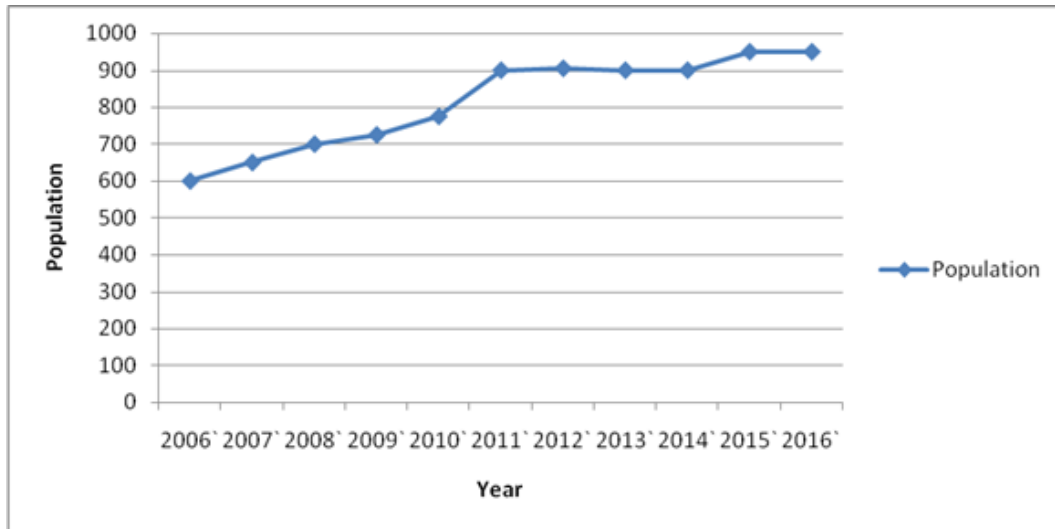


Fig 11: Walia Ibex Population Trend, from 2006 to Source: SMNP office 2006-2016

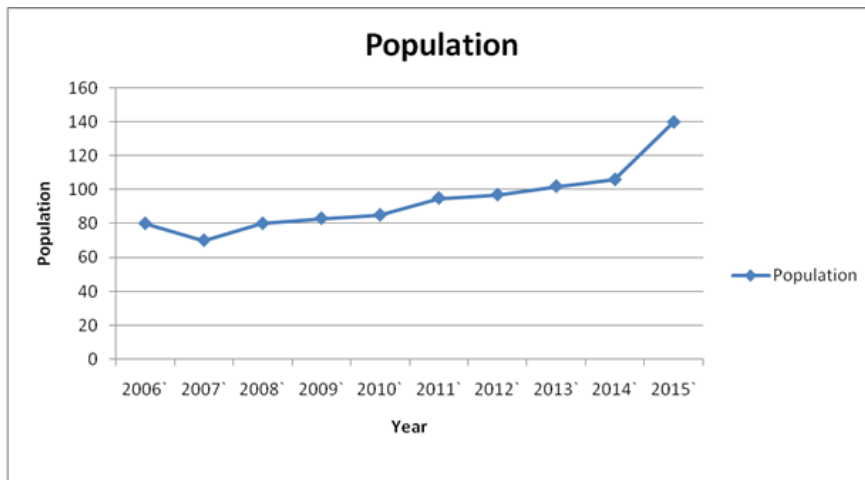


Fig 12: Ethiopian wolf Population Trend, from 2006- 2015 Source: SMNP office 2006-2015

The increase in population of key species has also been acknowledged by various researches and independent documents (Biodiversity Indicators Development National Task Force (2010)- <https://bipnational.net>; [http:// www.iucnredlist.org/details/3797/0](http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/3797/0); Ejigu D.et al...(2015); Gebremedhin D. and Grubb P., 2009; Gebremedhin D. et al..., 2016).



## **2.5. Updating the Progress of Road Re-alignment**

It is recalled that we noted about the re-alignment of road construction progress in our previous report. Although two local private construction companies (Akir and Satkon) had been engaged in the construction of the road program since 2012 the construction of the road program delayed due to capacity limitations of the companies. As a result Government has terminated one of the programs taken by Satkon construction and transferred it to new capable company called Defense Construction Company in this year and built the capacity of others.

As noted before the new road route extend outside the park from Debarq town -Sawrie (park check point )- Beless - Inchet kab - Mekane-Birhan (cover some 50 kms)to south west direction and twists to north western direction for about 20kms (still outside the park) to the border of the park (7 Minch outpost), and then the road will continue crossing the park land (through Buhait) for about 10kms and then to Atgeba Ras and Chroleba (small rural towns outside the park) and turn to the south, south west and thence western directions for a distance of about 60 kms to Delbiza town (a rural town for Beyeda Woreda) (Fig 13). It is clearly seen that the new alternative route design would significantly reduce the adverse impacts of the existing road on core natural ecosystem of the property.

It was justifiable from EWCA and the park authority side to accept this plan as there is no alternative to extend the road to the destinations Chiroleba and then Delbiza and there are mitigation measures agreed up on to minimize the predictable negative impacts of the road.

EWCA and its main development partners of SMNP want also to work together to realign the associated electric pole and lines of the existing road which pollutes vision of the natural scenery of the park. The work will require assessment of the existing electric pole and lines and determination of the required cost for the installation of the same in the alternative new road. This program will be undertaken together with the Ethiopian Electric power corporation and will require adequate funding from Government and our development partners.

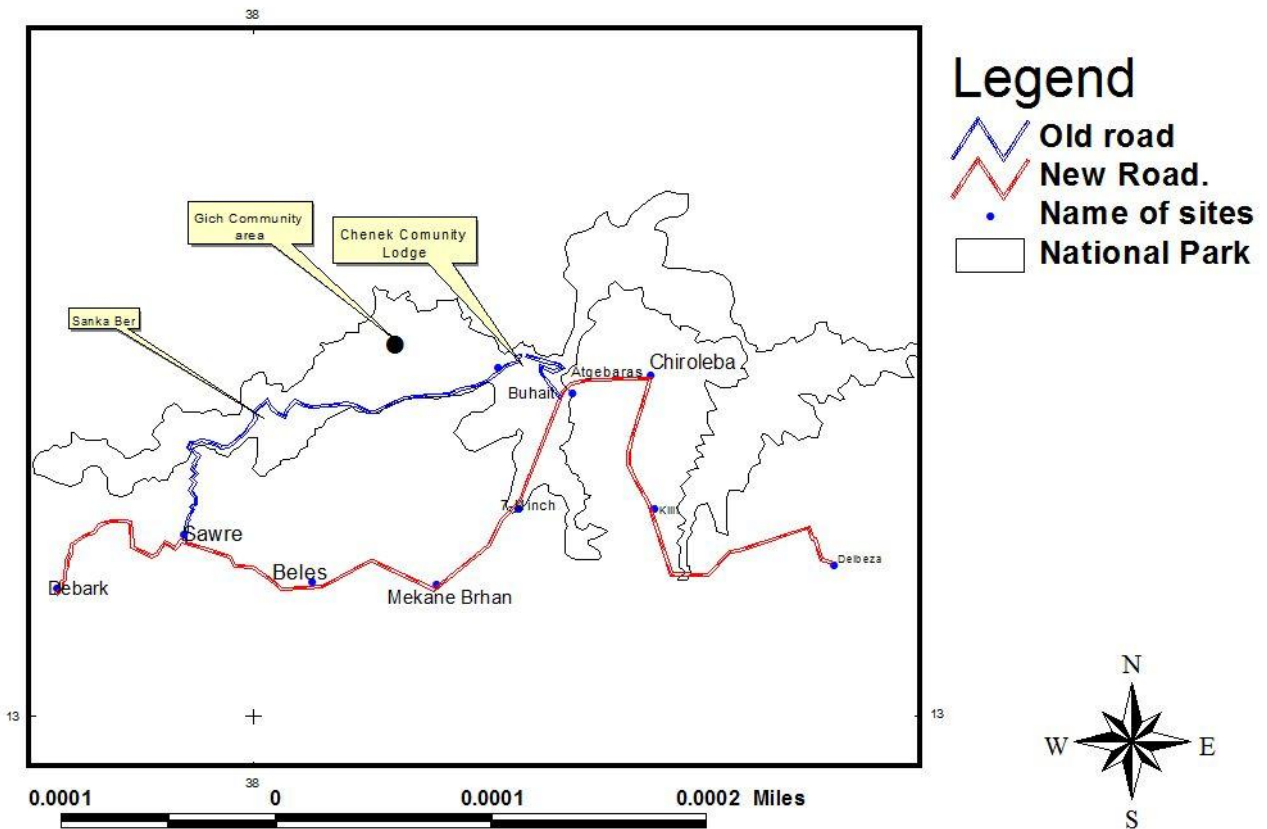


Fig.13: Picture showing the new road under construction and the existing (old) road.

Source; Source: EWCA (2016)

### 2.6. Eco-lodges and tourism activities in SMNP)

Tourism has become important tool for conservation and developmental activities of the SMNP. Many of the local communities living around the park and many residents of nearby towns involved and become dependent in the growing tourism business of the area. A number of ecotourism cooperatives, tour guide associations, cooker association tourism services (hotels, cafeterias, and shopping) have been flourishing in Debark town. Owing to these conditions apart from the people themselves, administrative at all level (region, zone wereda and kebele level) have shown a strong concern for the SMNP. Attitude of the local communities and *sense of*

ownership towards the national parks has been improving from time to time. As we noted above (other section) apart from the existing poverty level and lack of social infrastructures in Gich area of the park, park tourism development is one of the triggering factor for willingness of Gich people for their relocation outside the park.

Although tourists travelling to the SMNP are increasing over time, comparing to other similar national park in our neighboring countries (like Kenya, Mount Kenya national park) the SMNP is receiving less than 9% tourist number per annum. There is a growing interest from our primary and secondary target markets outbound tour companies (USA, Germany, Italy, France, UK, Spain, China...) to send tourists to the SMNP however due to challenges like delivery of a quality tourism product, lack of standard accommodation, poor quality and insufficient tourism infrastructures annual tourist flow from these countries has shown limited growth. Currently there are only two tourist standard Lodge providing tourist services in SMNP (namely Simien and Limalimo Lodges). There is big gap in demand and supply triggering the development of environmentally friendly standard tourist services infrastructures like Eco-lodge and hotel investments in and around the park.

As we noted in the last year state report Government body (the Ethiopian tourism organization responsible for tourism destination development and marketing) had approached and lobbied capable investors to develop eco-lodges in and around the national parks of the country. Following this EWCA had received three applicant interested investors and selected possible sites based on the criteria of eco-lodge sites selection and the management plan of the park and then proposed the sites for environmental impact assessment (EIA) study. Although the investors hired consulting firm and conducted the required EIA study on the selected sites EWCA management has been forced to delay the process as there are some complains from different concerned bodies. Some concerned body has also directly accused the authority to UNESCO as if the core habitats of the park were provided for eco-lodges development which is completely different from the reality on the ground. Following the request from UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the state party had given ample clarification on the raised issues in timely manner.

Currently, nothing has been started on the proposed and studied sites until we sort out the complaints raised by various stakeholders and partners. Besides, as a state party of UNESCO EWCA is expected to convince UNESCO World Heritage Committee about the importance of additional Eco-lodges in SMNP and show the selected sites are appropriate for the plan development. Hopefully apart from this report, the actual visit program of UNESCO reactive mission in the upcoming April 2017 will fully changes the UNESCO World heritage Committee understanding regarding Eco-lodges development plan in the property. As we clearly indicated in our response to UNESCO all the selected sites are almost on the boundary line (within the buffer zone) of the park (Fig.14).

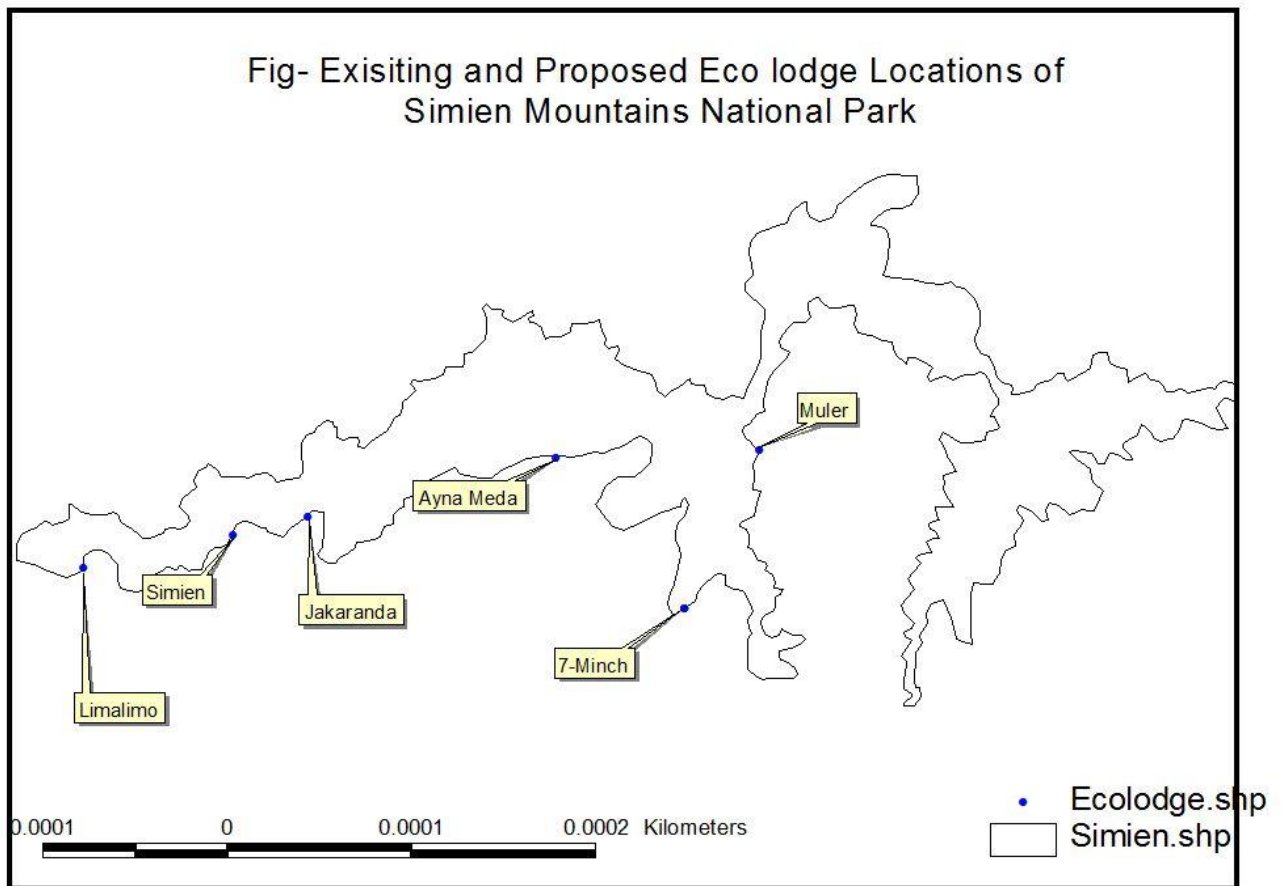


Fig.14: Picture showing locations of the existing and proposed Eco lodges; Source: EWCA (2016)

## **2.7. Boundary Modification Dossier**

The re-gazettal of the property is finalized and 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 played a vital role in 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 and recently some remaining budget has been released from UNESCO-WHC for developing the new map. The draft final report has been submitted by the team and currently EWCA in collaboration with AWF is working to develop 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.