

Prospects for Environmental Protection and Eco-Tourism In Semen Shewa

By
Hailu W.Amanuel
25 Chn.Ami-Argand, 1290 Versoix, Geneva
hwanegatu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The paper will attempt to review the existing environmental situation in Semen Shewa, identify sites for environmental protection and promotion of ecotourism, and shall put forward proposals for achieving soil, water and forest conservation as well as for promoting ecotourism in the region.

Semen Shewa embraces the Central Region of Ethiopia that lies north of the national capital city, Addis Abeba. It comprises of the traditional administrative areas known as Bulga, Angolela, Merhabete, Ensaro, Jiru, Ankober, Tegulet, Menz and Yifat.

The physiography of the area is characterized by mainly highlands (Dega, plateau (Weyna Dega) and lowlands (Kola). The high mountain peaks of the area, Mt.Abebe (4005), Mt.Megezez (3878), Mt. Kundi (3730) are found on the water divide of the Abay (Nile) River Basin and the Awash River Basin. The region receives adequate rainfall during the main rain season, June to September and the small rain season, march to April. The whole region is drenched with water for some three or four months and suffers from lack of water during most of the year.

The surprisingly fast, southward moving desertification process has began to seriously affect the region. Shortage of rain, desiccation, failure of the annual crops has occurred frequently causing starvation and death to numerous inhabitants.

The region is one of the oldest population centers of Ethiopia that has long been settled and cultivated. Through the ages it has suffered from deforestation, over cultivation, and over grazing thus exposing the land to excessive erosion and degradation. Steep slopes and marginal lands are farmed and put under crops leaving limited fallow land for grazing and afforestation. With the exception of the small and isolated existing forests, the region is largely devoid of forests, it is denuded of tree cover and suffers from lack of wood for fuel and construction. Dried dung is used for fire by most of the inhabitants of the region.

As one of the early developed parts of Ethiopia it has numerous historic sites, churches and monasteries that have to be properly identified and used to promote ecotourism in the region.

The study will attempt to identify the various scenic areas of the region, localities that would have to be protected and reforested, and areas, which would serve as foci for tourism. It will assess existing facilities and identify the potentials for environmental protection and ecotourism.

1.0 Introduction

Semen Shewa is one of the Central Regions of Ethiopia that lies between 38.5oE and 40.5oE Long and 9.oN and 11.o N Latitude. It has a total area of about 18,000 sq.kms and is organized under 18 administrative districts. The total population of the area is estimated at 1.8 million persons. The density of settlement is 100 inhabitants per square kilometer, which is much higher than the national average of 60 persons per square kilometer.

2.0 The Region

Semen Shewa embraces the whole region lying north of Ethiopia's Capital City Addis Abeba. It is composed of the traditional administrative areas known as Bulga, Tera, Angolela, Merhabete, Ensaro, Jirru, Ankober, Tegulet, Menz and Yifat. The region is

composed of highlands, plateaus, deeply cut gorges and steep slopped valleys (see map 2). The physiographic characteristics of the area is basically one of highlands (*Dega*), plateau (*Woyna Dega*) and lowland plains (*Kola*). The highest mountain peaks of Shewa, Mt.Abeye (4005m), Mt.Megezez (3878m), Mt.Kundi (3730m), are found on the crest of the watershed which divides the Abay (Blue Nile) and the Awash basins. The plateaus in between these mountains are flat at places but mostly undulating and deeply cut by running streams. The lowland regions are found basically in the deep river valleys, particularly the Adabay-Jemma Valleys to the west and the Awash Valley to the east.

Jemma River is the major westward flowing river draining into the great Abay River (see map 2). It cuts down into deep gorges that are densely populated and intensively cultivated.

Numerous annual and perennial rivers that tumble down from the higher grounds of over 3000ms.to bellow 900ms feed the main Jemma river, eroding and cutting deep ravines and gorges in their course of flow. The main tributaries of the westward flowing Jemma River are Robi, Chacha, Beresa, Dalecha, Dembaro, Gunagunit, Mofewuha and Wonchit rivers. There are also many small and big streams that emanate in the highlands and drain eastwards to the Awash Valley. The major eastward flowing rivers, from south to north, are Rivers Kesem, Kebena, Ayrara, Awadi, Robit, Jewuha and Jarra. The watershed region of these two major river systems of Ethiopia covering the whole region from Megezez Mt. in the south to Abuye Meda in the north offers a spectacular scenery and it could be protected and developed as a center Ethiopia's natural fauna and flora.

The Region receives adequate rainfall during the main rainy season, June to September and the small rainy season, March to April. The ridge of the Rift Valley facing the Awash River is cloudy and moist during most of the year. The whole area is drenched with water during the rainy season and suffers from serious lack of water in the dry season. The surprisingly fast encroaching desertification process that has progressively been moving southwards in the past decades has seriously affected the region. Dessication, shortage of rain, failure of the annual crops has occurred frequently in the region causing starvation and death to numerous inhabitants.

State forests were protected and maintained in the localities of Megezez, Wofwasha, Kundi, Tarmaber and Menz for generations. The size and content of the existing State forests has been much reduced by the overuse and abuse by the people residing in the adjoining areas. The largest existing unit, with a great variety of original trees and shrubs, is the State forest of Wofwasha that covers an area of about 16,000ha. Except the Guassa Natural Reserve in Menz, the other remaining natural forests are very small in size and could completely disappear if concerted efforts are not taken soon to safeguard them.

The Region is one of the oldest population centers of Ethiopia that has been long settled and cultivated. Through the ages it has suffered from deforestation, over cultivation and over grazing as well as excessive erosion and degradation. Steep slopes and marginal lands are farmed and put under crops, leaving very little fallow land for grazing or afforestation. With the exception of the small and isolated existing forests, the region is largely devoid of forests; it is denuded of tree cover and suffers from lack of wood for fire and construction. Dried dung is used for fire by most of the inhabitants of the region.

The people of the Region are hard working and have been exerting tremendous efforts to survive and sustain their existence. Shortages of food supply, lack of clean potable water, malnutrition and under nourishment are rampant in the region. Woman and Children have to travel long distances in order to fetch water, collect cow dung for fire wood.

Men woman and children have to toil from dusk to dawn in order to fulfill the requirements for minimum existence. Hard times are faced frequently by the inhabitants of the region as a result of the frequent occurrences of drought and crop failures. They are exposed to starvation and death. In the distant past, however the region has been self-sustaining and had served the Ethiopian State as a source of man power and food supply for generations.

From a historical perspective, the region has served as an Administrative Center for the Kings of Shewa and Ethiopia. Some of the centers that served as seats of Government, going back to the period of Amde Tsion (1314-1344) and Zera Yakob (1434-1468) up to the period of Menelik II (1865-1913), are: Menz, Tegulet, Debre Birhan, Sela Dingay, Lajagind, Ankober, Liche and Angolela.

There exist numerous historical sites, old churches, holy springs (*Tebel*,) sanctuaries, monasteries and learning centers which deserve to be recognized, preserved and put into better use by the present and for the coming generations. The high lands and scenic areas of Abeye Meda, Gishen and Afquera, Mezezo and Tarmaber in the uplands of Menz stand in contrast to the gentle and fertile valleys of Jewuha, Ataye , Robit and Awadi Vlleys in Yefat. Moferwuah and Adaby valleys in Tegulet harbor numerous caves, monasteries and centers of worship. Megezez mountain, Kormash and Kesem Valleys are also areas of great historic and scenic interest.

Semen Shewa, which is well watered, cool and healthy, has been very conducive for breeding cattle and sheep and the cultivation of varied grain crops and vegetables. Throughout the ages it has been well cultivated and until recently, rarely suffered from shortage of food crops. In fact it has been a surplus producing area providing other regions to the south, east and north with such products as barley, wheat, horse beans, chickpeas, lentil, onion, pepper, gesho (hops), cattle and sheep.

Wheat, beans and lentils produced on the undulating uplands of Shewa were exported to the Middle East and beyond during and after the Second World War. The prospect of self-sufficiency can be realized if alternative sources of employment are developed and the inhabitants are convinced to withdraw from cultivating marginal lands and concentrate in using land efficiently not only for cultivation but also for tree plantation and for raising cattle and sheep. Farmers could secure more and better food production if modern farming methods, better tools and selected seeds are put into use.

A main asphalt road running from Addis to Desse traverses the project area, connecting the towns of Sheno, Chacha, Debre Sina and Shewa Robit. All weather gravel roads also connect Shola Gebeya, Ginager and Asagirt in Tera to the main highway at Cheki. The road that runs from Debre Birhan to Jihur connects the towns of Mendida, Deneba, Inewari and serves many rural communities. The roads from Debre Birhan to Ankober, from Tarma Ber to Sela Dingay and Mehal Meda also serve many population centers and peasant associations. The capital city of the Administrative Zone, Debre Birhan is located in the middle of the Project zone.

In the past population congestion in the region has been partially relieved by out migration to the southern regions of Ethiopia. The area has been a supplier of manpower for service in the military, government administration, farming and other services in Addis Abeba and the southern regions of the country. Throughout the ages thousands of men and women have moved out of the region and settled in near and far away regions in Harrar, Sidamo, Gamo Gofa, Kaffa and Illubabor. Many top ranking civil and military leaders, clergy, teachers and scholars, engineers, lawyers, medical doctors and assistants have come from this region and made significant contributions to the process of development and state building in Ethiopia.

Many Ethiopians who originate from the area are now in the USA, Canada, Europe, Asia or Australia, learning, teaching, working and leading a more secure life. When the time comes and the call reaches them, they are bound to respond favorably and contribute towards the advancement of the noble community based project that is being envisaged now and which, it is hoped, will be the precursor of many more.

3.0 What could be done in the future by way of Environmental Protection and Eco-tourism?

Measures would have to be taken soon to reduce and eliminate poverty through the advancement of environmental protection and the creation of alternative sources of employment for the population of the project area. The protection and expansion of highland forest areas, the preservation, safeguarding and proper use of the natural and cultural heritage of the region and the promotion of tourism would be important components of the project.

Project components and programs will be identified and prepared taking into consideration the interests and requirements of the inhabitants of the region and with the view of making them not only direct beneficiaries but also participants in the execution of those projects and programs that will be implemented. Particular attention will be directed to devise appropriate programs that would alleviate hardships and burden imposed on mothers and children.

Securing safe and adequate water for the domestic consumption of the inhabitants and their livestock, watershed protection through soil and water conservation, the identification and safeguarding of natural springs, the construction of terraces and embankments for protection and the development of small-scale irrigation projects will be part of the project. The project will be gender sensitive and will give particular attention to woman and children. Effort will be exerted to empower them to engage in less burdensome and more rewarding activities.

The many scenic areas, mountains, deep gorges and canyons, natural forest reserves, sanctuaries, caves, monasteries, curative cold and hot water springs in the region would be properly identified, protected and developed. Measures will also be taken to safeguard old manuscripts, crowns, crosses and other artifacts of historic significance and use them properly for the promotion of eco-tourism in the region.

Construction of rural roads connecting communities and peasant associations to main population centers and towns would be an important component of the project. It will

open up alternative/supplementary employment opportunities for the residents and will enhance transport and trading activities in the region. With the expansion of trade, diversification into other activities would follow, thereby enhancing other economic activities that would be of benefit to the population.

A Government Sheep breeding experimental farm and an International Livestock Research Center have been established near the city of Debre Birhan a few decades ago. These Centers were designed to conduct research, serve as demonstration stations for the cattle and sheep breeders in the region and to distribute improved breeds to peasant farmers. Despite their long existence and the earnest attempts made by concerned authorities and functionaries, the outcome of these experimental stations has yet to have an impact. The activities of these research farms would have to be looked into and evaluated carefully before any specific measures for change and improvement are recommended regarding their future.

A variety of rocks, stones (granite, sandstone), gravel and sand abound in the region. The project will also look into the possibility of exploring, mining, quarrying, shaping and the transportation and marketing of products.

Diseases such as malaria, goiter and leprosy affect inhabitants of certain areas within the region. HIV/AIDS is also reported to be spreading very fast in the region. The project will look into the public health situation in the region and design programs for the prevention and elimination of prevailing diseases.

Support for training and upgrading of the skills and education of manpower would also be incorporated in the programs of the project area. Programs for practical training in poverty reduction, environmental protection and eco tourism as well as the need for proper nutrition and proper physical training would be assessed and programs would be worked out and implemented.

The area has unfortunately not received any significant injection of development funds, either private or public, for a considerable period, and the launching and implementation of self-help projects and programs would enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness.

4.0 The Need for appropriate Projects and Programs:

Before launching the project and programs, pre-feasibility and feasibility studies would be undertaken. Preliminary contacts have to be made and established with representatives of the Zone's Administration Office, Representatives of Governmental and Non governmental Organizations, Community leaders and Representatives of Farmers Associations.

At the outset project activities will be limited in space and content and detailed programs will be worked out allowing for gradual and progressive expansion.

Following the completion of pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, the first phase of the project will be the selection of Peasant Associations that would be involved in the establishment of tree seedling growing and distribution centers.

Sensitization and orientation programs on environmental protection and tourism promotion will be conducted for leading members of Peasant Associations, Students and

other functionaries. Identification of sites for spring development sites for the construction of embankments for water reservoirs, the identification and setting up of sites for cattle and sheep breeding will also be undertaken.

Sites of historic importance and tourism value will also be identified and recommendations made for the necessary preliminary work thereon.

Following the completion of feasibility studies detailed project and program preparations will be undertaken and reports will be submitted to the governing body of the Association and to supporting organizations and institutions.

5.0 Cooperation and Coordination of Activities:

DASE has been working very closely with the recently established private organization called “Ankober Amba Ecotourism PLC”. The enterprise aims at promoting ecotourism in the Ankober region that has maintained its historical name and fame, cultural richness and fabulous scenery. By linking Ankober to the outside world the enterprise plans to provide facilities that will be of benefit to national and international visitors and promote the socio-economic development of the area.

A recently completed Feasibility Study on Ecotourism in Semen Shewa has been supervised by Amba Ecotourism. The study was undertaken by a private consultant with the support of The Center for Development and Environment(CDE) of the University of Bern. The study has identified two natural reserve areas at Wofwasha State Forest and the Guassa Reserve Area where two modest tourist lodges of ten beds each could be constructed and developed for ecotourism promotion (Summary of the study is attached).

There are also other Private Organizations, Government Development Agencies and Non Governmental Organizations that have representation and operate in the region with which DASE plans to establish close relations and cooperation.

Some of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in the region are: Christian Children’s Fund (CCF-Ethiopia), Menschen to Menschen(MFM)or People to People Organization (Merhabete), The Lutheran World Relief (Mekoy, Yifat), Farm-Africa-Ethiopia (Mitak), Rada Barna (Norway) (Tegulet), Ethio-American Ethiopian Farmers Aid Association (EAEFAA) (Gidem-Wotagas-Yifat), DAY LaloMidir Development Project, (Wogera Area of Menz)., World Vision (Yifat).

Every effort will be made to identify and contact other NGOs operating in the region and to establish cooperation with them.

6.0 Project Phases and Programs

Project and programs will be developed and executed in phases. Initially the project area will be limited and will incorporate no more than three peasant associations in the first phase. Programs and activities will however be extended to larger areas and will embrace as many of the region’s inhabitants as resources and conditions permit.

The Development Association of Shewa-Ethiopia (DASE) will undertake feasibility studies, formulate and execute programs in consultation and cooperation with

representatives of government agencies and representatives of non-governmental organizations operating in the region as well as representatives of communities and peasant associations in the region.

7.0 Phase one:

- ◆ Mobilize human, material and financial support and assistance from individuals and organizations.
- ◆ Carry out feasibility studies for Ecotourism in the Tarmaber-Kundi-Wofwasha-Gorebela-Ankober locality of the Semen Shewa Mountains (Study completed, see attachment)
- ◆ Conduct pre feasibility and feasibility studies of the region.
- ◆ Contact Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies to identify programs and activities being undertaken in the region and explore possibilities of cooperation and coordination of activities with other agencies.
- ◆ Identify and select at least three peasant associations whose members would be willing to undertake tree seedling cultivation
- ◆ Identify peasant associations willing to cooperate in improving and expanding cattle and sheep breeding.
- ◆ Identify sites of springs, sites for ponds and embankments.
- ◆ Prepare detail programs and budget for Phase II

7.1 Phase II

- ◆ Finalize the preparation of detailed Project Plans and Programs
- ◆ Start Project Implementation (tree seedlings, springs, ponds, embankments) the limited areas (3-4 peasant associations) identified in phase one.
- ◆ Conclude agreements with limited peasant associations (3/4) for improved sheep and cattle raising
- ◆ Identify and register natural forest and wild life areas in the region.
- ◆ Identify sanctuaries, historic sites, monasteries and churches, register and negotiate with concerned authorities, establishments and individuals on how to safeguard and use for promotion of tourism
- ◆ Identify and negotiate concessions for quarries and stone works
- ◆ Identify sources of financial and material support and initiate and execute fund raising activities.

Phase III.

A Five Years Program Implementation Initiative shall be prepared. Based on experience gained in the implementation of projects and programs in phases one and two, a much expanded five-year program shall be prepared covering a much wider area and greater number of inhabitant participants.

The Need for A Development Association:

Concerned individuals familiar with the environment, the inhabitants, the living conditions and the potentials of the region are convinced and resolved to establish a development association for the region. The fundamental objectives of the Association

shall be to assist the inhabitants of the region in their endeavors to overcome and ensure a sustainable existence. The Association shall be involved in the identification, development and implementation of support projects and programs that will promote environmental protection, ecotourism, and related activities. The activities of the Association would be geared towards making positive contributions to the efforts of the inhabitants of the region to solve existing problems and to improve their living conditions. I am happy to state that our association has been recently registered in Addis Abeba and is now recognized as one of the NGOs and will be known as Environmental Development Association in Ethiopia (EDA).

Conclusion:

To realize the potentials of the region for the development of environmental protection and the promotion of Ecotourism, a concerted effort would have to be made by individual supporters, government agencies, no-governmental organizations and community organizations. One essential requirement for the realization of positive developments in the depressed and backward region of Semen Shewa would be the acquisition of adequate and appropriate material and financial Support. We hope and envisage that the Association that is now being established in Ethiopia and elsewhere will assist in the realization of such requirements.

.....

References:

1. Abir, Mordechai, “ The Rise of the Kingdom of Shewa and the New Christian Empire” pp.144 to 187, in *The Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855*, Longmans,
2. Buxton, D.R, “The Shoan Plateau and Its people: An Essay in Local Geography”, *The Geographical Journal*-Vol CXIV-No.4-6, Dec.1949.
3. Buxton, David, *Travels in Ethiopia*, Ernest Benn Ltd.1949, 1957.
4. Buxton, David R. *The Abyssinians* Praeger Publishers, New York, Washington,
5. Darkwah, Kofi R.H *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire 181-1889*, London, Heinemann, 1975.
7. Harris, W.C. *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, J.Winchester, New World Press, 80 Ann Street, N.Y, 1844.
8. Henze, Paul B. *The Heart of Old Shoa*. Unpublished paper prepared for “Orbis Aethiopicus in Munich, October 1999”.
9. Levine, Donald N. *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in the Ethiopian Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, 1965.
10. Pankhurst, Richard, *Ankoba: A Town with a History*, Selamta, pp
11. *Ibid.* Debre Berhan- *The Place of Light*, Selamita, pp49-55
12. Pankhurst, Rita, *In Quest of Ankober’s Church Libraries*, paper for the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies.
13. Trimmingham, John Spencer, *Islam in Ethiopia*, Oxford University Press, London, 1952.

Attachment:

“Summary of North Shewa Ecotourism Feasibility Study, Addis Abeba, May 2003.

Summary of the Feasibility Study for Ecotourism Development in Semen Shewa

May 2003

(by Theodros Atlabatchew , PhD, Team Leader, Getachew Taye and Bahru Alemu)

Introduction:

A recent feasibility study, initiated by DASE (Development Association of Shewa-Ethiopia), supervised by the Manager of Ankober Amba PLC and supported by the Center for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, has been carried out by a private consultant and associates. The study has identified two natural reserve areas in Semen Shewa that provide the requisite conditions for the development of ecotourism. These are the WofWasha State Forest and the Guassa Protected Area. The overall objective of the project was to develop two eco-tourism centers with the view of preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the area, contributing to the improvement of the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the local Communities, rendering quality services to tourists and generating economic benefits.

The reasons, which necessitated the development of Ecotourism in North Shewa include the availability of unique natural, cultural and historical tourist attractions; the location of the project sites, which are suitable for major inbound and domestic tourists; the relatively low investment cost of the project and high rate of return; the need to rehabilitate and preserve the natural and cultural assets of the area; and the need to encourage the development of socially, culturally and environmentally responsible type of tourism in the region, which can also serve as a pilot for replication in other areas of the country.

1.0 ASSESSEMENT OF THE PROJECT AREAS

North Shewa Administration (NSA) is one of the 10 administrations making the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) and lies in the South Eastern part of the region. It has an area of 16,070.25sq.kms divided into 21 Woredas (Administration Localities). The natural and man made forest ecosystems occupy, mainly, a narrow strip on the escarpments stretching northwards from Gorebela, Ankober to Tarmaber, Debre Sina and beyond towards Mahal Meda, Gera Keya Woreda (Map). It is a habitat to a variety of useful plants, endemic species and endangered wild animals.

Wof Washa State Forest and Guassa Protected Area, located in the four Wredas of the administration, are the most suitable sites for the development of ecotourism. Thus, in the vicinity of Wof Washa State Forest and Guassa Protected Area, places called Tif Amba and Yedi are selected respectively for the development of two ecotourism centers. Brief assessments of the project sites are presented below.

1.1. Wof Washa State Forest:

Wof Washa forest is located in the central highlands of Ethiopia in Northern Shewa and lies between 39°42'E and 39°50'E longitude and 9°34'N to 10°20' N latitude. The total area of the forest is 16,927.5 ha. Having a narrow shape, the forest area stretches from Ankober towards the North up to Tarma Ber. Originally, the demarcated area was about 9,550 ha. But it was later decided to include various state plantation sites and increase the area to 16,927.54 ha. The Wof Washa forest can be categorized as highland montane mixed broad leaved/conifer forest. The major species found in the forest are: *Juniperus procera*, *Podocarpus gracilios*, *Hajenia Abyssinica*, etc.

There are also plantations in the forest area, which are composed of exotic species mainly Cupressus lusitanica and Eucalyptus globulus. These plantations were established during the years 1980 - 89. In general, the Cupressus plantation looks healthy.

It is believed that Emperor Zera Yekob, in the 15th century, ordered the preservation of the forest as "Crown Forest". The forest has been the source of construction wood for the nearby churches, villages and urban centers for centuries. Later on, the forest was declared to be a State Reserve Forest following the establishment of the first forest policy in the country, by Emperor Menelik II (in 1880's),

According to a socio-economic survey conducted in 1994, there were 43 Peasant Associations (PAs) within and around the project boundary, out of which 4 are fully within the project area and the rest 39 are partially within the demarcation line. These 43 PAs contain a total of 7,270 households with 36,068 family members. The numbers of household heads of the 4 PAs, which are fully residing within the project area, are only 457 with a total population of 2,399.

The nearest urban centers that benefit from the forest and their respective population are Debre Berehan 43,652; Debre Sina 8,811; Ankober-Gorebela..., ,Aliyu Amba 1,927; Mezezo 1,548; Shewa Robit 17,848 and Mehal Meda 7,637.

Nursery- Seedlings for reforestation program are raised in three nurseries: Shola Meda, Tif Amba & Workit. Shola Meda nursery is located some 5 kms from Debre Sina has an area of about 1.5 hectares with a capacity of 2,000,000 potted seedlings. It has one water pump which supplies water from the near by pond. Tif Amba nursery is about one hectare and can produce approximately 1,000,000 seedlings. It is located near the main Wof Washa natural forest. The size of Workit nursery is about 0.5 hectare with a production capacity of 0.5 million seedlings.

Wildlife- Gilada Baboon, Cheatah, Bushbuck, Duikers, Colobus monkey and apes are among the frequent wild animals sheltering in the forest. Porcupine, Wild pigs, Wart hogs and other small wild animals including a variety of avifauna are also among the frequently observed wild life in the area.

1.2. Guassa Protected Area

The Guassa area is located in the Gera-Keya Woreda of Menz, in Northern Shewa, between 10.15°N-110.27°N and 39.45°-39.49°E (Map1). It is found at 260 km from the Ethiopian Capital Addis Ababa, and 132 km North of Debre Birhan, the capital of North Shewa. It has a total area of 98,450 ha. The Guassa Protected Area forms the western edge of the Great Rift Valley with abrupt cliffs rising up to thousands of kms. above the surrounding lowlands - a stupendous sight. The altitude ranges from 3200m asl to 3600m asl and it is a very rugged area in the region of Menz.

Guassa Area is a water catchment where 26 rivers rising up from the mountain flow both to the west and the east. The rivers that drain to the west join the Blue Nile (Abay) and those that flow to the east join the Awash River.

Guassa Grassland is the most important type of the vegetation for the community and comprises 19% of the total area of *festuca* grassland. "Guassa" grows up to 3600masl where the drainage is good and the soil deep. It is common on the hills of Ras Ketema, Sefed Meda, and in the southern hills of Yedi.

There are 6 species of rodents found in Guassa area. Mammals of the area such as the Ethiopian Wolf, belong to the order carnivore, which is endemic to Ethiopia. It is confined to the altitude range between 3000m-4000masl. The Ethiopian Mountain Wolf is the most endangered animal that is remaining with the approximate population of 500 in the country.

About 110 bird species have been recorded in the Guassa area of Menz. The Guassa area harbor 12% of the 861 species of birds recorded in Ethiopia (EWNHS, 1996). Out of the 14 endemic bird species of Ethiopia, 5 of them are found in the Shewa Area.

The range restricted and globally endangered Ankober Serin (Serins and Ankoberensis) is found in the Guassa area. This is restricted at the northern part of Guassa area. There are also Reptiles and Amphibians.

Gera-Keya Woreda has a population of 155,922 of which 93% of them live in the rural area. The average density of the population is 92 per km². As concerns age structure, population under 14 years age accounted for 39.75% and above 15 years age was 60.2% of the Wereda. The total population of females was 9% more than males in the Wereda. There were 34,348 households with an average household size of 4.5 persons. 99.9% of the population belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church while only 0.15% belonged to other denominations.

Meahal Meda, the Woreda capital is the principal town in the region. It is situated at 102 kms. North of Tarmaber and at a distance of 282 kms. from Addis Abebea. The distance from Ataye Town to Mehal Meda is only 42 kms. but requires regular maintenance for frequent use. Anget Mwugia is the site in Yedi that is suitable for the construction of the lodge. It has services such as electricity, telephone communication and clinic are available in the area.

2.0 TOURISM DEMAND AND SUPPLY

2.1 Tourism Demand: The number of international tourists visiting Ethiopia over the past forty years has witnessed substantial ups and downs. With the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in May 1997 the tourism industry suffered the quensequences of war showing substantial decreases in the period 1998-2000. With the termination of the war and the reinstatement of peace, once again the number of inbound tourists showed a steady growth recording more than 150,000 in 2002.

Domestic tourism, both of nationals and foreigners, residing in the country can also grow into an important tourist category, if well-organized packages of tour programs to the different attraction sites in the country are offered. Addis Ababa is a seat of the newly formed African Union (AU), the United Nations' Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), many other Regional and Sub-Regional organizations, Institutions of Higher Education, NGOs and More than 100 Embassy Offices.

If attractive and tailored tour programs are organized and promoted, there are good possibilities to penetrate this great market potential. Nationals with sizeable income are also important market potential, for which a comprehensive system for measuring the volume of this category of tourists is yet to develop.

Projected Inbound and Domestic tourism demand:

Ecotourism is a nature based form of specialty travel and defined as "responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people."

Ethiopia's natural and man-made tourist attractions have great potential for the development of ecotourism. Following the continuous travel intention survey of the European Travel Monitor (the largest tourist database of the world), there is a so-called interest potential for Ethiopia of 4%, which are more than 10 million Europeans. It is therefore, logical to conclude that quality tourism supply is the limitation for sales development and not the demand.

There are also a number of domestic tourists with sizeable income willing to spend their weekends or free times in such an environment. Foreign nationals residing in Ethiopia and affluent citizens, for instance, frequent Sodere and Lanangano. These places do not offer the types of attractions Wof Washa and Guassa areas can offer. Moreover, these places are faded by most of the visitors. North Shewa as a new destination, offers both natural and cultural attractions that could be more attractive for most of the domestic visitors.

The demand for eco-tourism in Ethiopia is not yet met due to poor resource management and lack of tourist facilities. However, if properly developed and managed the envisaged Eco-tourism sites are appealing to the following target groups: Ethnologists, Entomologists, Historians, Linguistics, Ornithologists, Amateur photographers, Bird watchers, Botanists, Camping fans, Hikers, Conservationists, Trekkers, Wildlife fans, Nature enthusiasts, Zoologists.

2.1 Demand and Supply for Accommodation Facilities

According to studies conducted by the European Travel Monitor there are more than 10 million potential tourists in Europe alone who are willing to visit Ethiopia. However, due to lack of adequate infrastructure and tourist facilities the number of inbound tourists to Ethiopia has always been extremely low. This situation has also affected the potential domestic tourists to travel freely and enjoy these attractions. Even

though the project sites and their surroundings are endowed with high quality natural and cultural tourist attractions these areas have not been able to attract tourists due to lack of infrastructure and the necessary tourist facilities.

Tourists coming to Ethiopia from abroad will prefer to be accommodated in such a place where they can enjoy culture, landscape, flora, fauna and traditional architectural designs in a secluded area. Unfortunately, the project sites and their surroundings do not offer even a single accommodation facility for nature and culture enthusiasts. This, however, will allow the project, at least for some time to come, to be the single accommodation establishment without strong competitors in the area. There are also a number of domestic tourists with sizeable income willing to spend their weekends or free times in such an environment. All the above factors justify the construction of eco-lodge accommodation and related facilities at the two proposed sites.

3.0. THE PROPOSED ECOTOURISM PROJECT

The study of the “Proposed Ecotourism Project” includes the Description of the Project, studies of anticipated benefits, project components and cost estimates, and manpower requirements. It also includes details about the investment feasibility, including envisaged revenue, operating costs and a cost-benefit analysis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study draws attention to the natural and cultural endowments of Semen Shewa and to the potentials for the development of sustainable tourism in the region. The project sites and their surroundings are highly privileged in natural and man-made tourist attractions, which would soon become very attractive and developed tourist sites.

The North Shewa Ecotourism Project has been designed to specifically address the needs and expectations of nature and culture enthusiasts, providing both a conservation tool as well as a mechanism, which can benefit the local community. The envisaged projects, at least for the time being, are two of the very few ecotourism establishments in the country and if established soon and properly managed and marketed, could be profitable beginning from the first year of operation.

Given the location of the sites and the marvelous tourist attractions, the real estate appreciation for the particular investment is very high and hence, the high future value is the most important factor encouraging investors to take a swift decision. The fact that the return on investment is very attractive compared to other types of tourism investments, this project is very encouraging to prospective investors.
