

Encouraging conservation through eco-tourism

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In July 2016, I took part in a site visit and learning exchange in July 2016 in Loita Hills, Kenya. The site exchange was part of an initiative by CEPF to build capacity among its grantees. The exchange was organized by the Tropical Biology Association and was hosted by Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO). It involved another representative from University of Gondar. The objective of the exchange was to explore and discuss the use of eco-tourism ventures for biodiversity conservation and livelihood improvement.

During the exchange I participated in a variety of activities. We visited KENVO Osutua eco-lodge where we learnt more about the facilities and how visiting groups are engaged on site. In addition, we travelled to Loita hills to get first-hand experience and take lessons in the design of nature trails and involvement of the local community, marketing strategies and benefits sharing. We then proceeded to interact with the local community and got to learn more about their role in eco-tourism activities. We also visited a number of sustainable enterprises owned by the local community.

Further, with local Maasai men acting as our tour guides, we browsed the nature trail, as they explained how they select the routes and the roles played by the local community.

Valuable knowledge was garnered from the exchange. For instance, the walking safari through the trails of Loita hills, the visit to the KENVO eco-lodges, and discussions made with the Maasai community of Kenya taught me how to improve the ongoing eco-tourism projects

under my supervision. I also learnt how to protect the ecological integrity of ecosystems of my country and elsewhere for the benefits of the generations.

The native Maasai also taught me how indigenous knowledge and cultural practices along with modern methods can be used to successfully conserve natural forests, design trails/trekking routes in the wilderness areas, and how to use ecotourism to enhance socio-economic benefits to the local community.

The exchange helped me fill up the gaps and challenges I have been facing while working on conservation and sustainable development projects in the last couple of years. I may now henceforth train others in my institution with the knowledge acquired during the site visit.