

# **Can tourism be a sustainable option for livelihood diversification? A case study in the South Omo Zone, Ethiopia**

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Country visited: Ethiopia

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## **Research background**

South Omo Zone (SOZ) is located in the Lower Omo Valley, southwest of Ethiopia. Its people are predominantly engaged in small-scale farming and agro-pastoralism for their livelihood. The zone is host to 16 diverse ethnic groups with distinct cultures and traditions and is also a major attraction for international tourists interested in heritage tourism. Six out of its eight *woredas* (districts) are major tourist destinations at the national level. The tourism sector as a national economic driver is well established (Sharply and Telfer, 2002),<sup>1</sup> but the extent of its benefit to local people at the destination is important in determining its full impact. Although such impacts are difficult to measure, a recent study on the impact of livelihood (Chen et al., 2018)<sup>2</sup> has yielded some results.

## **Research purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine the significance of cultural tourism on local people's livelihood in SOZ at two selected sites: a peri-urban village in South Ari, and a village in Mursiland, Selamago. The research assessed local people's perspective on the impacts of tourism on their livelihood through:

1. Unstructured interviews with open-ended questionnaires
2. Focus group discussion
3. Participatory observation
4. Photo and video footage of participants as part of the observation methodology

<sup>1</sup> Sharpley, R & Telfer D.J. (Eds.) (2002). *Tourism and Development. Concepts and Issues. Aspects of tourism 5*. Pf. 1-1. Clevedon. Channel View Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Chen, B; Qiu, Z.; Usio, N.; Nakamura, K. (2018). *Tourism's Impacts on Rural Livelihood in the Sustainability of an Aging Community in Japan*. *Sustainability* 10, 2896. doi:10.3390/su10082896.

In this research 30 purposefully selected individuals from the zonal town of Jinka, three households from the peri-urban village, five households in a cattle settlement in Mursi, three tourist sites, and one village far from a tourist destination (20 people in total) were involved.

### **Results/Achievements**

Local people at the studied sites described financial inputs from tourism as being essential in sustaining their main livelihood. In peri-urban settings, income from tourism provides an opportunity to compensate for the diminishing income from their small businesses over time (Photo 1). For some, this income covers grain price increases from pests and drought in the region. In agro-pastoralist Mursiland (Photo II), income from tourism is a buffer for their main asset (cattle) normally sold during crop failure due to unstable rainfall. Observation during fieldwork also substantiated this fact. However, in both cases, local people expressed that the guides and drivers who bring tourists act as gatekeepers, affecting the amount of cash they earn.

### **Plans for further research**

Expanding the number of households in the peri-urban setting, and further in-depth research in Mursiland will be my plan for undertaking two extended fieldworks in 2019.

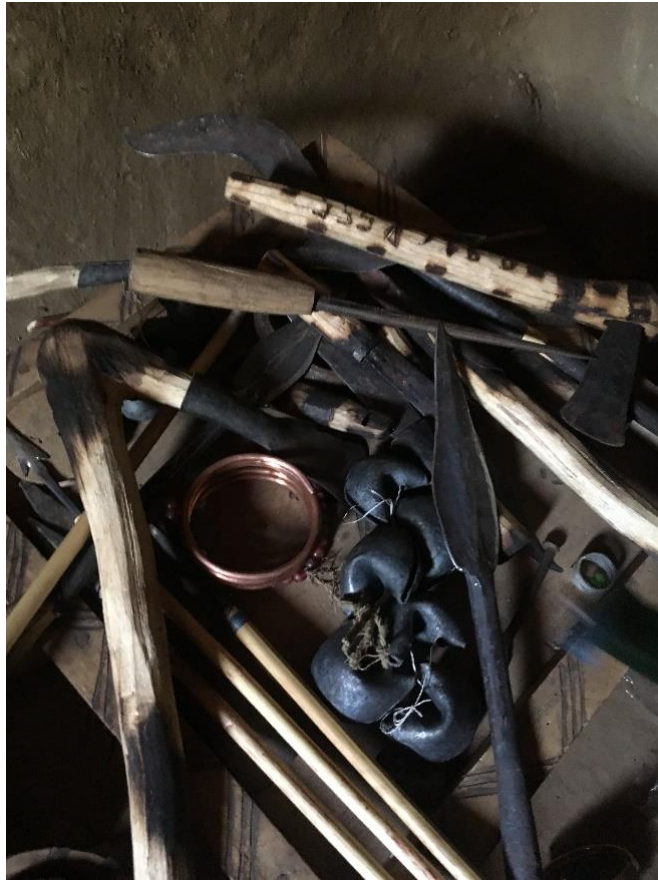


Photo 1: Products of a local Metalsmith displayed for tourists



Photo 2: K. Tourist site