

# Community based ecotourism for Kafa Biosphere Reserve in the wild coffee forests of Southwest Ethiopia

## GLEN 2014 Internship Report

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Internship title: Community based ecotourism for Kafa Biosphere Reserve in the wild coffee forests of Southwest Ethiopia

Internship number: 5000400604

Internship period: 15 September 2014 – 15 December 2014

Internship location: Bonga, Kafa zone, SNNPR, Ethiopia

Host organisation: The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), Bonga

Home organisation: INEX-SDA

## Summary

### English

The GLEN internship took place in the town of Bonga, administrative capital of Kafa zone which belongs to SNNPR federative state in Southwest Ethiopia, in the period from 15 September to 15 December 2015. It was hosted by Bonga office of *The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union* (NABU). Although most of NABU's activities in region focus on the protection of Kafa's Afromontane cloud forests and preservation of its unique biodiversity, the internship was aimed at development of Community based ecotourism for Kafa Biosphere Reserve. GLEN interns' tasks were supporting NABU's existing ecotourism programs while following the specific goals such as assisting community with existing and emerging tourism businesses, developing new initiatives and programs, sharing knowledge and raising awareness.

### Česky

Stáž GLEN probíhala ve městě Bonga, administrativním centru zóny Kafa, která je součástí federálního státu SNNPR nacházejícího se v jihozápadní Etiopii, a to v období od 15. září do 15. prosince 2015. Hostitelskou organizací byla místní pobočka *The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union* (NABU). Ačkoli je většina aktivit NABU v regionu Kafa zaměřena na ochranu afrického horského mlžného lesa a uchování jeho jedinečné biodiverzity, stáž samotná usilovala o rozvoj komunitního ekoturismu pro biosférickou rezervaci Kafa. Úkolem GLEN stážistů bylo podporovat existující ekoturistické programy NABU a sledovat naplňování specifických cílů jako pomoc komunitě se stávajícími a vznikajícími turistickými aktivitami, rozvíjení nových iniciativ a programů, sdílení znalostí a zvyšování uvědomělosti mezi místními lidmi.

# 1. Introduction

In this report, I would like to mention the most important aspects of my internship in Ethiopia which was an important part of GLEN multiplier training cycle. I am aware of the fact that it is only one side of the story – my side. With intention to write the report as objective as possible and avoid all emotionally distortion, I decided to take some weeks for re-thinking everything before I start to write it. It is not possible to cover all my reflection and experience from a three-months-long stay, so I decided to mention those I consider to be the most important.



## 1.1. Project background

GLEN (Global Education Network of Young Europeans) is a non-profit and politically independent network of non-governmental and governmental organisations. The GLEN initiative envisions a world in which people reflect on the global issues and consciously think about their role in a globalised society. GLEN aims to become “global partner network”, connecting people from Europe with people from developing countries on the principles of partnership. Such partnerships should lead to knowledge-sharing, developing global learning strategies and consequently implementing global education activities to promote responsibility, openmindedness, tolerance and respect. For this purpose, there is an annual multipliers training cycle during which some dozens of Young Europeans are selected and trained in order to spend three months as interns in one of the partner organisations abroad.

## 1.2. Interns

This internship was carried out by three European interns, Amato Baumgartner (ASA, Germany), Katarína Teglassyová (GLEN Slovakia) and me – Kateřina Procházková (INEX-SDA, Czech Republic).

At the time of the internship, I was a student of Master of International Development Studies, with previous experience with research in the field of ecotourism as well as from the area of communication and public relations. Katarína who studied the Cultural anthropology was skilled with project management and Amato, Business and

Administration student, was keen gardener and skilled photographer. So from my point of view, concerning our professional background and knowledge, we were nicely selected as a trinom with big potential for the project.

### 1.3. Host organisation

The Germany-based *The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union* (NABU) manages hundreds of nature protection projects all around the world. In Ethiopia, NABU aims to conserve the unique natural heritage site through various activities that focus on biodiversity conservation, sustainable regional development, logistic support to the protected area itself, community-based management systems and environmental education.

NABU Bonga office focuses primarily on the *Kafa Biosphere Reserve* area where since 2006 implements activities in the field of biodiversity/forest conservation, sustainable regional development, climate change, community based conservation programs and environmental education. The Bonga Office consists of some 5 employees and is based in the centre of Bonga town. Activities of the NABU Bonga are regularly supported by few European volunteers and contracted specialists from Ethiopia and abroad.



## 2. About the Project

### 2.1. Preparation in Europe

Being a student of International Development Studies, having previous experience with long-term stay and conducting research in a developing country, I was motivated to put my knowledge about ecotourism and community development in practice. I am conscious about how important is to share information and fight with stereotypes which are overpresent in the society and often have negative impacts on our world perception. Therefore, I wanted to experience reality of a developing country and try to work on a development project on my own to avoid any skewed ideas.

I chose *Community based ecotourism for Kafa Biosphere Reserve in the wild coffee forests of Southwest Ethiopia* project because I knew that I have a needed background and will not be completely lost about the topic, moreover, NABU seemed to me as an important and skilled organisation in the field of nature protection.

Before the arrival, we were regularly in contact with NABU headquarters in Berlin. We received many helpful materials and data to study to get familiar with local reality and projects well before we set out for the internship.

## 2.2. Life in Bonga

In mid-September, when our internship in Bonga started, Amato and me, we had already spent a month in Ethiopia by travelling. This fact made my integration much easier, because I already had some basics in Amharic and learnt a lot about the Ethiopian culture, traditions and habits.

Once we arrived, we were given about two weeks off just to get familiar with life in Bonga which is not as touristic as places we visited before. We were very grateful that we got to know other NABU interns and volunteers from Bonga who helped us a lot during first days with arranging mobile and internet cards, showing some important and useful places in the town, introducing us to local people, etc. We were also told about their volunteering experience and cooperation with NABU.



Bonga is a nice provincial developing town and administrative center of the area. There are many welcoming people who we became easily friends with and who often invited us to their place. I really enjoyed our stay there, regular market shopping, coffee breaks

and great meals in local places, as well as time spent with our friends, and never felt like missing something concerning supply of food, material or other things.



### 2.3. The Internship

From NABU headquarters in Berlin, we received the internship content and a list of tasks we should work on in Bonga. Speaking for myself, I was very motivated and worked on my preparation for the project from the moment we got the materials and data. I was regularly in contact with my internship partners and we shared our ideas and expectation and couldn't wait to start our work.

Therefore, we were willing to start our work for NABU immediately after the arrival, which, unfortunately, was not possible because the Office members were too busy with their work and some community work on approaching festivities. Our attempts to communicate with the head of the Office in order to set the framework for the internship and our work in NABU were not successful. To my disappointment, our first official meeting was some two weeks after the arrival (which meant that 1/6 of our stay was already gone) and the result was that we should work independently, identify what we are interested in and want to do, do our research and write reports, without expecting special support from the Office which has its own work to do. I must say that this was not what I expected.

My expectations were more practical and also more intensive cooperation with the host organisation, a mentor or a responsible person from the Office who would follow the process with us and critically discuss what is done and needs to be done or changed in our approach.

Also our stay differed from what was presented as *internship* which is supposed to be more professional-experience oriented and beneficial for both sides (organisation as well as interns) while our case was rather *volunteering* with practically no support.

We were asked to report to NABU headquarters regularly, but on the other hand we had almost no contact with Bonga office – there was no working space for us, so we had to work from the guesthouse where we stayed. Although we asked to establish some

regular meetings or to be engaged in ongoing NABU activities, it never happened. Therefore, we felt unwanted, which finally shown to be true when we were told that Bonga office asked for one volunteer and got more than they wanted – we were seven volunteers there in one point – which I really understand that was beyond their capacity. To sum it up, we met the head of the office only five times during our three-months-long stay.

Anyway, I decided to use my time regardless of our host organisation disinterest and work on the issues I saw important and useful, and discover local culture by meeting people, talking to them and discussing topics I was interesting about.

## 2.4. Problems, Challenges and Solutions

As mentioned in the previous part, we were facing many difficulties connected to the course of internship, such as lack of communication and cooperation and different perception of the process and the aim of our stay.

Another big issue was a language barrier, since English is not an official language in Ethiopia. It is Amharic and local language Kafino that are spoken in Kafa zone. There are, of course, some people speaking English and children have English classes at school, but in general it was hard to express the idea in a way it would be clearly understood by local people. Unfortunately, we had neither an interpreter, nor Amharic classes before and our slowly gained knowledge consisted of few phrases useful for everyday life, but was not enough for any kind of development work or dealing with any advanced topics.

Apart from that, we found out that it is very difficult to do any activities outside Bonga since there is very poor public transport and some places are not accessible without a car which we didn't have. Therefore, our work – originally described in much wider geographical context – was finally limited to Bonga area and its close surroundings.

Last, but not least, Katarína and me had to deal with visa extension process (because we were not given six-months-long visa we applied for, but only three-months-long one) which has to be done in Addis Abeba only. The travelling to Addis and back was very time consuming, so more than two weeks of our stay were wasted just by this issue.

## 2.5. Project Results and Experience

Since the cooperation with NABU was on very low level, we decided to do what we considered being important and useful. Therefore, I started to work with few local people on different micro projects. One of them reflected interest of a local farmer in diversifying his business by providing agrotourism activities at his small beekeeping farm. We had regular meetings where we discussed his vision and put it together with my knowledge and ideas from my previous experience and with examples from around the world I was continuously doing research about on internet. The result was a manual with tips and options for further development, pictures from abroad and also some marketing advice. Moreover, we figured out ideas to diversify his current production.



Another topic we jointly worked on with my partners was evaluation of ongoing tourism activities and attractions. We managed to make several trips around Bonga, some with local guides, other on our own. Consequently, we evaluated their strong and weak parts, identified opportunities and gave recommendation for further improvement. However, it seems to me, that since tourism activity in Bonga is not coordinated, it is not very easy to reach players who would put our findings into practice.

Being a big fan of coffee and realizing a huge potential of Kafa as a birthplace of coffee, Katarína and I, we developed a Coffee tour manual in which we put up our ideas and recommendation for potential coffee tours.



However, and it is hard to say, because of the obstacles I mentioned above, I think that we did not succeed in changing anything in Bonga community. Despite of all efforts we made, I doubt that the materials we created (maybe except the agrotourism manual which was a reaction to a specific demand) helped to improve community ecotourism development. It is because I see a little possibility that they will be implemented soon since tourism activities in Bonga are not effectively coordinated. Hopefully, some initiative to unite tour operators in Kafa will arise in future and will work more systematically to start and promote ecotourism in sustainable and participative way with a regard to what local people want and need.

Unfortunately, from my point of view, the main practical result of our stay was financing KDA Gueshouse operation.

### 3. Personal benefits

Although I see the internship as a disappointment, I perceive my stay in Ethiopia all in all being very usefull and life-changing experience. It opened my mind in many ways, starting from meeting the reality of development cooperation with its benefits but also its challenges, through learning about problems the local people face in their everyday life as well as about their needs and what they would welcome to be provided by development cooperation, to realizing how much actually geography (I mean climate, relief, location on the periphery, etc.) matters. And I could go on with many other examples. These are very important findings for my future work in the field of development and I will try to do my best to further learn from them.

Another important benefit is that I met many interesting people and made new friends who let me re-think my life values. Hours of discussions we spent together, talking about different issues made me realize that our European consumerism and chase for success is not a way to happiness, in other words it made me appreciate how simple life based on important values such as family, sense of belonging, mutuality can make truly happy and satisfying life.



My four months in Ethiopia were also very enriching in the area of cultural knowledge. I learnt many interesting things about Ethiopia's history, culture, traditions, about the way society is organized, about the importance of nature for human life, as well as lot from traditional knowledge which we in Europe already forgot to use in our lives.

## 4. Conclusion

Three months after I returned back to the Czech Republic, I am still thinking, re-thinking and trying to find out what was the real purpose of our stay. Was it the eye-opening mentioned above? Or should we have brought new knowledge to the project? Or just supplying the organisation with human capacities? I would like to know.

Three months are too short to plan and run successfully a project in a country that is so different, where society thinks and works differently and where people speak local language. To make the stay effective and useful and to implement a project that would have any impact, it would need much more time and support.

Furthermore, I do not see any reason why there should be European volunteers (moreover mostly students, not professionals) going to do activities and project that Ethiopians can do on their own. I did not feel our presence necessary or even needed. There are Ethiopian students and young professionals who would do much better in our place just because they already know local conditions, society and language, and as another benefit, they would get a precious experience which would move them forward.

Honestly, I feel that the person who benefited the most from this internship, in spite of almost non-existing cooperation with the host organization, was me (or our trinom), neither the community, nor the organisation. If this was the aim, then it was fulfilled, if not, then something needs to be changed for future.

In Olomouc, 28 February 2015