

The Potential Economic Benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita

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Abstract

This study was intended to explore the potential economic benefits of 'Gifaataa' Celebration of Wolaita (GCW). The subjects used were 600 individuals selected by availability sampling and 12 elders selected by purposive sampling (by their deep knowledge of overall indigenous wisdom of Wolaita) from six selected Woredas of Wolaita Zone. The descriptive research design was used having the quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaire, face-to-face interview and FGD. The analysis was made using the eclectic approach of data analysis. The result indicated that GCW has various potential economic benefits: It facilitates the promotion and marketing of indigenous local products and handcrafts of Wolaita. It is a fertile venture for budgetary decisions for development by local, regional and national administrators and from the attendants as a form of fund-raising. Gifaataa is also considered as an opportunity for promoting saving culture in Wolaita. However, Wolaitas have not yet exploited this potential opportunity due to lack of awareness. Based on these findings, therefore, Wolaitas should work hard to assure the sustainability of their Gifaataa celebration, the concerned government bodies should play their own roles in cultivating and transferring Gifaataa celebration to the next generation and researches of pertinent depth should be conducted by professionals for the reasons why Wolaitas have not yet exploited the potential economic benefits of their Gifaataa celebration.

Keywords: Wolaita, Gifaataa, economic benefits, celebration, event-marketing

1. Introduction

Goldblatt (2002) defined festivals as a “Kaleidoscope of planned culture, sport and political and business occasions: from mega-events like Olympics and world fairs to community festivals; from programs of events at parks and attractions to visits by dignitaries and intergovernmental assemblies; from small meetings and parties to huge conventions and competitions”. With this definition, it is indicated that festivals are multi-scoped occasions that are planned and celebrated for different purposes. Indicating these multi-dimensional purposes of festivals, Getz (1997) conceptualizes the definition of festivals as events that constitute one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business, and tourism-related phenomena. This implies that some festivals are celebrated for leisure; the others are for business, and still others are for tourism-related reasons.

Among the multi-dimensional purposes, festivals are celebrated for business reasons. In other words, when organized properly, festivals provide different economic benefits to its hosting community. Most often these economic benefits will be denoted as additional expenditure by visitors, direct local expenditure on services and supplies by organizers and event participants (LADCA, 2003). Most recognizably described, festivals are the great opportunities for mobilizing resources to the hosting community (Yeoman, *et al*, 2004). In other words, the celebration of festivals mobilizes resources for local development through fund-raising that promotes infrastructure for different development activities (Clark-Ekong, 1997).

As public events, festivals are accessible to traditional leaders, local citizens, elected and appointed political officials, tourists and entrepreneurs (Clark-Ekong, 1997). Similarly, Getz (1997) argues that festivals play a role of attracting visitors and increasing their average expense and length of stay. They are also seen as image-makers for the destination, creating a profile for destinations, positioning them in the market and providing a competitive marketing advantage. Thus through festivals, the elected government officials play an evolving role of understanding the continuing value of traditions in an age of modernity and make political decisions to invest on it (Clark-Ekong, 1997).

Festivals also have major effects on the local economy directly and indirectly. Such the spending by visitors on local goods and services by event-tourists has a direct economic impact on local businesses and also passes the benefits more widely to the economy and to the community (Raj, 2003). During festivals, enterprises, events and competitive activities get great opportunities to be performed and generate income for development purposes. The reason, according Lyck, Long and Grige (2012), is that festivals catch the attention of politicians, businessmen and tourism operators who can contribute economically a lot to the community as a way of public funding.

Furthermore, festivals can secure core businesses on its event and constantly add new and dynamic elements of economy to the hosting community (Lyck, Long and Grige, 2012). Such the new attributes that will have given birth in festivals may be new services, a new utilization of staffs, new revenue streams, innovation and services that are connected to the festival (Ibid). Through such new and innovative elements of local

economy, festivals provide an abundance of choices, an abundance of food, an abundance of things to buy, and a great abundance of people to meet (LADCA, 2003). Thus the attendants can enjoy dances and costumes for their eyes, storytelling and music for their ears, new friends and the jostling friction of bodies for the skin and special foods and drinks for their mouths (LADCA, 2003).

Generally speaking, festivals can be considered as a market-generating-place for local businesses. With their opportunities for commercial stalls, booths, merchant tents, and activity areas, including the provision of music and artistic expression, festivals provide an excellent setting for the introduction of new kinds of items and services to customers. As a consequence, festivals include a variety of offers (Lyck, Long and Grige, 2012). Through such a marketing event, festivals can be argued as ways to implement creative ideas and to investigate interest in the form of demand for these creative ideas. In this sense it is considered as a kind of major economic benefit for its hosting community (Lyck, Long and Grige, 2012).

Gifaataa is one among those festivals that contribute grand benefits to its aboriginal people (Wolaita). It is the most well-known festival among those rituals in Wolaita that has been celebrated annually in the month of September (Mohammed, 2014; Asella, 2012; Haile Gabriel, 2007). There was no written document that tells when the celebration of Gifaataa was started, but according to oral witness by Wolaita elders, it was started before many hundreds of years ago as a bridge between the accepting of New Year and sending-off the old one. It had been celebrated with the display and marketing of various long-aged cultural items and heritages as indigenous products of Wolaita People (Meshesha *et al*, 2016).

From the firsthand data obtained through participation (being in the celebration), the researcher realized that Gifaataa celebration of Wolaita has so many potential economic benefits that are not yet efficiently exploited. This is obviously not because of Gifaataa has no potential economic benefits rather it may be because of clear research gap on the issue and lack of promotion of the event via event-marketing. This initiated the researcher to conduct the current study to explore the potential economic benefits of 'Giffataa' Celebration of Wolaita.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Design of the Study

The descriptive research design was used for this study. The rationale is that the researcher selected it as a suitable design to explore and describe the potential economic benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. For the investigation of real economic benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita from the relevant sample of informants, three tools of data collection were used. These are interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and questionnaire and the mixed method (eclectic approach) of data analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data collected.

2.2 Description of the Research Setting

Wolaita is among 56 Nations and Nationalities in Southern Ethiopia (SNNPR) commonly known by its indigenous culture, beliefs, traditions, rituals, civilization and social identities that define them and make them distinct from other people in Ethiopia. These socio-political, economic and cultural realities of Wolaita people have been transferred from generation to generation solely through oral tradition (Haile Gabriel, 2007; Mohammed, 2014). Besides this, Wolaita is among highly populated areas in SNNPR having the population density of 385 per square kilometers (SNNPR SA, 2007). Wolaita has its zonal administrative structure having twelve Woredas and three city administrations. The major economic activities of Wolaita are mixed agriculture and trade. The Zonal city of Wolaita (Sodo) is located 330kms from Addis Ababa through Hossana and 160kms from the Regional capital (Hawassa) through Shashamane.

2.3 Participants of the Study

The population of this study is all Wolaita people, but for obtaining pertinent information for the current study, elders who have relevant knowledge of Wolaita language, culture, celebrations (festivals) and heritage were the targeted ones.

2.4 Sampling Technique

For this study, the researcher used availability sampling for selecting any one of society members (except elders and FGD members) for filling the questionnaire. The elders were selected by using purposive sampling for interview and to be targeted respondents in focus group discussion (FGD) who were also selected by purposive sampling. For collecting data through questionnaire, 600 individuals were selected from six (6) Woredas of Wolaita Zone and for interview, 12 elders having deep knowledge of Wolaita language; culture, festivals and heritage were selected from the same six Woredas. With the inclusion of two elders (selected for interview), ten individuals (from those selected for filling the questionnaire) were purposively selected in each Woreda (the total of 60) for collecting data through focused group discussion (FGD).

2.5 Tools of Data Collection

In order to achieve the intended research objectives by gathering valid, relevant and reliable data from the pertinent sample of the target population, the researcher used three tools of data collection: questionnaire, interview and focused group discussion (FGD).

2.6 Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher used mixed (both quantitative and qualitative) method of data analysis. The data collected through the close-ended parts of the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative method of data analysis using frequency and percentage those by the interview, open-ended parts of the questionnaire and focused group discussion were analyzed using narration; in a qualitative approach. Then, the result is presented in a systematic approach by describing, analyzing and interpreting the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 General Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1. The general demographic information of the respondents

Woredas	Sex		Age				Education					Religion		
	M	F	18-30	31-45	46-60	≥61	NE	EE	PE	HS	DA	FTB	CN	MLM
	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %
Boloso Sore	70 11.7	30 5	12 2	20 3.3	40 6.7	28 4.7	10 1.7	26 4.3	32 5.3	20 3.3	12 2	8 1.3	82 13.7	10 1.7
Damot Sore	65 10.8	35 5.8	14 2.3	25 4.2	36 6	25 4.2	12 2	21 3.5	36 6	18 3	13 2.2	11 1.8	76 12.7	13 2.2
Damot Gale	76 12.7	24 4	10 1.7	28 4.7	38 6.3	24 4	15 2.5	22 3.7	33 5.5	14 2.3	16 2.7	6 1	85 14.2	9 1.5
Damot Pulassa	72 12	28 4.7	13 2.2	42 7	28 4.7	17 2.8	18 3	23 3.8	30 5	15 2.5	14 2.3	14 2.3	82 13.7	4 0.7
Kindo Koysha	80 13.3	20 3.3	16 2.7	33 5.5	32 5.3	19 3.2	24 4	35 5.8	19 3.2	12 2	10 1.7	16 2.7	73 12.2	11 1.8
Sodo Zuriya	58 9.7	42 7	18 3	40 6.7	32 5.3	10 1.7	13 2.2	18 3	39 6.5	13 2.2	17 2.8	9 1.5	74 12.3	17 2.8
Total	421 70.2	179 29.8	83 13.8	188 31.3	206 34.3	123 20.5	92 15.3	145 24.2	189 31.5	92 15.3	82 13.8	64 10.7	472 78.6	64 10.7

*In the above table (Table 1) f=frequency %=percentage M=male F=female NE=not educated
 EE=elementary education PE=primary education HS=high school education DA=diploma and above
 FTB=followers of traditional beliefs CN=Christian MLM=Muslim

As indicated in the above table (Table 1), the sample of 600 people was drawn from randomly selected six Woredas of Wolaita zone: Bolosso Sore, Domot Sore, Damot Gale, Domot Pulassa, Kindo Koysha and Sodo Zuriya. 100 informants from each Woreda; the total of 600, were drawn using availability sampling and filled the questionnaire. During the sampling, significant attention was given to informants' diversity in their demographical background. Thus the informants were drawn from multifaceted traits of demography: sex (males and females), age (young, medium-aged and old), education (not educated, educated at elementary, primary, senior secondary and higher education levels) and religion (followers of traditional beliefs, Christians and Muslims) were participated in the study.

3.2 The Potential Economic Benefits of ‘Gifaataa’ Celebration of Wolaita

Table 2. Questionnaire responses of the respondents on the potential economic benefits that Wolaita people can utilize from their Gifaataa celebration

No	Potential Economic Benefits	Yes f %	No f %
1	A major event for special marketing of different items: oxen, cultural clothes, inset products, products of indigenous handcrafts...	600 100	0 0
2	A nice event for having budgetary decisions for development by local, regional and national administrators	534 89	66 11
3	An excellent event for fund-raising for development from people who are from different walks of life: artists, diasporas, merchants...	486 81	114 19
4	Promotes marketing of traditional foods, drinks, clothes and decorations to local, national and international attendants of Gifaataa celebration	490 81.7	110 18.3
5	Creates a nice opportunity for hotels, hostels and pensions in generating income from Gifaataa attendants	465 77.5	135 22.5
6	Promotes the saving culture in Wolaita as people of Wolaita traditionally saves money for a year to be used for Gifaataa event	580 96.7	20 3.3
7	Creates a nice opportunity for advertising and marketing indigenous handcrafts of Wolaita: products of pottery, waving, tannery...	520 86.7	80 13.3
8	An excellent venture of starting a new year’s activities with refreshed mind and spirit which leads to effectiveness in production	545 90.8	55 9.2

As indicated in the above table (Table 2, item 1), all (100%) respondents replied that Gifaataa is a major event for special marketing of different items: oxen, cultural clothes, inset products and products of indigenous handcrafts. Similarly, all FGD members, in different sessions, agreed that Gifaataa is a great event for the marketing and promotion of the aforementioned local products of Wolaita. Supporting this idea, one of the interviewed elders warmly explained saying “Gifaataa is clearly a special event in which the marketing and promotion of indigenous local products of Wolaita takes place”. The same elder added saying “There occurs the market promotion of indigenous products of Wolaita in Gifaataa celebration (which is also responded by 81.7% of questionnaire respondents (see Table 2, item 4). Thus very large amount of exchange occurs in inset products (goddetaa, itimaa, morchociya...), in animal products (milk, butter, oxen, cheese...), in cereals (maize, sorghum, barley, wheat...), in spices, in traditional clothes (hadiyaa, tibbiqwa...) and decorations (sagaayiuwaa, yelleliuwaa, migiduwa, gutichchaa...).

As to an interview response by one of the elders, for a long time, Wolaitas have not used Gifaataa as an event for fund-raising. As to him, it is a recent development that Wolaitas started using Gifaataa as a big venture for fundraising. Another elder argued that Gifaataa can be used as an excellent event for fund-raising to promote development in Wolaita. The FGD members deeply discussed on the issue and agreed that Wolaitas have a deep-rooted culture of fundraising for development purposes from aboriginal people of Wolaita and from others who support Wolaita’s development by different occasions rather than Gifaataa. As responded by 81% of questionnaire respondents, Gifaataa event can be used for fund-raising from people of different walks of life: artists, Diasporas, merchants, VIPs and the like.

On the other hand, FGD members also agreed that Gifaataa can be used as a nice event for having budgetary decisions for development by local, regional and national administrators. In their hot discussion, they underlined that Gifaataa brings administrators (who represent Wolaita people in local, regional and national structures of Ethiopia) to one stage that can be a fertile ground to have budgetary decisions for development purposes. 89% of questionnaire respondents supported this idea (as indicated in Table 2, item 2). One of the interviewed elders expressed the remorse of not using Gifaataa’s opportunities saying “We haven’t yet used this golden opportunity due to lack of awareness”. Another elder supports the same idea but believes that “We are not that much delayed. This is a right time for Wolaita people to use such a potential opportunity”.

As part of gaining potential economic benefits of Gifaataa, 77.5% of the questionnaire respondents replied that Gifaataa can create a nice opportunity for hotels, hostels and pensions in generating income from Gifaataa attendants. “If we use Gifaataa,” one of the interviewed elders says, “in its full potential by inviting people from different corners of the globe, our hotels, hostels and pensions can generate huge amount of income from the attendants through room renting, selling foods and drinks and other indigenous items”. The FGD members fully agreed with this idea and forwarded their allegation that Wolaitas should work hard to market their Gifaataa event.

Again, 86.7% of the questionnaire respondents replied that Gifaataa is used as a nice opportunity for advertising and marketing of indigenous handcrafts of Wolaita: products of pottery, waving, blacksmithing,

tannery and the like. According to the deep discussion by FGD members, these small traditional industries are bases for the establishment of other larger industries in Wolaita and Ethiopia at large. One of the elders, argued in interview that Wolaita has been original home for such small-scale industries producing hand-woven traditional clothes (hadiyaa, afaalaa, mashshquwa...), decorations (kallaacha, gozidaa, sagaayuwa, migiduwa...) and furniture (spear, scale, shodiraa, ayliyaa, domaa, maashshsaa, billamaa...). "These indigenous handcrafts of Wolaita," as another interviewed elder explained, "have high economic values being used as tools for agricultural activities, combating enemies and generate income for those indigenous craftsmen/women who produce the materials".

As another potential economic benefit, Gifaataa promotes the saving culture in Wolaita as people of Wolaita traditionally save money for a year to be used for Gifaataa event (as reported by 96.7% of the questionnaire respondents). Confirming this idea, the FGD members fully agreed that Wolaitas start saving for the coming Gifaataa at the celebration date of the taking-off-Gifaataa (the going away Gifaatta). They collect the first day's saving of the coming Gifaataa on the fresh skin of the ox slaughtered for taking-off-Gifaataa (the going away Gifaatta). The money they save is used for buying a fattened ox for the coming new Gifaataa. "This practice," as one of the interviewed elders argues, "promotes a saving culture in Wolaita." As the result, Wolaita people developed a strong and deep-rooted culture of saving. They not only save in cash; they save in kind too. They save coffee, cereals (maize, sorghum, barely, wheat, teff...), inset products, animal products, animals, trees etc.

Gifaataa is also an excellent venture of starting a new year's activities with refreshed mind and spirit which leads to effectiveness in production; as 90.8% of the questionnaire respondents reported (see Table 2, item 8). In line with this, one of the interviewed elders responded that Wolaita people pass an entertainment time of a month in Gifaataa event being free from any routine activities (either home, agricultural or other activities). "After such the entertainment time, another elder argues, "Wolaitas start their New Year activities very actively by their refreshed and renewed mind and spirit".

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussions presented above, we can conclude that Gifaataa provides different potential economic benefits to Wolaita people through promotion and marketing of indigenous local products and handcrafts, budgetary decisions for development by local, regional and national administrators and generating income from the attendants by hotel business. Gifaataa is also a venture for fund-raising to promote development in Wolaita and it is considered an opportunity for promoting saving culture in Wolaita. However, Wolaitas have not yet exploited this opportunity due to lack of awareness.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the above discussions and conclusions made, we can forward the following recommendations:

- Wolaitas should work hard to assure the sustainability of their Gifaataa celebration
- The concerned government structures of Ethiopia in general and Wolaita Zone in particular should play their own roles in cultivating and transferring Gifaataa celebration of Wolaita to the next generation.
- Researches of pertinent depth should be conducted by professionals having expertise in the area for the reasons why Wolaitas have not yet exploited the potential economic benefits of their Gifaataa celebration.

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