



# In Ethiopia's Central Rift Valley, Community Conservation Areas Learn About Sustainable Forest Management



*Participants on the way to Waboro mountain*

After witnessing the election of Community Conservation Area (CCA) management committee members in March 2010, the USAID-funded Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Alliance (ESTA) began creating awareness for the CCA committee on community based natural resource management and ecotourism development. ESTA and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS) organized an experience sharing visit to a successful ecotourism project for three Central Rift Valley CCAs: Lake Ziway, Lepis Forest and East Langano.

Nine committee members from each CCA, five stakeholders and four experts from ESTA and EWNHS participated in the visit to the “WAJIB” members of Adaba-Dodola forest and ecotourism service providers. (“WAJIB” is abbreviation for “Forest Dwellers’ Association” in the local language of Afan Oromo).

Although the visiting CCA committee members were aware of the importance of forest conservation in general, the experience they gained through discussion with the forest dwellers and the practical exposure to forest conservation gave them a different outlook. They realised that conservation friendly development activities like ecotourism and user rights to forest dwellers can

help to diversify the livelihoods of local communities and reduce long-term dependency on the natural resources of protected areas. Furthermore, the committee members understood that Participatory Natural Resource Management (PNRM) can increase sense of ownership, enhance biodiversity values, improve conservation status and reduce “free riding” in resource use.

Finally, all of the committee members from the three CCAs in the Central Rift Valley expressed their readiness and commitments to use such a model to safeguard the deteriorating natural resources in their area.

One participant from Lake Ziway said, “If there is unity, commitment and good management, nothing is impossible. This is what I’ve learned from this trip.” Another participant from Lepis said, “This is a place where forests weigh more than agriculture. I saw a lot of clean streams [flowing] because [the forest dwellers] conserve their natural resources. I do hope tomorrow will be bright if we work hard like the Adaba-Dodola forest dwellers’ association, and more tourists can come to visit our area.”