Located in the Amhara Region in the northern part of Ethiopia, Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) was one of the first sites to be inscribed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage list in 1978. Because of its soaring mountain ranges, the park is known as the "Roof of Africa," and abounds with exotic fauna and alpine flora. As a result of the growing local population and the subsequent expansion of sheep grazing and agricultural activities, however, the environmentally damaged SMNP was added to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1996.

The Government of the Amhara Region provided local residents, who relied on grazing and subsistence farming within the park for their food supply and livelihoods, with alternative opportunities to support themselves outside SMNP, such as the cultivation of orchards and beekeeping. The Government also tried to encourage residents to voluntarily relocate to areas outside the park. Many residents, however, continued to live inside SMNP. Freely-grazing sheep fed on the fresh shoots of trees in the park, and the environmental destruction continued unchecked.

It became necessary to provide local residents living in the park with livelihoods that would enable them to co-exist with nature in SMNP. One possible solution is tourism.

As an industry, tourism is expected to invigorate regional economies, improve the life of local residents, and help reduce poverty. In response to a request from the Government of Ethiopia, the Government of Japan launched the Project for Community Tourism Development through Public-Private Partnership in Simien Mountains National Park and Surrounding Areas (SIMCOT) in 2011. The project supports proactive efforts Partnership in Simien Mountains National Park and Surrounding

Community Tourism Development through Public-Private Partnership in Ethiopia, the Government of Japan launched the Project for

under the supervision of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA), local residents began to voluntarily limit sheep grazing areas in order to preserve the natural environment of SMNP. These efforts slowed down the pace of environmental destruction and the nature of Simien took a course to recovery.

While the project attracted overseas tourists to the villages in Simien and boosted tourism revenue, in fact, the positive effects reached even further. The local residents underwent a significant change in mindset, as they began to realize the enormous value of their co-existence with nature.

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The assistance project implemented by the Japanese government will end in February 2016, but the initiatives of Dr. Yaoita and her team to enrich the nature of SMNP and people’s livelihoods through tourism will be maintained by the local people. These efforts will primarily be led by a non-governmental organization whose Director General is Berhanu Gebre, former Deputy Director of the Amhara National Regional State Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Parks Development.