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Forest area

The Woody Biomass Inventory and Strategic Planning Project (WBISPP) and the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) estimate that approximately 58 million ha of Ethiopia’s terrestrial area is covered by forests, woodlands, and shrublands (WBISPP, 2004 in FAO, 2010). Using national definitions, the WBISPP (2004) assessment estimates that about 3.33 million ha of Ethiopia is covered by forest, and that about 9.63 million ha are high woodlands and 0.50 million ha are plantations (FDRE, 2011b and FAO, 2010). However, the latest assessment by the FAO (2010) estimates that total forest cover is about 12.29 million ha, and that other wooded land amounts to 44.64 million ha. The figure on forest cover includes natural (11.78 million ha) and plantation forests (0.51 million ha). According to these figures total forest cover comes to about 11% of total land area, which is in quite stark contrast to the WBISPP quoted figure of approximately 3%. Although the FAO (2010) assessment is the most recent one, it is the WBISPP that is the most commonly quoted, as it is seen as the only thorough forest resource assessment carried out in Ethiopia to date. Moreover, the FAO (2010) assessment is based on national data and a reclassification, calibration and extrapolation of the WBISPP data and as such does not represent new information. However, as the WBISPP is now becoming out of date there are on-going efforts to update this information with a new national forest inventory and resource assessment. Overall, availability and quality of reliable data on forest cover and socio-economic factors driving land-use change is lacking, and definitions on what constitutes a forest and forestland and who is responsible for managing it, need to be clarified.

The two main direct drivers of deforestation have been identified as agricultural expansion and fuel wood consumption, and this is closely related to the importance of agriculture to the national economy and a heavy reliance on biomass fuels for energy. For example, agriculture is Ethiopia’s largest sector, both in terms of employment and in terms of revenue. It employs about 80% of the
Biomass fuels constitute nearly 95% of total energy consumption and are the main source of energy for both the urban and rural population.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) estimates that in 1995 – 2005 the forestry sector contributed on average to 5.7% of the total GDP (Nune et al., 2010). However, other studies have argued that the actual value is closer to 9% if output from forest derived produce (honey, bees wax, wild coffee etc.) is accounted for as forestry, instead of agricultural, output (ibid). In terms of the contribution of the forestry sector to household income, studies have found that in some areas revenue from forest/woodlands and other vegetation based products constitutes over 50% of total income in rural areas (see Mulugeta and Tadesse 2010 and Demel et. al., 2010). Furthermore, in recent years there has been a steady growth of sales in eucalyptus products from eucalyptus forest farms, and farmers are increasingly setting aside parts of their land for tree farming to earn a second cash income to crop farming (see FDRE, 2011b; Mulugeta and Tadesse 2010; Zenebe et. al., 2007).

References


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