

Opening address

Dear colleagues,
Workshop participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure, indeed, to welcome you all to this national workshop on indigenous tree and shrub species for environmental protection and agricultural productivity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The direction for the economic development policy of EFDRE has been indicated to be Agricultural Development Lead Industrialization. In line with this, a rural development policy and strategy has been formulated in which the natural resource management has been set as one focus area of the agricultural development activity. In addition, sustainable natural resource management has been indicated as one of the Millennium Development Goals and this has been included in the Poverty Reduction Programme of Ethiopia.

This is because, as it is well known to you, the mainstay of the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian population depends on agriculture, where agriculture accounts for more than 54% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employs 85% of the population, accounts for about 90% of the exports and supplies over 70% of the raw materials for the agro-industries. Congruent with the above, the country has a huge potential of natural resources, both biotic and abiotic ones. These natural resources play a significant role in boosting agricultural production and productivity. Forests, one of the natural resources, play a vital role in rural livelihood. Forests provide various goods and services. They serve as a source of food, fodder, materials required for house construction and energy. They provide wood and wood products to meet a wide range of necessities, ranging from furniture and farm implements to various industrial outputs. This resource also plays an important role in protecting watersheds, reclaiming degraded land, controlling soil erosion, acting as a buffer against environmental changes, and maintaining biodiversity, as well as the preservation of water sources.

Despite of this, exploitation of the natural resources – and of forests in particular – is generally unsustainable. On the contrary, it is declining at a rapid rate, leading to a shortfall in the supply of wood and wood products, environmental degradation, degradation/drying up of water bodies, decline of biodiversity, and low agricultural productivity and production.

The challenge that the forestry sector is facing today is therefore to abate the destruction of forests and woodlands, expand the forest cover, arrest the environmental degradation, promote and improve the quality of life through a sustained balance between utilisation and conservation of the remaining high forest and woodland resources needed by society. This effort, however, has to be backed up by adequate and effective research findings.

The impacts of forestry research on forests, forest products, uses and services and management is immense. But keeping the balance between sustaining the forest and the research needs lies within the competence of the research agendas and the capacity of promoting and implementing the research outputs. This requires a concerted effort of all

actors, including decision makers, local population, the local and international scientific communities and the private sectors. It calls for a consolidation of the limited resources and efforts towards addressing issues that help combat environmental degradation and poverty reduction through on-farm tree planting and integrated watershed management, with the aim of improving rural livelihoods.

As indicated in the workshop programme, the motto of this workshop is geared towards addressing issues that revolve around three important themes. In principle, the focus of the workshop is not only timely but also appropriate, as it complements the government's policy and the MDGs. I realised that various papers focusing on the theme of the workshop will be presented and discussed. It is, therefore, my strong conviction that this workshop will assess and synthesise all the relevant issues that require urgent attention, research and management agendas. In this context, I would like to assure you that EIAR will do its best to own the recommendations of the workshop and will be actively involved in the successful implementation of the outcomes.

I hope that your three days stay in this workshop shall generate ideas that are expected from it and provide valuable information and direction for the future research and immediate development work. With this brief remark, I declare the workshop open.

Thank you,

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