



## Wild, valuable and vulnerable: Ethiopian forest coffee under threat

### Center for Development Research (ZEF) of Bonn University calls for political action to save the Ethiopian rainforests

So far, global public opinion has not taken much notice of what is happening in Ethiopia. Beyond the scope of daily news bulletins, there is a looming loss of biological diversity occurring in the country: Its montane rainforests are vanishing. This is mainly caused by population growth and an expansion of agriculture areas to secure food for the local poor. Disappearing rainforests not only lead to a huge loss of their rich biodiversity, but also to the endangerment of a unique plant producing one of the finest coffee varieties on the coffee market: wild *Coffea arabica*, or Arabica coffee.

The Center for Development Research (ZEF) of Bonn University has been working on concepts and solutions to improve the conservation and use of the wild coffee plant in the Ethiopian rainforests. "*Coffea arabica* has a high genetic diversity, which makes it extremely useful for breeding new coffee varieties", says Manfred Denich, project leader at ZEF. "This is one of the reasons for ZEF to call for action to stop deforestation".

However, the conservation of the Ethiopian rainforests has its price. Nowadays, consumers in Europe are willing to pay a higher price for fair traded and organically grown coffee of fine quality. However, scientists in the project doing research on the impact of certification cannot confirm that a certificate or label leads automatically to the sustainable use of wild coffee and its habitat in the country of origin. "At the moment we are afraid of a counterproductive development", says Till Stellmacher, a social scientist at ZEF, "a higher demand of wild coffee leads to an overexploitation of the forest and its wild coffee populations".

The scientists in the project are working in close cooperation with the local population and stakeholders to develop concepts for the sustainable use of the forests and its *Coffea arabica*, as well as on control mechanisms. "To us it is clear that you can't leave it up to the global markets nor to the Ethiopian government alone to save the forests and its wild coffee populations", explains Franz Gatzweiler, an economist in the ZEF project. "We have to raise public awareness at different levels and urge for action. We have to strengthen small farmers' tenure rights to secure their income from farming. They have to know it is worthwhile for them investing in the long-term conservation of wild coffee and the forests", adds Gatzweiler.

However, the costs for conserving the forests cannot be borne by the local population alone. Strengthening Ethiopian civil society, especially in the field of environmental protection, is of utmost importance, the scientists conclude. That's why the project initiated the establishment of an Ethiopian NGO, the Ethiopian Coffee Forest Forum (ECFF). Tadesse Gole and Feyera Senbeta, two of its active members, claim: "Only through a joint effort of the local population, the Ethiopian government and the international community we can achieve an effective conservation of the coffee forests of Ethiopia".

A long-term project goal is the establishment of a biosphere reserve in the region of Yayu in the South West of Ethiopia. Setting such a concrete target is in line with ZEF's trans-disciplinary research approach: ZEF does not want to reduce its output to scientific papers, but aims at implementing its research results into practice and action.

The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and conducted jointly by natural and social scientists as well as economists from Germany and Ethiopia.

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