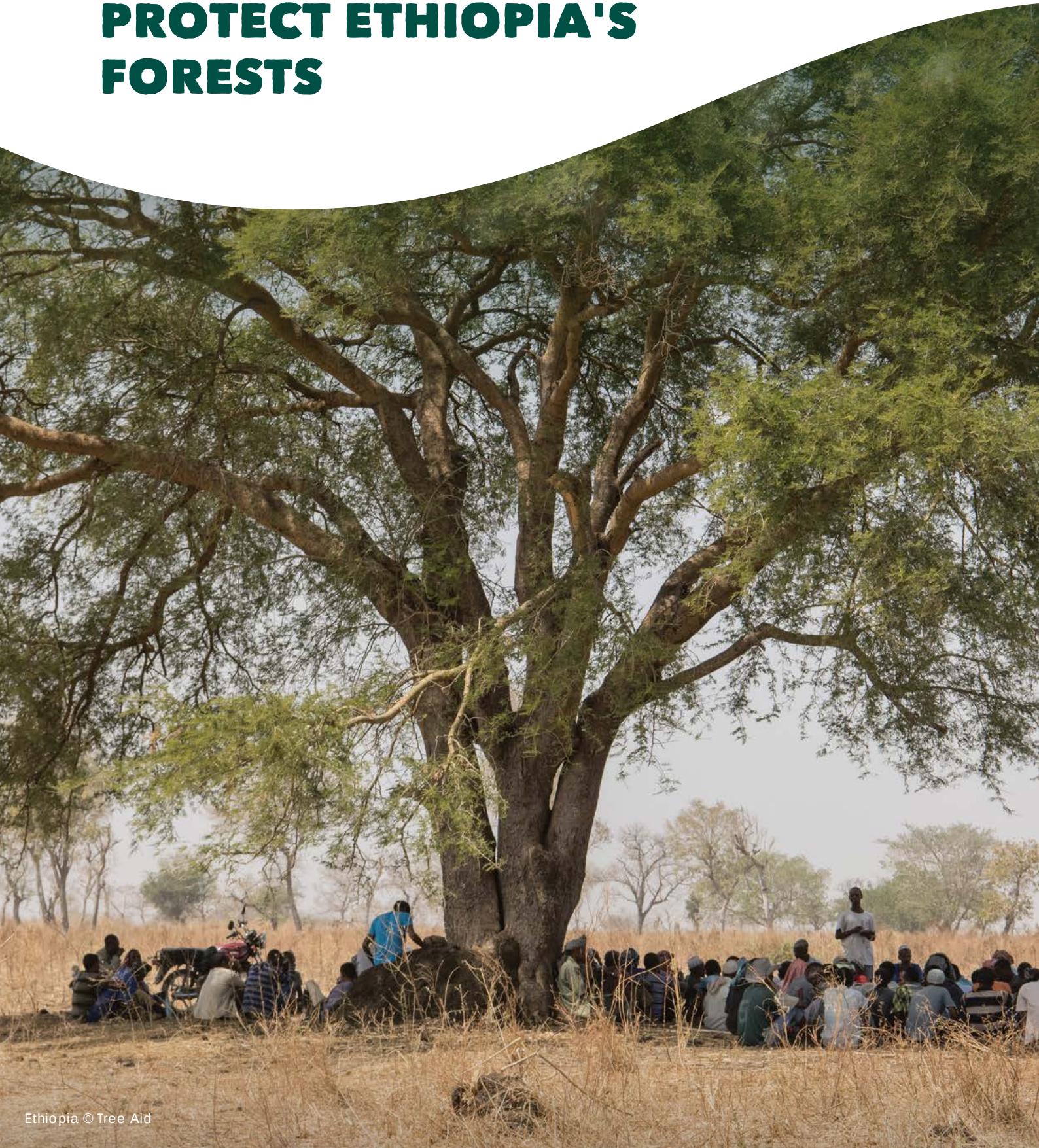


STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATORY FOREST MANAGEMENT TO PROTECT ETHIOPIA'S FORESTS

 **FARM AFRICA**



INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia's forests are critical for biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, watershed protection – and sustaining millions of people's livelihoods. However, despite a comprehensive legal and policy framework aimed at protecting the forests, deforestation continues apace. Ethiopia lost 67.6 kha of natural forest in 2024¹ alone, mainly due to weak enforcement of existing forest protection laws, expansion of both subsistence and commercial agriculture, and illegal settlements in the forests. Underlying these factors, respectively, are limited awareness, capacity and coordination around forest protection at all levels, as well as the motivation to generate immediate economic returns from agriculture.

Participatory Forest Management (PFM), an approach introduced to Ethiopia in the 1990s, enables joint governance of forests between communities and government through inclusive consultations that lead to formalised agreements.

They ensure economic incentives for local people to protect the forests, thanks to the incomes generated by harvesting non-timber forest products. Where the PFM model is properly implemented, it has proven effective in curbing deforestation, improving community incomes, and restoring degraded forest ecosystems. Indeed, PFM balances conservation and community interests.

However, if we are to reap the benefits of Ethiopia's forests in terms of the broader stakes for the country's future – the social, economic, security and environmental resilience that they provide – we need stronger political will behind PFM. We must urgently build the institutional capacity to enforce these community agreements, and resolve competing priorities around land use, so that community forest rights may be recognised and respected, and the forests may continue to benefit the country as a whole.

¹ Global Forest Watch. Accessed from: <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/ETH/?map=eyJjYW5Cb3VuZC16dHJ1ZlZlX0%3D>.

CHALLENGES UNDERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTICIPATORY FOREST MANAGEMENT

Weak forest law enforcement

Rampant illegal logging, encroachment, and unregulated agricultural expansion are exacerbated by poor enforcement and limited accountability.

Conflicting land use priorities

Unregulated agricultural expansion and large-scale investments (e.g., coffee, tea) are driving deforestation, undermining PFM agreements.

Insecure land and forest use rights

Community forest rights under PFM have only a limited legal basis in the long-term, which discourages full stewardship and community investment in action to protect the forests.

Limited institutional coordination

Overlapping mandates and poor coordination across government institutions – and from national to regional levels – prevent a cohesive system of forest governance policy and practice.

Socioeconomic pressures

Poverty and population growth are forcing communities to overexploit forests for fuelwood and farmland.

Under-representation and inequality

Women and other marginalised groups are typically under-represented in forest governance and benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Low technical and financial capacity

Forest-dependent communities, law enforcers, and local administrators often have limited resources and technical skill to optimally deliver what is expected of them. Inadequate monitoring tools and limited awareness of forest laws also limit enforcement and transparency.

Insufficient incentives for sustainable management

Underdeveloped markets for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), insufficient carbon investment, and inadequate 'Payment for Ecosystem Services' (PES) mechanisms limit the economic viability of conservation, as opposed to the quick economic gains of agricultural expansion.

TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ETHIOPIA'S FORESTS, WE NEED:

Participatory Forest Management (PFM)

Community governance of forests has been proven to significantly increase forest cover, reduce deforestation, and improve household incomes: we now need to strengthen and scale up the model.

Collective forest rights and certification

Building on PFM, formal certificates attesting to community rights further empowers communities to protect and sustainably manage forests.

Agroforestry and 'Climate-Smart Agriculture'

Sustainable agriculture boosts productivity and resilience, while also reducing pressure to clear forest land for agricultural use.

Multi-stakeholder platforms

Improved coordination between different groups facilitates local governance, helps mitigate or resolve conflicts, and aligns forest and development goals.

Forest-based enterprises and market linkages

Enterprise development support can improve value additions and livelihoods (e.g. honey, frankincense, ecotourism), demonstrating that forests can have economic value as well as farmland.

Carbon finance and PES

Moreover, larger-scale, longer-term revenue can be unlocked for communities managing forest carbon stocks, benefitting the national economy overall.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT ACTION

1 Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks

- Finalise and implement the National Land Use Policy with integrated forest conservation goals (to harmonise forest, agricultural, and investment priorities).
- Enforce PFM agreements by legally recognising community forest use rights.
- Establish specialised environmental courts to prosecute illegal logging and land grabs.
- Harmonise federal and regional forest-related laws and ensure alignment with Forest Proclamation No. 1065/2018 and its regulation (Regulation No 544/2024).
- Create multi-stakeholder platforms to align federal, regional, and local efforts.

2 Scale up and safeguard Participatory Forest Management

- Secure adequate national budget for PFM programmes and enforcement.
- Expand PFM to new regions, with a focus on biodiversity hotspots and forest frontier areas.
- Develop standardised and inclusive PFM agreements with long-term tenure, clear benefit-sharing, and safeguards for women and other marginalised groups.

3 Promote sustainable land-use practices

- Scale Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and agroforestry to reduce pressure on forests.
- Develop NTFP value chains (e.g. honey, frankincense) to incentivise conservation.
- Redirect investors to non-forest lands through zoning and eco-certification schemes.

4 Build capacity and accountability

- Train judiciary, police, and local administrators on forest laws and the PFM approach.
- Institutionalise 'recognition' mechanisms, e.g. 'forest champion awards' for effective forest law enforcers and community leaders.
- Strengthen forest crime detection, monitoring, and prosecution systems.

5 Mobilise finance and partnerships

- Leverage climate finance (REDD+, carbon markets) to fund PFM scaling and enforcement.
- Allocate national budgets for forest patrols, capacity building, and incentives for enforcement officers.
- Engage donors and private sector in eco-friendly investments, such as eco-tourism and sustainable forestry enterprises.
- Support cooperative development and market access for NTFPs and carbon credits.

6 Foster inclusive and participatory governance

- Institutionalise multi-stakeholder forums at regional and local levels.
- Empower women, youth, and other marginalised groups through legal literacy, land certification, and leadership roles.
- Leverage cultural and religious values to reinforce sustainable forest norms.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopia can achieve its NDC climate targets by scaling up PFM, enforcing forest laws, and integrating forests into its national development plans. By strengthening forest law enforcement, securing community rights, and incentivising sustainable practices, the Government of Ethiopia can transform its forests into engines of inclusive growth and environmental resilience.

JOIN US

Join us in calling on the Ethiopian Government to **#ProtectEthiopiasForests** and ensuring **#PFMForPeopleAndPlanet**

CALL TO ACTION

To safeguard Ethiopia’s forests and unlock their environmental, social, and economic potential, we call on national and regional policy-makers to act decisively.



To the Federal Government and Parliament:

- Prioritise PFM in national development and climate strategies.
- Finalise and operationalise the Land Use Policy.
- Legally recognise community forest use rights under PFM and enshrine them in national legislation.
- Scale up investment in PFM and forest-based enterprises.
- Empower communities with secure rights and equitable benefits.



To Regional Governments (including District and Kebele Administrators, and Land Administration Authorities):

- Policymakers must act now to secure Ethiopia’s forests through enabling policies, legal reforms, and sustained investment in community-led forest governance.
- Step up action to enforce forest laws.
- Prioritise PFM in policies, national development and climate action strategies.
- Finalise the Land Use Policy, and allocate enforcement resources.
- Scale up investment in PFM and forest-based enterprises.
- Empower communities with focus on women, youth and marginalised groups, secure use rights and equitable benefits.



To financial and technical partners:

- Invest in climate finance and community-led conservation.
- Support PFM implementations programmes and projects.



To civil society and communities:

- Advocate for rights and participate in forest governance.



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