

WILD PLANT UTILIZATION IN THE HIGHLAND FOREST AREA OF SOUTHWESTERN ETHIOPIA: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE BOSONA FOREST IN GERA WEREDA

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between the natural forest and the people living adjacent to it in southwestern Ethiopia. The paper focuses on the wild plant utilization by local people and the conservation of vegetation. In Ethiopia, the definition of natural forest varied in respective agencies according to their interests. For example, while FAO tends to consider that all forest areas must be conserved as precious resources, the Ethiopian government has designated some natural forest areas as “forest priority area.” In Gera Wereda, the people living in such a “forest priority area” recognize only its small portion and call it *bosona*, meaning natural forest in their language.

The village adjacent to the *bosona* has many tree species that are normally found in the natural forest. Most of the original vegetation in the residential area has largely been lost due to human intervention: farmers cleared the natural forest to grow crops. However, currently people do not go to the *bosona* to collect useful plants. This is partly because usable tree species have been introduced, cultivated and maintained in the residential area and some trees are still left in the southern rim of the village territory. For example, the villagers make fences with living trees and use their branches as firewood. The study reveals that the local people’s pressure on the forest is minimized due to the presence of both cultivated and wild plants in the residential area and the southern rim of the village.