

The Flora and Vegetation of Africa

(Church forests: biodiversity conservation, reforestation and economic benefit)



Photos: Upper left – Agricultural terraces have replaced forests; upper middle – mosses and lichens in Simien Mountains; upper right – *Erica arborea* forest in Simien Mountains; lower left – anthropogenic vegetation in Ethiopia; lower middle – *fruits and herbs for sale in Dire Dawa*; lower right: riparian vegetation close to a run-off system at the Blue Nile.

Background

UNESCO produced the book “Vegetation of Africa” (White 1983). Scientific documentations are highly important, but books alone cannot solve the problems of biodiversity loss. Forest depletion has led to the reduction of forest cover to unprecedented rates. In some areas, the natural vegetation has been decimated to small pockets only. This needs to be redressed in order to better protect agricultural areas from erosion and general biodiversity conservation. Many of the existing plant

species, including trees, various types of grasses and herbs as well as other types of plants, have never been analyzed for their economic value. This can only be done with focused botanical researches and concerted activities. Ethiopia has lost most of its forest cover. Less than 3% remains. Church forests play a major role in biodiversity conservation. UNESCO and the Development Arm of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC-DICAC) plan for *ex situ* conservation of the indigenous trees around Lake Tana. This requires a nursery and plantations along roadsides, rivers, and between church forests.

A total of **125,000 US\$** is needed to realize this highly important activity. You are kindly requested to support UNESCO and EOC-DICAC.

UNESCO has also suggested to the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE), to try and develop an Abrahamic Botanic Garden in Africa's Capital City, Addis Ababa. This is also being discussed with Ethiopia's leading vegetation specialists and Addis Ababa University. This biodiversity conservation element would also be a major contribution for regional biodiversity conservation, and the rapprochement of cultures.

Indicators:

- Number of trees planted.
- Botanical walkabout established.
- Plans for the Abrahamic Botanic Garden produced.

This work element contributes to:

UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014), the UN Decade on Biodiversity (2011 – 2020), the UN Decade for Deserts and against Desertification (2010 – 2020), the UN International Decade for Action "Water for Life" (2005 - 2015), the Millennium Development Goal 7 – Environmental Sustainability, the UN Convention on Biodiversity (1996), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (1999), Ethiopia's Climate-Resilient Green Economy, and Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan 2010 – 2015

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