

# Erosion degrades farm productivity

By Addis Mulugeta

**A**lthough rural development is playing a major role in stimulating economic growth, poverty, land degradation and low productivity have been a long standing problem in the countryside.

Different institutions and individuals have carried out extensive research to assess the problems of land degradation; its causes, remedies and impacts on agricultural development and sustainable resource use in Oromia and Southern Nations and Nationalities and people Regions (SNNPR).

At a two-day conference on May 18 and 19, held at the Christian Relief and Development Agency (CRDA), more than 30 papers on Sustainable Land Management and Poverty Alleviation in Oromia and SNNPR regions were presented.

Most of these research papers pointed out that the main cause of land degradation and its impacts in Oromia and SNNPR are soil erosion, nutrient depletion, deforestation, over use of fertilisers, declining use of fallow land, inappropriate farming practices, steep topography, highly erosive soil and intense rainfall.

In his paper, Siraj Bekele, Vice Director of Oromia Bureau of Land Administration and Environmental Protection tries to review the situation of land degradation in Oromia.

He states that soil erosion is the most widespread form of land degradation in the region. Though the average erosion rate for agricultural land has been estimated to be 40 tonnes per hectare per year, there is a wide variation in the region.

In some areas it goes up to or above 100 tonnes per hectare per year.

Rainfall intensity is also an important factor contributing to erosion. The paper indicated that the recent estimate of deforestation rate is about 3.1 per cent per year. This occurs because of expansion of farmland, shifting cultivation as a result of population pressure, commercial agriculture, fuel wood and commercial logging and urbanisation and poor management of natural forests. Land degradation adversely affects the ground water recharge and discharge through increased sedimentation. Ultimately, the welfare of the population is affected by all these losses.

In addition, those papers that examined SNNPR also identified that land degradation is a severe problem hampering efforts to increase productivity and economic growth in the region.

Land degradation is a great threat in both regions to the sustainability of land, and poses a serious problem for the livelihood of rural producers. It has also caused a decline in agricultural productivity, which is affecting food security and the growth of the economies of the two regions and the country in general.

These papers recommended solutions for land degradation. They said immediate institutional reform should be taken by the Government, at the federal and regional levels, which will contribute to alleviating land degradation and enhance conservation and the sustainable use of resources.

As a result, the Government and non-governmental organisations are attempting to improve the situation through a host of new approaches, such as watershed and sustainable land management to alleviate

poverty; natural resource management system in their locality, which includes fertility management, drainage improvement conservation activities, potential seed selection and reliable cultural practices.

Alemu Mekonnen (PhD) coordinator of the Environmental Economics Policy Forum for Ethiopia (EEPFE) told *Capital* that due to land degradation and related problems, agricultural productivity is declining by two per cent per year.

Stakeholders have benefited from empirical researches and now, to achieve the desired increases in agricultural production, reductions in poverty and to ensure sustainable use of natural resources, policy makers and the Government should take the recommended measures.

The papers have specific objectives to create a common understanding on existing policy and strategies, as well as implementation barriers, of the Oromia and SNNPR regions in particular. They allow policy makers to take stock of available and on-going sustainable land management research and draw possible policy implications.

During the two day conference, other papers were also presented that focused on the issue of land registration and certification in the country, which has been implemented since 1998. Millions of certificates have been awarded around the country.

The conference was organised by Land Use Forum (SLUF), Oromia Agricultural Research Institute (OARI), College of Agriculture of Hawassa University (CA-HU) and EEPFE at the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI).

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