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## Trend of Forest Cover Change in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

Forests cover one third of the global land area. However, deforestation and forest degradation are big global problems which demands serious attention in order to mitigate the alarming loss of forests, especially in the tropics. Although, there is a sign of a decrease in forest loss, it is still alarmingly high. In Ethiopia around 95 % of the forest cover is concentrated on three regional states of Oromia, Gambella and SNNP. That means north of the country is highly degraded due to the high population density that has been inhabiting the area for more than 2000 years. In Ethiopia 85 % of the population is agrarian, which puts significant pressure on the limited natural resources. Ethiopian is a country with diverse climatic conditions which resulted in high species diversity and endemism; even though the forests cover has been dwindling alarmingly due to fast population growth, wood energy, agricultural expansion, poor (governance; policy and land tenure system) and resettlement in-to forests. Investors are also clearing the forest for cash crop production and hence land grabbing is alarmingly affecting the forest. Some historical studies showed that an equivalent of 35 % of Ethiopia's land area had once been covered by natural high forests. However there has been a rapid decreasing percentage of natural forest cover of the country from 40 % in 1900 to 16 % in 1954, 8 % in 1961, 4 % in 1975, 3.2 % in 1980 and now it is estimated to be less than 3 % by some authors. However, according to FAO, the current total forest cover is around 11%; hence the different estimates by different authors are a matter of forest definition which should not be overlooked. The plantation forest in the country is 500,000 ha which is dominated by Eucalyptus and Cupressus species. In spite of the large number of seedling plantations, the survival rate remains very low. Alternative source of energy, modern agriculture, increasing plantations, strong forest institutions and policy are recommended to mitigate further forest losses and to increase the forest cover of the country.

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, forest degradation, forest loss