

**Combating Deforestation and Natural Resource Development
A Call to the Ethiopian Diaspora**

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Introduction

Ethiopia is facing rapid deforestation and degradation of land resources. Extensive forest clearing for agricultural use, over-grazing, and exploitation of existing forests for fuelwood, and construction poles and increased population has reduced the forest area of the country from 40 percent over a century ago to less than 3 percent today. The current rate of deforestation is estimated to be 150, 000 - 200,000 hectares per year (EFAP, 1994). It is estimated that fertile topsoil is lost at a rate of one billion cubic meters per year (FAO, 1981; Constable 1985), resulting in a massive environmental degradation and serious treat to sustainable agriculture and forestry. Agroforestry and rural tree planting which integrates trees with crops and /or livestock is a promising land-use system that improve the environmental degradation and leads to high productivity, better social benefits, that are not obtainable from monoculture of agriculture and/or forestry on the same unit of land (ICRAF, 2004).

Agroforestry and rural tree planting on farm and community lands are being practiced for the past three decades in Ethiopia, and were the most important topics of national and international development. The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the national and international institutions has made efforts to implement potential agroforestry and community tree planting programs in the country (Bishaw, 1993). However, success in this work has been limited and the current tree planting is also characterized by low rate of tree survival, estimated to be less than 20 percent on the national average (Uibrig, 1989; Gamachu, 1990). Problems of deforestation and environmental degradation have become more urgent after the recent major forest fire that devastated the last remaining virgin tropical forests in southern parts of Ethiopia. Also subsistence farming practices on the highlands for thousands of years without improved agricultural practices has lead to low crop yields and recurrent drought and famine for the last three decades. With this in mind, ETFF has set the following mission and objectives to overcome problems of deforestations, environmental degradation and poverty alleviation that threaten the survival of the nation.

Our Mission

Ethiopian Tree Fund Foundation (ETFF) is created with singular task of reclaiming the lands of Ethiopia. Our goal is to improve the environmental degradation in Ethiopia, and to increase the agricultural productivity of the land and to provide people with food, fuelwood and clean water on a sustainable basis. To meet these challenges, ETFF has laid out the following objectives (ETFF Articles of Incorporation, 2000).

Objectives

- Promote tree planting and natural resource conservation to reverse the environmental degradation and to provide the rural people with food, fuelwood and fodder;
- Encourage farmers and urban dwellers to plant trees around their homes, on their farms and farm borders, on degraded sites and community lands;

- Provide support for tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture by giving incentives, such as, tree seedlings, improved seeds, fertilizers, simple farm equipments;
- Provide training, advice and technical support on tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture for farmers, urban dwellers and school children;
- Initiate institutional collaboration among universities, ministries and NGO's to promote tree planting and agricultural development in Ethiopia.

Who we are?

Ethiopian Tree Fund Foundation is a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Virginia, United States. This Organization is created with singular task of reclaiming the land of Ethiopia. This challenge has become more urgent after the recent major forest fire that devastated one of the last remaining virgin tropical forests in the southern part of Ethiopia. To meet this challenge, ETFF, plans to work in close cooperation with government ministries and educational institutions, UN agencies, such as FAO, research universities worldwide and Non-Governmental Organizations, and other world organizations and people of goodwill who identify with this mission.

ETFF is free of any religious, ethnic, or political affiliation. It welcomes the membership and contributions from any individual or entity, which supports the program of reforestation and natural resource conservation in Ethiopia. Most importantly, ETFF would like to join hands with Ethiopians in the country and Diaspora to reclaim the land of our forefathers and rehabilitate it.

Its founding members have established ETFF upon the approval of statutes of the organization. Membership in ETFF includes the widest possible representation of persons of Ethiopian origin, and friends of Ethiopia from anywhere who support its objectives. The ETFF bylaws contain the objective of the foundation, membership responsibilities and administrative organization.

ETFF is open to all but most importantly to persons of Ethiopian origin and friends of Ethiopia who uphold the objectives of the organization. Members in good standing are those who continue to support the mission of the foundation and fulfill their membership obligations. Ten-dollar monthly membership dues per person are to be paid on semi-yearly basis. Membership dues can be paid directly online and members can monitor the activities online.

ETFF members, who reside in principal cities in Ethiopia and around the world where a significant number of constituent group live, may be organized in accordance with relevant by laws issued by the foundation. Such chapters may be headed by elected chapter convene whose responsibilities would be to co-ordinate chapter activities and act as liaisons with the society's headquarters (ETFF Bylaws, 2000).

Implementation Plan

As a non-profit organization ETFF is run by Board of Advisors and Executive Committee members. ETFF has National Board of Advisors with eleven members. The Board has Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Two executive presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, The public Relation Officer, and four other members. The Foundation and the Board shall have and shall exercise all powers of a not for profit corporation under the law of the Commonwealth of Virginia (ETFF Bylaws, 2000). The Co-

founders of the Organization Dr. Badege Bishaw and Mr. Demissew Gedamu shall be the Executive Presidents for Scientific and Technical Committee, and Administration and Finance, respectively (ETFF Article of Incorporation, 2000).

The main implementation strategy was to establish the ETFF chapter in Ethiopia. The Board of Advisors believes that strengthening ETFF in Ethiopia is critical for the success of the organization. With this understanding, the ETFF Board of Advisors in the U.S.A. has unanimously approved the establishment of ETFF Branch Office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This reaffirms the commitment of ETFF to promote tree planting and environmental conservation on the ground in Ethiopia with active participation of the urban and rural people. The Board has also approved Mr. Yoseph Assefa to be ETFF Country Representative and Engineer Tewodros W/Amlak, Deputy Country Representative, respectively. The ETFF Chapter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia has its own Board of Advisors and elected officers. In recent years, the ETFF Board has also approved the establishment of two ETFF chapters in North America. Today we have the Northwest chapter in Portland, Oregon and the Northeast chapter in Washington D.C. Metro area where the largest Ethiopian Diaspora lives.

Our primary purpose is to raise fund from international agencies, private organizations, individuals and people of goodwill who identify with the ETFF mission. ETFF will be actively involved in fund raising to provide support for the following activities: (1) provide technical support in tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture projects, (2) initiate collaborative research and outreach in tree planting and conservation programs, (3) train farmers and urban dwellers, and educate school children about tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture, (4) provide support to improve the educational and research facilities of universities and research institutions by donating books and computer facilities etc. (5) establish a database of professionals in forestry and natural resources who can provide service in teaching, research and consultation, and (6) establish a database of publications, reports, conference proceedings and pertinent information in forestry, natural resources and sustainable agriculture, and make it available for a wider use by students, educators, researchers, policy makers and extension people.

ETFF will foster these activities by creating collaboration with national universities, research institutions, ministries and NGO's in Ethiopia and international organization worldwide. We will create a close working relationship with these institutions to implement the tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture programs. Fortunately, some of ETFF founding – and board members have extensive experience in forestry and natural resource management in the country and internationally. Some have active working relations with most of the institution leaders in forestry and agriculture in Ethiopia. ETFF will provide the needed fund to implement the program, while the collaborating institutions will be responsible to provide personnel and facilities to implement the projects. The respective institution heads in Ethiopia will serve as board members of ETFF. They in turn will nominate a person (he/she) who will be responsible for the technical and managerial work of the tree planting, natural resource conservation and sustainable agriculture projects.

ETFF will collaborate in giving technical support to institutions: (a) in identifying tree species for afforestation / reforestation projects, (b) Selecting tree planting sites, such as individual farmers and/or a given watershed close to the institutions, (c) ETFF will also assist in planning the tree planting work such as in nursery management, field planting and care, (d) we will also be involved in monitoring and evaluation of the tree planting and conservation project to measure the success or failure of the project,

(e) we will identify natural protected areas for environmental and bio-diversity conservation work, and (f) ETFF will also assist farmers in identifying appropriate agricultural technologies, such as improved seeds, fertilizers etc. that promotes sustainable agriculture.

ETFF is now a registered non-profit organization in Ethiopia, and has an office in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, with physical address and phone number to run its day-to-day activities. This will help create linkages with ministries, universities, research institutions, schools, NGO's, and Farmer's and Urban Dweller's Associations and coordinate the tree planting and conservation efforts. We will continue to contact and attract new members with background in forestry, natural resource and agriculture both in the country and abroad. This will give ETFF an advantage to create good working relations with the institutions and individuals in the country and will help achieve its mission and objectives.

ETFF has started planting trees in Ethiopia. In 2007 the ETFF members have participated in tree planting in Bale and Acheber. They have planted 2600 indigenous trees in Bale and 500 trees in Acheber. They have worked closely with local communities NGO's, Nature clubs and provided free seedlings. In 2009 ETFF has planted 9,000 indigenous species of trees and 2,800 grafted apple seedlings in Acheber. They also conducted training to increase awareness in tree planting and environmental conservation for youth and the public. ETFF members have also served as advisors to the Ethiopia Millennium tree planting project. Currently we are working with an International NGO, The Back to Wild and trying to develop a joint project to promote conservation and livelihoods improvement in Ethiopia. Work is also under way to establish ETFF chapter in Seattle, Washington.

For more information about ETFF, please visit the foundation web site at: WWW.ETFF.ORG

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