



Ecosystems for water, food and economic development in the Central Rift Valley, Ethiopia

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Central Rift Valley (CRV)

Poverty and degradation of natural resources are exponents of a vicious downward cycle in the CRV. People deplete the natural resource base in their struggle for survival; on the other hand degraded natural resources together with unfavourable, variable climatic conditions aggravate poverty. The increasing pressure on land and water resources intensifies conflicts between various stakeholders, especially irrigated agriculture, industry (soda ash production), environmentalists and domestic water users. Severe environmental degradation has already become manifest, in terms of the drying up of lakes and wetlands, deforestation, erosion, soil nutrient depletion, and the loss of biodiversity.

In the past few years there have been many debates on the water resources, triggered by the decreased water availability in downstream areas of the CRV and the spectacular decrease in size of Lake Abyata. Although not all details are fully understood yet, there is increasing consensus that the development of (mostly small-scale) open-field irrigation is the principal cause of reduced water availability. Given the fragile hydrological and ecological system further expansion of irrigation may lead to the salinization of Lake Ziway, which is the largest fresh water resource in the area and a principal drinking water resource for humans and livestock. The water use by the floriculture enterprises is minor, they do, however, pose a risk of contamination of Lake Ziway.

The main challenge is to manage the different claims on land and water resources to achieve sustainable development.



Bottom-up: Multi-stakeholder platform 'Lake Ziway'

In June 2006 the multi-stakeholder platform 'Lake Ziway' was established to promote an integrated water resources management approach contributing to a more sustainable development of the CRV. This platform consists of professionals from the private and public sector involved in the development of the CRV. Wageningen UR supports the platform through the development of a sound knowledge base on water and land related issues. A well-founded knowledge base helps to distinguish myths from facts, and beliefs from realities. This promotes consensus among the various stakeholders and supports sound decision-making with respect to resource use and management, as well as to set the right priorities for policy and research.

Top-down: River Basin Organisation (RBO)

In addition to bottom-up initiatives, an institutional structure is required, with a legal mandate, who should liaise with stakeholders, search for commonly accepted solutions and implement (and reinforce) water policies. In 2007 the proclamation on River Basin Councils and Authorities has been endorsed by the Ethiopian Parliament. Although the legal framework is now in place there is still a lack of expertise, experience and tradition in inter-sectoral planning and management to implement these RBOs. Therefore, Wageningen UR will support and facilitate the development of a RBO for the CRV.

Challenge

There is a strong and urgent need for policy dialogue for mitigating conflicts, planning and decision making, involving smallholders, horticulturists, flower farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, industries, environmentalists and the tourist sector. Such a dialogue is required to address the various functions and services of natural resources, the multiple interactions between ecosystems and the human society and to identify options for improved resource use and management.