

Genetic Erosion – A Threat to the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Ethiopian Coffee (*Coffea arabica* L.) Germplasm

S. SEIFU¹ AND B. BELLACHEW²

¹Jimma Agricultural Research Center, Awada Agricultural Research Sub-center,
P.O.Box 205, Yirgalem, Ethiopia. E-mail: seyoum03@yahoo.com

²Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, Jimma Agricultural Research Center,
P.O. Box 192, Jimma, Ethiopia

SUMMARY

A number of reports are being published which indicated that the arabica coffee genepool of Ethiopia, which represents an important heritage of mankind and the most important resource for breeding of varieties and biological research, is under a severe threat of genetic erosion. The effort made so far to conserve the vast coffee genetic resource that the country is endowed with and to assess and monitor genetic erosion in this crop of high economic significance and world heritage has also been reported to be very little. Consequently, there has been a rising concern about possible genetic erosion of landrace coffee types and wild relatives due to replacement by few Coffee Berry Disease (CBD) resistant coffee varieties, shift in land use from Coffee growing to chat (*Catha edulis* Forsk. ex Endl), deforestation and incidental fire on the forest coffee ecosystem which harbour the arabica coffee genepool, and settlement of immigrants in portions of the forest coffee. In this article, the major factors contributing to the dwindling of the arabica coffee gene pool are discussed, the weak link between private public partnerships and international collaboration is highlighted and measures to be taken to save the threatened arabica coffee genepool are suggested.

Key words: Genetic erosion, *Coffea arabica*, Germplasm