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Strengthening evidence-use for equitable climate resilient coffee policy and praxis in Ethiopia

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations and acronyms

EIPM	Evidence-informed policymaking	CECS	Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation	EWNRA	Ethio Wetlands and Natural Resources Association
ECFF	The Environment and Coffee Forest Forum	CRGE	Climate Resilient Green Economy
ECTA	Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority	PSI	Policy Studies Institute
STEEP	Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable Climate Resilient Coffee Policies	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
		MoPD	Ministry of Planning and Development
FX	Foreign Exchange	MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
EIAR	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research	DDS	Due Diligence Statement
EFD	Ethiopian Forestry Development	FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
RCC	Research Commission Centre		
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom		

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Ethiopia's coffee sector lies at the intersection of climate risks, development priorities and fast changing international market regulations. *Coffea arabica* is endemic to the country, with the region possessing a rich genetic diversity. At the same time, coffee accounts for 35-40% of Ethiopia's total export earnings, supports over 15 million people and is a central element of the national identity. Securing these benefits is increasingly imperilled by growing climate change impacts, forest degradation, and the unilateral emergence of trade rules from key importers of coffee, particularly the European Union's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Quality evidence can provide a basis for better planning and solutions to manage many of the current threats to Ethiopia's coffee sector. Yet insights into how evidence flows among different policy actors and its impacts on whose voices and issues are recognised or legitimised for future intervention is poorly understood.

This report, produced under the Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable Climate Resilient Coffee Policies (STEEP) project, examines how evidence is produced, mobilised for coffee policymaking in Ethiopia. It applies an evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) approach to map the coffee evidence ecosystem, trace how information moves between various actors, and explore how political and institutional realities shape the use or neglect of evidence. The analysis draws on document review, stakeholder mapping, key informant interviews and two multi-stakeholder workshops with public officials, research institutions, civil society organisations, coffee companies, coffee producer organisations, and development partners.

The analysis found that Ethiopia has built a layered policy architecture that relies on coffee to deliver export growth, climate resilience, forest protection and rural development simultaneously. Long-term national development plans and cross-sector policies are linked with coffee-specific instruments like the Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy 2019-2033 (CECS), which acts as a fulcrum between macroeconomic and climate objectives and farm-level practice. On paper this architecture is increasingly coherent, but there is a huge void between the formulated policies and implementation. Indeed, coffee policies articulate commendable principles and initiatives, yet translating them into concrete practices, budgets and accountability mechanisms has been challenging across regions and institutions. Factors that contribute to this include incomplete devolution of key institutions to the grassroots level (e.g. ECTA, EFD), staff attrition, and limited capacity.



Evidence within Ethiopia's coffee policy ecosystem does not flow through a simple pipeline from research to policy. Instead, it moves through overlapping and sometimes fragile relationships among knowledge producers, intermediaries and decision-makers. Universities, research institutes, NGOs and programmes generate agronomic, socio-ecological and institutional insights, often in the form of projects and pilots. Intermediaries like consultancies and government agencies translate these lessons into policy-friendly formats and carry them into forums where decisions are made. Ministries, agencies and regional bureaus use evidence selectively, with influential individuals and "policy champions" frequently playing a decisive role in whether a given piece of information gains traction.

Four interlinked pathways shape how evidence travels and how powerful it becomes. Capabilities, in areas such as spatial analysis, traceability, monitoring for learning and cross-disciplinary landscape planning, are unevenly distributed, with significant gaps at regional and local levels. Relationships and networks, underpinned by trust, often matter as much as formal mandates in determining whose evidence is heard. Structures and processes, including coordination platforms on biodiversity and climate, taskforces and monitoring systems within statutory institutions such as ECTA and the EFD, have the potential to embed evidence in routine decision-making but are not always used strategically. Finally, the broader evidence culture, including norms around learning, documentation and openness to challenge, influences whether data and experience are treated as tools for adaptation or as after-the-fact justification.

These pathways are moderated by a set of contextual forces that strongly influence the uptake of evidence. Shifts in institutional mandates and decision authority create uncertainty over who decides and who convenes stakeholders in coffee policymaking. Federal-regional dynamics, including varying capacity and limited vertical coordination, weaken feedback from practice to policy. Fragmented data infrastructure and weak institutional memory also undermine lesson uptake, leading to attrition of information. Compliance pressures from regulations such as the EUDR are reshaping incentives around traceability, legality and deforestation-free production, with implications for who participates in export markets and on what terms.



Within this broader landscape, three decision arenas were identified as essential and priorities for future attention. The first is the climate–coffee–forest nexus, where Ethiopia must decide how to prevent the conversion of intact forest to coffee while optimising shade, yields and livelihoods in semi-forest, garden and plantation coffee production systems. The second is the enduring gap between policy development and implementation, which calls for a stronger delivery architecture, clearer protocols and better-aligned incentives rather than additional high-level strategy documents. The third is the response to the EUDR and similar regulations, which will test the country’s ability to build inclusive traceability systems and to protect smallholder participation while navigating compliance complexities and evolution.

The analysis also underscores that equity and knowledge pluralism are concerns. Unless Ethiopia can find alternative markets for about 39% of its coffee exported to the EU, the country’s smallholder coffee producers risk becoming “digitally invisible”, missing from registries, spatial data and due-diligence systems, and thus economically invisible in EU markets. At the same time, indigenous and experiential knowledge is under-recognised relative to scientific research, despite its importance for adaptation and forest stewardship. An equitable evidence ecosystem is needed to improve the recognition of plural forms of knowledge and strengthen producer organisations as data stewards and policy interlocutors, and not merely as data sources for exploitation

Strengthening evidence-informed policymaking for climate-resilient coffee in Ethiopia will require simultaneous attention to technical, relational and political dimensions. This report calls for targeted capability building, stronger relationships and networks for co-production, institutionalised structures and processes that make evidence use routine, and a more open and inclusive evidence culture. It also highlights the need to address key contextual moderators such as clarifying decision authority within pluralistic institutions, aligning finance with long-term resilience, improving federal government–regional government linkages, developing robust data infrastructure and engaging strategically with evolving market rules such as the EUDR. Specific, stakeholder disaggregated recommendations are provided, offering practical steps for government institutions (federal and regional), coffee companies, civil society and research institutions, development partners and producer organisations to improve their contributions to making Ethiopia’s coffee sector more adaptive, inclusive and climate-resilient.

“ Climate-resilient coffee policy for Ethiopia needs to recognise that forests that don't have coffee production may be more vulnerable to deforestation than those that do, and coffee-producing forests often have lower levels of biodiversity.”¹

1.1 The imperative for climate resilient coffee in Ethiopia

Coffee is an integral element of Ethiopia's forest-farm landscapes. The country is rich in biodiversity and widely recognised not only as the birthplace of *Coffea arabica* but also a globally significant reserve of coffee genetic resources. Coffee is native to the Afromontane rainforests in southeastern and southwestern Ethiopia, where diverse species of wild coffee continue to thrive (Wiersum et al., 2008). As a country of origin, coffee production is itself highly diverse in Ethiopia, spanning from wild collection in old-growth forests to modern, high-tech plantations. On the basis of management, vegetation, structural complexity, and agronomic practices, coffee production systems in Ethiopia can be categorised as 1) forest coffee (FC), 2) semi-managed forest coffee (SFC), 3) garden coffee (GC), and 4) plantation (ECFF, 2015). The first three systems have been practiced for centuries by smallholder farmers, and therefore, are considered as 'traditional' coffee production systems, accounting for about 90% of the production, with plantation making up the remaining 10%.

Unlike many producer countries, coffee is more than a commodity in Ethiopia. It is deeply embedded in the nation's cultural heritage, with nearly 50% of all coffee produced in the country consumed locally. At the same time, coffee is essential for the foreign exchange earnings, rural livelihoods, and sustainable land-use across Ethiopia's forest-farm nexus. Across coffee producing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda are one of the few that have maintained growing production over the last two decades (Figure 1). The country produced about 638,000 metric tonnes (MT) of coffee during the 2024/2025 season, with production estimated to increase by 9% (694,000 MT) by the end of the 2025/2026 season (USDA, 2025). Coffee export for 2024/2025 is projected to reach 420,000 MT, a 24% increase from the previous year. The Ethiopian government plans to expand its coffee outputs and associated foreign exchange (FX) earnings to USD 4 billion annually within the next decade (ECTA, EIAR and TechnoServe, 2019).

Coffee production is a source of local jobs and income, directly supporting about 15 million farmers across over 5 million households. Additionally, it enhances national identity, social cohesion and well-being, with Ethiopian authorities working to have the country's traditional coffee ceremony recognised as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2025). The multiple benefits Ethiopia derives from its coffee sector makes it extremely sensitive to any disruptions, including climate stress, pest and diseases, or a market downturn.

¹ Hylander et al., 2013.

Indeed, climate change impacts are already affecting Ethiopia's coffee landscapes. In addition to erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperature extremes, and the spread of coffee pests and diseases are forecast to erode yields and quality in strategic producing zones such as Sidamo, Jimma and Harar. Some studies suggest that without adaptive responses, many of Ethiopia's current arabica coffee areas could become unsuitable by 2050 (Moat, 2017). There is also evidence that *Coffea arabica* is migrating from lower to higher alternatives due to changing climate. Such developments threaten not only coffee outputs but also the socio-ecological balance between coffee, forests, biodiversity, and rural resilience. At the same time, emergent trade regulations such as the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) poses new risks to Ethiopian coffee (Tefera et al., 2025). Promulgated in June 2023, the EUDR aims to eliminate forest-risk commodities such as coffee linked with deforestation from the Union's market (McDermott et al., 2025).

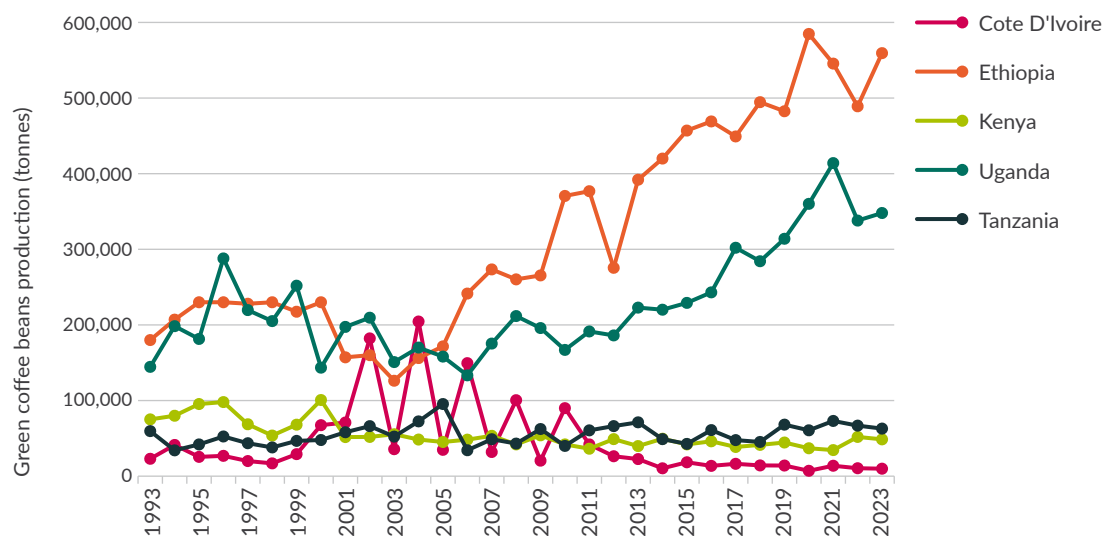


Figure 1: Coffee (green beans) production dynamics across top five producer countries in Africa (1993–2023), based on data from FAOSTAT.

The emergence of new regulatory mechanisms coupled with ecological risks to Ethiopian coffee precipitate the need for a critical reflection about the future of the sector, and in particular how to navigate climate resilient coffee that safeguards the sector and its positive contributions (Hirons et al., 2018). Such a reflection is not only a question for government and policymakers but the broad range of power differential actors and, interests engaged in the coffee sector. Understanding the various actors and their roles in influencing coffee sector policy is thus an essential first step to navigating, negotiating and reconciling competing interests and aspirations such as boosting export competitiveness, safeguarding smallholder livelihood, protecting forests, and responding to nascent unilateral international regulatory pressures.

1.2 STEEP project and evidence informed policymaking

The (non)use of evidence increasingly delineates reactive interventions and proactive policymaking. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, policymaking on agro-commodities have historically been driven by production targets and export imperatives, often formulated through top-down processes lead by institutional authorities and expats (Heirman, 2016; Mas Aparisi, 2024). The neglect of local ecological variability, gendered dynamics, and informal market realities by such approaches often constrained their executing and impact (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2022). Recognising this, governments, development practitioners and other stakeholders increasingly highlight the need for more institutionalised and systematic use research and data in policy processes (Sempé et al., 2025).

The Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable Climate Resilient Coffee Policies project (hereafter: STEEP) contributes to these discussions. STEEP aimed to improve an understanding of how evidence is mobilised in climate-resilient coffee policymaking across Ethiopia and Kenya. The project is funded by the British Academy and was implemented by the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, UK; and the Environment and Coffee Forest Forum (ECFF) and the Strathmore University, Kenya, with support from the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery, University of Oxford, and the Faculties of Forestry and Environmental Stewardship and Land and Food Systems, the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

This report focuses on Ethiopia where the federal government, development partners and other stakeholders are conducting policy and institutional reforms aimed at improving the climate resilience of its coffee sector.² The Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority (ECTA) generates information on the coffee sector, including production and trade statistics; the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), the Ethiopian Forestry Development (EFD), various universities, and civil society organisations (CSO) implement various projects, generating multiple lessons and research outputs. Yet it is unclear how: 1) evidence from these processes contribute to coffee policymaking; 2) recent changes in policy, regulatory, and socio-ecological processes that shape coffee production, trade and consumption is redefining challenges and opportunities in the Ethiopian coffee sector. These changes include the ongoing liberalisation of the Ethiopian coffee sector and emergent supply chain initiatives that emphasise the need for stronger traceability and transparency in coffee production processes. These precipitate new demands on data, its analytics and interactions with policy processes, from agenda setting, through policy formulation and adoption to implementation and opportunities.

Against this backdrop, this report positions evidence both as a bridge and catalyst for more effective climate-resilient coffee production, processing and governance in Ethiopia. Its findings intersect with and provides insights for navigating many of the strategic objects of Ethiopia's policies across climate, forestry, agriculture, and rural development, particularly the Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy: 2019 to 2033. It stresses two foundational issues. Firstly, across production, governance, and trade, the effectiveness of coffee policy depends on how well evidence systems support implementation and coordination. Secondly, a coordinated, inclusive, and implementation-oriented evidence system is therefore a critical enabler of Ethiopia's broader ambition for a climate-resilient and competitive coffee sector.

2 A separate report has been generated for Kenya and may be accessed via: [remember to insert DOI]

1.3 Approach and methodology

1.3.1 Conceptual framing: understanding evidence-informed policymaking

This report adapts the Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM) Framework (Sempé et al., 2025) as its conceptual foundation. The framework was developed to guide the Research Commission Centre (RCC) of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) work on evidence use in policymaking. It provides a systematic way for analysing how evidence is generated, shared, and applied within complex policy systems. The EIPM framework recognises that policymaking is not a linear process whereby research automatically drives policy designs and intervention. Alternatively, it perceives policymaking as a dynamic and negotiated space that is influenced by actors, relationships, institutional incentives, and political context.

Policy actors operate within a policy cycle, a non-linear, messy and interactive process involving the definition of policy problems (agenda settings), development of solutions or policy formulation, policy implementation, and evaluation to generate insights for future actions (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). At its core, the EIPM framework may be broken down into four sets of interrelated questions regarding who, how, why and when evidence is brought into policy processes. We parse out these questions to build an analytical framework to guide our analysis in the Ethiopian coffee sector.

To start with, evidence-informed policymaking is a nested ecosystem of actors “who” produce, broker, and use evidence. This encompasses individuals and organisations who generate, broker, and demand evidence in policy processes. Such actors may include government agencies, research institutions, farmers or producers' associations, private-sector actors, civil society, and development partners, and their intermediaries such as think tanks and knowledge translation platforms. The quality of interaction among these actors influences how effectively knowledge flows through the system. Each actor operates within an institutional environment that shapes their mandates, incentives, and capacity to engage with evidence. Typically, the institutions are further nested with broader policy and socio-political systems that are influenced across actors and scales. This layered structure creates multiple entry points for evidence to influence policy. Effective EIPM depends not only on technical research quality but also on trust, credibility, communication, and alignment of problems, agendas and politics across these actors (Kingdon, 1995). Where relationships are weak or misaligned, evidence risks being ignored, misinterpreted, or instrumentalised.

After actors generate evidence, the information can only influence policy if it is channelled and transformed across relevant individuals and institutions within strategic nodes of policy processes. “How” the information enters into such nodes depends on at least four pathways. The capability pathway relies on strengthening individual and institutional capacities to produce, interpret and apply evidence by providing them with technical research skills, policy analysis and other soft skills, including communication and negotiation. A relationships and networks pathway emphasises trust-based, sustained connections and linkages between actors in the evidence ecosystem for dialogue, co-production, mutual understanding of policy needs and evidence relevance.

A structures and processes pathway focuses on institutionalised mechanisms for embedding evidence in decision-making and may include dedicated evidence units, quality assurance systems, data sharing protocols, budget and shared planning frameworks. An evidence culture pathway centres fostering norms, values, and leadership behaviours that make the use of evidence a routine expectation. Taken together, these pathways constitute the “engine” through which evidence may inform, shape, and legitimise policymaking. They also represent the key levers for reform, areas where targeted interventions can strengthen the evidence-policy interface.

Finally, evidence use never occurs in a vacuum. Consequently, the EIPM framework recognises that political, economy, institutional and social context act as moderating forces in policymaking, influencing “why” and “when” evidence is used, or not. Political priorities, electoral cycles, budgetary timing, bureaucratic incentives, and public opinion all create or close “policy windows” (Ibid (1995). for evidence uptake. For example, leadership transitions, donor alignment, or international regulatory pressures can open opportunities for new, evidence-informed approaches to emerge. Alternatively, entrenched interests, limited institutional capacity, or competing narratives can restrict evidence use to symbolic or rhetorical functions. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for designing interventions that are both evidence-informed and politically feasible. In practice, this means recognising that context is not a backdrop but an active determinant of why and when evidence travels through the policy system. Effective evidence use depends on not only timing, framing, and relationships, but also data quality or methodological rigour.

The EIPM framework (Sempé et al., 2025) provides a systemic and adaptive lens for examining evidence use (or not) in Ethiopia’s coffee sector. Specifically, it helps unpack the complex interface between knowledge and power in coffee value chain governance by enabling us to trace: 1) who (the key actors and institutions) generates, mediates and uses evidence across the Ethiopian coffee value chains. 2) how evidence flows through various pathways based on the capabilities, relationships, structures and culture of the coffee ecosystem, and 3) why and when policymakers open or close off evidence uptake in coffee policymaking. By following this simple decomposition of the EIPM framework, this report moves beyond linear models of research uptake. On the contrary, it recognises and positions evidence use in policymaking as a relational, iterative, and context-dependent process that depends as much on socio-political systems around coffee in Ethiopia as on evidence itself.

Before describing our methods, it is to clarify our understanding of “evidence” as used in this report. Many studies, including EIPM focus on scientific and institutional knowledge as evidence (Sempé et al., 2025); this report adopts a broader, pluralistic perspective. Across Ethiopia’s coffee sector, we recognise that evidence also encompasses traditional, experiential, and indigenous knowledge systems, the intergenerational wisdom of farmers and forest communities whose practices have sustained *Coffea arabica* for centuries. Recognising these epistemic traditions alongside formal scientific research is essential for a genuinely inclusive vision of evidence-informed policymaking, particularly one that is rooted in the lived realities and ecological intelligence of Ethiopia’s coffee landscapes. Building on this inclusive understanding of evidence, the next section outlines our empirical approach for examining how diverse forms of knowledge interact with policymaking processes across Ethiopia’s coffee sector.

1.3.2 Data collection and analysis

This report adopts a three-phased approach (Figure 2) to examine who, how, why and when evidence is (not) enrolled for coffee sector policymaking in Ethiopia. This iterative approach was designed to 1) capture how evidence, broadly defined, circulates, is valued, and is applied within Ethiopia's coffee policy ecosystem, and 2) ensure the research moves beyond descriptive mapping to interrogate the dynamic processes and contextual conditions shaping evidence use. The approach combines documents analysis, key informant interviews, stakeholder mapping and stakeholder workshops, and analytical synthesis. Our design emphasised inclusion of diverse stakeholders and knowledge systems, reflecting Ethiopia's deep heritage of coffee cultivation and governance.

Phase I: Stakeholder mapping and document analysis

Working with the ECFF, we mapped key stakeholders in the Ethiopian coffee sector. The mapping focused on key actors that produced, used or facilitated the uptake of evidence in coffee policymaking. We also collated and analysed multiple policy documents at the forest-farm nexus, with emphasis on coffee. The process involved, firstly, taking stock of the key documents and screening the abstracts and executive summary to establish their relevance. Based on this, we categorise the documents according to the scale at which they engage with issues in the coffee sectors as 1) national, 2) cross-sector, and 3) coffee sector specific. We then develop a narrative to connect the issues raised by the overlapping documents, informing the policy context presented in [Section 2.1](#), and the key informant interviews and multi-stakeholder workshops, as explained below.

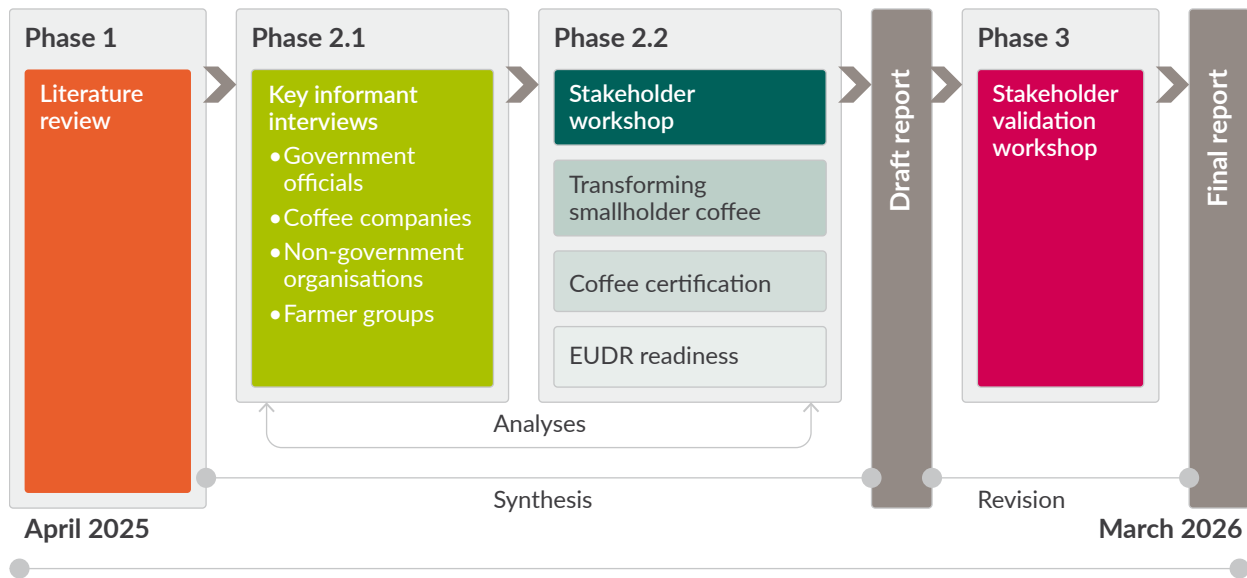


Figure 2: Approach to producing the report

Phase II: Key informant interviews and stakeholder workshops:

Following the stakeholder and policy mapping, we conducted 11 in-depth semi-structure interviews with purposively selected stakeholders across a range of institutions involved in coffee governance and policymaking. Participants included officials and experts from federal government bodies, research and extension organisations, embassies, producer cooperatives, private exporters, civil-society, and development partners, which were established based on a mapping of key stakeholders buttressed by their review of key policy documents on coffee, forests, agriculture and rural development. [Annex 1](#) is a list of the participants interviewed. The interviews explored: 1) how evidence is understood and valued within coffee policy processes and the most influential actors in the process; 2) the institutional mechanisms and incentives shaping evidence use; 3) perceived enablers and barriers to integrating research and experiential knowledge; 4) examples of effective or missed opportunities for evidence uptake, 5) and topical issues in coffee that require more evidence. Phase I was instrument not only important in revealing “who” mattered in coffee policymaking but also their relationships with other actors, their key capabilities and motivations, as well as “how” they mobilise or ensure their evidence is considered in policymaking within Ethiopia.

During this second part of Phase 2, the project team held multi-stakeholder workshop (Annexes 2 and 3, list of participants) on 8 October 2025 and 20 March 2026, bringing together participants from across the coffee value chain to validate, deepen, and co-interpret findings from Phases 1 and 2.1. Through presentations, group work and discussions, the workshop participants collectively established “how” evidence moved through policy spaces. The workshop also created a deliberative environment to discuss priority issues and challenges for achieving climate-resilient coffee policy. Key priority issues discussed included: 1) tensions at the interlinkages of climate, coffee and forests, 2) gaps between policy design and implementations, and 3) navigating the EUDR in Ethiopia. The participatory process of this stage stimulated mutual learning between policymakers and evidence producers, reinforcing the EIPM framework’s emphasis on relations, trust and co-production.

Phase III: Validation and synthesis

The final phase of our approach involved a multi-stakeholder validation workshop in Addis Ababa on 20 March 2026. This triangulation enabled a comprehensive analysis of how evidence interacts with Ethiopia’s coffee policy landscape, guided explicitly by three dimensions of the EIPM framework namely; actors and institutions, pathways of change, and moderating and contextual factors (Sempé et al., 2025). The synthesis thereafter integrated various stakeholder comments from the workshop, distilling further the patterns of evidence, (non) engagement and barriers across various levels of coffee governance in Ethiopia, sustainable production and trade. By connecting our empirical analysis with conceptual insights, the report connects grounded experiences with Ethiopia’s coffee policymaking and evidence ecosystem with systemic lens of Sempé et al.’s (2025) EIPM framework.

1.3.3 Methodological reflections

Our qualitative, multi-phase approach combined with the different data collection approach enabled triangulation aimed to enhance the rigour of the report. Nevertheless, some limitations are inalienable with our approach. Firstly, the research was conducted within a limited time frame (April 2025 – March 2026).

This limited the scope of the stakeholders we could cover (Annexes 1 and 2). Some policy actors, particularly at sub-national (regional state) levels and within local communities were underrepresented due to access and scheduling constraints. Secondly, we relied on self-reported perceptions with coffee policymaking and implementation, which may have introduced selective recall or institutional bias among some of the stakeholders interviewed. Yet by triangulating data from multiple sources, including the stakeholder validation workshop, we provided space for diverse stakeholders to review, refine and confirm interpretations of preliminary findings.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is organised into two substantive sections followed by conclusions and recommendations. Each section builds cumulatively on the previous one, translating the conceptual framing of evidence-informed policymaking into empirical and policy-relevant analysis for Ethiopia's coffee sector. Throughout the sections, we deliberately provide space for the voices of the various actors engaged during the research. We do this by quoting materials from our interviews and stakeholder workshops.

[Section 2](#) applies the EIPM framework to map Ethiopia's coffee policy ecosystem. It begins with an overview of the formal policy and regulatory landscape governing Ethiopia's coffee sector, followed by an analysis of the actor ecosystem, the who of evidence use. It then explores the pathways of change through which evidence travels across institutions and networks, and the moderating and contextual factors that shape when and why evidence influences decisions. Together, these analyses reveal how evidence currently operates within Ethiopia's coffee governance architecture.

[Section 3](#) draws on the key informant interviews and stakeholder workshops to synthesise the issues that actors themselves identified as most critical for achieving a climate-resilient coffee policy in Ethiopia. It examines three interlinked policy arenas: (i) the climate-coffee-forest nexus; (ii) gaps between policy development and implementation; and (iii) emerging external legislative requirements, notably the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). The analysis connects these issues to the evidence pathways identified earlier, showing where knowledge generation and policy processes either align or diverge and specific action points that require stakeholders' attention.

The final section ([Section 4](#)) integrates insights from across the report to distil the key lessons for effective, climate-resilient coffee policymaking in Ethiopia, with resonance for other producer countries. It revisits the EIPM framework to identify leverage points for strengthening evidence use and formulates stakeholder-specific recommendations for government agencies, producer organisations, research institutions, and development partners. The section concludes by outlining practical steps toward a more adaptive and inclusive evidence ecosystem in Ethiopia's coffee sector.

A list annexes follows the main text, providing supporting documentation from the research process.

2. Evidence-use in coffee policymaking in Ethiopia

“ When implementing projects, the goal is to develop lessons that can influence policy through practice on the ground... documented and taken as lessons.”
(Key informant, August 2025)

2.1 Overview of the Ethiopian coffee policy landscape

Ethiopia's coffee economy is governed by a layered policy architecture. National strategies set ambition and macro-discipline; cross-sector frameworks translate that ambition into programmes and initiatives that cut across land, forests and markets; and sector instruments codify the rules, incentives and services specific to coffee. As Figure 1 illustrates, these layers have evolved over time but increasingly point in the same direction.

At the federal (national) level, successive development and climate strategies connect growth to resilience (Ministry of Planning and Development, Ethiopia, 2020). Long-term plans prioritise agricultural transformation, export earnings, industrial linkages and jobs, while adaptation and mitigation commitments position land use, forests and watershed protection as strategic national interests (Planning and Development Commission, Ethiopia, 2020). For coffee, this means that resilience is not optional. Exposure to rainfall variability, temperature stress, pest and disease makes climate adaptation central to export reliability. Concurrently, various macro constraints are binding. For instance, foreign-exchange (FX) needs and fiscal space will continue to influence which interventions are funded and when. Therefore, evidence that quantifies the returns on adaptation, for instance such as costed shade regimes, disease-resistant varieties and climate advisory services, and that clarifies the FX implications of quality upgrading are likely to garner more attention and interest. These national fora also open policy windows. For instance, budget cycles and international climate reporting timelines create timed opportunities for credible analysis to influence priorities.

Between national vision and farm-gate realities lie cross-sector frameworks that connect agriculture, forestry, watershed management and rural development. With regards to land, various policies such as the National Adaptation Plan, Updated Nationally Determined Contribution (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2021) and REDD+ Strategy (2018-2030) (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2018) promote tree-based systems, soil and water conservation, restoration and protected-area management; on the market side they push value addition, market integration and export competitiveness. This is the tier that governs the forest-coffee nexus, i.e., from managing forest coffee zones and buffer areas to incentivising agroforestry in garden and semi-forest systems. It is also the place where agricultural extension, forestry enforcement, rural roads and land administration need to align. If not, coordination challenges are likely to follow. For instance, productivity gains in one pocket might be offset by leakage or deforestation in other areas. Credible co-benefit evidence that shows simultaneous impacts on yields, biodiversity, carbon and household incomes is likely to unlock joint programming across ministries and development partners.

The junction between national priorities and farm-gate realities is also the space where external compliance pressures are most likely. For example, deforestation-free supply and due-diligence regimes require traceability infrastructure that transcends sectors. Spatial data, producer registries and verifiable land-use baselines although driven by specific commodities traverse spaces, as many commodities, including coffee are typically grown under integrated land use systems (ECFF, 2015).

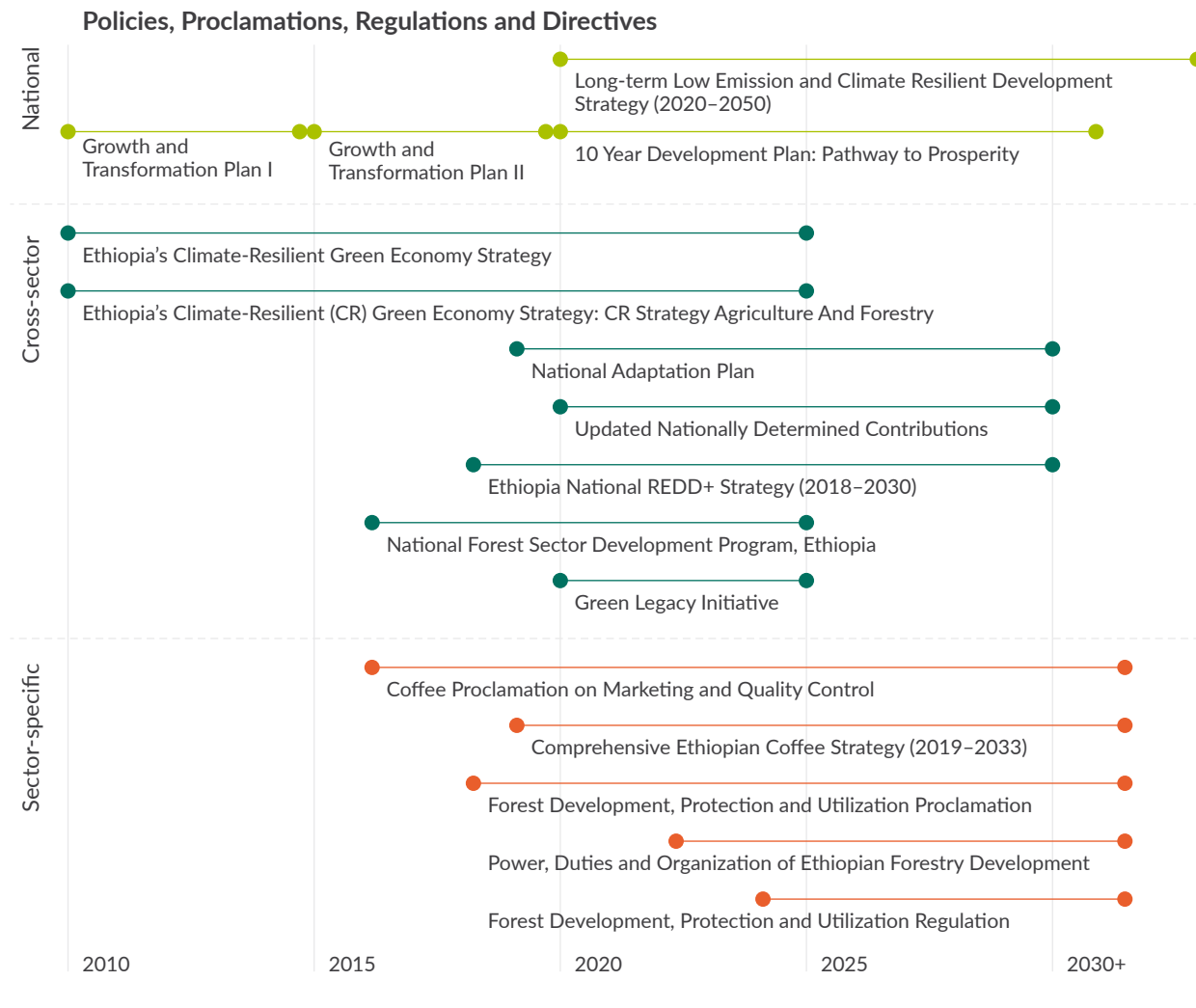


Figure 3: A schematic of selected key policies in Ethiopia's forest and agriculture sector, focusing on coffee.

Regarding coffee, policies targeting the commodity have unfolded in waves. Early market reforms, e.g. "Coffee Proclamation" of 2017 (Federal Republic of Ethiopia, 2017), sought price transparency and quality control, including the introduction of commodity-exchange mechanisms; these were followed by greater allowances for direct exports and speciality trade to preserve traceability and terroir (or place-based) identity. Most recently, the Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy, 2019-2033 (CECS) (ECTA, EIAR and TechnoServe, 2019) consolidates these agendas into a single roadmap.

It calls for a market-oriented upgrade path focused on quality differentiation, branding, logistics and market intelligence; it promotes sustainability and climate resilience through agroforestry, adaptive research and design, climate services and soil-and-water management; it argues for embedded research and extension, disease surveillance and control, quality laboratories and regulatory analytics; and it highlights the need for governance and coordination through stronger mandates for national agencies and regional bureaus, coupled with performance monitoring.

In effect, the Ethiopian coffee policy landscape, as demonstrated by Figure 3, illustrates a layered policy domain where various different policies operate together, rather than operating hierarchically. National frameworks set the strategic direction, cross-sectoral policies translate that vision into integrated programs, while sector-specific instruments operationalise it through targeted interventions. Within this architecture, the CECS serves as the nexus policy, the point where macro-level priorities on climate resilience and green growth intersect with the micro-level realities of farmers, cooperatives, and exporters. Its alignment with the several higher level policies reflects an increasing coherence between economic, environmental, and social objectives.

For evidence-informed policymaking, this layered architecture indicates that there are multiple entry points for evidence production and use. National strategies create political mandates for evidence, cross-sectoral programs generate multi-disciplinary data, and sector strategies shape how such evidence is applied in regulation and practice. Understanding these linkages is essential for diagnosing where evidence flows smoothly and where blockages occur within Ethiopia's coffee governance system. We delve into this in the next section by applying the EIPM framework to the understand the coffee policy ecosystem in Ethiopia.

2.2 The actors' ecosystem influencing coffee policymaking in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia's coffee sector, evidence does not move through a single channel; it flows within a nested ecosystem of various actors and channels that frequently overlap, and whose influence depends as much on relationships and incentives as on technical quality. Individuals are embedded in institutions, and institutions operate within a wider policy system that includes infrastructure for data, funding and coordination, precisely the multi-level "actor ecosystem" the EIPM framework foregrounds (Sempé et al. 2025, p. 11).

2.2.1 Evidence producers

Stakeholders interviewed consistently named national NGOs such as the Environment and Coffee Forest Forum (ECFF), Ethio Wetlands and Natural Resources Association (EWNRA), and Farm Africa, alongside public research institutions as the sector's most visible generators of actionable knowledge. On the government side, Ministry of Finance (CRGE Facility), Policy Studies Institute (PSI), Ministry of Planning and Development (MoPD), and the Ministry of Agriculture (through ECTA and EFD) emerged as central to commissioning studies, piloting interventions and curating data for policy. Universities and coffee research centres (e.g. Jimma Agricultural Research Center) were also noted to drive varietal pipelines and agronomy, but much of the policy-shaping "grey literature" (rapid assessments, policy notes, pilot evaluations) originates in NGO and programme spaces.

Among others, two stakeholder reflections capture the dominant orientation among evidence producers: *“If you are not doing anything on the ground, you cannot influence anybody... Our responsibility is to document the lessons so that when they are required, we can share them [with evidence users and intermediaries]... this makes it easier to interact with and change the minds of key decision-makers.”* (CSO 2, 08.25); and from government, *“When implementing projects, the goal is to develop lessons that can influence policy through practice on the ground... documented and taken as lessons.”* (GO4, 08.25). In EIPM terms, these evidence producers are not only creating evidence; they are packaging and positioning lessons for “policy windows”, anticipating the demands of key evidence users.

2.2.2 Evidence intermediaries

A second group occupies the critical “middle space” between evidence production and use: consultancies and NGOs (ECFF, TechnoServe, Farm Africa, IUCN), professional associations (Ethiopian Coffee Science Society; Ethiopian Forestry Society), and national secretariats/ platforms on restoration and biodiversity. These organisations convene dialogues, translate coffee research findings into policy-ready products, and sustain relationships across ministries, embassies and cooperatives. As one CSO representative put it: *“Our strategy was through evidence-based policy dialogue... we produce policy briefs shared with policymaking institutions.”* (CSO 1, 08.25). Another interviewee was blunter about the political economy of evidence brokering observing that: *“NGOs have more power to influence policy... they have the money... the agenda... and access. NGOs have more influence than universities.”* (G06, 08.25).

Within this vital space of intermediation in EIPM, credibility, access and timing appear to go a long way in relation to the approaches or methods used to generate evidence. Various intermediaries pointed out that they cultivate and maintain activate relationships and networks, build capabilities (through training and co-production), and help institutionalise structures and processes (e.g. briefings, strategic outreaches) that make their evidence legible to government and other actors involved in policy formulation.

Another element that influences how intermediaries draw evidence into the policy process is compressed timelines within which policies are developed. This limits their ability of stakeholders to engage all the coffee stakeholders. Alternatively, actors within their influence orbit get more attention, as depicted in Figure 4 below.



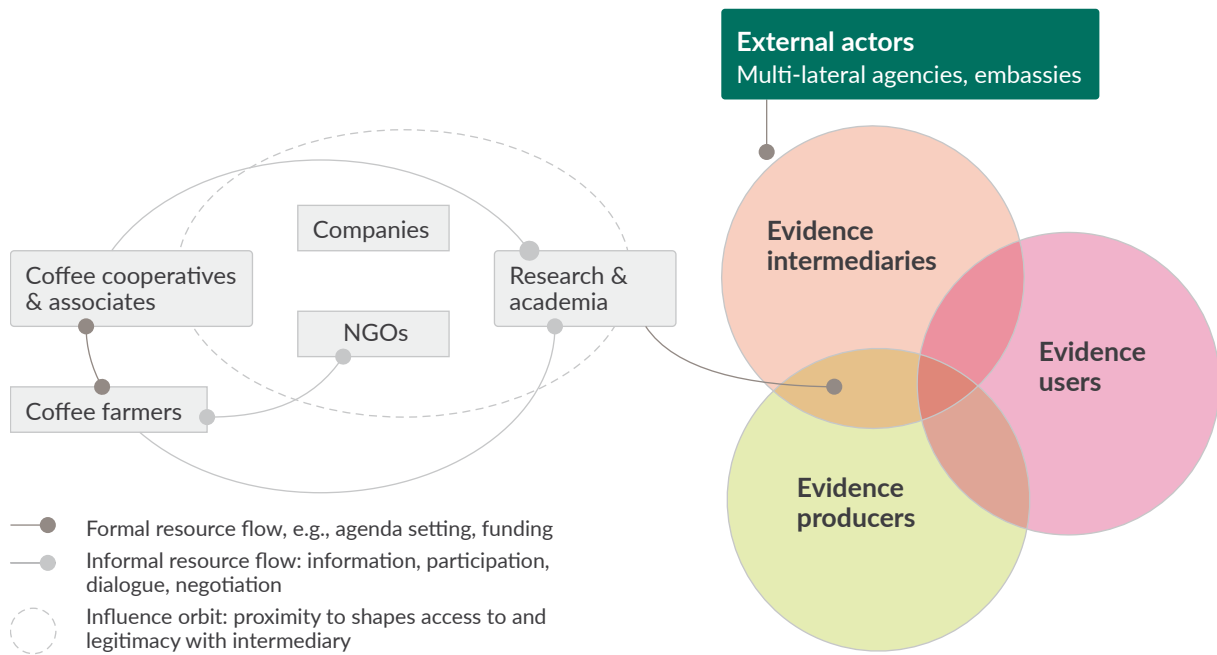


Figure 4: The evidence ecosystem as a relational field: actor configurations and legitimisation dynamics in Ethiopian coffee policymaking.

Key actors that tend to be in the evidence orbit including public institutions like ECTA, the Jimma Agricultural Research Centre, notable university professors and researchers, relevant coffee companies, NGOs like Farm Africa, ENWRA and ECFF, and coffee cooperatives like the Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union (OCFCU), which has 413 member cooperatives, covering over 560,000 coffee farmers.

2.2.3 Evidence users

With regards to translating evidence to policy, government ministries, institutes and agencies are often the ultimate users. Key actors within this actor ecosystem, including Ministry of Agriculture (with support from ECTA and regional bureaus), and MoPD.

Consultancies and influential policy champions, referred to by some of our interviews as “the people in power” often operate as proximate users. These actors synthesise options and advise principals in the policymaking process. Two observations from the various interviews underline how evidence use occurs over time and across venues: “[the *Climate Resilience and Green Economy Programme*] CRGE will end this year, but its lessons informed the [Long-term] Low Emission Development Strategy that has been developed.” (GO4, 08.25); and “If you look at the coffee forestry area, person ABC [anonymised] alone can influence more policy than most academics and institutions.” (GO6, 08.25). This suggests that, policy memory, i.e., lessons migrating from one strategy to the next, and individual authority (trusted champions) are powerful conduits for evidence use for coffee policy in Ethiopia. This finding is fully consistent with the EIPM framework’s emphasis that informal influence operating across multi-level pathways plays a key role in evidence-informed policymaking.

2.2.4 External actors

Outside the core producer–intermediary–user triad, the coffee policy ecosystem in Ethiopia is influenced by bilateral partners. The Swedish, Danish, German and Swiss Embassies were all mentioned during the key informant interviews and workshops for funding coffee project pilots and platforms intended to demonstrate promising coffee technologies at the grassroots level and then scale through to policymaking. As one NGO representative observed: *“We are piloting with the Norwegian Government funding to get good learning. They deliberately provided this to us because they know our history with producing such lessons.”* (CSO 2, 08.25). Other stakeholders across government and NGOs also directed attention to the EU-Coffee Action for Ethiopia (EU-CAFÉ) as an essential project that the EU as an external actor is using to shape the coffee sector. EU-CAFÉ (2019-2026) is a 10.5million euro project funded by the EU through the European Union Delegation in Ethiopia. The project covers a range of issues such as productivity enhancement through resource supply to farmers, improving capacity for coffee processing and marketing and EUDR compliance. It is implemented by ECTA, Regional Bureaus of Coffee, and Tea (and Spices) and Jimma Agricultural Research Center.

Multilateral agencies, notably UNEP, UNDP, IUCN were also pointed out as key external actors that not only provide finance and technical support but use their convening power to organise stakeholders for various policy discussions and interventions. Additionally, the key informants also recognised the media (television, radio and internet) as key external actors that amplify policy narratives, manage public expectations, train and mobilise the public to invest and support policy process. As one government official noted, *“our (the EFD’s) communications through mass media, several radio and TV programmes, I had two radio programmes yesterday, all these created the fertile ground, without which the GLI would not have succeeded.”* (G07, 08.25). Much of the communications in question were conducted under the country’s REDD+ programme, funded by the World Bank. While these external actors may not be readily visible within the evidence ecosystem, they appear to wield a massive influence via finance, legitimacy and agenda-setting.

2.2.5 Interactions between actors in the evidence ecosystem and implications for coffee policymaking

Evidence actors in Ethiopia’s coffee policymaking are not only vast but it appears that influence is highly relational (who trusts whom), institutional (who controls budgets, projects and platforms), and temporal (who can align what evidence with specific interests, developments and trends). This may explain why “documented lessons” and policy-ready briefs feature so prominently in the various stakeholders’ accounts. They are the currency through which evidence travels across levels, from individuals to institutions and the wider political system for making coffee policy,

Two practical implications follow from this. Firstly, stakeholders need to invest where roles overlap. Many NGOs are simultaneously evidence producers and intermediaries; some consultancies are de facto users when drafting policy documents; and some government units (e.g. ECTA) produce and use evidence. Supporting these overlaps, for example, through open data sharing, may shorten the path from pilot and research outputs to policy. Secondly, it may be important to treat external funders and media as context multipliers. Through their projects and narratives, these actors can expand or narrow policy windows. Therefore, aligning pilots with forthcoming strategies, compliance timelines and budget cycles may materially increase uptake.

In its design, the EIPM framework anticipates this. It stresses that outcomes improve when capabilities, relationships, processes and culture reinforce each other under enabling contextual conditions. This mapping of the who sets up the next focus on the how, the concrete pathways through which these actors move their lessons from the field through deliberations at “resorts and hotels” to policy documents.

2.3 Pathways of changing coffee policy in Ethiopia

As noted earlier, evidence rarely travels linearly from study to policy in Ethiopia’s coffee sector. In this section, we clarify the key pathways, entailing how various actors rely on expertise, networks but also formal structures to mobilise evidence into coffee policy processes.

2.3.1 Capabilities: studies, pilots and policymaking

Capabilities determine whether actors can generate, interpret, and apply evidence. Public research (e.g. Jimma and regional centres), the PSI, MoDP, analytics within ECTA (Ministry of Agriculture), and programme implementers (ECFF, EWNRA, Farm Africa, TechnoServe, etc.) collectively produce a flow of agronomic, market and socio-ecological knowledges. Practice-based capability was widely recognised by various actors during our interviews, with one actor observing that *“the funders deliberately chose us because of our history in generating lessons,” ... “If you are not doing anything on the ground, you cannot influence anybody.”* (CSO 2, 08.25). At the same time stakeholders were concerned that capabilities are unevenly distributed in Ethiopia’s coffee policy ecosystem:

“ You need incentives to maintain high-calibre expertise, those who can support policy, resource mobilisation, partnerships. At EFD, we have the privilege of having such people. However, these people also need research technical experts to support them.” (G06, 08.25).

While recognising the relevance of maintaining quality expertise, the quote also highlights some of the challenges they face. These include “limited funding,” “technical capacity, particularly at the regional state level,” and “staff attrition”. Specific capacity gaps mentioned include: 1) genomics and genetic conservation, 2) spatial analytics, 3) traceability, 4) effective record keeping and 5) result-based monitoring and evaluation for learning. An understanding of “coffee-community-forest interactions” was identified as a “key challenge” that required transdisciplinary expertise to navigate in the future. In the context of EUDR, workshop participants raised the high up-front cost of building systems required for EUDR compliance, including on-the-ground mapping, databases and information management systems, as a key capacity gap. Similarly, they highlighted the concerns about potential digital colonisation and the risk of losing sovereignty over their geo-location data and other information demands by the EUDR. This latter point while capacity-related also concerns power asymmetries between Ethiopia as a producer country and the EU as an importer.

Bridging some of these capabilities within ECTA and regional bureaus as demand hubs, and within research institutions, NGOs/consultancies as supply hubs may shorten the path from practice to policy, aligning with the EIPM framework’s emphasis on skill and organisational learning as a crucial pathway for evidence uptake and use in policymaking.

The broader issue of power asymmetry requires a different approach, which may entail building alliances with other producer countries in order to develop and apply a uniform approach to contesting the EU's structural dominance with the EUDR.

2.3.2 Relationships and networks

Trust, access, and convening power determine whether evidence is heard. Intermediaries such as ECFF, TechnoServe and Farm Africa, along with professional bodies (e.g., Ethiopian Forestry Society) and national secretariats/platforms (e.g. on restoration and biodiversity) serve as evidence brokers between researchers and decision-makers, using dialogue, co-production workshops, and policy briefs, as noted pointed out by an NGO representative: "Our strategy was through evidence-based policy dialogue" (CSO 1, 08.25).

Many stakeholders interviewed were blunt about the political economy of accessing policy networks, manifested in, for instance the observation such as: "NGOs have more power to influence policy... they have the money... the agenda, access and influence than universities." G06, 08.25); "although there are stakeholder meetings and discussions, often Ministers and others have the highest influence; ... elites, high officials take the final decision." (G03, 08.25). Influence was noted to reside in champions, or "people in power", people whose legitimacy can carry a single policy brief further than a stack of research reports. Within the EIPM, these networks and connections are not soft add-ons. On the contrary, they are a core infrastructure for agenda setting, sense-making, reframing, and coalition-building around feasible coffee policy options.

2.3.3 Structures and processes

Even compelling evidence may stall without clear vehicles for embedding it into the machinery of government. In Ethiopia's coffee governance, the most salient "vehicles" were: 1) recognised consultation platforms such as parliamentary committees, 2) technical platforms, e.g. on biodiversity and restoration; 3) performance and monitoring reporting and verification (MRV) routines that move beyond activity count to track outcome and thus reward evidence uptake, e.g. REDD+ MRV; 4) nascent compliance-oriented systems such as EUDR geolocation requirements.

These structures enable stakeholders to convey key project lessons and technical insights into coffee policy processes and was articulated in multiple interviews. Reflecting on this, some government officials observed that:

“ As a government agency, we generate documents that contribute to policies. We are also invited to join policy formulation teams to provide comments. Recent examples, including the rural development policy and the payment for ecosystem services (PES) framework and benefit sharing.” (G03, 08.25).

“ The Climate Resilient Green Economy engages other stakeholders on platforms where lessons can be taken up.” (G04, 08.15).

Another official also recalled how the documentation and discussion of insights from their involvement in the Oromia Forest Programme on multiple platforms generated lessons that shape multiple national and regional state policies on “the benefit sharing mechanism, carbon ownership, title transfers” (G03, 08.25). In the context of EIPM, these structures and process are institutional rails along which evidence travels predictably, rather than opportunistically.

2.3.4 Evidence culture: leadership, norms and incentives for use

Culture is the hardest evidence pathway to see and perhaps easiest to underestimate. Ethiopia’s coffee policy actors repeatedly referenced “learning” and “documentation”, signals of a nascent evidence culture. For example, the CRGE experience, drawing on lessons to inform the recent Long-term Low Emissions Development Strategy, was cited as policy memory in motion. The institutional culture around evidence use may range from one where policy briefs are expected artefacts of deliberation and when using evidence is rewarded (e.g. in performance appraisals or budget approvals) to one where evidence is symbolic, for example, where evidence is quoted but not used, or when timelines and incentives make analysis irrelevant to the decision-making rhythm.

Although many of the actors interviewed supported the various platforms government agencies, policy consultants and NGOs used to solicit evidence during coffee policymaking in Ethiopia, a few were also concerned about the culture of what might be termed as *tokenistic involvement*:

“ Ministers and others have the highest influence. For the sake of discussion, everyone is invited to participate in meetings, from grassroots to the highest level. But it is normal; elites, high officials take the final decision.” (G03, 08.25)

It is normal in this context to suggest an established culture, and perhaps, an informal acceptance of this approach. Invariably, norms and leadership behaviours influence whether capabilities, relations and processes cohere into habitual evidence use. A manifestation of this was the revelation that experiential evidence about benefits of the Green Legacy Initiative (GLI) influenced legislative change creating budgetary allocation for its continuation:

“ Through our experience we have established a new financial flow for GLI. For example, we have established a vehicle where 0.5-1% of domestic resources will be invested in GLI and restoration – river basin management, forest protection, agroforestry – forest and forest related investment.” (G04, 08.25).

In this case, policy change is not based on evidence generated systematically, but is based on a culture that recognises and takes a pragmatic approach benefiting from experiential evidence. The experiential evidence in question concerns public discourse and manifestations of improvement in green spaces, including within various Ethiopian cities. The EIPM emphasises that policymakers can differ in their epistemological stance towards evidence, with some preferring scientific rigour while others prioritise experiential knowledge and political power (Sempé et al. 2025, p. 14). The preference for experiential evidence within the Ethiopian context is influenced by multiple contextual factors, which are examined next.

2.4 Key moderating and contextual factors influencing coffee policymaking in Ethiopia

Building on [Section 2.2](#) and [Section 2.3](#) described the who and the how of evidence use, this section explains the why and when, the contextual forces that enable or inhibit evidence use in Ethiopia's coffee policymaking. Fiscal pressures interact with political priorities, institutional compliance deadlines collide with capacity and data gaps, federal–regional state dynamics influence whether project pilots scale or stall. These different facts are often intertwined. Understanding this mix of constraints and enablers is essential to deciphering which evidence will matter, *to whom*, and *at what moment* in the coffee sector.

2.4.1 Political economy and decision authority

All stakeholders interviewed in Ethiopia's coffee sector recognise that coffee policy sits at a junction of economic growth, foreign exchange earnings and rural livelihoods and legitimacy. The close relationship between foreign exchange earnings and the sustenance of the Ethiopian economy means that evidence use may not always align with the scientific merit of the information generated. Alternatively, it is also influenced by political considerations. Many stakeholders directed attention to this by highlighting the persistence of frequent mandate shifts and institutional reorganisations in Ethiopia. This includes changes in reporting lines and portfolio responsibilities across ministries of agriculture, environment/forestry and trade. While some of the changes may be pragmatic, others were also argued to be abrupt and politically informed, with little to no clarity on why. One example involves the restructuring, particularly “*the degrade of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to the Ethiopian Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission and subsequently to the Ethiopian Forestry Development (EFD)*.” (G02, 08.25). This fluidity, stakeholders argued, creates not only ambiguity about who can decide, who can convene, and which forum counts but also who receives what resources or lead policy reforms.

There were some indications of institutional reforms aiming to streamline operations and improve the linkages between research and policy, with actors appearing to be learning lessons slowly:

“ In Ethiopia, we see little impacts of research output on policies. I see a kind of broken line. Most research does not emanate from development need, or in the end, end up fulfilling academic purposes. For instance, EFD had separate a development wing and research wing. While they have merged over the last three years, we are still struggling to use development to influence research.” (G06, 08.25).

Institutional reforms, especially when done abruptly, may create multiple challenges for the policymaking at the climate-coffee-forest nexus. Policies which could have travelled directly through “key principals” (see [Section 2.3.2](#)) need to be routed through to different institutions that may have different priorities or ways of looking at coffee relations with lands and forests. Technical insights or key policy changes within such restructuring can stall if they are perceived as belonging to 1) “the wrong department or desk”, 2) if they clash with short-term priorities (e.g. agriculture productivity versus conservation), or 3) if they are perceived to come with new or expanded resource requirements.

2.4.2 Fiscal and macro constraints

As noted earlier, coffee remains central to foreign-exchange earnings and, via export performance and rural incomes, to macro stability in Ethiopia. For example, a few stakeholders observed that “*coffee exports contributed over USD 2.6 billion to our economy in 2025, so we need to take it seriously.*” (Workshop participants, 20th March 2026). This macro salience moderates policy choice. For example, under tight fiscal conditions, coffee policy is likely to privilege short-term solutions that improve productivity compared capital intensive solutions that provide long-term benefits.

Although various stakeholders, including the EBI, EFD and NGOs, pointed out their appetite for more research to guide coffee policy, many were concerned about the availability of funding to support their activities: “*Research budget also has impacts on this development. With small budget, you cannot achieve much.*” (G06, 08.25). The inability to achieve much here is not only about research output but also how ambitious the outputs are. This means that evidence that is likely to persuade is not only one that proves that a coffee technology etc., works or leads to climate resilient production. Alternatively, it depends on how it is sequenced and financeable under the real fiscal constraints of the country. This question of limited finance was contended by a couple of workshop participants who observed that “*resources are not our biggest challenge. I think the resources are available; the question is misalignment, channelling the resources into the most essential issues*”.³ Irrespective of the position, the inadequate supply of finance is not limited to federal, regional or local coffee evidence producers in government agencies but also other actors, including NGOs, coffee cooperatives, and farmers.

2.4.3 Federal–state implementation dynamics

Coffee policy implementation in Ethiopia is decentralised from the federal government to regional states. The decentralisation aims to engender better customisation of solutions to context. Unfortunately, however, stakeholders were concerned that “*several federal coffee institutions do not have a clean vertical line from federal level down to woredas and kebeles. This includes ECTA and EFD.*” (Workshop participants, 20th March, 2026). This means that implementing coffee policy relies on regional bureaus and local administrations with uneven capacity, different agro-ecologies and variable resource access. While this creates opportunities for tailored learning within the various contexts, the disconnect between key state and federal institutions working at the climate-coffee-forest nexus limits uptake of lessons, insights and evidence from coffee policies implementation. Some stakeholders indicated that certain institutions try to bridge this gap between evidence producers and users across the federal and state levels, but there is considerable room for improvement: “*Organisations such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) tries to fill the gap but in most institutions, e.g. universities, where I worked, there is little connection between researcher and policymaking.*” (G06, 08.25).

Workshop participants suggested there are various ways to overcome this challenge. Firstly, decision-makers need to reconsider decentralisation within key coffee institutions such as the ECTA and EFD to ensure that they connect more adequately with institutions at the regional state level. One pathway for achieving this is to establish a designated policy-practice liaison portfolio between federal and state institutions to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination.

³ Workshop participant (Oct, 2025).

Such a position, they held, could help 1) streamline reporting structures within existing institutional arrangements; 2) document, refine and promote coffee research and practice-based evidence and strategic regional and federal policy platform; 3) set the agenda for next generation of coffee policies in line with changes in the social, political and economic contexts. [Section 2.3](#) highlights some of the pathways such an institution needs to be cognisant of to ensure effective evidence uptake in coffee policy.

2.4.4 Data infrastructure and institutional memory

The Ethiopian coffee sector's ability to (re)use what it learns from policy implementation is limited by fragmented datasets, limited capacity and staff attrition. Many stakeholders argued that it was challenging to incentivise and retain competent staff, particularly at the lower levels of political administration. This means that essential lessons and institutional memory tend to disappear when personnel moves. Also, spatial layers, registries and monitoring and evaluation series may be stored in incompatible formats or personal accounts that become inaccessible. For example, most public officials use generic platforms (e.g. email, data storage, etc.) for their formal duties, while federal and regional offices often lack designated private networks and data storage infrastructure.

Improving stakeholders' ability to find data and standardisation are potential paths for transition toward a more institutionally rigorous and evidence-positive operational environment. Minimal but reliable data infrastructure, standard insights/lesson templates, with cost and outcome sections may increase the chances of taking up insights from various new study or pilot. This could be achieved, for instance, when the federal government develops a policy/praxis architecture, with an end-user dashboard, for displaying key evidence and policy implications from different coffee projects at all levels. This could be open source whereby different evidence producers and intermediaries contribute over time, with a layer of validation provided by public officials.

Tackling staff turnover with handover routines, shared repositories, and role-based access could also safeguard institutional memory so that evidence belongs to systems (regional states and federal), not to individuals.

2.4.5 Compliance pressures and market rules

Emerging due-diligence and deforestation-free import regimes, particularly the EUDR, is re-ordering incentives for Ethiopia's coffee sector. The EU's demand for traceability and due diligence compliance requires a routing of export contracts/consignments to origins that can prove coffee deforestation-freeness and compliance with relevant human rights legislations. This creates a policy window, as finance and attention flow to traceability, registries and landscape monitoring. However, there is also a significant risk smallholders are impacted, companies are likely to push compliance costs downstream. Emerging studies provide accounts of evidence that are likely to shape choices and influence equity in EUDR implementation. These include but are not limited to (McDermott et al., 2025): costs associated with EUDR compliance, e.g. plot geolocation; price and direction of Ethiopian coffee trade; percentage of coffee benefits captured by farmers; levels of food security and poverty among farmers; EU and member states investments in coffee and smallholders' production and livelihood improvement.

Reflecting on stakeholder interviews and workshops, this section has demonstrated that Ethiopia's coffee policy ecosystem comprises various stakeholders who produce, engage and transmit evidence, relying on their capabilities, networks and the country's evidence culture to influence policy. Within this complex ecosystem, evidence has a better chance of shaping coffee policy, when it is aligned with authority, financeable within pragmatic fiscal constraints and executable through federal–region state delivery systems. These moderating factors together with others do more than condition evidence uptake. They pre-figure the pressure points where policy is (un)made. They are, in effect, the context in which any credible solution in the Ethiopian coffee sector must prove its mettle.

[Section 3](#) turns to some of the key interlinked pressure points that coffee sector stakeholder identified as essential for the coming years, namely 1) the climate–coffee–forest nexus, 2) the gap between policy development and implementation, and 3) the emergent compliance agenda driven by deforestation-free and due-diligence rules. In elaborating on each, we maintain the EIPM framework in view, clarifying which and whose evidence is required, how it can travel, and why/when it can gain traction. This enables us to move from description to decision, identifying essential levers that can be prioritised for action.

3. Emergent issues for climate resilient coffee in Ethiopia

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Various local and international developments pose multiple risks and opportunities to evidence-informed policymaking in Ethiopia. Engagements with key coffee sector stakeholders pointed towards three priority themes/issues. Climate change and forest transition in Ethiopia is redefining geographical areas and practices need to maintain/boost coffee production to meet national goals of mobilising USD3 billion annually from coffee exports, while meeting local coffee needs. Gaps between policy design and implementation require attention to improving achievement of policy objectives and developing new insights to future-proof the coffee sector. Policy actors also need to remain cognisant of development in international coffee markets, adapting strategies and technology that move Ethiopia from being a compliant-oriented country to one that sets the pace on sustainable coffee production. These three issues overlap and influence not only who produces evidence but how it is used strategically to address coffee sector challenges within fiscal and resource boundaries. This section lays out each of the three issues, including actionable points distilled by stakeholders based on group works conducted during the participatory workshops.

3.1 Climate change and the coffee-forest nexus

Ethiopia's policy discourse often presents coffee as a forest-friendly commodity, and with good reason. Much of the country's arabica heritage has been nurtured in forest and semi-forest systems (ECFF, 2015). In practice, however, the relationship is neither uniform nor static. Ethiopian coffee is managed across four systems: forest, semi-forest, garden and estates, along a gradient where management intensity rises and shade declines. Differentiating high-shade coffee from natural forest remains an unresolved scientific and regulatory challenge. Remote-sensing products often struggle to distinguish structurally complex agroforests from natural forests, while field observations diverge on ecological quality and long-run land-use trajectories.

Stakeholders across the interviews and workshops mirrored this ambivalence. Many coffee-production oriented stakeholders argue that coffee production supports sustainable forest management, even restoring degraded forest when incentives are aligned and communities' rights are recognised. Others, particularly those within conservation institutional mandates cautioned that such claims can be misleading because high-shade coffee may increase canopy cover while reducing ecological function relative to intact forest. As one study puts it, to craft effective policy we must hold two truths at once: *"forests without coffee can, in some contexts, face higher deforestation risk than forests with coffee, and forests with coffee often have lower biodiversity value than forests without coffee."* (Hylander et al., 2013). That tension sits at the heart of Ethiopia's climate-coffee-forest nexus and requires policy to make explicit choices about what it values, where, and when.

Indeed, those choices are not theoretical. Some interviewees flagged the nascent allocation of high-value protected forests to investors for coffee and tea estates in some regions of southwestern Ethiopia: *"In some cases, the state, the Investor Commission, has allocated forest lands to affluent persons/companies for coffee production despite such areas being sanctuary and protected."* (G02, 08.25).

Where commercial estates expand into intact forest, deforestation is a real risk. By contrast, in smallholder systems, often under PFM, the more common pattern is forest degradation: thinning of structure, loss of understory and species composition shifts as shade is reduced and management intensifies. The policy problem is therefore two-sided: preventing outright conversion in biodiversity hotspots, while optimising shade and management in mixed coffee-forest landscapes so that productivity, biodiversity, carbon and water regulation are jointly considered.

Workshop deliberations converged on several practical levers. Firstly, shade-productivity optimisation was pointed as being central. Participants highlighted that in parts of the south-west, shade below roughly 50% correlates with declining biodiversity and farmer yields, unsurprising in rain-fed systems where shade regulates evapotranspiration and buffers heat stress. Secondly, an “A-B-C classification manual” for coffee forest production systems, developed by the ECFF to balance conservation and production, exists and is endorsed by nationally by government. However, its implementation is weak due to a lack of incentives and enforcement at the regional states level. Thirdly, coffee extension packages require re-design for the dry montane and moist Afromontane zones to internalise forest protection and climate adaptation rather than maximising coffee beans output alone. Fourthly, cross-disciplinary collaboration between agricultural and forestry experts was pointed as an essential precondition for coherence. Too often, workshop participants observed, coffee policy pursues productivity, while forest and biodiversity strategies pursue protection, with little operational translation in between.

Secondly, a forward-looking coffee policy needs to connect this landscape logic to markets and climate finance. Workshop participants argued for integrating semi-forest and high-shade coffee systems into emission reduction and removal initiatives that also account for biodiversity and restoration co-benefits. Achieving this requires credible MRV systems that can handle transdisciplinary data/information: plot geolocation, shade indices, species/structure proxies, yield data, narratives and oral histories that together demonstrate co-benefits rather than simple canopy area. It also requires aligning with compliance regimes in key markets (expanded upon in [Section 3.3](#)): traceability, risk assessment and group verification through cooperatives can turn conservation-aligned management into market access preservation and, potentially, price premiums (Wiersum et al., 2008). Some workshop participants noted emerging interest in using AI to characterise production systems at scale. However, this will only be useful if coupled to policy-relevant thresholds (e.g. minimum shade bands by ecozone) and institutional procedures so that their results feed directly into proclamations, directives, extension guidance, and coffee investment screening procedures.

Thirdly, clarity on narrative and values emerged as equally important in navigating the climate-coffee-forest nexus. Workshop participants posited that Ethiopia needs a coherent public position that recognises: 1) no expansion of coffee into intact forests and core zones (e.g. biosphere reserves); 2) managed optimisation of shade and species in semi-forest/garden systems to sustain farmer incomes and ecological function; and 3) landscape-level planning where coffee sits alongside restoration, protected areas and other livelihoods.

This position, they argued, need to be backed by risks-based land-use planning, especially in south-western frontiers, where the Investment Commission’s screening, regional bureaux’ permitting and environmental authorities’ oversight are aligned to prevent “ill-planned”, “deforestation-oriented” commercial projects from degrading high-value forests.

Within this context, participants argued that the nascent Green Legacy Special Fund could become a vehicle to finance restoration of degraded coffee forests. They called for clear eligibility rules tied to the “A–B–C coffee system” and to measurable ecological gains, not just established tree counts.

Fourthly, some stakeholder observed the need for irrigation to become a key element of discussions about the climate-coffee-forest nexus. This stemmed from their recognition that coffee water-stress is one of the largest threats posed by climate change. Thus, next to all the other mechanisms, including generating climate-resilient coffee varieties, improving irrigation adds up to the policy issues that require attention at the nexus.

From an EIPM perspective, these insights raise new demands on evidence production, transformation and use. For instance, decision-makers require ecological information such as shade-yield-ecology interrelations, costs and benefits of various coffee models with the “ABC system”, site-to-ABC-system match, climate impacts on area suitability for forests and coffee, and irrigation demands and dynamics. Institutionally, information on institutional diagnostics and fit, targeted extension, investment screen and enforcement modalities, to name a few. Evidence producers such as the ECTA, EFD, universities (local and foreign), NGOs, can generate and package such evidence, targeting policy windows that align with evidence users’ interests and resource availability. Evidence users such as ministries, agencies and regional bureaus must also demand evidence at the right moment, e.g. during annual, medium-term reviews and planning.

3.2 Gap between policy development and implementation

Ethiopia’s coffee sector is not shy of policy ambition. At the federal level there is a growing corpus of frameworks that, on paper, should raise productivity, climate resilience and forest protection (see [Section 2.1](#)). The gap, as stakeholders consistently pointed out, appears after the policy is written, with their translation often being piecemeal and incomplete. Three recurring forces sit at the core of this gap, incomplete devolution to the last mile, weak inter-institutional coordination, and policy conflict between environmental protection and investment promotion, around which a wider set of capacity, financing and governance frictions accumulate. The challenge, then, is not necessarily to add several other policies, but to make existing ones implementable in the places and institutions where they must actually work.

3.2.1 Devolution without a delivery spine

Many of the coffee sector’s keystone institutions, ECTA and technical units within the Ministry of Agriculture among them, do not enjoy a clean vertical line of authority from federal to woreda and kebele level. Coffee policy implementation depends on regional bureaus and local administrations with different agro-ecologies, staffing levels and budget execution performance. Uniform directives under-perform in this setting.

According to workshop participants, what could potentially close the gap are implementation protocols that sit beneath national rules: ecozone-specific extension packages; checklists that translate forest/coffee classification (A–B–C) into concrete “do and don’t decisions”; and service protocols that specify who does what, by when, with which data. Critically, these protocols need to specify budget holders at regional and woreda level and routine feedback loops back to the federal level.

Without such a spine, even the strongest federal coffee policy will continue to struggle to reach farms and forests.

3.2.2 Translating paper-based coordination to practice

Workshop participants highlighted that the climate–coffee–forest nexus is unavoidably cross-sectoral. Agriculture, environment/forestry, planning, finance, trade and regional governments each own a slice of the problem and the budget. In practice, coordination often defaults to information sharing rather than joint planning, joint indicators and joint accountability. This is where implementation falls short: agricultural extension maximises output; forestry enforces protection; planners and financiers referee late, with limited shared metrics to arbitrate trade-offs. A workable fix is to move from “platforms that meet” to tasked arrangements that deliver. For example, the introduction of a Coffee–Forest Task Group could bridge this gap. Such a task force would need to be co-convened by ECTA, EFD and MoDP with a clear mandate to agree annual joint indicators (yield, shade/forest proxies, income, compliance readiness), assign costs across budgets, and publish a brief results ledger at annually or bi-annually. This could foster a culture for frontline teams to operate collaboratively.

3.2.3 Policy conflict around investment

Stakeholders described a pattern in which the Forest Proclamation’s intent (no farming in forests) is diluted by regional investment decisions that allocate high-value forest to large estates for coffee and tea. Where conversion of intact forest is allowed, deforestation follows; where smallholders intensify within forests, degradation is more typical. These tensions are not fully resolved by national law; they are resolved in permits, audits and enforcement. Closing the gap means aligning the Investment Commission’s screening with environmental authorities and regional bureaus through a simple, enforceable zoning logic – no-go (intact/core zones), conditional-go (semi-forest/garden with shade and biodiversity thresholds), and go (non-forest areas) – and making permits contingent on traceability and MRV obligations that can be audited. In a sense, the compliance agenda of [Section 3.3](#) could provide a lever for navigating this. However, it needs to be done within the context of prioritising Ethiopia’s own needs and priorities as opposed to merely addressing external actors’ legal mandates.

3.3.4 Capability, incentives and integrity

The workshop surfaced persistent capacity gaps (regulatory analytics, spatial M&E, enforcement, extension re-design), ownership misalignment (who is truly responsible at each level of governance), and integrity risks in segments of the supply chain where opaque intermediation erodes farmer prices and undermines standards. Staff attrition was observed a barrier that escalates the problem: lessons leave with people, and programmes reset with change in government. According to stakeholders closing this gap requires a few targeted, systemic fixes rather than diffuse training plans. Priority capacity gaps identified include: genomics and genetic conservation, spatial analytics and remote sensing, traceability, effective record keeping, and result-based monitoring and evaluation for learning. In addition to bridging such gaps, resources are also required to retain trained staff, for example, through performance-based compensation packages.

3.3.5 Finance that matches roles

Access to finance is also key challenge behind many coffee policy implementation problems. Regions and woredas cannot enforce or extend what they cannot fund; farmers cannot adopt resilient practices if working capital is unavailable or overpriced; quality labs and spatial registries cannot be maintained off project grants alone. Some stakeholders held that the finance gap is not necessarily due to a lack of fund/resources but a misalignment that limits practitioners from focusing on the most essential issues. Notwithstanding, coffee policy implementation is likely to improve when budgeting and policy align. In addition to providing for funding mobilisation from different sources, joint-budgeting and implementation of actions for efficiency, policy recommendations need to provide clarity on activities and timelines increase the chances for their uptake.

3.3 The European Union Deforestation Regulation and future coffee production and trade

The EU's deforestation law, adopted in 2023, requires every shipment of coffee placed on or exported from the EU market to be (i) *deforestation-free* after the cut-off date of 31 December 2020 and (ii) *legal* under the producer country's laws. Operators must file a Due Diligence Statement (DDS) in the EU's EUDR Information System (on the TRACES platform) before placing product on the market. Following a 2024 decision by EU lawmakers, the application dates were pushed back to 30 December 2025 for large and medium operators and 30 June 2026 for micro/small enterprises. The EU's country benchmarking system, published in May 2025, classifies Ethiopia as "standard risk," meaning Member State authorities will check *at least 3%* of operators and products linked to Ethiopia, and EU buyers must complete full due diligence (risk assessment and mitigation) for Ethiopian coffee. These are the operative dates and rules at the time of writing – there are ongoing debates concerning amending the EUDR.

For now, a DDS must reference geolocation for every production plot supplying a shipment; the Commission's system expects GeoJSON uploads in WGS84. Guidance and frequently asked questions (FAQs) clarified geometry types and precision, and many implementers have adopted a points-for-very-small-plots / polygons-for-larger-plots convention to keep files within the platform's size limits – though polygons are increasingly preferred for auditability and to avoid "false positives" in satellite checks. Put simply, Ethiopia's compliance hinges on the ability to map farms, prove legality, maintain batch-level traceability, and link documentation all the way to the DDS.

Stakeholder interviews and the workshop discussions pointed to a national push led by the Ministry of Finance and the ECTA to coordinate geolocation and traceability. Stakeholders described a three-year action plan, a central platform led by ECTA (with a domestic ICT partner) to ingest farm coordinates and link them to lots, stepped-up trainings for woreda and cooperative enumerators, and pilots at cooperative-union and exporter level to rehearse DDS routines. Development partners are already supporting readiness for example through the EU-CAFÉ project. Independently, some coffee unions (e.g. Sidama, Yirgacheffe/Oromia) are racing to map farms and prepare upstream data flows; exporters are piloting shipment-ready DDS routines.

Yet two gaps remain stark, as pointed out by workshop participants and the interviewees. Firstly, awareness is thin, not only among smallholders and rural traders, but also among some larger estate operators whose recent coffee expansions into forests may intersect awkwardly with the 31 December 2020 cut-off. Secondly, coffee farm coverage is incomplete, mapping is happening, but unevenly, and the bridge from disparate pilots to a national, auditable record is still under construction.

According to various stakeholders, the short-term risk for Ethiopia evident: EU buyers will reweight portfolios toward origins that can evidence low forest risk at scale. The opportunity is equally clear: Ethiopia's coffee, much of it produced in forest and semi-forest mosaics, can compete on nature-positive credibility if the system makes those mosaics visible and verifiable. That requires a response calibrated to Ethiopia's production realities rather than a generic JRC/IT rollout. Practically, stakeholders observed that this requires paying attention to three key issues.

Firstly, it is imperative to make cooperatives the first mile of due diligence. In a smallholder-dominated sector, primary cooperatives and unions are one of the key actors with the reach to maintain living registries of plots and producers, refresh coordinates annually, and tag lots so that exporters can file shipment-ready DDS. When cooperatives are resourced as data stewards, devices, offline-first apps, field teams, and modest performance payments for audit-ready data, traceability could become inclusive rather than exclusionary.

Secondly, ECTA, the Ethiopian government in coordination with the EU need to invest in a standardise a minimal, financeable data model. A "minimum viable EUDR package" per plot and per lot keeps the burden realistic and the audits passable: unique producer and plot IDs; GeoJSON geometry; production-system type (forest, semi-forest, garden, plantation); links to legality documents; harvest year and lot ID; and a simple chain-of-custody trail from cooperative to exporter. Publishing this data dictionary and embedding it in the national platform reduces rework and makes interoperability with TRACES predictable.

Thirdly, coffee sector actors need to improve the existing governance mechanisms. A credible EUDR coordination unit, ECTA leading with EFD, regional bureaus and coffee cooperatives, need to set technical standards, run quality assurance and random back-checks, issue short guidance notes as EU FAQs evolve, and keep a readiness dashboard (share of volumes mapped; DDS acceptance rates; defect logs). Linking such a dashboard to budget decisions could help align incentives where they matter.

Achieving this should not be seen only as a data exercise. On the contrary, it must be concurrently pursued as a policy narrative. Engagement with the EU should be framed around the EUDR's own logic. For example, benchmarking is reviewable and so too are check rates. Besides, in pursuing the various reforms, provisions for partnerships within the EUDR need to be explored to leverage resource to co-deliver many of the action points raised, many of which are highlighted further in the [Recommendations](#).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

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This final chapter distils key lessons for improving evidence-informed coffee policymaking in Ethiopia. It begins with a synthesis of the key issues from analysis of the various actors, processes and moderating factors before offering some concluding thoughts. Success will depend on mobilising finance, building stakeholder partnerships across government, civil society and private sector at various levels of governance. The report reflects on these before ending by way of stakeholder disaggregated recommendations.

4.1 Towards effective climate resilient policymaking and praxis in Ethiopia: a synthesis

The analysis so far has demonstrated that the main challenge with Ethiopia's coffee sector is not simply one of evidence deficit, but a more intricate misalignment between different types of evidence that are generated, the decisions that truly matter, and the institutional mechanism for negotiating such decisions. This section harness insights from the evidence ecosystem mapping, pathways and contextual factors, and the priority issues highlighted by stakeholders to show what this misalignment tells us about the potential to achieve climate-resilient coffee policy and praxis across Ethiopia. Six key lessons are particularly noteworthy in this regard.

Firstly, evidence in the Ethiopian coffee sector is abundant but insufficiently and unevenly actionable. The country's coffee policy landscape is dense, with overlapping national, cross-sector and sectoral policies, notably the Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy (2019-2033). Together, these intersecting policies set out an ambitious vision within which coffee is expected to contribute to economic growth, resilience and environmental protection. Several NGOs, public institutions, universities (local and international) continue to produce a substantial body of agronomic, ecological and institutional knowledge, with the notion of "documented lessons" firmly established in the vernacular of projects and programmes delivery.

Notwithstanding, many of the most urgent decisions, e.g. how to prioritise investments under limited fiscal opportunities, or how to operationalise "no intact forest conversion" within Ethiopia's coffee producing regions require different types of knowledge. Not merely evidence that an initiative works in principle, but evidence that is sequenced, costed and feasible under the country's macroeconomic and institutional realities. Interviewees and workshops themselves consistently indicated that research which does not speak to delivery capacity but also coffee foreign-exchange implications often struggles to gain traction. This basically means that strengthening evidence use in Ethiopia's coffee sector is as much a question of understanding the foreign exchange impacts of the evidence produced, their implementability, but also whose needs it serves more broadly: Ethiopia or external actors.

Secondly, coffee policy is seldomly made within single sectors. Alternatively, it is made in the overlaps of climate, coffee, forests, trade and rural development, and between distinct institutional mandates and fund flows. Our characterisation of the evidence ecosystem ([Section 2.2](#)) reveals a complex system where roles blur, with many actors playing multiple roles concurrently.

For example, NGOs and research institutes produce evidence but are also often intermediaries; government institutions such as ECTA, EFD and EBI produce data and analysis while also being key policy users. External funders serve as outlets for scaling and context multiplying, indirectly influencing which issues rise on the agenda and when policy windows are open for change. These demonstrate a series of intersection points where mandate, incentives, narratives and discourses collide. Within this, broader shifts, e.g. how REDD+ narratives paved the way for GLI implementations, or the EUDR shifted attention to coffee traceability, appear to have occurred when overlaps are skilfully navigated. This indicates that future efforts to improve evidence need to work with and on overlaps, clarifying responsibilities and creating platforms and mechanisms where sectoral boundaries are most porous and open.

Thirdly, the three priority areas, concerning 1) tensions at the climate-coffee-forest nexus, 2) policy implementation challenges, and 3) EUDR demands, could be interpreted as stress tests of the Ethiopian coffee evidence ecosystem, each exposing different shortfalls of the described evidence pathways (see [Section 2.3](#)). The first reveals limits of current capabilities and knowledge pluralism. While there is growing scientific research on shade, yields and biodiversity, recurring challenges in differentiating high-shade coffee from natural forests, and disagreements over ecological quality, all demonstrate that technical evidence alone cannot resolve the underlying value choices. In this context, the gap is not only data but an institutional space where ecology, local knowledge and policy preferences need to be weighed together explicitly.

Meanwhile, policy-implementation gaps and challenges emphasise the structures and processes pathway. National plans and strategies often reference climate resilience and forest protection. Yet, decentralised implementation relies heavily on regional state officials and institutions with different pragmatic power aspirations, uneven capacity, unclear vertical linkages and fragile feedback loops. In the absence of credible routines for learning from policy implementation, even well-designed policies cannot easily adjust to grassroots realities. At the same time, the EUDR and wider compliance agenda also tests both capabilities more severely. Capabilities not only in terms of data infrastructure, developing transparent, credible traceability systems, but also Ethiopia's competence to 1) use its socio-ecological knowledge to fight for what and how to use its land and forest resources, and 2) contend and resist external pressures and tight timelines imposed through asymmetrical power relations between Ethiopia and the EU as trading partners. These three issues highlight that the EIPM pathways are only as strong as their weakest links, with weaknesses varying based on the challenge at hand. Thus, a dogmatic approach to improving evidence use is highly unlikely to work. On the contrary, policy reforms need to be tailored, focusing on specific challenging while targeting the targeting the pathway combinations best-fit for each policy decision.

Fourthly, the analysis foregrounds a tension between visibility in narrative and visibility in systems. Smallholder coffee farmers, forest communities and other marginalised groups feature considerably in policy narratives as beneficiaries and stewards. However, they are primarily treated as being peripheral in the systems that define what count as evidence. This creates a real risk of digital invisibility, illustrated in debates around EUDR compliance (see [Section 3.3](#)), whereby such actors who are not included in registries, geospatial datasets or due-diligence systems may eventually be excluded from markets, even as their contribution are invoked rhetorically. Similarly, while this report has deliberately adopted a broad understanding of evidence that includes traditional, experience and indigenous knowledge, the structures through which evidence is mobilised currently, e.g. policy briefs, project reports, etc., overwhelmingly privilege certain type of written, externally validated information.

This duality suggests that equity in the evidence ecosystem is not merely about who benefits from policy outcomes, but also about whose knowledge is legible to policymakers and encoded in infrastructures upon which planning increasingly rely. Tackling this critical challenge would require a more participatory language that offers grassroots actors and their organisations tangible roles in both generating and interpreting evidence but also monitoring tools that are useful to them and not only exporters and regulators.

Another key lesson from the analysis is that contextual factors (see [Section 2.4](#)) do more than influence evidence uptake. They considerably shape the kinds of policy solutions that are conceivable. For example, under high fiscal pressure and foreign exchange squeeze, even well-evidenced recommendations that need significant startup investment or have long payback, or are not viable economically but are socially and environmentally, risk being sidelined for quick fixes. Frequently institutional reorganisations and shifts also not only perturb existing evidence flows, but also influence what counts as relevant coffee issues, as responsibilities for land, forests, trade and climate are shuffled across institutions. Within this thinking, evidence-informed policymaking is less about inserting facts into a neutral, apolitical decision space and more about negotiating evidence within a dynamic political economy. A key implication of this is that actors who seek to strengthen evidence use need to closely follow timing, framing and coalition building, aligning evidence to issues that resonate deeply, but also alliances that can convey contested issues through institutional turbulence.

Lastly, the analysis suggest that Ethiopia's coffee sector holds an opportunity to move from a policy mode that appears to be based on episodic projects towards a more organic learning state policy mode for truly climate-resilient coffee. Much of the evidence that is used to influence coffee policy is currently generated through externally funded pilot projects and programmes, each with their very own latent interests. While this model is useful for developing innovations and pointing towards emerging risks, it remains vulnerable to staff turnover, funding cycles and shifting donor priorities. There is a risk of repetitions and reinventing the wheel rather than building cumulatively on previous lessons. Meanwhile, there are indications and opportunities for more recursive, domestically owned evidence system. These including multiple references to learning pointed out by different government institutions such as the ECTA, EFD, PSI, EBI, etc. One strategic question is whether Ethiopia can now use evidence, and a growing culture of multi-stakeholder dialogues to find lasting solutions to some of the most contentious and value-oriented issues, including questions at the climate-coffee-forest nexus. Another concerns whether the country can leverage resources from climate and compliance agendas to invest in locally adaptable and equitable infrastructures that make learning from evidence an ordinary part of how its coffee sector is governed, rather than an exceptional activity tied to specific projects.

Overall, our application of the EIPM framework to Ethiopia's coffee sector does more than document who produces what evidence and where it goes. We have highlighted the specific ways in which evidence, power and context interact to shape climate-resilient coffee policymaking. Additionally, we have demonstrated the barriers between abundant evidence generation and constrained action, the importance of working in the overlaps between sectors and mandates, the differentiated stress that different decision arenas place on the evidence pathways, the politics of visibility and knowledge and the possibility of moving from projectised learning to a more embedded, system-wide practice of adaptation. The recommendations that follow are designed to respond to these insights by proposing concrete steps for different actor groups to realign evidence, institutions and incentives in support of a more resilient, equitable and forest-positive coffee future for Ethiopia.

4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below respond directly to the diagnosis that Ethiopia's challenge is not a simple lack of evidence, but a misalignment between existing evidence, the decisions that matter, and the institutions and incentives that shape those decisions. They focus on three stress-tested arenas, i.e., the climate–coffee–forest nexus, the policy–implementation gap and the EUDR/deforestation-free agenda – and on the four EIPM pathways: capabilities, relationships, structures and culture.

Actions are organised by stakeholder group, but they are intended to be read as a shared, problem-focused agenda. Their impact will depend less on isolated reforms than on whether government, companies, producer organisations, civil society, research institutions and development partners move in concert in the places where their mandates overlap.

4.2.1 Government (federal and regional)

Government's central challenge is to turn an ambitious policy architecture into grounded, sequenced choices – especially where coffee, forests, climate and trade collide. The priority is not more strategies, but clearer roles, targeted capabilities and simple feedback loops that turn scattered project lessons into system learning.

Make the institutional overlaps governable[KJ3.1]

- Name clear institutional leads for each “stress arena” (climate–coffee–forest, implementation, EUDR) and spell out who convenes whom.
- Publish a simple “who does what” map for land-use classification, forest protection, traceability and extension, including regional roles.

Direct capabilities at real decisions, not generic training needs

- Build spatial/landscape planning and negotiation skills where forest and coffee decisions are most contested.
- Strengthen regional, woreda and kebele teams in results-based planning and data use (not just data collection).
- Develop a small core of “EUDR fixers” who can link technical detail to negotiation with buyers and regulators.

Turn project lessons into low-friction feedback

- Require all major programmes to submit one-page “insight notes” (what worked, what did not, costs, preconditions).
- Create annual reflection moments in planning and budgeting where these notes must be discussed and some adjustments agreed.
- Ask each new policy or programme to state when and how it will be revisited in light of evidence.

Build shared data backbones, not parallel systems

- Invest in a basic, federated coffee–forest data backbone that regions and cooperatives can plug into.
- Standardise a few essential data fields for plots, systems and legality that serve both domestic planning and EUDR-type demands.
- Introduce simple data stewardship rules (archiving, shared drives, handover notes) to protect institutional memory.

Guard coffee farmers' visibility and inclusion

- Set an explicit objective that smallholders in major coffee zones become “visible by design” in farmer/plot registries and maps.
- Pilot inclusive traceability models built around cooperatives as first-mile data stewards – and scale what works.
- Make distributional impacts (who gains, who loses) a required element of land-use and investment decisions.

4.2.2 Coffee companies (exporters, unions, estates, roasters)

Companies sit at the hinge between regulatory pressure and farmer reality. The way they design sourcing and traceability systems will do a lot to decide who stays in, who is priced out and how resilient the system really becomes.

Align commercial strategies with forest and climate reality

- Implement “ABC coffee policy” to rule out conversion of intact forest and reward good shade/ecosystem performance.
- Use climate and forest risk assessments to guide where to expand, where to stabilise and where to diversify away.

Share compliance burdens fairly and invest in the first mile

- Co-design traceability with cooperatives and local institutions, and pay for the work of data collection and internal control.
- Make cost-sharing for EUDR and other due-diligence demands explicit – including what reaches the farm gate.
- Give farmers and cooperatives access to their own data (quality, volumes, compliance status) in usable formats.

Serve as evidence brokers, not just evidence users

- Feed structured learning from certifications, pilots and sourcing programmes into national platforms using simple templates.
- Use your convening power to push for realistic, smallholder-inclusive models of compliance in policy and buyer discussions.

4.2.3 Civil society organisations and research institutions

Civil society and research actors already produce a large share of usable evidence – but much of it stays trapped in project reports. The opportunity is to become curators and co-producers of system-relevant insight, not just project implementers.

Move from project-by-project to problem-by-problem

- Design and focus fewer, deeper pilots explicitly around system questions, for instance, what makes inclusive traceability work in practice.
- Produce comparative syntheses across projects and regions that highlight costs, feasibility and political enablers/barriers.

Co-produce evidence with those who carry the risks

- Involve cooperatives, communities and frontline public staff in setting research questions and success criteria.
- Treat participatory work as evidence in its own right and channel community indicators into formal monitoring systems.

Build capabilities where challenges are highest

- Support regional and woreda institutions to use maps, simple monitoring tools and scenario thinking in real decisions.
- Co-create practical tools (checklists, decision trees, simple dashboards) that can be used in meetings, not just in reports.

Protect integrity and pluralism

- Be upfront about uncertainties and trade-offs, especially in politically sensitive areas like forest allocation or investment approvals.
- Work with media and producer organisations to communicate evidence in accessible, story-rich ways – including failures and unintended effects.

4.2.4 Development partners

Development partners strongly influence what gets measured and what gets funded. The most valuable contribution now is to support the “connective tissue” – data backbones, convening, synthesis and learning – rather than just a new wave of stand-alone projects.

Fund systems, not just project pilots

- Reserve a meaningful share of support for shared data infrastructure, joint learning processes and cross-programme synthesis.
- Avoid building parallel traceability and reporting systems; strengthen national ones and accept some imperfection as they evolve.

Use EUDR and climate agendas to develop a learning state, not just compliance

- Frame support as co-investment in Ethiopia's long-term ability to document forest-positive, climate-resilient coffee.
- Back multi-actor "learning labs" around the three decision arenas, with room to adapt course as evidence accumulates.

Stay close to domestic priorities and feasibility

- Anchor new programmes firmly in existing strategies and in the real capacity of core institutions.
- Encourage proposals that confront trade-offs (e.g. volume vs resilience, strict benchmarks vs inclusion) instead of papering them over.

4.2.5 Producer organisations, communities and other stakeholders

Producers and their organisations are often talked about, less often listened to. Yet they hold critical knowledge and are central to whether any of this works. The key shift is from being objects of data collection to being subjects of evidence and negotiation.

Embrace roles as data stewards

- Strengthen cooperatives' systems for member registries, plot data and internal control so they become indispensable first-mile partners.
- Ask for and use access to data collected about members in price negotiations, planning and discussions with local authorities.

Make local knowledge legible

- Develop and share local indicators of forest health, climate stress and livelihood security – and insist they are taken seriously.
- Document experiences (positive and negative) with land-use changes, investments and compliance schemes as evidence for future decisions.

Build coalitions for fair implementation

- Work with CSOs, sympathetic companies and local administrations to form coalitions around concrete problems (e.g. EUDR in one corridor, protection of a specific forest coffee landscape).
- Use community radio, social media and other platforms to bring grounded stories into wider public and policy debate.

Taken together, these recommendations point towards a shift from fragmented, project-driven interventions to a more coherent, long-term and shared endeavour for Ethiopia's coffee sector. They call: on government to clarify mandates, invest in capabilities and build a stronger delivery and data architecture; on companies to align sourcing models with forest and climate goals and share the costs and benefits of compliance more fairly; on civil society and research actors to co-produce usable knowledge and champion inclusive evidence practices; on development partners to fund systems and institutions rather than isolated pilots; and on producer organisations to act as empowered stewards of first-mile data and local knowledge. If pursued in concert, these actions can help ensure that evidence is not simply cited, but genuinely shapes decisions in ways that keep Ethiopia's coffee landscapes productive, resilient and just.

Annex 1: List of stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholder group	Actor	Date
Government	Policy Studies Institute	
	11.08.25	
	Ethiopia Forest Development; Ethiopian Forest Society	12.08.25
	Ethiopia Biodiversity Institute	12.08.25
	Ministry of Finance, CRGE Facility	12.08.25
	Ethiopia Coffee and Tea Authority	13.08.25
	Ethiopia Forestry Development	13.08.25
	Ethiopia Forestry Development, REDD+	14.08.25
	Ethiopia Forestry Development, GLI	14.08.25
Civil Society Organisation	Ethio Wetlands and Natural Resources Association	13.08.25
	Farm Africa	14.08.25
Private Sector	Robera Coffee PLC	14.08.25

Annex 2: Participants of multi-stakeholder

	Name	Organisation
1	Mengitsu Basho	Ministry of Planning and Development
2	Ayele Feleke	Farm Africa
3	Fekadu Deferes	Ethiopia Coffee and Tea Authority
4	Solomon Zewdie	Royal Norwegian Embassy, Ethiopia
5	Abebe Damte	Policy Studies Institute
6	Getu Shiferaw	ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum)
7	Dessalegn Fufa	Ministry of Finance CRGE Facility
8	Alemayehu Nigussie	NABU Ethiopia
9	Tadesse woldemariam	ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum)
10	Daniel Jaleta	Ethiopian Forest Society
11	Hamid Said	Ethio Wetlands and Natural Resources Association

	Name	Organisation
12	Samson Shimelis	Ethiopia Biodiversity Institute
13	Kuleni Abreham	Robera Coffee P.L.C
14	Sheleme Dimissie	ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum)
15	Kibebework Getachew	Ethiopia Forestry Development
16	Girma Eshetu	Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute
17	Zelalem Addis	Ethiopia Forestry Development
18	Beshea Abdissa	ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum)
19	Ziyenu Lemma	Global Green Growth Institute
20	Silke Stallkamp	German Embassy, Ethiopia
21	Eric Mensah Kumeh	University of Oxford
22	Techane Gonfa	ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum)
23	Endale Solomon	ECFF

Annex 3: Participants of validation workshop, 20th March 2026.

	Name	Organisation
1	Tadele Plamo	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research
2	Daniel Jaleta	Ethiopia Forestry Society
3	Tadesse Woldemariam Gold	Environment Coffee Forest Forum
4	Anne-Lily Kamau	Strathmore University
5	Dangne Guta	Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union
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