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Authors

Eric Kumeh | Assistant Professor, Faculties of Forestry & Environmental Stewardship, and Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Mark Hirons | Research Fellow, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford

Tadesse Gole | Executive Director, Ethiopian Coffee Forest Forum, Addis Ababa

Techane Gonfa | Ethiopian Coffee Forest Forum, Addis Ababa



Environmental Change Institute



Strengthening evidence use for equitable, climate-resilient coffee processes in Ethiopia

Overview

Ethiopia's coffee sector sits at the intersection of climate risks, forest conservation, and evolving international trade requirements, notably the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Coffee accounted for over USD2.6 billion in foreign exchange earnings in 2025, supports over 15 million rural livelihoods, reinforces Ethiopian national identity, while Ethiopia's coffee forests are a globally significant biodiversity reserve.

Funded by the British Academy, this project examined how evidence is produced, shared, and used across Ethiopia's coffee policy ecosystem in response to climate, pests and diseases and regulatory risks in coffee. The process involved documents analysis and multi-stakeholder workshops across government officials, coffee companies, civil society organisations, and coffee cooperatives.

Key implications from the analysis

The effectiveness of existing policies and reforms will depend on strengthening a coordinated, context-sensitive evidence system that supports implementation across federal and regional levels, connects diverse actors, and enables learning from practice.

This brief does not prescribe sector priorities but highlights how evidence must function to support a more effective, inclusive, and climate-resilient coffee sector across four strategic themes.

1. Production



Key finding: Coffee production in Ethiopia is highly diverse and predominantly smallholder-based, often embedded in forest and semi-forest systems. However, evidence supporting production is uneven, with gaps in extension capacity, technical specificity, and translation of research into practice.

Implication for evidence use: Evidence systems need to better connect research, local knowledge, and farm-level decision-making.

- Strengthen extension systems to provide context-specific guidance (e.g. by agroecology, land-degradation status, altitude, and production system)
- Integrate scientific and experiential knowledge, particularly in managing the coffee-forest nexus
- Improve feedback loops from farmers and various actors into research and policy processes

2. Governance & institutions



Key finding: Ethiopia has a relatively comprehensive policy architecture, but implementation is constrained by institutional complexity, shifting mandates, and uneven coordination across federal and regional levels downwards.

Implication for evidence use: Evidence must support coordination, continuity, and implementation across institutions.

- Strengthen clarity and alignment of institutional roles across federal, regions, zones, woredas and kebele levels.
- Embed evidence in local implementation protocols, not only high-level strategies
- Support mechanisms for policy learning and continuity amid institutional reforms
- Ensure evidence flows vertically between federal and regional systems to inform delivery

3. Trade



Key finding: The EUDR is reshaping requirements for traceability and legality, creating both risks (e.g. exclusion of smallholders) and opportunities (e.g. positioning Ethiopia's forest coffee systems as nature-positive).

Implication for evidence use: Evidence systems must enable practical, scalable compliance while reflecting Ethiopia's coffee production, conservation history and cultural realities.

- Develop traceability and geolocation systems suited to small, fragmented plots
- Strengthen cooperative and union-level roles as aggregators of compliance data
- Ensure evidence requirements are inclusive and feasible for smallholder coffee producers
- Use evidence strategically to position Ethiopian coffee within global sustainability narratives

4. Cross-cutting implications for evidence generation and use

Key finding: Evidence in Ethiopia's coffee sector is generated across a wide range of actors, but its uptake is shaped by capability gaps, relational dynamics, institutional processes, and contextual constraints. Evidence flows are often fragmented and dependent on individuals, projects, or policy windows.

Core implication from this study: Strengthen a coordinated and practice-oriented evidence system that supports implementation, learning, and alignment across levels.

Such a system needs to:

- Improve linkages between federal and regional levels downwards, ensuring evidence informs implementation
- Strengthen data infrastructure and institutional memory, reducing fragmentation and loss of knowledge from staff attrition and institutional change and reshuffling
- Support continuous learning from pilots and practice, not only one-off policy design
- Enable coordination across sectors (coffee, forestry, climate, trade)
- Value multiple forms of knowledge, including farmer and community experience

Concluding note

The findings intersect with and provide insights for navigating many of the strategic priorities in the Comprehensive Ethiopian Coffee Strategy 2019 to 2033 as well as several policies and proclamations across climate, forestry, agriculture and rural development. Overall, they highlight that:

- Across production, governance, and trade, the effectiveness of policy depends on how well evidence systems support implementation, coordination, and learning.
- A coordinated, inclusive, and implementation-oriented evidence system is therefore a critical enabler of Ethiopia's broader ambitions for a climate-resilient and competitive coffee sector.



A full report on the study is available at: naturerecovery.ox.ac.uk/outputs/evidence-for-equitable-climate-resilient-coffee-ethiopia-report/

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About us

The ongoing loss and degradation of nature is one of the greatest challenges of our time. In response, the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery (LCNR) was created in 2022 as a hub for innovative research on nature recovery. It brings together experts from a broad range of disciplines across the University of Oxford. The team collaborates with partners in communities and organisations around the world.

What is nature recovery?

We define nature recovery as the activity of helping life on Earth to thrive by repairing human relationships with the rest of the natural world.

Our aims

- To understand the societal, biophysical, policy and systemic factors that enable or challenge nature recovery
- To collaborate with practitioners, communities, and partners in diverse contexts to test, challenge, and innovate the tools, techniques, and theories that deliver fair and effective nature recovery.
- To establish an inclusive nature recovery community at Oxford, leveraging its intellectual capital and interdisciplinary convening power to address key debates and challenges in the field.



Contact us

 naturerecovery@ouce.ox.ac.uk

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