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Changing Land-use Systems and Socio-economic Roles of Vegetation in Semi-arid Africa: The Case of the Afar and Tigrai of Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT In recent years, increased populations and the accompanying human demands have led to changes in land-use in the drylands of sub-Saharan Africa, in turn resulting in the reduction of vegetation and other natural resources. These changes have had a negative impact on natural resources and how these resources are being exploited. The affected uses include those related to livestock production, farm and off-farm linkages, ethno-veterinary and human medicines and marketing. This study used socio-economic surveys to obtain information on these changes and how especially, they may be influencing the use of vegetation by the local communities – the Afar and Tigrai – in north-eastern Ethiopia. The study revealed that large proportions of the plains are severely denuded due to the introduction of flood recession cultivation (in the early 1960s) with the aim of improving people's livelihoods. The findings further show that woody vegetation provides a range of products for direct use by the local communities. The results suggest that efforts should be made to protect and reproduce important vegetation species by integrating indigenous technical knowledge with modern technology.