

Public Lecture

By visiting academic Dr. Habtamu Assaye Deffersha



Dr. Habtamu will be staying with the Chair of Physical Geography from **16-28 February 2026**. He is Assistant Professor at the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Bahir Dar University (BDU), Ethiopia. If you want to arrange for a meeting with Mr. Habtamu, please send an email to Ms. Mehringer: sarah.mehringer@uni-passau.de (Geography section).

The Role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church for Forest Conservation and Catalyzing Landscape Restoration

Wednesday, 18.02.2026, Time: 18:00-19:00h, Room: PHIL HS 3 (updated date and time!)

Forest resources are vital to the livelihoods of Ethiopia's rural majority, providing over 90% of household energy from biomass, 80% of traditional medicines, and supporting over half the population through coffee production, beekeeping, and other forest-based activities. However, natural forests have been severely degraded or lost due to growing human and livestock populations, with remaining patches now confined largely to inaccessible areas. Amid this widespread degradation, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has preserved forest patches within the grounds of approximately 35,000 churches across the country. These sacred sites demonstrate the vital role of cultural and religious institutions in conserving remnant forest ecosystems. Beyond their value as biodiversity hotspots, church forests are increasingly recognized as potential catalysts for broader landscape restoration in their surroundings. Yet, they now face mounting pressures, including livestock grazing and overharvesting of wood by local communities. These threats underscore the need for urgent intervention by relevant authorities. Consequently, the legacy of Ethiopia's church forests stands at a crossroads: without increased protection and community engagement, these unique ecosystems risk further degradation; if cherished and supported, they could inspire and ignite the restoration of the surrounding barren landscapes.

The public lecture is open to everyone. No need to register!



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