



PRESS RELEASE

For more information contact:
Michele Pietrowski, +(251-1) 46 32 15 m.pietrowski@cgiar.org
Susan MacMillan, +(254-2) 63 07 43 s.macmillan@cgiar.org



For Immediate Release
April 24, 2002

Reducing Hunger, Poverty and Environmental Degradation in the Highlands

Conference presents new research on strategies to improve agricultural and environmental practices in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda

Addis Ababa—More than 100 experts are convening a regional conference designed to achieve sustainable land management and reduce poverty in the East African highlands.

“With the right policies, in the right places, opportunities are ripe to reduce hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation in the highlands of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda,” asserted John Pender, a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, and one of the lead organizers of the conference, which runs today through April 26 at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

High-level government officials and some of the world’s leading researchers attending the three-day conference will address challenging policy issues, and debate how best to balance the sometimes-competing objectives of reducing hunger, increasing agricultural production, and preserving the environment.

Low crop yields, poverty, and natural resource degradation are severe problems in many parts of the East African highlands—problems that are only getting worse. Forests are

–More–

disappearing, soils are eroding, and farm sizes are shrinking. Most farm households survive on less than \$1 per day.

“It is critical that we overcome these problems,” emphasized Dr. Wilberforce Kisamba-Mugerwa, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries for the Government of Uganda. “This land management research could not have come at a more opportune time. It will be of particular help to us as we confront the problem of land degradation, which is one of the greatest challenges to the modernization of agriculture in Uganda.”

The East African highlands are very diverse, however, and farmers face different challenges in different places. No “one-size-fits-all” strategy will work in all areas.

“Some areas of the highlands are very fertile, while others are prone to drought. These areas in turn may be extremely remote, or close to roads and markets,” explained Simeon Ehui, coordinator of the livestock policy analysis program at the International Livestock Research Institute, and a co-organizer of the conference. “Development strategies need to take these differences into account, and be linked with the comparative advantages of a particular area,” he said. “In the dryland areas of northern Ethiopia, for example, investing in livestock can provide an important pathway out of poverty.”

The research shows that in some places, it makes most sense to spend scarce resources to build roads, develop markets, and buy fertilizers and improved seeds. In other areas, farmers are better off engaging in soil and water conservation measures, such as building stone terraces on steep slopes, or planting trees.

“Ideally, we would like to implement measures that simultaneously increase agricultural productivity, improve natural resources, and reduce poverty,” stated Ato Belay Ejigu, Vice Minister of Agriculture in the Government of Ethiopia. “But we recognize that most policies will

–More–

involve trade-offs, and that's where this research will be of immense value. Using it, we can determine, based on the priorities and resources of particular areas, which strategies will yield the most benefits—for the economy, for the environment, and, most of all, for the people of this region.”

###

The conference is cosponsored by:

- International Food Policy Research Institute
- International Livestock Research Institute
- International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
- Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis
- African Highlands Initiative
of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)
- Regional Land Management Unit
of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- Soil, Water and Nutrient Management Program of the CGIAR