POPULATION STATUS OF *ACACIA SENEGAL* (LINNE) WILLENOW AND ITS GUM QUALITY IN THE CENTRAL RIFT VALLEY OF ETHIOPIA

M. Sc. THESIS

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DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my work. It has not been submitted for any degree in any other university and it has never been published nor submitted for any journal by another person.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. VI
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................... VII
ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... IX

1. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background and Justification ......................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Objectives .................................................................................................................... 5
       1.2.1 General objective .................................................................................................... 5
       1.2.2 Specific objectives .................................................................................................. 5

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................................................... 6
   2.1 Drylands — Challenges and Opportunities .................................................................... 6
   2.2 A General Background to Non–Timber Forest Products ............................................. 11
       2.2.1 Non–Timber Forest Products for Conservation of Forest Resources .................... 12
       2.2.2 Non–Timber Forest Products for Economy ............................................................... 13
   2.3 Acacia senegal and its Socio–economic and Ecological Roles ...................................... 14
       2.3.1 The Genus Acacia .................................................................................................. 14
       2.3.1 Acacia senegal ...................................................................................................... 15
       2.3.2 Distribution and Ecology of A. senegal ................................................................. 16
       2.3.3 Propagation .......................................................................................................... 17
       2.3.4 Use of A. senegal ................................................................................................. 18
   2.4 Gum Arabic ................................................................................................................... 19
       2.4.1 Uses of Gum Arabic .............................................................................................. 20
       2.4.2 Harvesting ............................................................................................................. 21
       2.4.3 Yields and Economics ............................................................................................ 22
       2.4.4 Quality of Gum Arabic ......................................................................................... 23
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. *Estimates of land areas affected by desertification in Ethiopia* ........................................ 6

Table 2. *Leading world producers of gums and gum resins* .......................................................... 23

Table 3. *Physicochemical properties of gum exudates from some Acacia species* ....................... 24

Table 4. *Density, abundance, frequency, dominance and importance value index (IVI) of the tree species in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia* ......................................................................................... 39

Table 5. *Analytical data for the physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic samples collected from the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia* ......................................................................................... 52

Table 6. *Evaluation of gum arabic from Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia with other studies and international specifications* ........................................................................................................ 54
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. *Acacia* wood land of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia................................. 7

Figure 2. Agricultural expansion and over grazing affecting the *Acacia* Woodland in

Central Rift Valley............................................................................................................ 9

Figure 3. *A. senegal* tree from Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia........................................... 18

Figure 4. Study area and distribution of sample plots in the study area............................... 28

Figure 5. Distribution of trees in different diameter classes of land cover/land use

categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia ............................................................ 41

Figure 6. Distribution of trees in different Height classes of land cover/land use

categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia............................................................. 42

Figure 7. Distribution of different tree species in different diameter classes of land

cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia ................................. 45

Figure 8. Distribution of different tree species in different height classes of land

cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia ................................. 49
This work is dedicated to my beloved parents

Yebeyen Burru and Wuditu Alemayehu
ABSTRACT

Population Status of *Acacia senegal* (Linne) Willdenow and Its Gum Quality in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia

Dagnew Yebeyen Burru

The vegetation of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia is under severe threats of degradation. Thus there is a need for urgent measures to abate the situation. Managing the woodlands to offer economic incentive to the local people is probably a viable and lasting strategy to discourage deforestation. One of the possibilities for the dryland vegetation of Rift Valley in this regard is the production of gum arabic from *A. senegal* species, which is one of the conspicuous elements in the vegetation of the area. Despite the natural occurrence of *A. senegal* in the woodland, no studies have assessed the population of the species in terms of density, abundance, frequency and dominance on the one hand and its gum quality for commerce. The objectives of this study were, therefore, to (i) investigate the population status of *Acacia senegal* in the area, (ii) characterize the quality of the gum arabic obtained from the species for several quality characteristics, and (iii) compare the obtained quality characteristics of the gum arabic from this area with the qualities of gum arabic reported from known producer and exporter countries as well as against international standards. Population status was studied by comparing the vegetation structure of four different land cover/land use categories common in the region that represented different degree of human interferences. These are intact, relatively intact, open grazing and farmland. Randomized sampling technique was used to locate the sample plots. In each plot, identity of woody species encountered was recorded; diameter at breast height (DBH) and height measurements were done. The status of populations of *A. senegal* and associated species was examined by estimating dominance, density, abundance, frequency, importance value index and population structure. The physicochemical analysis of the gum arabic: moisture, ash, viscosity, pH, specific rotation, N content, tannin and cation metals were determined using standard laboratory procedures. The results show that the density, abundance and importance value index for *A. senegal* is high in all of the land cover/land use categories except in the Abernosa ranch where *A. tortilis* predominate. Frequency of *A. senegal* is the highest on the farmland and in the park and the lowest at Abernosa ranch. In terms of dominance, *A. senegal* is the first in the farmland, the second in the Park and third at Abernosa ranch. The population structure of *A. senegal* shows large population in the lower size classes (good regeneration); however, very few individuals in the higher size classes, possibly as a result of harvesting the mature trees for firewood and charcoal. The physicochemical characteristics of gum arabic collected from *A. senegal* trees in the area yield: moisture content of 15%, ash content of 3.56%, viscosity (centipoises) 10gl⁻¹ of 0.9954, pH on 25% solution of 4.0, gel moderate, specific rotation of −32.5, nitrogen content of 0.35%, Protein content of 2.31%, and no tannin content. Mineral contents of the gum arabic (g/100g) are Ca 0.7, Mg 0.2, Na 0.01, K 0.95, Fe 0.001, P 0.6 and trace for Pb, Co, Cu, Zn, Ni, Cd, Cr, and Mn. The physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic are similar with qualities reported from major producer and exporter countries such as Sudan and fitted well to international standards in all aspects. Indeed, it is possible to exploit the resource for commercial purpose.

Key words: *A. senegal*, gum arabic, physicochemical characteristics, population structure, density, abundance, frequency, dominance, importance value index.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Justification

The livelihood of vast majority of rural people in Ethiopian drylands depends on the forests and woodlands as sources of agricultural land, firewood and charcoal, as well as non–timber tree products such as food, fiber and medicines. Because the ecological balance in arid and semi–arid environments is delicate, sustainable land use practices are required if people's basic needs for the future are to be fulfilled (Karmann and Lorbach, 1996). The vegetations in the dryland areas of the country are facing serious problems of degradation. The prolonged degradation of dryland areas continues to affect the productivity and genetic diversity of forest, woodland and bushland resources. Superimposed by recurrent drought, the ultimate outcome of deforestation and degradation of these dryland vegetation resources may be desertification (Tefera et al., 2005). These drylands which are currently being threatened by advancing desertification are, however, important as production zones of crops and livestock, and as areas with diverse vegetation cover in Ethiopia. Therefore, unless significant adaptation measures are soon taken to abate the growing desertification, the socio–economic and ecological costs that Ethiopia is about to face will be unbearable (Tamerie, 1997; Mulugeta and Demel, 2004). This calls for the design of economically feasible, socially acceptable and ecologically viable management and conservation strategies for dryland ecosystem (Tefera et al., 2005).

The dryland areas in Ethiopia which fall within the range of UNEP’s definition of desertification cover 71.5% of the country’s total land area (Tamerie, 1997). Of the total
estimated area of drylands in Ethiopia, 25 million ha is covered with woodland and bushland (Tefera et al., 2005). Accordingly, the woodland and savannah region covers some 20% of the total land area of Ethiopia. From this woodland and savannah, the Acacia woodland and savannah occupy various environments and accounts for some 11% of the total land area of Ethiopia. Such woodlands are also known for their plant, animal, and habitat diversity. Nonetheless, they are also very fragile ecosystems that could be drastically affected by over exploitation and mismanagement (Mekuria et al., 1999).

The exploitation and management of “Non–Timber Forest Products” (NTFPs) is increasingly proposed as a potential means of ensuring sustainable management of forests and their biodiversity (e.g. Mulugeta and Demel, 2003 & 2004). NTFPs are frequently touted as important to household consumption, and as a way to maintain or to increase the value of standing forest and thus to discourage deforestation (Wilkie et al., 2001). Thus, management of NTFPs cannot be seen separately from general forest management, which, unlike forest plantation, affects vegetation and biodiversity in general (Kleinn et al., 1996).

In the dryland woodlands of Ethiopia several species in the genus Acacia, Boswellia, Commiphora and Sterculia, know to hold commercially important NTFPs such as gum arabic, frankincense and myrrh, are predominating the vegetation composition (Mulugeta et al., 2003). Ethiopia is known as one of the world leading producers and exporters for some of these NTFPs with significant socio–economic contributions at both national and local level (Mulugeta and Demel, 2003 & 2004). Apart from essential oils, which provide an array of flavours and fragrances, gums, resins and latexes are perhaps the most widely used and traded
category of NTFPs other than items consumed directly as foods, fodders and medicines (FAO, 1995b), which indicates the potential for commercial promotion of the products in Ethiopia. Besides their economic significance several species of *Acacia, Boswellia* and *Commiphora* could be managed to provide, concurrently, multiple ecological services that will help to fight desertification and soil erosion by water and wind, contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, improve soil fertility, and provide an opportunity for C–sequestration (Mulugeta and Demel, 2004).

One of the most recognized NTFPs product of the dryland vegetation of Africa in general and that of Ethiopia in particular is gum arabic. Gum arabic is a dried exudate obtained from the stems and branches of *Acacia senegal* (L.) Willdenow or *Acacia seyal* (FAO, 1999). The major source of presently traded gum arabic (95%) is *Acacia senegal* (L) Willd., with the remaining 5%, from *Acacia seyal* sold as an entirely separate product (gum talha) (Seif el Din and Zarroug, 1996).

The use of gums has declined today, compared with the early part of the 20th century. The decline is a preference for raw materials of consistent, predictable quality, which are not subject to the vagaries of weather, insect pests, stability in producing countries, and price. Despite the changes the demands for gum will continue and even bound to increase in the future for several reasons such as consumers’ preference for natural products (FAO, 1995b). This is good news for people in the producing countries, provided that due attentions are given to such aspects as quality control and sustainable management of the resources.
Gums from different species (*A. senegal* and *A. seyal*) exhibit characteristics that are intrinsically different. Even within the same species, different varieties produce gum with different characteristics. Recognizing these differences in the species and/or varieties is important in producing gum arabic for desired end use (Chikamai, 1997). Because of the stringent regulations imposed on all food additives, gum arabic, like all other food ingredients, is subjected to extensive toxicological control by countries, organizations and users of the product, which aim to protect the consumer of processed foods containing additives, and thus to ensure the freedom of gum arabic from toxicological hazards. To achieve this end and get into the market, gum arabic for commerce must conform to certain chemical specifications (Seif el Din and Zarroug, 1996).

Chemical analysis and quality assessment have been carried out on gum exudates from a large number of *Acacia* species (as well as gum–arabic–like exudates from other genera), but relatively little detailed information is available on the intra–specific variation of *A. senegal* gum. In–depth physicochemical screening is needed, to learn more about between–site, between–tree and seasonal variations in gum quality (FAO, 1995b). Moreover, compared to other producer countries, very little studies have so far been done on the physicochemical characteristics of gum arabic of Ethiopian origin. Besides, not only the quality of the gum that affects commerce but also the resource base that influences the steady supply of the product once promoted was little studied. This also calls for assessment of the population status of *Acacia senegal* in the area under consideration so as to establish the production potential of gum arabic in the region.
1.2 Objectives

1.2.1. General objective

The main focus of this study was to acquire information on the status of Acacia senegal (L.) Willd. species in the Central Rift Valley and to examine the quality of the gum arabic obtained from it.

1.2.2. Specific objectives

The following are the specific objectives for the study:

1. To investigate the population status of Acacia senegal in the Central Rift Valley area;

2. To assess the effect of different intensity of human interference on the population of A. senegal species;

3. To characterize the quality of gum arabic from the Acacia senegal trees in the Central Rift Valley area; and

4. To compare the physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic of the area with other studies on gum arabic from known exporting countries and against international specifications.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Drylands — Challenges and Opportunities

Drylands are defined as areas where mean annual precipitation is less than half of the potential evapo–transpiration (FAO, 1993b). Thus, drylands embrace arid, semi–arid, dry sub–humid lands as well as more desertic (hyper–arid) areas. These lands are characterized by low and erratic precipitation, which is reflected in relatively low and notably unpredictable levels of crop and livestock production. In some parts, for instance in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, a bimodal regime prevails and although the total annual rainfall may be higher, the distribution of the rainfall and the intensity of the dry season impose a semi–arid regime (FAO, 1995d).

Table 1. Estimates of land areas affected by desertification in Ethiopia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bioclimatic zone</th>
<th>Area (1000 km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyper–arid</td>
<td>53 – 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arid</td>
<td>300 – 310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-arid</td>
<td>207 – 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Sub–humid</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>860 – 915</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mulugeta and Demel (2004)

Approximately, 55 % of the land surface of Africa is arid or semi–arid (FAO, 1995d), in which up to 80% is in the Inter–Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) countries, in which Ethiopia is a member (Barrow, 1997). In Ethiopia alone the total dryland area,
including the dry sub–humid zone, amounts to 860,000 km² (Tamerie, 1997), which is one of the largest in the region (Table 1).

Over two–thirds of all Africans rely directly or indirectly on forests for their livelihood. In some situations forests provide an income; in others they act as a safety net for the poor. Forests also fulfill many important ecological functions (CIFOR, 2005). Forests/Trees are used for a wide variety of purposes nowhere more so than in the drylands where woody vegetation survives better and produces more in the drier times (Barrow, 1997).

**Figure 1. Acacia woodland of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia**

Despite the significant importance of forests in the livelihoods of dryland communities, there has been a significant increase in forest loss over much of Sub–Saharan Africa during recent
years. East Africa, for example, lost 10 per cent of its forest covers between 1990 and 2000 (CIFOR, 2005). Thus, the enormous dryland vegetation resources of Eastern Africa in general and that of Ethiopia in particular are facing serious problems of degradation. Vegetation resources, particularly the woody plants, in these areas are declining both in quantities, due to deforestation, and in quality as a result of degradation. The main causes of the degradation have been cutting of woody plants for various purposes such as agriculture land expansion, firewood and charcoal and over grazing (Tefera et al., 2005, see also Figure 2). While our knowledge about the woodlands and the valuable species constituting them is scanty, the area of the woodlands and populations of these species are rapidly declining before we have the chance to study and document them (Abeje et al., 2005).

Removal of perennial plant cover in dryland zones causes reduction of soil organic matter, induces soil erosion by water and wind, causes soil crusting by the splashing effects of raindrop, and salinization by evaporation. The ultimate consequences of all these processes are the degradation of the carrying capacity and regeneration capability, loss of biodiversity, depletion of water availability due to destruction of catchments and aquifers and, finally, abandonment of the area as desertified land (Mulugeta and Demel, 2004). These and other signs of desertification, such as accelerated soil erosion by wind and water, increasing salinization of the soils of drylands, reduction in soil moisture retention, increase in surface runoff, variability in stream flows, decline in species diversity and plant biomass, and reduction in the overall productivity in dryland ecosystems (Tewolde Birhan, 1989; EFAP, 1994; Tamire, 1997) are evident across the drylands of Ethiopia. Besides the looming desertification, drylands in Ethiopia are showing clear signs of vulnerability to global climatic
change. In the past few decades, these drylands have been suffering from increasingly erratic and decreasing amounts of annual precipitation. Frequent drought, fodder and crop failure, and famine are becoming common phenomena in the dryland regions of Ethiopia (Mulugeta and Demel, 2004).

Figure 2. Agricultural expansion and over grazing affecting the *Acacia* Woodland in Central Rift Valley

Sustainable conservation and utilization of the remaining dryland vegetation resources and rehabilitation of those that have already been degraded would provide economic, social and ecological benefits. This requires the design of economically feasible, socially acceptable and ecologically viable management and conservation strategies of dryland vegetation (Tefera et al., 2005). For dryland natural resource management to be important and developed, it has to
have value, particularly economic value at a local and national level (Barrow, 1997). The low, erratic and poorly distributed rainfall in the arid and semi–arid regions, especially in areas with less than 400 mm, places greater value on perennial vegetation, especially multipurpose trees such as the *Acacia* than annual crops (FAO, 1995d). To the same end, many of the indigenous trees and shrubs in the vast arid and semi–arid lowlands including the dry sub–humid area, hold known or potential promise for the production of economically valuable products, principally oleo gum resins such as gum *Acacia* (gum arabic and gum talha), frankincense, myrrh, hinna, and gum karaya (FAO, 1995a; Mulugeta and Demel, 2003). These potentials are opportunities to be exploited for the reversal of desertification, conservation of biodiversity and adaptation of dryland ecosystems to potential global climate change (Mulugeta and Demel, 2004).

In terms of commercial importance and livelihood support, gum and resin producing trees and shrubs in the drylands of Ethiopia occupy a central position both at local and national scales. At the local household level, gum and resins are collected and sold to generate income. Both direct collection, in most cases, and hired labor by forest concessionaires play a substantial role as a source of income to households. At the national scale, gum arabic, frankincense and myrrh are the most valued products. They constitute some of the few export articles from which Ethiopia earns its foreign currency (Mulugeta and Demel, 2004). Besides, the same species that provide gums and resins can offer multiple roles that contribute to dryland development. For instance, they provide fodder for animals, protect against desertification, contribute to biodiversity conservation and enable dryland communities to adapt well to possible climate changes. Indeed, the role of the vegetation in the economics of the dryland
communities through the provision of gums and resins also integrated and balanced with other opportunities for dryland management can contribute to the economic well-being and long-term viability of, such otherwise marginal, drylands (Barrow, 1997).

2.2 A General Background to Non–Timber Forest Products

Non–Timber Forest Products generally embraces all materials of a biological origin excepting timber which is being extracted on an industrial scale obtained from forested landscape. The range of NTFPs includes foods, spices, medicines, fodder, essential oils, resins, gums, latexes, tannins, dyes, rattan, bamboo, fibers, a great variety of animal products and ornamental plants (FAO, 1993a). NTFPs have been harvested by human populations for subsistence use and trade for thousands of years (Ticktin, 2004). The trade of NTFPs dated back to old times. For instance, ancient Egyptians imported gum arabic from Sudan for use in paints and in the mummification process. International trade in sandalwood oil also dates back to the twelfth century A.D. In recent years forests have been increasingly recognized as rich reservoirs of many valuable biological resources, not just timber (FAO, 1995c). Over the past two decades, NTFPs obtained from plant resources, including seeds, flowers, fruits, leaves, roots, bark, latex, resins and other non wood plant parts, have gained much attention in conservation circles (Ticktin, 2004).

The increased attention paid to NTFPs in recent times stems from a perception that management for NTFPs is more compatible with sustainable use of tropical forests than management for timber or shifting agriculture and the growth in awareness that the use or sale of NTFPs is important parts of the livelihood systems of very large numbers of people, outside
as well as inside tropical forests. There has also been an increase in commercial demand for many non-timber outputs of tropical forests — rattan, oils, resins, pharmaceutical extracts, etc. — and a realization that it is likely that there are other species and products of significant industrial value in such a rich and diverse genetic resource (Arnold and Pérez, 1996). The development and implementation of sustainable production and conservation of NTFPs, with rigid product quality control, efficient marketing and equitable distribution of benefits to all concerned, from the producer to the consumer, is a key component for a successful programme for achieving more sustainable management of the forest resources, including better conservation of their biodiversity (Vantomme, 1997). It has also been argued that this potential could be considerably enhanced by drawing on indigenous knowledge and building on the sustainable systems of use that local people often seemed to have created. In consequence, interest in NTFPs has been linked to the issue of empowering local people, and recognizing and legally securing their rights to manage their forest resources (Arnold and Pérez, 2001).

### 2.2.1 Non–Timber Forest Products for Conservation of Forest Resources

Interest in NTFPs has grown with the increasing awareness of tropical forest problems and destruction. NTFPs have been heralded by some as a means of slowing forest destruction by increasing the overall worth of the forest and by shifting the emphasis of forest exploitation from trees to products whose harvest is believed to be less ecologically destructive (Falconer, 1996). Since the early 1990s, NTFPs have been assumed to contribute effectively to the preservation of tropical forests and the improvement of forest dwellers' economic situation by raising awareness of the value of natural resources (Schröder, 2001). The maintenance of a
forest–like structure associated with production of NTFPs is generally acknowledged as being positive, contributing to some of the classical forest environmental functions such as carbon storage, nutrient cycling, erosion control, hydrological regulation, and biodiversity conservation, while providing an important source of income (Arnold and Pérez, 2001).

2.2.2 Non-Timber Forest Products for Economy

In recent years, a growing body of scientific research has suggested that, given certain basic conditions, NTFPs can help communities to meet their needs without destroying the forest resource (FAO, 1995c). In fact, NTFPs are well known worldwide for their contributions to national and local economies (Mulugeta et al., 2003). For instance, in India over 50% of forest revenues and 70% of forest export income comes from NTFPs (Shiva, 1993). Some valuation exercises suggested that the potential income from sustainable harvesting of NTFPs could be considerably higher than timber income or income from agricultural or plantation uses of the forest sites. NTFPs are also widely important as a subsistence and economic buffer in hard times (Arnold and Pérez, 2001). NTFPS contribute to household self–sufficiency, food security, income generation, accumulation of savings and risk minimization, and fill seasonal and other food or income gaps (Arnold and Pérez, 1996).

Like wise NTFPs, such as gums and incense, resins and spices, or honey and wax from beekeeping, play an important role in the consumption patterns and income diversification of rural communities of Ethiopia (Vivero Pol, 2002). NTFPs often play critical roles as “safety–nets” by providing food or income in times of shortage, as important dietary supplements, especially for children, and as cultural symbols. Generally speaking, it is important to
recognize these values, even if they are difficult to quantify, and to protect them where possible (Wollenberg and Belcher, 2001).

2.3. *Acacia senegal* and its Socio–economic and Ecological Roles

2.3.1 The Genus *Acacia*

*Acacia* are trees or shrubs, sometimes climbing; the native species almost always armed with prickles or stipular spines. Leaves bipinnate or, in introduced species, modified to phyllodes; gland usually present on upper side of petiole, glands often also present at insertion of pinnae (Asfaw and Thulin, 1989). Acacia flowers are small, regular and are usually bisexual. Each flower contains basically 4 or 5 sepals and petals. The sepals may be free or united into a calyx and the petals free or united into a corolla. The stamens are numerous and arise from under or just above the base of the ovary. A threadlike style protrudes shortly beyond the stamens. The ovary is sessile or shortly stalked and its outer surface may be smooth or covered in minute hairs. Each flower is subtended by a small bracteole whose shape varies according to species (FAO, 1995d).

There are some 1100 species, mostly tropical and subtropical, the majority in Australia, and some 130 in Africa (Asfaw and Thulin, 1989). *Acacia* species are widely distributed through the drier regions of tropical and southern Africa, often the dominant tree and in some areas forming mono–specific communities (FAO, 1995d). *Acacia* woodland is a major vegetation form in the arid and semi–arid parts of Ethiopia (Getachew and Ståhl, 1999). It covers nearly
11% of the total land area in the country (Getachew and Ståhl, 1998). This is an important genus for its many uses to man and his domestic animals. Most species produce abundant nectar and pollen, which are good for honeybees. Both domestic and wild animals browse on the leaves, shoots and pods. Roots and bark are fibrous and can be used as rope substitutes. Many species produce gums and resins that may be used medicinally and are eaten in times of food shortage (Asfaw and Thulin, 1989). Acacia species are Nitrogen–fixing; but their potential for use in agroforestry, apart from a few species, has been neglected. Some can be effectively utilized for shade, shelter, live fences, soil stabilization as well as for street trees and ornamentals. Grasses and herbs alone cannot support a livestock industry in the semi–arid regions; browse, especially from Acacia species, plays an essential part (FAO, 1995d).

2.3.1 Acacia senegal

Acacia senegal is a deciduous shrub or tree up to 15 m high, crown variable, flat to rounded; bark yellowish–brown to purplish black, rough or smooth, scaly; branchlets with prickles just below nodes, either in threes with central one hooked downwards and laterals curved upwards or with laterals absent; leaves pinnate, pinnae (2–)3 – 8(–12) pairs, leaflets 7–25 pairs; inflorescence spicate, 2–12 cm long, pedunculate, flowers white or cream; pods dehiscent, yellowish to brown, flat, papery oblong 2–19 X 1–4 cm; seeds subcircular–lenticular, olive brown, 8–12 mm in diameter (FAO, 1988). Varieties of A. senegal present in Ethiopia are (Asfaw and Thulin, 1989):
Var. *kerensis*

- Shrub, branching from near the base.

Var. *senegal*

- Bark not papery and peeling; young branchlets sparingly to densely pubescent inflorescence axis mostly pubescent.

Var. *leiorhachis*

- Bark yellow, papery and peeling; young branchlets glabrous or almost so; inflorescence axis glabrous or almost so.

### 2.3.2 Distribution and Ecology of *A. senegal*

*Acacia senegal* var. *senegal* is found in Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire, Central African Republic, Rwanda, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, and India. It has been introduced into Egypt, Australia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands (Cossalter, 1991). The other varieties of *A. senegal* have a much more restricted distribution than var. *senegal* and provide only very tiny amounts of gum to the market. *A. senegal* var. *kerensis* occurs in parts of Somalia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. *A. senegal* var. *leiorhachis* is also found in parts of East Africa but it occurs also in Central and Southern Africa (Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa) (FAO, 1995b).

*Acacia senegal* thrives on dry rocky hills, in low–lying dry savannas. This hardy species survives many adverse conditions, and seems to be favored by low rainfall and absence of frost. It ranges from Warm Temperate Thorn through Tropical Thorn to Tropical Dry Forest
Life Zones (Duke, 1983). It is very drought resistant. It grows on sites with annual rainfall mainly between 300–400 mm, and 5–11 month dry periods. It tolerates high daily temperatures (mean maximum temperatures of up to 45°C or more), dry wind, and sandstorms. *Acacia senegal* prefers coarse–textured soils such as fossil dunes, but it will also grow on slightly loamy sands and skeletal soils such as Lithosols. The best sites have pH of 5 to 8. The tree ranges from 100–1700 m elevation in the Sudan to 1950 m around Nakuru in Kenya (Cossalter, 1991).

### 2.3.3 Propagation

*Acacia senegal* propagated well in seeds. Seed should be harvested before pods have dried for easy collection and to avoid insect attack. Freshly extracted seed should immediately be dusted with an insecticide. Seed will remain viable for 3–4 years if kept in opaque, airtight containers (Cossalter, 1991). *A. senegal* seeds abundantly and, although pods and seed may be attacked by insects, germination capacity is generally high. Direct spot–sowing is the normal method of establishment and plantations require intensive weeding over the first 2 yr (FAO, 1983). Fresh seeds with soft seed coats can germinate without pretreatment, if sown immediately after collection (FAO, 1988). Seed collected in previous seasons, however, requires pretreatment to break seed dormancy. Soaking seed in water for 12–24 hours gives good results and is simple to apply. Seeds can also be nicked (Cossalter, 1991). Another method of propagating *Acacia senegal* is by shoot cuttings and coppicing (Duke, 1983).
2.3.4 Use of *A. senegal*

*Acacia senegal* is an amazing tree. It grows where almost nothing else will survive, enriches the soil with nitrogen, and provides nutritious fodder and gum arabic. Specifically, gum arabic is an extraordinary harvest from *Acacia senegal* which can bring security to the fragile existence of people in the arid lands who depend on livestock or dry-land farming (Holmes,
Wood from *A. senegal* is an excellent slow–burning fuelwood giving intense heat and little smoke, it also used for charcoal making (FAO, 1995d). *Acacia senegal* is important for desertification control through sand dune stabilization and wind breaks. It has role in agricultural systems by restoring soil fertility (Cossalter, 1991). It is an important tree for agroforestry systems in arid and semi–arid areas of Sudan and Western Ethiopia (Asfaw and Thulin, 1989). It is browsed by livestock, especially goats and camels, and is reputed to fatten livestock and enrich milk. It is a good source of bee food. Strips of under bark are used to tan leather, often strengthened with material from *A. etbaica*. Dried, crushed and powdered bark is used to pack infected wounds to disinfect and ward off further infection and gangrene (FAO, 1995d).

### 2.4 Gum Arabic

The term ‘gums’ is used to describe a group of naturally occurring polysaccharides which find widespread industrial use because of their ability either to form viscous solutions or gels or to stabilize emulsions and dispersions (Casadei, 1997). Gum arabic is a dried exudate obtained from the stems and branches of *Acacia senegal* (L.) Willdenow or *Acacia seyal* (FAO, 1999). *Acacia* gum, also called gum arabic, is a complex arabinogalactan–type polysaccharide exuded by *Acacia* trees (Sanchez *et al.*, 2002). Gum *Acacia* contains neutral sugars (rhamnose, arabinose, and galactose), acids (glucuronic acid and 4–methoxyglucuronic acid), calcium, magnesium, potassium, and sodium (Duke, 1983). The average molecular weight of gum arabic from *Acacia senegal* var. *senegal* is between 4.86 to 6.47 X 10^5 (Al-Assaf *et al.*, 2005).
2.4.1 Uses of Gum Arabic

The combination of high solubility in water and low viscosity confers on gum arabic its highly valued emulsifying, stabilizing, thickening and suspending properties (FAO, 1995b). Gum arabic is unique and natural product which is used extensively in pharmaceutical preparations, food industries such as in confections and sweetmeats, in the cosmetics industries, and for other industrial products such as ink, paint, paper, matches, ceramic, water–colors, wax polishes, liquid gum, for dressing fabrics, giving luster to silk and crepe, and for thickening colors and mordants in calico–printing (Duke, 1983; FAO, 1988).

Gum arabic is used in the food industry to fix flavors and as an emulsifier, to prevent the crystallization of sugar in confectionery products, as a stabilizer in frozen dairy products; its viscosity and adhesive properties find use in bakery products, and as a foam stabilizer and clouding agent in beer (Cossalter, 1991). Whilst our modern lifestyle has led to an increasing demand for convenience foods our growing awareness of the relationship between food and health has increased the requirement for high–fiber, low–fat food products. These factors have resulted in a considerable interest in the use of hydrocolloids, including various gums, modified starches and gelatin, in foods and this is expected to continue in the years ahead (Casadei, 1997).

In the pharmaceutical industry gum arabic is used as a stabilizer for emulsions, as a binder and coating for tablets, and as an ingredient in cough drops and syrups (FAO, 1995d). In modern pharmacy, it is commonly employed as a demulcent in preparations designed to treat diarrhea, dysentery, coughs, throat irritation, and fevers. It serves as an emulsifying agent and gives
viscosity to powdered drug materials; is used as a binding agent in making pills and tablets
and particularly cough drops and lozenges (Duke, 1983).

Gum arabic is used in cosmetics as an adhesive for facial masks and powders, and to give a
smooth feel to lotions. Industrially, gum arabic is applied as an adhesive, as a protective
colloid and safeguarding agent for inks, sensitizer for lithographic plates, coating for special
papers, sizing agent for cloth to give body to certain fabrics, and coating to prevent metal
corrosion. Gum arabic is also used in the manufacture of matches and ceramic pottery
(Cossalter, 1991). Powdered, reddish–brown gum exudate mixed with fat or grease is used to
anoint the body. The fresh gum exudate is being used as a depilatory. A solution of gum,
drunk on an empty stomach, is used to relieve chest pains. The eating of gum is reputed to
strengthen the stomach muscles; excessive eating of gum can cause flatulence and some
discomfort. Gum is highly nutritious, 175 g being sufficient to support an adult for 24 hours
(FAO, 1995d).

2.4.2 Harvesting

Gum exudes from cracks in the bark of wild trees. In Africa, it is regularly tapped from trees
which are about six years old by making narrow transverse incisions in the bark in February
and March. In about a month, tears of gum form on the surface and are gathered. Trees begin
to bear between 4–18 years of age and are said to yield only when they are in an unhealthy
state owing to poor soil, lack of moisture or damage (Duke, 1983). In Sudan and Nigeria,
virtually all gum from A. senegal is obtained by tapping the trees; there is very little natural
exudation. A. senegal does produce gum naturally and all of the gum which is collected comes
from harvesting natural exudates (FAO, 1995b). In Ethiopia gum arabic is collected both from natural stands (Southern part) and by tapping (Northern part).

### 2.4.3 Yields and Economics

Yields of gum arabic from individual trees are very variable and little reliable data are available on which to base sound estimates of "average" yields. A figure of 250 g of gum per tree per season is often cited as an average yield. Yields of several kg or more have been reported from individual trees. In Sudan, yields from cultivated *A. senegal* are said to increase up to the age of 15 years, when they level out and then begin to decline after 20 years (FAO, 1995b). Virtually all the gum arabic of commerce comes from Africa with Sudan accounting for up to 80% of the world production followed by Chad and Nigeria. About 12 other countries in the Sahel, stretching from Senegal/Mauritania in West Africa to Somalia in the Horn of Africa and southwards to Tanzania are also producers (Mugah *et al.*, 1997). Gum arabic sales peaked at around 1970 at approximately 70,000 t, of which about 70% went into confectionery products. The price for gum arabic is $US 5000 per tonne (FAO, 1995d). The severe Sahelian drought of 1973/74 resulted in a world shortage of gum arabic and high prices which, in turn, accelerated the replacement of gum arabic by substitutes such as modified starches. Demand for gum arabic has, therefore, been constrained at times by the supply, and under these circumstances end-users who switch to alternatives do not always revert to gum arabic when supply problems are eased (FAO, 1995c). A summary of product types and world major producers and exporters is presented in Table 2.
Table 2. *Leading world producers of gums and gum resins.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product type</th>
<th>Producers</th>
<th>World production and export</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gum resins (Frankincense, myrrh and opopanax)</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum arabic</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum karaya</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mulugeta and Teshale, 2006

2.4.4 Quality of Gum Arabic

Gum arabic from *A. senegal* is a pale to orange–brown coloured solid, which breaks with a glassy fracture. The best grades are in the form of whole, round tears, orange–brown in colour and with a matt surface texture; in the broken, kibbled state the pieces are much paler and have a glassy appearance (FAO, 1995b). The increasing international pressure towards tighter trade specifications and labelling regulations, identity and purity has led to the Revised Specifications (FAO/WHO–JECFA) where gum arabic is defined as originating from *A. senegal* or closely related species, with a specific optical rotation range of $-26^\circ$ to $-34^\circ$ and a Kjeldahl nitrogen content of 0.27–0.39% (FAO, 1995d). Gum arabic has been described in various reports and laboratory analyses as forming an aqueous solution of up to 50%; colourless and free of taste and odour, these solutions do not readily interact with other
chemical compounds. It is readily soluble in water, to give aqueous solutions of low viscosity (Seif el Din and Zarroug, 1996).

Table 3. Physicochemical properties of gum exudates from some Acacia species

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>drepa</th>
<th>mala</th>
<th>sese</th>
<th>sele</th>
<th>seya</th>
<th>sefi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moisture % w/w</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash % w/w</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid insoluble matter % w/w</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWIG % w/w</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HWIG % W/W</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ca (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mg (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methoxyl % w/w</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrogen % w/w</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hence, Protein (N x 6.25)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ a ]D In H_2O, deg</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>–25</td>
<td>–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viscosity (centipose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 gl^{-1}</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 gl^{-1}</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>11.04</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optical density</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannin %w/w</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid Equivalent Weight</td>
<td>2263d</td>
<td>2607</td>
<td>1615</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Mhinzi and Mrosso (1997)
Drepa = A. drepanolobium;
mala = A. malacocephala;
sese = A. senegal var. senegal;
sele = A. senegal var. leiorhachis;
seya = A. seyal var. seyal; and
sefi = A. seyal var. fistula)

One factor observed to influence the quality of gum arabic is botanical origin. Quality of gum arabic differs between and within species (Chikamai, 1997). The Acid Equivalent Weight (AEW’s) and total ash levels of the gums from A. senegal var. leiorhachis and A. senegal var. senegal are similar. However, apart from these two parameters, the overall impression is that
these two species produce gums with different properties. The viscosity of *A. senegal* var *leiorhachis* gum is significantly higher than that of *A. senegal* var *senegal* at the same concentration. *A. senegal* var *senegal* has been found to have a more negative optical rotation (Mhinzi and Mrosso, 1997; see Table 3).

It is so fundamentally important that we present gums which are not adulterated with gums of another type or species. Gum arabic is increasingly used as a technical product. It is often blended with other gums or materials to produce precise ingredients for food and pharmaceuticals (Holmes, 1997). The same source also emphasized that, the vast sums of money which go into developing new product lines demand that ingredients must be of a relatively invariable nature. Users also want traceability and guarantees that ensure they receive a product which does not expose them to risk.

In order to promote the commerce of gums and gum resins, knowledge on the chemistry for each gum or resin type is crucial. However, none of such characterisation has been carried out for gums of Ethiopian origin. This could be mentioned as one bottle neck for expanded commercialization of gums of Ethiopia. The goal of this thesis is to contribute to this knowledge gap particularly *A. senegal* gum, gum arabic.
3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Study Site

The study was conducted in the Central Rift Valley, near Lake Langano, Abijata and Shalla, South of Addis Ababa (Figure 4). The study area lies 7° 29′ 59″ to 7° 50′ 4″ Latitude and 38° 35′ 32″ to 38° 41′ 30″ Longitude; at an altitude ranging from 1597 to 1678. The Ethiopian Rift Valley System is part of the Afro–Arabian Rift System. The main parent materials that give rise to the soils of the region are basalt, ignimbrite, lava, gneiss, volcanic ash and pumic, and riverine and lacustrine alluvium (Makin et al. (1975) cited in Getachew, 1999). The soils are developed on lake deposits interspersed with pumice. They are coarse–textured, alkaline (pH=7.6–8.2), silty, clay loam and rather infertile (Mekuria et al., 1999).

The region consists of several leguminous tree species such as *Acacia senegal*, *Acacia seyal*, *Acacia tortilis*, *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Balanites aegyptiaca* and other important shrub and herbaceous species. The natural vegetation in most areas of the central parts of the Rift Valley is sparse woodland dominated by *Acacia*. Because they are utilized in many different ways, the *Acacias* are important to the rural economy (Getachew and Ståhl, 1999). They are important sources of wood fuel. They also provide the rural community with other forest products and benefits such as fodder, construction materials, farm implements, shade, honey, etc. and income; and thus are important components of livelihood (Getachew and Ståhl, 1998).

This zone is the most extensive part of the valley floor where it is currently subject to increasing settlement pressure. Both the human population and the livestock population have increased dramatically (Mekuria et al., 1999). The area is overgrazed and trees are cut
extensively for charcoal and fire wood. Livestock and wood products are the major sources of income for the local people (Mohammed, 1993). Agro–sylvopastoral land use system is dominant in the area. Consequently, crop production is an essential element in the land use systems. Cattle raring in the area are of two types i.e. the traditional way of cattle raring by the community and the modern way of cattle production implemented by Oromia Agriculture Bureau (Getachew, 1999).

The region is classified as a semi–arid eco–climatic zone. It is similar to the semi–arid regions of East Africa. The climate of the study area is characterized by distinct wet/dry seasons and has bimodal rainfall (Mekuria et al., 1999). The area experiences a climate characterized by rainy season that extends from July to September. The mean annual rainfall is 600 mm. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures are 26.9 and 11.7°C (Getachew, 1999).
Figure 4. Study area and distribution of sample plots in the study area
3.2 Data Collection and Measurements

A reconnaissance survey was made across the woodland in the central lakes sub-regions part of the Rift Valley, between Arsi Negele and Ziway, in order to obtain an impression of the condition of the vegetation of the site. Four sites, which represented four vegetation conditions namely intact (protected against all intervention), relatively intact (exposed to controlled grazing), open grazing land, and farm fields, were selected. The site considered as intact and relatively intact were the Abijata Shalla National Park (head quarter) and Abernosa Cattle Ranch, respectively (Figure 4). Farmlands of Hada, Langeno, Bana, Dalu, Daka Ilala and Daka Lole areas, and open grazing lands of Danga, Humo, Gale, Chancho, and Harengema areas were represented the other two sites (Figure 4).

After the sites were selected, sample plots were randomly laid out on the topographic map of the area (scale 1:50,000) by means of square grids (Figure 4). The geographical coordinates of the plot centers were taken from the topomap and fed in to GPS. The sample plots were located on the ground using the GPS navigation system. Sample plots, having 500 m$^2$ (12.56 m radius circle), were laid having the coordinates as the center of the circle (De Gier, 1989).

In each plot, the total number of individuals of *A. senegal* and other associated species were counted and recorded. The height and diameter at breast height (DBH) of these individuals, with heights of 1.5 m or more, were measured using hypsometer and diameter tape, respectively. For individuals with a height of less than 1.5 m, their basal diameters and heights were measured using caliper and calibrated sticks (rods), respectively (Abeje *et al.*, 2005).
Gum samples were collected from randomly identified *A. senegal* trees in the area. The collected gum samples were taken to the Forestry Research Center (FRC) and Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, for preparation for chemical analysis.

### 3.3 Physicochemical Characteristic Analysis of Gum Arabic

Analysis on the physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic was done in the laboratories of FRC, Ethiopian Quality and Standards Authority and Essential Oils Research Centre. The physico–chemical properties of the gum analyzed included colour, odour, moisture content, ash content, viscosity, pH and gel determination, specific rotation, nitrogen content, tannin content and mineral contents. The procedures used for the analysis of physicochemical properties of the gum arabic samples were presented as follows.

1. **Moisture Content**

   Approximately 2 g of ground gum arabic sample was weighed and oven dried at 105 °C for 5 hour. It was allowed to cool in a desiccator before reweighing. Moisture content was expressed as a percentage of the weight loss from the original weight (FAO, 1999). The experiment was done in three replications and an average was taken.

2. **Ash Content**

   A sample of the gum arabic was first heated on a burner in air to remove its smoke. Then it was burned in a furnace at 550 °C. The Ash content was expressed as a percentage ratio of the weight of the ash to the original weight.
3. pH determination

A 25 % gum solution was prepared and the pH meter was calibrated with a standard solution of known pH. The pH measurements of the gum solution was read from the instrument.

4. Gel determination

The determination of gel was of qualitative. A 25 % gum solution was prepared and its gelling property was determined according to whether there is no gel, light gel, moderate gel and heavy gel.

5. Specific Rotation

Optical rotation was determined for 1.0% w/w solutions (on a dry weight basis) using polarimeter fitted with a sodium lamp. Three readings were made of the rotation of the solution at 25° temperature. The solution was replaced with the reserved portion of the solvent, the same number of readings was made, and the average used as the blank value. The blank value was subtracted from the average observed rotation since the two figures are of the same sign to obtain the corrected angular rotation (FAO, 1991; Idris et al., 1998). The specific rotation for each gum sample was calculated (Al-Assaf et al., 2005):

\[
\left[ \alpha^\circ \right]_D = \frac{100 \alpha}{lc}
\]

where \( \alpha \) is the observed rotation;

\( l \) is the path length (dm);

\( c \) is the concentration (g/100 ml);
\( T^\circ \) is the measuring temperature; and

\( D \) is the D–line of Na.

6. Viscosity

A 200 mg gum sample was dissolved in 20 ml 1.0 M NaCl over night (Idris et al., 1998). The solution was then filtered and the measurements were carried out by means of a Townson Mercer Type–Zaitfuchs Cross Arm Viscometer. The viscometer was immersed in a liquid bath at 25 °C temperature. The sample solution was introduced into the viscometer flowing freely, the time required for the solution to pass from the first to the second timing mark was measured, in seconds (Al-Assaf et al., 2005). The viscosity in Centistokes was calculated by multiplying the calibration constant of the viscometer, 0.003512, by the flow time (FAO, 1991). The value of the viscosity was then converted to Centipoises by multiplying the value in Centistokes by density of the solution.

7. Tannin Content

To 10 ml of a 2% solution of the gum sample was added with about 0.1 ml of ferric chloride. The solution was then centrifuged. A blackish precipitate indicates the presence of tannin (FAO, 1999). Further analysis of the positive test of tannin present was expected to be done by condensation of tannins with formaldehyde. A diluted solution of 100 ml in a conical Erlenmeyer flask added with 10 ml of 40% formaldehyde and 5 ml HCl (1.19 gm/cm\(^3\)). The mixture was refluxed for 30 min on a water bath. The observed resin will be weighed and expressed, as % ratio (Obolenskaya et al., 1991).
8. Nitrogen Content

Nitrogen analysis was undertaken by means of a Vapodest Distillation Apparatus. 0.6 gm of the gum sample was used in the analysis. The amount of Nitrogen was calculated by the amount of acid added, that was needed to change, the color of the distilled gum solution. The protein content was calculated using the nitrogen conversion factor (NCF) of 6.6 as proposed by Anderson (1986; cited in Idris et al., 1998).

9. Mineral Content

Ash from sample of gum arabic was prepared and dissolved in concentrated sulfuric acid. The solution was then used for the determination of mineral elements studied, except for Phosphorous, by Atomic Absorption Spectrometer (AAS). The appropriate standard solution was prepared for each metal and used by the AAS to prepare the graph for the determination of the amount of each metal from the gum solution. All measurements were done in triplicates. The detection limit of the AAS was parts–per–million (ppm). The amount of phosphorous in the sample was determined by wet ash method. The amount of Phosphorous was determined by means of a UV–VIS spectrometer at 400 nm wave length.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Vegetation

The status of populations of *A. senegal* and associated species was examined by estimating dominance, density, abundance, frequency, importance value index (IVI) and population structure.
3.4.1.1 Density, Abundance, Frequency, Importance Value Index and Dominance

Density was calculated by the number of individuals of a species per unit of area (Abeje et al., 2005). Abundance is defined as the number of stems per plot. Two sets of the abundance values were calculated, i.e., average abundance per plot was calculated by dividing the sum of the number of stems per species from all plots by the total number of plots (maximum frequency). Local abundance was calculated as the ratio of the total number of stems of a species divided by its absolute frequency (Tadesse, 2003). Frequency is defined as the presence or absence of a given species in sample quadrats (Lamprecht, 1989). Absolute frequency of a species was obtained by counting the number of plots in which the species was recorded (Kent and Coker, 1994; Tadesse, 2003). Relative frequency of a species was done by calculating the ratio of the absolute frequency of the species to the total number of study plots (which is equal to maximum frequency) (Getachew, 1999; Tadesse, 2003). Importance Value Index (IVI) allows a comparison of the ecological significance of species in a given forest type and depicts the sociological structure of a population in its totality in the community (Lamprecht, 1989). Therefore, it is a good index for summarizing vegetation characteristics and ranking of species (Kindeya, 2003). The importance value index (IVI) was calculated as the sum of the relative dominance (%), relative abundance (%) and relative frequency (%) of A. senegal and associated species (Lamprecht, 1989). The IVI of each species was converted into a 100 per cent scale (Kindeya, 2003).

The term dominance refers to the degree of coverage of a species as an expression the space it occupies. Dominance is usually expressed by stem basal area. This may be expressed as the absolute dominance (=the sum of the basal areas of the individuals in m² per ha) and relative
dominance (= the percentage of the total basal area of a given species out of the total measured stem basal areas of all species) (Lampréchet, 1989). Basal area is the cross sectional area of a tree trunk measured at diameter breast height (BH, 1.3m). Basal area was calculated for *Acacia senegal* and associated species which had diameter breast height greater than 2.5 cm (Kumelachew and Taye, 2003). The basal area of a tree was calculated as follows:

\[ BA = \frac{\pi d^2}{40000} \]

Where \( BA \) = Basal area in \( m^2 \)

\( d \) = Diameter at breast height in cm.

\( \pi = 3.14 \)

### 3.4.1.2 Population structure

Population structure is the numerical distribution of individuals of different size or age within a population at a given moment of time (Peters, 1996). To determine the population structure of *A. senegal* and associated species, all individuals of the species encountered in the quadrats were arbitrarily grouped by 4-cm diameter classes (0 – 4 cm, 4 – 8 cm, 8 – 12 cm …52 – 56) and by 2-m height classes (0 – 2 m, 2 – 4 m, 4 – 6 m …26 – 28). The population structure was depicted using frequency histograms of both diameter and height-class distributions (Abeje *et al.*, 2005). The overall shapes or slopes of these frequency histograms were then compared visually. The histograms were classified into three of the most common size-class distributions exhibited by tropical tree populations (Peters, 1996). These are:
Type I – displays a greater number of small trees than large trees, and an almost constant reduction in numbers from one size to the next (inverse J shape).

Type II – shows a characteristic of species that has discontinuous or periodic recruitment.

Type III – reflects a species whose regeneration is severely limited for some reason.

### 3.4.2 Data on Gum chemistry

The physicochemical properties of the gum arabic obtained from the laboratory analysis are compared with results of gum arabic studies done from major producing countries and also with international standards.
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Floristic Composition of the Vegetation

The diversity of tree and shrub species in the study area is very low; about eight tree and shrub species are recorded from all of the sites in the present study (Table 4). The total number of tree and shrub species registered at the four studied sites is more or less the same. However, the sites with higher disturbance, the open grazing and farmland, are found to own relatively higher number of tree and shrub species (six) than the less disturbed sites (five) (Table 4). Other studies also reported that the natural vegetation in most areas of the Central Rift Valley is low in tree diversity (Mohammed, 1993; Getachew, 1999). The low diversity in tree species composition may be due to ecological limitations, as associated to low and erratic rainfall and soil nutrients deficiency, in the area.

The density, abundance, frequency, dominance and importance value index (IVI) of the tree and shrub species in the different land cover/land use categories studied also reveal a pattern depending on the degree of disturbance (Table 4). Density of tree species is the highest in the open grazing (1584 stems/ha) and lowest in the controlled grazing site (268 stems/ha). In terms of density of each species, *A. senegal* is the species with the highest density in three of the four sites, intact, open grazing and farmland, with the density range from 224 – 632 stems/ha (Table 4).
When compared with earlier studies at Abernosa Cattle Ranch (Mekuria et al., 1999), controlled grazing, the results of the present study for the densities of the species is in agreement for *B. aegyptiaca*, but higher density is recorded for *A. senegal* and lower density for *A. tortilis, D. cinerea* and *A. seyal* species. Compared with the study made by Getachew (1999) in Abernosa Cattle Ranch, the results of the present study show a lower density for *A. tortilis, A. senegal, A. seyal*, and *B. aegyptiaca* but a very high density for *D. cinerea*. In the open system (both at farmland and open grazing), in the present study the densities recorded are generally higher for all species except *D. cinerea*, compared with the study by Mekuria et al. (1999). In the Abijata Shalla National Park, the present study shows a higher density for all the tree/shrub species present compared with the study by Mohammed (1993). This may reflect changes in vegetation over time. Despite the low floristic composition, the density of the woody plants in general is quite good for such a dryland environment.

In terms of abundance, *A. senegal* is the most abundant in the intact, open grazing and farmlands, but third in the controlled grazing. In addition, *A. senegal*, a species known to hold multipurpose including high economic significance is observed to dominate the abundance, and own the highest density in most of the land use/land cover exiting in the area. This may be associated with the incidence of disturbance in the area. In general, disturbed sites have higher regeneration of woody plants than less disturbed sites if the disturbance is not severe (Rogers et al., 2005). According to the same literature, natural disturbances are essential processes in most ecosystems, and it has been demonstrated that their loss or disruption through anthropogenic intervention may threaten the persistence of certain species. Disturbance may replenish nutrients previously lost to an ecosystem through soil weathering. However, those
Table 4. *Density, abundance, frequency, dominance and importance value index (IVI) of the tree species in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Intact site</th>
<th>RO</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>RD (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% N</th>
<th>LN</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>% F</th>
<th>DO</th>
<th>% DO</th>
<th>IVI (%)</th>
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<th>% N</th>
<th>LN</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>% F</th>
<th>DO</th>
<th>% DO</th>
<th>IVI (%)</th>
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<th>% N</th>
<th>LN</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>% F</th>
<th>DO</th>
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<th>% N</th>
<th>LN</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>% F</th>
<th>DO</th>
<th>% DO</th>
<th>IVI (%)</th>
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<td>2.56</td>
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RO = Rank order of the average abundance per plot of the species (N) in a descending;  
D = Density per ha;  
RD = Relative Density;  
N = Average abundance per plot;  
% N = Relative abundance of the species;  
LN = Local abundance;  
F = Absolute Frequency;  
% F = Relative frequency;  
DO = Absolute Dominance (m² ha⁻¹);  
% DO = Relative Dominance; and  
IVI = Importance Value Index.
disturbances that alter the structure of populations, communities and ecosystems will have consequences for plants.

Both *A. senegal* and *A. tortilis* are the most frequent species in intact and farmlands, while *A. tortilis* is the most frequent in the rest. *A. senegal* is the second frequent species in open grazing and the third in the controlled grazing. In terms of dominance *A. senegal* rank first in the farmland and second in intact woodland and open grazing, and third in controlled grazing. In most of the sites *A. tortilis* is the dominant. This may be with a reason *A. tortilis* is the most preferred tree species in the area as forage and for charcoal making and fuelwood. So individuals of the species are purposely made to have large size, which make it to be dominant in most of the sites.

*A. senegal* rank first in IVI in the intact woodland and farmland, second in the open grazing and third in the controlled grazing. *A. tortilis* rank first in the open grazing and controlled grazing sites (Table 4). This shows that *A. senegal* and *A. tortilis* are the two most ecologically important tree species in the study area. In fact, each different tree species has different total IVI in different land cover/land use categories. This indicates that each species has different ecological importance in different ecosystem. Stands that yield more or less the same IVI for the characteristic species indicate the existence of the same or at least similar stand composition, structure, site characteristics and comparable dynamics (Lamprechet, 1989).
4.2 Population Structure

All the land cover/land use categories show TypeI distribution both in diameter and height (Figure 5 & 6). This means that the different categories hold vegetation structures that are nearly alike. However, higher regeneration is seen in the open grazing and on farmland. But in these land cover/land use categories smaller number of individuals are present as we move to higher classes.

*Figure 5.* Distribution of trees in different diameter classes of land cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia (Diameter Classes: Class 1 = 0 – 4cm; Class 2 = 4 – 8cm; Class 3 = 8 – 12cm; Class 4 = 12 – 16cm; Class 5 = 16 – 20cm; Class 6 = 20 – 24cm; Class 7 = 24 – 28cm; Class 8 = 28 – 32cm; Class 9 = 32 – 36cm; Class 10 = 36 – 40cm; Class 11 = 40 – 44cm; Class 12 = 44 – 48cm; Class 13 = 48 – 52cm; Class 14 = 52 – 56cm).
Good numbers of individuals are recorded at higher classes for the intact woodland and controlled grazing sites. This shows that there is high extraction for fuelwood and charcoal, which are common in the area, in open grazing and farmland and a relatively better protection in the intact woodland and controlled grazing sites. Not only vegetation population structure varies between sites but also structure of individual species within a site shows variation that worth analysis.

Figure 6. Distribution of trees in different Height classes of land cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia (Height Classes: Class 1 = 0 – 2m; Class 2 = 2 – 4m; Class 3 = 4 – 6m; Class 4 = 6 – 8; Class 5 = 8 – 10; Class 6 = 10 – 12; Class 7 = 12 – 14; Class 8 = 14 – 16; Class 9 = 16 – 18; Class 10 = 18 – 20; Class 11 = 20 – 22; Class 12 = 22 – 24; Class 13 = 24 – 26; Class 14 = 26 – 28).

None of the species is represented by the whole range of diameter and height considered in all of land use categories. *A. senegal* is represented by large proportion of individuals smaller
than 12 cm in diameter and less than 6 m in height in all land use categories, except in open grazing, where it is represented by trees less than 8 cm in diameter and 4 m in height (Figure 7 & 8). *A. tortilis* is represented largely by individuals in 8–36 cm diameter class and the 2–8 m height class in the intact site, and by individuals less than 8 cm in diameter and less than 6 m in height in other land use categories (Figure 7 & 8). *A. seyal* is represented largely by individuals in diameter class less than 8 cm in all land use categories, except in controlled grazing, where it is represented in diameter classes less than 4 cm and between 16–20 cm, and height classes less than 4 m. *B. aegyptiaca* is represented in the area by a large proportion of individuals less than 12 cm in diameter and 4 m in height. *D. cinerea* is represented in the area largely by individuals less than 4 cm in diameter and 4 m height. *M. senegalensis, Z. mucronata* and *A. etbaica* are represented by very small numbers of individuals in the area (Figure 7 & 8). *A. senegal, A. tortilis,* and *A. seyal* are represented in most plots in the intact site and open grazing; but *Z. mucronata, M. senegalensis* and *A. etbaica* are the least represented in the plots. In the farmland, *A. tortilis* and *A. senegal* are represented in almost all the plots but *M. senegalensis* and *D. cinerea* are the least represented. In the controlled grazing, *A. tortilis* is represented in all plots and *D. cinerea* is represented in most of the plots. In addition, in this site *A. senegal* and *B. aegyptiaca* are represented by almost half the number of plots, while *A. seyal* is the least represented.
Figure 7: Distribution of different tree species in different diameter classes of land cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia (Diameter Classes: Class 1 = 0 – 4cm; Class 2 = 4 – 8cm; Class 3 = 8 – 12cm; Class 4 = 12 – 16cm; Class 5 = 16 – 20cm; Class 6 = 20 – 24cm; Class 7 = 24 – 28cm; Class 8 = 28 – 32cm; Class 9 = 32 – 36cm; Class 10 = 36 – 40cm; Class 11 = 40 – 44cm; Class 12 = 44 – 48cm; Class 13 = 48 – 52cm; Class 14 = 52 – 56cm).

*A. senegal* shows an approximately Type I size class–distribution in both diameter and height in all land cover/land use categories of the region. *A. tortilis* and *B. aegyptiaca* show an approximately Type I size class–distribution in both diameter and height in all land use...
categories except in the intact woodland where it exhibits a Type II size class–distribution in both diameter and height class–distributions (Figure 7 & 8). *A. seyal* shows an approximately Type I size class–distribution in both diameter and height in all land use categories of the area, except in controlled grazing, where the numbers of individuals are very few and in patchy to classify in one of the types. *D. cinerea* shows a Type I size class–distribution in both diameter and height in the controlled grazing and farmland, the only land cover/use categories in which the species present. *M. senegalensis*, *Z. mucronata* and *A. etbaica* are represented by very few individuals in an irregular manner, and do not fall into any of the types of size class–distributions (Figure 7 & 8).

Population structure data have long been used by foresters and ecologists to investigate the regeneration characteristics of tropical trees. Since it is difficult to determine the age of tropical trees, studies on population structure are based on size class–distributions. Most analysis of these types has found that tropical tree populations are characterized by a limited number of different size class–distributions (Peters, 1996). According to the same literature, population structure demonstrate the degree to which a tree species is dependent on canopy gaps for regeneration, as well as it is an extremely useful tool for orienting management activities and, perhaps most importantly, for assessing the impact of resource extraction. The height and diameter class–distribution of the population—population structure—of a species indicates regeneration status as well as past and recent regeneration patterns (Demel, 1996).

A Type I size class–distribution (as the types are described in the materials and methods section) is characteristic of shade–tolerant canopy trees that maintain a more or less constant
rate of recruitment. There is a large probability that the death of an adult tree will be replaced by the growth of individuals from the smaller size classes and it is considered by many authors the ideal of a stable, self-maintaining plant population (Peters, 1996). But as seen in the histograms of the present study, even though there is a positive regeneration for the species that show TypeI size class–distribution, they have small number of individuals in the higher diameter and height classes due to the reasons discussed at the population structure of the vegetation. Therefore, urgent action is needed to maintain acceptable number of individuals at higher diameter and height classes to use them for the desired end–use like NTFPs and environmental benefits and to have enough mother trees.

A TypeII size class–distribution is a characteristic of species that show discontinuous or periodic recruitment. The actual level of seedling establishment may be sufficient to maintain the population, but its infrequency causes notable discontinuities in the structure of the population as the newly established seedlings and saplings grow into the larger size classes. This type of diameter distribution is quite common among late secondary species that depend on canopy gaps for regeneration (Peters, 1996). But in the case of the species in the study area that show TypeII size class–distribution at the specified land cover/land use category, the result is likely due to external factors than the nature of the species since their population structures in most of the land use categories show TypeI size class–distribution.
Figure 8. Distribution of different tree species in different height classes of land cover/land use categories of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia (Height Classes: Class 1 = 0 – 2m; Class 2 = 2 – 4m; Class 3 = 4 – 6m; Class 4 = 6 – 8; Class 5 = 8 – 10; Class 6 = 10 – 12; Class 7 = 12 – 14; Class 8 = 14 – 16; Class 9 = 16 – 18; Class 10 = 18 – 20; Class 11 = 20 – 22; Class 12 = 22 – 24; Class 13 = 24 – 26; Class 14 = 26 – 28).

*M. senegalensis*, *Z. mucronata* and *A. etbaica* in all land cover/use categories where they are present and *A. seyal* in controlled grazing don’t fall in any types of the size class–distribution. Their densities in the area are also insignificant and are present in irregular manner. Therefore it is difficult to describe and discuss their population structure and the associated implication.
attached to it. There is a need for in-depth study on their regeneration mechanisms and environmental factors affecting their population, and to devise appropriate methods and following management actions to facilitate and increase their regeneration.

When compared with earlier studies, the population structure for the controlled grazing concur with results reported by other authors (Mekuria et al., 1999) for the species of *A. tortilis*, *B. aegyptiaca* and *D. cinerea*, but different for *A. senegal* and *A. seyal* in that, in these authors *A. senegal* exhibits TypeIII size class–distribution and *A. seyal* exhibits TypeII size class–distribution. This may be associated to the different factors affecting the populations of the species through time. For the open system including the farmland and open grazing, the population structure concur with the results of the same authors (Mekuria et al., 1999) for the species of *A. senegal*, *A. seyal*, *A. tortilis*, and *D. cinerea* but different for *B. aegyptiaca* where it doesn't depict any type of the three size class–distribution in their study. Periodic monitoring of population structure of a species can therefore be used to assess the ecological health of a tree population and to guarantee the long–term sustainability of NTFPs (Peters, 1996).

*A. senegal* trees are tapped beginning from smallest size class, less than 5 cm diameter, by making incisions in the stems and branches by stripping away the bark to accelerate exudation of gum arabic (Mohamed, 2005). To determine harvestable number of *A. senegal* trees for gum arabic production in the region, trees having diameter greater than and equal to 3 cm are used. Harvestable number of *A. senegal* trees per hectare in the study area are 106, 116, 12, and 209 for intact site, open grazing, controlled grazing and farmlands respectively. The
estimated amount of yield of gum arabic in the region based on the average number of harvestable number of *A. senegal* trees (111) and estimated average amount of gum arabic per tree per season (250 g; FAO, 1995b) is 27.71kg per hectare per season. The estimated income earned from the gum arabic (calculating from export prices of Ethiopia’s gum arabic, 0.68 – 2.50 US$ per kg; Mulugeta, 2005) will undoubtedly supplement the unpredictable agricultural production in the area. In addition, there is also very high regeneration of *A. senegal* species in the area; so that, if there is good management in the area, there is a possibility to get more harvestable trees in one to two years. Therefore, it is encouraging to start the gum arabic business in the region.

### 4.3 Physicochemical Characteristics of the Gum Arabic from Central Rift Valley

The color of the gum arabic collected from the Central Rift Valley is pale–white to orange–brown. It is solid and brakes with a glassy fracture, just like gum arabic of high quality described in literatures (e.g. FAO, 1999). The gum is tasteless and odorless. It is readily soluble in water and insoluble in Ethanol. Table 5 shows the analytical data for the physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic samples in the laboratory.

The fact that gum arabic, specially the one from *A. senegal*, is a major component of food additive, made that the specifications set on its quality attributes are very strict. This strict requirement is so because there are several adulterants of *Acacia* gums traded as ‘gum arabic’, which, however, should not be used as food additives. Some of the specifications set on gum arabic by different regulatory bodies (e.g. JECFA, USP, BP, IP) are shown below and against these the quality of the gum arabic of the Rift Valley evaluated (Table 6).
Table 5. Analytical data for the physicochemical characteristics of the gum arabic samples collected from the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moisture content %</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ash content %</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viscosity (Centipoise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 gl⁻¹</td>
<td>0.9954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.5 gl⁻¹</td>
<td>0.9552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>pH (25% sol.)</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nitrogen content</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Protein %</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N x 6.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>% w/w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gel (25% sol.)</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Specific rotation, degrees²</td>
<td>–32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tannin content</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>% w/w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ca (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mg (g/100g)</td>
<td>0.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>K (g/100g)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Na (g/100g)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fe (g/100g)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>P (g/100g)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pb (g/100g)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mn (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Co (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Cu (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Zn (g/100g)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Ni (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Cd (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Cr (g/100g)</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND – Not detected;  
² = At 25 °C temperature; and  
b = Based on the classification category: no gel, light gel, moderate gel and heavy gel.

The average moisture content of the gum arabic samples from *A. senegal* trees of Central Rift Valley is 15 %. This is similar to the studies done by Mhinzi and Mrosso (1997) for Tanzania and Idris *et al.* (1998) and Karamalla *et al.* (1998) for Sudan. The analyzed samples of gum arabic are slightly acidic, on average measured pH value of 4.04 and this is in good agreement with most of the reports (E.g. Mhinzi, 2003 for Tanzania), and in close agreement with the reports of Chikamai (1977) and Karamalla *et al.* (1998), which they put the pH on the range 4.3 – 5.1 and 4.3 – 4.4 respectively. The specific rotation, – 32.5, concurs with the results of
Idris et al. (1998), Karamalla et al. (1998), and Al-Assaf et al. (2005). The determination of gel property of the gum arabic samples was qualitative. The characteristic of the gum arabic from Rift Valley is moderate gel. The nitrogen content of the samples (0.35 %w/w) and hence the protein content, 2.31, are similar to reports of Chikamai (1977), Mhinzi and Mrosso (1997), Idris et al. (1998), and Karamalla et al. (1998). The absence of tannin content for the Acacia gum collected from the Rift Valley are in agreement with some reports (Chikamai, 1977; FAO, 1999); whereas Mhinzi (2003) in his paper indicated that Acacia senegal and Acacia seyal gums collected from Tanzania show 0.28% – 0.58% and 0.58% – 1.19% tannin content respectively. The viscosity of the gum arabic samples in centipoises (10^3 g/l) is 0.9954. The viscosity of the gum arabic could not be compared with other studies since the concentration of the gum solution used for the measurement of viscosity in the present study is different from other studies.

The maximum limit of total ash for food and pharmaceutical quality of Acacia gum is 4% w/w (Chikamai, 1977; Mhinzi and Mrosso, 1997; Karamalla et al., 1998; and FAO, 1999), and is in good agreement with the result obtained in the present study, 3.5%. Characterization of gum arabic by mineral content is not common in most of the literatures. However, the Ca, Mg, Na and K content of the present gum arabic samples (0.7, 0.2, 0.01 and 0.95% respectively) is similar to the report of Mhinzi & Mrosso (1997). The alkali and alkaline elements in the Acacia senegal gum show the trend as follows K > Ca > Mg > Na. The slight increase of Na and probably of K is due to the high concentration of these elements in the soil parent material, volcanic ash, of the Rift Valley. The Lead content of gum arabic samples is
Table 6. Evaluation of gum arabic from Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia with other studies and international specifications

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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Moisture content (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>&lt; 15%</td>
<td>&lt; 15%</td>
<td>&lt; 15%</td>
<td>13–15</td>
<td>&lt; 15%</td>
<td>14.1–15</td>
<td>8.1–14.05</td>
<td>12.5–16</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ash content (%)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>&lt; 4%</td>
<td>&lt; 4%</td>
<td>&lt; 4%</td>
<td>3.0–3.9</td>
<td>&lt; 4%</td>
<td>3.8–4.5</td>
<td>2.75–5.25</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viscosity (centipoises)</td>
<td>10 g l&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.9954</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.5 g l&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.9552</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Intrinsic viscosity (ml/g)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15–22</td>
<td>1–73</td>
<td>9.7–26.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>pH (25% sol.)</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.3–4.4</td>
<td>0.27–0.44</td>
<td>0.28–0.33</td>
<td>4.3–5.1</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Nitrogen content (% w/w)</td>
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<td>Specific rotation (degrees)</td>
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<td>ns</td>
<td>-30–-34</td>
<td>-25–-26</td>
<td>-23–-29</td>
<td>-27–-36</td>
<td>1.8–2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Protein %</td>
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<td>Tannin content (% w/w)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.28–0.52</td>
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<td>Gel (25% sol.)</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Ca (g/100g)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.43–0.72</td>
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<td>0.02–0.29</td>
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<td>K (g/100g)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.09–0.98</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Cr (g/100g)</td>
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</table>

<sup>a</sup> Ranges of values for <i>A. senegal</i> var. <i>senegal</i> from four countries: Sudan, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda; and <sup>b</sup> = Source–Chikamai (1997).
negligibly low to be detected at the laboratory investigation on Atomic Absorption Spectrometer. Given that gum arabic is used as food additives the amount of heavy metals like Pb has to be minimal, and this is set as less than 2ppm (FAO, 1999). The gum arabic from *Acacia senegal* of Central Rift Valley, analysis shows a better result which is not detectable at ppm level. The contents of Fe and P in the present gum arabic samples are 0.001 and 0.6% respectively, and Co, Cu, Zn, Ni, Ca, Cr and Mn are also small enough to be detected.

Therefore, the present work has shown that the physicochemical characteristics of *Acacia senegal* gum samples from Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia exhibit similar characteristics and even better result to the international standards set for gum arabic and to the reports from different producer and exporter countries of gum arabic. This together with the dominance of the species in the Rift Valley woodland clearly reflects the potential of the product for commerce and thus contribution to livelihoods and national economy.
5. CONCLUSION

The population status of tree species of the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia shows generally presence of good regeneration. However at higher size classes the number of individuals dramatically falls probably due to high rate of harvest taking place in the area. Nonetheless, *A. senegal* which is one of economically important tree species is found to have higher density, good regeneration, and high IVI in most of the land uses in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia. If appropriate management activities are applied, the nature of the population structure of most of the tree species including *A. senegal* is of stable type. Indeed, there is a possibility to start the gum arabic business in the region with the existing harvestable number of *A. senegal* trees in the area, as this could supplement the income from agricultural production in the area. There is a possibility of recruiting harvestable number of *A. senegal* trees in the near future since there is very high regeneration of *A. senegal* trees in the area.

With regard to the physicochemical characteristic of the gum arabic samples, the characteristics of the samples are in good agreement with the studies at other places for the gum arabic from *A. senegal* variety *senegal* and international standards. Thus the gum arabic from the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia possess identical quality to gum arabic of commerce from *A. senegal* variety *senegal* for commercialization purpose. The following recommendations are forwarded for effective commercialization of gum arabic in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia:
1. Improved management of the woodland is needed.

2. Appropriate tapping technology should be developed or indorsed from experienced countries to the area; and training should be given to the farmers as to the tapping, gum collection/harvesting, processing and storing, etc. activities.

3. Yield study should be followed in order to determine the amount of gum arabic produced from the area whether the amount satisfy for commercialization purpose.

4. Tree improvement activities should be done in order to enhance the amount of gum produce per tree.

5. The same kind of study should be done in other parts of the country where there are enough *A. senegal* populations present.

6. Market studies should go hand–in–hand with the development of the countries' *A. senegal* resource base for gum arabic production.

7. Devising mechanism as to promoting the countries' potential for value–addition and industrialization of gum arabic is essential.
6. Reference


Mulugeta Lemenih and Demel Teketay, 2004. Natural Gum and Resin Resources: Opportunity to Integrate Production with Conservation of Biodiversity, Control of Desertification and Adapt to Climate Change in the Drylands of Ethiopia. Paper Presented to the First


