

Original Research Article

Evaluation of *Ipomoea* for gully rehabilitation through different propagation techniques in north western zone of Tigray

Abstract

Since the past two decades, watershed management practices such as construction of stone bunds and establishment of exclosures have been widely implemented in the semi-arid low and highlands of northern Ethiopia to curb land degradation by soil erosion. The aim of this study was to identify scientific name and its impact of gully rehabilitation measure in the *Serenta* watershed of the Maitsebri experimental site, northern Ethiopia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, transect walks, field observation and field measurements to characterize the species. The species was identified and characterized by of the national herbarium of Addis Ababa University its scientific name as *Ipomoea carnea* Jac. Based on the average result of the planted cuttings of stem/direct planting, its survival rate at side was greater than cuttings planted at top position of the gully. (100% at side and 95.84% at top). And for these cuttings planted by budding/layering, its survival rate at side and top positions are equal. (58.33% at side and 58.33% at top). This study demonstrated the potential of the species to bring remarkable restoration of eroded gully through reinforcement of gabion check dams that could serve as a basis for sustainable planning of future developments of areas experiencing severe land degradation due to water erosion and over grazing.

Keywords: *Ipomoea*, Gully, Propagation, Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

Soil erosion caused by heavy rainfall and surface runoff is a serious problem in agricultural areas, especially on inclined slopes where the soil loss can reduce soil productivity and increase sediment and other pollution loads in receiving waters [1]. Soil erosion often occurs on steep slopes due to improper land use, monoculture and the use of tillage tools that leave the soil bare and pulverize it excessively [2]. After such treatments, the soil can be carried away by heavy rains. This problem affects crop productivity and the incomes of farmers. Soil erosion by runoff is often accepted as an unavoidable phenomenon associated with agriculture on sloping land. However, erosion removes the topsoil which is the part of the soil profile highest in nutrients and organic matter [3]. This has effects on potential Mankind is faced with a shortage of clean air to breath, absence of clean water to drink and degradation of fertile soils to cultivate. The rate of accelerated

erosion commonly exceeds $10\text{ton ha}^{-1}\text{a}^{-1}$ and sometimes exceed $100\text{ton ha}^{-1}\text{a}^{-1}$ and some of the plateau area of china and in the Himalayan foot hills of Nepal, where values in excess of $200\text{ton ha}^{-1}\text{a}^{-1}$ have been recorded. Similarly, in India, gully erosion results of about 8000 ha of land per year [^{2,4}]

The annual soil loss of Ethiopia is estimated to be 1.5 billion tons of soils are eroded every year [⁵]. Due to the eroded fertile soil the productivity of the crop lands decreasing from time to time. One of the most wide spread threats to soil quality in this region is wind and water erosion that impacts our lives in numerous ways. As a result of untreated catchment, poor vegetation covers and sever erosion have been forming gullies in the region. This formation of gullies leads to changing the productive land to marginal/unproductive/ land which in turns impacts the food security of the individual households since the size of land is small due to fragmentation. The government of the region awards this, and then it has launched strategies which improve the natural resources of the region. Such as catchment treatment, gully reclamation and other soil and water conservation structures, as a result in some parts of the region attempts were made to reclaim these gullies by different measures. Recently introduced gully reshaping and revegetation efforts are found in various parts of the region with promising results. To be more effective these physical measures should be integrated with biological measures such as, grasses, shrubs and trees to reinforce, strengthen and provides complete ground cover. It is with this burning issue in mind that conserving the remaining natural resources (soil & water) through physical and biological measures are the current home work for the present generation to increase the productivity of the land for both short and long period of time.

However, very little or no research has been done so far on the biological indigenous shrub species *Awir*, its local name, which is not identified and documented scientifically in Tigray in general and in the study area in particular. But in Western Tigray, Tsegede woreda zurya dansha kebele farmers used the species as small gully rehabilitation, source of nectar for honeybees, fuel wood, live fence to prevent animal entry to their crop lands by cutting the stem and planting on their boarder sites due to great performance of survival, unpalatable for animal browsing and needless management. This also means that indigenous knowledge of biological soil and water conservation method is not strongly supported by scientific bases

There for the objective of the study was to characterize and evaluate *Awir* as biological gully rehabilitation measure by determining the adaptability of environmental variables and morphological growth characteristics of different propagation techniques.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study area description

The experiment was conducted at Peasant Association (PA) 'Medhani-Alem', Tselemti Wereda, North Western Tigray (Fig1). It is categorized as moist kola and geographically located at $38^{\circ}08'$ longitude and $13^{\circ}05'$ latitude with an altitude of 1350 m.a.s.l. Sorghum, maize, millet and *Taf* are the major crops and onion, tomato, Potato, pepper, carrot, garlic and groundnut are the most vegetable types grown in the zone. The area was also rich in natural resource. *Boswellia papyrifera*, *Zizphus spina* -Christ, *Biospyros mespliformis*, *Cordia africana* and *Adansonia digitata* are the main vegetation types found in the area that serves as a source of income and utilizes for different purposes. The Wereda center Mai-Tsebri is far away about 380 km from Mekelle, city of the region, towards North West. The altitudinal range of the wereda falls between 800 and 2872 m.a.s.l. The land form is characterized as flat plain plateau, hills, mountains, gorge (valley) and some immediate break of slope.

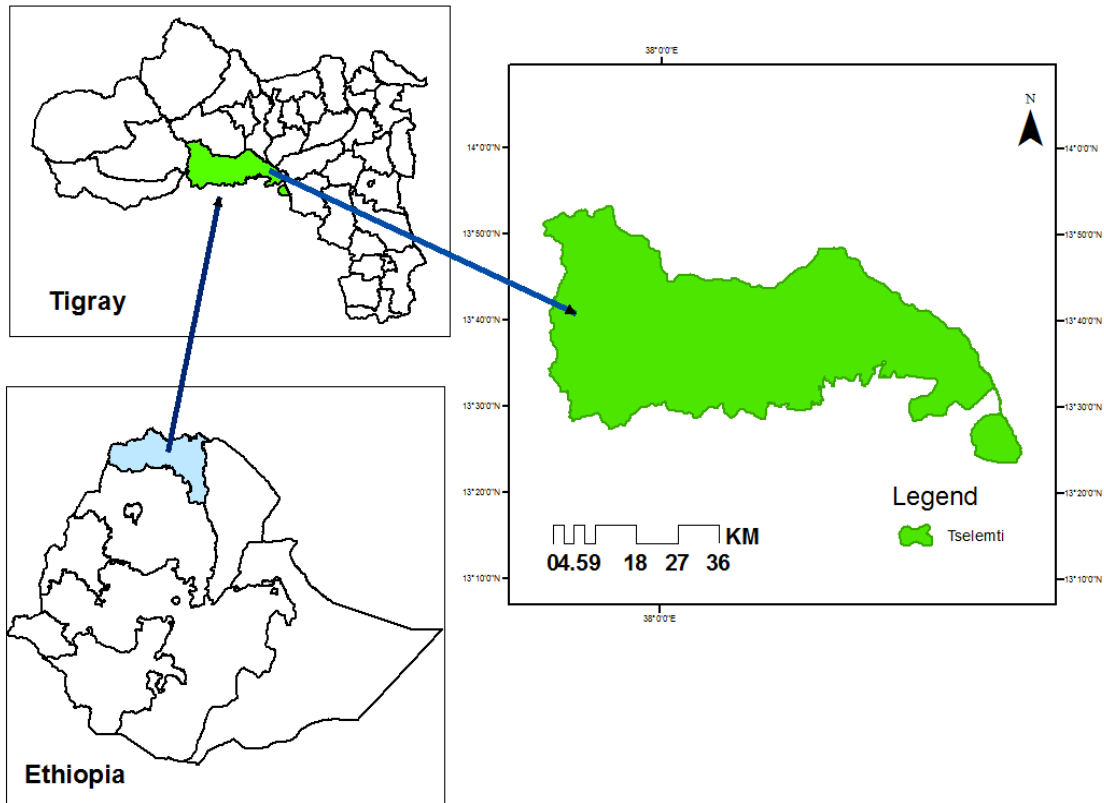


Fig. 1: location map of the study area

The agro-climatic condition of the area is hot to dry semiarid lowland plains dictated by a very hot temperature. The maximum temperature ranges from 35.6°C in May to 36.4°C in April, while the minimum temperature is ranging from 15.7°C in December to 21.8°C in May (Tigray National Meteorological Agency (TNMA 2014)) (Fig. 2). The dry season occur between November to March whereas, the rainy season occurs between June to September, which follows a unimodal rainfall pattern.

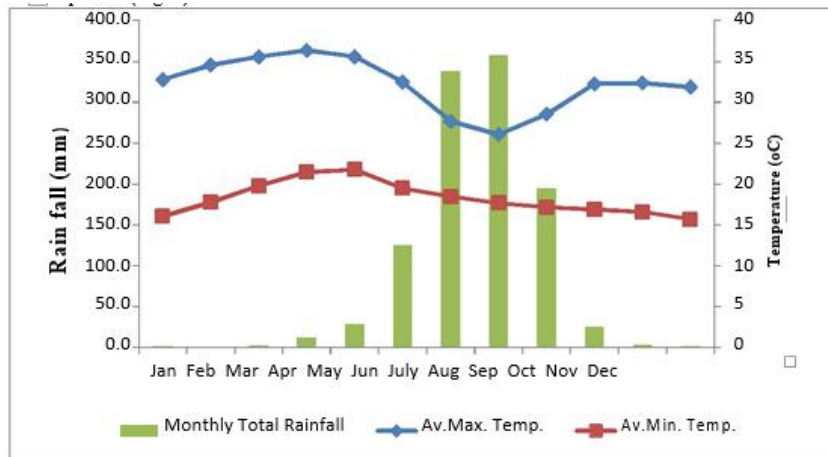


Fig. 2. Six year rainfall and temperature of the study area (Source: TNMA, 2014)

Agriculture is the main livelihood of the community in the study area. It is known for its mixed farming system, where the rural people depend on crop and livestock production and in addition with agroforestry practices for their living.

2.2. Identification of *Awir* and Source of cuttings

It is a shrub species, which is found in western zone of Tigray. Traditionally local communities of the area have been used to protect their lands from erosion by planting *Awir* on their homestead lands. Literatures were reviewed to identify and understand its agro-ecological distributions, management requirements and scientific nomenclature, but information was not found about the history of the species. In contrast, these areas have covered with *Awir* resources that have not provide multi- service functions for the local communities in particular and the region in general. So to utilize and manage the species properly as biological soil and water conservation and other socio-economic importance, its local and scientific name should be registered and Known. Hence, sample was taken to the national herbarium of Addis Ababa University for identification and characterization. The study was conducted through analysis of secondary data and supported using a participatory reconnaissance survey by employing different participatory tools, such as personal observation, transect walks, group discussions and focused group interviews. Representative peasant associations were selected for the actual study and then its main

function, area converges and distribution of the species was recorded with the help of key informants and development agents.

Awir growing localities, namely Zuria Dansha and Baeker were selected for cutting collection based on agro-ecology similarity, representativeness, accessibility, distance from the experimental site. This was done through consultation of local people and agricultural expertise by employing different tools of participatory reconnaissance survey. And then branch cuttings were collected from altitudinal range of 1000 to 1350 m.a.s.l to minimize variations among sites and cuttings. Branch cuttings were taken from shrubs that look healthy at least phenotypically with a size range of 3 cm–5 cm in DBH and 2m–4 m in height. Then cuttings were collected, loaded and transported with a great care to ovoid damages and scrapes to the planting site. As soon as arrived at the planting site, cuttings were trimmed to the required size using a sharp axe and planted in the prepared pits to protect cuttings against desiccation.

2.3. Experimental design and treatments

Site (gully) selection

The establishment of protective vegetation in a gully is usually much more difficult if run off is not handled through the channel at the same time the plants are being planted. There are gullies that are treated with mechanical measures was selected for the satisfactory flood control and revegetation (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Active gully with free grazing problem of the experimental site.

2.4. Planting techniques and managements

Many different types of control measures for handling different kinds of erosion problems have been over the last decades, even though effective conservation practices

have not yet been developed for all numerous problems and combination of problems relating to the contrasting agricultural lands and practices. It is necessary there for, to seek constantly for cheaper and more efficient ways of conserving soil. Hence, using Awir species for biological soil and water conservation was cheaper and efficient due to resistant to drought, not palatable for animals in case of areas dominated by free grazing and need less management. The question is now, how and when Awir can plant to achieve the required objectives. The study is designed to answer these questions. Two propagation techniques (stem, layering) & planting position on the gully was used to investigate which type of planting technique and position is appropriate for successful revegetation.

Cuttings of the species was collected from kafta humera where “Awir” found naturally exist. At each study experiment a total of 120 cuttings (stem & layering) was considered at side and top position of the gully. The cutting length of stem (1.5m) & layering (60cm) with a common branch girth was used in this experiment. There were 4 branch cuttings planted in double rows at spacing of 1m b/n plants and blocks when stem and layering propagation techniques used. The plot size used 5m by 4m. Each branch cutting was planted in a pit that has 30-45cm depth and a cross-sectional area of 900cm². It was placed within the fine soil of the pit and slanting lower cut will remain horizontal by keeping the cutting in an oblique position. Revegetation of gully is the plantation of the reshaped gully sides and bottom with biological species so that it reduces run off and control erosion and make the land productive. Gully revegetation implies reaching a dense vegetation cover over the entire gully surface, i.e. both sides and bottom by planting Awir species. But for successful revegetation, three conditions and steps are important: Exclude the cattle throughout the year, use cut and carry and reshape the gully sides (1 hori: 1 ver. Min). Reshaping can be done either by cutting the edges or shaping the slope in to series of steps or micro benches (every 0.75-1m distance) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Gabion check dam construction and planted branch cuttings by direct and layering on reshaped gully

2.5. Data collection

To evaluate its growth rate 30% samples were taken at the month of 1, 2, 3, 6 & 12 from the total cuttings planted and then data on total shoot number, sample shoot length, total leaf number and sample leaf length and survival rate of the cuttings were collected periodically.

2.6. Data analysis

Descriptive analysis such as mean of data was conducted on survival rates and planting methods on different growth response of morphological characteristics of planted branch cuttings and supported by photo evidences to show the effect of the species on sediment deposition and gully rehabilitation of the experiment.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Uses and characterization of *Awir*

It is an exotic shrub species, originally came from Sudan. local communities of the area have been used to protect their lands from erosion and live fence by planting on their homestead lands. The socioeconomic analysis reveals that the species has two local names; ***Awir*** and ***Serka-abebe*** (meaning flowering all year round). The species was identified and characterized by of the national herbarium of Addis Ababa University its scientific name as *Ipomoea carnea* Jac. Respondents under lined that, the main function of *Awir* is protecting land from erosion, live fence, increase soil fertility by reducing soil erosion, honey bee flora, check climatic condition and can be used as shade for wild life if planted at protected areas. In respondent's point of view, it is important to scale up this as alternative technology at areas that have gully and grazing problems. The species does not need much management but if we plant at farm lands pruning will be important to decrease its holding area coverage and it has the ability to tolerate moisture stress and grow at poor soil.



Honey bee flora



Irrigation site is protected from flood



Gully in homesteads are protected by Awir

Fig. 5. Showing local communities use for different purposes

3.2. Propagation techniques and its effect on gully reclamation

After cuttings were planted, it started to give new shoots and leaves within 5-7 days. Based on the collected data for stem/Budd planting at both side and top positions of the gully, the average result of planted cuttings was shown below (Table 1).

Table 1: descriptive analysis of branch cuttings

S.N	Planting method	shoot number	sample shoot length	sample leaf length	sample crown diameter	Survival rate
1	Stem	18.17	207.78cm	22.45cm	2.92m	97.92%
2	Bud	6.83	160.11cm	22.00 cm	1.47m	58.33

Based on the average result of the planted cuttings of stem/direct planting, its survival rate at side was greater than cuttings planted at top position of the gully. (100% at side and 95.84% at top). And for these cuttings planted by budding/layering, its survival rate at side and top positions are equal. (58.33% at side and 58.33% at top). For budding propagation method of Awir, the survival percent is decreasing due to huge flooding (side) and water logging (top) effect. Hence, when we see almost all the morphological growth characteristics of planted cuttings in stem/direct planting, promising result has shown than cuttings planted by budding/layering propagation method. Different and relevant stakeholders such as individual farmers, extension workers, researchers, the media and other concerned individuals and professionals were invited to visit the observation trial at different occasions. All the visitors and/or the respondents were aware on the newly vegetative propagation technology & underlined to scaling up for other areas that have gully problems.

223



224



225



Fig. 6. Showing by arrow large tree on the upper catchment to see the effect of the biological species on gully rehabilitation over time.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

The results suggest that *Ipomoea carnea* Jac., were the most suitable for biological soil and water conservation in agricultural areas where free grazing are the main problem. It is suggested that farmers should select high performance that adapt to harsh environmental conditions, easily established, locally available and a lower cost that bring better gully rehabilitation and environmental conservation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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257

258