



FADING FORESTS, ENCROACHING SANDS: A CRITIQUE OF NIGERIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS ON DEFORESTATION

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Abstract:

Forest resources are an important natural asset for any country, including Nigeria. It is a major carbon sink resource and a strategic and sustainable nature-based solution to climate change. It is also a natural ecosystem for most fauna and flora, a source of raw materials for some economic activities. However, the continuous depletion of this critical national resource through deforestation threatens its viability. Currently, anthropogenic-induced deforestation remains a pressing environmental challenge in Nigeria, and this is exacerbated by climate change, exponential population growth and the consequential unsustainable exploitation of forest resources for economic gains and other economic activities. The goal of this paper is to examine the impact of the extant regulatory environment relating to the protection of forest resources in the country. It argues that the legal scrutiny and control of activities that threaten our invaluable forest reserves is of utmost importance. Large-scale illegal logging, destructive mining operations, the relentless expansion of agricultural lands, and uncontrolled infrastructural development all pose serious risks that can lead to devastating deforestation and adverse consequential outcomes. These activities not only strip the land of its verdant beauty but also endanger the delicate balance of the ecosystems, making it imperative to address the impact they have on vital national treasures. It subsequently recommends a multi-stakeholder approach to forest governance and protection as comparatively practised in other countries over the decades beyond the general government-regulatory system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Forests, Regulation, Environment, Encroachment, Logging, Deforestation, Forest Management

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Deforestation and desertification pose significant environmental challenges in Nigeria, threatening biodiversity, accelerating climate change, and undermining the livelihoods of communities that depend on forest resources. The constant quest for economic growth and social development has resulted in an increased demand for resources.¹ This demand implies that humans would have to resort to measures that may have negative impacts on the natural environment such as clearing the

¹ Liang Yuan, Renyue Li, Xia Wu, Weijun He, Yang Kong, Thomas Stephen Ramsey and Dagmawi Mulugeta Degefu, 'Decoupling of Economic Growth and Resources-Environmental Pressure in the Yangtze River Economic Belt, China' *Ecological Indicators* (2023) 153 110399

forest for infrastructure development or food production, mining, and deep-sea probes.² Enaruvbe and Atafo, who studied deforestation patterns, noted that the consequences of extensive forest depletion are especially pronounced in specific regions such as South-East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and South America.³ In South-East Asia, for example, Gatti and Velichevskaya analysed how rapid deforestation driven by palm oil plantations and logging led to critical losses in biodiversity, threatening species such as the orangutan and the Sumatran tiger.⁴ Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, the cutting down of trees for agricultural expansion/small-scale farming, fuel use, and charcoal production has resulted in severe soil erosion and the disruption of local ecosystems, exacerbating issues like climate change and food insecurity.⁵ Meanwhile, in South America, particularly in the Amazon rainforest, rampant deforestation for cattle ranching, logging, and agriculture is not only driving wildlife extinction but also releasing vast amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, further intensifying global warming.⁶ Armenteras et al, for instance, reported high deforestation rates in the Colombian Amazon related to land use and various environmental and historical socio-economic factors, such as oil extraction, illegal cropping, and cattle ranching.⁷

The increasing degradation of these vital forest ecosystems poses significant risks to the environment and the livelihoods of communities that depend on them.⁸ The rapid surge in deforestation can largely be traced to the relentless hunger for arable land, driven by an expanding global population. As cities swell and communities grow, the demand for fertile soil to cultivate food intensifies, leading to the systematic clearing of vast stretches of forest. Each tree felled

² Terrapass, 'The Problems We Face With the Overconsumption of Natural Resources' (Terrapass Blog, 19 August 2022) <https://terrapass.com/blog/overconsumption-of-natural-resources/> accessed 28 June 2025.

³ Glory O Enaruvbe and OZien P Atafo, 'Analysis of deforestation pattern in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria'. *Journal of Land Use Science*, (2014). 11(1), 113–130.

⁴ Roberto Cazzolla Gatti, Alena Velichevskaya, 'Certified "sustainable" palm oil took the place of endangered Bornean and Sumatran large mammals habitat and tropical forests in the last 30 years' *Science of The Total Environment*, 742, (2020)140712; Maria Voigt, et al, 'Global Demand for Natural Resources Eliminated More Than 100,000 Bornean Orangutans' *Current Biology*, (2018) Volume 28, Issue 5, 761-769.e5,

⁵ Fisher, B. (2010). African exception to drivers of deforestation. *Nat. Geosci.* 3, 375–376; Colin A. Chapman et al, 'The future of sub-Saharan Africa's biodiversity in the face of climate and societal change' *Front. Ecol. Evol.* (2022) Volume 10 - 2022 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2022.790552>; The Africa Center for Strategic Studies,

'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' December 7, 2022. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-biodiversity-loss-risk-human-security/>

⁶ World wildlife 'What are the biggest drivers of tropical deforestation? They may not be what you think' <https://www.worldwildlife.org/magazine/issues/summer-2018/articles/what-are-the-biggest-drivers-of-tropical-deforestation>

; Greenly Earth, 'The Complex Role of the Amazon Rainforest' <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/the-complex-role-of-the-amazon-rainforest>

⁷ Armenteras, D., Rudas, G., Rodriguez, N., Sua, S., & Romero, M. (2006). Patterns and causes of deforestation in the Colombian Amazon. *Ecological Indicators*, 6, 353–368

⁸ K. K., Goldewijk, and N. Ramankutty, 'Land cover change over the last three centuries due to human activities: The availability of new global data sets' *GeoJournal*, (2004). 61, 335–344. doi:10.1007/s10708-004-5050-z

represents not just a loss of greenery, but a step closer to a precarious balance in our ecosystem, as the relentless quest for sustenance transforms lush landscapes into barren fields.

Nigeria is one of the countries struggling to combat deforestation which is a major driver of biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and desertification, exacerbating food insecurity and displacement, particularly in rural communities. Despite various state-level regulations and international commitments, Nigeria lacks a comprehensive federal framework to govern deforestation effectively. In contrast, several countries, like the United States of America, have developed multi-layered governance structures that integrate federal, state, and international policies to combat illegal logging and promote sustainable forest management. The absence of a unified legal approach in Nigeria has led to inconsistent enforcement, allowing deforestation to continue at an alarming rate.

This article examines the current policies and regulatory measures in Nigeria aimed at addressing deforestation, assessing their effectiveness in curbing illegal logging and protecting forest resources. It also identifies gaps and challenges in enforcement. Moreover, this study illustrates the importance of grassroots engagement with local communities in forest management within Nigeria's existing regulatory framework, highlighting their contributions and the limitations they face. By analysing these aspects, the paper seeks to provide insights into strengthening Nigeria's deforestation governance, drawing lessons from international best practices to propose a more cohesive and effective legal structure.

1.1 The Importance of Forestry and Impacts of Deforestation

Forestry is the practice and study of managing and conserving forested areas. It involves the systematic planning, establishment, cultivation, and harvesting of trees for various purposes such as timber production, biodiversity conservation, and maintaining the ecological balance.⁹ The definition of forestry also encompasses the protection and maintenance of forest ecosystems and the sustainable utilization of forest resources. It includes public and private forests, designated areas legally set aside for long-term forest growth and preservation. This definition highlights the multi-faceted nature of forestry and its significance in maintaining the health, productivity, and environmental benefits of forests. The types of forest reserves include government-reserved

⁹ United States Department of Agriculture, 'Forestry' <<https://www.usda.gov/topics/forestry>> accessed 6 February 2025.

forests, local administration-reserved forests, communal forest areas, and private forests. Government reserved forests are demarcated areas that have been set aside by the government for the growth of forests in perpetuity. These forests are managed and protected by government authorities. Local administration reserved forests are similar, but they are managed and protected by local administrative bodies. Communal forest areas are designated for collective use and management by local communities. These areas allow communities to sustainably utilize forest resources while conserving the ecosystem. Private forests, on the other hand, are owned and managed by individuals or private organizations. These forests play a significant role in meeting the demand for timber and other forest products.

Deforestation is the widespread destruction of forests driven by human activities seeking to satisfy various needs and demands.¹⁰ The removal of trees from the forest can be due to several factors, including clear-cutting for agriculture, energy (especially wood fuel), ranching, and unsustainable logging for timber.¹¹ Though negligible, it can also be caused by climate change or natural factors when the forest ecosystems are unable to continue to provide essential products and services to both humans and the natural world. Natural hazards which result in deforestation include erosion, diseases, damage to trees by other plants or death and decay of trees.¹² Climate change variables like temperature and wind speed can also exacerbate deforestation.¹³ Strong winds have the power to uproot trees entirely or cause a great number of trees in their path to break.¹⁴ High temperatures can cause scorching, which is the formation of a ring of scorched plant tissue around seedling stems where they come into contact with the soil.

This loss of forest cover has significant implications for the environment, including the depletion of wildlife habitats, changes in local and regional climates, and the release of substantial amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The decline of these trees to lock away carbon and the ongoing release of carbon dioxide from fire and decomposition cause greenhouse gases to rise because vast primary forests store substantial amounts of carbon. In addition to the immediate and

¹⁰ N. B., Eniolorunda, and A. G. Bello, 'Forest cover change assessment of Tangaza forest reserve, north-west of Sokoto State, Nigeria' (2011). *Ife Research Publications in Geography*, 10, 66–74.

¹¹ Adediran Daniel Ikuomola, Rashidi Akanji Okunola and Adeshina Francis Akindutire, 'Criminality: Illegal Logging of Woods in Nigeria's South-West Forest Belt' *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies: AJCJS*, (2016) 9, Issue 1.

¹² Debra Ronca & Sascha Bos, 'What Is Deforestation?' (Oct 27, 2023) <https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/deforestation.htm>

¹³ B.F., Alves de Oliveira, *et al.*, 'Deforestation and climate change are projected to increase heat stress risk in the Brazilian Amazon' *Commun Earth Environ* 2, 207 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-021-00275-8>

¹⁴ Andrew Moore 'Hurricanes Are Killing Trees. Why That's A Problem' NCSU, (October 7, 2020), <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2020/10/hurricanes-are-killing-trees/>

long-term repercussions mentioned above, the immediate result of deforestation is deteriorated soil quality and loss of biodiversity, as the plants and animals that once inhabited the area must find new homes or face extinction. When a forest is removed, it frequently has a disastrous impact on the dependent species and might result in habitat loss or fragmentation. In any case, the species' local population will start to decline and eventually go extinct. Ultimately, this can upset the food chain to such an extent that the ecosystem collapses, and the region turns into a desert. This is known in the field of ecology as the "keystone species" theory¹⁵ and is used to explain why such a high proportion of the Earth's species are found in such a small area of the planet.

Similarly, deforestation causes soil erosion that threatens lives and the ecological system.¹⁶ Without the support provided by the roots of trees, the nutrients in the soil may be washed away, making the ground unusable. Because there is less chance for the water to seep into the earth when soil is washed into rivers and streams, there is a greater chance of flooding. Widespread environmental degradation may result in the loss of cultures and livelihoods for communities that depend on forest resources for their way of life, such as those that use trees to make natural remedies and medicines. Moreover, deforestation generally has negative effects on indigenous people, leading to displacements and generating territorial disputes over scarce resources. In addition, the development of roads for trade and transportation and other modern infrastructure can lead to fragmentation of the area and impede the movement of wildlife. It also has a negative impact on species survival and may lead to a decrease in genetic diversity, which may result in more extinctions.

Wet and moist forests, such as tropical rainforests, are known as primary forests, and the trees have large canopies, abundant wildlife, and tall trees that support over 5,000mm of rain each year. With the removal of trees, the intense sunlight reaches the forest floor and rapidly dries the soil, creating hotter, drier climatic conditions that significantly impact the natural wildlife and vegetation.¹⁷ The plants and animals that once lived in the area cannot survive the rapid temperature change and disperse, often resulting in the extinction of these species.

¹⁵ Madhu Rao and Trond Larsen, 'Ecological Consequences of Extinction' Network of Conservation Educators and Practitioners, Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, American Museum of Natural History (2010)

¹⁶ Nelva B. Riquetti, Samuel Beskow, Li Guo, Carlos R. Mello, 'Soil erosion assessment in the Amazon basin in the last 60 years of deforestation,' (2023) *Environmental Research*, 236, Part 2, 116846; Sensoy Huseyin, 'Impact of Deforestation and Erosion on Some Soil Physicochemical Properties and Microbial Activity on Steep Slopes (2017) *Croatian Journal of Forest Engineering*, 45, issue: 2, 13

¹⁷ David Ellison, et al, 'Trees, forests and water: Cool insights for a hot world' *Global Environmental Change*, (2017) 43, 51-61,

Not only does deforestation contribute to species extinction and the destruction of natural habitats, but it also negatively impacts human health and welfare and impedes the advancement of science and medicine in the future.¹⁸ For example, nations with sizable rainforests—like South America, which contains the majority of the Amazon—may experience problems with property ownership and the distribution of income if their rainforests are overexploited.¹⁹

As human activities like road construction, logging, and agriculture encroach on tropical forests, the risk of virus transmission from wildlife to humans increases.²⁰ When over 25% of the original forest is lost, human-wildlife interactions become more frequent, heightening the likelihood of disease spillover. Activities such as deforestation further facilitate forest preservation to mitigate future pandemics.

1.1.1 Depletion of Forest Resources in Nigeria

Deforestation in Nigeria, the act of human-induced forest removal for purposes like timber extraction or land clearance for agriculture and urbanization, has emerged as a critical problem.²¹ This stems from the nation's rising demand for timber, fuelwood, and agricultural space, among others. For example, the United Nations data reveals that Nigeria has the world's highest deforestation rate, losing approximately 3.7% of its forest cover annually.²² In another instance, the Akure-Ofosu Forest Reserve was set up to protect rainforest areas in Nigeria. But fire and logging are rampant in the reserve, with satellite data showing it has lost 44% of its primary forest cover in just two decades.²³ Poverty is seen as a driving force behind deforestation, with four in ten Nigerians living in poverty in 2019, according to the World Bank.²⁴

The expansion of agricultural activities, logging and timber extraction, and infrastructure development are the main causes of deforestation in the country.²⁵ This rampant deforestation has

¹⁸ Megan Clark, 'Deforestation in Madagascar: Consequences of Population Growth and Unsustainable Agricultural Processes' *Global Majority E-Journal*, (2012), Vol. 3, No. 1, 61-71; Kahrić Adla, Kulijer Dejan, Dedić Neira, Šnjegota Dragana, 'Chapter 9 - Degradation of ecosystems and loss of ecosystem services', In Joana C. Prata, Ana Isabel Ribeiro, Teresa Rocha-Santos (eds), *One Health* (Academic Press, 2022) 281-327,

¹⁹ Rhett A. Butler, 'Consequences of Deforestation' *World Rainforests* April 1, 2019 <https://worldrainforests.com/09-consequences-of-deforestation.html>; WWF, 'The Amazon Rainforest' - <https://www.wwf.org.uk/where-we-work/amazon>

²⁰ The Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' December 7, 2022. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-biodiversity-loss-risk-human-security/>

²¹ DGB Group "Deforestation in Nigeria: causes, effects, and solutions" accessed March 6th 2024.

<https://www.green.earth/blog/deforestation-in-nigeria-causes-effects-and-solutions>

²² Ibid

²³ Morgan Erickson-Davis, 'What is the Link between Rising Deforestation and Poverty in Nigeria?' (Nature and Biodiversity, World Economic Forum, March 31, 2022) <<https://www.weforum.org/stories/authors/morgan-erickson-davis/>> accessed 6 March 2025.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Mayowa Fasona and others, 'Drivers of Deforestation and Land-Use Change in Southwest Nigeria' in Leal Filho (ed.), *Handbook of Climate Change Resilience* (Springer Nature 2018); Green Earth, 'Deforestation in Nigeria: causes, effects, and solutions' <https://green.earth/blog/deforestation-in-nigeria-causes-effects-and-solutions>

led to the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, increased carbon emissions and climate change, and the disruption of local communities and livelihoods.²⁶ Furthermore, local communities and livelihoods have been negatively affected by the destruction of forests. Addressing deforestation in Nigeria is of crucial importance due to its significant environmental, social, and economic impacts. Preserving and restoring forests in Nigeria is crucial to lowering atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels and limiting the release of new greenhouse gases. This also aligns with Nigeria's commitment to the Paris Agreement's goal of a global temperature increase of less than two degrees Celsius (2°C) over pre-industrial levels. It is within this context that this paper examines whether and how legal and policy frameworks have been deployed as useful tools in addressing this menace in the country.

1.2 Regulating the Use of Forest Resources in Nigeria

1.2.1 Policy regulations serve as essential frameworks that guide and govern the actions of individuals and organizations within a society. By establishing clear rules and guidelines, they ensure compliance, accountability, and the protection of rights and resources. Some of the policy guidelines for forest conservation are as follows.

The Nigerian National Policy on the Environment

The Nigerian National Policy on the Environment, revised in 2016, establishes a comprehensive framework that guides the Nigerian government in addressing various sectors that potentially affect the country's environmental health.²⁷ Among the critical issues highlighted in this policy is deforestation, which poses significant threats to biodiversity, climate stability, and the livelihoods of communities that rely on forest resources. The policy emphasizes the importance of sustainable land management practices, conservation of natural ecosystems, and the need for collaborative efforts across sectors to mitigate the adverse effects of deforestation and promote environmental sustainability in Nigeria. It starts by acknowledging the menace of 'increasing deforestation, soil degradation, deterioration and desertification' in the country.²⁸ At the centre of the causes of the continuous depletion of forest resources with its impacts on biodiversity and human needs are bush

²⁶ HI Aigbe, SO Oluku, 'Depleting forest resources of Nigeria and its impact on climate' *Journal of Agriculture and Social Research (JASR)* Vol. 12 No. 2 (2012); Oga Omoyemi, (2023) *An Assessment of the Effects of Deforestation On Biodiversity in OJO, Lagos State, Nigeria*. Glob J Ecol 8(2): 075-080.

²⁷ Available at web site <http://environment.gov.ng>

²⁸ Federal Ministry of Environment, 'National Policy on the Environment (Revised 2016)', para. 4.9 <<https://www.nesrea.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/National-Policy-on-Environment.pdf>> accessed 16 February 2025.

burning, illegal or unsustainable logging practices, the spread of agricultural activities into forest reserves, soil degradation, and forest fires, among others.²⁹ This policy provides the government strategies towards addressing the causes of deforestation identified above and achieving its sustainability objective through forest conservation and other practical tools for reforestation and restoration of the applicable resources. These include:

- a. Regulating the sustainable exploitation of forest resources for economic uses and enhancing conservation and environmentally sound management practices.
- b. Nursing the quantitative and qualitative improvement of forest cover and their impacts using conventional means and modern technology.
- c. Providing data on the balance between the nation's forest biomass and the prevailing environment and changes in the forest biomass is considered to have a significant impact on the environment.
- d. Strengthening forest protection programmes to ensure adequate vegetation cover in critical areas and mitigate harmful forest resource exploitation.
- e. Assessing the state of natural vegetation resources and identifying endangered sites and species for priority action.
- f. Protecting flora and fauna in danger of extinction and forest reserves for scientific, recreational, and other cultural purposes.
- g. Encouraging reforestation and afforestation programmes and activities with a view to rectifying forest losses and the adverse effects of deforestation.
- h. Combining desirable features of traditional approach with modern scientific methods of conservation.
- i. Increasing support of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community tree planting programmes.
- j. Promoting the development of alternative energy sources while supporting programmes for the development of more efficient methods of wood energy use.

²⁹ Ibid.

- k. Protecting forests from bush and forest fires and taking measures to discourage wanton destruction of forest resources.
- l. Developing and disseminating scientific and technological information conducive to more efficient use of forest resources and wildlife, among others.

The National Policy on the Environment is a foundational policy document that directs decision-making concerning strategic policies and actions to achieve a sustainable economy. However, will, like any policy statement, is devoid of normative value, as no polluter or violator will be subjected to a penalty or other sanctions.³⁰ The existing policy fails to incorporate adequate punitive measures that could effectively deter unwanted behavior. Without the implementation of specific consequences, there is little motivation for individuals to comply with the established guidelines. This lack of deterrence not only undermines the policy's overall impact but also allows potential violations to go unchecked, thereby diminishing the seriousness of the regulations in place. In other words, the national forestry policy is a municipal soft law because it does not allocate and enforce rights and responsibilities regarding forest regulation among the various tiers of government in the country.³¹ It merely gives policy directives which can better be fortified by statutes and other hard law instruments that prescribe normative and implementation frameworks regarding forest resources conservation and allied matters. Furthermore, although the policy serves as a comprehensive synthesis of various policies related to environmental issues, it falls short in several critical areas, particularly when it comes to elaborating on specific strategies for mitigating deforestation and combating land degradation. This oversight means that essential components, such as targeted reforestation efforts, sustainable land management practices, and community engagement in conservation efforts, are not adequately addressed. As a result, the policy lacks a nuanced approach to effectively tackle the pressing challenges posed by habitat loss and soil erosion, which are crucial for maintaining ecological balance and supporting biodiversity. This notwithstanding, it is a fulcrum that guides and drives legal and regulatory responses to effective forestry use and regulation in Nigeria.

The National Forest Policy, 2006

³⁰ It has similarly been observed regarding plastics policy in Nigeria that, as a “policy document, it is not expected to deal in detail with technical issues pertaining to a given subject. It gives life and form to other laws, regulations and guidance documents related to the subject matter.” See Sradev Nigeria, “Transposition of the Basel Convention Amendment in Nigeria: National Policy on Plastics Wastes Management: Gaps and Recommendations” (Policy Brief No. 1, 2021) <<https://sradev.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Plastic-Waste-Amendment-Policy-Brief.pdf>> accessed 5 April 2024.

³¹ B Fajemirokun, ‘Making the Case for Reforms of Forestry Policy and Law: Lessons and Experiences from Nigeria’ (2021) *Environmental Policy and Law* 51 (2021) 321 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3233/EPL-201004>> accessed 17 February 2025.

Similarly, The National Forest Policy of 2006 outlines the strategic framework and regulatory guidelines that shape the forestry sector in Nigeria. This policy establishes clear objectives aimed at sustainable forest management, conservation of biodiversity, and the promotion of socio-economic benefits derived from forest resources. It emphasizes the importance of stakeholder participation, addressing issues such as deforestation, illegal logging, and land degradation while advocating for the integration of forestry practices into national development plans. Additionally, the policy serves as a platform for enhancing collaboration among government agencies, local communities, and non-governmental organizations to ensure the sustainable use and preservation of Nigeria's rich forest ecosystems.³² It provides guidelines for the sustainable management and utilization of forest resources. The policy aims to promote responsible forestry practices, conservation of biodiversity, and the protection of forest ecosystems. It addresses the issue of indiscriminate deforestation for timber and other forest products by granting extensive powers to combat such activities. The first Nigeria Forest Policy was approved in 1988 as part of an Agricultural Policy.³³ It was also geared towards achieving self-sufficiency in wood products by applying sound forest principles and techniques.³⁴ The policy also aimed to mobilize human and material resources for forestry conservation. Although this policy represents an important step forward, it ultimately lacks the necessary strength to function as a true legal regulator. Specifically, it does not establish enforceable obligations that would hold individuals or organizations accountable. Moreover, without the implementation of punitive measures, there is no mechanism to effectively deter potential violations or to impose consequences on those who fail to comply. This deficiency diminishes the potential impact of the policy, as it does not create a framework that actively promotes adherence or penalizes misconduct in a meaningful way.

The National Policy on Climate Change

Another action plan policy that supports combative efforts and protective measures is the National Policy on Climate Change (NFAP).³⁵ The NFAP is instrumental in promoting sustainable forest management practices across Nigeria, thereby reinforcing the country's commitment to combat

³² Ibid; see also the Forestry Law of Bayelsa State, Chapter 51 (A Law to provide for the establishment of Forest Trust Fund and for other purposes connected therewith).

³³ G C Ujor, 'The Forest Policies of Nigeria: A Cursory Analysis' (2018) 5(1) *Nigerian Agricultural Policy Research Journal (NAPReJ)* 20–30 <http://www.apnetworkng.org>

³⁴ G. C. Ujor, 'The forest policies of Nigeria: a cursory analysis' *Nigerian Agricultural Policy Research Journal (NAPReJ)* Vol. 5, Iss. 1, (2018). Federal Ministry of Environment (2002). Proceedings of the South East Zonal Stakeholders' Workshop on the Review of the National Forest Policy and the Draft National Forestry Act, Enugu

³⁵ Federal Ministry of Environment (Department Of Climate Change) 'National Policy On Climate Change' Federal Ministry Of Environment.

climate change. This comprehensive framework not only guides forest conservation efforts but also facilitates the responsible utilization of forest resources to optimize environmental benefits. It, therefore, also acts as a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring sustainable forest management and promoting a participatory process of development.³⁶ It focuses on facilitating private sector involvement in forestry development and adopting an integrated approach to forestry development. The NFAP comprises three sub-programmes: forest management, social forestry, and forest industries. These sub-programmes, if fully implemented, have the potential to significantly increase Nigeria's forest cover for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Furthermore, the NFAP enables Nigeria to participate in the REDD+ global programme, providing the country with opportunities to benefit from international initiatives related to reducing deforestation and forest degradation emissions.

In addition, the Forestry Management, Evaluation, and Coordinating Unit (FORMECU) plays a vital supervisory role in overseeing various afforestation initiatives throughout Nigeria. FORMECU is tasked with coordinating the implementation of these programs, ensuring they align with national objectives for biodiversity preservation, habitat restoration, and carbon sequestration. By monitoring these efforts, FORMECU helps to enhance the effectiveness of forest management strategies and encourages community involvement in sustainable practices, ultimately contributing to a healthier ecosystem and better climate resilience for the nation.

Despite being a well-structured and thorough policy designed to address various issues; these challenges may include inadequate resources, lack of stakeholder engagement, or insufficient training for implementation. Infrastructure deficits also limit the capacity to respond to climate change impacts, such as flooding and erosion. In the same vein, the inaccessibility of remote regions makes it difficult to implement and monitor programs. Financial and budget economic constraints compound these issues. Heavy reliance on fossil fuels for economic stability further complicates the transition to greener alternatives and makes it harder to control the effect. The vulnerability of Nigeria's economy to climate-related shocks, such as changes in agricultural productivity is another glaring challenge to the effective impact of this policy, all of which impede the policy's intended impact and success.

1.2.2 Statutory Regulation

³⁶ Ibid.

Forestry is inarguably part of the agricultural sector. This being the case, it is a matter within the regulatory competence of both the federal and state governments in Nigeria, depending on where the forest reserve is located. Items 18 and 20 to the Second Schedule to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic (as Amended)³⁷ provide for agriculture as a matter under the concurrent legislative list – over which both tiers of government possess powers to make laws. In the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, and in federal lands found all over the nation, the federal government, through the National Assembly, exercises law-making competence over such forest resources, especially in relation to the eight national parks in the country.³⁸ While the regulatory powers over forests in Nigeria lie with the states, the federal government plays an advisory role and coordinates or monitors projects funded by the federal government³⁹ over forest reserves or protected areas owned by states or under their regulatory remit. However, regarding those situated in the states and local governments, the Houses of Assembly of the various states of the federation make laws regulating their use. Forestry legislation and regulations in the various states in Nigeria play a crucial role in combating deforestation.⁴⁰ These laws aim to protect the country's forests and natural resources by imposing regulations on timber extraction, logging activities, and the expansion of agricultural activities. For example, the Forestry Law of Bayelsa State makes provision for the sustainable management and conservation of forests, as well as measures to mitigate the impacts of deforestation on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and climate change.⁴¹

Preceding this decentralized governance system over forest resources in the country, there was a centralized forest management and regulatory system in the country, especially during colonial rule and the early post-independence period. The Forest Act 1958 serves as the governing legislation for the forestry sector in the country.⁴² Its purpose was to regulate and control activities related to forestry, particularly focusing on issues such as deforestation and sustainable practices. Flowing from the above, states have promulgated Laws regulating the exploitation, management,

³⁷ Cap. 24, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

³⁸ Hans Gregersen, et al, 'Forest Governance in Federal Systems: An Overview of Experiences and Implications for Decentralization' <https://www.cifor-icraf.org/publications/pdf_files/interlaken/Interlaken_pre-paper.pdf> accessed 1 March 2025.

³⁹ Owolabi Saka-rasaq, 'Forest Loss in Nigeria, the Impact on Climate and People from the perspectives of illegal Forest activities and Government Negligence' (Bachelor Degree's Thesis, Raseborg, 2019) <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333557763>> accessed 3 March 2025.

⁴⁰ Federal Ministry of Environment, 'Approved National Forest Policy, 2006' Federal Ministry of Environment Abuja. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/15148-0c4acebeb8e7e45af360ec63fcc4c1678.pdf>

⁴¹ Section 3, Bayelsa State Forestry Law, Cap. 51, Laws of Bayelsa State, 1998, available at <<https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/nig203191.pdf>> accessed 2 March, 2025.

⁴² Esegbe Joseph Omon and Oni Mildred Ilobekemen, 'Legal and Regulatory Reforms of Forest Resources Conservation in Edo South, Edo State, Nigeria Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization Vol.72, (2018) 38.

and protection of forest resources in the country. The Forestry Laws of the States are similar in form and content.

The Forestry Law of Bayelsa State will be examined as a mirror reflecting the nation's overarching regulatory landscape. Section 2 of this Law creates a fund for forest resources protection and management without detailing the sources of such a fund besides government support, which is usually insufficient or not forthcoming at all. This is because funding the protection of such resources from budgetary allocations and charges made by forest officials for the use of those resources are usually insignificant to support any productive activity bordering on the protection of this vital asset.

The Forestry Law applicable in Bayelsa State empowers the Commissioner of Agriculture to designate specially protected areas⁴³ and equally grants him the power to licence the exploitation of forest produce in the state's forest reserves.⁴⁴ The Law similarly has penal sanctions for unauthorized exploitation of forest resources, uprooting of trees, setting fires in forest areas, hunting, and building, among others.⁴⁵ It imposes a penalty of five years imprisonment or ten thousand Naira fine or both for any violation of its provisions.

Finally, the Law empowers the Commissioner to make rules that address issues pertaining to the protection of forest produce, regulate the setting of fires, prohibit the taking or destruction of timber within forest areas and empower the forest officers, administrative officers or the police to stop the transportation of any suspicious timber or similar produce from the forests or seize such items pending investigation.⁴⁶

In the same vein, some state laws complement the Nigerian Forestry Policy and play a vital role in the regulation and enforcement of forestry activities at the state level. For example, the Forestry Law of Sokoto State⁴⁷ provides for the preservation and control of forests. The Law makes special provisions for the creation of forest reserves and protected forests. The procedure for constituting a forest reserve is also stated in the legislation. It also prohibits the illegal felling of timber, illegal installation or operation of sawmills, and fines/punishment are imposed for violations. Likewise, the Forestry Law of Lagos State establishes specific land areas known as forest reserves, where

⁴³ Sections 15(2) and 23, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Section 39, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Section 50, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sections 44 and 45, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Forestry Law of Sokoto State, section

activities are permissible only upon obtaining a license.⁴⁸ Violations of the Act's regulations can result in penalties, including fines and imprisonment. This legislation serves as a foundation for promoting sustainable forestry practices in Nigeria and ensuring the long-term ecological stability and economic viability of the country's forests.

It is worth adding that while some states have enacted environmental regulations, the absence of a comprehensive federal deforestation law poses a challenge to preventing deforestation. Without a doubt, Nigeria's forests are rapidly disappearing due to rampant deforestation driven by illegal logging, agricultural expansion, and unsustainable land-use practices. This environmental crisis contributes to climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, and the displacement of communities dependent on forests for their livelihoods, and these must be combated through comprehensive legal control, management and liability. The absence of federal legislation also leads to inconsistencies in enforcement, allowing loopholes that industries and individuals exploit. Without a unified legal framework, state-level efforts remain fragmented, limiting their effectiveness in addressing large-scale deforestation. A national deforestation law would establish clear, enforceable standards that apply uniformly across all states, ensuring that weak or conflicting policies do not undermine conservation efforts.

Beyond harmonizing regulatory frameworks, a federal deforestation law must address emerging issues in deforestation control by restricting the use of wood from illegally deforested land. Holding individuals, companies, and organizations accountable for their role in deforestation is essential to ensuring effective environmental governance. Such legislation should require companies to certify that wood and wood products were not sourced from illegally deforested land and mandate supply chain traceability reporting for commodities linked to deforestation. Additionally, it should recognise illegal deforestation as a federal financial crime, strengthen legal tools to combat deforestation-related corruption and provide funding to assist foreign governments in addressing illegal deforestation in Nigeria. By implementing these measures, Nigeria can create a more transparent, enforceable, and globally aligned framework to curb deforestation, protect its natural resources, and promote sustainable development.

⁴⁸ See also the Complimentary Forestry Protection and Soil Conservation Law of Lagos State.

Alternatively, a variety of targeted federal legislation could be developed to effectively combat, control, manage, and restore Nigeria's forest resources. This could include laws aimed at preventing illegal logging and deforestation, promoting sustainable land use practices, and enforcing penalties for violations. Additionally, initiatives could focus on reforestation efforts, incentivizing communities to engage in conservation projects, and establishing protected areas to safeguard critical habitats. By implementing comprehensive policies and fostering collaboration with local stakeholders, Nigeria can work towards preserving its invaluable forest ecosystems for future generations. Comparatively, deforestation governance in the United States involves a combination of federal, state, and local regulations aimed at managing forest resources, preventing illegal logging, and promoting sustainable land use. Similar to Nigeria, the U.S. does not have a single comprehensive federal deforestation law, but several statutes and policies contribute to its governance. Key federal laws include:

The Lacey Act (1900, amended 2008): Prohibits the trade of illegally sourced timber and wood products and holds companies accountable for ensuring their supply chains do not contribute to illegal deforestation domestically or abroad.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 1969): Requires environmental impact assessments for projects that may lead to deforestation or habitat destruction.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA, 1973): Protects habitats critical to endangered species, indirectly limiting deforestation in certain areas.

The Forest Service Organic Act (1897) and The National Forest Management Act (1976): Regulate the management and conservation of national forests, ensuring sustainable timber harvesting and land use.

The Farm Bill (updated every five years): Includes provisions such as the Forest Legacy Program, which funds conservation easements to prevent deforestation on private lands.

1.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Process

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process plays a crucial role in Nigeria's legal framework aimed at regulating deforestation and ensuring responsible land use practices. This process involves a comprehensive evaluation of the potential environmental consequences associated with proposed development projects, which may include large-scale logging operations, infrastructure advancements, and other activities that can impact forest ecosystems. At the heart

of the EIA process is the requirement for project proponents to systematically identify and analyse the possible environmental impacts their projects may cause. This analysis extends to factors such as biodiversity loss, soil erosion, water quality degradation, and effects on local communities and indigenous populations. Additionally, project developers are mandated to propose effective mitigation measures to alleviate potential harm, which may involve restoration plans, conservation strategies, or alternative approaches to project design.

Engagement with stakeholders and affected communities is a vital component of this process. Project proponents are required to actively involve these groups to ensure their voices are heard and considered in decision-making. This engagement often includes meetings, workshops, and public forums where community members can express their concerns and provide valuable insights regarding the project's impact on their livelihoods and environment.

Furthermore, the EIA process incorporates a public consultation period, allowing for a transparent dialogue between project developers, regulatory bodies, and the public. This period serves as an opportunity for further discourse and refinement of project plans based on community feedback.

By embedding the EIA process within its legal framework, Nigeria is empowered to thoroughly assess the environmental repercussions of activities leading to deforestation. This allows for more informed decision-making processes that prioritize the protection of vital forest resources and promote the preservation of the nation's rich biodiversity for future generations.

1.4 Challenges and a Way Forward

Deforestation in Nigeria presents several challenges that need to be addressed to regulate and combat this environmental issue effectively.

Enforcement Challenge: One major challenge is the weak enforcement of existing laws and regulations.⁴⁹ Despite the presence of relevant legislation such as the Forestry Act, state laws and Regulations, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), enforcement has been lacking. This has allowed illegal logging and timber extraction to persist, leading to continued deforestation. The weak enforcement also contributes to the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as the disruption of local communities and

⁴⁹ Y.M Ahmed and E.D Oruonye, (2017) 'Challenges of Enforcement of Forestry Legislation in Taraba State, Nigeria,' *International Journal of Geography and Geology*, Conscientia Beam, vol. 6(3), pages 48-57; Khalid Raji, 'Challenges Facing Policies Against Deforestation in Nigeria' (Jan 18th 2022) <https://earth.org/challenges-facing-policies-against-deforestation-in-nigeria/>

livelihoods. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, including collaborative efforts between government agencies, law enforcement, and local communities.

Addressing other implementation gaps, such as adequate funding and resources to implement policies effectively and ensure effective coordination among various governmental agencies and stakeholders involved in deforestation efforts, are steps that can contribute to its mitigation and management.

Political Will and Commitment: The varying levels of political will to address deforestation, which is a pressing environmental issue, directly influence how consistently policies are implemented and prioritized. When political leaders acknowledge the urgency of deforestation, they are more likely to allocate resources, create supportive legislation, and establish initiatives aimed at conservation. However, periods of diminished enthusiasm can lead to lapses in policy enforcement, funding cuts, and a lack of innovative approaches to tackling this critical challenge.

Moreover, ensuring sustained commitment to combating deforestation over time proves to be complex, particularly with changes in administration. Each new leadership can shift focus and resources away from environmental agendas, often prioritizing short-term economic growth or other immediate concerns. This inconsistency can undermine long-term strategies designed to protect forests, making it crucial to foster a bipartisan approach that embeds environmental stewardship into the core governance framework.

Implementing Global Environmental Standards to Control Deforestation in Nigeria: The challenge of harmonizing national policies with international climate agreements and frameworks is a significant hurdle for Nigeria. This difficulty is particularly evident in the country's efforts to adopt and enforce global environmental standards aimed at curbing deforestation. Several international treaties and agreements have been established to promote sustainable forest management, combat deforestation, and address the environmental impacts of forest degradation. These agreements aim to foster global cooperation, protect biodiversity, and mitigate climate change by ensuring that forests are managed responsibly. Key global forest-related treaties and agreements include: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) & The Paris Agreement (1992, 2015): These agreements recognize the role of forests in carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation. Initiatives such as Reducing Emissions from

Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) were developed under the UNFCCC to provide financial incentives for developing countries to protect and restore forests. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992): This treaty aims to conserve biological diversity, including forest ecosystems, through sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits. The Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework emphasize forest conservation as a key priority. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD, 1994): Focused on addressing land degradation and desertification, this treaty highlights the importance of sustainable forest management in preventing desertification, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions like northern Nigeria. The Forest Principles & Agenda 21 (1992): Adopted at the Rio Earth Summit, the Forest Principles are non-legally binding guidelines promoting sustainable forest management. Agenda 21 also emphasizes the need for national policies to prevent deforestation and support community participation.

The International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA, 1983, revised 1994 & 2006): This agreement, overseen by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), aims to promote the sustainable trade of tropical timber while ensuring environmental conservation and fair economic benefits for timber-producing countries. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES, 1973): This treaty regulates the trade of endangered tree species, such as rosewood and mahogany, to prevent illegal logging and deforestation driven by commercial exploitation. The New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF, 2014): A voluntary, non-binding agreement endorsed by governments, corporations, and NGOs, the NYDF aims to halve deforestation by 2020 and end it by 2030 while restoring millions of hectares of degraded land. The Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use (2021): Signed during COP26, this agreement commits countries to halting and reversing deforestation by 2030, with funding support for conservation efforts and sustainable land-use policies. These international agreements serve as crucial frameworks for guiding national policies and encouraging global collaboration in forest conservation. However, their effectiveness depends on national implementation, enforcement mechanisms, and financial commitments in Nigeria.

These standards are essential for preserving Nigeria's rich biodiversity and addressing environmental degradation. Even when efforts are made to align local policies, however, the integration of these international commitments into national legislation and practice often

encounters obstacles such as limited resources, varying local governance capabilities, and socio-economic pressures that prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Therefore, effectively controlling deforestation in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that aligns local actions with the overarching goals of international climate initiatives.

Lack of Awareness and Education on Sustainable Forestry Practices: Despite the legal framework in place for regulating deforestation in Nigeria, a significant challenge lies in the lack of awareness and education on sustainable forestry practices. Many individuals and communities are unaware of the long-term environmental consequences of deforestation and the importance of preserving forests for biodiversity and ecosystem services. This lack of awareness contributes to the continued expansion of agricultural activities, logging, and the continuation of destructive activities and infrastructure development without proper consideration for sustainable practices.

To address these issues, there is a need for comprehensive education campaigns that highlight the benefits of sustainable forestry and promote the adoption of responsible practices. Additionally, empowering local communities through education and advocacy can enhance their capacity to participate in forest conservation efforts and ensure the sustainable management of Nigeria's forests. Furthermore, strengthening community participation and engagement is crucial. By involving local communities in decision-making processes, they can become more invested in sustainable forestry practices and have a greater sense of ownership and responsibility. This can lead to more effective and long-lasting solutions to deforestation. Additionally, increased nationwide publicity campaigns and education on sustainable forestry practices are needed to ensure compliance with existing laws.

Specific Laws and Focus On Illegal Logging And Encroachment: To combat illegal logging, regulations must focus on strict enforcement of laws requiring documentation of timber origin, robust certification systems for sustainable forestry practices, and strong penalties for companies importing or trading illegally sourced wood, with key examples like the Lacey Act in the United States which prohibits the trade of illegal timber products within the country and helps monitor the source of imported wood products.

Unregulated Land Use, Forest Depletion and Conflicts: As aforementioned, agriculture activities, development efforts, and urban development present significant challenges that can lead to unsustainable land use and rapid forest depletion. As agricultural expansion encroaches on

forested areas to meet the growing demand for food and resources, the delicate balance between preserving biodiversity and supporting human livelihoods often tips in favour of short-term gains. Urban development, driven by population growth and economic pressures, further exacerbates this situation, as cities expand into previously undeveloped landscapes, fragmenting ecosystems and displacing wildlife. Furthermore, tensions arising from the displacement of communities due to climate change, socioeconomic disparities, and conflict can contribute to an unhealthy reliance on forest resources. When communities lose their traditional lands, they may turn to forests for survival, increasing pressure on these vital ecosystems. This dependency complicates conservation efforts and makes it challenging to implement effective measures until the situation becomes dire. By the time attention is finally focused on deforestation, it may already be too late to reverse the damage.

To tackle these interconnected issues, the law must adopt a multifaceted approach that addresses various aspects, including Integrated Land Use Planning: Developing comprehensive land use plans that prioritize sustainable practices can help reconcile agricultural, urban, and conservation needs. Strategies should be adopted to encourage the collaboration of stakeholders, including local communities, farmers, urban planners, and conservationists, to create strategies that balance economic development with environmental protection. Legislative mechanisms can be adopted to encourage agroforestry practices, which combine agriculture and forestry, to enhance productivity while preserving forest cover. This approach allows farmers to cultivate crops alongside trees, improving biodiversity and soil health while providing additional income. In the same light, legislative tools can be deployed to promote reforestation and afforestation efforts to help restore degraded lands and recover lost ecosystems. Numerous authors have advocated for reforestation initiatives. Ogbuene, who explored the effects of rainfall variability and deforestation in south-eastern Nigeria by analysing historical rainfall data, identified soil erosion, flood disasters, reduced stream volumes, seasonal droughts, and rising carbon emissions as some of the effects connected to rainfall variability and deforestation in the region.⁵⁰ Ogbuene consequently recommended that implementing afforestation, creating forest and game reserves, and applying necessary adaptation strategies could help alleviate these environmental issues. Effiong who also investigated deforestation in the Calabar River catchment area of south-eastern Nigeria, emphasized the urgent

⁵⁰ E. B. Ogbuene, 'Environmental consequences of rainfall variability and deforestation in southeastern Nigeria' *International Journal of Water and Soil Resources Research*, (2010). 1, 100–115.

need to control the current rate of forest loss in the region through reforestation measures.⁵¹ It follows that implementing policies that prioritize sustainable land use and provide financial incentives for conservation can drive change. This might include subsidies for sustainable farming practices, tax breaks for conservation efforts, or payments for ecosystem services that reward landowners for maintaining forest cover.

Multi-sectoral Challenges: Despite the implementation of various statutory measures aimed at environmental protection, significant challenges continue to threaten the sustainability of the ecosystems. Among these are the alarming rates of deforestation driven by urban sprawl, the devastating impacts of wildfires, and the ongoing conversion of forests into agricultural land. To address these issues effectively, a multi-faceted approach involving legal frameworks and policy interventions is essential including strengthening land use regulations. Authorities could enhance zoning laws to limit urban sprawl into forested areas. Implementing stricter controls on land development can help protect vulnerable ecosystems from encroaching urbanization. Establishing and funding comprehensive fire management plans, which include controlled burns and community awareness programs, can mitigate the risk and impact of wildfires, preserving forest health.

By advancing these multi-sectoral law and policy-related solutions, Nigeria can combat deforestation and promote a sustainable balance between development and environmental conservation.

1.5 The Role of Local Communities in Forest Management Within Nigeria's Regulatory Framework

It is worth reiterating that local communities and grassroots engagement play a crucial role in forest management and conservation in Nigeria, as they are often the primary stewards of forest resources.⁵² Through traditional knowledge and indigenous practices, many communities engage in sustainable land use, agroforestry, and afforestation initiatives to protect and restore degraded lands. Community-based forest management programs, supported by non-governmental

⁵¹ J. Effiong, 'Changing pattern of land use in the Calabar river catchment, southeastern Nigeria' *Journal of Sustainable Development*, (2011). 4, 92–102.

⁵² FOA, 'Present Status of The Forestry Sector Of Nigeria' <https://www.fao.org/4/ab592e/ab592e03.htm>

organizations (NGOs) and international partners, have contributed to conservation efforts by promoting participatory governance and reforestation projects. Additionally, some local groups collaborate with state forestry agencies to monitor illegal logging activities and enforce conservation rules. Examples include Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF): Founded in 1980, the NCF's Green Recovery Nigeria (GRN) initiative aims to increase forest cover by 2047. The NCF also has an "Adopt-A-Tree" program;⁵³ WINCO: A women-led NGO that works to combat deforestation and support local food production;⁵⁴ South West Niger Delta Forest Project: An NGO that works to conserve threatened wildlife and habitats in southern Nigeria;⁵⁵ NABU: An NGO that works to promote sustainable forest management and alternative sources of income from forest products.⁵⁶

However, despite these contributions, local communities face significant limitations within Nigeria's existing regulatory framework. Many forest policies are designed at the state or federal level without adequately incorporating community participation, leading to a disconnect between legislation and grassroots realities. Land tenure insecurity further weakens local engagement, as communities often lack formal rights to the forests they depend on, making them vulnerable to land grabs and exploitation by commercial loggers. Limited access to funding, technical support, and legal recognition also hinders their ability to implement long-term conservation strategies. Strengthening community involvement in forest governance through legal empowerment, resource allocation, and inclusive policymaking is essential for sustainable forest management in Nigeria.

1.6 Conclusion

Tackling the pressing issue of deforestation necessitates a united and multifaceted approach that brings together various stakeholders, including government bodies, private enterprises, civil society organizations, and local communities. It is imperative that these groups collaborate to effectively implement existing policies and regulations aimed at protecting forests.

⁵³ NCFN, 'Forest Programme', <https://ncfnigeria.org/forest-green-recovery-nigeria/#:~:text=Forest%20Programme,Sustainable%20Livelihoods>

⁵⁴ Ava Eucker. 'What challenges are African forests facing? Meet two remarkable women safeguarding these crucial ecosystems' 26 August 2024 <https://thinklandscape.globallandscapesforum.org/69615/what-challenges-are-african-forests-facing/#:~:text=Along%20with%20the%20rest%20of,by%20creating%20biodiversity%20rich%20ecosystems.&text=WINCO%20works%20in%20the%20Stubbs,woman%20conservationist%20steadily%20restore%20it.%E2%80%9D>

⁵⁵ Daniel Whyte, 'NGO fighting to save threatened species in southern Nigeria' August 22, 2023. <https://www.oneearth.org/ngo-fighting-to-save-threatened-species-in-southern-nigeria/#:~:text=According%20to%20Rachel%20Ashegbofe%20Ikemeh,our%20programs%2C%E2%80%9D%20she%20said.>

⁵⁶ NABU, 'Forest protection in Nigeria Conservation of the community forest Iko Esai and its biodiversity' <https://en.nabu.de/topics/ecosystems/iko-esai-project/index.html#:~:text=Our%20activities,implement%20local%20forest%20protection%20statutes>

To achieve meaningful results, we must focus on strengthening the enforcement of these laws, ensuring that they are not just guidelines but actionable commitments. Furthermore, adopting collaborative strategies that engage all stakeholders is crucial. This can include community-led initiatives that empower local populations to manage and protect their natural resources effectively. Innovative solutions play a vital role in this process. For instance, utilizing technology to monitor deforestation activities, implementing sustainable agricultural practices that minimize land-use impact, and promoting reforestation efforts can significantly contribute to fostering resilience in our ecosystems. By prioritizing these comprehensive strategies, the state, individuals, and organizations can work towards a more sustainable future where economic development and environmental conservation go hand-in-hand.