



POLICY BRIEF

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Addressing the issue of Deforestation in Nigeria: The Need for Legislative Action

*Authors: Dr. Martins Solomon Udom,
Oche Okoh Samson & Amana Naphtali*

Executive Summary

Nigeria faces a high rate of deforestation driven by agricultural expansion, illegal logging, fuelwood use, infrastructure development, and weak enforcement of environmental laws. The Forestry Act of 1958, which governs forest management, is outdated and poorly aligned with modern priorities such as climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource use. Its effectiveness is further limited by weak penalties, fragmented state-level implementation, inadequate funding and capacity, overlapping institutional mandates, lack of modern monitoring technologies, minimal community participation, and persistent land-use conflicts. Comparative experiences from countries like Ghana, Ethiopia, and Brazil demonstrate that stronger legal frameworks, stricter enforcement, technological monitoring, and community-based forest management can significantly improve outcomes.

Addressing the issues and challenges of deforestation in Nigeria, this Policy Brief hereby recommends that the National Assembly may wish to:

- i. review and overhaul the existing forestry law (**Forestry Act 1958**) to reflect contemporary environmental realities.
- ii. consider increasing penalties and enforcement provisions by introducing harsher sanctions, including substantial fines and longer imprisonment terms for illegal logging and forest conversion, ensuring penalties are proportional to the economic value of forest resources destroyed.
- iii. mandate the Ministry of Environment to deploy satellite surveillance, GIS, and remote sensing technologies, establish a centralised national forest monitoring system, ensure real-time reporting with public access to deforestation data, and provide for digital tracking of timber movement and permits as is done in Ghana and Brazil.
- iv. consider strengthening institutional capacity and funding by ensuring adequate budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Environment by establishing dedicated forest protection funds, mandating continuous training and capacity building for enforcement officers, and enhancing staffing and logistical support.
- v. direct the Ministry of Environment to partner with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) for a continuous nationwide public awareness campaign on forest conservation and community sensitization programmes on sustainable resources in every quarter of the year.



1. Introduction

Nigeria, once heavily forested, has lost substantial forest cover over the decades. Forests play a critical role in climate regulation, biodiversity conservation, watershed protection, and the sustenance of local livelihoods.¹ However, Nigeria is reported to have one of the highest deforestation rates globally, with an estimated annual forest loss exceeding 350,000 hectares.² Major drivers include agricultural expansion, commercial and illegal logging, fuelwood and charcoal production, infrastructure development, and weak enforcement of environmental regulations.

Although the Forestry Act provides the legal framework for the management, protection, and regulation of forest reserves and forest resources with mandates to control logging, prevent illegal exploitation, and safeguard forest ecosystems, its outdated provisions and weak enforcement have limited its effectiveness in curbing deforestation³. Consequently, without urgent and robust legislative reform, Nigeria's forests risk further degradation, with significant socio-economic and environmental consequences, including biodiversity loss, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and heightened climate vulnerability.⁴

2. Issues and Challenges of the Forestry Act 1958 (as Adopted by States in Nigeria)

The Forestry Act, though foundational to forest governance in Nigeria, faces numerous challenges in its application across states, which have significantly limited its effectiveness in addressing modern deforestation pressures. The Act is outdated, as it was enacted during the colonial era and primarily reflects priorities focused on revenue generation and resource extraction rather than sustainability, and it lacks provisions for climate change mitigation, carbon market, and biodiversity conservation standards.⁵ The penalties prescribed under the Act such as (£5–£10) translate today into very insignificant amounts (often less than ₦10,000 depending on historical conversion methods used by states), many Nigerian states still apply these outdated figures or slightly adjusted equivalents, making enforcement weak. The penalties are weak and obsolete, as they are too low to deter illegal logging and commercial deforestation and do not reflect the current economic value of forest resources, making forest offences highly profitable with minimal risk (Humphreys, 2006).⁶ Furthermore, the decentralisation of forestry responsibilities to states has led to fragmentation, resulting in different versions of the law across states, inconsistent enforcement standards, and weak coordination between state and federal

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). *Global forest resources assessment 2020: Main report*. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>

² *ibid*

World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria Country Environmental Analysis*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org>

³ Nigeria. (1958). *Forestry Act 1958* (Laws of the Federation of Nigeria). Government Printer.

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). *Global forest resources assessment 2020: Main report*. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>

United Nations Environment Programme. (2021). *State of the Environment in Nigeria*. UNEP.

⁵ Mekonnen, A., & Köhlin, G. (2019). *Determinants of Participation in Forest Management Programs: Evidence from Ethiopia*. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 102, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2019.01.001>

⁶ Humphreys, D. (2006). *Logjam: Deforestation and the crisis of global governance*. Earthscan.



authorities. In addition, state forestry departments often suffer from weak enforcement capacity due to inadequate funding, a shortage of trained personnel, and poor monitoring infrastructure, which contributes to widespread illegal logging and encroachment into forest reserves. The Act also fails to adequately recognise community participation, as it does not sufficiently provide for indigenous land rights or community-based forest management, thereby excluding local communities and reducing compliance and cooperation.

There are also overlapping institutional mandates between state forestry agencies and federal bodies such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), leading to role duplication, regulatory gaps, and weak accountability⁷. Moreover, the Act lacks modern monitoring and data systems, as it does not provide for technologies such as satellite monitoring or real-time tracking of forest loss, making it difficult to detect and respond to deforestation promptly.⁸ The implementation of the Act is further undermined by land-use pressures and policy conflicts, particularly the influence of the Land Use Act, which allows state governors to allocate land for agriculture, urban development, and infrastructure, often resulting in the conversion of forest land for other uses. Additionally, weak institutional oversight has enabled corruption and illegal logging networks, including bribery in permit

issuance, illegal timber trade, and collusion between officials and loggers⁹.

3. Cross-Boundary Experience in Forest Governance and Deforestation Control

This section examines the forest laws in some other countries. This is to enable Nigeria to learn lessons on how other countries operate and enforce forest laws.

In terms of enforcement, Nigeria continues to face institutional weaknesses, including limited funding, inadequate personnel, and weak coordination between federal and state agencies. While the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency play a regulatory role, its impact is constrained by overlapping mandates and insufficient enforcement capacity¹⁰. By comparison, Ghana has implemented reforms such as the Timber Resources Management Act, supported by a stronger regulatory framework that enhances monitoring and accountability in forest exploitation¹¹. Similarly, Ethiopia has strengthened community-based enforcement through participatory forest management systems that involve local stakeholders in conservation and monitoring¹².

Nigeria's penalty regime is another area of concern. Fines and sanctions under existing forestry and environmental laws are relatively low and fail to reflect the economic value of forest resources, thereby reducing their

⁷ Federal Ministry of Environment. (2020). *National policy on environment*. Government of Nigeria.

⁸ National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA). (2021). *National Remote Sensing and Earth Observation Report*. Abuja, Nigeria: NASRDA.

⁹ Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). (2020). *Annual Report*. Abuja, Nigeria: ICPC.

¹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. (2021). *State of the Environment in Nigeria*.

¹¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020: Main Report*. FAO.

<https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>

¹² Mekonnen, A., & Köhlin, G. (2019). *Determinants of participation in forest management programs: Evidence from Ethiopia*. Forest Policy and Economics, 102, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2019.01.001>



deterrent effect¹³. In contrast, Ghana has introduced stricter sanctions and licensing systems to regulate timber extraction, while Ethiopia combines legal penalties with community enforcement mechanisms, making illegal logging less attractive¹⁴.

Technological integration also reveals a significant gap. Nigeria lacks comprehensive satellite-based monitoring and real-time forest tracking systems, which limits its ability to detect and respond to deforestation activities. In contrast, countries like Brazil and Ghana are increasingly adopting digital monitoring tools and geographic information systems (GIS) to improve surveillance and enforcement outcomes¹⁵. Community participation is another key distinction. Nigeria's forestry laws provide limited recognition of indigenous and community forest rights, reducing local involvement in conservation. By contrast, Ethiopia has successfully implemented community-based forest management, which has improved forest conservation outcomes through shared ownership and responsibility¹⁶. Similarly, Ghana's collaborative forest management approach integrates local communities into forest governance structures.

Finally, Nigeria's forest governance is undermined by land-use conflicts under the Land Use Act, which allows state authorities to allocate forest lands for agriculture and infrastructure, often leading to deforestation¹⁷. In contrast, countries like

Ghana have better harmonised land and forest policies, reducing policy conflicts and promoting sustainable land use¹⁸.

5. Areas for Legislative Intervention

Addressing the issues and challenges of deforestation in Nigeria, this Policy Brief hereby recommends that the National Assembly may wish to:

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¹³ World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria country environmental analysis*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org>

¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). *Global forest resources assessment 2020: Main report*. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. (2021). *State of the environment in Nigeria*

¹⁶ Mekonnen, A., & Köhlin, G. (2019). *Determinants of participation in forest management programs: Evidence from Ethiopia*.

¹⁷ World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria country environmental analysis*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org>

¹⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). *Global forest resources assessment 2020: Main report*. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>



- iv. consider strengthening institutional capacity and funding by ensuring adequate budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Environment by establishing dedicated forest protection funds, mandating continuous training and capacity building for enforcement officers, and enhancing staffing and logistical support.
- v. direct the Ministry of Environment to partner with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) for a continuous nationwide public awareness campaign on forest conservation and community sensitization programmes on sustainable resources in every quarter of the year..

6. Conclusion

Nigeria's rising deforestation rate exposes the inadequacy of the outdated Forestry Act of 1958, marked by weak enforcement, low penalties, and limited community involvement. Drawing lessons from countries like Ghana, Ethiopia, and Brazil, effective reform requires modernized laws, stronger sanctions, improved institutional capacity, technological monitoring, and sustained public awareness. With strong political will and coordinated action, these measures can curb deforestation, protect forest resources, and enhance environmental sustainability.

Contact

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies

National Assembly

NILDS Permanent Site, No.2 Abubakar O. Sulaiman Avenue, Piwoyi District, off Umaru Musa Yar'adua Expressway, Airport Road, Abuja.

E-mail: info@nils.gov.ng

Website: <http://nils.gov.ng>

NILDS Liaison Office

Suite 214 Senate Wing

National Assembly Complex

Mobile: +234 807 364 482