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Legal Strategies for Biodiversity Conservation in Southern Nigeria: Lessons from International Laws

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Abstract
Southern Nigeria is currently facing a profound environmental crisis characterized by rapidly rising sea levels, recurrent and intensified flooding, and widespread ecological degradation. These developments pose a growing threat to human settlements, critical infrastructure, and fragile ecosystems. Alarmingly, government projections suggest that over 30 Nigerian states could soon be impacted by severe flood events, amplifying the urgency for a robust and integrated legal response. Biodiversity loss is occurring at an unprecedented rate, with many indigenous plant and animal species either endangered or already extinct due to unsustainable land use practices, deforestation, urban sprawl, and pollution. This paper critically evaluates Nigeria' s biodiversity conservation framework, with a particular focus on Southern Nigeria, where the ecological stakes are highest. Through a doctrinal and comparative legal approach, it investigates the effectiveness of existing national environmental laws and the institutions responsible for enforcing them, including the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) and the National Parks Service. It explores Nigeria' s legal obligations under key international and regional environmental instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Nagoya Protocol, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (African Nature Convention). Furthermore, the paper draws on international legal principles and judicial precedents, including those from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to assess Nigeria' s compliance with transboundary environmental obligations. Recommendations include harmonizing domestic laws with international norms, improving institutional coordination, and integrating indigenous knowledge into conservation strategies to enhance biodiversity protection in Southern Nigeria.

Keywords: biodiversity, legal, conservation, environmental law

I. INTRODUCTION

At an earlier stage in international environmental governance, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),[2] signed in 1992 and ratified by Nigeria in 1994, obligated member

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[2] *Convention on Biological Diversity, signed and ratified 1992,* (entered into force 1994)

states to integrate biodiversity conservation into national legislation. In response, Nigeria launched the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan in 1997,[3] whose goal is:

> " to develop appropriate frameworks and program instruments for the conservation of Nigeria' s biological diversity and to enhance its sustainable use by integrating biodiversity considerations into national planning, policy, and decision-making processes."

Although Nigeria has enacted domestic laws such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act of 2007[4] and the Endangered Species Act 2016[5] these legal instruments remain significantly misaligned with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, particularly Target 11 which addresses the effective management of protected areas. Furthermore, the objectives of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization, developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity[6] are scarcely reflected in Nigerian legislation, leaving indigenous communities exposed to the risks of biopiracy. The Ikale people of Ondo State for instance, have watched foreign corporations patent traditional medicinal knowledge derived from *Garcinia kola* without compensation – a violation of both the Nagoya Protocol and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).[7] This dissonance between international commitments and domestic implementation underscores what scholars like Reyad[8] term " ecological legal dissonance," a phenomenon where legislative *inertia* perpetuates environmental degradation.

[3] E. Mitrotta, " Convention on Biological Diversity" *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Security* 12(3) (2020): 1-7. See also Olubisi F. Oluduro and Gideon N. Gasu, " A Critical Appraisal of the Legal Regime for Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria" *Canadian Social Science* 8(4) (2022) 249-257 & Ijaiya Bashir L. " Analytical legal framework on biodiversity conservation in Nigeria, India and United Kingdom" *International Journal of Law, Justice and Jurisprudence* 1(1): 1-13.

[4] *National Environmental Standard and Regulations Enforcement Agency (Establishment) Act 2007*, (No. 25 of 2007)

[5] *Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act*, 1985 No. 11 (entered into force 20 April 1985)

[6] Access and Benefit-sharing, ' The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing' (2022) *Convention on Biological Diversity*

[7] E. O. Olugbenga et al, " Ethnobotanical Survey of the Ikale people of Ondo State, Nigeria" *International Journal of Innovative Agriculture and Biology Research* 10(4) (2022): 16-24. See also D. O. Aworinde, " The Doctrine of Signatures in herbal prescriptions in Ikale and Ilaje communities of Ondo State, Southwestern Nigeria" *Journal of Medicine Plants Research* 12(18) (2018): 222-227.

[8] S. Reyad, " Relationship between international and national law and issues of their harmonization" *Uzhhorod National University Herald Series Law* 2(78) (2023): 390-397.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria' s transboundary obligations under regional treaties like the Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources 2016[9] further illustrate this disconnect. The Niger Delta' s mangroves, theoretically protected under Aransiola et al. implied " wise use" principles, continue to suffer from unregulated oil exploration.[10] The landmark ruling of the International Court of Justice in *Costa Rica* v. *Nicaragua*[11], which was on the compensation which established state liability for transboundary environmental harm also presents a convincing blueprint for reform. Critical ecosystems such as the Cross River Rainforest and the Oban Hills Corridor are no better off.[12] Although the National Park Service Act of 1999, which consists of 53 sections divided into 7 parts, nominally designates these areas as protected, enforcement falls far short of IUCN standards.[13] Unlike other legislations, a good example being the Kenyan Forest Conservation and Management Act of 2016[14] which criminalizes illegal logging with prison terms; Nigeria' s laws lack enforcement power – which goes ahead to enable the destruction of 55.09% of primary forests in Cross Rivers State since 2000. This paper interrogates these fissures through a jurisprudential lens thereby drawing lessons from global best practices.

Harmonization of Domestic Legislation with International Biodiversity Frameworks

In legal theory, the interaction between international and national law remains a key issue within the broader discourse on aligning domestic legal systems with international legal frameworks.[15] One such international framework is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a landmark treaty adopted in 1992 to promote the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Since entering into force in 1994, the treaty has gained near-universal

[9] African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, adopted by the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Maputo Mozambique 11 July 2003 (entered into force on 23 July 2016)

[10] S. A. Aransiola et al, " Niger Delta mangrove ecosystem: Biodiversity, past and present pollution, threat and mitigation" *Regional Studies in Marine Science* 75(1) (2024)

[11] Costa Rica v. Nicaragua [2018] International Court of Justice. Judgment of 2 February 2018, I.C.J. Reports 2018, 15.

[12] E. Julius, ' Cross River communities demand action as Oron-Calabar waterway turns deadly' *Punch Newspaper* (16 May 2025) <https://punchng.com/cross-river-communities-demand-action-as-oron-calabar-waterway-turns-deadly/> accessed on 16th May 2025.

[13] The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions, as adopted by the 98th Meeting of the IUCN Council in 2020.

[14] Forest Conservation and Management Act, 2016, No. 155 of 7 September 2016 (entered into force by Notice in the Gazette by the Cabinet Secretary).

[15] L. Kodra, " The Relationship between International Law and National Law" *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* 6(1) (2017): 1-11. See also Artur Roberto C. G., " The Interaction between International and Domestic Legal Orders: Framing the Debate according to the Post-Modern Condition of International Law" *German Law Journal* 19(1) (2018): 1-20.

acceptance, with 194 Parties as of May 2014, following the accession of South Sudan. Further reinforcing the goals of the Convention, the Nagoya Declaration outlines various collaborative strategies aligned with global biodiversity priorities.[16] The 2012 Rio+20 Conference further reinforced this imperative, as states acknowledged biodiversity' s foundational role in ecosystem health and sustainable development. The declaration recognized biodiversity's extensive value and the grave consequences of its decline, including threats to food security, water availability, public health, etc.[17] The conference thus underscored the urgent need for national laws to reflect international commitments thereby ensuring stronger biodiversity conservation between different jurisdictions. In today' s rapidly evolving environmental context, legislators increasingly require clear guidance to develop effective biodiversity laws. In furtherance, 2012 publication by the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL) and the World Future Council (WFC)[18] outlined key elements that should define a forward-looking and visionary biodiversity legal framework.

These elements include:

i. Establishing robust governance structures at national, regional, and local levels, supported by participatory, transparent, and accountable decision-making processes;
ii. Integrating biodiversity considerations across all policy areas such as climate change, forestry, land use, agriculture, and marine management;
iii. Creating legal and policy linkages that support the Convention on Biological Diversity objectives, including conservation, sustainable use, and equitable Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) related to genetic resources;
iv. Developing a coherent and synergistic implementation strategy for biodiversity-related international obligations, such as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, CITES, the Convention on Migratory Species, the World Heritage Convention, and the Nagoya Protocol;
v. Defining a legal scope that comprehensively addresses all core obligations under the CBD;
vi. Ensuring mechanisms for meaningful consultation and inclusion of Indigenous and Local Communities (ILCs), along with other stakeholders, in biodiversity-related decision-making;
vii. Establishing both in-situ and ex-situ conservation measures, including protected area management that respects the rights and roles of ILCs;
viii. Creating legal frameworks that facilitate and incentivize the sustainable use of biodiversity;

[16] Ekardt, F., Günther, P., Hagemann, K. et al, "Legally binding and ambitious biodiversity protection under the CBD, the global biodiversity framework, and human rights law" *Environmental Sciences Europe* 35(80) (2023) Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-023-00786-5> accessed on 15th May 2025

[17] United Nations, ' United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 20-22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro' *Building on the Millenium Development Goals* (June 13, 2022) <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio2012> accessed on 15th May 2025.

[18] United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, *Survey of Future Just Biodiversity Laws and Policies* (World Future Council, Mexikoring, Hamburg Germany 2012)

ix. Implementing effective monitoring and compliance systems to track and respond to ongoing biodiversity loss;

Compliance Mechanisms for Transboundary Environmental Obligations

The concept of transboundary environmental harm emphasizes the legal responsibility of states to prevent ecological damage that originates within their territory but adversely affects another. As global environmental challenges transcend national borders, especially jurisdictions like Nigeria, the demand for structured compliance mechanisms has become more urgent.[19] Transboundary harm may result from pollutants carried across borders through air and water, hazardous waste exported to less regulated jurisdictions, or ecological degradation impacting migratory species. The legal discourse on this issue was formally introduced in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration where Principle 21[20] established a compliance-oriented framework:

> "States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction."

This principle has evolved into a central norm in international law that also informs later instruments like the Principle 2 of the 1992 Rio Declaration which holds that " *States have in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Principles of International Law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction."*[21] Central to this evolving framework is the duty of due diligence, which serves as a critical compliance mechanism. This duty requires states to implement precautionary measures aimed at anticipating and minimizing environmental risks. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, the obligation is process-based compliance is evaluated based on whether adequate procedures were followed to avoid foreseeable harm.

African Convention on Conservation of Nature

The Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources 2017,[22] also known as the *Maputo Convention*, is a significant regional environmental treaty

[19] M. Jervan, " The Prohibition of Transboundary Environmental Harm. An Analysis of the Contribution of the International Court of Justice to the Development of the No-Harm Rule" *PluriCourts Research Paper* 14(17) (2024) 123-149.

[20] Respicio & Co., " Principle 21 of Stockholm Declaration: International Environment Law" *Political Law and Public International Law* (October 6, 2024) <https://www.respicio.ph/bar/2025/political-law-and-public-international-law/public-international-law/international-environmental-law/principle-21-of-stockholm-declaration> accessed on 15th May 2025.

[21] United Nations, ' Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development' *United Nations General Assembly (Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992)* A/CONE151/26 (vol. 1)

[22] Convention (n. 8)

adopted under the auspices of the African Union. It aims to promote sustainable development through the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources across the African continent. Despite Nigeria being a signatory and expressing commitment to the Convention its practical implementation particularly in the Niger Delta region has faced critical challenges, one of which is the ineffectiveness of penalties related to oil pollution.[23] The 2017 version of the Revised African Convention which was built upon the original Algiers Convention of 1968,[24] places an emphasis on the equitable and sustainable use of natural resources, the protection of ecosystems, and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to participate in natural resource management. Article 15 of the Convention explicitly mandates states to take all necessary legislative and administrative measures to prevent pollution, particularly that arising from the extraction of natural resources, and to impose sanctions for environmental harm. The Convention also underscores the precautionary principle, polluter-pays principle, and intergenerational equity, all of which are central to contemporary environmental law.

Nigeria ratified the Revised Convention in furtherance of its commitments under Article 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,[25] which guarantees the right to a general satisfactory environment. In theory, this ratification places an obligation on Nigeria to harmonize its domestic laws with the provisions of the Convention.[26]

International Liability Regimes

A major shortcoming is Nigeria' s failure to ratify the International Law Commission' s (ILC) Draft Principles on the Allocation of Loss in the Case of Transboundary Harm Arising out of Hazardous Activities (2006), which outline essential legal norms for assigning liability and ensuring remediation in cross-border pollution incidents. These principles reinforce the concept that states and non-state actors must be held accountable for environmental damage that transcends national boundaries, ensuring that affected countries or populations receive redress. Nigeria effectively weakened its capacity to seek compensation or demand remediation when foreign entities or upstream activities cause environmental harm within its borders simply by not aligning with these standards an increasingly relevant concern given the shared nature of ecosystems such as river basins, coastal zones, and migratory wildlife corridors across West

[23] A. Akindele and R. Chabinga' " Navigating Climate Change and Sustainability Solutions: Nigeria's Role in International Environmental Law" *African Journal of Climate Change and Resource Sustainability* 3(1) (2024): 331-344.

[24] African Union, ' Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources' (Febuary 14, 2022) *African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources* <https://wildlife.au.int/en/20220214/document/revised-african-convention-conservation-nature-and-natural-resources> accessed on 15th May 2025.

[25] Cap A9, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004

[26] E. Longo, ' Article 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: an individual or peoples' right to a satisfactory environment?' (May 2011) *The American University in Cairo*

Africa.[27] Contrastingly, the European Union has adopted a far more proactive and legally enforceable approach through the Environmental Liability Directive. The Directive is a comprehensive legislative framework based on the *Polluter Pays* principle, and it obliges operators engaged in potentially hazardous activities (such as energy production, waste management, chemical manufacturing, and industrial agriculture) to bear the cost of preventing and remedying environmental damage they cause. This includes damage to biodiversity, water bodies, and land, as well as restoration obligations that go beyond mere financial penalties. The ELD also enables member states to recover the full costs of environmental rehabilitation, and it encourages public participation by allowing individuals and environmental NGOs to request enforcement actions against violators.

Protected Area Legislation

A major shortcoming lies in the absence of legally defined buffer zones, which are essential under IUCN guidelines for Category II areas. Buffer zones act as transitional areas between fully protected ecosystems and surrounding land use, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, reducing edge effects, and limiting the impact of agricultural or industrial encroachment. The IUCN recommends that such zones be legally mandated and managed to provide a protective perimeter around core conservation areas. In the case of Nigeria, the failure of the National Park Service Act to incorporate this standard has left the Cross River National Park and other forest reserves vulnerable to progressive habitat loss, deforestation, and illegal resource extraction.[28] Research, including that by Nchor et al.,[29] has documented rising levels of encroachment, poaching, and illegal logging within and around the Cross River rainforest, a biodiversity hotspot home to endangered species such as the Cross River gorilla and Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee. In many cases, communities living near the park's periphery, lacking alternative livelihoods and legal clarity regarding land use, exploit forest resources unsustainably. The absence of clear statutory buffer zones has allowed subsistence farming, logging operations, and infrastructural development to creep into protected areas with little legal deterrent.

III. METHODOLOGY

The legal framework for environmental protection in Nigeria provides a vital foundation for safeguarding the country' s critical ecosystems, particularly those in the southern regions (Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Cross River, and Edo states), where biodiversity is both rich, but also very vulnerable.[30] Section 20 of the Nigerian Constitution[31] underscores the

[27] C. E. Foster, " The ILC Draft Principles on the Allocation of Loss in the Case of Transboundary Harm Arising Out of Hazardous Activities: Privatising Risk" *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law* 14(3) (2005): 265-282.f

[28] A. Nchor et al, " Challenges of Funding Protected Areas: The Case of Cross River National Part, Nigeria" *International journal of Business Research* 5(12) (2017): 37-44.

[29] Nchor et al., (n. 28)

[30] Idachaba M. et al, " The Legal Framework for the Protection of Environmental Rights in Nigeria" *Kogi State University Law Journal* 7(1) (2022)

obligation of the State to protect the environment, including the air, land, water, forests, and wildlife. This constitutional provision according to Falana[32] legitimizes the development and implementation of legal instruments focused on conserving the nation's natural heritage. In pursuit of this mandate, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has enacted several laws aimed at protecting biodiversity hotspots, including those in the Cross River rainforest and Oban Hills corridor.[33]

The first schedule of the Endangered Species Act of 1985[34] from its commencement enforced that the hunting or capture of or trade in, the animal species (being animal species threatened with extinction) is absolutely prohibited. prohibits the international trade and trafficking of endangered species, curbing one of the key threats to wildlife survival in southern Nigeria.

The National Parks Service Act of 1991 is also another important legislation that establishes a management regime for protected areas, regulating activities such as hunting, logging, and mining that could otherwise degrade these sensitive ecosystems. The Act sets out the objectives and management principles for protecting the landscapes, natural and historical features, and wildlife within the national park system which encompasses parks, monuments, preserves, wild rivers, and lakeshores, thereby ensuring that these resources are preserved without harm for the benefit of future generations. Studies by Laurance[35] point to ongoing threats such as habitat destruction, deforestation, poaching, pollution, climate change, and over-exploitation of natural resources. The researcher hence believes that the critical ecosystems in southern Nigeria remain under pressure. These pressures lead to the rapid loss of natural habitats, fragmentation of ecosystems, and the extinction of key species.

Community Participation and Rights-Based Approaches

Nigeria' s Land Use Act 1978[36] vests land ownership in State governors, conflicting with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of peasants. The Nigerian Land Use Act of 1978 marked a significant shift in land governance by dismantling the diverse land tenure systems previously practiced and replacing them with a centralized and uniform system of land administration throughout the country. Before the enactment of the Act, land rights were governed under three distinct systems. The customary tenure system, grounded in indigenous customs and traditions, allowed communities or families through their chiefs or heads to hold

[31] Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, s 20.

[32] F. Falana, ' Justiciability of Chapter Two of 1999 Constitution (as amended): Need for the Nigerian judicial system to be more proactive' (March 3, 2022) *Vanguard Newspaper* <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/justiciability-of-chapter-two-of-1999-constitution-as-amended-need-for-the-nigerian-judicial-system-to-be-more-proactive/> accessed on May 15th 2025

[33] O. M. Chinedumije, " An Appriasal of the Legal Regime for Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria" *University of Nigeria Nssuka Law Journal* 1(2) (2022)

[34] Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act 1985, sch 1

[35] W. F. Laurance, *Habitat destruction: Death by a thousand cuts* (2nd edn., Oxford University Press, 2010)

[36] *Land Use Act,* Cap L5, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004

land in trust for collective use, thereby reflecting a participatory and community-based approach to land ownership. In contrast, the non-customary system, influenced by English legal principles and mainly operative in the former Lagos Colony, vested land ownership in the British Crown while allowing for private ownership through leaseholds or freeholds, which tended to marginalize local participation. A third system, practiced in Northern Nigeria, was more state-centric yet still community-oriented, placing land under the control of the Governor for the benefit and use of indigenous populations.[37]

The 1978 Act, while aiming for administrative uniformity, significantly altered community participation in land management. In an attempt to vest all lands within a state in the hands of the Governor to be held in trust for the people, the Act effectively centralized control and introduced bureaucratic oversight that often alienated traditional landholders.[38] From a rights-based perspective, this transition has sparked ongoing debates around the erosion of communal land rights, limited local participation in land decision-making, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups (particularly women and indigenous communities) from secure access and control over land. As such, integrating community participation and rights-based approaches into land administration remains essential to redress historical inequities and promote inclusive, equitable, and sustainable land governance in Nigeria.

Institutional Capacity and Cross-Sectoral Legal Integration

The NESREA which was established under the NESREA Act 2007,[39] is the lead federal agency for enforcing environmental laws and regulations in the country. While its mandate includes monitoring and sanctioning environmental infractions across the country, its effectiveness is often diluted at the state level due to jurisdictional overlaps with State EPAs. These state agencies, created through various state-level laws, sometimes operate autonomously, with mandates that may not always align with NESREA' s federal guidelines. The lack of a harmonized operational framework leads to duplicative efforts, regulatory gaps, and institutional turf wars, all of which compromise the quality and effectiveness of conservation projects. The situation is further complicated by the presence of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which was originally established to drive sustainable development in the oil-producing states of the Niger Delta. While the NDDC engages in environmental remediation and infrastructural development, it often does so in isolation from NESREA and the State EPAs. This results in poor integration of environmental impact assessments (EIAs), inadequate enforcement of conservation standards, and the frequent sidelining of local environmental priorities in project execution.[40] The absence of a coordinated inter-agency strategy reflects the weak institutional

[37] E. U. Otty and C. Nwosu and U. Nnamdi, " Critique of Nigerian Land Use Act of 1978" *IJESC* 11(6) (2021): 28115-28120

[38] K. Hassan and S. Hull, " Examining the Land Use Act of 1978 and Its Effects on Tenure Security in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekiti State, Nigeria" *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 22(1): 1-34

[39] *National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act 2007* (Nigeria).

[40] N. K. Akani, " A Critical Review of the role and Performance of the Niger Delta Development Commission" *The Journal of Environmental and Human Right Law* 4(3) (2024): 186-201.

capacity of the state to manage the environment through a unified and effective legal and administrative system.

Legal frameworks governing environmental protection in Nigeria are layered across federal and state levels, but they rarely operate in synergy. NESREA, while empowered to enforce international conventions and federal environmental regulations, often lacks statutory clarity regarding its interaction with state agencies. There is no binding national policy that compels state EPAs and the NDDC to adopt a shared approach to conservation or to integrate federal environmental standards into their legal and operational frameworks.[41] This leads to fragmented legal instruments, inconsistent application of regulations, and enforcement challenges.

Key national and international laws such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992,[42] Biodiversity Convention,[43] and Maputo Convention 2003[44] are often referenced without the accompanying institutional mechanisms to ensure collaborative implementation. Just as NESREA is tasked with ensuring compliance with international conservation treaties, the development agenda of the NDDC may prioritize infrastructure over environmental sustainability, and the Environmental Protection Agencies in the state may lack the capacity or political will to enforce biodiversity conservation laws.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study opines that the biodiversity crisis in Southern Nigeria is driven by habitat loss, pollution, illegal logging, and weak enforcement mechanisms, and hence highlights the pressing need for urgent legal reforms. Existing environmental laws are either outdated, poorly implemented, or suffer from overlapping mandates between federal and state agencies. Harmonizing domestic laws with international standards, strengthening compliance mechanisms, and empowering communities has resulted in Nigeria replicating global best practices. Judicial adoption of ecocentric principles will further advance conservation goals.

[41] N. Echefu and E. Akpofure, " Environmental impact assessment in Nigeria: regulatory background and procedural framework" *UNEP EIA Training Resource Manual* 9(2) (2023)

[42] *Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992* (Nigeria).

[43] Convention on Biological Diversity (adopted 5 June 1992, entered into force 29 December 1993) 1760 UNTS 79.

[44] African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (adopted 11 July 2003, entered into force 23 October 2016) AU Doc CAB/LEG/24.9.

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