

The Impact of Insurgency and Insecurity on Forestry and Wildlife in Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Pathways for Sustainable Recovery

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ABSTRACT

Northern Nigeria has experienced persistent insecurity driven by terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and land-related conflicts. Beyond the humanitarian and socio-economic consequences, these crises have significantly impacted forestry resources and wildlife conservation. This paper examines the ecological implications of insurgency on forest ecosystems and biodiversity in Northern Nigeria and proposes practical, science-based solutions for recovery and resilience.

Keywords: Environmental Security; Armed Conflict; Forestry Management; Wildlife Conservation; Biodiversity Loss; Climate Vulnerability; Forest Governance; Northern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, insecurity in Northern Nigeria has escalated into a complex crisis. Insurgent activities, particularly in the Sahel and Guinea savanna regions, have disrupted governance systems and environmental management frameworks. Forest reserves and protected areas once critical for biodiversity conservation have increasingly become ungoverned spaces, exposing natural resources to exploitation and degradation.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between insecurity and environmental degradation is well established in environmental security literature. Armed conflict often leads to weakened institutions, increased illegal resource extraction, and habitat destruction. In Northern Nigeria, insurgency has intensified these dynamics.

Effects of Insecurity on Forestry

Deforestation and Illegal Logging

Insurgent groups and displaced populations rely heavily on forest resources for survival. Studies show increased rates of illegal logging and fuelwood extraction in conflict zones. Forest reserves in states such as Borno, Zamfara, and Kaduna have witnessed accelerated deforestation.

Loss of Forest Governance

Forest management institutions have been weakened due to insecurity. Rangers and forestry officials are often unable to access protected areas, leading to a breakdown in monitoring and enforcement.

Land Grabbing and Agricultural Expansion

Conflict-induced displacement has triggered unregulated land use changes. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) often encroach into forest lands for farming, contributing to habitat fragmentation.

Effects on Wildlife

Poaching and Wildlife Decline

Wildlife populations have drastically declined due to increased poaching. Armed groups exploit wildlife for food and trade, while the absence of law enforcement exacerbates illegal hunting.

Habitat Destruction

Forest degradation directly affects wildlife habitats, leading to species migration or extinction. Key biodiversity hotspots in Northern Nigeria are under severe threat.

Disruption of Conservation Programs

Conservation projects have been suspended or abandoned due to security risks, reversing years of ecological progress.

Socio-Ecological Consequences

The environmental degradation caused by insecurity has broader implications:

- Increased desertification and climate vulnerability
- Loss of ecosystem services (e.g., water regulation, carbon sequestration)
- Heightened competition over scarce natural resources, further fueling conflict

Practical Solutions and Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Environmental Security

Integrate environmental protection into national security strategies. Establish eco-security task forces to protect forest reserves.

Community-Based Forest Management

Empower local communities through participatory forest governance. Evidence shows that community-managed forests are more resilient.

Restoration and Afforestation Programs

Launch large-scale reforestation initiatives in degraded areas using climate-resilient species.

Technology-Driven Monitoring

Deploy geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing, drones) for real-time monitoring of forests and wildlife.

Rehabilitation of IDPs

Resettle displaced populations sustainably, reducing pressure on forest ecosystems.

Strengthening Law Enforcement

Rebuild forestry institutions and equip rangers with adequate security support.

International Collaboration

Partner with global organizations such as UNEP and FAO for funding, technical expertise, and policy support.

CONCLUSION

Insecurity in Northern Nigeria is not only a humanitarian crisis but also an environmental emergency. The degradation of forests and loss of wildlife threaten long-term ecological sustainability and national stability. Addressing this challenge requires a coordinated approach that integrates security, environmental governance, and community resilience.

Nigeria must act decisively. The cost of inaction extends beyond human lives it endangers the natural systems that sustain them.