

Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Government Policies and Private Sector Practice in Nigeria

*Nigeria’s Long Term Vision for biodiversity management is: ‘A Nigeria with healthy living environment where people live in harmony with nature and sustain the gains and benefits of biodiversity, integrating biodiversity into National programme aimed at reducing poverty and developing a secure future in line with the principle of ecological sustainability and social equity’ (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2016 – 2020)).*

Natural Capital and Regulatory Landscape

Forests in Nigeria provide critical habitats and ecosystems for biodiversity, and provide goods and ecosystem services that benefit citizens. The importance of biodiversity as a natural resource cannot be over emphasized because of the basic needs they satisfy and their role as the vital cultural heritage of the nation.

However, biodiversity and ecosystem services are threatened as the country continues to experience high deforestation rate, considered as one of the highest in the world. Factors like rapid population growth, over exploitation of resources, deepening poverty, weak institutional and legal framework combine to exacerbate ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss in Nigeria.

Responding, Nigeria has put in place several policies and legislation for the protection and conservation of biodiversity, under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Environment. But the implementation of these laws is weak and a number of them would require revision. The revised National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP; 2016 – 2020) already pointed out that biodiversity issues have been relegated into the background despite its significant contributions to national development and the ecosystem services it provides.

For Nigeria to achieve its sustainable development ambitions and equally meet its several international conservation obligations, it is important for government to promote biodiversity and ecosystem values through: **1)** appropriate measures, **2)** updates of relevant policies, laws, and regulations, and **3)** supports for processes and structures to guarantee equity and justice in enforcement of regulations related to land use, ecosystem management, and biodiversity conservation; thus, this policy brief.

Background to this Policy Brief

Sustainability and Conservation Education for Rural Area (SCERA) is a non-government organisation supporting conservation initiatives in Nigeria. With funding from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF), SCERA has developed this policy brief to support the mainstreaming of biodiversity values in national planning and integration in environmental practices of the private and public sectors. This policy brief is an outcome of practical lessons from on-the-ground projects and national policy dialogue involving stakeholders from the public and private sectors, civil society and communities in the country.

International Commitment

Nigeria became a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1994 and thus committed itself to the convention’s three

objectives: **1)** the conservation of biological diversity; **2)** the sustainable use of its components; and **3)** the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are required in Article 6 to prepare and implement a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), which Nigeria has complied with, even having a revised version in 2016. The NBSAP is intended to define the current status of biodiversity, the threats leading to its degradation and the strategies and priority actions to ensure its conservation and sustainable use within the framework of the socio-economic development of the country.

### National Strategic Response and Limitations

Nigeria's revised NBSAP (2016-2020) adopted 14 SMART National Targets with 21 Impact Indicators and 67 Actions with 123 Performance Indicators and 20 Programmes. **Specifically;**

- National Target 2 mentioned that “By 2020, a comprehensive programme for the valuation of biodiversity is developed and implemented, and payments for ecosystem services (PES) and goods are mainstreamed into the national budget”.
- National Target 3 stated that by 2020, Nigeria will adopt “a national ecosystem-based spatial planning process and plans, promoting the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services to sustain development”.

These targets suggest how Nigeria is making efforts to address the economic and social impediments to sustainable conservation and utilisation of its biodiversity. The country has indicated willingness to promote the value of biodiversity through its valuation and integration into national development planning and

budgeting. However, Nigeria has not carried out a valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and so does not have the needed information for effective legislation in terms of protection, allowable levels of utilisation, and calculation of benefits that could accrue from various ecosystem services to negotiate for payments and/or incentives.

### Addressing Barriers to Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Governance and Development

Nigeria needs to address **weak governance and institutional arrangements** exemplified by the many agencies that are in charge of environmental matters and so work at cross purposes to the extent that statutory delineation is not adhered to. There is need to amend the **constitutional defect** surrounding the legislative lists (exclusive, concurrent, and residual), which provide for the legislation of powers between the Federal and State governments. The country should protect critical ecosystems and hotspots that are threatened by **economic and infrastructural developments** supported by governments and/or private sector investors. Attention should be paid to the problem of **unsustainable conservation projects** because they are short-lived, inadequately funded, localised, poorly linked to other programmes, and do not inform the policy process. Furthermore, there is **low capacity and dearths of data** regarding biodiversity conservation processes that need to be addressed to inform evidence-based decision making and inclusiveness. It ought to be worrisome that even at this time in Nigeria, complete knowledge of the species of organisms and their total worth is still unknown. **Poverty, unsustainable land use** for both commercial and subsistence utilisation for agriculture and other land use types should be addressed to sustainably manage ecosystems and conserve biodiversity in the country.

## The Need for Strategic Innovations

A **shift to a green economy** is the only long-term sustainable development trajectory; business-as-usual is simply not a viable option for Nigeria. Nigeria needs to make the engagement and involvement of the private sector a pre-condition for conservation programmes to succeed. This is necessary as private sector plays a key role in resource utilisation and can contribute immensely to biodiversity conservation financing and innovative production and consumption options to mitigate and reverse biodiversity loss. If comprehensive engagement is not prioritized, there is a high probability that social, financial, economic and political mechanisms designed to reduce forest and biodiversity loss will be ineffective and wasteful in every way.

**Public sector interventions** are necessary to address the market, policy and governance failures that are a significant contributing factor to biodiversity loss<sup>1</sup>. It will be good that Nigeria's public sector considers the four broad policy intervention approaches, including:

- i. **Incentives** used to steer behaviour that will encourage forest and biodiversity-friendly investments which may be **1) non-financial incentives**, such as the clarification of land tenure and granting clear rights over use of the land; and **2) financial incentives**, which can take the form of upfront payments, such as grants or taxation, or results-based payments, such as payments for environmental services.
- ii. **Risk mitigation instruments** often provided by the international community on

developmental or environmental grounds in the context of official development assistance or international climate finance, which can be used to reduce or share risks related to specific activities. The Nigeria REDD+ programme and the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), among others, already provide the country with the requisite mechanisms to facilitate such negotiations.

- iii. **Minimum standards of behaviour** that can be applied in a wide range of scenarios to prevent unsustainable practices. They can be applied to land, as when developed under a moratorium or the Forest Codes or Forest Standards; to information, as via mandatory standards for labelling and reporting; to trade, as via the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil or similar mechanisms like Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade, UTZ Certification, FLEGT, etc with focus on priority tree crops like cocoa, oil palm rubber, timber and others; and to finance, through financial regulation or through social and environmental criteria set out by organisations.
- iv. **Enabling conditions** that will provide long term risk mitigation to attract investment and build confidence. This will require that the Federal Government of Nigeria implements the more fundamental reform processes in political, legal, economic and societal structures that will address the underlying drivers of the relevant risk categories that affect investment and conservation. Such reforms will be rather structural, rather than strategic, and include institutional reform and capacity building, investments in research and infrastructure development, increased coordination between government ministries, departments and agencies, creation of effective information systems, investment in education, sound legal framework, increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Kissinger et al. (2012) Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation and Creed, A (2013) Halting and Reversing Forest Loss at Jurisdictional Scale

transparency through reporting and accounting frameworks, law enforcement capacity, clear signs of strong political will and stakeholder consultation.

### The Need for Inclusiveness

The government needs to understand that these interventions should not happen in isolation. Nigeria needs to design a biodiversity conservation framework inclusive of initiatives such as greater inter-ministerial coordination, real-time forest monitoring, expansion of protection and/or sustainable management, prioritization of specific critical or high-risk ecosystems for stricter measures, revision of environmental legislation and a rural credit policy linked to environmental compliance, to serve as part of incentives for sustainable development measures. The three broad areas of engagement below are important.

**Engage the Private Sector:** Private sector contributes immensely to degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity loss; yet they are an important part of the solution in the three key areas of innovation, investment and implementation.<sup>2</sup> They will achieve these by developing and deploying new and climate smart technologies and innovations, adopt structural changes to current and future investment patterns, and be heavily involved in activities on the ground required to transition to a green economy.

**Paradigm shift (multi-sectoral coordination):** In order for the private sector's potential to be unlocked, the current paradigm needs to change, and major structural issues need to be addressed.

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<sup>2</sup> UN-REDD Programme Policy Brief on The Role of the Private Sector in REDD+: the Case for Engagement and Options for Intervention

There is need for more coordination and collaboration between the public sector, private sector and civil society to influence and control market signals that inform subsidies, taxation, pricing, regulation and land tenure issues, which often contribute to making deforestation a profitable activity<sup>3</sup>.

**Influencing the behaviour of the private sector –** different types of interventions that alter the private sector's impact on land use can range from the implementation of policies to the creation of financial instruments, development of certification schemes and other interventions of a voluntary nature. These interventions influence behaviour through varying degrees of legality, price and awareness<sup>4</sup>.

### Conclusion

Nigeria will make significant progress towards biodiversity conservation and increasing sustainability through the green economy, bio-economy and circular economy, as well as strengthen its disaster management systems to mitigate the impact of climate change. To achieve this, Nigeria's strategic direction will be to focus on policy reform programmes, expanding skills development for innovation, and ensuring financing and technical support to build strong environmental and disaster management systems.<sup>5</sup> The government should see this as a long term goal and commence early to take actions, transparently coordinated across sectors, to secure the nation's natural capital.

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<sup>3</sup> TEEB (2010). The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature

<sup>4</sup> Whitley, S (2013). At cross-purposes: subsidies and climate compatible investment.

<sup>5</sup> NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP) 2021-2025 Volume I