

Degradation of the Ivorian Forest Cover from 1960 To The Present Day

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Abstract: *This paper examines the degradation of forest cover in Côte d'Ivoire since 1960, marked by a loss of nearly 90% of primary forest, shrinking from 16 million hectares to only 3.4 million hectares today. This depletion has a significant incidence on the biodiversity, with 1,300 plant species and 160 animal species threatened with extinction. This phenomenon is mainly due to factors such as increased agricultural production, climate change and creeping urbanization as 55% of the population now live in urban areas. Intensive cocoa cultivation has caused the conversion of 1.2 million hectares of forest into agricultural land, thus affecting ecosystem services, food security, and the health of local communities. The paper makes recommendations for sustainable forest management, aimed at preserving this vital ecosystem for future generations.*

Keywords: forest cover degradation, biodiversity loss, natural resources, forest area, plant species, creeping urbanization, climate change, urban population, intensive cocoa cultivation, ecosystem services.

INTRODUCTION

Forest cover degradation in Côte d'Ivoire is a major environmental issue that has evolved in a worrying manner since 1960. First of all, it is worth noting that at that time, Côte d'Ivoire boasted approximately 16 million hectares of forest cover, representing nearly 50% of the country's total surface area¹. However, due to various anthropogenic pressures, this forest wealth has gradually been put in jeopardy. Today, the country is left with only 3.4 million hectares of forest, representing an alarming loss of nearly 90% of the primary forest².

Several factors do contribute to this critical situation. Soaring urbanization, which has caused the urban population to grow from 20% in 1960 to nearly 55% in 2020, is putting tremendous pressure on forest resources³. Similarly, intensive agriculture, particularly cocoa cultivation,

¹ FAO, State of the World's Forests 2020.

² Ministry of Water Resources and Forestry, Côte d'Ivoire, National Report on Deforestation 2020.

³ Institut National de la Statistique de Côte d'Ivoire, Étude Démographique 2020.

has led to the conversion of nearly 1.2 million hectares of forest into agricultural land between 1990 and 2020⁴. Furthermore, climate change is exacerbating this situation by affecting water regulation and increasing the vulnerability of forests to extreme weather events⁵.

At this stage, the burning question is: what's the current state of degradation of Côte d'Ivoire's forest cover? This deforestation does not simply shrink the forest area, it also has disastrous consequences for the biodiversity, food security, and the health of local communities.

This study therefore aims to analyze the history of deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire, identify the contributing factors, and assess the resulting ecological and socio-economic impacts. Finally, recommendations will be made to ensure a sustainable future for forest resources and the communities that depend on them for their livelihood.

STATE OF FOREST COVER DEGRADATION

In this Part 1, we took stock of forest cover depletion in Côte d'Ivoire, highlighting its historical developments and underlying factors. Chapter 1 focuses on the history of deforestation by analyzing the evolution of forest cover since 1960. At that time, Côte d'Ivoire had a vast forest area of approximately 16 million hectares, rich in biodiversity. Unfortunately, this situation has changed radically over the decades, with an alarming loss of this natural capital, representing nearly 90% of the primary forest today.

In this context, Chapter 1 also addresses the various factors driving deforestation, including anthropogenic activities such as urbanization, intensive agriculture, and mining. These activities exert significant pressure on forests, leading to dramatic ecological consequences. Moreover, climate change is emerging as an aggravating factor, affecting not only the quantity but also the quality of forest resources.

Dwelling on the the civil society's contribution to the sustainable development of the Banco Forest, Chapter 2 highlights the impacts of this forest degradation, particularly on biodiversity and ecosystem services such as water regulation and soil protection. It is worth underscoring that these impacts are not limited on the environment; they also touch local communities, affecting their food security and health.

This Part 1 provides an overview of deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire, while identifying the major issues that require urgent attention. Therefore, to preserve this vital ecosystem and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come, concrete actions need to be taken.

A. History of Forest Degradation

Deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire advances by leaps and bounds since the 1960s. First and foremost, in 1960, the country's forest area was approximately 16 million hectares, representing nearly 50% of the country's total surface area. Unfortunately, this major natural resource is fast depleting over the decades due to various factors. Between 1960 and 2020, Côte d'Ivoire lost

⁴ Banque Mondiale, Cacao: Economic Impacts and Sustainability Challenges in Ivory Coast, 2020.

⁵ Organisation Météorologique Mondiale, Rapport sur le Climat Mondial 2021.

approximately 90% of its primary forest, and is left with only about 3.4 million hectares of forest today⁶.

This dramatic loss of forest area has taken a heavy toll on biodiversity. As a result, nearly 1,300 plant species and 160 animal species are now threatened or endangered⁷. These figures illustrate the crucial importance of biodiversity for the balance of ecosystems and the need to protect natural resources.

Secondly, deforestation is driven by several factors, including anthropogenic activities, which play a key role in all this. On the one hand, expanding urbanization has caused the conversion of vast forest areas into urban land. Presently, nearly 55% of the Ivorian population live in urban areas, with forecasts indicating that this figure could reach 70% by 2030. This rapid growth avidly calls for additional land, thereby increasing pressure on forest resources.

On the other hand, intensive agriculture, particularly cocoa cultivation, has also led to clearing of forests. In fact, approximately 1.2 million hectares of forest have been cleared for agricultural purposes since 1990, with cocoa production accounting for around 15% of Côte d'Ivoire's GDP.

Finally, climate change is making the situation more compounded. Recent studies show that rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns are affecting the resilience of forest ecosystems⁸. Consequently, prolonged periods of drought and extreme weather events are exacerbating the loss of forest cover.

The evolution of forest cover in Côte d'Ivoire reveals a worrying situation. The combination of anthropogenic activities and climate change has led to significant depletion of forest resources, affecting both biodiversity and ecosystems. It is imperative to act quickly to protect and restore these precious natural resources.

B. Impacts of Forest Degradation

Deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire has major impacts on both biodiversity and ecosystem services. First, biodiversity loss is one of the most alarming consequences of this phenomenon. The destruction of natural habitats has caused a severe decline in species; approximately 1,300 plant species and 160 animal species are now threatened or endangered. The local fauna and flora are severely affected, thus posing a threat to species that are key to maintaining ecological balance.

Moreover, the disruption of ecosystems has adverse effects on ecosystem services. For example, studies reckon that the loss of forest cover reduces the ability of forests to regulate the water cycle, leading to a 30% to 50% decrease in river flows in some regions⁹. This situation makes it very difficult to access drinking water, thus impacting communities and their

⁶ Ministère des Eaux et Forêts, Côte d'Ivoire, Rapport National sur la Déforestation 2020.

⁷ IUCN, Red List of Threatened Species: Status of Biodiversity in Côte d'Ivoire, 2021.

⁸ Organisation Météorologique Mondiale, Rapport sur le Climat Mondial 2021.

⁹ Centre de Suivi Écologique, Impact de la Déforestation sur le Cycle de l'Eau, 2021.

development. In addition, deforestation heightens soil erosion, with losses estimated at more than 30 million tons of fertile soil per year, thus affecting agricultural productivity¹⁰.

Forest degradation does not only have ecological consequences; it also affects socio-economic spheres. On the one hand, local communities, which depend directly on forest resources for their livelihoods, suffer severe consequences. In fact, a study has shown that around 60% of people living near forest areas suffer adverse economic effects due to the depletion of natural resources¹¹. This translates into a loss of income and economic opportunities, thus exacerbating poverty in these regions.

On the other hand, deforestation has implications for food security and human health. The loss of vital forest resources compromises food supplies, while soil degradation affects crop quality. Data reveals that up to 20% of children in affected communities suffer from malnutrition due to limited access to nutritious food from forests¹². As a result, the overall population health is at risk, thus making the fight against poverty more complicated.

Forest degradation impacts in Côte d'Ivoire are multidimensional, ranging from ecological to socio-economic. The figures highlight the urgency of conservation and sustainable forest resource management initiatives to protect biodiversity and ensure the well-being of local communities.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND FOREST PROTECTION POLICIES

In this Part 2, we looked at the legal framework and policies put in place to protect forests in Côte d'Ivoire. Chapter 1 analyzes the laws and regulations in force concerning logging and environmental conservation. The 2014 Forest Code is a fundamental text that establishes rules for the sustainable exploitation of forest resources while incorporating biodiversity protection considerations¹³. However, despite the existence of these laws, their implementation remains a major challenge due to corruption, lack of resources, and ineffective surveillance.

We also examined the role of government institutions and NGOs in the implementation of these regulations. Thus, the actions taken by the government in synergy with community initiatives are essential to ensure forest conservation. NGOs play a key role by carrying out community sensitization and supporting reforestation and ecosystem protection projects¹⁴. However, it is worth emphasizing that to ensure the effectiveness of these policies, local communities' commitment is indispensable.

Chapter 2 discusses opportunities for improvement and restoration initiatives put in place to reverse forest degradation trends. It is important to note that legislative recommendations, such as the adoption of new amendments to stiffen forest protection, are necessary. Alongside,

¹⁰ FAO, Erosion des Sols et Dégradation des Terres en Côte d'Ivoire, 2020.

¹¹ Oxfam, Impacts Sociaux de la Déforestation sur les Communautés Locales, 2021.

¹² UNICEF, Nutrition et Sécurité Alimentaire en Côte d'Ivoire, 2020.

¹³ Code forestier de la Côte d'Ivoire, 2014.

¹⁴ Greenpeace, Rôle des ONG dans la Conservation des Forêts en Côte d'Ivoire*, 2021.

examples of international best practices, where countries have successfully restored their forest cover, offer valuable lessons for Côte d'Ivoire¹⁵.

This Part 2 highlights the crucial importance of a robust legal framework and multi-stakeholder cooperation to protect Côte d'Ivoire's forests. Therefore, to meet the current challenges of deforestation and ensure a sustainable future for the country's forest resources, Government's, NGOs, and local communities' commitment is essential.

A. Legal Framework for Forests

This section discusses the legal framework governing logging and environmental protection in Côte d'Ivoire. First, it is important to consider the key legislation that has been put in place to guide these activities.

The 2014 Forest Code is one of the main pieces of legislation, establishing provisions that aim to balance the exploitation of forest resources with the need to preserve the environment¹⁶. This code sets forth that any logging activity must be preceded by an environmental impact assessment to weigh the potential consequences on the ecosystem.

At the same time, other laws, such as the Law on Nature Protection (Law No. 96-766 of 1996), reinforce measures for the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources. This law also imposes sanctions on offenders, thus making illegal logging more difficult¹⁷.

Secondly, specific regulations were prepared, including environmental codes governing the use of forest resources and conditions of access to protected areas. These regulations aim to preserve biodiversity while allowing for the rational use of resources.

The implementation of these laws is essential to ensure effective protection of forests. In this regard, the role of government institutions is crucial. The Government, through the Ministry of Water and Forests, has taken several actions to monitor and regulate logging. These include deploying forest rangers on the field to monitor logging activities and implementing measures to prevent deforestation¹⁸.

At the same time, the commitment of NGOs and the civil society is also crucial for forest conservation. Community initiatives, such as reforestation programs and sensitization projects, help involve local populations in the sustainable management of forest resources. For example, several NGOs are working with communities to plant trees and restore degraded areas, while training residents in sustainable agricultural practices¹⁹.

The legal framework for forests in Côte d'Ivoire provides a set of laws and regulations which, when properly implemented, can contribute to the protection of forest resources. However, the

¹⁵ FAO, *Leçons Apprises de la Restauration Forestière dans le Monde*, 2020.

¹⁶ République de Côte d'Ivoire, *Code forestier*, 2014.

¹⁷ Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, *Law No. 96-766 on nature protection*, 1996.

¹⁸ Ministère des Eaux et Forêts, Côte d'Ivoire, *Rapport sur l'Exploitation Forestière* 2021.

¹⁹ FAO, *Partenariats entre ONG et Communautés pour la Conservation des Forêts*, 2020.

success of these measures depends on cooperation between the Government, NGOs, and local communities, thereby enabling integrated and sustainable forest management.

B. Prospects for Improvement and Restoration Initiatives

In this section, we analyze the prospects for improvement in forest legislation in Côte d'Ivoire. First, it is imperative to propose amendments and new laws that address the contemporary challenges of deforestation. To encourage sustainable practices, it is crucial that sanctions on illegal logging be hardened and certification mechanisms for forest products be established²⁰. For example, the introduction of a “Sustainability Index” for logging operators could facilitate product traceability and guarantee their responsible sourcing.

Furthermore, case studies from other countries that have successfully protected their forest cover provide valuable lessons. For example, Costa Rica has established a system of payments for environmental services that has helped restore nearly 60% of its forests between 1987 and 2016²¹. This type of initiative could be adapted to the Ivorian context to encourage farmers to adopt agroforestry practices that are environmentally-friendly.

Restoration strategies also play a vital role in forest conservation. On the one hand, reforestation programs must be intensified to restore degraded areas. Initiatives such as the national reforestation program, which aims to plant at least 100 million trees by 2030, must be supported through adequate funding and participation of local communities²².

On the other hand, it is essential to invest in environmental sensitization and education. Educating local communities on the importance of forests and sustainable practices beefs up their commitment to protecting natural resources. Educational projects that involve young people in conservation and reforestation activities can have a lasting impact on environmental awareness²³.

The prospects for improving forest management in Côte d'Ivoire require an integrated approach, combining legislative reinforcement and practical restoration initiatives. Therefore, to ensure a sustainable future for the country's forests, active collaboration between the government, NGOs, and local communities is absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSION

The degradation of forest cover in Côte d'Ivoire is a major environmental and socio-economic challenge, with far-reaching consequences for biodiversity, ecosystems, and local communities. Firstly, it is alarming to note that over the last six decades, Côte d'Ivoire has lost nearly 90% of its primary forest, and is now left with less than 3.4 million hectares of forest

²⁰ Ministère des Eaux et Forêts, Côte d'Ivoire, Rapport sur la Législation et l'Exploitation Durable des Ressources Forestières, 2021.

²¹ Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement (PNUD), Évaluation des Pratiques Écologiques au Costa Rica, 2019.

²² FAO, Initiatives de Reforestation et Durabilité en Afrique, 2020.

²³ WWF, Sensibilisation et Éducation Environnementale pour les Communautés Locales, 2021.

cover²⁴. This loss is accompanied by a severe decline in biodiversity, with more than 1,300 plant species and 160 animal species endangered²⁵.

Moreover, deforestation causes the disruption of essential ecosystem services such as water regulation and soil protection. Studies reveal that up to 50% of river flows could decrease in affected areas, thus directly impacting access to drinking water for riparian communities²⁶. The socio-economic consequences are equally worrying, with around 60% of people living near forests reporting negative economic effects due to the depletion of natural resources²⁷.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to adopt strategic recommendations for a sustainable future. First, strengthening laws and regulations, including the introduction of incentives such as adopting a payment system for environmental services, could foster sustainable resource management²⁸. Secondly, ambitious reforestation programs, such as the project to plant 100 million trees by 2030, must be supported through adequate funding and commitment of local communities²⁹.

To protect Côte d'Ivoire's forest cover, it is crucial to adopt an integrated approach by bringing about synergies between the Government, NGOs, and local communities. This will not only ensure the preservation of biodiversity, but also the economic and food security of populations dependent on forest resources. A sustainable future for Côte d'Ivoire's forests is possible if concerted action is taken now.

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²⁴ Ministère des Eaux et Forêts, Côte d'Ivoire, Rapport National sur la Déforestation 2020.

²⁵ IUCN, Red List of Threatened Species: Status of Biodiversity in Côte d'Ivoire, 2021.

²⁶ Centre de Suivi Écologique, Impact de la Déforestation sur le Cycle de l'Eau, 2021

²⁷ Oxfam, Impacts Sociaux de la Déforestation sur les Communautés Locales, 2021.

²⁸ FAO, Leçons Apprises de la Restauration Forestière dans le Monde, 2020

²⁹ Programme National de Reforestation, Côte d'Ivoire, 2021.

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