

Evaluation of Illegal Forest Activities in South-West of Nigeria

Abiodun Olusesi Oso¹ and Folaranmi D. Babalola²

¹Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, Olabisi Onabanjo University,
Ago Iwoye Ogun State, Nigeria.

²Department of Forest Resources Management, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria
Corresponding author: Folaranmi D. Babalola, email: babalola.fd@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract

South-west region of Nigeria comprises states that are among the major timber producing states in the country. However, this region of the country is dominated with different forms of forest offenses. Despite this, there is lack of information on the different forms of forest offenses as well as the economic implication of such offenses in the region of the country. This study investigated the different forms of forest offenses in six states of south-west of Nigeria. The study sites were Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States. The survey was carried out through evaluation of records on forest offenses and corresponding fines charged for each of the offense for a period of 10 years (2004 to 2013). An interview of forest stakeholders was also carried out as a follow-up on factors responsible for the offenses. The group of respondents interviewed during the survey includes forest officers, saw-millers, timber contractors, and rural people living around selected forest reserves in each of the states. Ogun State had the highest number of forest offenders. This was followed by Osun, Ondo, and Oyo states, respectively. Illegal cutting of trees ranked topmost of all the forest offenses and attracted the highest cumulative fines of N3,395,350 (23.6%) for the 10 years under study. This was followed by trafficking of unhammered logs which attracted cumulative fines of N1,768,115 (12.3%) for the same period. Other forest offenses recorded include illegal farming, flitching in the reserve, among others. The present practice of accepting forestry as public venture is not ideal. A newly reconstructed and restructured forest sector, built on the pillars of accountability and transparency, would play a major role in economic growth and sustainable development.

Keywords: fines, saw-millers, stakeholders, timber, trees

Introduction

As explained by Contreras-Hermosilla and Peter (2005), illegal activities in the forest sector occur when wood is harvested, transported, processed, bought or sold in violation of national laws. In the same vein, Udo (1997) defined illegal activities, synonymous with forest offense, as any act of commission or omission carried out in or outside a forest in contravention of the forest laws and regulations. In addition, it is “a violation of the criminal law”. Over the years, the strategies for forest policy implementation in the south-west Nigeria have been feeble and uncoordinated. As grievous as this act was, there is dearth of information on the magnitude of the forest offenses. Also, stakeholders’ involvement in forest offenses and the impacts of forest offenses on the sustainable forest management in Nigeria have not been properly documented. General reports on forest administration have revealed that annual occurrence of forest offenses has for long been a forest management problem [Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), 2003].

The CIFOR has raised concern about illegal forestry activities over the last few years. Among other explanations, illegal logging was considered as harvesting of timber in contravention of a country’s laws. Together with the associated international trade in illegally-harvested wood products, it causes environmental damage, costs governments billions of dollars in lost revenue, and is closely associated with corruption and organized crime. It also undermines the competitiveness of legitimate forest operations in both exporting and importing countries. Illegal logging in public lands worldwide is estimated to cause losses in assets and revenue in excess of US\$10 billion annually (Baird, 2001).

According to Udo (1997), over exploitation of forests is caused by inadequate number of protective staff, absence of working plans and stocks maps, and insufficient use of the law to reserve forestland and protect it from destruction. These factors are directly or indirectly responsible for forest offenses. Furthermore, the cases of corruption within the forestry sector in various countries of Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean have been reported (Sizer & Plouvier, 2000). Over half of

all the active logging licenses in 1999 have been reported illegal (with offenders operating with expired licenses or logging in parks and reserves) and the legality of allocations of 23 other timber concessions was in doubt. Furthermore, many of the offending companies and individuals that operated outside the law were never prosecuted because of the influence of a “higher authority”. Several institutions such as the Environmental Investigation Agency and Global Witness and Friends of the Earth have researched on forest crime in a number of other countries and have shown that it is a critical problem facing the sustainable management of forest resources (Environmental Investigation Agency, 1996; Glastra, 1999; Global Witness, 1999).

As identified by Contreras-Hermosilla and Peter (2005), the five general factors contributing to the illegal forest activities include: flawed policy and legal framework, minimal enforcement capacity, insufficient data and information about the forest resource and illegal operations, corruption in the private sector and in government, and high demand for cheap timber. From the foregoing, these factors are interlinked in terms of contributions to illegal forest activities. However, the greatest challenge as well as most effective method of preventing forest offenses is monitoring (Ahmed & Oruonye, 2017). Monitoring involves provision of up to date information. Despite difficulty in direct observation of offenses by forest officials, supplementary information could be sourced from people who are mostly living closer to these resources for timely intervention. To gain full access and legal right into operations going on in concession areas, there should be provision for such in the concession contract. Specifically, inspections must be allowed on a routine basis, not only when a crime is suspected (Christy, 2004).

Forest offenses in their entirety have caused lots of environmental damage, cost governments billions of local currencies in lost revenue, promote corruption, and undermine the rule of law as well as good governance (Greenpeace, 1999; Palmer, 2001; Özden & Ayan, 2016). They also retard sustainable development in most of the producing countries. Many researchers have only indicated the destructive effects of forest offenses in plantations and natural forest

wildlife and their habitats. They have hardly quantified the magnitude of financial losses involved (Contreras-Hermosilla & Peter, 2005).

South-west Nigeria comprises states that are major timber producing in the country. However, a number of the states are dominated by different forms of forest offenses. Despite this, there is lack of information on the different forms of forest offenses as well as the economic implication of such offenses in the region of the country. This study therefore investigated the different forms of forest offenses in six states of south-west of Nigeria from 2004 to 2013.

Materials and Methods

Study site

The study sites are South-west States of Nigeria comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti (Figure 1). The region lies between longitude 2°31' and 6°00' East and Latitude 6°21' and 8°37'N with a total land area of 77,818 km² and a projected population of 34,406,231 in 2009 (NPC, 1991). The area is bounded in the East by Edo and Delta States, in the North by Kwara and Kogi States, in the West by the Republic of Benin and in the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The study area has 85 constituted forest reserves with a forest area cover of 842,499 hectares.

Data collection

The survey was carried out through evaluation of records in the State Department of Forestry, specifically records on forest offenses committed from 2004 to 2013. The records also evaluated corresponding fines charged for each of the offense within the same period. A follow-up interview on the factors responsible for commission of forest offenses was carried out. Structured questionnaire and focus group discussions were used for the interview. The respondents that constituted the sampling frame were forest officers, saw-millers, timber contractors, and people living around selected forest reserves in each of the six states.

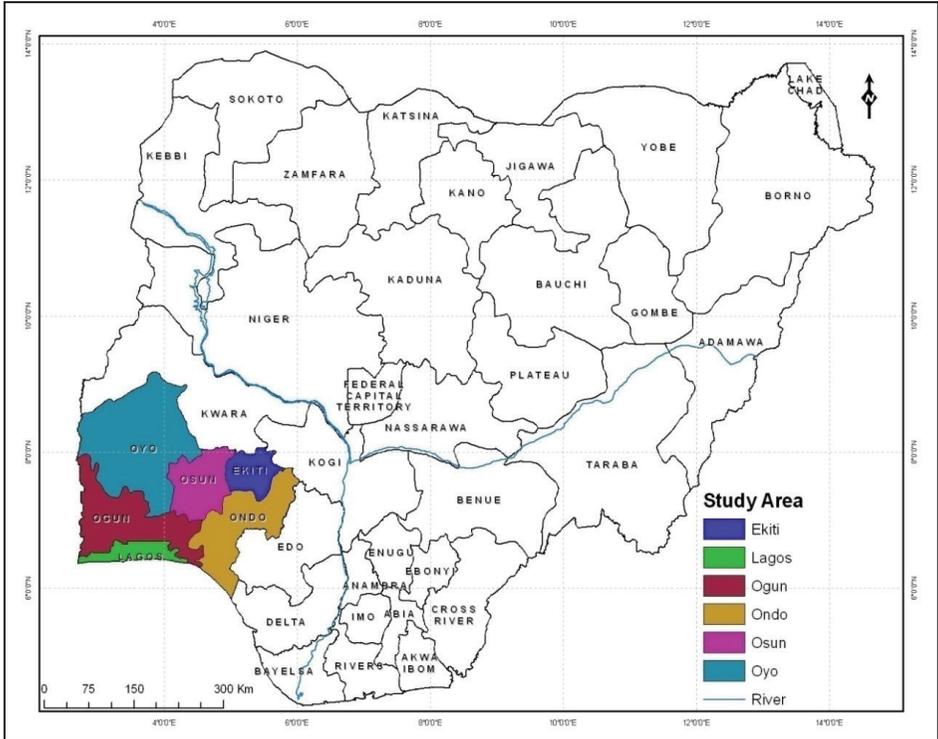


Figure 1. Map of Nigeria showing the study area.

Results and Discussion

Figure 2 shows the cumulative frequency of forest offenses committed in each of the states within the 10 years under study. Ogun State had the highest number of forest offenses. This was followed by Osun, Ondo and Oyo states, respectively. Forest offenses have huge economic implication on the nation. It was observed from the result that the number of offenses increased through the years, which implies that either the forestry policies that guide forest offenses were not being implemented or there were more people in the illegal activities. From observations, illegal felling of trees increased from 2004 to 2013 at a steady rate and there was no intention of reducing this menace in the

states under study. Hence, by 2021, this could have increased so drastically and it will keep costing the nation millions of naira that could have been invested in other sectors of the economy.

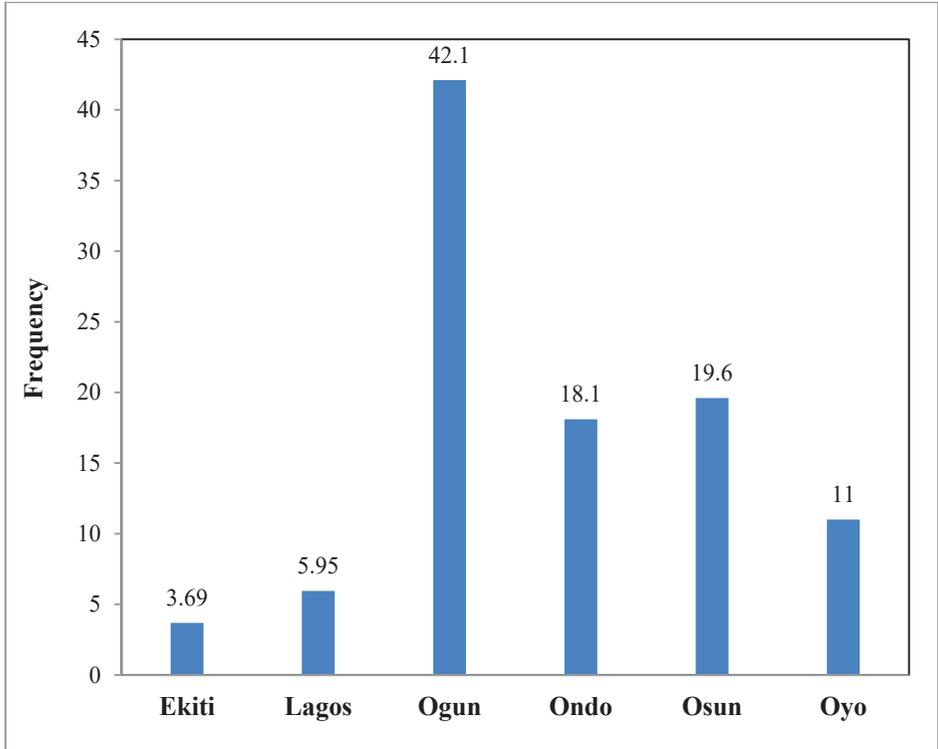


Figure 2. Frequency of forest offences from 2004 to 2013 in South-west States of Nigeria.

From the responses of the more than half of the forestry officials, it was observed that most of the offenses were committed by people who directly handled timber and logs. However, in actual sense, some of these offenses were aided by some corrupt forest officers. Media reports indicate that corruption is one of the major current problems facing the forestry sector (Guardian, 2014). More than 70 percent of the timber contractors and saw-millers indicated that they had committed one forest

offense or more in the last five years. Also, more than 70 percent of the rural dwellers (farmers) around the forest reserve also agreed to the commission of forest offenses. Figure 3 shows some trucks impounded for sundry offenses at the Ministry of Forestry, Abeokuta, Ogun State.



Figure 3. Trucks impounded for sundry offenses at the Ministry of Forestry, Abeokuta, Ogun State.

Figure 4 shows the different forest offenses committed in the six states under study. Illegal cutting of trees, closely followed by illegal farming, ranked topmost of all the forest offenses committed in the states.

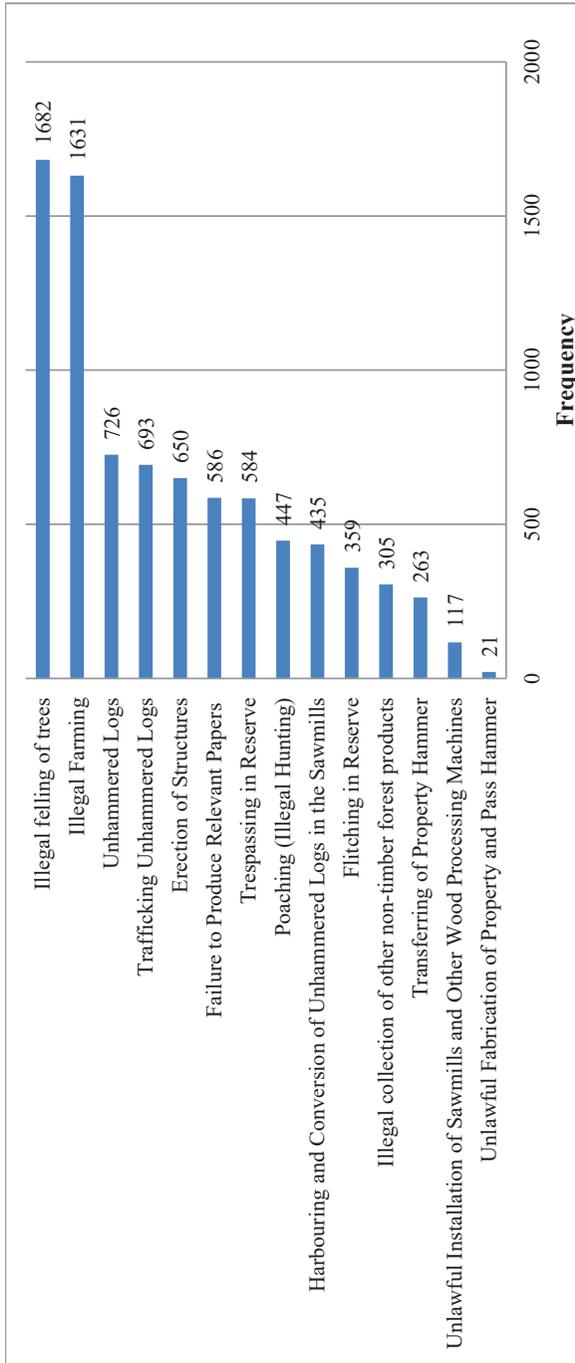


Figure 4. Frequency of forest offenses in South-west States of Nigeria.

Illegal cutting of trees also attracts the highest cumulative fine of N3,395,350 (23.6%) for the 10-year period under this study while illegal farming attracted cumulative fine of N1,768,115 (12.3%) of the total fines documented for the same period (Table 1). Illegal cutting of trees was carried out by people who have not received appropriate permit from the State Forestry Department to carry out cutting operations. This mainly includes the timber contractors and other timber fellers. Illegal logging is also rampant across the globe (Leipold & Winkel, 2016; Winkel et al., 2017; Mizuno, 2018).

Table 1. Cumulative amount of fines realized from Forest Offenses in Southwest States of Nigeria (2004 to 2013).

Forest offenses	Cumulative amount of fines	Percent
Illegal felling of tree	3,395,350	23.6
Trafficking Unhammered Logs	1,768,115	12.3
Illegal Farming	1,491,333	10.4
Unhammered Logs	1,170,768	8.1
Flitching in the Reserve	1,084,283	7.5
Harbouring and Conversion of Unhammered Logs in the Sawmills	1,000,233	7.0
Transferring of Property Hammer	845,417	5.9
Unlawful Installation of Sawmills and Other Wood Processing Machines	799,917	5.6
Illegal collection of other non-timber forest products	752,300	5.2
Erection of Structures	617,500	4.3
Failure to Produce Relevant Papers	449,125	3.1
Unlawful Fabrication of Property and Pass Hammer	357,833	2.5
Trespassing in the Reserve	342,500	2.4
Poaching (Illegal Hunting)	310,283	2.2
Unlawful Pass-hammering	-	0.0
Total	14,384,958	100.0

Illegal farming was mainly carried out by the local people who invade forest reserves and other protected areas to carry out unauthorized land clearing for farming. Farming is only allowed in free areas outside forest reserves and within buffer zones set around forest reserves. Any clearing activities advancing into the forest reserve and other protected areas is an encroachment which is a punishable offense.

However, expansion of human activities on lands surrounding protected areas has disturbed the forest reserve (Kusimi, 2015).

Trafficking of unhammered logs is another offense which is against majority of the enacted forest legislation in the different states. Anyone who is found in possession of unhammered logs or trafficking of unhammered logs is liable to pay appropriate fines as well as subjected to punishment. Within the period under study, forest offenses relating to unhammered logs and harboring and conversion of unhammered logs in sawmills attracted cumulative fines of 1,170,768 (8.1%) and N1,000,233 (7.0%), respectively. Another forest offense closely related to this committed by people in the states was failure to produce relevant papers by the timber contactors. Contractors must have approved documents issued by Forestry Department before operating. However, those without such documents or with expired documents are offenders who were requested to pay fine.

Establishment of settlements leads to erection of permanent structures within areas not permitted by the gazette of forest reserves. It is unfortunate that erection of these illegal structures was observed around forest reserves in the visited states. Quite a number of people who engaged in this illegal activity also constituted those that were requested to pay fine which eventually accumulated to N617,500 (4.3%). Human encroachment in protected area is recognized a problem in natural resource management (Watson et al., 2015; McWilliam et al., 2015).

Another serious offense carried out in the reserve was flichting (Figure 5). This involved conversion of logs into planks within the reserve. This leads to generation of lots of waste, hence inefficient way of log conversion and not permitted under law.

On further investigation of factors leading to forest offenses, it was discovered that weak penalties and non-enforcement of forest laws were the main causes. This is in line with the findings of Udo (1997) and Agera et al. (2009) who reported dearth of forest legislation and corrupt practices by forestry staff as some of the major causes of forest offenses. In the study areas, there was no adequate (if any) enforcement of forest

law against offenders. Those apprehended eventually got away since it costs them very little to be released.



Figure 5. Fitches prepared by illegal fellers in Ondo State Forest Reserve.

Increasing demand for wood in the market against short supply of timber, as well as high government tariff, were indicated by the saw-millers and timber contractors as other factors promoting forest offenses. The high tariff levied on the timber contractors could be a major reason for the high cost of production, hence commission of forest offenses to offset the costs.

Other reasons for committing forest offenses included lack of capital to finance the business, avoiding payment of official fees, inefficient exploitation practices by contractors and saw-millers, low

level of job satisfaction by forestry officials, inadequate or lack of funds for forestry field activities, and untimely release of funds for effective forestry administration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that illegal forest activities and forest offenses occur at different levels of forestry stakeholders in Southwestern, Nigeria. Among the identified forest offenses, illegal felling of trees was the most prominent that the stakeholders had committed in the last 10 years. Forest offenses are also on the increase due to increase in demand for timber resources, with resultant loss of revenue to the government and hindrance to attaining sustainable forest management. It is sad to note that most of the observed offenses were not committed by only one group of stakeholders. It was discovered that the offenses cut across all the stakeholders. This includes the timber contractors, sawmillers, local people as well as the forest officers. There were incidences of collusion by two or more of these stakeholders for an offense to be carried out. The present practice of accepting forestry as public venture is not ideal.

The private firms and industries that derived their raw materials from the forest should be made to pay back through investing in tree planting and forest regeneration. It is recommended that 25 percent of the gross profit should backwardly integrate towards forest regeneration or re-afforestation. Finally, a newly reconstructed and restructured forest sector, built on the pillars of accountability and transparency, would play a major role in economic growth and sustainable development.

Acknowledgment

The authors hereby tender a special appreciation to Ogun State Department of Forestry for the support given during data collection stage of this study and for provision of necessary data used for the study.

Literature Cited

Agera, S. I. N., Adegeye, A. O., & Jimoh, S. O. (2009). Deforestation trends in forest estates of Vandeikya Local Government, Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Forestry, Wildlife and Environment*, 1(1), 46-55.

Ahmed, Y. M., & Oruonye, E. D. (2017). Challenges of enforcement of forestry legislation in Taraba State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Geography and Geology*, 6(3), 48-57.

Baird, M. (2001). *Forest crimes as a constraint to development in east asia. speech delivered at the forest law enforcement and governance*. In East Asia Ministerial Conference, Bali, Indonesia, (September 11-13, 2001. Retrieved from <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/eap/eap.nsf/2500ec5f1a2d9bad852568a3006f557d/c19065b26241f0b247256ac30010e5ff?OpenDocument>

Christy, L. (2004). Designing forestry legislation to improve compliance. Consultant report to FAO, Rome.

CIFOR. (2003). Forest law enforcement and rural livelihoods: Analysis and dissemination by the centre for international forestry research with funding from DFID and PROFOR international forestry. *Review*, 5(3), 1-8.

Contreras-Hermosilla, A., & Peter, E. (2005). Best practices for improving law compliance in the forestry sector. *FAO Forestry Paper*, 145.

Environmental Investigation Agency. (2001). Timber trafficking (EIA & Telepak Indonesia). Retrieved from <http://www.eia-international.org/Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Forest Governance> 73. Accessed 21st June, 2008.

- Glastra, R. (Ed). (1999). *Cut and run: Illegal logging and timber trade in the tropics* (pp. 43-47). International Development Research Centre, IDRC, Ottawa, Canada.
- Global Witness. (1999). A briefing document on how the garden furniture trade in destroying rainforest; made in Vietnam - cut in Cambodia. (pp. 1-16).
- Greenpeace International. (1999). *Buying destruction: A Greenpeace report for corporate consumers of forest products* (pp. 16-17). Greenpeace International Amsterdam.
- Guardian. (2014). Brazil laundering illegal timber on a “massive and growing scale”. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/may/15/brazil-laundering-illegal-timber-on-a-massive-and-growing-scale>
- Kusimi, J. M. (2015). Characterizing land disturbance in Atewa range forest reserve and buffer zone. *Land Use Policy*, 49, 471-482.
- Leipold, S., & Winkel, G. (2016). Divide and conquer—Discursive agency in the politics of illegal logging in the United States. *Global Environmental Change*, 36, 35-45.
- McWilliam, W., Brown, R., Eagles, P., & Seasons, M. (2015). Evaluation of planning policy for protecting green infrastructure from loss and degradation due to residential encroachment. *Land Use Policy*, 47, 459-467.
- Mizuno, K. (2018). State and local people—illegal logging, forest management, and sustainability: A case study in west Java, Indonesia. *Sustainability and Crisis at the Village: Agroforestry in West Java Indonesia*, 171.

- Özden, S., & Ayan, S. (2016). Forest crimes as a threat to sustainable forest management. *Sibirskij Lesnoj Zurnal/Siberian Journal of Forest Science*, 4, 49-55. doi: 10.15372/SJFS20160405
- Palmer, E. (2001). The extent and causes of illegal logging: An analysis of a major cause of deforestation in Indonesia. CSERGE (Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment) London.
- Sizer, N. & D. Plouvier. (2000). Increased investment and trade by transnational logging companies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific: Implications for sustainable management and conservation of tropical forests (pp. 18-20). WRI/ WWF.
- Udo, E. S. (1997). *Forest offences and impediment to forest resources conservation in Akwa-Ibom State* (pp. 8-14). In proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference of the forestry Association of Nigeria held in Ibadan Oyo state, Nigeria.
- Watson, F. G., Becker, M. S., Milanzi, J., & Nyirenda, M. (2015). Human encroachment into protected area networks in Zambia: Implications for large carnivore conservation. *Regional Environmental Change*, 15(2), 415-429.
- Winkel, G., Leipold, S., Buhmann, K., Cashore, B., De Jong, W., Nathan, I., ... & Stone, M. (2017). Narrating illegal logging across the globe: Between green protectionism and sustainable resource use. *International Forestry Review*, 19(1), 81-97.