

ENFORCEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT LAWS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA'S EXTRACTIVE SECTOR

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Abstract

The paper examined the enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws and their alignment with Nigeria's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the context of the extractive sector comprising oil, gas, and solid minerals. It reviewed the conceptual framework surrounding EIA and SDGs, evaluated existing legal instruments such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Act Cap E12 LFN 2004, and examined the current level of compliance by industry players. The paper highlighted key environmental violations, institutional gaps, and governance challenges—including weak enforcement, political interference, lack of stakeholder participation, and inadequate regulatory capacity. It was observed that these issues contribute to environmental degradation, water contamination, and loss of livelihoods in host communities, thereby slowing progress on SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), and 15 (life on land). The paper recommended targeted legal reforms, inter-agency collaboration, capacity building, and the inclusion of EIA enforcement in national sustainable development strategies. Ultimately, it called for a more accountable and participatory legal system capable of ensuring environmental justice and sustainability.

Keywords: Environmental impact assessment, SDGs, environmental governance, legal enforcement.

Introduction

The enforcement of environmental regulations, particularly Environmental Impact Assessment laws, remains a critical concern in Nigeria's quest for sustainable development, especially in the extractive sector. The environmental consequences of oil exploration, gas flaring, and mining activities continue to threaten ecological integrity and human well-being, thereby raising serious questions about the effectiveness of existing legal safeguards. As Nigeria strives to meet global benchmarks for sustainability, particularly those outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the alignment between environmental governance and development objectives in the extractive industry has become more important than ever. The extractive sector, comprising oil, gas, and solid minerals, is a major pillar of Nigeria's economy. It contributes significantly to government revenue, foreign exchange, and gross domestic product. According to the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in 2021, crude oil and natural gas account for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's export earnings and over 50 percent of total government revenue¹. Similarly, mining activities such as the extraction of gold, limestone, tin, and coal are increasingly expanding in states like Zamfara, Kogi, and Ebonyi, reflecting federal efforts to diversify the economy beyond oil dependence. Despite its economic benefits, the extractive sector is linked to widespread

¹ Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (2021). Oil and gas industry report: 2021. Abuja, Nigeria: NEITI.

environmental degradation, particularly in oil-producing areas like the Niger Delta, where oil spills, gas flaring, and land contamination have led to loss of biodiversity and displacement of communities. Uchegbu emphasized that most environmental crises in Nigeria can be traced to weak enforcement of environmental protection laws, especially in sectors where economic interests override ecological considerations². This trend is compounded by limited institutional capacity, political interference, and corporate negligence, which collectively undermine the implementation of Environmental Impact Assessment processes.

Environmental Impact Assessment is a legal and administrative process designed to evaluate the likely environmental effects of a proposed project before any physical development begins. In Nigeria, this process is regulated by the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, originally enacted in 1992 and codified as Cap E12 in the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004. The Act stipulates that all public or private projects likely to cause significant environmental harm must undergo a formal review and approval process through an Environmental Impact Statement. This regulatory instrument is aimed at promoting environmental preservation, sustainable land use, and responsible industrial planning³. Environmental Impact Assessment serves as a preventive legal framework that integrates environmental considerations into developmental planning, thereby reducing adverse effects before they occur⁴. However, in practice, the enforcement of these laws in Nigeria has remained largely ineffective due to institutional deficiencies, regulatory capture, and limited technical capacity. Several actors in the oil, gas, and mining industries continue to evade or manipulate the Environmental Impact Assessment process, often with the complicity of weak enforcement institutions⁵. The relationship between Environmental Impact Assessment enforcement and the Sustainable Development Goals lies in their shared concern for environmental integrity, intergenerational justice, and responsible resource management. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, include key targets such as Goal 6 on clean water, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, Goal 13 on climate action, and Goal 15 on life on land⁶. Weak enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment laws hinders Nigeria's progress towards these goals, particularly in regions suffering from extractive industry-related pollution, land degradation, and public health risks. Effective enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment laws is essential in promoting transparency, safeguarding community rights, and ensuring that industrial growth does not compromise environmental sustainability⁷.

² Uchegbu, S. N. (2018). *Environmental management and protection*. Enugu, Nigeria: Precision Publishers.

³ Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *Environmental Impact Assessment Act (Cap E12)*. Laws of the Federation of Nigeria.

⁴ Ogbodo, S. G. (2010). *Environmental protection in Nigeria: Two decades after the Koko incident*. *Annual Survey of International and Comparative Law*, 15(1), 1–27.

⁵ Ebeku, K. S. A. (2014). *The oil and gas industry and the protection of the environment in Nigeria: Current realities, future prospects*. *Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, 4(1), 63–82.

⁶ United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York, NY: United Nations.

⁷ Okonkwo, N. N., & Odoemena, A. O. (2019). *Environmental impact assessment as a tool for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria: A legal perspective*. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Law*, 9(1), 45–60.

Conceptualization

Environmental Impact Assessment is widely regarded as a proactive environmental management tool that enables the identification and mitigation of negative environmental effects of developmental projects before implementation. Samson Godwin Ogbodo defined Environmental Impact Assessment as a “process which identifies the future consequences of a current or proposed action,” emphasizing its role in safeguarding environmental values before irreversible decisions are made⁴. Akintola Adeniyi described it as “a formalized process used to predict the environmental consequences of any development project and to propose measures to mitigate adverse impacts,” particularly in resource-sensitive sectors⁸. Akintola further viewed it as a “decision-support tool that provides information about the environmental implications of development, ensuring that sustainability is built into economic growth strategies”⁸. Similarly, Chika Okafor noted that Environmental Impact Assessment “promotes accountability and transparency in project planning by ensuring that stakeholders understand the trade-offs involved in development choices”⁹. Based on these scholarly perspectives, the researcher defined Environmental Impact Assessment as a legal and scientific process that systematically identifies, analyzes, and mitigates the negative environmental impacts of proposed projects, particularly in the extractive industry, before their execution.

The Sustainable Development Goals represent a global commitment to ending poverty, protecting the environment, and ensuring prosperity for all by 2030. According to the United Nations, the goals offer “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere”⁶. Michael Dada conceptualized Sustainable Development Goals as “an intergovernmental agenda built on the principle of leaving no one behind while balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability”¹⁰. Okafor further defined them as “a strategic framework adopted by the global community to guide national development plans in a way that respects ecological boundaries and social justice”¹⁰. Likewise, Helen Nnaji described the goals as “a multidimensional blueprint comprising targets and indicators designed to promote inclusive growth, environmental resilience, and global equity”¹¹. Drawing from these definitions, the researcher defines the Sustainable Development Goals as a globally agreed set of environmental, social, and economic objectives intended to ensure responsible resource use, equitable development, and long-term planetary well-being.

The legal framework for Environmental Impact Assessment in Nigeria is anchored on the Environmental Impact Assessment Act Cap E12, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. This Act mandates that all projects likely to affect the environment significantly must undergo a formal Environmental Impact Assessment process. The legislation outlines clear steps, including project screening, public consultation, environmental reporting, and the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement prior to approval³. The law applies to both public and private sector undertakings, especially in sensitive areas such as oil exploration, gas flaring, mining, and industrial construction. Supporting regulations

⁸ Adeniyi, A. K. (2015). Legal dimensions of environmental impact assessment in Nigeria. *African Environmental Law Review*, 7(1), 55–70.

⁹ Okafor, C. C. (2018). Environmental assessment as a planning tool for project sustainability. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Planning*, 6(2), 112–126.

¹⁰ Dada, M. A. (2017). The relevance of the sustainable development goals to environmental justice in Nigeria. *Nigerian Environmental Law Review*, 5(2), 23–38.

¹¹ Nnaji, H. U. (2020). A legal appraisal of Nigeria's compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals. *Nigerian Journal of Sustainable Governance*, 8(1), 72–87.

include the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act and sectoral guidelines issued by the Federal Ministry of Environment. Nonetheless, enforcement challenges persist due to institutional inertia, limited technical manpower, and corruption within regulatory bodies⁵.

Current Realities in the Extractive Sector

The level of compliance with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws in Nigeria's extractive sector remains largely inadequate, with many companies engaging in extractive activities without fully adhering to the requirements of the EIA Act. Although the law mandates that all major development projects must undergo environmental assessment before execution, several extractive firms commence operations without obtaining the necessary EIA certification or present manipulated reports to secure approvals¹². Such non-compliance is often facilitated by weak institutional checks, corruption, and political patronage, all of which weaken the enforcement process¹³. Environmental violations are widespread across extractive zones in Nigeria, particularly in oil-rich and mineral-producing communities. Oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, soil erosion, and the contamination of surface and underground water sources remain prevalent. In the Niger Delta, these violations have contributed to the collapse of local livelihoods, especially fishing and farming, while in northern regions, artisanal and illegal mining activities have led to toxic pollution, child labor, and violent conflicts¹⁴. These impacts persist despite existing legal frameworks because offenders are rarely prosecuted, and remediation measures are poorly enforced¹⁵.

The role of regulatory agencies such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), and the Federal Ministry of Environment is central to environmental oversight. However, these agencies face structural weaknesses that undermine their effectiveness. Issues such as limited funding, poor technical expertise, lack of access to real-time environmental data, and inter-agency rivalry reduce their capacity to monitor and enforce EIA compliance effectively¹⁶. Additionally, overlapping roles between federal and state-level institutions create regulatory confusion, leading to delays or total neglect in responding to environmental infractions¹⁷. Another critical issue is the politicization of EIA processes in extractive licensing and project approvals. Political elites and corporate actors often collude to bypass EIA protocols in exchange for economic or political gains. This manipulation of regulatory frameworks creates a culture of impunity, where companies engage in unsustainable practices with little or no fear of sanctions. In many documented cases, EIA reports are commissioned long after extractive activities have

¹² Adekoya, A. O. (2020). Strengthening environmental compliance in Nigeria's extractive industries: The role of EIA implementation. *Environmental Policy and Law*, 50(1), 22–30.

¹³ Nnaji, I. U., Mbaegbu, C. C., & Okonkwo, E. F. (2021). Challenges of enforcing EIA laws in Nigeria: A review of practices in the solid mineral sector. *Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, 18(1), 91–103.

¹⁴ Ogundele, F. O., Adeniyi, T. A., & Akintola, A. S. (2019). Mining and environmental degradation in Nigeria: A critical assessment. *International Journal of Ecology and Development*, 34(1), 45–59.

¹⁵ Chukwu, J. C., Anyanwu, I. F., & Eze, P. C. (2022). Environmental degradation and human security in Nigeria's oil-producing communities. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Studies*, 14(2), 65–79.

¹⁶ Ibe, C. U., Onuoha, N. M., & Chukwuma, G. O. (2020). Regulatory institutions and sustainable extractive governance in Nigeria. *African Journal of Public Policy*, 11(3), 134–149.

¹⁷ Okoye, V. C., Akintunde, A. O., & Ezeaku, C. C. (2021). Environmental governance and the extractive sector in Nigeria: Regulatory agencies in focus. *Sustainable Development Review*, 27(2), 109–123.

begun, rendering the assessments reactive rather than preventive in approach¹⁸. This practice undermines the environmental justice principle and denies host communities the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes¹⁵.

Finally, there is a growing disconnect between EIA outcomes and community realities. Most EIA documents are written in technical language inaccessible to local populations, and community consultation is often reduced to tokenism. Many host communities remain unaware of the environmental implications of proposed projects until after environmental degradation occurs. This alienation fosters mistrust between communities, regulatory agencies, and extractive companies, often resulting in protests, litigation, and violent conflicts¹⁷. Addressing this disconnect requires not just legal reform, but a deliberate shift towards participatory environmental governance that centers local voices in the assessment and monitoring processes¹⁹.

Challenges in the Enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment Laws

The enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws in Nigeria's extractive sector faces numerous systemic and institutional setbacks that hinder their effectiveness. These challenges significantly weaken the legal framework's capacity to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development in resource-rich communities. One of the most pressing challenges is institutional weakness and poor inter-agency coordination. Regulatory bodies such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency and the Federal Ministry of Environment often operate with overlapping mandates, limited funding, and inadequate personnel, which undermines effective enforcement of EIA provisions¹⁹. Secondly, political interference and corruption remain widespread in the issuance of EIA approvals. Influential individuals and corporations often bypass legal procedures or manipulate environmental audits through political connections, which compromises the objectivity and transparency of EIA processes²⁰. A third major issue is the lack of public awareness and stakeholder engagement. Host communities are often excluded from the decision-making processes regarding extractive operations, leading to mistrust, resistance, and non-cooperation with government agencies and project developers²². Fourthly, the enforcement mechanisms for EIA laws suffer from weak sanction regimes and poor follow-up mechanisms. Penalties for violations are either insufficient or rarely imposed, and post-approval monitoring of projects is infrequent, leaving violators unaccountable²¹. Fifth, there is a noticeable lack of technical capacity within regulatory institutions. Many staff lack adequate training in environmental assessment methodologies, modern monitoring tools, and data interpretation, which results in low-quality environmental reviews and oversight²².

Sixth, legislative gaps and outdated regulatory instruments hinder comprehensive enforcement. Some aspects of the EIA Act are not in sync with modern sustainable

¹⁸ Adesina, F. A., & Lawal, R. O. (2018). Environmental justice and community engagement in environmental impact assessment in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Law*, 12(1), 74–88.

¹⁹ Echefu, N., & Akpofure, R. (2017). Environmental impact assessment in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities. *Nigerian Environmental Law Review*, 11(2), 19–35.

²⁰ Adebayo, F. A., & Iyiola, M. E. (2020). Corruption and environmental governance in Nigeria's oil sector. *Journal of African Environmental Law and Policy*, 5(1), 33–46.

²¹ Ihuoma, O. C., & Nwachukwu, G. N. (2019). Weak enforcement of environmental policies in Nigeria: A review. *International Journal of Environmental Studies and Research*, 7(4), 78–88.

²² Onyeji, N. O., & Ogbonna, E. C. (2021). Capacity-building for EIA enforcement in Nigeria: Issues and prospects. *West African Journal of Environmental Law and Practice*, 10(1), 15–28.

development frameworks, and there is a lack of harmonization with international best practices²³. Finally, insecurity in many resource-rich regions disrupts enforcement activities. In areas like the Niger Delta, threats from militant groups, vandalism, and community unrest often deter field inspections and effective monitoring by government officials²⁴. These challenges cumulatively weaken the integrity of Nigeria's environmental governance system and slow progress toward achieving key environmental and developmental objectives.

Implications for Sustainable Development

The weak enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment laws in Nigeria's extractive sector poses significant risks to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The implications of this legal and regulatory failure are multifaceted, impacting environmental sustainability, public health, and socio-economic development. The following points highlight these critical consequences:

- **Environmental Degradation and Ecosystem Loss:** The continued failure to enforce EIA laws has led to large-scale deforestation, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity in oil-producing and mining communities²⁵. Fragile ecosystems are frequently destroyed due to unregulated industrial activities, threatening species survival and natural balance, especially in the Niger Delta region²⁶.
- **Threats to Health, Water Resources, and Livelihoods:** Pollution from extractive operations contaminates water bodies and soils, resulting in unsafe drinking water, reduced agricultural productivity, and increased disease prevalence²⁷. This directly undermines SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) as rural communities bear the burden of toxic exposure and loss of traditional means of livelihood²⁸.
- **Undermining of Nigeria's Progress Toward Achieving Relevant SDGs:** Weak enforcement mechanisms derail Nigeria's commitment to SDGs such as SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)²⁶. The absence of robust legal accountability for environmental violations reflects poorly on national development planning and international climate obligations.
- **Increased Socio-Economic Inequality and Environmental Injustice:** Marginalized host communities suffer disproportionately from environmental externalities while corporations profit from resource exploitation²⁹. This exacerbates inequality and undermines SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and

²³ Chukwu, O. G., & Udeh, E. O. (2022). Gaps in Nigeria's EIA legal frameworks and the need for legislative reforms. *African Journal of Law and Policy Review*, 9(2), 55–67.

²⁴ Nnadi, P. C., & Ezeaku, C. A. (2020). Environmental conflict and security challenges in Nigeria's oil region. *Nigerian Journal of Sustainable Development*, 6(1), 41–52.

²⁵ Aigbedion, I. N., & Iyayi, S. E. (2020). Environmental impact of mineral exploitation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Environmental Science and Policy*, 15(2), 55–69.

²⁶ Akpomovie, O. B., & Uwawah, E. (2019). Deforestation and biodiversity loss in the Niger Delta. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Sociology*, 3(2), 73–85

²⁷ Okoro, M. N., & Nnaji, M. U. (2021). Environmental health hazards in extractive communities. *Nigerian Journal of Public Health Policy*, 4(1), 15–30.

²⁸ Ijeoma, M. N., & Abangwu, N. P. (2020). Water pollution and public health in the Niger Delta. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health Studies*, 7(2), 33–48.

²⁹ Agwu, M. O., & Okoye, F. C. (2017). Environmental injustice and oil exploration in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, 4(1), 44–58.

Communities), as many of these communities lack compensation, relocation support, or access to justice³⁰.

- **Erosion of Public Trust in Governance and Institutions:** The visible failure to hold violators accountable contributes to declining confidence in environmental laws and public institutions³¹. Citizens perceive the state as complicit or indifferent, which undermines SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), especially in regions prone to militancy and civil unrest²⁷.
- **Compromised Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Efforts:** Ineffective EIA enforcement limits Nigeria's ability to adapt to or mitigate climate change, particularly in managing emissions, preserving carbon sinks, and protecting climate-sensitive ecosystems³². This has direct consequences for SDG 13 (Climate Action) and global environmental agreements to which Nigeria is a party²¹.
- **Weak Institutional Accountability and Development Planning:** Poor integration of environmental governance into development strategies results in short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term sustainability²⁵. This undermines integrated planning under SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and weakens the institutional framework for inclusive and environmentally sound development²². These implications demonstrate that without reforming and enforcing EIA laws effectively, Nigeria risks derailing its path to sustainable development and aggravating existing socio-environmental crises.

Legal and Policy Recommendations

Effective enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws in Nigeria's extractive sector requires a multi-dimensional legal and policy approach. While existing frameworks provide a foundation, systemic weaknesses continue to hinder compliance and accountability. To ensure that EIA laws contribute meaningfully to environmental sustainability and the country's development agenda, the following legal and policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms:** The absence of rigorous enforcement undermines the intent of EIA legislation. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms involves establishing independent environmental courts or tribunals with the authority to adjudicate EIA violations promptly³³. Additionally, empowering agencies like the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) with adequate legal authority and logistical support would promote effective compliance monitoring and sanctions for noncompliance³⁴.
- **Enhancing Transparency and Public Interest Litigation:** Transparency in EIA processes can be improved by mandating public disclosure of environmental reports and project approvals. Furthermore, expanding the legal standing of civil society and

³⁰ Ogar, J. E., & Nwafor, P. C. (2021). Oil-induced inequality and community displacement. *Journal of Environmental Justice in Africa*, 5(3), 61–76.

³¹ Ibe, A. C., & Okorie, T. C. (2020). Governance, public trust, and environmental law in Nigeria. *International Journal of Law and Political Science*, 6(1), 47–59.

³² Umeh, L. N., & Akpata, I. A. (2021). Climate action and legal compliance in Nigeria. *Environmental Law and Climate Review*, 3(1), 70–85.

³³ Adebayo, A., & Oladipo, T. (2017). Legal reform and environmental protection in Nigeria: The role of environmental courts. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Law*, 8(1), 45–60.

³⁴ Akinsanya, A. O., & Ogundele, T. M. (2021). Reassessing the enforcement of environmental impact assessment in Nigeria's extractive industries. *Environmental Law Review*, 23(2), 148–164.

community-based organizations to initiate public interest litigation would strengthen accountability³⁵. This approach encourages public scrutiny and legal redress against environmentally harmful projects³⁶.

- **Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement in EIA Processes:** Inclusive participation of stakeholders particularly affected communities ensures that environmental and social concerns are fully considered³⁷. Legal provisions should require project developers to obtain documented community input and consent during the EIA process³⁸. This will foster transparency, reduce conflict, and promote project legitimacy.
- **Capacity Building for Regulatory Agencies:** Many regulatory agencies lack the technical expertise and resources necessary for effective EIA enforcement. Policy efforts should prioritize training of personnel, provision of monitoring tools, and inter-agency collaboration to close these capacity gaps³⁹. A well-equipped and knowledgeable regulatory workforce is critical to implementing and enforcing EIA laws⁴⁰.
- **Integrating EIA Laws with National SDG Plans:** To promote coherence in environmental governance, EIA implementation should be integrated into Nigeria's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) strategy⁴¹. Environmental assessments should specifically address how proposed projects impact goals such as clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15)⁴². This integration would ensure that development projects contribute positively to national sustainability objectives.
- **Reviewing and Amending the EIA Act:** The current Environmental Impact Assessment Act (Cap E12 LFN 2004) requires revision to reflect technological advancements, climate change concerns, and evolving international standards⁴³. Key amendments should include mandatory periodic audits, integration of climate risk assessments, and use of digital submission systems⁴⁴. Such reforms will enhance the Act's relevance and applicability.

³⁵ Ogbodo, S. G., & Nnamani, R. U. (2019). Public interest litigation and access to environmental justice in Nigeria. *Journal of Law and Social Justice*, 4(1), 102–119.

³⁶ Ume, K. N., & Eze, C. I. (2022). The legal standing of NGOs and communities in Nigerian environmental litigation: Prospects for reform. *African Journal of Legal Studies*, 10(3), 119–134.

³⁷ Chukwuemeka, E. O., & Ogbonna, C. P. (2020). Community participation in environmental impact assessment in Nigeria: Policy gaps and institutional failures. *African Journal of Public Policy*, 15(2), 72–85.

³⁸ Ikejiani-Clark, M., & Okafor, K. U. (2018). Stakeholder engagement and EIA compliance in oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta. *African Journal of Conflict and Development*, 7(1), 25–39.

³⁹ Okoye, J. N., & Uba, R. N. (2021). Institutional weaknesses and EIA enforcement challenges in Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 13(4), 177–194.

⁴⁰ Ezenwa, C. C., & Akachukwu, A. E. (2016). Building institutional capacity for environmental regulation in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 18(4), 90–105.

⁴¹ Obi, S. N., & Ekweozor, I. K. (2020). Environmental impact assessment and Nigeria's sustainable development goals: Legal and institutional dynamics. *Nigerian Law Journal*, 25(2), 55–70.

⁴² Ojeh, V. N., & Ajibade, L. T. (2018). Mainstreaming the SDGs in Nigeria's environmental impact assessment system: Gaps and opportunities. *Journal of African Environmental Policy*, 11(2), 133–147.

⁴³ Agu, S. O., & Otu, J. A. (2015). *Environmental law and policy in Nigeria: Problems and prospects for sustainable development*. Enugu, Nigeria: CIDJAP Press.

⁴⁴ Nwankwo, C. O., & Onuoha, F. C. (2019). Reforming Nigeria's EIA legislation: A comparative legal review. *International Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, 12(3), 210–225.

- **Adopting a Multi-Agency Enforcement Strategy:** Environmental regulation should involve coordinated efforts from multiple government institutions. A multi-agency task force comprising NESREA, the Federal Ministry of Environment, the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), and anti-corruption bodies would enhance compliance monitoring and policy coherence⁴⁵. Clear role allocation and joint enforcement protocols would prevent overlap and inefficiencies⁴⁶.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws remains a crucial instrument for safeguarding Nigeria's environmental resources amid the pressures of extractive activities. This opinion paper has emphasized that while Nigeria possesses a formal legal framework for EIA enforcement, its practical implementation is hindered by weak regulatory capacity, corruption, poor stakeholder engagement, and inconsistent political will. These lapses have contributed to ecological degradation, health hazards, and a failure to align extractive operations with sustainable development goals. A forward-looking and accountable legal system is urgently needed to transform EIA regulations from mere procedural formalities into substantive safeguards for environmental integrity and human well-being. The way forward involves strengthening institutional enforcement, promoting transparency, ensuring public participation, and aligning EIA procedures with Nigeria's national development and climate obligations. A holistic and participatory environmental governance regime rooted in the rule of law and public accountability will ensure that Nigeria's extractive sector contributes not just to economic growth, but also to the sustainability and dignity of future generations.

⁴⁵ Maduka, O. E., & Chineme, A. C. (2021). The role of NESREA and DPR in environmental enforcement: A multi-agency perspective. *Environmental Management and Law Review*, 6(1), 31–46.

⁴⁶ Duru, U. A., & Okorie, P. C. (2020). Institutional frameworks and inter-agency coordination in environmental governance in Nigeria. *Nigerian Public Administration Review*, 9(2), 89–103.

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