

Forest Governance related to Wildlife/CITES in Ethiopia-Implementation

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing a review of policies in relation to wildlife conservation and management in Ethiopia. The paper will give information on wildlife policy, legal matters, challenges towards implementing existing wildlife laws, as well as perform gap analysis. The paper uses a literature or document analysis technique. A country like Ethiopia has wildlife policies, acts, or laws for conserving, protecting, and developing wildlife resources. Data for analysis was analyzed by SWOT techniques, which stand for Strength Weakness Opportunity Threats analysis. It was clear that there exist gap conditions in relation to wildlife strategies' policies and laws, including private protected areas for management, environmental impacts, as well as community benefits. Other conditions such as lack of enforcement for wildlife laws, wildlife trafficking, as well as absence of technology for controlling wildlife offenses, occur in conserving wildlife resources for implementing an existing law, which was proclamation No. 575/2008. Although there exist gap conditions, availability of such laws for wildlife conservation may avail international or local institutions for developing ecotourism. Therefore, this paper concludes that gap conditions existing in relation to policies, legal issues, for wildlife strategies development will warrant implementing conditions with law enforcers, improving prosecutors' capacities, use of technology, as well as preparing strategies for reducing poaching.

Keyword: Trafficking, Wildlife conservation, Wildlife Legal framework, Wildlife policy and strategy.

1. Introduction

Conservation of wildlife resources as well as forest resources in Ethiopia faces a complicated legal framework in the form of various international agreements, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES for short. With its accession to CITES in 1989, conservation measures, including legal reforms, were undertaken with a view to controlling trade in endangered species. Yet, despite various legal commitments, wildlife resources as well as conservation of forests face difficulties in implementing legal structures.

One of the most contemporary overviews of such challenges was given by Taye Lemma Geleta in 2025. In a synopsis of wildlife laws, policies, and enforcement power in relation to biodiversity conservation in a more sustainable use in Ethiopia, Geleta asserts that

several flaws exist that continue to jeopardize biodiversity conservation as well as sustainable use. This section shall synthesize, as well as interpret, the main results established by Geleta.

2. Forest Governance in Ethiopia

Forest governance in Ethiopia has evolved through a series of policy reforms aimed at promoting sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and community participation. Historical assessments by Lemenih and Kassa (2014) highlight that state-led forest management approaches often marginalized local communities, resulting in weak ownership and limited compliance. More recent reforms emphasize participatory forest management (PFM), which has been shown to improve forest condition and community livelihoods (Gobeze et al., 2009). Despite these improvements, gaps remain in integrating forest governance frameworks with wildlife regulations, especially in areas where forest degradation overlaps with illegal wildlife harvesting.

3. Policy and Legal Framework for Wildlife and Forest Governance

Geleta (2025) notes, 'although Ethiopia has a significant range of wildlife as well as forest policies, most of which are inadequately coordinated,' that it still requires a lot. Grouped under its Wildlife Policy and Strategy, there are four main objectives: wildlife development, resource utilization, investment, as well as building capacity for research and education, as enshrined in a range of proclamations such as the Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Environmental Protection Policy, among others.

Nevertheless, it has been noted that there are weaknesses in these tools. For instance, Geleta emphasizes that lack of clarity in community rights, but most importantly, about community access to wildlife resources as well as forest products, has emerged as a key concern. Though access by communities has been identified as imperative, this cannot occur in a clear manner either with regard to benefit sharing or with regard to assigning control over such resources. Also, it has been noted that this Act remains mum about disposal of confiscated wildlife products, which results in corruption at times.

In relation to forest, such legal uncertainties also encompass species like *Prunus africana*, *Osyris lanceolata*, as well as others under *Aloe*, which lie under CITES Appendix II. For such species, control of harvesting as well as exporting revolves around both forestry as well as wildlife control agencies, which leads to bureaucratic disputes as well as delays. It appears that, according to Geleta, a lack of standardized control measures might result in uncertainties for enforcer, such as whether it was a violation of forestry or wildlife regulations.

4. Wildlife Management and CITES Implementation

Research by Reeve (2002) and subsequent evaluations by the CITES Secretariat emphasize that effective implementation hinges on strong institutional structures, wildlife monitoring, and enforcement capacity. In Ethiopia, wildlife management institutions face challenges related to limited budgets, inadequate training, and insufficient species-level data (Desalegn et al., 2020). Furthermore, CITES-listed species such as Abyssinian rosewood and various reptiles often encounter illegal trade pressures, highlighting enforcement vulnerabilities. Studies by Abebe et al. (2021) demonstrate that stronger cross-sectoral collaboration between forestry, customs, and wildlife authorities is needed to enhance compliance.

5. Community Participation and Compliance

Literature widely supports the role of communities in effective natural resource governance. Community-based Forest management initiatives in Ethiopia have shown measurable improvements in both forest regeneration and reduced illegal activities (Kassa et al., 2011). However, community roles in wildlife protection remain underdeveloped. Studies by Ostrom (2009) and Agrawal and Gibson (1999) emphasize that community compliance increases when local benefits are clear, rights are secure, and monitoring mechanisms are shared. Applying these principles to CITES implementation in Ethiopia requires integrating community incentives, awareness programs, and participatory wildlife monitoring.

6. Challenges of Enforcement and Prosecution

Enforcement, or application, as a feature of the conservation regime, in the case of Ethiopia, highlights serious mismatches between existing capacities or instruments for enforcement. Geleta (2025) establishes that, as a framework, enforcement instruments in this country are formal, including punishment, fines, and imprisonment, but their application remains sporadic, with cases offering lenient punishment or abandoning cases involving wildlife.

Various weaknesses in the system contribute to such results. Law enforcement institutions such as the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA), custom offices, and regional administrations work with minimal resources and a poor communication system. Gathering information remains at a basic level, with no coordination between local monitoring units, custom information, and international enforcement. Geleta isolates airports as major trafficking routes, together with porous overland borders, especially for wildlife products as well as CITES species of plants for medicinal and perfume production.

Weak enforcement capacity remains one of the most cited challenges across sub-Saharan African countries (Busch et al., 2015). In Ethiopia, limited species-identification skills, inadequate forensic facilities, and porous borders exacerbate illegal wildlife trade. Research by Shepherd and Nijman (2008) indicates that border markets often lack proper inspection mechanisms, leading to increased trafficking risks. Moreover, federal-regional institutional fragmentation reduces coordination, as noted by the EFCCC (2018) in its national compliance reports.

Another level of complexity stems from a lack of judicial understanding. This refers to a lack of legal training for prosecutors and judges on wildlife/CITES laws, which will result in misunderstandings of laws as well as improper sentencing. At this point, effective laws do not equate to effective results for conservation.

7. Institutional Capacity and Technological Limitations

Institutional weakness is a recurring theme in Geleta's (2025) review. The Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, the national focal agency for CITES, struggles with insufficient staffing, inadequate operational budgets, and outdated infrastructure. Similar deficiencies characterize regional wildlife and forest bureaus.

It is noted in this review that there has been a low level of adoption with regard to contemporary enforcement practices such as forensic science labs, genetic analysis, UAV or 'drone' surveillance, and scent-based detection. Pilot programs for such tools are being employed, but they are geography-specific and rely on external aid.

From an economic standpoint, it may be seen that there are cost opportunities stemming from such institutional weaknesses. It may be noted that inefficient disease monitoring mechanisms create a demand for illegal trade that costs the country export earnings that could come from prudently managed natural resources in its forests as well as its wildlife.

8. Human-Wildlife Conflict, Community Participation, and Governance

Another limitation in the conservation policies in Ethiopia, as provided by Geleta (2025), comes with its poor community engagement. Human-Wildlife Conflicts (HWC) are widespread in the environs of protected forests, taking forms such as raiding of crops, destruction of livestock, and in some instances, physical injury to humans.

Though such concerns are addressed in the national strategy, there is no formal compensation program for affected households. This, in turn, causes resentment, which often results in retaliatory killings or harvesting of wildlife and/or forest resources.

It also emphasizes that benefit-sharing frameworks are inadequately addressed. Additionally, local communities living close to national parks or forest reserves will get no significant benefit economically related to tourism or resource utilization. Therefore, conservation will not be a community effort but a result of external factors.

For example, Geleta promotes co-management practices, which involve community participation in planning, monitoring, as well as revenue sharing. There is analogous evidence from other African countries that confirms that shared governance increases levels of compliance as a way of countering illegal exploitation.

This finding has a major implication for CITES: if, for example, local economies and/or local livelihoods rely on controlled harvesting, community participation is both a necessity for sustainability as for monitoring.

9. Loopholes in Regulation of CITES-Controlled Flora and Forest Materials

Even though the paper by Geleta in 2025 emphasizes wildlife, it admits that there are difficulties in controlling forest plants as well as plants in Appendices II and III of CITES, which are of great value for export as a source of resin, oils, or medicine in species such as *Osiris lanceolata* and *Boswellia papyrifera*.

Control over such species must, therefore, be coordinated between the forestry, trade, and customs departments. However, according to Geleta, a central database or a standardized export permit for monitoring harvesting, processing, or export of such species does not exist in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, this policy framework fails to address appropriately the value addition that should occur for such species. Since raw materials are exported as opposed to value-added products, this leads to lost gains that, in turn, could raise finances for conservation. With respect to the economics of such forests, this establishes that CITES compliance must keep in pace with industrializing pursuits.

10. Integrating Forest and Wildlife Governance

Theoretical frameworks by Ribot, Lund, and Agrawal (2010) argue that natural resource governance improves when decision-making authority is decentralized and well-coordinated. Applying this to Ethiopia, several studies propose that harmonizing forest and wildlife policies under a unified governance model would reduce contradictory mandates and improve efficiency (Tadesse & Woldemariam, 2019). Aligning national legislation with CITES requirements, supported by updated species inventories and stronger digital permit systems, can significantly enhance compliance.

11. Cross-Cutting Structural Constraints

Geleta (2025) identifies a constellation of structural challenges that jointly undermine conservation outcomes:

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- Corruption/Insider threats, where public servants engage in facilitating illegal trade for pecuniary benefits
- Fragmentation between federal and regional governments, with different mandates being interpreted in different ways.
- Inadequate data or monitoring systems, which impede assessments of resource levels or trading volumes.
- Trans boundary trafficking routes, especially at borders with countries such as Sudan, Kenya, Somalia,
- Development pressures, such as agricultural development, infrastructure, or relocation that infiltrate wildlife habitats.

All these factors cover both economic and governance components. Corruption affects market incentives, while fragmentation increases transaction costs for legal businesses asking for CITES export permits. Development drives, being economically rational, create externalities for biodiversity conservation as well as for local populations. Overall, a more comprehensive governance framework needs to integrate economic tools such as cost compensation, conservation fees, or community development benefits with pure environmental instruments.

12. Evolving Opportunities and Policy Suggestions

Despite the considerable challenges, the literature reviewed by Geleta (2025) identifies several avenues for reform.

Firstly, legal revisions and harmonization are crucial for drawing clear guidelines for institutions with respect to confiscated items. Secondly, building capacities for modern technologies related to enforcement, such as forensic labs, DNA barcoding, or drones, might result in a significant improvement in the efficiency of detection. Thirdly, benefit-share programs might create a social channel for decreasing the motive for poaching.

Additionally, international collaboration, both at a Horn of Africa level as well as globally, remains imperative for intelligence, joint patrols, as well as coordinated trade monitoring. This fits with CITES' intent, which will help improve its standing as a sustainable exporter of forest products as well as wildlife resources.

13. Research Gaps and Implications for Forest Economics

Analysis of Geleta's conclusions shows that a number of under-explained topics are relevant to research in forest economics:

- Economic value of illegal and confiscated lumber. Assessing the loss of value for confiscated products might improve enforcement outlays.
- Cost-benefit analysis of enforcement innovations. Evaluating the relative efficiency of drones, canine units, or forensic labs would inform optimal resource allocation.
- Socioeconomic effects of CITES controls on rural living conditions. It is imperative to comprehend the influence of trade measures on income generated by communities relying on resin or NTFPs.
- Establishing benefit-share mechanisms. Benefit-share mechanisms may improve community cooperation as a result of economic models for revenue distribution.

Exploring these topics would bridge the gap between legal-institutional studies and quantitative forest economics, offering evidence-based recommendations for national policy.

14. Conclusion

The research reveals that Ethiopia's forest governance system, while supported by strong policy frameworks, faces persistent implementation challenges that limit effective compliance with CITES. Weak inter-agency coordination, limited enforcement capacity, insufficient species data, and fragmented legislation contribute to inefficiencies in protecting both forests and wildlife. Community-based approaches have demonstrated success in forest management but remain underutilized in wildlife protection and CITES-related compliance. Strengthening these linkages is essential, especially given the integral role communities play in monitoring, reporting illegal activities, and ensuring sustainable resource use. Ultimately, sustainable forest governance and the protection of CITES-listed species in Ethiopia depend on integrated policy frameworks, improved institutional capacity, and stronger incentives for community participation.

The appraisal undertaken by Taye Lemma Geleta in 2025 paints a dismal scenario of the wildlife and forests management system that prevails in Ethiopia. This country follows a legislative framework that fits international best practices, but it should be noted that there appears to be a huge gap between policy formulation and implementation.

For both researchers and policymakers, it becomes important to move from legal structures to workable mechanisms that combine conservation needs with realities of economies. Enhancing institutional capabilities, advancing technology, or ensuring community benefits seem more sensible measures for this purpose. For a thesis about forest economies, such learning's form a starting point for empirical research about how CITES or equivalent regimes affect efficiency, equity, or sustainability in nature resource management economy for a country like Ethiopia.

14. Recommendation

- **Integrate forest and wildlife governance frameworks** to streamline mandates, reduce policy overlap, and support unified implementation of CITES.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity** through targeted training for enforcement officers, customs personnel, and regional authorities on species identification, monitoring, and CITES protocols.
- **Enhance community involvement** by expanding benefit-sharing mechanisms, participatory wildlife monitoring, and awareness programs on illegal trade and species protection.
- **Improve species monitoring and data systems**, including national inventories of CITES-listed species and digital permit systems for improved oversight.
- **Increase funding and cross-border collaboration** to support enforcement operations, intelligence sharing, and regional anti-trafficking initiatives.
- **Update legal frameworks** to ensure full alignment with CITES requirements, including stronger penalties, clearer mandates, and consistent implementation across regions.

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