

UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN



THE TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SEVENTH (277TH) INAUGURAL LECTURE

**“THE BELIEFS, MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT
FORESTS AND CONNECTION TO HUMANITY”**

By

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Great Students of the University of Ilorin,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Preamble

Glory, honour, adoration, and majesty to Him who sits on the throne. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit - the I Am That I Am. He deserves all my praise and honour for the rare privilege granted to me today, 10 April 2025, to deliver the 277th Inaugural Lecture of this *Better by Far* University. This is the 22nd Inaugural Lecture in the series for the Faculty of Agriculture. Prof. John O. Olaniyan delivered the 21st of the Faculty, and the 275th in the University, titled *Understanding Soils: The Bedrock of Man's Existence and Sustenance*. However, mine is the first in the Department of Forest Resources Management, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ilorin.

This lecture is special and unique because, it is the first to be delivered in the Department of Forest Resources Management. It is also delivered by the First Professor of

Forestry at the University of Ilorin. It marks my Golden Jubilee Anniversary in the year that University of Ilorin is also celebrating its 50th Anniversary. The events happening are not a coincidence but have been divinely arranged to the glory of God. All through my life, I have been a product of Divine Favour and Grace. Who would have ever thought something great would come out of forestry? A course that is being looked down upon by many. “*Asogbo*” for that matter! But God looks upon me with His grace to bring out excellence out of mockery. I am not taking this privilege for granted, and I give all the glory to God alone for His faithfulness!

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, from a young age, I developed a strong desire to attend university and become a medical doctor. However, this dream encountered a challenge when my father lost his job with the Kwara State Housing Corporation, Ilorin. Since my parents could no longer afford to pay our school fees at private school, we were withdrawn and enrolled in a public school. This landed me to Tanke Z.E.B. School, Ilorin (also known as *Tanke Ile Iwe*). After completing my education at *Tanke Ile Iwe*, with the school leaving certificate, my parents requested me to choose a public school in my village for my secondary education. This marked the start of my relocation from the city of Ilorin to continue my secondary education at Igosun High School, in our village, in 1989.

As a science student in a village secondary school, there were no adequate teachers for most of our core subjects. Together with my friends, Abiodun Oladipo (of blessed memory) and Azeez Adeniyi (currently in Canada), we took it upon ourselves to study independently after school hours and on weekends for topics we had not been taught in school. We began self-studying, read beyond school syllabus and started answering WAEC questions right from SS1. Eventually, I completed my SSCE with six A and two B, thereby setting a record in the school.

Vice-Chancellor, sir, looking back, I now understand that everything in life happens for a reason and serves a purpose. My entry into the world of forestry was divinely arranged, and I can confidently say that my time in the village truly prepared me for the professional journey ahead. In the village, farming was

the primary occupation. We produced nearly all the food we consumed at home, except during Easter or Christmas when my parents bought rice. We fetched water from the village stream (*Odo Osun se'ngbo*) to drink, cooked with firewood, and walked to and from the farm carrying loads of firewood or farm produce on our heads. We drank traditional herbal medicine, called 'agbo', to treat malaria, fever, and other sicknesses. We collected produce like mushrooms, snails, and fruits, among others, from forests to eat at home. These were common livelihoods that I grew up with.

While in the village, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, Mrs. Jolade **Babalola**, *Iya Elero*. She often told me stories about cultural practices, including those related to the protection of nature and the environment. As a science student, I often found it difficult to accept these stories, and I would frequently argue with her about taboos, traditions, and cultural beliefs. Grandma would always say, "*Folaranmi, o ti mo lo yaju; mon de ja mo,*" meaning, "*Folaranmi, you argue too much; stop dismissing local beliefs*". Little did I know that she was preparing me for my professional journey, particularly in understanding the role of local beliefs and traditions in forest and tree conservation.

The name of my hometown is **Igosun**. The town was named after a tree known in Yoruba as "**Igi Osun**". Later, I discovered the scientific name of the tree as *Baphia nitida* Lodd. In the account of Sayomi (2016), this tree was once abundant in the forests surrounding the area where my village was founded and was highly valued for producing a special red powder called *Osun*, which was used in traditional medicine to treat smallpox. People traveled from far and near to purchase this red powder for medicinal creams. Over time, the town's name evolved from "**Igun Osun**", meaning "*pounding of the Osun,*" to "**Igosun**" (Sayomi, 2016).

Not only was my village named after a tree, but my family's compound in *Igosun* is called "*Ile Elegu,*" which translates to "*Compound with Weaverbird.*" Weavers are a family of small passerine birds. The birds are noted for their nest-building techniques on trees using grasses. The name "*Ile*

Elega” reflects the abundance of numerous trees that provided ideal nesting sites for weaverbirds. It is no coincidence that a Professor of Forestry like me originates from a village and compound with their names associated with trees and birds!

When I sat for JAMB in 1997 to enter University of Ibadan, I intended to study medicine or pharmacy but could not meet the required admission cut-off point. My uncle, Dr. Adebayo A. Omoloye (now a Professor of Entomology) of the Department of Crop Protection and Environmental Biology at the University of Ibadan, advised me to apply for a change of course to Faculty of Agriculture to secure the university admission. I was not particularly interested in studying any of the agricultural courses, but my primary goal was just to enter the University with the hope of later transferring to a preferred course (medicine). I eventually received my admission letter and it indicates “Forestry”. This was one of the moments I was very confused. I remember asking myself, “What is forestry? What kind of course is this? When I took the letter to my uncle (Prof. A. A. Omoloye), he added to my confusion by calling me “*Asogbo*,” meaning “forest guard”. A term I was hearing for the first time and did not like then.

My efforts to cross over to medicine did not yield the required result. When I got to 300 level and had interaction with Dr. Busuyi Olasina Agbeja (later Professor of Forest Policy, Law, and Administration) of blessed memory, he gave me a book titled “*My Future Career in Forestry*” written by David A. Hanaburgh (1974) to read. The book exposed me to the different disciplines and specialisations in forestry. I started looking for more information and gradually developed an interest in forest economics.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, my passion for forestry and biodiversity conservation grew stronger after receiving a full scholarship from the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) to travel to Uganda in 2003 for a month-long field training on tropical forests at Kibale. After completing my National Youth Service Corps in 2004, I returned to the University of Ibadan to pursue my master's degree in forest economics and management. Having developed a strong interest in academics, couple with

scholarships and international funding opportunities that I received, I enrolled for the doctoral program in forest economics at Ibadan. Looking back at my career, you will agree with me that “*I did not choose forestry-rather, forestry chose me.*” It is no surprise or coincidence that I ended up becoming a Professor of Forestry. It was a divine arrangement, embedded in my DNA!

Introduction

As a way of definition, forest is defined as land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10%, or trees able to reach these thresholds *in situ* (FAO, 2020a). However, this definition does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use. In the definition by IUCN (2017), forests are therefore defined as “ecosystems dominated by trees and characterised by significant ecological processes, supporting biodiversity, protecting watersheds, and providing economic, social, and cultural services to human populations.

Globally, forests are classified into tropical forests, temperate forests, and boreal forests, each found in distinct climatic regions. However, more than half of the world's forests are found in only five countries of the world, and they include Brazil, Canada, China, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America (FAO, 2020b). The Amazon Rainforest (found in Brazil) is the world's largest forest in the world, covering 5.5 million square kilometres, while the Congo Rainforest is the second largest forest in the world, but the largest in Africa, and it covers approximately 2 million square kilometres in size (FAO, 2020b).

Forests, often referred to as the lungs of the earth, play an indispensable role in sustaining life, fostering economic development, and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. Forests supply raw materials like timber, fuel wood for domestic uses, and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) that benefit the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide (Babalola, Ekpo & Adebayo, 2021). Tropical forests alone are responsible for approximately 25% of the earth's carbon storage (Pan, 2011). In addition to supply of raw materials and carbon

sequestration, forests provide essential ecosystem services, including water filtration, air purification, flood control, nutrient cycling, soil stabilisation, and biodiversity support. These services are crucial for maintaining environmental health, as well as human survival and well-being (IPBES, 2019; Adeyemi, Chirwa, **Babalola** & Chaikaew, 2020).

Nigeria's forests are classified into Rainforest, Freshwater Swamp Forest, Mangrove forest, Montane forest, Guinea Savanna, Sudan Savanna, and Sahel Savanna, based on climatic and ecological characteristics. Collectively, these forests reflect Nigeria's diverse ecological zones and their role in sustaining biodiversity and livelihoods (FAO, 2020; Adejuwon, 1982; **Babalola et al.**, 2021). However, it is sad to inform that Nigeria's forests are disappearing at a rate of 3.7% annually, one of the highest deforestation rates in the world (Global Forest Watch, 2023; 2025). It is expected that 25% of the total land area of a country should be covered by forest. Unfortunately, Nigeria is currently less than 4%. This loss was due to deforestation resulting from land clearing for farming, mining, grazing by livestock, logging and timber extraction for wood, raw materials, fuel and energy, and construction activities.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, despite the benefits that forests provide, the relationship between forests, trees, and humanity is frequently misunderstood, masked in misconceptions(also known as myths) that obscure the realities thereby require urgent needs for interventions. In this inaugural lecture, I will embark on a journey to dissect these misconceptions, illuminate the facts, and challenge the narratives that shape public policy and societal perceptions of our forests. The inaugural lecture, titled *The Beliefs, Myths, and Facts about Forests and Connection to Humanity* is not just a milestone in my academic journey in forestry but an opportunity to explore the intricate relationships between forests, trees, and humanity. It delves into how beliefs, myths, and science intertwine to shape our perception and understanding of forests and trees around us.

Beliefs and Myths

Beliefs are the ideas, opinions, or convictions that individuals or groups accept as true, regardless of whether they are supported by evidence or not. They often stem from cultural, religious, personal, or societal influences and can shape how people perceive and interact with the world. Within the context of this lecture, beliefs can be generally categorised as follow:

- a) **Cultural Beliefs:** Rooted in the traditions and shared values of a particular group. Example: Some cultures believe that specific trees have sacred or spiritual significance.
- b) **Spiritual (or religious) Beliefs:** Based on the faith and doctrines of a particular religion. Example: The belief in the "Tree of Life" as a symbol of creation in various religions.
- c) **Personal Beliefs:** Formed by individual experiences, upbringing, and values. Example: A person may believe that planting trees protects the environment.
- d) **Scientific Beliefs:** Founded on evidence and scientific reasoning, though they may evolve with new discoveries. Example: Forests are believed to play a critical role in carbon sequestration.

In the context of this lecture, myth is taken as misconception which can influence peoples' perceptions about nature, conservation, and human interactions with forests, sometimes leading to misguided policies or unsustainable practices.

Myth 1: Forests are endless and can be exploited indefinitely

Reality: Many people assume that forests are vast and will never run out, leading to unsustainable logging and deforestation. However, forests are fragile ecosystems that require careful management.

Myth 2: Forests are dangerous and inhabited by evil spirits

Reality: Some traditional beliefs depict forests as mysterious and home to supernatural beings. While forests hold cultural,

traditional, and spiritual significance, they are ecosystems rich in biodiversity.

Myth 3: Forests are just trees

Reality: Many people view forests as nothing more than collections of trees, ignoring their complex ecosystems. Forests provide habitat for diverse wildlife, regulate water cycles, store carbon, and contribute to soil health.

Myth 4: Forests recover quickly after deforestation

Reality: Natural forest regeneration is a slow process that can take decades or even centuries, depending on the ecosystem. While some trees may regrow quickly, others may take longer years. Also, the biodiversity, soil health, and ecological functions of a deforested area may never fully recover.

Myth 5: Forests are useless and should be cleared for agriculture

Reality: Converting forests to farmland may offer short-term benefits but often leads to soil degradation, reduced rainfall, and long-term agricultural losses. Sustainable land-use practices, including agroforestry and conservation farming, allow for both food production and forest conservation.

Myth 6: Forests are hideouts for criminals and should be destroyed

Reality: Due to security challenges, forests have been associated with criminal activities such as insurgency and kidnapping. However, forests themselves are not the cause of insecurity; rather, they are an abode of peace and tranquility. Instead of destroying forests, governments and communities should focus on security measures that address criminal activities while preserving the ecological and economic benefits that forests provide.

My Contributions to Science and Forestry

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, my field of specialisation is forest socio-economics. This field examines the interactions between forests, people, and economic systems. It focuses on how forests contribute to livelihoods, rural development, and economic growth while analysing the social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence forest management and policy. By understanding the socio-economic dimensions of forestry, this

forestry and wildlife education is offered by 219 institutions in Africa, including 49 colleges and 170 universities in 55 countries. The top seven African countries with the highest number of forestry and wildlife programmes from vocational (diplomas) to degrees (B.Sc., M.Sc., and Ph.D.) are Nigeria (153), Kenya (126), Ethiopia (60), Cameroon (54), South Africa (49), Tanzania (47), and Ghana (33).

However, one of the major challenges identified in forestry education is the declining interest of students (Onatunji, Shonowo & **Babalola**, 2019; Onatunji *et al.*, 2021). Many students view forestry as a less attractive career path due to limited awareness, inadequate career guidance, and misconceptions about the potential of the profession (**Babalola** & Onatunji, 2018). This perception has led to a low enrolment rate in forestry programme, thereby impacting the professional workforce. In another study that I conducted with Hussain (2022), it was discovered that 56.3% of the graduates of forestry and wildlife programme at University of Ilorin developed a growing interest in pursuing postgraduate degrees at home or abroad after their graduation. This finding could be connected with the quality of mentorship and guidance that the graduates received from their lecturers at the Department. Despite this, some of the key challenges that the students mentioned that should be improved upon in the Department include insufficient academic staff, inadequate lecture halls, limited equipment for practical, and missed field trips.

Marketing of Forest Products and Associated Issues

Vice-Chancellor, sir, forest products play a vital role in the social and economic fabric of people around the world, contributing significantly to livelihoods, trade, and sustainable development. The potential of multipurpose tree species to peoples' livelihoods in southwest Nigeria has been reported (**Babalola** & Agbeja, 2009; **Babalola et al.**, 2013). Having trees on farmlands not only diversifies income streams for farmers but also reduces pressure on natural forests by providing alternative sources of essential products (Agbeja & **Babalola**, 2010).

In a study on the marketing chain of *Parkia biglobosa* (locust beans; *Iru* in Yoruba), it was discovered that

inefficiencies in transportation and inadequate storage and packaging facilities significantly hinder profitability for rural producers of locust beans (**Babalola**, 2012). Similarly, the marketing of *Tetracarpidium conophorum* (African walnut; *Awusa*), *Irvingia garbonensis* (Bush mango; *Ogbono*), and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (Shea butter; *Ori*) present unique marketing opportunities and challenges. However, addressing seasonal variability, quality control, post-harvest losses, and inconsistent pricing could enhance market penetration and profitability of these forest products (**Babalola** & Agbeja, 2009; **Babalola**, 2011; Oso *et al.*, 2022).

A study by **Babalola** and Arowosoge (2011) assessed the trade in overhead wooden transmission poles (WTPs) in Ibadan to determine the quality of the poles. The dominant timber species sold as WTPs in the market were *Gmelina arborea*, followed by *Cassia* spp. and *Tectonagrandis* (Teak). The demand for and supply of the poles have been increasing, but, in contrast, the quality of the poles has been declining. However, there were no available official documents regulating the operations of traders or the standards of the transmission poles. The government should, therefore, formulate policies to monitor and control entry into the WTP trade, implement proper monitoring of traders' operations, and specify the quality and standards that products must meet before they are put to use.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, our research on small-scale wooden furniture operations underscored the influence of factors such as access to credit, raw material availability, and market competition on the business success (**Babalola**, 2018a). By fostering entrepreneurship and providing capacity-building initiatives, small-scale furniture enterprises can thrive, contributing to job creation and economic diversification. Also, the study on small-scale nursery enterprises found that private nurseries play a pivotal role in providing seedlings for reforestation projects, thereby supporting green economies and fostering entrepreneurial ventures in forestry (**Babalola et al.**, 2020).

Bushmeat marketing (popularly known as *eran igbe*) represents another critical area of forest product trade. However, the issues surrounding sustainability, overharvesting, complex

supply chains, and legal restrictions pose threats to this trade (**Babalola** & Oladipupo, 2018; **Babalola**, 2023). There was a progressive increase in prices of bushmeat from the hunters to other middlemen along the marketing chain. Increased pressure on the wild animals was one of the reasons for the decline of the wild animals. There is the need for empowerment and training of the local hunters on the domestication of the wild animals consumed as bushmeat.

Forest and Climate Change

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, climate change is one of the global issues of our time, and forests have been identified as one of the major solutions to mitigation of climate impacts (**Babalola**, Akpata & Arabomen, 2020). A critical aspect of my research on climate change has been the exploration of community awareness and perception of the impacts on forest ecosystems (**Babalola et al.**, 2020). In Malawi, our study revealed that forest-dependent communities exhibited a general awareness of climate change, and a strong belief in anthropogenic causes of climate change (Chisale *et al.*, 2022). Communities reported significant disruptions of climate change to agricultural activities, shifts in forest species composition, and increased resource scarcity (Chisale *et al.*, 2021). However, some of the people still perceived climate change as a result of anger from God and punishment from the ancestral spirits. This discovery presents the need to educate rural people, and general public by extension, on the concept and causes of climate change (Chisale *et al.*, 2022).

In addition, a perception-based analysis conducted in the Vhembe District of South Africa illustrated that community perceptions of climate change were deeply entangled with their socio-economic factors and forest-based livelihoods (Ofoegbu *et al.*, 2016; 2017a; 2017b, 2018). The study reaffirmed that effective climate adaptation strategies must consider local socio-economics and cultural contexts, as well as resource dependencies.

Public Perception of Ecosystem Services Provided by Forests

Another critical aspect of my research explored local perceptions and preferences for ecosystem services. Ecosystem services refer to the benefits that humans receive from rural or urban forests. The services are classified into provisioning, regulatory, cultural and supporting services. A study in Omo Biosphere Reserve, Nigeria revealed that rural communities place high value on provisioning services, such as timber and NTFPs, but often lack the institutional support to manage these resources sustainably (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2022). However, in the urban areas the research conducted by **Babalola** (2010) at the University of Ibadan and **Babalola** and Raji (2016) at the University of Ilorin revealed that campus occupants highly value trees for their shade, aesthetic appeal, building protection, erosion control, and provision of edible fruits. However, a prevailing perception that trees can harbour evil spirits and pose dangers to life and property also emerged (Borokini, Onafeli & **Babalola**, 2013). These studies suggest that incorporating local preferences into forest management and conservation strategies can inform species selection for planting initiatives and support the sustainable management of urban forests.

Financing Ecosystem Services Provided by Forests and Trees

Vice-Chancellor, sir, over the years, my studies have explored alternative strategies for financing the management of forests and trees in urban areas. This strategy includes Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) which is a financial mechanism in which beneficiaries of ecosystem services-such as clean water, improved air quality, or carbon sequestration - compensate those who manage or conserve the ecosystems providing these benefits. A study conducted across three parks in Abuja – Millennium Park, Children Park and Zoo, and Jabi Lake Park – revealed that park visitors generally value the ecosystem services provided by urban trees (Bello, 2024). Most of the visitors to the parks expressed a willingness to pay modest fees of less than ₦5,000 per month for park maintenance, demonstrating a positive attitude toward financial contributions. High satisfaction levels (79%) with the park greenery significantly influenced their

willingness to pay. Although, some of the visitors also highlighted the need for improved infrastructure, such as enhanced facilities and better aesthetic appeal to facilitate the payments.

Another study carried out at Flower Garden in Ilorin, showed a significant appreciation for the benefits of trees by the visitors, particularly their role in improving air quality and aesthetic appeal (David, 2024). The visits to the park peaked during school holidays and festive periods. Over 42% of the visitors to Flower Gardens were also willing to pay less than ₦5,000 monthly for maintenance of the park, with the factor such as cleanliness of the environment contributing to their willingness. However, concerns were raised about the frequent cutting of trees in the garden, which reduces its aesthetic value.

Research conducted by Arabomen, Chirwa and **Babalola** (2019) revealed that socioeconomic factors contributing to willingness to pay for the environmental services provided by urban trees include income level, education, and environmental awareness. The research further found that while residents generally appreciated the presence of trees in urban areas, their willingness to pay for maintenance programs was contingent on perceived transparency and accountability in fund utilisation (Arabomen, **Babalola**, Idumah & Oforu, 2021). This indicates the necessity of fostering trust between stakeholders and program implementers to boost financial contributions towards urban greening initiatives.

Forest within the Nexus of Culture and Religion Beliefs

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, forests and trees hold significant spiritual meaning across various cultures, religions and traditional beliefs. In Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religions, forests are often seen as sacred spaces, symbols of life, and places of divine connection. Each belief system incorporates teachings that reflect the importance of trees and forests in sustaining life, fostering spiritual growth, and serving as metaphors for moral and ethical values. In Christianity, forests and trees are frequently referenced in the Bible as symbols of life, wisdom, and God's provision. Trees play a pivotal role in biblical narratives, from the time of

creation in the Garden of Eden as written in the Book of Genesis to the imagery of the Tree of Life in the Book of Revelation. Genesis 2:9 highlights the importance of trees in creation:

And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9 NKJV).

Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus often employed trees and nature to convey spiritual truths. For instance, Jesus spoke of the mustard seed, emphasising the power of faith and its potential for significant growth. The fig tree, used by Jesus to illustrate lessons of faithfulness and bearing fruit, became a powerful symbol of spiritual fruitfulness and genuine discipleship (Williams, 2023). In Islam, great emphasis is placed on the protection and conservation of trees and the environment. Trees are seen as a blessing from Allah, providing sustenance, shade, and ecological balance. The Qur'an and the Hadith highlight the importance of trees and environmental stewardship. Some of the well-known Hadith states:

If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (Sadaqah) for him. (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2320; Sahih Muslim, 1553).

“Even if the Day of Judgment arrives and one of you has a sapling in his hand, he should plant it. (Musnad Ahmad, 12902).

The second hadith encourages continuous environmental responsibility, even in difficult times. Islam, therefore promotes the preservation and nurturing of trees as part of fulfilling one's duty as a steward (Khalifah) of the earth. This stewardship reflects the Islamic principle of balance (Mizan) in maintaining the natural world.

In traditional belief system, sacred forests play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation and the preservation of traditional knowledge (Babalola *et al.*, 2014). These forests are protected through traditional beliefs that prohibit activities like tree cutting and hunting of wild animals, thereby safeguarding

biodiversity without formal legal frameworks. Research has shown that sacred groves in southwest Nigeria contain rare or extinct species, highlighting the effectiveness of indigenous conservation methods. One of my research that documented traditional beliefs protecting natural forests is at *Igbo Olodumare*, located in Oke-Igbo Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. This mysterious forest was first brought to public attention through two of D. O. Fagunwa's renowned works: *Ògbójú Ode nínú Igbó Ìrúnmolè* and *Igbó Olódumarè* (Fagunwa, 1949). The study by Owoade (2021) discovered that *Igbo Olodumare* still harbours tree species such as *Terminalia superba* (Afara), *Khaya spp.* (African Mahogany; Apa, Oganwo), *Albizia zygia* (Ayunre), *Mansonia altissima* (Mansonia), *Ceiba pentandra* (Araba) (Plate 1), among others.

The forest is also home to a variety of wildlife, including monkeys, bats, giant rats, guinea fowls, antelopes, squirrels, and snakes. These trees and animals remain protected due to the traditional belief and taboos upheld by the local people. The local people strictly prohibit tree felling, hunting, or farming within the sacred forest due to the fear of retribution from "*Baba Onirunbon Yewuke*" (Plate 2), *one of the deities in the forest*. Also, the presence of the bottomless pit (*Ogbon Ainisale*) limits movement within the grove, thereby requiring visitors to be guided by a local guardian. The believe of the people is that when sacrifices, prayers, and supplications are offered to the spirits residing in *Ejola Ibinu*, *Okuta Adimula* (Plate 3), or *Ebora Anu*, especially for the request of a child and other requests, such prayers will be answered (Owoade, 2021).



Plate 1: *Ceiba pentandra* (Araba) and other trees in Oke Langbodo



Plate 2: A statue of *Baba Onirunbon Yewuke* in *Igbo Olodumare*

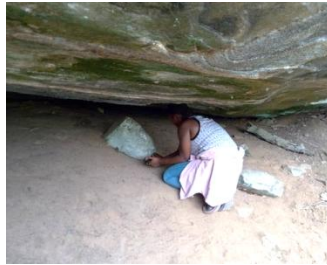


Plate 3: *Okuta Adimula* used as an object of worship in *Igbo Olodumare*

Other studies that I conducted on the role of traditional and cultural practices in forest conservation and protection include research on the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove in Osun State (**Babalola et al.**, 2014) and *Igbo Oro* and *Igbo Oso'ro* in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State (Adesiji & **Babalola**, 2012), among others. These studies revealed similar beliefs and cultural practices that contribute to the conservation and protection of community forests.

In Yoruba traditional belief systems, forests are regarded as sacred and often serve as the dwelling places of deities (*Orisa*) and ancestral spirits. Many Yoruba communities believe that certain trees possess spiritual powers and are linked to specific deities. For example, the Iroko tree (*Milicia excelsa*) is revered and thought to be inhabited by spirits capable of granting

blessings or curses (**Babalola, et al., 2013**).In an in-depth content analysis carried out by Ibrahim (2016), different Yoruba proverbs relating to forests and trees are translated, some of these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Yoruba Proverbs Relating to Forests and Trees with their Translations

Yoruba Proverbs	Translations	Meanings
<i>Igi kan o le da'gbose</i>	<i>A tree cannot make a forest.</i>	One person or entity alone cannot achieve something that requires a collective effort. Emphasizes the importance of unity, collaboration and teamwork.
<i>Bi a ba ni ka ge igi, a o bee eeyanmo</i>	<i>If one attempts to cut a tree, one will cut people with it.</i>	Violence, aggression, or destructive behaviour can have devastating effects.
<i>Igbe lowo wa.</i>	<i>Bush (forest) is where money dwells.</i>	Forest is a place where valuable resources or wealth can be found. Also means wealth or financial opportunities can be found in unexpected or places yet untapped.
<i>Bi Şango bańpa araba, to ńpa iroko, bii tigi ńla kọ.</i>	<i>Even though Şango kills the silk-cotton tree and kills the iroko tree, no such fate can befall the huge tree.</i>	Some people or institutions are more resilient or powerful or better equipped to withstand challenges or adversity than others.
<i>Igi a ba fehinti lęgun-un; ęni a ba finu han ńkajo ęni kiri</i>	<i>The tree one would lean on has thorns; the person one would confide in is spreading evil stories about the</i>	Sometimes the person you trust or rely on can actually be harmful or untrustworthy. It discourages betrayers.

	<i>confider.</i>	
<i>O ko ̣a igi ̣ogḅe, o kota oguro ̣ofa, o dedii ̣ọe o gḅenu soke o ̣ireti; s' ̣ọe ni ̣iro?</i>	<i>You did not slash the trunk with a cutlass; you did not shoot an arrow at the top of the palm-wine-producing palm tree; you came to the foot of the palm tree and raised your open mouth. Does it drip all by itself?</i>	This proverb advocates the need for hard work. One should not expect to reap benefits or rewards without putting in the necessary effort or work.
<i>A kii ja nigbo ka rahun ̣opa</i>	<i>One does not fight in the bush (forest) and lament lack of sticks</i>	One should not start a fight or take on a challenge without being prepared for the consequences.
<i>To'ju ba n ̣on ni, igḅe la'n ro fun</i>	<i>When one is afflicted with poverty, he speaks to the forest.</i>	It highlights the desperation and isolation that can come with poverty, and how it can lead people to seek help from anywhere, even if it's just a symbolic or futile attempt.
<i>Bi ̣ọmode bam ge igi nigbo, agbalagba a maa wo ibi ti yo woo si</i>	<i>If a youth is felling a tree, an elder will be considering where it will fall.</i>	It highlights the importance of foresight, planning, and considering the potential impact of one's actions.
<i>̣Okunrin ki i ke, aḳo igi ki i ̣ọje</i>	<i>A man does not cry; hardwood does not ooze sap</i>	Strong person does not exhibit emotional weakness. Used to encourage people to be strong and resilient in the face of challenges.
<i>Igi to to erin lerin ̣nfara ṛo</i>	<i>It is a tree that is as mighty as the elephant that the</i>	Only a person or thing of equal or greater strength, power, or status that are

	<i>elephant leans on</i>	dependable and can provide reliable support or shelter.
<i>Igi ti a fehinti ti o gbani duro, bo wo luni ko le pani</i>	<i>A tree that one leans on but that cannot support one's weight, if it falls on you it will not crush you.</i>	If you rely on someone or something that is unreliable or weak, and they fail you, the consequences won't be catastrophic. It's a warning against relying too heavily on unstable or untrustworthy sources.
<i>Bi igi ba wo lu igi, toke la ko re</i>	<i>If trees fall atop one another, one removes the topmost one first.</i>	When dealing with a complex problem or issues, it's best to tackle the most obvious or pressing issue first, before addressing the underlying ones.
<i>Ẹnikan i pe kọmọ o mọ dẹtẹ, to ba tile da 'gbogbe</i>	<i>No one warns a child against being afflicted with leprosy as long as such a child can live alone in the forest.</i>	A proverb warning individual of the consequences of their actions, and preventing them from becoming defiant.
<i>Bi a ba ge igi nigbo, ka fi ọran ro ara ẹni wo</i>	<i>When one cuts a tree in the forest, one should apply the consequences to oneself.</i>	When you take action or make a decision that affects others, you should also consider how it might affect yourself.
<i>Igi ti baba ẹni ba lẹ, a ki i fa a tu, bii t'ẹge kọ</i>	<i>A tree that one's father plants one does not uproot, but that does not apply to cassava</i>	Some traditions, customs, or decisions made by one's ancestors or predecessors should be respected and continued, but not everything they did or decided should be blindly followed.

Source: Ibrahim (2016)

Vice-Chancellor, sir, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that are in behind conservation and protection of natural forests are rapidly disappearing due to civilisation and modernisation (**Babalola**, 2011; **Babalola**, 2014). In a study that I was involved in, alongside other 16 international scientists (Rekola *et al.*, 2025), we discovered that the inclusion of traditional and indigenous knowledge has been either poor or entirely absent in the curricula of tertiary, vocational, and technical forestry education. It is undeniable that local beliefs and practices, such as the sacredness of forests, taboos, and customary restrictions, have proven to be more effective in protecting and conserving natural resources than formal laws and policies. There is therefore a critical need to harmonise both scientific knowledge and indigenous practices, passed down through many generations, for the effective protection of forests and other natural resources (**Babalola et al.**, 2013).

Forests and Domestic Energy

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, wood fuel and charcoal constitute over 70% of domestic energy sources in Nigeria, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. The study by **Babalola et al.** (2014) highlighted that biomass, particularly fuelwood and charcoal, remains the dominant domestic energy source in Nigeria due to their affordability and accessibility. Rural households rely heavily on fuelwood, while urban households often shift towards charcoal due to convenience and storage benefits (**Babalola, et al.** 2010; **Babalola & Opii**, 2013). Key drivers of biomass consumption include low household income, high prices and unavailability of alternative fuels, and cultural preferences (**Babalola & Opii**, 2012; **Babalola, Opii & Oso**, 2014).

The extensive use of firewood and charcoal as domestic energy exerts significant pressure on forest resources, leading to deforestation and forest degradation. Research that I conducted in Southwest Nigeria revealed that the rate of deforestation correlates with the high demand for fuelwood and charcoal, contributing to environmental challenges such as soil erosion and loss of biodiversity (**Babalola**, 2011). The implications for household welfare are also profound, as households that depend heavily on biomass often face increased labour burdens,

particularly for women and children who are tasked with fuelwood collection (**Babalola et al.**, 2010). To mitigate the environmental and socio-economic impacts of excessive firewood and charcoal use, policymakers should promote the adoption of sustainable and affordable alternative energy sources, such as improved cookstoves, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and renewable energy solutions, while also implementing reforestation and afforestation programs.

Sustainable Forest Management and Policy Issues

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, a crucial element of sustainable forest management is the active involvement of diverse stakeholders (**Babalola & Jegede**, 2020). The role of participatory forest management (PFM) cannot be overstated, as it leads to efficient resource utilisation and improved rural livelihoods. A study conducted by Arabomen, Paxie, and **Babalola** (2020) demonstrated that incentive-based programs and awareness campaigns significantly enhanced public participation and willingness to invest in tree conservation. In a case study from Malawi, PFM not only curbed illegal logging but also enhanced economic opportunities for local populations (Senganimalunje, Chirwa, **Babalola et al.**, 2015; 2016). Also, forest-based public-private partnerships facilitated equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms among beneficiary communities in South Africa (Tshidzumba, Chirwa, & **Babalola**, 2018). To strengthen sustainable forest management, governments and stakeholders should expand participatory forest management initiatives, integrating incentive-based programs, public-private partnerships, and community-driven conservation strategies to enhance local engagement and equitable benefit-sharing (Senganimalunje, Chirwa, & **Babalola**, 2020).

Forest offences in Nigeria manifest in various forms, including illegal logging, unauthorised farming within reserves, poaching, and arson. These activities not only degrade forest ecosystems but also disrupt local economies and governance structures (Oso & **Babalola**, 2021). Research by **Babalola** and Oso (2018) in southwestern Nigeria identified illegal logging as the most pervasive offence, driven by poverty, lack of alternative livelihoods, and weak law enforcement. Illegal activities are

often indicative of broader socio-economic issues, including land tenure insecurity and ambiguous forest boundaries. **Babalola** (2013) notes that vague policy frameworks worsen forest offences, as conflicting interests between state and local authorities create enforcement loopholes. Addressing these challenges requires policy clarity and strengthening institutional capacity for monitoring and enforcement. Oso and **Babalola** (2021) argued that enforcement agencies often lack the technical capacity to track illegal activities effectively. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms requires multi-faceted strategies, such as deploying technology for forest monitoring, increasing ranger patrols, and establishing whistle-blower programs to report illegal activities.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, forest policy in Nigeria has evolved over the decades, reflecting shifts in governance, economic priorities, and environmental consciousness. Early policies emphasised timber extraction and revenue generation, with limited attention to conservation and community involvement (**Babalola** & Ajayi, 2002). Recent reviews underscore the need for a more integrated approach, balancing exploitation with conservation and incorporating the perspectives of local communities (**Babalola**, 2013). Despite progressive policy formulations, the gap between policy intent and implementation remains wide. **Babalola** and Oso (2021) highlight the limited involvement of stakeholders in forest policy implementation across southwestern Nigeria, revealing that participatory approaches, while recognised as beneficial, are inconsistently applied. This disconnect fosters a breeding ground for illegal practices and weakens the enforcement of existing regulations. Enforcement of forest policy and law in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, corruption, and limited personnel. Effective forest governance necessitates the active participation of all stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and the private sector. Oso and **Babalola** (2021) demonstrate that stakeholder involvement enhances policy compliance and fosters a sense of ownership over forest resources.

University of Ilorin Teak Plantation

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, Teak (*Tectona grandis*) is among the most economically valuable hardwoods globally, renowned for its exceptional qualities and high demand in international markets. Teak wood is known for its durability, resistance to pests, and water-repellent properties. The wood is widely use in furniture, flooring, ship building, and outdoor applications (Kollert & Kleine, 2017). The University of Ilorin Teak Plantation is an ambitious project initiated by the administration under the leadership of Prof. Is-haq O. Oloyede (now an Emeritus Professor). The plantation spans over 500 hectares, equivalent to more than 500 football fields, making it one of the largest teak plantations owned by an institution in Sub-Saharan Africa. Teak trees are often claimed to be highly resistant to fire (Key & Benson, 2006), however careful assessment of the impacts of fire, is necessary to examine the recovery potential and delayed mortality. A study conducted on assessment of distribution of fire burn areas and fire impacts in the teak plantation using satellite imagery revealed that frequent fires in the plantation are largely responsible for delayed growth, poor tree regeneration, and increased forest gaps. One of the key challenges confronting the effective management of the teak plantation is a lack of manpower. Adequate labor is needed to carry out silvicultural activities, such as pruning and planting in vacant spaces within the plantation. Pruning is required to promote straight timber formation and increase quality of the wood (Mohammed, **Babalola**, Dahir, Abdul-Ganiyu & Babalola).

My Contributions to Training and Mentorship

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, I have had the privilege of teaching forestry courses at the University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin, and University of Pretoria, South Africa, for over 15 years. At Unilorin, I have supervised over one hundred undergraduate students in Bachelor of Forestry and Wildlife. I also supervised four master's and six doctoral students at the University of Pretoria, as well as one master's student at the University of Lleida, Spain. Many students who have passed

through my tutelage and mentorship have secured various funding opportunities, including grants, scholarships, and international opportunities. In 2022, I was thrilled to see some forestry graduates join me at the World Forestry Congress in Seoul, South Korea, courtesy of the Korean Forest Service (KFS) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). These are just a few examples of the many students who have benefited from my mentorship and are excelling in their academic and professional careers in the UK, United States, Canada, and beyond.

Grants, Scholarships and Fellowships

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have been fortunate to receive several grants, scholarships, sponsorships, and fellowships that have significantly contributed to my academic and professional growth. In 2002, I received my first research grant from the African Network for Agriculture, Agroforestry, and Natural Resource Education (ANAFE) to conduct a study on agroforestry. In 2003, I was awarded the African Scholarship of the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) to participate in their field course on tropical ecology at Kibale, Uganda. Subsequently, I received the Earthwatch Fellowship (2004) to participate in a mangrove restoration project in Kenya. In 2005, the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), Japan, awarded me a fellowship to undertake a study at Gambari Forest Reserve, Ibadan.

Furthermore, in 2005, I received a joint Junior Scientist Fellowship Programme from the African Forest Research Network (AFORNET) and the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) to support my master's programme. In 2006, I won the University of Ibadan Postgraduate School Scholarship and the International Foundation for Science (IFS) research grant for my doctoral studies. In 2012, I won the Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Pretoria, which allowed me to collaborate on postgraduate supervision, scientific research, and publications. In 2013, I received the Staff Exchange Fellowship of the Association of African Universities (AAU). I was among the few young researchers at the University of Pretoria who successfully passed the rigorous assessment

process to become a Rated Researcher in South Africa, benefiting from the National Research Foundation's (NRF) five-year annual incentive funding.

I participated in the three-week professional course on Competing Claims on Natural Resources at Wageningen UR Centre through the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NUFFIC) awarded to me in 2013. I have also served as a visiting scholar at the University of Lincoln, UK, and I am currently a visiting scientist at the African Forest Forum (AFF), hosted at World Agroforestry (ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya, where I am engaged in internationally funded forestry projects across Africa.

Other grants that I had won include Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA) (2009); Small Grant and Networking Grant of Tropical Biology Association (TBA) (2010 and 2015); Outreach Grant of British Ecological Society (BES), UK (2014); Tertiary Education Tax Fund (TETFUND) of Federal Govt of Nigeria (2015); Small Grant of Society for Conservation Biology, USA (2016); First Rufford Grant, UK (2017); 2nd Rufford Grant, UK (2019); IdeaWild (Field Equipment) (2018); African Bird Club (ABC) (2018); National Geographic Explorer Grant (2019); and Meridian Grant of National Geographic Society, USA (2022).

Travel Sponsorships

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I have received over forty (40) travel sponsorships and subsidies from international organisations, government agencies, and professional societies, enabling me to participate in World Forestry Congresses, as well as other international conferences, workshops, professional courses, and training programs across various countries, including Brazil, South Korea, Germany, United Kingdom, Scotland, United States, Indonesia, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, Italy, including many African countries. To God be the glory.

Consultancies for International Organisations

I have had the privilege of providing consultancy services to renowned international organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2020 on small-scale forest enterprises in Africa, the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) from 2021 to 2022, MPIDO in Kenya in 2022, and the African Forest Forum (AFF) in 2024 on *Enhancing the Interest of Youth and Young Professionals in the Forest and Wildlife Profession and Education in Africa*. These consultancies have led to production of technical reports, policy briefs and fact sheets.

Community Services

The Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I was privileged to receive two prestigious grants to implement community-based projects in Ilorin, Kwara State: The Explorer Grant from National Geographic, United States (2019), and the UNEP Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP) (2020). These grants facilitated the successful execution of several impactful projects, with the following achievements:

- a) Trained and engaged over 1,000 students and 100 teachers across 50 schools in Ilorin and its environs on gardening, tree planting, and seedling nurturing within their school compounds (Plate 4).
- b) Established 50m × 50m permanent school gardens in 30 schools in Ilorin, securing them with iron wire fences for sustainability.
- c) Provided essential gardening tools and materials, including watering cans, pesticides, and vegetable seeds, to support schools in initiating gardening activities.
- d) Repaired the perimeter fence at the permanent nursery site within Sheikh Abdulkadir Secondary School, Ilorin, enhancing security and ensuring the sustainability of their nursery project.
- e) Awarded scholarships and covered WAEC examination fees for 22 students at Agbabiaka Government Day Senior Secondary School and four students at Saint Barnabas Secondary School, Ilorin (Plate 5).

- f) Provided small research grants to three undergraduate students in the Department of Forest Resources Management to support their final-year projects.’
- g) Trained about 200 students in secondary schools and university of Ilorin on plant and animal identification using web-based and mobile software such as *iNaturalist*.
- h) Organise annual workshops for final-year students at the University of Ilorin, focusing on essential skills such as professional CV preparation, grant proposal writing, and applications for postgraduate scholarships and funding opportunities.
- i) Developed and introduced simple and efficient cookstove to over 200 households in rural communities of Kwara State with the aim of reducing pressure on natural forests for firewood collection, decrease indoor air pollution resulting from firewood use, and ultimately mitigate the impacts of climate change (Plate 6).
- j) Constructed wells and installed piped water systems to supply clean and accessible water to nearly 20 schools in Ilorin (Plate 7).
- k) Undertaken tree planting and ornamental landscaping at the Faculty of Agriculture thereby enhancing the aesthetic appeal and restore lost trees on the campus. Seedlings were distributed to staff in the university for free to promote tree planting and encourage environmental sustainability in their respective homes.

In January 2025, a student from Faculty of Education, Unilorin walked into my office to administer a questionnaire for her final year project. When she was about to leave, she said, “*Sir, I know you from somewhere – you paid my WAEC fee at Agbabiaka Secondary School!*” This was a big surprise to me! One of the students whose WAEC fees were paid by my NGO is now a final-year student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ilorin. This is one of the testimonies that almost brought tears to my eyes among the positive impacts of my community projects.



Plate 4: Some of the Mature Trees Planted by Save Sahara Network in Schools in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria



Plate 5: Presentation of Scholarship Award Letters to students at Agbabiaka Government Day Senior Secondary School, and Saint Barnabas Ilorin, Nigeria



Plates 6: Introduction of Simple and Efficient Cookstove made from Local Materials for Communities in Ilorin, Kwara State



Plate 7: Water provision by Save Sahara Network at secondary schools in Ilorin

Member and Leadership of Professional Societies

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have been an active member of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB), USA, since 2003. I was elected Membership Coordinator and Board Member of the African Section of SCB, during which I facilitated a significant increase in membership from Africa. I initiated the formation of the Nigeria Chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology (NSCB) and was elected as its pioneer president. NSCB has since been officially registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria (CAC), and I serve as one of its Board of Trustees members.

In addition, I played a key role in establishing the Nigeria Tropical Biology Association (NTBA). Under my leadership, these societies have successfully organised conferences in Ibadan, Ilorin, Lagos, Akure, and Uyo, among other locations. We have also conducted capacity-building workshops, training sessions, seminars, and webinars to enhance conservation knowledge and professional development. In 2014, I chaired the Scientific Committee for the Student Conservation Conference organised by the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2018, I was appointed Chair of the Scientific Committee for the 3rd African Congress on Conservation Biology (ACCB), held in El Jadida, Morocco.

I am an active member of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and the International Union of Forestry Research Organisations (IUFRO). In 2024, I was elected as the Coordinator of the Forest Education Research Group of IUFRO. This gives me the opportunity to contribute to advancing forest education at the global level.

Involvement in Spiritual and Neighborhood Development

I serve as member of Board of Trustees of the Kingdom Proclaimer Baptist Mission (KPBm) since 2013. I am currently an ordained Deacon, and previously serves as the President of Kingdom Men Fellowship in the mission. I am one of the members of Board of Trustees of Agbede Community, Tanke Oke-Odo, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, a neighborhood where I am living and contributing to development of the community.

Administrative Experiences at University of Ilorin

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, at the University of Ilorin, I served as the Head of Department of Forest Resources Management twice; Acting Head of Department from 2016 to 2018, and substantive Head of Department from August 2024 to date. I also served as member of the University Senate. In 2017, the Vice-Chancellor appointed me as the manager of the University of Ilorin Teak plantation, and from 2024 to date, the pioneer Chairman of the Unilorin Campus Tree Management Committee.

Other administrative positions that I have served include: Faculty Representative at the Computer-Based Centre (CBT); Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences (2016-2018); Chairman, Faculty-Based Research Committee (2018-2019); Secretary, Moringa Plantation Management Committee (2011-2014); Secretary, University Farm Management Committee (2021-2024); Departmental Seminar Coordinator and Level Adviser. I was also a member of the following committees: Faculty Screening Committee for Admission/Certificate (2011-2017); Faculty Curriculum Review Committee (2017-2018); Committee on Admission Quota (2017-2018); Committee on Environment Beautification and Sanitation (2017-2018). These roles have allowed me to make impactful contributions to the academic, environmental, and administrative progress of the university.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, across cultures and religions, forests have been used, exploited and managed. Also, the marketing of forest products plays a crucial role in livelihoods of many people. However, without proper regulation and awareness on the rate of exploitation of these resources, illegal logging, deforestation, and other forest offenses will continue to threaten its existence and sustainability. Furthermore, forestry education is critical in shaping future conservationists, researchers, and policymakers who will drive sustainable forest management. By integrating climate change education into forestry curricula, we can enhance public understanding of the role of forests in carbon sequestration, microclimate regulation, and climate resilience. Without urgent action, deforestation will worsen climate change, leading to increased desertification, loss of biodiversity, and disruptions in ecosystem services that millions depend on.

In conclusion, the path to resilient and thriving forest ecosystems lies in collective action – through responsible forest exploitation, policy enforcement, and community engagement. By addressing the myths, facts, and misconceptions surrounding forests and trees, we can secure their future, ensuring that they remain pillars of environmental sustainability, economic growth, and societal well-being for generations to come.

Recommendations

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, I want to make the following recommendations for sustainable management of our forests, as well as the development and sustainability of forestry profession in Nigeria and beyond:

1. **Public Awareness and Advocacy:** We need to enhance forestry awareness through strategic education initiatives, media campaigns, and policy engagement. This aims to highlight the vital role of forests in sustainable development and address common misconceptions about forestry as a profession.
2. **Conserving Indigenous Tree Species:** Active planting and restoration of indigenous tree species, such as Iroko, Mahogany, and Shea butter, among others will preserve our unique tree biodiversity. This will also support traditional medicinal and economic uses, ensuring long-term ecological balance.
3. **Integrating Indigenous Knowledge with Scientific Conservation:** Collaborating with indigenous communities and incorporating their ecological wisdom into national conservation policies will enhance sustainable forest management. This approach will also protect biodiversity, preserve cultural heritage, and promote ecological balance.
4. **Strengthening Forest Policies and Enforcement:** Updating national forest policies to reflect current ecological, economic, and social realities is crucial. This update, coupled with stricter enforcement mechanisms, will help combat illegal logging, deforestation, and land degradation. It will also promote sustainable forest governance.
5. **Improving Security in and around Forests:** Enhancing surveillance and security measures will prevent forests from being exploited as hideouts for criminals. Forests should be recognized as vital biodiversity sanctuaries and eco-tourism assets that contribute to environmental stability and community well-being.

6. **Enhancing Forestry Education:** Reviewing forestry curricula to address emerging environmental challenges is essential. Providing necessary equipment, infrastructure, and facilities, and recruiting adequate academic staff will enable the production of highly skilled graduates. These graduates will be equipped to drive innovation in forest conservation and management.
7. **Sustainable Management of Unilorin Teak Plantation:** Implementing best silvicultural practices, such as re-stocking vacant spaces, pruning trees, and long-term maintenance, will enhance timber quality and plantation sustainability. Leveraging carbon markets and securing dedicated funding will provide financial stability and contribute to global climate change mitigation.
8. **Enhancing the University Campus Tree Management Committee (UCTMC):** Strengthening the committee with adequate funding, skilled personnel, and necessary resources will ensure effective management, restoration, and protection of campus trees, creating a greener and more sustainable learning environment.
9. **Enhancing Forest Restoration and Management through Private Sector Participation and Funding:** Encourage private forest ownership and investment in commercial plantations, while increasing financial support from government and private sectors to facilitate large-scale afforestation efforts, restore degraded landscapes, and promote sustainable forestry practices.
10. **Strengthening the Department of Forest Resources Management (UNILORIN):** Expanding staff strength, upgrading research and teaching facilities, and establishing a dedicated departmental building will position the department as a centre of excellence in forestry education and research. This will foster global collaborations and produce industry-ready graduates.

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Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, this lecture will not be complete if I do not recognise the bone of my bone. The divine gift sent by God to support, care, and stand by my side through every step of my journey. My adviser, my prayer warrior, my confidant, my pastor, and my true love; Pastor (Mrs.) Oluwakemi Adebimpe Babalola. Thank you, my sweetheart, for the trust you have in me, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you to say “Yes” in 2008 (about 17 years ago) and marrying someone like me. Thank you for the understanding while I share the time to be with you with my laptop and buried in books. Today is not for me alone, but for us. I celebrate and appreciate you. We will live long to enjoy our labour in Jesus name. I will forever love you! To our lovely children: Emmanuel Toluwanimi; Ayomikun Dorcas, and Israel Oluwaferanmi. You are all true heritage and reward from the Lord. Thank you for the understanding and cooperation most times that Daddy will be away and buried in books. You will grow up to fulfil your destiny and divine purpose in Jesus name.

Please, if I have left out anyone or group due to constraint of space and time in this acknowledgement, kindly accept my unreserved and sincere apology. I appreciate you all and I am very grateful.

Endowment Fund

The Vice-Chancellor, Sir, "To whom much is given, much is expected." Please allow me to give back to the University of Ilorin, my home institution, for providing conducive academic environment that brought out the excellence in me, and granting me the esteemed title of a Professor. In recognition of this honour and as a way of giving back, I am establishing an Endowment Fund of One Million Naira in my name, Professor Folaranmi Dapo Babalola, to the Department of Forest Resources Management. From this fund, a sum of ₦50,000 will be awarded as prize to First-Class Graduates of the Department, as a token of encouragement and motivation for academic excellence in Forestry.

Please, let me finish with these quotes:

*A society grows great when old men
plant trees in whose shade they shall
never seat – Greek Proverb*

*The Best Time to plant a tree was 20
years ago. The Second-Best Time is
NOW. – Chinese Proverb*

Thank you all for your attention. God Bless you for coming and journey mercies to your destinations in Jesus name (Amen).

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