IJMSERH

International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Scientific Emerging ResearcH (IJMSERH)

Volume 14, Issue 2, April-June 2026

Impact Factor: 9.274

International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Scientific Emerging ResearcH (IJMSERH)

| ISSN: 2349-6037 | www.ijmserh.com ||Impact Factor: 9.274||Quarterly, Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal|

|| Volume 14, Issue 2, April-June 2026 ||

DOI: 10.15662/IJMSERH.2026.1402015

Applications of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Forest Resource Management: Innovations, Challenges, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT: Forest resources face unprecedented threats from deforestation, climate change, and illegal exploitation, necessitating advanced tools for sustainable management. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), encompassing Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), drones, and blockchain, offers transformative solutions for inventory, monitoring, and governance. This review examines core ICT applications in geospatial mapping, real-time sensor networks, predictive analytics, and supply chain traceability, drawing on global case studies from India, Brazil, and the European Union. Empirical evidence indicates that ICT enhances precision forestry, reduces illegal logging by up to 40% in monitored areas (Silva et al., 2024), and supports carbon credit verification. However, challenges such as high implementation costs, connectivity gaps in remote areas, and data privacy concerns persist. A comparative analysis highlights trade-offs between tools like GIS and IoT. The article concludes with strategic recommendations for scalable integration, emphasizing emerging technologies like 5G and edge computing. Policymakers and practitioners can leverage ICT to align forest management with Sustainable Development Goals, fostering resilience in the face of global environmental pressures.

I. INTRODUCTION

Forests cover approximately 31% of global land area, providing essential ecosystem services valued at $16.2 trillion annually, yet they are declining at 10 million hectares per year due to agricultural expansion, logging, and wild res (FAO, 2025). In regions like the Amazon and Southeast Asia, habitat loss exacerbates biodiversity decline and contributes 12-15% to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2024). Traditional management relies on manual surveys, which are labour-intensive, error-prone, and infrequent, limiting proactive interventions.

ICT emerges as a pivotal enabler, integrating data from satellites, sensors, and algorithms to deliver actionable insights. GIS facilitates spatial planning; IoT enables continuous monitoring; AI predicts risks; and blockchain ensures traceability (Johnson et al., 2024). These tools shift forest management from reactive to predictive paradigms, enhancing efficiency and equity.

This review synthesizes recent advancements, structured as follows: core applications, integration practices, case studies, impacts, benefits/challenges with comparative analysis, and future directions. By citing empirical studies up to 2025, it underscores ICT's role in sustainable forest resource management (FRM), informing policymakers and researchers.

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II. CORE ICT APPLICATIONS

Geospatial Technologies (GIS and Remote Sensing)
GIS and remote sensing form the backbone of modern FRM by enabling high-resolution forest mapping and change detection. Satellite imagery from Landsat and Sentinel-2, processed via GIS platforms like ArcGIS or QGIS, quantifies es canopy cover, biomass, and deforestation rates with 85-95% accuracy (Chen et al., 2023). For instance, normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) algorithms detect subtle shifts in forest health, aiding reforestation prioritization. Studies show GIS reduces planning errors by 60% compared to ground surveys (Patel and Lee, 2023).

IoT and Sensor Networks
IoT deploys low-cost sensors for real-time data on environmental variables. Networks of soil moisture probes, humidity gauges, and acoustic detectors monitor microclimates, re risks, and wildlife activity. In tropical forests, LoRaWAN-enabled IoT systems transmit data over 1015 km, alerting managers to anomalies like unauthorized chainsaw sounds (Garcia et al., 2025). Integration with cloud platforms like AWS IoT scales deployments, achieving 99% uptime in pilot projects.

AI and Machine Learning
AI processes vast datasets for predictive modeling. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) analyze hyperspectral imagery to detect pests or invasive species with 92% precision (Wang et al., 2024). Machine learning forecasts timber yields and carbon sequestration, optimizing harvest schedules. Reinforcement learning models even simulate poaching scenarios, improving patrol routes.

Drones and Mobile Apps
Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) equipped with LiDAR and multispectral cameras conduct rapid inventories, penetrating dense canopies for 3D biomass models. Mobile apps like Forest Eye allow rangers to geofence report illegal activities, crowdsourcing data via GPS (Silva et al., 2024).

Integration with Forest Management Practices
ICT integrates seamlessly into FRM workflows, from inventory to certification. Digital twins virtual forest replicas built from GIS/IoT data support scenario modeling for sustainable yields (Thompson, 2025). Blockchain platforms like IBM Food Trust track timber from stump to market, verifying legality via QR-coded tags and reducing illicit trade by 30% (Kumar et al., 2024).

Decision support systems (DSS), such as the Forest Vegetation Simulator enhanced with AI, aid in multi-objective planning, balancing timber production, biodiversity, and recreation. Mobile GIS apps empower eld teams with offline-capable dashboards, streamlining data collection and reducing paperwork by 70% (European Forest Institute, 2023). These integrations foster adaptive management, where real-time analytics inform policy adjustments amid climate variability.

Case Studies
India's Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) app deploys GIS and mobile reporting for 2.5 million hectares, monitoring afforestation success and detecting encroachments with 88% accuracy; it has expedited fund allocation by 50% since 2022 (MoEFCC, 2025).

In Brazil's Amazon, the Global Forest Watch initiative combines satellite data, AI, and citizen alerts via drones, alerting authorities to 1,200+ deforestation alerts monthly, curbing losses by 25% in monitored zones (Hansen et al., 2024).

The EU's Forest Info platform integrates IoT sensors across 15 member states for re prediction and inventory, supporting the Green Deal; pilots report 40% faster response times (EFI, 2023).

Africa's Miombo woodlands use blockchain for carbon credits, certifying 500,000 tons via community apps, boosting revenues for locals (World Bank, 2024).

These cases demonstrate ICT's scalability across contexts.

Social, Economic, and Governance Impacts
ICT democratizes FRM by empowering communities through participatory apps, where indigenous groups upload data for co-management, enhancing tenure security (Ostrominspired models; Agrawal et al., 2024). Economically, precision

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tools cut costs by 20-35% via optimized logistics, while carbon markets yield $1-2 billion annually (Goldman et al., 2025).

Governance improves via digital dashboards for transparent reporting, reducing corruption in permit systems. Digital twins enable evidence-based policies, aligning with REDD+ frameworks.

Benefits, Challenges, and Comparative Analysis

ICT delivers precision, scalability, and inclusivity, but faces hurdles like infrastructure deficits.

ICT Tool	Key Benefits	Challenges	Cost Level	Adoption Examples
GIS/Remote Sensing	Accurate mapping; long-term trends	Cloud cover interference; expertise needed	Medium	Global Forest Watch (Brazil)
IoT Sensors	Real-time data; low power	Poor rural connectivity; battery life	Low-Medium	EU Forest Info
AI/ML	Predictive insights; automation	Data quality issues; black-box models	High	India's CAMPA app
Drones	High-res surveys; accessibility	Regulations; weather dependency	Medium-High	Amazon monitoring
Blockchain	Traceability; fraud reduction	Scalability; user training	High	Miombo carbon credits

High costs (e.g., $50,000+ for drone fleets) and connectivity gaps in 60% of developing forests hinder adoption, alongside skills shortages (Rodriguez et al., 2025). Mitigation via open-source tools and subsidies is essential.

III. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

ICT's strategic importance in FRM lies in its capacity to operationalize sustainability, safeguarding ecosystems amid escalating pressures. Integrated platforms could halve deforestation rates by 2030 if scaled (UNEP, 2025).

Future directions include 5G for ultra-low latency IoT, edge computing for offline AI, and satellite constellations like Starlink for connectivity. Quantum sensors promise hyperaccurate biomass measurement, while federated learning addresses privacy. Policymakers should prioritize public-private partnerships, capacity building, and standards like ISO 19115 for data interoperability. By embedding ICT in national strategies, FRM can transition to resilient, data-driven paradigms, securing forests for generations.

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ISSN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA

INNO SPACE SJIF Scientific Journal Impact Factor

doi cross ref

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International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Scientific Emerging Research (IJMSERH)

Impact Factor: 9.274

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