

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

My Dear Colleagues and Friends:

Africa remains one of the most breath-taking places in the world with regard to its spectacular natural resources but it contains some of the most threatened ecological systems in the world. A number of forces which are endogenous to the countries of Africa and others which are exogenous to the region are at play in the plight of the ecological systems of the continent.



The endogenous factors include overconsumption of the renewable and non-renewable natural resources; over-exploitation for domestic and foreign markets; exponential increase in human population which lead to haphazard development which culminates in the shrinking of the ranges for wildlife and the destruction of the ecosystems; the development of agricultural land and rapid urbanization; inadequate planning, conservation and environmental protection; insufficient funding for environmental projects; slow efforts in governmental policy and legislation; lack of coordination of national and international priorities in economic development and conservation of natural resources; and the lack of dissemination of information to local citizens in area endowed with the natural resources so that they can be part of the comprehensive plans for development and conservation of the natural resources.

The exogenous factors continue to be dominated by the insatiable appetite or demand for the natural resources by foreign interests. Excellent examples would be the rhinoceros horns and the elephant tusks by Asian countries. The demand for Africa's natural resources has skyrocketed since China began industrializing and its economy has been expanding exponentially although in the last year there has been a slow down due to the global recession. China's demand for timber and petroleum from Africa has exacerbated the environmental concerns on the continent of Africa. Foreign companies engaged in oil business in Africa have been increasing in number over the years. They have not been environmentally responsible in their extraction activities and they have shown a lack of commitment to holistic development in the areas where their activities are prominent. Some of the papers in the JSDA lament the lack of commitment on the part of the multinational corporations and the national/host country governments.

The activities of the multinationals have to go beyond the primary activity of extraction of the raw materials. The companies must engage the local communities in the establishment of secondary and tertiary industries which would certainly help the efforts of sustainable development. The establishment of educational and health related institutions in the local communities in partnership with the federal governments of the host countries would help build the much needed trust in the communities. A good example of a place in Africa where the relationship between the oil companies and the local communities has deteriorated and has resulted in terrorism is in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The local radicals also blame the governments for not doing enough to improve the local communities where the mineral extraction occurs. Genuine partnerships that are built on solid foundations are needed and attention must be paid to the eradication of corrupt practices which seem to derail the efforts of leaders to bring about transparency in resource management.

The papers in this issue discuss many obstacles confronting African countries in their quest for sustainable development. The authors interrogate the current practices and strategies of development and they provide excellent recommendations for moving forward. We certainly hope that they are thought provoking and that they will help in the development efforts across Africa.

Thank you for your support.

With warm regards,

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