

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

My Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It is with a great deal of excitement and pleasure that I bring you this issue of the *JSDA*. The world community is gradually moving to the realization that humans are contributing, in a significant way, to the demise of the world's ecological systems. The growth in human population, haphazard development (without a concerted effort for environmental preservation and conservation) and the lack of policies at local, regional, national and global levels to curb the insatiable appetite of people everywhere in the consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources are causing irreversible ecological problems of monumental proportions. This issue of the *JSDA* brings to the attention of its readership, scholars, researchers, governmental and non-governmental agencies, the problems confronting the region of Africa and some of the remedies that might help in solving the problems. Academics and practitioners featured in this issue have highlighted the problems and have provided sustainable solutions to their local problems from their disciplinary perspectives.

One is encouraged by the awareness that is happening in Africa and around the world and the steps that are being taken to curb the steady decline in environmental quality which has direct implications on human health and quality of life. In a recent United Nations conference, the world body adopted the extension of the Kyoto accord. At the conference, in Doha, Qatar, nearly 200 countries agreed to extend the Kyoto Protocol. This treaty limits the greenhouse gas output of the rich countries. Another global awareness worth mentioning is the global phenomenon which threatens the dwindling populations of elephants, rhino, and the big cats of Africa. The demands for these wildlife are from China, United States, and Europe. The illegal trade in ivory, rhino horn, and the hides of the big cats have escalated in the last few years. Yahoo! ABC News (11/17/12:2) observes that:

“One of the most critical situations is the slaughter of elephants in Central and Eastern Africa. Poachers are killing tens of thousands of the animals every year, fueling the illegal trade in ivory.



In late October, customs officers in Hong Kong confiscated nearly 4 tons of ivory, worth more than \$3 million dollars in the biggest such seizure ever. Earlier this summer, authorities fined two men after finding nearly a ton of ivory in jewelry stores in New York City's Diamond District. And in mid-July, customs officers in Bangkok, Thailand, seized more than 150 elephant tusks hidden in crates aboard a flight from Kenya.

Thailand is a top transit hub for the illegal wildlife trade. All manner of animals, from lizards and turtles to baby panthers, leopards and tigers have been discovered, even in passengers' checked luggage. Late in October in northern Thailand, police intercepted a driver with 16 tiger cubs in the back seat of his truck. This week, customs officials at a checkpoint seized 600 cobras from a truck transporting them from Malaysia for use in food and traditional medicine.

Governments and private organizations are doing what they can to stem the trade. In 2005, the State Department created the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking, a public-private partnership of government agencies and non-governmental organizations, with the stated goals of improving enforcement, reducing consumer demand, and catalyzing high-level political will to fight the illegal wildlife trade."

Poaching of African wildlife poses a very dangerous problem for the continent's economic, and socio-cultural systems. It is certainly a "frightening" thought to imagine an "Africa" without its majestic wildlife or its "environmental wonderlands." The gradual disappearance or decline in the biodiversity and the deterioration of the ecological systems due to natural resource exploitation require immediate attention to help stem the tide of the ecological disaster that has engulfed the continent. The National Geographic article by Bryan Christie (October 2012:1) illustrates the demise of Africa's wildlife:

In January 2012 a hundred raiders on horseback charged out of Chad into Cameroon's Bouba Ndjidah National Park, slaughtering hundreds of elephants—entire families—in one of the worst concentrated killings since a global ivory trade ban was adopted in 1989. Carrying AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades, they dispatched the elephants with a military precision reminiscent of a 2006 butchering outside Chad's Zakouma National Park. And then some stopped to pray to Allah. Seen from the ground, each of the bloated elephant carcasses is a monument to human greed. Elephant poaching levels are currently at their worst in a decade, and seizures of illegal ivory are at their highest level in years. From the air too the scattered bodies present a senseless crime scene—you can see which animals fled, which mothers tried to protect their young, how one terrified herd of 50 went down together, the latest of the tens of thousands of elephants killed across Africa each year. Seen from higher still, from the vantage of history, this killing field is not new at all. It is timeless, and it is now.

It is encouraging to note that regional and global efforts to fight environmental problems in Africa are growing. For example, Google is funding the use of drones to fight the poaching problems in Africa:

Google-funded drones will fight rhino poachers in Africa. On Tuesday, Google announced the disbursement of a \$5 million grant to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to purchase a fleet of drone aircraft in Africa. The WWF already uses trackers in Nepal to protect endangered species.

The \$5 million grant is part of Google's Global Impact Award program and will help the WWF acquire an undisclosed number of lightweight "conservation drones," which are

launched by hand and can fly approximately 18 miles. According to Mother Jones' Dana Liebelson, the WWF will use the drones to track African ivory poachers. (<http://www.fastcompany.com/3003766/google-drones-launch-africa> 12/7/2012)

The fight against environmental decline in Africa is winnable. It will take national, regional, and international efforts to achieve the goals of environmental stewardship. Resource management, resource conservation, and protection require the involvement of local citizens and a dedicated government. The training and education of citizens is paramount in the efforts to reverse the trends of environmental destruction and international coordination with respect to discouraging the illegal trade in wildlife is necessary.

We thank you for your loyalty and support.

Sincerely,

Valentine Udoh James, Ph.D.; CEI; CAQS
Professor of Environmental Management, Planning and Policy
Certified Environmental Inspector
Certified Air Quality Specialist
Clarion University of Pennsylvania