

Editorial

The Editorial Board of the Strathmore Law Journal is pleased to publish a special issue on environmental law, under the theme “*Beyond Formal Law: The Role of Ethics, Beliefs, and Values in Amplifying Action against Plastic Pollution in Africa.*” This publication is timely in light of the ongoing negotiations under United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) aimed at developing a legally binding treaty on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

The central theme in the issue is that while formal laws play a critical role in tackling environmental challenges, they do not have absolute control over human behavior. Beyond these formal laws, an often-overlooked body of informal laws—such as ethics, culture, beliefs, and religion—also shapes individual and collective actions. In pluralistic societies, these informal laws coexist with formal regulations, sometimes conflicting and sometimes reinforcing each other. This issue, the first of its kind, explores how these informal regulatory frameworks can be harnessed to strengthen and complement formal legal mechanisms in addressing plastic pollution.

The issue kicks off with an article titled “*Role of Informal Laws in Tackling the Plastic Crisis*”. It propounds that considering the ubiquitousness of plastic pollution in our lives, informal norms and practices like customs, ethics, and beliefs will play a significant role in shaping societal responses and enhancing the effectiveness of plastic-related laws.

The second article, “*Informal Institutions, Informal Mechanisms, and their Utility in the Promotion of Environmental Protection in Africa*”, explores the contributions of informal institutions and informal mechanisms such as self-coordination, collective action, collective identity, graduated sanctions, and the role of religion in environmental preservation in the protection of the environment. It further analyses the negotiations of a plastic treaty, highlighting that integrating religious and customary norms can lead to better outcomes in the governance of plastic waste.

In search of moral environmental stewardship, the third article, “*Plastic Pollution and our Moral Responsibility: Lessons from the African Eco-Communitarian Responsibility Approach*”, argues for adoption of the Eco-Communitarian Responsibility approach to redefine moral responsibilities towards plastic pollution

in Africa, emphasizing the interconnectedness and collective responsibility, and proposes integrating these principles into global sustainable environmental practices. Taking a similar approach, the fourth article “*Social Norms and Pro-Environmental Behaviour in a Sub-Saharan African Sample*”, examines the influence of injunctive norms (what people should do) and descriptive norms (what people do) on pro-environmental behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically among 581 Nigerian university students. The study suggests that recognizing the mutual suppression effect of these norms can inform social policies to better promote environmentally friendly behaviour.

In appreciating the role of indigenous and traditional knowledge in combatting environmental challenges, the authors in the fifth article, “*The Role of Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge in Combatting Plastic Pollution*” explores how plastic pollution impacts social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of life. It documents the recent developments in recognition of indigenous and traditional knowledge in combatting environmental challenges and argues that incorporating indigenous and traditional knowledge in the mainstream scientific solutions can offer valuable solutions for achieving a plastic-free planet.

Children and young people have become an important constituency in environmental governance including in climate litigation. Amelia in “*Spinning the Yarn: Exploring the Potential of Narratives Framed by Children and the Youth in Shaping Ethics, Beliefs and Value Systems for Plastics Governance in Africa*” investigates the role of children and youth in shaping informal norms for plastics governance in Africa. The article argues that children can frame persuasive narratives to influence ethics, beliefs, and customs positively using the Narrative Policy Framework.

Finally, Khomba in “*Towards Environmental Restoration and Sustainability: Embracing the African Ubuntu Philosophy*” explores the importance of cultural beliefs, particularly the African Ubuntu philosophy, in shaping society and the natural environment relationship. It argues that integrating cultural norms and beliefs with legal frameworks, such as a plastics treaty, can enhance environmental restoration efforts and inspire a global dialogue on addressing plastic pollution.

I would like to thank and appreciate the contributors of this issue. Being the first issue dedicated to exploring role of informal laws in plastic pollution, the authors have contributed to this breakthrough and I trust the issue provides a platform for exploring the ideas further, beyond plastic pollution to environmental pollution and eventually to other fields of law.

I am also grateful to Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for their generosity. In addition to providing financial assistance at the conference where these papers were presented, KAS generously funded the publication of this issue.

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Editor-in-Chief
Strathmore Law Journal