

Foreword

I am honored to introduce this special edition of the *Strathmore Law Journal*, featuring a compilation of insightful papers derived from the conference “*Beyond Formal Law: The Role of Ethics, Beliefs, and Values in Amplifying Action against Plastic Pollution in Africa*.” This conference, which was held on 3rd November 2023, was jointly organized by Strathmore University, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Rule of Law Program for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Notably, the concept of “*Beyond Formal Law*” was envisioned much earlier, during the 4th International Parliamentarians Conference on the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), which we co-hosted in Nairobi in May 2023. The conference focused on the interlinkages between FoRB and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, it also emphasised the integration of diverse perspectives on climate justice and environmental governance, engaging parliamentarians, academics, NGOs, religious leaders, and environmental law experts. Particularly, discussions on FoRB and Environment and Climate Justice inspired the idea of a multidisciplinary approach to addressing environmental justice challenges. These deliberations highlighted the need to implement environmental protection laws and policies through informal religious and cultural channels, offering an effective pathway to streamline the shared goals of legislators, policymakers, and the broader community.

This vision aligned seamlessly with UNEP’s work on developing *an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment*; and Strathmore University’s commitment to advancing this innovative approach. Collectively, our shared interests culminated in the conference, which sought to explore how norms grounded in ethics, beliefs, and values could complement and enhance formal legal frameworks in addressing plastic pollution.

The conference gathered a diverse range of participants, including academics, civil society organizations, representatives of indigenous peoples, students, and environmental governance experts from Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Malawi, Ghana, and Australia. Thereafter, its findings were compiled into a report and availed at the 3rd session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on developing the aforestated legally binding instrument, held at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi in November 2023.

Beyond the conference, our collaboration fostered ongoing engagement, culminating in this edition of the *Strathmore Law Journal*. Following a call for papers, we were deeply encouraged by the responsiveness and commitment of contributors—leaders, youth representatives, religious figures, indigenous community advocates, and academics—who brought geographical and professional diversity to their work. The seven papers featured in this edition reflect the depth of research and innovative solutions discussed during the conference.

Each contribution demonstrates that addressing plastic pollution requires more than formal legal frameworks. It calls for the integration of informal norms—ethics, beliefs, and values—to influence behavior and drive meaningful change. This holistic approach underscores the transformative potential of informal norms in shaping sustainable environmental practices.

I extend my deepest gratitude to UNEP, notably, Prof. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director, UNEP Law Division and the leadership of Strathmore University School of Law for their invaluable collaboration, as well as to all conference participants, authors, editors, and reviewers whose tireless efforts made this publication possible. It is my hope that these contributions will inspire further academic inquiry and practical action towards a sustainable, pollution-free future.

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