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Safe and just resource management specialty grand challenge

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Globally, the intersection between resource exploitation, the environment, and social protection foregrounds the debate on sustainable use and management of natural resources (Olsen et al., 2007; Kuriakose et al., 2013). While historically, humanity has exploited the environment for its sustenance, such dependence on the environment was *relatively more sustainable*—due mainly to the small global population, organic systems of food production, rudimentary means of production, and very low carbon footprint in transportation, among other factors that characterized the Preindustrial Age (Giddings et al., 2002).

This relationship with nature began to change with the fossil-fuel-driven Industrial Revolution in the mid-eighteenth Century. Europe led the world in a carbon-intensive economic revolution that was never known to humankind until then. The industrial revolution was fed by coal, crude oil, and natural gas mainly from Africa, Asia, and parts of North and South America (Senge et al., 2001; Castle and Hendry, 2020). With unbridled industrialization and the discovery of steam engines, transportation was revolutionized and exploration of "unknown" parts of the world intensified, which brought about colonization, dispossession, and exploitation of new territories. Some scholars have argued that the scramble for the control of global energy resources propelled the colonization of diverse territories (Hagel, 1973; Kent, 2013) and the loss of the environmental sovereignty of colonized indigenous communities. The way these colonies were scavenged for minerals and other resources, often using forced, local labor revealed the primary goal of the colonial authorities, their mining companies, and powerful individuals. In fact, these colonies were literally treated as "mining fields" rather than spaces where human communities thrived (Watts, 2007; Umejesi and Thompson, 2015). The exploitation of these energy resources and other minerals remains the *propellant* of the global economy—ceaselessly saturating our atmosphere with smog, causing global climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Mass production, a direct outcome of the insatiable consumerist world, inadvertently poses a serious threat to human societies, especially in countries and communities where resource extraction and exploitation take place. In these largely low-income countries, environmental and social protection and good governance are second class (Lammi et al., 2013; Devereux et al., 2015; Arfvidsson and Follin, 2020). Resource extraction takes place as though human communities do not count. Equally, local environmental justice movements and other forms of opposition to the systematic destruction of the environment and society are criminalized as "economic sabotage". What emerges from this unsustainable arrangement is a skewed relationship between key stakeholders, mainly the state, resource extractive companies, and local communities. In this relationship, resource extraction (i.e., *the extractive complex*) is privileged against society and the environment (Obi, 2008; Umejesi and Akpan, 2013; Umejesi et al., 2018). Hence, in different resource-rich communities of Africa, Asia, and South America (the so-called *global South*), local environmental groups,

often supported by international advocacy solidarity, have raised questions about social "safety nets" and the "justness" or otherwise of such skewed arrangement (Frynas, 2000; Umejesi and Thompson, 2015).

In 2013, the *Africa Progress Report* on the extractive sector in Africa, a study led by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, noted that although African states have experienced relative growth in the extractive sector since the 2000s,[1] the benefits have eluded communities and the environment have been ruined. The Report then concluded that "Africa lags behind other regions in meeting environmental and social protection standards". Consequently, extractive industries "leave the poor behind" and "harm the environment" (Frynas, 2000; Africa Progress Panel, 2013). Equally, studies in South America, Asia, and other regions have confirmed similar socioecological predicaments from natural resource extraction in local communities (Olivero and Solano, 1998; De Theije et al., 2014). It therefore poses the question: how do resource exploitation and economic growth intersect with environmental preservation and social protection? This is the overarching question that strikes at the heart of sustainable management of resources, especially when explored via the lens of *safe* and *just* practices.

The "Safe and Just Resource Management" Section of *Frontiers in Sustainable Resource Management* provides the platform for interrogating various questions related to:

- resource management between diverse stakeholders,
- access and inequality in resource ownership rights,
- resource management policy,
- environmental sovereignty in indigenous communities,
- just transition and socioecological protection in resource extraction,
- governance frameworks,
- climate change,
- risks, vulnerability, and socioecological resilience in the extractive space,
- land use,
- social and environmental justice movements,
- conservation and participatory resource management,
- critical assessment of sustainable development goals related to resource management, and
- other related subjects.

1 Growth was boosted by the boom in primary products and high demand especially from China.

It is important to promote critical engagement, research, and publication of quality articles in these focus areas as a way of analyzing, understanding, and reducing the tensions and underlying factors. Resource-related conflicts in different parts of the world, but especially in Africa, South America, and parts of Asia, and their attendant pernicious social and environmental consequences highlight the urgency to consolidate this niche area and create a body of knowledge that focuses on resource management at community level, country, regional, and interregional contexts. More positively, we can ask whether this conflict is inevitable. Some argue that a shift toward good governance, together with the fortuitous transition away from the Industrial Revolution as we enter a new *Kondratieff* (in which there are no unavoidable wastes), will render it optional (Grinin et al., 2014; Thompson, 2017). This is the core mission of Safe and Just Resource Management of Section of *Frontiers in Sustainable Resource Management*.

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