



Book Review

Global Environment Outlook 3: Past, Present and Future Perspectives

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Reviewed by Kofi Ankomah

In June 1972, one hundred and thirteen countries and other stakeholders convened in Stockholm, Sweden, for the first international conference on the environment. They deliberated on the major environmental issues facing our world; they took stock of our earth's resources, and they evolved remedial action plans. Participants of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm reached a consensus to embark on collective global actions to mitigate the adverse impacts on the environment in order to ensure sustainable development. Among other things, the Conference made 26 declarations (Principles of the Stockholm Declaration) and proposed 109 recommendations (Action Plan of 109 recommendations.) One of the major outcomes of the Stockholm Conference is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), our globe's most dedicated guardian of the environment. Major achievements have been chalked-up since the conference. As Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, puts it in the 'Foreword' to *Global Environment Outlook 3: Past, present and future perspectives*: 'That landmark event is widely credited with having

put environmental issues on the international agenda, leading in turn to the establishment of environment ministries at the national level and increased awareness of the impact that even local decisions can have on the global environment' (p. xv). The global environment report reveals that the global environment is under siege: there is pressure on land, forest, biodiversity, freshwater, coastal and marine areas, the atmosphere, and on urban areas.

This information-packed book is the outcome of a collaborative network of great magnitude - UNEP's Global Environment Outlook Project (the GEO Project,) - deriving its mandate from *Agenda 21* and a decision of the UNEP Governing Council of May 1995. 'Agenda 21' - 'a blueprint for environment and development into the 21st Century' (p. 15) - is one of the action programmes emerging from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (the 'Earth Summit') held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Global Environment project is a network of specialised centres, institutions and individuals spanning the globe and collaborating on data gathering and information sharing about the

state of the world's environment. The GEO project provides support to specialised centres, institutions and individuals, through a comprehensive internet-based portal, to strengthen their capability for comprehensive and integrated national and regional environment assessment.

Global Environment Outlook 3: Past present and future perspectives traces major global developments and their impact from the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 till the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The book begins with a 'Foreword' by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, in which he places the publication in historical context. Klaus Töpfer describes the collaborative mechanism employed by the GEO Project and the scope and concerns it covered in the 'Preface'. This is followed by a 14-page 'Synthesis' which is like an executive summary that presents the issues, tests the logic, and pulls the plan sharply in focus, thus enabling UNEP to effectively communicate its vision. Chapter 1, 'Integrating Environment and Development: 1972-2002' addresses what environment and development issues confront the world as we move through the 21st century. Chapters 2 'State of the Environment and Policy Retrospective: 1972-2003' and 3 'Human Vulnerability to Environment Change' discuss the current state of the environment and the frightening pace of degradation through human made as well as natural disasters, which for the database of the strategic plan constitute the strategic analysis. Chapter 4,

'Outlook 2004' identifies and maps out alternative scenarios for the future. Chapter 5, 'Options for Action' provides policy actions for sustainable development (action plans).

This fine book provides not only an admirable strategic plan, but also a wealth of environment information of the world's regions. The accompanying compact disk is also a wonderful resource. It aptly portrays how humans have used and abused the resources of the world. It is a pointer to the actions that need to be taken to reverse, and in some places to contain, the accelerated depletion of endowed resources. The information presented in the book shows that there are actions that people can take in their various capacities: as individuals, as members of families, as members in teams at their work places, as members in their places of worship, as citizens in their various countries and as members of the human race.

We need to commend those individuals who, with the foresight prior to 1972, laboured to organise the first United Nations Conference on Human Environment for sensitising the world to the steep decline of our environment. Indeed, we now bemoan the degradation, but one wonders what would have happened without the tremendous achievements during the intervening years in principles, declarations and treaties that have come about with these efforts.

Kofi Ankomah, Ph.D., 144 Freetown Avenue, (La-Bawaleshie Road), P. O. Box 9395, Airport, Accra, Ghana, West Africa. Email: Kankomah@ghana.com.