



Editorial

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Eric Hobsbawm wrote that the 20th century began with high expectations and closed under the dark clouds of pessimistic scenarios. When it started, there was the belief that technology would solve the most difficult challenges to humanity. Peace seemed to be a safe outlook and social inequalities seemed on the way of being reduced.

Reality negated these expectations. Wars were never more devastating and lethal; welfare state policies did not manage to reduce the great chasm between the rich and the poor; technologies, even though they spared humanity from many heavy productive toils, was frequently misused and generated undesired negative impacts.

The 21st century has been incepted already under an aura of concern and appeals concerning responsibility. Envisioned scenarios inspire attention and call for changes in pathways and attitudes, as they are now based on much more solid bases than those of the late 19th century.

The instruments of analysis, the databases and the ability to process information have all grown and improved. Today, when we look at the future and identify risks, the reliability is strong. The intensity may vary, but not the fact.

One of the most serious problems generated by the mode of development adopted over the last two centuries is related to climate change. Going beyond the power of natural phenomena, expressed in remarkable episodes recorded in different parts of the planet, we now must deal with the climatic effects of human actions.

Our ability to predict and react to natural catastrophes is still limited, but we are increasingly able to identify the possible effects of the changes that result from our own interventions in the natural systems in which we live. Reliable studies, such as the successive documents produced by the IPCC and the Stern Report, leave no room for optimism. Whatever the short-term changes in the behavior of humanity, certain effects over the climate are inexorable, because they will be the outcome of actions that belong to the past.

The seriousness of the problems has drawn close attention from different sectors of society. Academicians and scientists are closely involved, together with citizens' groups and governments. Businesses also acknowledge the need for change. Given the planetary dimensions and the fact that solutions do not depend on the actions of any particular country or people, direct or indirect consequences of inaction will fall upon all.

This entails the creation of supranational governance instruments. With higher or lower degree of success, some international protocols have been drawn. Adherence to them and their effec-

tiveness are still below what is required, but it is clear that climate change is on the agenda and commands ever more attention by all.

Sustainability in Debate - SeD dedicates most of its second issue to the topic of Climate, Sustainability and Development in Semi-Arid Regions. This was in part prompted by the *ICID 2010 – Second International Conference on Climate, Sustainability and Development*, an international scientific meeting held in Fortaleza (Ceará), Brazil, between August 16 and 20, 2010. It brought together scientists, decision makers, development agencies and others types of actors involved in or responsible for the consequences of climate change, particularly processes of desertification.

Around 200 scientific papers were delivered at the event. The ad hoc Scientific Committee of the event selected about a dozen of them, at our request. Antonio Rocha Magalhães, ICID Coordinator, was invited to organize the dossier published herein. It was planned to contain a selection of papers that combine the diversity of contexts in which semi-arid regions are affected by climate change and high academic standards. *SeD* reviewers, under the system of double-blind peer-review, then evaluated these pre-selected texts. The texts approved by this selection process are all included in the dossier, which we present to our readers with great satisfaction.

This issue also contains the message sent to conference participants by Ban-Ki Moon, United Nations General Secretary, a transcript of the opening speech delivered by Professor Ignacy Sachs (“In Search of Threewin Solutions: the Challenges of the 2012 UN Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development”), and the document officially drafted by all Conference participants (“The Fortaleza Letter”).

The issue is further enriched by an essay concerning the contributions of Professor Elinor Ostrom, the 2009 Nobel prize winner in economy, by an interview with Carlos Afonso Nobre, a renown Brazilian scientist (from the staff of the Brazilian Institute of Space Studies (INPE) who is among the authors of the Fourth IPCC Report, and by two reviews about recent books dealing with climate change.

We take the opportunity to invite readers to submit their work to *SeD* and to sign up as possible manuscript evaluators at www.revista.sustentabilidade.unb.br

Finally, we hope that our readers will enjoy the content of this issue and that they will help make it better known among their peers, colleagues and students.

Our goal is to contribute to the advancement of the debate, the understanding and the addressing of challenges linked to sustainability of development.