

## **Editorial note by Guest Editor**

Prof. Martin Oteng-Ababio

### **Editorial**

The idea for this special issue arose from series of discussions among the executives of the association during the planning for the 2016 GGA/GGTA conference which place in Tamale in the Northern Region. That motivation was borne out of the financial constraints that the association faced at the time, and the need to strategize to circumvent that challenge. In the process, the executives decided to seek assistance from potential corporate entities who would be interested in the outcomes of our presentations either in the form of journal articles or edited book chapters. With the kind assistance and initiative of Prof Mariamah Awumbilla, a renowned population geographer and a faculty member of the Department of Geography and Resource Development at the University of Ghana, Legon, we were able to identify and negotiate with Savanna Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) who willingly and gracefully accepted our proposal, and this gave birth to this edition of our esteemed journal, *Ghana Journal of Geography*, we are witnessing today.

This SADA special issue falls under the theme “*Actualization of the sustainable development goals: the role of the Geographer*”. Our intention here is to showcase some of the current studies authored by our members which interrogate some of the causal factors explaining why Northern Ghana lags behind the rest of the country in terms of development and how the situation can be rectify, the very focus of SADA’s tremendous activities. We opted for a short review format. This rules out the possibility of an exhaustive review of subthemes but nevertheless allows for a quick introduction to key themes. We pursued an inductive process. Rather than selecting people with specific thematic interests, we made an open call to propose ideas for review articles. We were flexible in following the interests of those who responded rather than trying to cover a prescribed set of subthemes. While some articles bear titles which align squarely with the mission of SADA,

others covered remotely related subfields and thus, we are able to generate a sense of the variety of interests that are engaging geographers today.

We anticipate that these reviewed articles will be of tremendous value for SADA and its future, but more importantly, we hope these will provide and generate the opportunity and needed interests for further research works. Rather than a static accounting exercise of the themes, we hope that it will be part of a living archive of literature. Some contributions to the journal concentrate on conceptually, exploring the underdevelopment of SADA zone, while others focus on the physical characteristics of the region as a whole. As Martin Oteng-Ababio, Simon Mariwa and Louis Kusi's essay on uneven development between the north and south of the country demonstrates, current studies have made it abundantly clear that there is no merit in the conventional arguments which attempt to attribute the region's underdevelopment to its physical and climatic challenges, which are no more serious than other West Africa Sahelian countries where greater economic development is visible. They argue that adopting a rather ubiquitous deterministic lens oversimplifies or overlooks not only the flawed vestiges of colonial and post-colonial administrations but also the policy inconsistencies pursued and still being pursued in the Fourth Republic. As rightly and aptly revealed by some studies by SADA, they emphasized that the colonial policy biases, coupled with successive rounds of post-independence policy (dis)continuities, tend to gloss over fundamental problems underpinning the region's low productivity and underdevelopment, adding that these tendencies conceptually legitimize and constitute a key strategy in explaining the region's developmental problems.

Some contributions remind us that the 'northern-dweller' in Ghana is not independent from global policy dynamics, but rather is equally subjected to dictates of changing global and regional policy developmental paradigms. One of them is Kenneth Peprah's paper which addresses the ramifications resulting from the implementation of global development paradigms in Ghana from pre-independence to the present. An attempt is made to match these paradigms to development decades, identifying the key evolving issues from decadal paradigms and relating the issues to essentially previous dominant paradigm(s). He furthermore clarifies 'the situation in the north' in as essentially a colonial project, one in which the 'region' performed the role of passive agents. Cities like Tamale, Salaga, or Bawku were planned as slave post where the 'north' was regarded as "labour" reserves. In his estimation, the recent Sustainable Development Goals draw from the

antecedents of colonialism, economic growth and development, people-centred development, sustainable development, and globalization. He further maintains that the implications for policy are key issues in regard to the analytical meaning of the co-existing paradigms and the destination at which Ghana hopes to find itself at the end of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The sense of novelty, amazement, and ‘glare’ (as in Issahaku Abdul-Rahaman and Ebenezer Owusu-Sekyere’s insights on the climate variability of the north and its impact on sustainable food production) is inextricably accompanied with a sense of suspicious alienation. They highlight how the how the past two decades have seen invigorated debates on the causal link between climate variability and food crop production, and extends the debate further by investigating how climate variability has affected the production of four specific food crops: maize, millet, rice, and groundnuts in north-eastern Ghana. In a similar fashion, Issaka Kanton Osumanu and Ayamga Atia Samuel also examine the importance of collaboration and partnership with local communities in forest management and conservation using the Gbele Reserve in north-western Ghana as a case study. They explored how since the promulgation of the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy, community participation in forest resource management has become the norm in most Ghanaian communities. Further, Collins Adjei Mensah, Kwabena Barima Antwi, James Kweku Eshun and Paul Baidoo’s highlight the fact that conserving green spaces (parks, gardens, forest) in the physical landscape of cities is an action that has been identified as contributing to the sustainability of cities. They however caution that to be able to conserve such spaces, some barriers need to be overcome, a subject that has received very limited academic attention. Their paper subsequently provides and highlights some of the ‘physical’ barriers that must be overcome in the quest for urban green spaces in order to enhance the urban sustainability. The penultimate article, authored by Rachel Olawoyin and Peter Kwabenah Acheampong adopted the Thiessen polygon model to objectively assess and estimate the areal rainfall depths in the River Volta catchment in Ghana.

The final paper, which is Martin Oteng-Ababio’s viewpoint on how developing countries and Ghana for that matter can achieve the global agenda of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted on 25 September 2015 by the 156 UN member states including SDG 11 on cities: ‘Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’. He adequately articulated how the event was heralded with pomp and pageantry, and the relevance of cities in achieving global

development. The paper rightly drew attention to the fact that the first two UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I and 2) saw governments back then making qualified commitments not only for universal water and sanitation but more importantly also for the upgrading of informal settlements. He reflects on how cities especially can implement the global agenda with targets in areas of critical importance – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, and argued that the novel approaches and strategies to addressing the SDGs offer hope of greater effectiveness, particularly by given recognition to the fact that how urban growth is managed in developing countries, the type of infrastructure that is put in place and the jobs and city socio-economies that are developed will be crucial to the SDGs for decades to come. Hinging on the multi-faceted nature of the urbanization debate, he finally opines that without a well-managed urban transition, it will be difficult to see how the SDGs could be achieved

Generally, this is a maiden attempt to consciously but intellectually explore, through an edited special edition of a journal, the reasons for the underdevelopment of Northern Ghana. One of the simplest aspects of this Special SADA edition that speaks most powerfully about its implicit mission of exploring Ghanaian solutions on a Ghanaian dilemma – as much in its physical and intellectual production on home ground as in its subject matter – is the very light way in which it features several subject matters. This special edition is much the better for it, and it is to be hoped that future editions may expand to include other socio-cultural issues. Perhaps the strongest part of this special edition's offering is the richness and timeousness of its offering as a collection. This is in excess of the power of individual contributions (such as the matchless Oteng-Ababio, Simon Mariwa and Louis Kusi's essay on uneven development between the north and south, or Issahaku Abdul-Rahaman and Ebenezer Owusu-Sekyere imaginaries on the impact of climate variability of the north on sustainable food production. Clearly, this special edition is not only for academics, nor is it entirely effortless for the casual reader. It asks the academy to engage with an affective multi-dimension and disciplinary nature of the northern experience; it asks the casual reader to engage rigorously with the social, cultural and political paradigms and processes that subtend lived experience and narrative. If this is the future of a hybrid academic-corporate publishing, we could be at the start of a golden age.