

Journal of tropical futures editorial update: Rethinking tropical futures – towards sustainable systems of justice, care and regeneration

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Patrick Elf^{1,2,3} , Jacob Wood^{3,4} , and Pengji Wang³

Nearly three years after its inception, the *Journal of Tropical Futures* (JTF) continues to evolve. When the journal was officially launched in 2022, it sought to highlight the significance of tropical regions for questions of sustainable business, governance, and development (Case et al., 2022). Today, as the world faces accelerating ecological crises, widening inequalities, and shifting geopolitical realities, the need for a systemic and plural rethinking of sustainability has never been greater.

The tropics – home to over 3.8 billion people and more than 80% of global biodiversity (State of the Tropics Report, 2020) – remain at the forefront of these transitions. Far from being merely sites of environmental or developmental challenge, tropical regions represent critical laboratories of innovation, resilience, and epistemic diversity. They are places where alternative modes of living, governing, and knowing are constantly being experimented with – offering insights into how humanity might reimagine its collective futures.

As we enter this new phase, JTF reaffirms its role as a forum for substantive research and knowledge at the intersections between disciplines (and beyond them) about the relationships between humanity and its possible futures. The journal retains its commitment to analyze and challenge misuses and abuses of futures – such as those embodied in planetary resource overshoot (Rockström et al., 2025) – while advancing a robust understanding of the conditions needed to create emancipatory, socially responsible, and ecologically just futures. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the developmental opportunities and systemic challenges emerging from the tropics, recognizing these regions as crucial sites for reimagining sustainability beyond the confines of capitalist domination and the logics of endless growth.

From development to systems thinking

While the inaugural editorial reflected the centrality of developmental perspectives in the tropics – particularly their political and economic dimensions – the journal now

moves toward a systems-oriented understanding of tropical change. This shift acknowledges the entanglement of ecological, economic, and cultural processes that shape both the vulnerabilities and the transformative potential of tropical regions (e.g., Biermann and Kim, 2020).

The new editorial direction emphasizes that the tropics, as well as the Global South more widely, are not simply a problem space – for instance, associated narrowly with plastic pollution or deforestation – but perhaps the most crucial environment and context for the survival of humanity and many species. Importantly, the Global South is a relational space where interdependent systems of life, economy, business, and culture converge. The journal thus encourages analyses that connect local tropical and Global South realities to global systemic conditions, recognizing the mutual implications of tropical and non-tropical futures alike.

This approach also invites reconsideration of sustainability itself (e.g., Werner et al., 2025). Rather than equating sustainability with growth or efficiency (cf. Manolchev et al., 2024), JTF supports scholarship that explores alternative development pathways, including post-growth, sufficiency, and wellbeing-oriented approaches (Jackson, 2023; Kothari et al., 2019; Raworth, 2017). Such perspectives foreground livelihoods, equity, and cumulative intrinsic values – those relational, cultural, and spiritual connections between humans and nature that sustain collective life (Chan et al., 2018).

¹Centre for Enterprise, Environment and Development Research (CEEDR), Middlesex University London, UK

²Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP), University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

³James Cook University Singapore (JCUS), Singapore

⁴Southern Institute of Technology, Invercargill, New Zealand

Corresponding author:

Patrick Elf, Centre for Enterprise, Environment and Development Research (CEEDR), Middlesex University London, UK.

Email: p.elf@mdx.ac.uk

Re-examining business, governance, and responsibility

Sustainability in business and governance remains at the heart of JTF's mission, yet both concepts are undergoing profound transformation. The rise of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks have made sustainability performance a central concern for corporations and investors, yet these tools often obscure systemic inequities or reproduce narrow understandings of value (Sullivan, 2022; Schaltegger et al., 2023). JTF therefore seeks research that interrogates how sustainability is governed and measured and made meaningful – particularly in tropical and Global South contexts marked by social complexity, informal economies, and cross-cultural worldviews.

Equally, the journal remains committed to exploring questions of corporate and institutional responsibility, including through its recent and forthcoming Special Issues. For instance, 'Novel approaches to sustainable consumption and production in the Global South: From challenging dominant assumptions to setting future debates' (Elf et al., 2025b), and the forthcoming Special Issue on 'Just Futures in the Global South', which accompanies the 2026 SCORAI conference¹, provide fora for critical approaches. Together, these collections have advanced critical debates around consumption patterns, supply chain justice, and the politics of sustainability governance.

The JTF also has a strong desire to shine a light on sustainable forms of development and how circular business managers can develop, innovate, and implement circular economy business models (CEBMs). For instance, recent research by Queiroga et al. (2025) explored how the COM-B model can be used to identify key factors that drive CEBM development and the facilitation of more sustainable consumption behaviours in Brazil. Through their empirical work, the researchers have shown that CEBMs – and circular managers as key transition brokers – are essential for advancing cleaner production and consumption by introducing new approaches to doing business, producing, and consuming (Queiroga et al., 2025).

These contributions highlight that business, governance, and community actors in the tropics are not merely recipients of global change – they are co-creators of new institutional logics, capable of shaping trajectories of justice, sufficiency, and regeneration.

Building on JTF's thematic achievements

Across its volumes, JTF has established itself as a meeting ground for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogues. Its pages have explored issues such as livelihood transitions, circular and responsible business, decolonial governance, and climate justice – always with attention to the diversity and heterogeneity of tropical contexts.

The journal's themed special issues reflect the vibrancy of these discussions and the growing community around them. Going forward, JTF will continue to develop thematic clusters that bridge conceptual, empirical, and speculative work. Priority areas include, but are not limited to:

- The politics of sustainable futures in times of global uncertainty
- Cross-cultural conceptions of value and wellbeing
- Environmental justice and community governance
- Livelihoods and sufficiency transitions
- Sustainability performance and ESG critique
- Sustainable economic and developmental opportunities and challenges

Introducing practitioner insights²

In recognition of the crucial role of practice in shaping sustainability transitions, JTF now introduces Practitioner Insights – a new section dedicated to bridging research and action. This section provides a platform for practitioners, policymakers, social entrepreneurs, and community leaders to share grounded experiences, reflections, and lessons learned from practice. It will feature shorter manuscripts (1800–2000 words), which include case studies, field-based insights, and practitioner reflections highlighting how innovative practices, policies, and partnerships contribute to more just, sustainable, and regenerative futures – particularly in the context of the Global South and tropical regions.

By creating this bridge between scholarly inquiry and practical experience, JTF seeks to expand its relevance beyond the academy, fostering dialogue among scholars, practitioners, and communities engaged in the shared task of building equitable and sustainable futures. This section *complements* our successful Tropical Provocations section (see e.g., Böhm, 2023) and reinforces JTF's commitment to amplifying diverse voices and transformative practices emerging from the tropics.

Refreshed aims and scope

Given the significance of the tropics and the Global South to the world's environmental, economic, and socio-cultural ecosystems, it is imperative that more is done to better understand the complexities and heterogeneous nature of one of the fastest growing regions in the world (Cockburn et al., 2024).

As a peer-reviewed, transdisciplinary journal, JTF is dedicated to exploring the interconnections between sustainability, governance, and human futures in tropical and subtropical regions. The journal seeks to advance critical, context-specific, and action-oriented knowledge on how the tropics contribute to, and are shaped by, global transformations in climate, with a particular focus on climate adaptation strategies, resilience mechanisms, and community-led responses, as well as local and global economies and societies.

JTF's aims are to:

- Advance holistic and systemic understandings of tropical sustainability and development.
- Explore the interplay between livelihoods, equity, and ecological wellbeing.
- Critically assess corporate, institutional, and governance responses to sustainability challenges and development across the tropics.
- Illuminate cross-cultural and intrinsic values shaping human–nature relationships.
- Conduct comparative studies across tropical regions and between Global South contexts to underscore heterogeneity in the Tropics, and to generate broader insights for policy and practice.
- Strengthen practice-based and community-led knowledge through the new practitioner section.
- Contribute to global debates on justice, care, and regeneration through empirically grounded, theoretically rich, and interdisciplinary research.

Expanded thematic areas

In our refocused editorial direction, we expand our efforts to include six key thematic areas. These areas represent the key developmental issues representing the tropics today and are at the forefront of JTF's move towards a systems-oriented understanding of tropical, and Global South change.

Public policy, regional development and governance

Public policy and governance constitute the backbone of sustainable futures. They determine how resources are allocated, how power is exercised, and how accountability and participation are structured. In the context of accelerating climate crises and geopolitical change, governance capacity is increasingly tied to the ability to navigate uncertainty, foster collaboration, and sustain ecological and social wellbeing.

In the tropics and the Global South, policy and regional development challenges are compounded by legacies of colonialism, environmental vulnerability, and institutional fragmentation. Decentralized governance in Southeast Asia (Burchardt and Dietz, 2024), regional cooperation across Latin America (Beling et al., 2018), and climate adaptation policies in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2023) exemplify the diversity of tropical governance contexts. These regions are crucial contexts for experimentation in participatory policymaking, digital transformation, and resilience building to foster locally focused approaches.

Viewed through a systems-thinking lens, governance is not merely about institutional design but about the relationships between state, market, and community (Oliveira et al., 2021). JTF invites research that critically examines these relationships – how they enable or constrain sustainability

transitions – and how governance can evolve towards adaptive, equitable, and care-centered forms of responsibility.

Human and workforce development

Human and workforce development are fundamental to achieving equitable and resilient futures (Alkire et al., 2013; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). Education, skills, health, and wellbeing enable people to adapt, innovate, and sustain livelihoods amid global transformations such as automation, climate migration, and demographic change.

In the tropics and Global South, where populations are young and labour markets are dynamic, workforce development presents both an opportunity and a challenge (Kharas, 2010; UNDP, 2023). Informal employment, migration, health and gendered inequalities (e.g., Callander & Topp, 2020) remain pressing issues, which require urgent attention. Yet, these same contexts also generate innovation in vocational education, community learning, and hybrid work models (Evans, 2010).

JTF seeks contributions that examine how capabilities, care, and sustainability intersect – how workforce practices, education, and social protection can promote regenerative and just transitions. Such insights are vital to rethinking governance and organizational responsibility within complex social–ecological systems.

Sustainable business and social responsibility

Sustainable business remains a defining concern of JTF, but the journal now embraces a broader understanding of business as an agent of systemic change rather than a driver of growth alone (Mont et al., 2025). Contemporary frameworks such as ESG, impact accounting, and responsible innovation have introduced new ways of measuring performance – but they also risk reducing sustainability to metrics and compliance.

In tropical and Global South contexts, business activities intersect directly with questions of justice, livelihoods, and planetary boundaries. Local enterprises, social innovations, and informal sector dynamics often reveal alternative models of value creation – ones that are relational, community-driven, and ecologically embedded. From circular economy initiatives in Brazil (Queiroga et al., 2025) to cooperative entrepreneurship in Africa (Burchardt and Dietz, 2024), tropical regions demonstrate that responsible business can foster both equity and resilience.

At the same time, the persistence of modern slavery and exploitative labour conditions across global value chains remains one of the most urgent moral and governance challenges in tropical regions (Li and Goerzen, 2024). High-risk sectors such as agriculture, garments, fisheries, and construction continue to rely on precarious and often invisible labour regimes, embedded within fragmented subcontracting networks and informal economies (Anner, 2020; LeBaron,

2020; Manolchev et al., 2024). These exploitative practices, which disproportionately affect women, migrants, and Indigenous peoples, expose the contradictions of sustainability in the global economy. Addressing them requires not only enhanced supply-chain transparency and due-diligence legislation (Barrientos et al., 2016; Gold et al., 2015), but also structural reform of purchasing practices, living-wage commitments (Werner and Lim, 2021), and enforcement mechanisms that redistribute responsibility across the entire value chain. JTF thus invites scholarship interrogating how new accountability frameworks can be leveraged to dismantle systemic exploitation in tropical production networks.

Furthermore, global institutions and multinational corporations (MNCs) play a pivotal role in shaping development pathways and influencing the lives of those at the bottom of the pyramid. While inclusive-business rhetoric and social-enterprise models have proliferated (London and Hart, 2011; Prahalad, 2004), deep-seated hierarchies, poverty traps, and social exclusions continue to constrain equitable participation in many economies (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011; George et al., 2016), including tropical economies. JTF therefore calls for contributions that critically examine how MNCs, development agencies, and global frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are translated into local realities – whether through fair-trade systems, micro-enterprise networks, or cooperative governance. Equally, research on Southern-led enterprises, hybrid organizations, and community-based cooperatives can reveal how alternative development logics resist dependency and foster empowerment (Kistruck & Beamish, 2010; Mair et al., 2012). Such inquiry is vital for re-conceptualizing the relationship between business, poverty alleviation, and justice in the tropics.

JTF welcomes contributions that analyze these evolving practices and their implications for global sustainability governance. By linking business behaviour to systemic outcomes, the journal encourages work that redefines corporate responsibility as co-created, context-sensitive, and integral to wider transformations in policy, society, and the environment.

Responsible tourism, hospitality and marketing

Tourism and hospitality are powerful economic engines across tropical regions. They shape perceptions of place, affect ecosystems, and provide critical livelihoods. Yet they also embody global inequalities and unsustainable consumption patterns (Elf et al., in press; Mont et al., in press). Post-pandemic recovery and escalating climate pressures demand a rethinking of tourism's role – from growth-driven expansion to community-centered regeneration (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Saarinen, 2021).

In the tropics and Global South, tourism carries both risks and possibilities (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019). Coastal degradation in the Pacific region (Foale, 2023), cultural commodification in Southeast Asia (Hall, 2019), and ecotourism innovation in Africa (Ramaano, 2024; Saarinen, 2021) all

illustrate the complex interplay between local communities, visitors, and ecosystems. Tourism thus offers a window into how global consumption systems intersect with local governance and environmental limits.

Through a systems perspective, JTF views tourism and marketing as leverage points for transformation. We invite work that rethinks tourism beyond markets – as relational systems linking people, culture, and nature. Studies of regenerative tourism, responsible marketing, and hospitality ethics can illuminate how these sectors contribute to systemic care, equity, and ecological restoration.

Indigenous peoples and approaches

Indigenous knowledge systems offer profound insights into sustainability, relationality, and care. Grounded in millennia of coexistence with ecosystems, Indigenous approaches challenge dominant paradigms of growth and extractivism, proposing instead ethics of reciprocity, stewardship, and kinship (Elf et al., 2025a).

Across the tropics and the wider Global South, Indigenous peoples are key custodians of biodiversity and cultural diversity. From the Amazon and the Pacific to Southeast Asia and Southern Africa, Indigenous cosmologies emphasize interdependence between humans, non-humans, and landscapes – a worldview increasingly recognized as vital for global sustainability (Chandler & Reid, 2020; Kimmerer, 2013; Whyte, 2018). However, Indigenous communities continue to face displacement, marginalization, and appropriation of their knowledge.

JTF invites scholarship and practice-based contributions that foreground Indigenous epistemologies as integral to systems thinking. Rather than treating Indigenous knowledge as complementary to Western science, we encourage approaches that re-center Indigenous worldviews as frameworks of governance, business ethics, and relational responsibility. Mechanisms for decolonial governance might include co-management arrangements between states and Indigenous communities, legal personhood for natural entities, participatory land titling, and epistemic recognition frameworks that embed Indigenous decision-making within institutional processes (Bastos Lima & Gupta, 2022). This aligns with the journal's mission to re-examine the moral and ecological foundations of tropical futures through plural and decolonial perspectives (de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Escobar, 2020; Smith, 2021).

Technology and sustainable tropical development

The tropics, and the Global South more widely, are home to some of the world's most dynamic, diverse, and rapidly transforming economies. From smart cities in Southeast Asia to renewable energy innovations in the Pacific and digital entrepreneurship across Africa and Latin America, the intersection of technology and tropical development presents both

remarkable opportunities and unique challenges (Amankwah-Amoah & Lu, 2024; Bilgili, Tumse & Nar, 2024; Choi & Kenney, 2024). Yet these opportunities are accompanied by significant risks, including widening digital divides, forms of techno-colonialism that replicate existing power asymmetries, and the growing ecological footprint of digital infrastructures (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Hickel, 2020)

JTF invites scholarship and practice-based contributions that explore how technology can catalyze sustainable and inclusive development in tropical and Global South contexts. We welcome studies discussing digital transformation and inclusive growth, sustainable technologies for tropical development, technology's role in reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion, as well as governance, policy, and ethics related to technological development and adoption in tropical regions.

Conclusion

As an emerging multidisciplinary journal, the Journal of Tropical Futures is deeply committed to advancing sustainable and responsible business, management, and governance across the Tropics and the wider Global South. Our editorial direction recognises the complex and heterogeneous nature of the ecological, social, and economic transformations shaping our focus regions. We seek to move beyond narrow developmental paradigms and embrace systemic, plural, and justice-oriented perspectives that foreground responsible stewardship, Indigenous knowledge, community resilience, and regenerative organisational practices. By fostering meaningful dialogue between scholarship and practice—supported by initiatives such as our Practitioner Insights section—the journal aims to amplify diverse voices and challenge extractivist logics that have long constrained equitable futures. Looking ahead, JTF will deepen its engagement with interdisciplinary research, practice-based insights, and decolonial frameworks to better understand and navigate the unique and precarious concerns facing Tropical societies. Through this commitment, the journal positions itself as a critical forum for transformative approaches that support futures grounded in care, sufficiency, ecological resilience, and social responsibility.

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ORCID iDs

Patrick Elf  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7420-4434>

Jacob Wood  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3096-5159>

Notes

1. Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) conference: <https://2026.scorai.net/>
2. For further information see 'Practitioner Insights / From the Field': <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/JTF>

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