Abstract:

Africa is a rich repository of palaeoenvironmental and palaeoclimatic change. It is unique in that it is the only continent that, almost symmetrically, straddles the equator, and hence experiences both northern and southern hemispheric climatic influences. This, coupled with the influence of the oceans that surround it, results in an intriguing palaeo-record that offers the possibility of understanding the links in climate between the high latitudes and the tropics, and inter-hemispheric teleconnections. The sediments from both the large and small lakes, swamps and mires, ranging in altitude from sea level to over 5000m above sea level, and extending from the northern mid-latitudes to the southern mid-latitudes, provide an array of palaeo-proxies and range of sensitivities to the regional and global climate system that are essential in the elucidation of natural climate and environmental variability in the past. They also provide the prospect of delinking present natural variability from anthropogenically induced variability, in order to be able to better assess the extent of the current anthropogenic impact on the climate and environment, and to better predict the possible future trends in the dynamic earth system as a whole. Several PAGES activities e.g. IDEAL, PEP III, INQUA Palaeomonsoons Projects are being undertaken in Africa. This paper examines how palaeo-research in Africa can help to guide long term management and policy strategies for sustainable use of natural resources and environment.