This edited volume is part of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Academy of Environmental Law Series, and collects selected papers presented at the Academy’s fifth annual colloquium, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2007. The annual colloquia of the Academy provide a forum for environmental lawyers from around the world to exchange ideas. The large number of contributors to this volume and their diverse provenance are a testimony to this dialogue, with papers by scholars from Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Sustainability is the thread connecting the twenty papers in the volume, ranging from conceptual investigations on the origin and evolution of the notion of sustainability; philosophical and practical enquiries into environmental rights and liability; and the use of sustainability criteria in natural resources, energy, climate, and nature-conservation law.

The volume opens with an introduction by the editors, followed by an aspirational piece by Nicholas Robinson (Pace University School of Law). Robinson looks to the future of environmental law, taking stock of present inconsistencies and inadequacies. He argues that international law should turn into a more robust tool for environmental stewardship, building upon past successes (such as the Vienna Convention to Protect the Stratospheric Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol; and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), and-not-yet-adopted instruments (such as the draft Covenant on Environment and Development, whose fourth edition was released in 2010; and the Earth Charter). He emphasizes the role of universities in ‘educat[ing] students to sustain values that money cannot buy’ (p. 26) and in taking the lead in advancing major innovations in environmental law (p. 27). These suggestions are echoed in a chapter by Charles Odidi Okidi (University of Nairobi), who illustrates advances in African universities’ teaching capacity in environmental law, painting an optimistic outlook for the future.

The next set of chapters review concrete efforts to adopt sustainability as a paradigm for action at the domestic and regional levels. Anél du Plessis (North-West University, South Africa) describes obstacles encountered in fulfilling the objectives of Agenda 21 through local environmental governance in the city of Capetown. Fernanda de Salles Cavedon and Ricardo Stanziola Vereira (Universidade do Vale do Itajaí, Brazil) introduce Brazilian ‘socioambientalismo’ as a paradigm to reconceptualize environmental law. Nicola Lugaresi (University of Trento, Italy) analyses the promotion of sustainability in the
European Union through public procurement, along lines that widely resonate with recent EU policies on green growth.

The second part of the volume collects papers on environmental rights, access to justice, and liability issues, starting with an investigation of the role of equity in international environmental law by Werner Scholtz (also from North-West University). The author argues that economic inequality between developed and developing countries calls for a rectification of the distribution of wealth in the world. He concludes that intra-generational equity should be the ‘primary focus of sustainable development’ leading the way to a new ‘International Sustainable Development Order’ (p. 132).

Next follow chapters that deal specifically with environmental rights. Karen Morrow (University of Swansea) gives an excellent account of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the United Kingdom, underscoring challenges inherent in overcoming a ‘professionalised and technocratic approach to decision-making’ and, crucially, the prohibitive costs associated with access to justice in environmental matters (p. 153). The article by Robert Kibugi (University of Nairobi) provides a thought-provoking overview on innovative avenues for access to environmental justice in Kenya. While the author praises efforts to overcome locus standi and cost constraints, he recommends that judicial institutions take ‘extraordinary steps in extraordinary circumstances’, issuing orders to enforce fundamental rights, such as the right to a clean and healthy environment under the Kenyan Constitution (p. 174). The section concludes with two papers on liability. José Juan González (Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, Mexico) sketches the evolution of environmental liability in Latin America, highlighting shortcomings in civil-liability approaches and advocating the adoption of mechanisms such as environmental insurance, taxes, and restoration funds as a means to address ‘pure’ environmental harm (p. 183). The paper is nicely complemented by that of Arlindo Daibert (City of Rio de Janeiro) on diffuse damages in environmental torts in Brazil.

A shorter section of the volume is dedicated to natural resources, where Joseph W. Dellapenna (Villanova University, US) and Flavia Rocha Loures (WWF, US) review the International Law Commission’s Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers, and Mekete Bekele Tekle (Addis Ababa University) offers an insightful analysis of Ethiopian legislation on plant breeders’ and farmers’ rights.

The next section deals specifically with sustainability in energy and climate change law. David Hodas (University of Delaware) draws a parallel between the collapse of negotiations at the 15th Session of the (now disbanded) Commission on Sustainable Development and the subsequent failure to achieve significant progress under the UN Framework Convention on Climate