

ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Abuja Declaration on Sustainable Development in Africa: The Role of Higher Education

WE, participants at the 12th General Conference of AAU, co-hosted the University of Ilorin and the University of Abuja, held in Abuja, Nigeria, from 4 – 9 May, 2009,

Noting that

- The World Conservation Union (IUCN) coined the term “sustainable development” in 1980.
- Development will be sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".
- The world is undergoing rapid changes and is driven prominently by technology and globalisation.
- Africa remains unprotected and at risk of being exploited without due recognition of, and remuneration for, its resources.
- Africa’s sustainability problems hinge on food insecurity, poverty, disease, land degradation, poor accessibility to water, negative effects of climate change, conflicts, deforestation, natural disasters, and urbanization.
- Education is necessary to transform and improve the conditions of both the learner and the community, and is crucial to the achievement of sustainable development.
- Higher education has a special responsibility to conduct scholarly and scientific research necessary to generate new knowledge, and to educate the leaders and teachers of tomorrow, laying emphasis on integrative learning and the ability to apply knowledge, skills and values to real-world settings.

Acknowledging that

- The real challenges for sustainable development in Africa are the promotion of economic and industrial development, the eradication of poverty, the resolution of conflicts, and the optimum and sustainable use of its natural resources.
- To address those challenges, new sustainability practices and technologies that are specifically suited to the African continent are needed.
- The African higher education research agenda has focused essentially on academic and scientific objectives rather than on the development needs of the continent.
- Most of the research in Africa has not been directed sufficiently to the search for continental solutions to health, education, water, climate change, energy and food security - all sustainable development indices.
- Where research has been conducted in relevant areas, the findings have not been adequately disseminated or implemented.
- Strong emphasis on the use of scientific and technological methods and tools, and innovative approaches, are essential in guiding the setting of the African research and development agenda.
- Institutional collaboration, such as trilateral university-industry-government linkage, may help to guide the direction of research and lead to the optimum and efficient use of both human and physical resources.

Hereby Call Upon

(a) Africa's Higher Education Institutions to:

- Embark on a revision of the educational system to effectively achieve Higher Education for Sustainable Development in Africa (HESDA), and adopt the inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to teaching and research and operationalise this by emphasising programme integration and synergy to promote staff and student exchanges.
- Establish internal democracy in university governance.
- Improve the quality, focus and employability of graduates to make them relevant to national needs and to be globally competitive.
- Use innovative technologies in teaching and make provision for open and distance learning.
- Forge partnerships between institutions and with government, the private sector and local communities.
- Introduce entrepreneurial education and adopt outcome-based curricula that are periodically assessed.
- Embrace the Open Access Initiative and ensure that issues of intellectual property rights protection are addressed.
- Commit themselves to greening the campuses while contributing to the sustainable needs of university communities.

(b) National Governments and Regional Organisations to:

- Ensure adequate funding of higher education institutions by committing at least 3% of GDP to education to enable the institutions to effectively and efficiently achieve their mandate of teaching, research and community service.
- Reduce bureaucratisation and promote differentiation of higher education institutions.
- Improve the working conditions of academics so that more young people can be attracted to the profession.
- Embrace the Earth Charter Initiative and encourage the adoption of its principles at all levels of society.
- Emphasize spirituality, ethics and morality in the curricula for sustainable development at all levels of education.
- Support initiatives that ensure that higher education institutions are adequately connected to the rest of the world in order to access and disseminate knowledge at affordable costs.

(c) Development Partners:

- Those interested in engaging in academic programmes and pursuits in Africa, to be willing and ready to work with African higher education institutions in a collaborative partnership.
- To increase funding as well as support to promoting sustainable development in Africa.
- Those organisations responsible for environmental degradation, to put in place adequate mitigating measures to reduce the burden on Africa.

Abuja, Nigeria
8 May, 2009