



Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities Partnership

(2004-2008 Report)

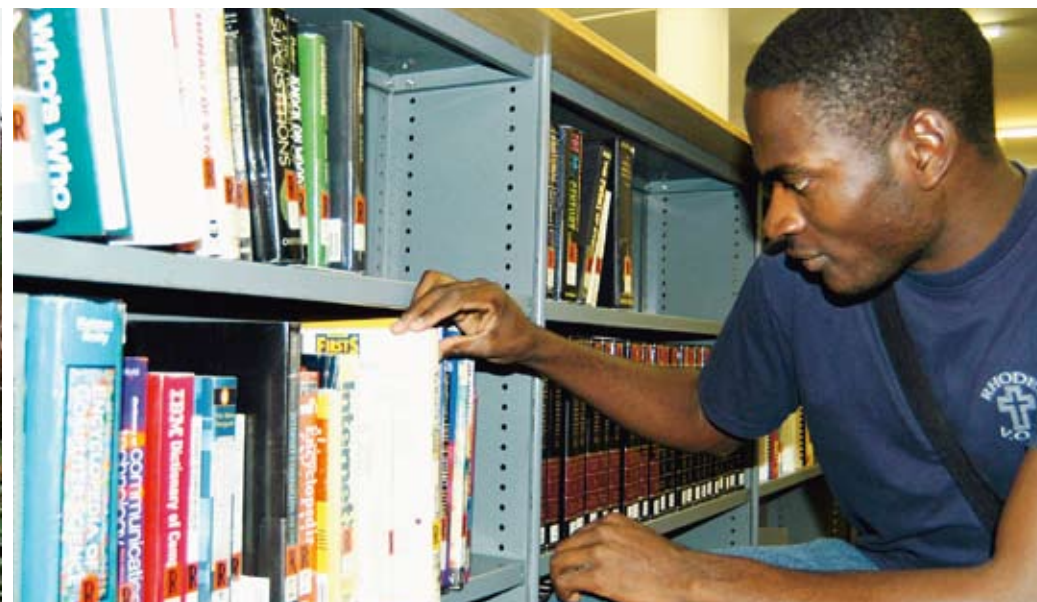


Supporting Universities to Respond to Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Challenges



A UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Partnership Initiative





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Africa has an extraordinarily rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage. The environment in Africa provides a critical resource for development of the continent and for cultural and social well-being of current and future generations. Sustainable management and utilisation, as well as protection and care of the environment is, therefore, important to Africa's people now and in the future. At the start of the 21st century, Africa's universities are being called to help societies respond to various environment and development challenges, including the impacts of climate change. The Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities Partnership (MESA) was established in 2004 as a UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD: 2005-2014) Partnership Initiative, led by UNEP and joined by other major organisations such as the African Association of Universities (AAU), UNESCO and many others. This report documents the growth, in participation in MESA since 2004, as well as the outcomes that are visible at university and regional levels following various activities that have taken place across the African continent to support universities to respond to climate change, and other environment and development challenges.

The report also provides insight into what mainstreaming of environment and development means in universities in Africa. This report, covering Phase 1 and the first year of Phase 2 of MESA (2004-2008) is designed to inform deliberations at the first International MESA Conference, the 2009 World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, the 2009 AAU Conference on Sustainable Development and Higher Education, the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education and the 2009 World Environmental Education Congress. The report demonstrates that Africa's universities have much to offer the global community at a time when sustainability of society is at the top of the global political agenda. It invites even wider participation in MESA, particularly from leaders in African universities as well as lecturers, professors and students across the continent.



www.unep.org

United Nations Environment Programme
P.O. Box 30552 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (254 20) 7621234
Fax: (254 20) 7623927
E-mail: unepub@unep.org
web: www.unep.org



Foreword UNEP

Education is the key to steering the world on a more sustainable path. Unless people have the tools to understand and analyze the world around them, they will not be able to address the challenges that face our society and environment.

Part of the response to this challenge is UNEP's Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities Partnership (MESA). The project builds on a resolution by the UN General Assembly declaring 2005-2014 the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD).

As the environment conscience of the United Nations, UNEP undertook concrete steps to contribute to this Decade by among other things, strengthening its collaboration with the UNESCO secretariat for the DESD (the lead agency), and building partnerships with institutions of higher learning in Africa.

As shown in this report, the MESA Universities Partnership aims to boost the quality and policy relevance of university education in Africa by making environment and sustainability a key topic across curricula, research and community engagement activities in universities.

The aim is to create a scientific knowledge base on Education for Sustainable Development in Africa, enhance the quality and policy relevance of university education, and strengthen African scholarship and partnerships for sustainable development. Beyond that, the objective is to raise awareness and spread a new way of thinking of contemporary development problems from the environment and sustainability perspective.

The MESA Universities Partnership contributes to the work programme of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), which is an integral part of the Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

There are numerous environmental challenges facing Africa, not least climate change, but also huge opportunities if only we can seize them. Universities are key partners in realizing this change, and I am happy to present this report on our MESA Universities Partnership project.



Achim Steiner,
UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme



Foreword UNESCO

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD: 2005-2014), for which UNESCO is the lead agency, aims to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behaviour that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all.

UNESCO believes that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) embraces a wide range of learning experiences and programmes, including the Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African (MESA) Universities Partnership programme. Capacity development, one of the four thrusts of ESD identified in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 as essential to support a sustainable future, is an important component of life-long learning. The development of training programmes to ensure that all people have the knowledge and skills necessary to live and perform their work in a sustainable manner is essential.

Universities should function as places of research and learning for sustainable development, and as initiators and poles of activity at national and community levels. They should also provide leadership by practising what they teach through sustainable purchasing, investments and facilities that are integrated with teaching and learning. All university students should acquire an understanding of the importance of sustainability. Thus, Higher Education should emphasize inquiry-based problem-solving approaches, interdisciplinarity and critical thinking as well as develop curricula that use relevant case studies and identify best practices.

We ask you to join us in promoting an education that is relevant to the key problems of living in the 21st century, that empowers people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future, and to encourage all institutions and individuals to promote development which is socially desirable, culturally sensitive, economically viable and ecologically sustainable.



Mark Richmond
Director, Division for the Coordination of UN Priorities in Education
UNESCO

Foreword AAU

The world is changing at a momentum driven principally by technology, globalisation and, ultimately, human actions. These forces have often tended to impact negatively on the physical environment, and general observations give a collective picture of a warming world whose repercussions, without appropriate and deliberate interventions, spell doom for all peoples on Earth. To rectify this situation, there is a general consensus that development should be sustainable and equitable within and across generations. There is equally a consensus that education at all levels is key to achieving sustainable development.

The numerous conferences and conventions, from the 1992 Rio Summit through to the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, the 2001 NEPAD Environment Initiative and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), all call for a more strengthened role of education, training and public awareness in achieving sustainable development. This call ultimately led to the establishment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD: 2005-2014).

In Africa, the Higher Education sector is gradually gearing towards responding to the continent's myriad challenges of poverty, disease, land degradation, water security, climate change, conflicts, deforestation, natural disasters, and urbanization. UNEP's MESA programme, initiated with partner organisations, offers a further opportunity to universities and other Higher Education institutions in Africa to mainstream environmental and sustainability issues into their teaching, learning, research and community engagement activities, and thereby enhance their relevance as agents of change in society. The Association of African Universities is committed to promoting sustainable development in Africa through Higher Education. Indeed, its next General Conference, to be held in May 2009 in Abuja, Nigeria, has as theme: "Sustainable Development in Africa: The Role of Higher Education".

The success of MESA, as enumerated in this document attests to the optimism that the goals of the Decade can be met and that Higher Education institutions are, undoubtedly, at the forefront in advancing, creating, disseminating and providing relevant expertise to assist societies in meeting their overall developmental needs. MESA is to be replicated, with the same vigour, from the basic school up to the post-graduate levels to make education for sustainable development an agenda for life-long learning.



Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai
Secretary-General
Association of African Universities, Accra, Ghana

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“We shall only obtain decisive success over the long run if everyone on this planet is profoundly convinced that working for the preservation of his/her own environment is also to accomplish a duty on behalf of generations to come. And, herein lies the importance of environmental education.”

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