

Global Universities Partnership on Environmental and Sustainability (GUPES)

Universities and Sustainability - Towards Rio+20

Green Room Event, 16.00–17.30hrs

22 February, 2012 – UNEP HQs, Gigiri



- **Mr Mahesh Pradhan**, Chief of UNEP's Environmental Education and Training Unit welcomed participants and provided a background on the objectives of the event.
- **Ms Elizabeth Mrema**, Deputy Director of UNEP's Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, in her opening remarks, emphasized that universities' should take a more central role in shaping the attitudes and value systems of society towards sustainability.
- **Mr Surendra Shrestha** gave an overview of the Rio+20 processes. Clauses 98 – 101 of the zero draft of framework document is about education. He referred to the *Higher Education Initiative* coordinated by the Rio+20 Executive Coordinator's Office to be launched at Rio.

Four presentations on ongoing EETU initiatives were made, namely:

- **Dr Heila Lotz-Sisitika** highlighted the need for transformation in the quality and relevance of education as highlighted in the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development. The five section *innovative curriculum guidebook* will provide information, tools and inspiration for universities to make curricula responsive and transformative.
- **Prof. Mark Curtis** of Mc Gill University presented two sourcebooks on Green Economy and Ecosystems Management. These resources are innovative tools that allow UNEP to deliver key science and policy messages to academics and strengthen linkages.
- **Prof. Deo Prasad** of New South Wales University, Australia, presented the Greening Universities Toolkit, which addresses sustainability challenges in infrastructure and buildings, faced by Universities. He highlighted the need to make campuses living laboratories. The toolkit will include case studies from other universities.
- **Prof. David Mungai** of University of Nairobi, Kenya, gave an overview of the ESDA – SUD programme being jointly developed in partnership with UNU, UN-Habitat, UNEP, Kenyatta University and Nairobi University. A learning approach adapted in delivery of these courses is aimed at building capacity through issue-based learning and problem-solving approaches, by shifting the current systems of teaching. Focus was on sustainable urban development.

Feedback from invited panellists and the floor included the following key points:

- Education has a bearing on the way we envision the world and has a direct impact on society;
- There is a need for transformative education focusing on sustainable development, and the four EETU products are helpful inputs towards this process;
- Universities have a huge opportunity to impact on the society given the number of graduates in different professions every year around the world;
- There is need for students to be empowered not only through education delivery but through systematic approaches which allow them to participate in decision making processes as well;
- Online platforms should be considered as resources for innovative teaching and learning;
- There is a need to think beyond Rio+20, whereby universities should formulate strategies in developing the next generation of leaders in the transition towards a Green Economy.
- Gender and inter-generational equity should be considered in all GUPES activities

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