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 terminology "sustainable development" was coined by The World Conservation Union (IUCN) 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 threats to food security, poverty, disease, land degradation, water security, climate change, conflicts, deforestation, natural disasters, and urbanization.
- Education explores the edges of possibility and probability needed to transform and improve upon 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 the scholarly and scientific research necessary to generate the new knowledge needed, and to train the leaders and teachers of tomorrow, laying emphasis on integrative learning and the ability to apply knowledge and skills 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 use of its natural resources.
- The African Higher Education research agenda tend to focus on purely academic and scientific objectives in order to ensure publication in refereed journals, with little regard to developmental needs because of the "publish or perish" syndrome,
- Most of the research works in Africa are rarely relevant 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 remained largely on shelves and unavailable to those who need to take action or implement the often useful recommendations.
- 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 would not only ensure the direction of research but also the optimum and efficient use of both human and physical resources.

Hereby Call Upon

(a) Africa's Higher Education Institutions to:
- Completely re-engineer the system to effectively achieve Higher Education for Sustainable Development in Africa (HESDA) and employ the trans-disciplinary approach 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 quality, focus and employability of graduates to make them relevant to national needs and be globally competitive.
- Forge partnership with government and the private sector.
- Introduce entrepreneurial education and adopt outcome–based curricula that are periodically assessed.
- Embrace the Open Access Initiative and develop appropriate software to address concerns on intellectual property protection and plagiarism.
- Commit to Greening the Campuses.

(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 effectively and efficiently achieve their mandate of teaching, research and community service;
- Reduce bureaucratisation and homogenisation of Universities;
- Consider embracing the Earth Charter;
- Emphasize spirituality, ethics and morality in the curricula for sustainable development of Africans.

(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 intervention in the area of funding
- Those organisations responsible for environmental degradation, to put in place adequate mitigating measures to reduce the burden on Africa

Abuja, Nigeria
8 May, 2009