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**Report of Working Group 4  
University Research & Sustainable Development**

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***Results and conclusions***

The overall objective of the group work was first to explore the links between University research and sustainable development, bearing in mind the 4 themes developed by the key speakers: (i) How can universities contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, (ii) Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP) as a contribution to the WSSD Plan of Implementation, (iii) Contributing to education for a sustainable future through the curriculum, by innovative methods of education and other means, (iv) What is the role for higher education institutions in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development? The second objective was to propose concrete solutions, from a University point of view, and linked to GHESP toolkit.

The group identified four major needs:

- (i) to foster collaborative and cooperative research with local communities' stakeholders;
- (ii) to reform Universities' administrative structures;
- (iii) to convince faculty and people in general to support and promote Sustainable Development through conversations and information;
- (iv) to promote change of practices, enhancing collaboration & evaluation.

***University Research is responsible towards society and stakeholders***

A major concern with participants was how to link scientific research to practical implementation. They all agreed that University research is responsible towards society and stakeholders: it should therefore be proactive in contributing to the future development of society and it should be geared to the needs of the community. Research results should be used to promote policy and programmes. University Research could thus address the “missing link” between the Declarations level (Kyoto and other Declarations<sup>1</sup>) and the implementation level.

Of particular concern were the relationships between University Research and the business/commercial world: how to formulate transdisciplinary research questions and how to ensure industrial development and transfer to society. Participants agreed that researchers need to explain the need for interdisciplinary research to policy-makers. Interest also focused on ways and means to exchange University Research results in partnerships between developed and developing countries: not only those results from research conducted in developed countries but conversely, research results obtained in developing countries.

***« The worst enemies are among ourselves »***

Tools and methods as well as evaluation criteria are needed to assess problem-solving oriented research. Because of the organisational structure of universities along disciplinary boundaries information, knowledge about colleagues’ competences is missing. Moreover, Interdisciplinary Research (IR) and Transdisciplinary Research (TR) are not as “honourable, well respected” as traditional disciplinary research. Journals are missing, thus hampering the scientific career: PhD, publications, chairs, etc. Missing also are:

- Indicators for the measurement of utilization of research results to the society needs;
- Interdisciplinary competences for evaluation;
- Researchers’ tradition in IR (peer review).

Participants concluded that disciplines do form a framework for IR and TR: they are still needed; but a balance should be found, that depends on the desired solutions. A paradigm shift is needed towards acceptance and acknowledgment of IR: international scientific organizations should promote this shift and put pressure on funding institutions. Simultaneously, mechanisms are needed to disseminate best practices.

***A new collaborative paradigm is needed to foster cooperation between researchers, between researchers and PhD students, between researchers and society stakeholders.***

This is particularly true when researchers and students come from developing countries. Participants agreed that researchers and their partners should create spaces of shared responsibility and of social dialogue to determine the research objects, and that research questions must be relevant to the socio-environmental context and should not only be discipline-oriented.

Pedagogical research methods must be revisited and evaluation practices changed. They pleaded for the creation of learning environments to foster equilibrium and harmony: professors, senior researchers, those with « power » should be turned into learners themselves;

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<sup>1</sup>See : <http://www.unesco.org/iau/sd/declarations.html>

spaces for dialogue should be opened, « *respecting the local brains and letting them grow* ». Links between research and teaching must be reinforced: researchers should be teachers.

### ***Methodology***

Participants introduced themselves and formulated their views on the links between University research (UR) and sustainable development (SD). Their statements were recorded. The moderator and rapporteur then clustered statements into 3 specific themes:

- (i) Linking UR to practical implementation;
- (ii) Assessment / evaluation of inter- and transdisciplinary research (IR and TR). The image of IR and TR;
- (iii) Challenges for University research.

3 discussion groups were formed accordingly. They brainstormed for half a day, and a rapporteur from each group delivered the main conclusions, which were discussed collectively.

### ***Suggestions as to development of the GHESP toolkit***

The discussion regarding the GHESP toolkit began with an initial introduction to the concept and the work completed to date on the toolkit. The participants at first expressed that they found it difficult to comment on something they were not familiar with, but the general discussion brought up the points summarized below:

- The toolkit must be accessible to people in multiple languages;
- There is a need to ensure high quality of resources (not just a clearinghouse) of information, therefore develop strict criteria for what will be included;
- It is important that the toolkit show case studies of interdisciplinarity within higher education;
- It would be helpful for the toolkit to offer best practice examples in interdisciplinarity in SD research;
- Participants wanted to see more support for south to south, and south to north cooperation in terms of capacity building AND good examples of this;
- Participants indicated that it would be helpful to have a network platform (chatroom) to discuss issues with colleagues;
- Participants wanted a list of universities that are already engaged in SD research and SD initiatives;
- The toolkit should have a searchable database of full articles that are downloadable;
- The toolkit should have a searchable database for "grey" literature and publications yet to be published;
- It would be helpful to have a list of Master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations related to Sustainability in Higher Education;
- Participants would like to see a listing of schools that offer Ph.D. programs that encourage SD and interdisciplinary research;
- Also helpful would be a listing of administrators that seem open to SD and interdisciplinary research (and perhaps some anecdotes from them);

- Students in the group indicated that a list of potential mentors and a list of possible areas of research/key needs to advance SD in higher education.