

RESEARCH-BASED KNOWLEDGE FOR INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Coordinator: University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Partners: University of Zambia; University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Study areas: Education, Teacher Training, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences

What are the main aims of your network?

The project aims at defining the core contents for teaching and learning about integrated sustainable development and at contributing to the quality of teaching in this field. Another important aim is to develop inclusive education systems and teaching in special needs education. On a more general level, the network endeavors to integrate research on current development challenges into teaching at all levels, to prepare institutions for joint research projects and to improve the practices of student and staff mobility.

The project activities are based on the multi-disciplinary Master's Degree Programme in Development and International Cooperation, which emphasises integrated sustainable development with a multi-disciplinary approach in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals.

What kind of activities are there in your network?

The project activities include student exchange, teaching visits, joint intensive courses and network meetings in the fields of social sciences, special needs education, psychology and environmental sciences.

Within the period of 2004–2007 University of Jyväskylä has welcomed 7 incoming students from 3 partner universities and sent out 8 students. Incoming students have taken courses mainly within the Master's programme in Development & International Cooperation, studying in a very international student group. Outgoing students have managed to combine course work, studying towards their Master's thesis and an internship during their study period abroad.

Similarly, in 2004–2007, University of Jyväskylä has received 5 teachers from the partner universities and sent 4 teachers on a teaching assignment to a partner university. Furthermore, several other teaching visits have been carried out within this network with complimentary funding from University of Jyväskylä.

Teaching is closely linked with ongoing research projects related to development. Both the African and Finnish lecturers aim at a collaborative teaching approach highlighting international and multi-disciplinary perspectives. In connection with the study period in the South, an internship learning contract is being developed and implemented in cooperation with development agencies.



What sort of successes and challenges have you encountered during your project?

The project has succeeded in increasing lecturers' capacity to apply research-based knowledge for integrated sustainable development, and to strengthen the basis for future exchange activities. All the participating universities struggle with the shortage of teachers' expertise with regard to the complex and multiple problems of development. The teaching visits have been enormously valuable in complementing the expertise of each partner. They have also enabled the partners to modify their own curricula and modes of learning in accordance to new knowledge attained through the exchange.

According to the feedback from students, the project has given them an opportunity to complement their curriculum with unique courses provided in the partner universities and to gain insight into other cultures. However, guiding incoming exchange students through the visa and insurance procedures has been time-consuming. Furthermore, it has been a challenge to agree about student mobility practicalities with the administration of the partner universities. Eventually everything has worked out well.

The programme has also supported partnership between African and Finnish scholars beyond the purely academic level and the work of the NGOs and official development cooperation of the government of Finland have been taken into consideration.

Your advice to forthcoming networks

Careful planning well in advance, including good pre-departure orientation, is important in all mobility activities. Personal contacts make everything easier.

